

THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform
Throughout the World.

THE WILL OF GOD

Address by Rev. F. S. Arnold, on St. Lucy's Day 1909, to the Rectory Club, at
Christ Church, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

(Expressly Reported For The Review.)

In addressing a meeting of the priests of our Church on the subject of the Single Tax, I am naturally about to present this doctrine as a moral law, as a principle with a religious foundation, as part of the Thought of God. But in so doing I am simply expressing the feeling of Single Taxers generally, for it is a characteristic of our great Anglo-Saxon Economic movement, as markedly contrasted with the Socialistic movements of the continent, that there has generally been a very religious aspect to our propaganda.

Now this is only fitting. It carries on the tradition of Anglo-Saxon reform, which is always a godly and a religious tradition. The army of the barons which won Magna Charta, headed by our Archbishop Stephen Langton of Canterbury, was called the army of God and Holy Church. The English people canonized the Earl of Leicester, the founder of the House of Commons. Miracles were worked at his tomb. The movement toward constitutionalism in the seventeenth century was the best expression of Puritan Religion. In our own times the Abolition movement has been a religious thing. So we see that it is the genius of our Anglo-Saxon folk to see the Will of God in every movement toward human betterment. I thank God that He has given us Grace so to do.

In order that I may make clear whereof I speak, I must begin by some preliminary remarks telling you all what is the Single Tax. I will then turn back to Holy Scripture and then to Christian History, show how the underlying principles of the Single Tax are the same as the economic principles of Moses' Holy Law; show in the development throughout Christian history, of liberty, equality, fraternity, how the Single Tax is a legitimate development from, and a great effort at the realization of the Divine Manhood of the Son of God in the universal company of all men that will be saved.

The fundamental premise of the Single Tax theory is one that it would

be hard to deny, that every man absolutely needs the land to live. This is true though a man's direct relation to land be so slight as an office in the eighteenth story of a skyscraper.

That office rests on land. Moreover in order to live, such a man's indirect relation to the land is much larger than his direct relation to it.

Every man needs the land.

Therefore, the landless man has no industrial freedom and his political and civil freedom are at the mercy of the landed man who controls the opportunities to labor.

Hence, if a man has an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, he has an inalienable right to a share in the land, to the general bounty of nature, to a chance to work and a "square deal."

Under primitive conditions, as under the old Hebrew polity, or in the primitive Teutonic village community, this equal right of all to the opportunity to labor could be secured by an equal division of agricultural land among the tribesmen. Such primitive expedients are utterly impossible under modern complex industrial conditions.

Industrial equality, however, may still be attained by taking the rent of land for the service of the community. This would enable us to abolish all other taxes. Capital, labor, the consumer, would be freed from taxation and a great stimulus given to business and production. The whole burden of government would fall upon privilege; the Single Tax on the rental value of city lots, mines, oil-wells, water-power, and franchises, all which, in the economic sense, are land. It would thus be impossible to hold city lots, mines, etc., out of use, for unused land would be taxed as high as land in use. Unused land would come into the market. Land-monopoly would be destroyed. The man who needed to use land on a considerable scale would gain his advantage from his use thereof, and could afford to pay the tax. The man who didn't need land, except for the merest house room and office room, would be practically free from taxation and would get his advantage from the land, to which all have an equal right, through the Single Tax paid by the land owners, out of which the government and public institutions would be supported. Labor and capital, freed from taxes, would be encouraged and business would boom. Land being taxed would come into the market. Land monopoly would be abolished and privilege, not labor or thrift, would bear the burdens of government. This would be a simpler and juster form of taxation than our present heterogeneous system. Under the Single Tax, every man would have an equal chance and a square deal. Yet nobody pretends that the system is a cure-all. Under any system, human ignorance and human sin would leave plenty of work for the Church, and the charitable.

Having said so much, let me fix your attention on this text from Isaiah:

"Woe to them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." Isaiah V: 8.

The prophets, says Renan, were *publicists radicaux et journalists intransigeants!*

I ask you were they not so? Were not the spiritual leaders of Israel great tribunes of the people, great social Democrats, great protectors of the poor; men who spoke for the plain people, who urged the cause of the lowly, who taught the civil and industrial, and even though more rarely, something like the political equality of all men. Samuel could condemn the cry for a king and denounce the coming tyranny of political privilege. Nathan could condemn King David to his face, who had taken the poor man's wife. Elijah could call down the awful judgment of God upon King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, who had taken the poor man's land. I Kings 21-24: "Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat."

And if the prophets were apostles of equality and justice, equality and justice lay at the foundation of the religion of the Hebrews.

What was the law? It was a supreme step forward toward equality. Above the high-priest of the humblest Levite; above the King of Israel or the meanest slave, the law was supreme. There amidst the smoke and the thunder of Horeb, in the Ten Words, the oldest fragment of the Pentateuch, in the kernel of the Mosaic tradition, is the divine protection of the individual in his personal and civil rights, the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I will not go into the discussion of the age of the Priestly Code. Scholars generally hold that it is exilic in matter and, perhaps, post-exilic in form. I will be satisfied to insist, first, that it undoubtedly to some extent embodies institutions far older than itself, dating back to some sort of primitive Israelitic custom; secondly, that it, at least, represents the divine ideal for the Jewish people, as the spiritual minded of Israel in the time of the exile, when the spiritual insight was quickened by suffering, could look searchingly and see clearly into the Thought of God for their nation. This is the least we can make of the idea of the inspiration of the Pentateuch, but this is a great thing:—the divinely guided insight of clear spiritual vision, the high thought of the great souls of Israel.

Now in the Priestly Code, in Leviticus XXV for instance, we find a sort of rough and primitive legislation of industrial equality and of land nationalization, suited to the conditions of a simple, an agricultural or pastoral people, where, partly through war, partly through other causes, emigration for instance, population is nearly stationary.

According to Numbers XXVI and *passim* the land of Israel was divided between the tribes of Israel and between the families of the tribes, with a rough and primitive equality. After giving the lists of the Israelitish tribes, and families, Numbers XXVI, 52-56 goes on to say: "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance; to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him.*

* This of course refers to whether there were many or few in the family.

Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few." *

In the beginning of the settlement of Canaan, then, the land of the nation was divided, not only between the tribes, but between the families of the nation with a kind of rough equality. Now the year of Jubilee, the Fiftieth year, made the law in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, is a plan for making this rough sort of industrial equality perpetual. As the Deuteronomist had laid down, in Deuteronomy XV, that in the seventh year, the year of rest, all debts were to be wiped out and every slave to go free, so that slavery could be little more than a seven year indenture of servitude in ancient Israel, a sort of apprenticeship to industry, so also Leviticus XXV directs that in the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, all sales of land are wiped out, all lands go back to original owners. In other words, an Israelite could not legally alienate his land for more than fifty years. When the trumpet sounded in the year of Jubilee all lands reverted to the families originally in possession of them.

The equal possession by all the people of Israel in the land of Israel was preserved inviolate forever.

We may pause a moment to admire the great and carefully articulated system of Sabbaths, producing in the Israelitish economy, not a meaningless ritual, as the shallow critics of religion and revelation imagine, but a beneficial body of agrarian and labor legislation. The seventh day is a day of rest.

Primarily for the laborer, just like an eight-hour law, it had little or no connection with the Temple-worship. The sabbath is pure labor-legislation. Only after the exile, when synagogues were established, did it come to be found convenient for religious services.

The seventh year (Deut. XV) is the year when debts are wiped out and slaves go free. It is a year of rest, not only for the plowed land, but also for the poor debtor and for the slave.

Finally, the Jubilee, the Sabbath of sabbaths, the fiftieth year, terminated all alienation of land and reproduced the primitive equality of land-holding.

It is this equality in land-holding and permanency of land-tenure which lay back of the agricultural Democracy, the strength and fibre of Israel. This landed Democracy fought the battles of Yahveh and maintained His laws and supported His prophets when they rebuked even kings. These great democratic and agrarian features of Israel constitute the vast political and economic difference between free Israel and the enslaved and landless masses of other Asiatic kingdoms. It is Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood, secured by the Law, sanctioned by Yahveh, defended by the prophets, that is the firm, industrial background of the splendid, prophetic development of

* The same chapter (Num., XXVI: 62) shows that the Levites received no inheritance of land. They had tithes and other perquisites, but their religious profession did not demand agricultural possessions.

the race of spiritual freemen, in whose midst God achieved His supreme Self-expression in the terms of our Manhood, in Jesus, the Messiah.

We begin to understand why the theft of Naboth's vineyard, breaking as it did into the primitive equality of land tenure, roused Elijah to such denunciatory fury. We see now how the rebuke of kings and the restriction of privilege became the burden of the current prophetic message. As we read Amos, Micah, Isaiah, we hear the Spirit of God sounding the splendid message of Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood, through the mouths of His prophets, rebuking special privilege, monopoly, and unearned wealth.

"Woe to them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." One feels that Isaiah, in the growing wealth and corruption of Samaria and Jerusalem in his day, in voicing the thought of Pliny: "*latifundia Italian perdidere**;" or of Goldsmith:

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

I have sketched the divine idea of economic liberty and industrial equality, as sight was partly vouchsafed thereof to the spiritually clear-sighted of Israel.

God did not leave His truth without witness in the breasts of the Gentiles, as St. Paul told the Athenians. Only the sinful wills of unregenerate mankind perpetuated special privilege and land monopoly, and thereby achieved the fearful ruin in a long agony of civil war, tyranny, and barbaric invasion of that brilliant, wicked, and lost ancient civilization, resting, as it did, on chattel slavery, land monopoly, and special privilege. Tiberias Gracchus in 133 B. C., proposed a taxation of the public lands up to their rental values and an equalization of land holdings. A reactionary mob assassinated him as they had done by Spurius Cassius, who proposed similar things many years earlier, in 485 B. C., and as they did by Caius Gracchus ten years later, in 123 B. C. After the murder of the Gracchi, there was nothing left for heathen antiquity but special privilege and slavery and imperialism. How awful the welter of plutocracy and poverty, war, slavery, and revolution became one learn, by reading the recent and graphic history of Guglielmo Ferrero, "*Greatness and Decline of Rome*," Vol. I, "*The Empire-Builders*." The first wrath fell on the plutocrats themselves who were chiefly responsible for the ruin of Rome. It is some comfort to think that the Caesars, chiefs of a Democratic revolution originally, wreaked their bloody tyranny on the heads of the plutocratic families. Eventually, in the Barbarian invasions, the vials of divine wrath were poured out on all the guilty nations and peoples that consented to monopoly, special privilege and imperialism. "*Latifundia Italiam perdidere*."

Meanwhile, within the Catholic Religion, human salvation, including also even economic and political salvation, was preparing.

* "*The great estates have ruined Italy*."

The Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation is the supreme Democracy.

Jesus is not a man, as the Socinians falsely teach, which would be aristocracy and privilege. Jesus is the Man, the universal Man, our common Manhood in Jesus is assumed by the Son of God. All Manhood, not merely one great man, is divine in Jesus Christ.

So from the doctrine of the divine Manhood has developed all the great movements of human betterment, and every real extension of democracy. The rise of constitutionalism, the birth of parliaments, the coming of the friars, the revival of Roman law and Aristotelian Science, the renaissance, the reformation, the revolution, the movement now rapidly taking shape toward industrial equality, all these are parts of the great gospel of the divine Manhood, God Incarnate in Jesus, progressively incarnate in the universal Church, which is the extension of the Incarnation.

There is the supreme, divine, eternal, holy foundation of the things we believe to be true; liberty, equality, fraternity, or, concretely expressed, free trade, free land, free men.

We believe the whole movement for industrial liberty is a holy thing, a thing founded in the Law and interpreted by the prophets, a thing whereof the rejection ruined the ancient civilization, a thing supremely revealed to the world in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Since the fall of Rome the whole progress of history has been a gradual working out of the divine thought for mankind through enlarging liberty, equality, fraternity; or, concretely, free trade, free land, free men.

Now we Single Taxers bear witness that special privilege in land is the great fundamental monopoly, after chattel slavery has once been done away, which curbs the equality of opportunity and renders true Democracy impossible to human industry and effort. We go back to the masters of the Manchester School, to Ricardo's Law of Rent and to John Stuart Mill. The factors of production are land, labor and capital. Labor is man with all his parts and powers engaged in production. Capital is the result of man's work upon the land, when that wealth so produced is used again to aid further production. Land is the natural opportunity to labor. The word in its economic sense covers mines, oil-wells, water-powers, franchises, etc., as well as city lots, or agricultural lands. Wages are the return to labor. Interest is the return to capital, the price of thrift. Rent is the return to land. All lands are not equally productive. Natural rent is a differential return paid by the occupier of better lands to equalize his gains with the gains of the occupier of poorer lands. Where all land is private property monopoly-rent gradually rises above natural rent, until, as a theoretic limit, it will leave to labor only a bare existence and to capital only a minimum return.

Now wages are just, for a man has a right to his own body, and interest is just, for a man has a right to his own thrift, but the land no man made and he has no right to the rent, while if men are to be industrially equal their rights to the land must be equal for no man can live without land.

This principle of the equal rights of all in the land is the underlying prin-

ciple of the Hebrew system that I set forth at the beginning of this paper.

But we cannot go back to precisely the Hebrew system, or to anything very like it. We are not a simple agricultural community. Free trade in land and permanence of possession is absolutely necessary to the conditions of our modern life. True, we cannot go back to any primitive system, but we can equalize the rights of all men in the land in another way. We can take the rent of the land for the community. We can tax land up to the full rental value. Thus those who use mines, oil-wells, water-power, city lots, etc., could have full permanence of possession and ownership of their improvements, but they could not afford to monopolize lands they did not use, thus creating artificial scarcity in the product of those lands, with the concomitant high prices, while keeping labor and capital unemployed. When men used land they could afford to pay the tax, but they would be employing capital and labor and improving the community. They could not afford to pay the tax on land that they monopolized without using it. Such lands would come into the market again and unemployed labor and capital could go to work thereon. Wages would rise, interest would rise, but, as land-monopoly ceased, monopoly rent would fall till there was left only economic rent, which would be collected by the state in lieu of all other taxes. We would tax the opportunities to labor so that those who monopolized these opportunities should pay the price to the rest of us. We would free labor and capital from taxation, thus stimulating industry.

In other words, we would cease to tax labor and cease to tax thrift. We would tax only privilege. The taxation of privilege would equalize the share of all in the general bounties of nature and the freedom of labor and capital from taxation would stimulate business.

This is "the square deal," the real industrial Democracy.

So far I have only treated this subject in the abstract by dealing first with its theological and then with its ethical and politico-economic sides. In addressing a clerical club I want to make clear that the Single Tax is, in our minds, a holy thing, part of the Thought of God. But this subject has a very practical side. No one would imagine we could come into the Single Tax at one leap. All such changes must be gradual, giving society opportunity gradually to adjust itself to the new conditions. The movement toward the Single Tax means the gradual reduction of taxes on labor and capital and the gradual increase of taxes on special privileges (that is on some form of land-values). Tariff Reform is a step in the direction of the Single Tax. Free Trade is a long step. Therefore all Single Taxers were enthusiastic supporters of Grover Cleveland and we still revere his memory. The taxation of franchises, which always represent special privilege in land, is a long step toward the Single Tax. Here Single Taxers find Mr. Roosevelt and Governor Hughes helping on the good work. Taxation should be removed from personal property and concentrated on Real Estate. Finally, we should cease to tax improvements, thus encouraging men to employ labor and improve, and we should tax land values only.

The British Budget is a very interesting case in point. The great victory of 1846, in the repeal of the corn laws, was a victory in the direction of the Single Tax. It went no further, however. The English land tax is ridiculously small, and labor and thrift are taxed in many ways, direct and indirect. Now, however, the increasing war-burdens make additional taxation necessary. Immediately we get the conflict: Mr. Asquith's government would increase the tax on privilege, that is, on land; the reactionary opposition desire to leave the land-lords untaxed and put the burden in the shape of increased tariff taxation, upon the workingman and the consumer.

"Ca ira, ca ira,
La Liberté's etablira,
Malgre les tyrans, tout reusira!"

Or as Isaiah said:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is arisen upon thee."

FRANKLIN AND FREEDOM.

[Address by Joseph Fels to the "Poor Richard" Club of Philadelphia,
January 6th, 1910.]

The opinions of Franklin as an uncompromising free trader will be interesting at the present time. His enthusiastic approval of the *impot unique*, forerunner of the Single Tax principle, will surprise the general public.

The City of Philadelphia is indebted to an honored merchant, Justus C. Strawbridge, for a beautiful statue of her first citizen and adopted son, Benjamin Franklin. The statue is in the highest degree pleasing, and itself appears well to match the encomium by Washington which, with dignified simplicity, graces the pedestal:

"Venerated for benevolence,
Admired for talents,
Esteemed for patriotism,
Beloved for philanthropy."

He who knows Benjamin Franklin only from his extraordinary, varied and persistent services to his country, state and city; his observations and pioneer work in gathering secrets from Dame Nature; and the homely and quaint maxims of "Poor Richard," has not sounded the depths of his feelings; has not yet learned the whole worth of the man.

A FREE TRADER.

Franklin was opposed to the theory and practice euphemistically, but improperly I think, known as "protection," but sometimes defined as "public tax-