

Christ and Wages

OR

WHAT IS HONESTY ?

BEING

SOME OVERDUE REMARKS

ON

PIOUS HUMBUG.

DEDICATED TO ALL

WHO TOIL,

WHO LOVE,

AND

WHO HOPE.

BY T. H. FERRIS.

ISSUED BY THE BROTHERHOOD CHURCH, BEESTON, LEEDS.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

CHRIST AND WAGES.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.”

Rest—for My yoke is easy,
Rest—'neath My burden light ;
Rest—in revolt from Mammon,
Rest—in the laws of Right.

“The wages of sin is death.”

The cause of labour unrest is unjust wages. And, needless to say, the cause of unjust wages is sin.

“I could have told you that!” says the man in the street. “Of course it is a sin to refuse a living wage. The masters are to blame.”

Very true. But not the whole truth. For it is also a sin *not to demand* a just wage. That is the sin of the workers. And its wages are overwork, underfeeding, poverty of soul, disease, injuries, and an early death.

“Do you mean to tell me,” says the man in the street, “that the workers don't ask for just wages? Why, they are always asking for them, and getting refused. Is that their fault?”

Well, to begin with, the workers refuse to trouble their heads with the question at all, as to what *is* a just wage, and what is not. Even those few who know what a just wage should be, neither ask for it, nor expect it, in their time.

Secondly, those who ask a just wage must be prepared to *pay* a just wage, and this the workers are unwilling to do.

Thirdly, those who ask a just wage must not vote for those who will certainly refuse a just wage. For voting is asking, and it is no use to ask for a thing, and then vote against it.

A natural wage is what is produced by a man's labour. This belongs to him, as long as no other persons are concerned in it. But since men generally share and divide the labours of production, and since Nature herself is more bountiful in some places and conditions than in others, a *just* wage can only be reckoned by dividing up the *natural* wage equally, amongst those who are engaged in producing it. That is to say, the *average* product of labour per hour of time worked, should be paid for each hour of working time. And each kind of work, *whether of hand or brain*, should be paid at the same rate. Those who say this would require difficult calculations, can be met with the plain fact that such calculations would be less difficult than any at present in use.

Let it be granted, then, that the foregoing statement,—that a just wage means the payment per hour of the average product of joint labour per hour of time worked,—is sufficiently sound and true for all practical purposes.

Now, then, who is asking for the payment of a just wage? Not the workers! Not the Churches,—for they have deserted Christ. Not even the Socialists,—for though they know what a just wage is, they neither ask it nor pay it, but deal as unjustly as other men.

A handful of Syndicalists are urging the workers to demand a just wage, and even to seize upon it. A few groups of co-operative idealists are trying to put just wages into practice. These latter are building up the kingdom of God, and fulfilling the promise of Christ to those that are weary and heavy-laden.

But the great majority neither know nor care what is a just wage; they scramble along from day to day, toiling, suffering, and hoping; but neither believing in Right, nor doing anything to bring it about. Yet until they believe in Right, and yield themselves to serve the Truth, they cannot be saved from the sordid Hell in which they live.

It is necessary to ask, here, by what means the workers are cheated out of a just wage. The first thing is to “noble” their religion. The next thing is to set up politics instead of religion.

The business of religion is to teach, and demand, Right and Justice; here on earth as it is in heaven. To bring about the kingdom of Truth and Love, in short. But those who want to live luxuriously on the backs of the people are determined to put a muzzle on that sort of thing. So they insist that the truth is against good manners.

It is really surprising how people suck in this rot about good manners. If you hear a man preaching abominable falsehoods in the name of Truth, you must not interrupt him, because—forsooth it is not “good manners!” Tennyson, the bard of the “correct,” might have written:—

Howe'er it be, it seems to me

'Tis only good to be polite:

Kid gloves are more than toil-worn hands,

And gentle speech than Truth and Right.

It is the simple fact that good manners have successfully destroyed religion in all the Churches. Controversy is absolutely forbidden, and is tolerated nowhere, and Truth simply *cannot live* where controversy is suppressed.

Dimly realising this, the people have been steadily leaving off attending Churches, and can now only be persuaded to come to adult classes, P.S.A.'s, and lectures; where they can at least ask questions, and sometimes get in a little mild criticism. But these functions are not much attended by those who control the Church Policy, nor are they supposed to contain the real Church Life.

They are just a dodge to provide a safety-valve where the innocent young members of the Church can let off steam, and fancy they are doing something. But the young members are never allowed to control the Policy of the Church itself.

In Politics it is just the same. The leading Parties, Liberal, Tory, and Labour, decide how the game is to be played, and anyone who introduces a breath of sincerity and honest criticism is forcibly suppressed. When George Lansbury spoke the truth about the detestable cruelty of forcible feeding he was compelled to leave the House of Commons. When Victor Grayson protested against the tomfoolery of going on with a licensing Bill, (not yet passed!) instead of attending to the immediate needs of the Unemployed,—he was hounded out of Parliament, and disowned even by the Labour Party. When Keir Hardie spoke of the “atrocities” for which the Tsar was responsible, he weakly withdrew the term, to save the feelings of honourable gentlemen who wished to be on good terms with assassins and cowards.

Good Manners, then, serve to keep out of Churches, and out of Public Life, those who take their example from that beastly rude person Jesus Christ, who told the Authorities that they were liars, hypocrites, oppressors, thieves, and sons of the Devil; hating God, and hating truth, because their deeds were evil.

Because not only is Controversy suppressed, but all the Preachers are required to say nothing that would offend the well-to-do members of their congregation, from whom their salaries are largely drawn. So they are encouraged to teach men to focus their attention and their efforts on the next world, and not to expect too much in this life. As a result, it is literally true that *it is impossible to get a straight lead on any moral question* from any Preacher or paid Teacher, occupying any official position in any Church. I know of no exceptions to this rule.

Good Manners having destroyed religion, men have nothing to live by but Politics, Economics, Culture, Art, Science, Faddism, and all the other misbegotten half-truths that are called in as substitutes for the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In religion, a man's virtue is the measure of his influence and power. In politics he counts as one head, and any other unprincipled bounder counts just the same,—one vote.

Religion decides things on their merits, by quality. Politics decides them by counting their supporters, by quantity.

Religion adopts the Christian standard of Right. Politics adopts the will of the average impure man as its standard.

Religion acts only voluntarily. Politics acts by coercion,—laws, and brute-force.

Religion says a man must choose every hour between good and evil. Politics only gives him an effective choice once in a year, or every few years.

Religion says a man must decide what is in his own mind, clear and ready. Politics says he must decide questions chosen and put by others, in their own way.

Religion gives man an eternal standard of truth to judge by. Politics gives him a welter of confused and contradictory statements, *not* to extract the truth from, but to choose between! And when he has chosen, Politics insists that if he is in a minority, his choice must not be carried out!

The fact is, that Politics is a game of skill and chance, in which the people are invited to take a hand,—the stakes being their lives, and property and natural rights. Once they have been cajoled and flattered into voting, they can be called upon to abide by the issues of the game, and to pay with their lives, and their property, and their children's lives, when they lose. It is a wicked and cruel lottery, in which the prizes go to the wealthy and strong, and the blanks are drawn by the weak and broken-hearted. A few able and clever women desire to take part in politics, because they stand (or think they stand) to gain. So they are mad for votes. Why they should be in such a hurry to chuck away their higher selves, and reduce their personalities to the level of counting one against any drunken wastrel, who also counts one,—it is hard to see.

Doubtless I shall be told that a great personality—voting apart—counts for more than one, in Politics. My answer is, that it would count for much more still, if it kept out of the whole dirty game. At the last conference of the Labour Party one or two of the honester M.P.'s wanted to be allowed to vote on all questions *on the merits* of each question. They were coolly told that such a method in Politics would be suicidal. And so it would. You cannot combine honesty with successful gambling.

But it does not follow that honesty is not the best thing. It would certainly destroy the chance of winning the political game, and would either land the honest persons outside Politics (as at present), or else it would smash the whole political machine (the rotten "British Constitution") all to pieces. But neither of those alternatives would be disastrous. In either case the people would progress more rapidly. Idol-smashing does not hurt religion, nor do revolutions destroy patriotism.

I have used the word "Politics" to cover all false conventions, shams, and fashions which are put in place of truth,—for Politics contains and gives effect to them all, though it does not create them. Let me now deal with the effect on Wages.

From time immemorial, the produce of the workers has been taken from them by thieves. Those thieves who best understood the game have posed as the friends of the people. "Give us charge of your affairs," they said, "and we will keep the other thieves off." and then they enslaved the people, and took everything they could.

Even to this day the English people are paying seventy millions a year to English thieves, to keep off German thieves. And the German people are paying a like sum to German thieves, to keep off English thieves. If each nation sacked its own thieves, they would both be safe.

Since robbery with violence, and out-and-out slavery, or serfdom, became a little too thin and obvious in their methods to be quite fashionable, (it was in the days when they prevailed, be it noted, that the fine flower of Good Manners,—called "Chivalry," or riding the high horse,—was brought to perfection,) since then, be it observed, new methods of injustice and theft have had to be invented, and brought up to date. People were allowed to purchase their freedom by money payments, but these payments were made perpetual.

One of these payments, rent by force from the users of land, was therefore called "Rent." It was supposed to be payment for the hire of land, which the landowner was supposed to hold for the service of the nation. Of course it was really black-mail, extorted as the price of freedom from molestation. Nobody has any right to land, except the man that uses it. Nobody made the land, and therefore no one but the user could acquire a right of ownership. And since all "improvements" in land have either been made by tenants themselves, or else made out of money paid by the tenants, in Rent, these improvements could never rightly become the property of the landlord.

The next of these payments was once called "Usury," but is now called "Interest." Just as Rent is a sum paid for permission to use land which the landowner cannot work himself, so interest is a sum paid for permission to use money, which the owner cannot use himself, profitably. In each case it is a payment of something for nothing, for the land or the capital never, in scores of years, becomes the property of the user, but has to be given back to the owner as good as new.

The third of these payments is called "Profit," or "Dividend," and is a payment demanded by the owner of any goods, *in addition to the proper price of the goods*, when the goods are sold or exchanged. The Dividend is what remains over when all wages and expenses have been paid, and *of course it comes out of wages*, and so do Rent and Interest.

Rent, Interest, and Profit (or Dividend) are thus three taxes laid upon the useful members of society by those who pretend to "own" the land and capital; which, however, they never came by honestly, but by violence and trickery. In paying these taxes, the people pay the whole value of the land and capital every fifteen or twenty years,—but they never get any nearer to owning them!

Wages are less than half of what they would be, if these taxes were not taken out of the produce of labour, first of all. How, then, is a just wage to be secured?

The man who doesn't want to do right himself, and somehow thinks that a lot of unprincipled men, all acting together, will produce a righteous result, says, "State Ownership." We do not observe equality of pay amongst those who serve the State, however. So we reply that he must be thinking, not of actual State ownership, but of some State up in the clouds, or in dreamland, where the law that the State can only express the will of the average man, and therefore is always miles in the rear of the good man, does not apply.

No. We cannot wait for the State to make us honest,—else we are no better than those who fill the prisons. Besides, the State has been on its trial for two thousand years, and has made painfully slow progress. While the teaching of Christ has made those who *really* believed in him pure, and honest, and just, from time immemorial.

No doubt changes in the laws of the State are required. But just as it was possible for Christians to give up holding slaves, long before the State chose to abolish slavery,—so it is equally possible and necessary for Christians to give up exacting Rent, and Interest, and Profit, and to live solely by their own labour, and not as parasites on their fellow-men,—long before Rent, and Interest, and Profit, are abolished by law.

In this manner only can a just Wage be established, that in buying and selling, men shall charge simply for their time at a standard rate, and shall put no premium or overcharge upon the goods, of any kind at all. And that in borrowing money it shall be sufficient to repay the sum lent, without interest. And when money is taken for house or land, it must be accepted towards payment for the house or land, and the house or land shall in time become the property of him who pays.

The teaching of Jesus really requires much more than this. The forgiveness of debts, the lending of money where it will be lost, and so on. These are counsels of love. But the payment of a just wage, by foregoing Rent, and Interest, and Profit,—this is the barest minimum of righteousness; without which we can *not* enter the kingdom of God. For we cannot serve God and Mammon.

The Politicians are so lost in dishonesty, that they will not see to the payment even of a wage that has been promised. The great coal strike came about mainly because the allowances promised for working in abnormal places, if unpaid, could not be recovered in a court of law. The dock strike rested on similar grievances.

But, indeed, while employers have to pay rents, and royalties, and dividends on shares, and interest on borrowed moneys,—liabilities of which the Politicians do not intend to relieve them,—it is not possible for them to pay wages much above current rates. It rests with them and their employees to ask for *real* Free Trade,—namely, rent-free land, interest-free capital, and profit-free exchange.

And it will be Christians who will grant these demands; it will not be Statesmen. At any rate not for a generation or two. But let the Workers make a beginning with their own savings, and start a just system of co-operative production, and so work out their own salvation.

Meanwhile let them grasp the fact that Politicians (even if they want to) can do nothing for them. The State can only do what the people have already done for themselves. Until they have set up and worked a new standard, the State cannot adopt or enforce it. All talk of Socialism is mere vapour, until the people have become socially just in their dealings.

The Labour Party is a gross failure, inevitably. So will a Socialist Party be. If they even obtained a Parliamentary majority,—directly they tried to legislate beyond the current practice of the people, they would lose it. Or there might be civil war.

If America had allowed the Southern States to secede from the Union, instead of fighting them, with fearful savagery, the North would have struck a far more telling blow at the cruelties of slavery. Just as, if women were to abstain from helping in any political work, they would strike a far heavier blow at political pretensions than they will ever strike by getting the vote.

Let the Workers once learn that there can be no increase of wages that does not come out of rents, and usury, and profits, and that until they have made up their minds about the morality of these things, and cleansed their own dealings of them, the State can do little or nothing for them,—and they will be on the high-road to sanity and wisdom.

But at present they are up against a wall, and it is no use kicking. They have got to pull the wall down. The wall consists of things that they believe in, (Rent, Interest, and Profit) and until they give up their belief they cannot have a just wage.

Moreover, they believe in Politics. They are sure they can locate the pea under the right thimble, if they only watch close enough. But the pea isn't under any of the political thimbles. The pea is in their own pockets, and they can afford to leave the thimble-riggers alone. "Heads I win, tails you lose! A fair offer—two remotes against one dead cert!" cries the Political Parasite, and the Worker planks his coin down on the two "remotes." But the "dead cert," the faithful word and example of Jesus Christ, who came to save him from all this folly and villainy, the Worker does not know or understand. The Churches have made it another "remote," a mystery of the past, or of the future. Anything you like, except justice, and freedom, and love, in the present.

I know that there are a few, (a very few,) men in politics who think they can do some good there. But I never heard that any of them was reasonably satisfied that he had done much good, however hard he tried. They present the same pathetic picture as a hen, trustfully sitting upon a china egg, confident that it only wants hatching to become a champion chicken. If the course of events does not open their eyes, nothing I can say will convince them. If they are satisfied to spend months upon an Insurance Bill, only to vote against its third reading,—thereby confessing that their labour was a waste of time,—what shall startle them into consciousness of their futility?

If they have passed a Trades Disputes Act, to protect Union funds, only to see the Dockers offering to pledge their funds as security for the keeping of agreements,—and are satisfied with their wise achievement, why, what on earth could possibly *dissatisfy* them?

“Woe unto you, ye lawyers, for ye took away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered,” is their condemnation.

The love of God alone can lead the people from the error of their ways, if they repent, and turn to Him. But the would-be saviour of his kind, who thinks to lift them up by act of Parliament, has forgotten the law of God, that a man can only be saved from within; and the further law that a man can only be helped from without, by him who acts upon the law within. The State gives alms to be seen of men, and does it with money first wrung from the poor whom it professes to help. If there is a more godless fraud than that, doubtless the Labour Members will be duped by that also. For if the light that is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness!

T. H. FERRIS.