

THE LAND QUESTION: A WOMAN'S SYMPOSIUM.

BY ESTELLA BACHMAN BROKAW, ALTONA A. CHAPMAN, SARAH MIFFLIN GAY, JULIA A. KELLOGG, FRANCES M. MILNE, LONA INGHAM ROBINSON, FRANCES E. RUSSELL, CATHERINE H. SPENCE, CHARLOTTE PERKINS STETSON, ELIZA STOWE TWITCHELL AND MRS. SIDNEY WEBB.

IX. LAND MUST BE FREE THAT WE MAY LIVE. Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

A change of vast importance is taking place in the human world today. This change marks a stage in the development of our race from its past condition of individual consciousness to its future condition of social consciousness. The race — as a race — is just being born. This great change is marked in centuries past by the exhibition of race consciousness in individual men who were ahead of their times and suffered accordingly; and marked in the century present by the kindling sense of common interest — race consciousness, which draws all hearts together in unity; not only on lines of class feeling, national feeling, professional feeling, but in great swelling waves of interclass, interprofessional, international, *human* feeling, as wide as the world.

One of the symptoms marking this change is the special enthusiasm on what is called the land question. Among the many distressing conditions of a transition stage such as mankind is now passing through, and with the necessarily localized range of interests in most minds, it is natural that the evils most immediately pressing should arouse most attention, and that their cure should seem to cure all things. Thus many thousands of reformers — and reformers are those more advanced cells in the body politic most keenly alive to the inadequacy of present conditions, and most painfully eager for new and better ones — many thousands of these are convinced that the liquor question is the crucial one, and that could we eliminate alcohol from our problem all would be easy. In the land question the physical basic necessity of land seems to give it a metaphysical basic necessity as well, and the ground is taken that if the monopoly of land could be forever prevented the rest of our desired economic changes would surely follow.

In my study of this question it does not seem to me that the advocates of the single tax theory prove either that our distresses are all due to land monopoly, or that a tax on land values only would finally prevent such monopoly. That it would for the time being cheapen land, relieve the congested districts, and bring about a temporary amelioration of our troubles I believe, but not to ultimate safety.

The single taxer holds fast to two great principles, — one the permanence and value of private property; the other that every man should be free to become richer than his neighbors if he has the ability. Yet these principles — and they are closely allied — lie at the root of our social disorders, and while they are accepted the evil we have now will remain with us. Monopoly in

land is bad enough in itself; but to prevent it would not prevent other monopolies producing the same ill results. We must remember that relative freedom of land, as now found, does not show a proportionate improvement in all economic conditions.

That the land is common to us all and should be so maintained seems to the advanced thinker a self-evident proposition; but there follows this: Land should be free to all because from it come the necessities of life — it must be free that we may live. The necessities of life are, however, only obtainable to us today by means of organized labor, machinery and capital; therefore these things should be held in common and free to all, precisely as the land. Of what avail is free land with monopoly in capital, machinery and labor?

Free land is not enough. In earliest days
When man, the babe, from out the earth's bare breast
Drew for himself his simple sustenance,
Then freedom and his effort were enough.
The world to which a man is born today
Is a constructed, human, man-built world.
As the first savage needed the free wood,
We need the road, the ship, the bridge, the house,
The government, society and church —
These are the basis of our life today —
As much necessities to modern man
As was the forest to his ancestor.
To say to the newborn, "Take here your land;
In primal freedom settle where ye will,
And work your own salvation in the world,"
Is but to put the last come upon earth
Back with the dim forerunners of his race,
To climb the race's stairway in one life!
Allied society owes to the young —
The new men come to carry on the world —
Account for all the past, the deeds, the keys,
Full access to the riches of the earth.
Why? That these new ones may not be compelled
Each for himself to do our work again;
But reach their manhood even with today,
And gain to-morrow sooner. To go on —
To start from where we are and go ahead —
That *iz* true progress, true humanity.

CHARLOTTE PERKINS STETSON.

Oakland, Cal.