

## THE SOCIAL REFORMER.

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# ADDRESS FROM THE SINGLE TAX ASSOCIATION

— TO THE —

## MINISTERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

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REVEREND SIRS,

The overwhelming importance of the problems to which we wish to call your attention is our only apology for addressing you on the present occasion.

On every hand the evidences of some great wrong in our present social arrangements, are only too apparent.

Is there a city on this continent in which we do not witness extraordinary disparities in society, poverty appalling in the midst of aggregations of wealth great beyond the dreams of avarice—hovels of wretchedness within a stones throw of palaces, gorgeous in their luxuriousness.

And as population advances, as wealth increases, is it not manifest that the two poles of society are growing further apart, that the gulf between Dives and Lazarus is ever widening? There is a growing conviction that this disparity is due not merely to individual merit or demerit, but that it is owing to some extent to a violation of the principles of justice in the regulations of society.

For the Christian church, therefore, the question that must take precedence of all other questions is, are we honestly and earnestly endeavoring to apply the principles we profess to advocate, the rule of Christian brotherhood to the treatment of our fellow men.

Are we making manifest the principles of righteousness by strictly and earnestly observing the rights of our neighbors? Are we showing our faith by the fruits of righteousness?

Permit us with all brotherly kindness to submit a few questions bearing on this subject:—

For whom did the Creator make this world? For all equally, for the poorest as well as for the richest? For every one of every generation as much as He ever made it for any one of any generation? Or did He make it for a special few? Are we all equally heirs to His gifts? Is He equally the father of us all, so that each one of us has an equal right to His heritage, or is the heritage of this earth for one portion of humanity exclusively?

What is the meaning of the Fatherhood? What do we mean when we proclaim humanity a Brotherhood? What is the meaning of the command: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself? Do not these doctrines necessarily teach the equal heirship of every one of God's children to God's gifts? What possible respect could we have for a religion which declared that God had furnished His gifts for one portion of humanity exclusively and not for all equally, that the earth hath He given to *some* of the children of men?

If this doctrine of the equal brotherhood and the equal heirship is essential to Christianity, how can we justify our present administration of this important trust, whereby we allow one part of humanity the power to charge their fellows for ever for the occupation of this planet, for access to the bounties furnished by the Creator? We can easily understand that it is quite right that men should charge for the clothes they fabricate, the houses they build, the things they make, the services they perform; but for men to claim as a right the power to charge for the land which they never made and to continue this charge for all generations, does not this claim set at naught the fact that this earth is the *gift* of God to humanity?

Do we not by this method of administering the gifts of the Creator teach that the heritage of the earth is the gift of God to *some* of the children of men and not the gift to all? In the face of this administration with what consistency can we maintain the doctrine of the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of humanity?

The foregoing question necessarily involves another: To whom belong of right the products of industry? To the industrious men and women who produced them, to those who have aided in their production or transportation, who have rendered service? Can any one in accordance with justice claim produce, except on the condition that in some way he has aided in production, that he has honestly endeavored to render service? To claim produce without producing, is not this the doctrine

of vassalage, of servitude, of spoliation, of slavery? It most certainly cannot be the doctrine of the golden rule of Christianity.

And yet how do we treat this doctrine of service before reward? To reap without sowing, to enjoy wealth without begetting wealth, to claim product without producing, is looked on not merely as right but quite meritorious. In every large city, we see some claiming immense incomes to the production of which they are under no obligation to perform even the shadow of a service or to furnish an ounce of product. So long as the producers must surrender a share of their product for the occupation of the land for access to the common heritage, just so long do we deny the right of the producer to the reward of his industry, and we teach that men may claim product to the production of which they have contributed no effort.

Is it not essential to religion that we respect the rights of property? In order to do this must we not learn what is the correct basis on which this right must rest? How can we be honest unless we know the foundation of honesty? That the producer has a right to produce is universally conceded, but can there be even a shadow of justice in allowing some to appropriate wealth simply because population becomes more congested and consequently land relatively more scarce. And yet do we not maintain this system without so much as a whisper of protest? Wherever there is any indication that population is likely to concentrate, do we not witness a rush for possession of the land, not to till and dress it, or in any way to use it as an agent of production, that men might rejoice in the fruits thereof; but to use it as an agent of extortion. How can it be right for one man to claim service from another man, except on condition of rendering an equivalent service in return? To be honest must not service be reciprocal?

By what possible right can one man say to his fellow: "You must work to feed me, to clothe me, and to house me, to tend me in my sickness, to educate my children; but you must not

look for any service in return from me."

Would not such language be utterly repugnant to the spirit of Christianity.

How could this accord with the exhortation to "Bear ye one another's burdens;" "Render to every man his due."

And yet what do we witness in every city, men claiming as a right that they should be allowed to take away from the toilers, product of an enormous value yearly, without the slightest thought of rendering any service or product in exchange. Is it not true that we have become habituated to this injustice, that we regard with indifference the fact that one set of men and women should toil laboriously during long hours and be compelled to surrender the products of their industry to others who may thus revel in luxuriant enjoyments without the slightest thought of rendering any service in exchange.

Man did not make the land, and yet we treat it as an article of manufacture and we allow some to charge their fellows for occupying land just as though it was the product of their industry.

In our cities especially we see this charge increasing more rapidly than population increases, we see the so-called landowners rapidly rising in fortune, not by making produce more abundant, but by placing their fellows beneath an increasing obligation.

Thus are we rapidly developing on this continent the same form of society as in the old world with its hideous contrasts, its unjust disparities, and its unholy castes, estrangements and antagonisms.

As population increases the obligation of the industrious masses to surrender their product keeps ever growing, dooming them inevitably to lives of degrading poverty, with all its ghastly train of hideous vices.

Year after year on this continent it dooms one part of society to an inevitable, everlasting, irredeemable indebtedness, an unjust servitude, the condition of toiling animals, their lives a slavish existence, their fortunes an animal's lot, barely enough for the satisfaction of their lowest wants and the meagre support of their children.

So long as we in silence acquiesce in

the maintenance of these wrongs of what avail our professions of Christianity? What the proclamation of its sublimities, while we keep our fellows degraded beneath a huge injustice? What avails our preaching, unless it begets a spirit zealous to rectify wrongs, to establish the triumph of righteousness? What avail our ceremonies and organizations unless founded on the eternal principles of justice? In all human thought can the mind rise to a sublimer conception, the soul to a nobler aspiration than the prayer, "Thy kingdom come." But how can that possibly be realized while we maintain conditions essentially unjust? In all reverence we may without hesitation declare that there are things God will not do for us, things the accomplishment of which He has left for us to do, for which He holds us responsible. As we sow so shall we reap. Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Sowing injustice, can we reap the fruits of justice, sowing unrighteousness can we reap righteousness, building on the foundation of the kingdom of evil, how can we establish the kingdom of God?

Did not God make this world so that the easiest thing for a man to do was to find employment, so that enforced idleness was utterly unnecessary. To-day, with all our boasted advances in civilization, how is it that thousands are looking in vain for work, for an opportunity to exercise their industry. They want fuel, they want a shelter, they want food and tools and clothing, and to provide these God has furnished the mines, the forests, the land. Why should anyone stand in idleness, when the opportunities to exercise their industry are practically unlimited. Are we carrying out the intentions of the Creator in giving to one portion of society the power to put a padlock on all these resources and thus to exclude their fellows from the very opportunity of living and thus keeping them in enforced idleness?

Has history ever witnessed anything comparable to the growth of population on this continent? Flying from the old world population has spread over this continent as a flood. Deserts have be-

come bounteous homesteads, hamlets have become cities, towns have become great commercial centres? With the rise and development of mighty states, and especially in the large commercial cities, what is the meaning, and what the proper function, of the immense value that accrues to the land, a value, not the result of individual effort, not a product of industry, as the production of crops, of horses, of goods, but a value that is caused by the joint growth of the community.

Here is a power that determines the destination, the distribution of wealth, and like every other power will be a blessing or a bane, just as it is used for its appropriate or inappropriate function. It is not the product of individual effort; then how can individuals rightly claim it. If we allow individuals to continue to appropriate it as we are doing now, we shall certainly develop two monstrosities, one of excessive superabundant wealth, the other a spectacle of pitiable poverty. Just as light is intended for the eye, and air for the lungs, is not this particular fund—the land value—intended for the joint use of the community; is this not the proper source from which we should draw our funds for community purposes.

The golden rule is: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." The rule upon which society seems to act at present is: "Look out for your own welfare, and if, to keep yourself out of the slough of poverty, it is necessary for you to take advantage of laws that bear hardly against your fellow-men, why 'business is business,' you must do it."

Here, for example, is a man who owns a piece of land, and his fellow-man who occupies it as tenant. The lease is about to expire, but meanwhile the land has advanced in value, by reason of the growth of the community. Now, the golden rule says to the landlord: "Put yourself in your tenant's place. He has worked all these years to build up a business on that lot. In his place, wouldn't you like to have the owner of it renew the lease at the same rental (or lower)?" Assuredly. But says "business":

"Raise the rent to the extreme limit of the increase in value! The golden rule must go by the board."

It is practically out of the question to act in the spirit of the golden rule so far as this great matter of land ownership is concerned. A proper incidence of taxation by putting the land value now collected from the tenant in the public till, would give the golden rule spirit a chance. It would remove the great obstacle, Greed, which now stands between fellow-men. So far as natural opportunities are concerned, men would have no motive as they now have to ignore and repel Christ's teaching. This is a consideration which ought to appeal strongly to every Christian minister.

We hear much of the "Evidences of Christianity" but what evidence is at all comparable to Christianity itself? Let the world once see its doctrine, the triumph of righteousness, the dominance of justice, the reign of love, and what other evidence is needed? But if we disregard these things, trample justice beneath our feet, array society in hostile camps, rewarding the undeserving and casting down the meritorious, filching from the producer that which he has honestly earned with his toil, treating this most important charge the administration of the earth with childlike recklessness, making the land the great game for speculators, teaching that industry is not the only honest avenue to riches, and that methods of extortion are no disgrace, in the face of all these things, of what possible value to compile learned treatises on the Evidences of Christianity? Truth is its own defender, and justice its own vindicator.

Let us once have the manifestations of Christianity in our social adjustments and Christianity will have all the evidence it needs for its defence. Corrupt fruit appeals in vain to the ancestry of its source, the fully developed fruit, rich in its juices, luscious in its flavor, nourishing in its substance, needs no evidence of its genealogy.

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