

BISHOP, ARCHBISHOP AND PRIEST.

Of special interest to Catholics as presenting the views of an eminent Catholic theologian and bishop, this letter of Dr. Nulty's is well worthy the attention of men of all beliefs. For though containing here and there a sentence or a paragraph which may not be readily understood by those unfamiliar with the writings of the economists whose works it is evident Dr. Nulty has carefully studied, and bearing evidence of the influence of environment in the disposition to dwell on the question with peculiar reference to agricultural, while almost ignoring the even more striking manifestations of the same principles in great cities and industrial centers, this essay is yet as a whole a most admirable presentation in all its breadth and fullness of the land question, or rather, as Dr. Nulty clearly recognizes it to be, the great social question of our times. And to anyone who understands the great, almost crushing weight which the authority of the English economists has had upon the thought of cultured men on the other side of the Atlantic; the manner in which the Irish bishop, while accepting their views in many respects, discards their leadership in others, and goes straight to the heart of the most important questions will inspire the greatest respect for his intellectual freedom and strength, not unmingled with regret that his daily round of episcopal ministrations over a large diocese should leave him so little opportunity for work of this kind. If Archbishop Carrigan would only get Dr. Nulty excommunicated as well as Dr. McGlynn, Ireland might lose a bishop, but the cause of the emancipation of labor, the whole world over, would gain an apostle.

In beginning his essay Bishop Nulty recognizes the wide and

long acceptance of private property in land. Yet this he declares cannot justify an institution in itself unjust, and he points to the wide and long acceptance, even by the Christian church itself, of property in human flesh and blood as evidence that no amount of sanction that the world can give to a social institution ought to prevent inquiry into its essential character. Having thus at the outset disposed of the main argument of the defenders of the right of private property in land, he goes on to show how and why the right of private ownership does attach to things that are produced by human labor, and how the recognition of this right is necessary to social well being. But from the necessity of private property in the products of labor, he deduces with irresistible logic the common right to land, and in words which could not be made stronger, he, over and over again, asserts the absolutely equal right of every human being to the land of his country as his equal share in the gift of a common Creator.

Starting again, from the irrefutable proposition that the inhabitants of every country are equally entitled to the use and enjoyment of the land of that country, Dr. Nulty proceeds to inquire how best this common estate may be utilized to the greatest advantage of all. Showing that each individual is entitled to the full enjoyment of the fruits of his own exertions, and that security in the possession of land is necessary to the individual use of land, he arrives at the conclusion that the value which the growth of society gives to the original and indestructible qualities of the soil should be taken for the use of the community, leaving to the improver or user that value which is due to his improvements or use. That rent, in the economic sense of the word (that is to say, the

value attaching to land by reason of social growth and improvement, as distinguished from the value which may be produced upon it by the exertions of the individual user), is the natural provision for social needs, Dr. Nulty sees with the utmost clearness. And this evidence of creative intent fills him, as it must every man who recognizes it, with a new and deep sense of the beauty of the creative scheme. For it shows that the wrongs and injustice which under present conditions seem due to the very advance of civilization, do not result from any failure or jangle of natural laws, but are due solely to the injustice of human laws, which, denying to the masses of men their most obvious natural rights, make what was intended by God for the use of all the private property of a few, and turn the great fund arising from social growth and improvement, into a fund for the encouragement of monopolization and waste and the promotion of monstrous social inequality. Dr. Nulty sees clearly the real reason why the marvelous increase of productive power by modern invention has failed to raise wages, and why the enormous increase in wealth has served but to make want more bitter. He sees that the prime cause of our social difficulties, the real root of the seeming conflict between labor and capital, which is the most menacing danger of our time, arises simply from the monopolization which has been permitted in that natural element indispensably necessary to production and to life, and he sounds the keynote of the great struggle for the emancipation of labor and the abolition of poverty in the rallying cry with which he concludes, "Back to the Land!"

Signed: Henry George,
June 18, 1887