

THE DUTY AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCHES

ADDRESS BY MR. CHARLES H. SMITHSON

In introducing Mr. Frederick Verinder Mr. SMITHSON said that Mr. Verinder's name was a household word in Single Tax circles in every country represented at the Conference. For 40 years he had been the esteemed secretary of the English League and although during those 40 years the name of the League had been changed from the English Land Restoration League to the League for the Taxation of Land Values, the policy of the League had remained the same throughout—namely—to take the full economic rent of the land for the community, and as speedily as possible, by means of the Taxation of Land Values. For these 40 years Mr. Verinder had been the moving spirit of the League. He had devoted his life to the advancement of our common cause.

Next year there would be a great Conference of the Christian Churches in this country to discuss the attitude of the Churches to social and economic questions. One of the questions to be answered was—should Christians regard all forms of property as equally justifiable, and if not on what principles should they distinguish between them? The English League had asked their Secretary to prepare an answer to that question, the substance of which Mr. Verinder would submit to this Conference this morning.

During the week they had been discussing in large measure the economic aspects of Henry George's teaching, and it was a happy thing that in the closing sessions of the Conference their attention should be directed more particularly to the ethical side of his teaching, because here was a platform which would bring them closely together in unity of spirit and in the bond of peace. He did not wish, however, to draw a hard and fast distinction between the secular and religious side of the movement. Things temporal and things spiritual could not be put into water-tight compartments, and Henry George had clearly demonstrated that "economic law and moral law are essentially one." It was this fact which enabled them to describe the teaching of Henry George as a gospel of glad tidings. Towards the end of the last chapter of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* he wrote: "When I first realized the squalid misery of a great city, it appalled and tormented me and would not let me rest until I had discovered what caused it and how it may be cured—but out of this inquiry has come something I did not seek to find and a Faith that was dead revives."

Someone had referred earlier in the Conference to the gratitude they all felt to the man or woman who first introduced them to the teaching of Henry George, a gratitude only to be repaid by a life consecrated to the mission of carrying his message to others. There were tens of thousands of people in all parts of the world who feeling "the burden and mystery of all this unintelligible world" were sunk in the depths of despair because they saw no effectual way out. But those whom Henry George carried to the mountain tops of thought where they caught a glimpse of the promised land, had a vision that lifted them at one step from the dark shadows of pessimistic doubt into the glorious sunshine of an optimistic Faith. That vision revealed that human misery and vice and crime were not due to *natural causes* but could be directly traced to human institutions based upon a violation of Natural Law. The teaching of Henry George revealed the *Benevolence* of Natural Law. The law of competition which many regarded as harsh and cruel in its operation was seen to be perfect in its adaptation to human needs when the social structure had its foundation laid in Justice. It was a more perfect instrument than any human ingenuity could devise to secure the full reward of services rendered. The Law of Rent revealed a potential common fund continually increasing by scientific discoveries applied to the arts of production, so that when this fund was used for common purposes all might share equally in the advantages of an advancing civilization.

The vision of the beneficence of Natural Law justified and frequently restored a Faith in the belief in an overruling Benevolence as the central and all pervading power governing the universe. "But we must first seek *Justice* for as Henry George says 'it was not by accident that the revelation the Lord Thy God is a Just God preceded the sweeter revelation of a God of Love.' Justice provides the true environment in which the Law of Love can find its fullest expression. This is the message which a stricken world is aching to receive; this is the gospel of glad tidings which it is the duty and function of the Churches to carry to the people."