



THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

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



**SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF
GERRARD WINSTANLEY, THE DIGGER, THE HENRY
GEORGE OF THE COMMONWEALTH PERIOD**

BY LEWIS H. BERENS.

[FIRST PAPER.]

“When you have seen a truth that those around you do not see, it is one of the deepest of pleasures to hear of others who have seen it. This is true, even though these others were dead years before you were born. For the stars we of to-day see when we look, were here to be seen hundreds and thousands of years ago. They shine on. Men come and go, in their generations, like the generations of the ants.”—HENRY GEORGE.

ON April 16, 1649, the Council of State of England received information of certain people who had come to St. George’s Hill, in the county of Surrey, and had begun to dig and plough the common land on that side of the Hill next to Campe Close, and had sowed the land with parsnips, carrots, and beans. “It was feared they have some design in hand;” and so the Council of State sent Lord General Fairfax instructions “to disperse the people so met, and to prevent the like for the future, so that a malignant and disaffected party may not, under cover of such ridiculous people, have any opportunity to *rendezvous* themselves in order to do a greater mischief.” Accordingly, Lord-General Fairfax sent one of his officers, a Captain John Gladman, to inquire into the matter; but when Mr. Winstanley and Mr. Everard, “which are the chief men that persuaded these people to do what they have done,” undertook to appear before the Lord-General on the following day, he washed his hands of the whole matter, and reported to his superior officer that though he intended to go and persuade these people to leave this employment “if I can, yet if then I see no more danger than now I do, I shall march back to London to-morrow. . . . Indeed the business is not worth writing nor yet taking notice of; I wonder the Council of State should be so abused with information.”

As they had undertaken, Winstanley and Everard duly appeared before the Lord-General, and the following account of their interview appears in the stately pages of Bulstrode Whitelocke’s *Memorial of English Affairs* :

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“ Everard and Winstanley, the chief of those that digged at St. George's Hill, in Surrey, came to the General and made a Large Declaration to justify their proceedings—

“ That all the liberties of the people were lost by the coming of William the Conqueror, and that ever since the People of God had lived under tyranny and oppression worse than that under the Egyptians. But God would bring His People out of the slavery, and restore them to their freedom in enjoying the fruits and benefits of the earth.

“ That they intended not to meddle with any man's property nor to break down any enclosures, only to meddle with what was common and untilled, to make it fruitful for the use of man, and that the time will be that all men shall willingly come in and give up their estates and lands and submit to the Community. And for those who should come and work they should have meat, drink, and clothes, which is all that is necessary for the life of man, and that for *money* there was no need of it, nor of clothes more than to cover nakedness.

“ That they will not defend themselves by arms, but will submit to authority and wait till the promised opportunity be offered, which they conceive to be at hand.’

“ While they were before the General they stood with their hats on, and being demanded the reason thereof they said he was but their fellow creature.”

My Lord Fairfax, noble soul though he was, evidently did not know what to make of such men ; but he seems to have been favorably impressed by them, for on his way from Guildford to London the following month he visited them at their work, of which visit we take the following account from a contemporary news sheet dated May 31, 1649 :

THE SPEECHES OF LORD-GENERAL FAIRFAX AND THE OFFICERS OF THE ARMY TO THE DIGGERS AT ST. GEORGE'S HILL IN SURREY, AND THE DIGGERS' SEVERAL ANSWERS AND REPLIES THEREUNTO.

As his Excellency the Lord-General came from Guildford to London, he went to view the Diggers at St. George's Hill in Surrey, with his Officers and attendants. They found about twelve of them hard at work, and amongst them one Winstanley, who was the chief speaker. Several questions were propounded by the Officers, and the Lord-General made a short speech by way of admonition to them, and to this Winstanley returned sober answers, though they gave little satisfaction (if any at all) in regard of the strangeness of their action. It was urged that the Commons were as justly due to the Lords as any other lands. They answered that these were Crown Lands where they digged, and the King who possessed them by the Norman Conquest being dead, they were returned again to the Common People of England, who might improve them if they would take the pains ; that for those who would come dig with them, they should have the benefit equal with them, and eat of their bread ; but they would not force any, applying to all the Golden Rule, to do to others as we would be done unto. Some Officers wished they had no further plot in what they did, and that no more was intended than what they did pretend.

As to the barrenness of the ground, which was objected as a discouragement, the Diggers answered that they would use their endeavours, and leave the success to God, who had promised to make the barren ground fruitful. They carry themselves very civilly and fairly in the country, and have the report of sober, honest men. Some barley has already come up, and other fruits formerly ; but was pulled up by some of the envious inhabitants thereabouts, who are not so far convinced as to promise not to injure them for the future. The ground will probably in a short time yield them some fruit of their labours, how contemptible soever they do yet appear to be.

Gerrard Winstanley, who thus strangely makes his appearance in the annals of English history, was born, we have some evidence for believing, at Wiggan, in the county of Lancashire, in the year 1609. When a man he appears to have established himself as a small merchant, or trader, in the city of London. For in a pamphlet published in September of the year of the proceedings al-

ready related—1649—and entitled, “A Watchword to the City of London and the Army ; wherein you may see that England’s Freedom, which should be the result of our victories, is sinking deeper under the Norman power,” in the opening epistle addressed to the city of London, he claims to be one of her sons by freedom. He then goes on to relate that “the burdens of and for the soldiery in the beginning of the war” had ruined him, and forced him to seek a refuge in the country. He continues :

“Not a full year since, being quiet at my work, my heart was filled with sweet thoughts, and many things were revealed to me which I never read in books, nor heard from the mouth of any flesh. When I began to speak of them some people could not bear my words. Amongst these revelations this was one—THAT THE EARTH SHOULD BE MADE A COMMON TREASURY OF LIVELIHOOD TO THE WHOLE OF MANKIND WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS.”

He then tells us that “I had a voice within me that bade me declare it to all abroad, which I did obey, for I declared it by word of mouth wheresoever I came. Then I was made to write a little book called ‘The New Law of Righteousness,’ and therein I declared it.” This book, we regret, we have not yet been able to procure, but from the accounts of it we believe it to be much more vague and mystic than a pamphlet written some years later called “The Law of Freedom,” from which we shall take numerous quotations in the second part of this article.

Winstanley then details the causes and motives that impelled him to take up the work of digging on the common land in the following suggestive and interesting words :

“Yet my mind was not at rest, because nothing was acted ; and thoughts ran in me that words and writings were all nothing, and must die ; for action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing. Within a little time I was made obedient to the word in that particular likewise. For I took my spade and went and broke the ground upon George’s Hill in Surrey ; thereby declaring Freedom to the Creation, and that the Earth must be set free from entanglements of laws and Land Lords, and that it shall become a Common Treasury to all, as it was first made and given to the sons of men.”

After detailing the consequences of this action, how “the old Norman Perogative Lord of the Manor caused me to be arrested for digging on that barren heath,” he makes the following stirring appeal to his fellow-citizens :

“All men have stood for Freedom ; thou hast kept fasting days and prayed in morning exercises for Freedom ; thou hast given thanks for victories because of hopes of Freedom ; plenty of Petitions and Promises thereupon have been made for Freedom. But now the common enemy is gone, you are all like men in a mist seeking for Freedom, and know not where nor what it is. Assure yourselves,” he continues, “that if you pitch not now upon the right point of freedom in action, as your Covenant hath it in words, you will wrap up your children in greater slavery than ever you were in.”

In the body of this pamphlet, after drawing a vivid picture of the doings of the court before which he had been called, and denouncing its judgment as being opposed even to the written law of the land, he summarizes his case and justifies his action in the following courageous, moderate, but incisive words :

“But that all men may see that we are neither ashamed nor afraid to justify that cause we are arrested for, neither to refuse to answer to it in a righteous way, therefore we have here delivered this up in writing, and we leave it in your hands, disavowing the proceedings of your Court, because you uphold perogative oppression, though the Kingly office be taken away. The Parliament hath declared England a Commonwealth, so that the Perogative cannot be in force, unless you be besotted by your covetousness and envy.

"We deny that we have trespassed against these men or that we should trespass against any, if we should dig up and plough for a livelihood upon any of the waste land in England. For thereby we break no particular Law made by any Act of Parliament, but only an ancient custom bred in the strength of Kingly prerogative, which is that old Law or Custom by which Lords of Manors lay claim to the Commons, which is of no force now to bind the people of England, since the Kingly power and office was cast out. And the Common People, who have cast out the oppressors by their purse and person, have not authorized any as yet to give away from their purchased freedom; and if any assume a power to give away or withhold this purchased freedom, they are Traitors to this Commonwealth of England; and if they imprison, oppress, or put to death any for standing to maintain their purchased freedom, they are murderers and thieves, and no just rulers.

"Therefore in the light of Reason and Equity, and in the light of the National Covenant which Parliament and People have taken with joint consent, all such Prerogative Customs, which by experience we have found to burden the Nation, ought to be cast out with the Kingly office, and the Land of England now ought to be a free land and a common treasury to all her children, otherwise it cannot properly be called a Common-Wealth.

"Therefore we justify our act of digging upon that Hill to make the Earth a common treasury, first, because the Earth was made by Almighty God to be a common treasury of livelihood to the whole of mankind in all his branches without respect of persons. . . . Secondly, because all sorts of persons have lent assistance of purse and person to outcast the Kingly order as being a burden that England groaned under. Therefore those from whom money and blood was received, ought to obtain freedom in the land to themselves and posterity, by the Law of Contract between Parliament and People.

"But all sorts, poor as well as rich, Tenant as well as Landlord, have paid taxes, free-quarter, excise, or have adventured their lives to cast out the Kingly office. Therefore all sorts of people ought to have freedom in the Land of their Nativity, without respecting persons, now the Kingly Power is cast out by their joint assistance.

"Therefore in that we do dig upon that Hill, we do not thereby take away other men's rights, neither do we demand of this Court, or from the Parliament, what is theirs and not ours. But we demand our own to be set free to us and to them out of the tyrannical oppression of ancient customs of Kingly prerogative; and let us have no more gods to rule over us, but the King of Righteousness only.

"Therefore as the Freeholders claim a quietness and freedom in their enclosures, as it is fit they should have, so we that are younger brethren, or the poor oppressed, we claim our freedom in the Commons; that so elder and younger brothers may live quietly and in peace, together freed from the straits of poverty and oppression in this Land of our Nativity."

Winstanley then relates how the bailiffs came and seized four cows which had been lent to him—the court had fined him ten pounds and costs, twenty-nine shillings and a penny—and how he, hearing of it, went to them and said: "Here is my body, take me, that I may come to speak to those Normans who have stolen our land from us"; and how the bailiffs told him that they had no claim against his body, it was his goods they were to have; to which he replied, "Take then *my* goods, for the Cows are not mine." He then continues:

WINSTANLEY'S MEDITATIONS.

"Then I went away and left them, being quiet in my heart, and filled with comfort within myself, that the King of Righteousness would cause this to work for the advancing of his own cause, which I prefer above estate and livelihood. Saying within my heart as I walked along, that if I could not get meat to eat, I would feed upon bread, milk and cheese. And if they take the cows and I cannot feed on this, or hereby make a breach between me and him who owns the Cows, then I'll feed upon bread and beer, till the King of Righteousness clears up my innocence and the justice of his own cause. And if this be taken from me for maintaining his cause, then I'll stand still and see what he will do with me, for as yet I know not."

WINSTANLEY'S PRAYER.

"Saying likewise within my heart :

"O thou King of Righteousness show thy power and do thy work thyself, and free thy people now from under this heavy bondage of misery. And the answer within my heart was satisfactory, and full of sweet joy and peace ; and so I said : Father, do what thou wilt, for the cause is thine, and thou knowest that the love to righteousness makes me do what I do.

"I was made to appeal to the Father of Life in the speakings of my heart, likewise thus :

"Father, thou knowest that what I have writ or spoken concerning this light, that the Earth should be restored and become a common treasury for all mankind without respect of persons, was thy free revelation to me ; I never read it in any book, I heard it from no mouth of flesh, till I understood it from thy teachings first within me. I did not study nor imagine the conceit of it ; self-love to my own particular body does not carry me along in the managing of this business ; but the power of love flowing forth to the liberty and peace of thy whole Creation, to enemies as well as to friends : nay, towards those who oppress me, endeavouring to make me a beggar to them. And since I did obey thy voice, to speak and act this truth, I am hated, reproached and oppressed on every side. Such as make profession of thee, yet revile me. And though they see I cannot fight with fleshy weapons, yet they will strive with me by that power. And so I see, Father, that England yet doth choose rather to fight with the Sword of Iron and Covetousness, than by the Sword of the Spirit, which is Love. And what thy purpose is with this land or with my body, I know not, but establish thy power in me, and then do what please thee.

"These and such like sweet thoughts dwelt in my heart as I went along ; and I feel myself now like a man in a storm, standing under shelter of a hill in peace, waiting till the storm be over to see the end of it, and of many other things that my eye is fixed upon."

The second of Winstanley's pamphlets to which we would draw the attention of our readers, is an open letter to Lord-General Fairfax and his Council of War, at that time by far the most powerful assembly in England, dated June 9, 1649, that is, about a month after the visit to the diggers already recorded. Though American readers will find a copy of it in the *Harleian Miscellany*, (vol. ii, p. 485), to be found in almost every important public library, we feel constrained to quote largely from it. In pamphlet form its full title ran as follows :

"A LETTER TO LORD FAIRFAX AND HIS COUNCIL OF WAR, With Divers Questions to the Lawyers and Ministers: Proving it an undeniable equity that the Common People ought to dig, plow, plant, and dwell upon the Commons without hiring them or paying Rent to any. By Gerrard Winstanley in the behalf of those who have begun to dig upon George's Hill in Surrey." And at the end of the pamphlet we are assured that—"This Letter with the Questions were delivered by the Author's own hand to the General and the Chief Officers, and they mildly promised that they would read it and consider it."

The letter commences as follows :

"Our digging and ploughing on George's Hill in Surrey is not unknown to you, since you have seen some of our persons, and heard us speak in defence thereof ; and we did receive kindness and moderation from you and your Council of War, both when some of us were at Whitehall before you, and when you came in person to George's Hill to view our works. We endeavor to lay open the bottom and intent of our business, as much as can be, that none may be troubled with doubtful imaginations about us, but may be satisfied in the sincerity and universal righteousness of our work.

"We understand that our digging upon that Common is the talk of the whole Land, some approving, some disowning, some are friends filled with love, and see that the work

intends good to the Nation, the peace whereof is that which we seek after; others are enemies filled with fury and falsely report of us, that we have intent to fortify ourselves, and afterwards to fight against others. and take away their goods from them, which is a thing we abhor. And many other slanders we rejoice over, because we know ourselves clear, our endeavour being no otherwise than to improve the Commons, and to call off that oppression and outward bondage which the Creation groans under, as much as in us lies, and to lift up and preserve the purity thereof."

He then points out that their opponents are but "one or two covetous freeholders that would have all the Commons to themselves, and that would uphold the Norman tyranny." He explains his system in the following words, which show Winstanley and his companions to have been, amongst themselves, pure Communists. He says :

"He told you, upon a question you put to us, that we are not against any that would have Magistrates and Laws to govern, as the Nations of the World are governed, but, as for our own parts, we shall need neither the one nor the other in that nature of government. For as our land is common, so our cattle is to be common, and our corn and fruits of the earth common, and are not to be bought and sold among us, but to remain a standing portion of livelihood to us and our children, without that cheating entanglement of buying and selling, and we shall not arrest one another.

"And then what need have we of imprisoning, whipping, or hanging laws, to bring one another into bondage? And we know that none of those who are subject to this righteous law dare arrest or enslave his brother for or about the objects of the earth, because the Earth is made by the Creator to be a Common Treasury of Livelihood to one equal with another, without respect of persons. What need have we of any outward, selfish, confused laws, made to uphold the power of covetousness, when we have the Righteous Law written in our hearts, teaching us to walk purely in the creation."

Winstanley then complains of the actions of some of the soldiery, but does not desire that they should be punished—only cautioned not to offend again—and states the readiness of himself and companions to come to headquarters at any time "upon a bare letter." He again emphasizes the fact that their demand is simply to be allowed to enjoy freedom "according to the Law of Contract between you and us"; freedom, not to trespass upon the enclosed, but to till the common land. He then continues :

QUESTIONS FOR THE LAWYERS.

"We desire that your Lawyers may consider these questions, which we affirm to be truths, and which give good assurance, by the Law of the Land, that we that are the younger brothers, or common people, have a true right to dig, plow up, and dwell upon the Commons, as we have declared.

"(1) Did not William the Conqueror dispossess the English, and thus cause them to be servants to him?

"(2) Is not King Charles the direct successor of William I.?

"(3) Whether Lords of the Manors were not the direct successors of the chief officers of William I., holding their rights to the Commons by the power of the sword?

"(4) Whether Lords of the Manor have not lost their royalty to the common land by the recent victories?

"(5) Whether any Laws since the coming in of Kings have been made in the light of the Righteous Law of our Creation, *respecting all alike*; or have not been grounded upon selfish principles in fear or flattery of their King, to uphold freedom in the gentry and clergy, and to hold the common people under bondage still, and so respecting persons?

"(6) Whether all Laws that are not grounded upon equity and reason, not giving an universal freedom to all, but respecting persons, ought not to be cut off with the King's

head? We affirm they ought. If all the laws be grounded upon equity and reason, then the whole land of England is to be a common treasury to everyone born in the land.

“(7) Whether every one without exception, by the Law of Contract, ought not to have liberty to enjoy the earth for his livelihood, and to settle his dwelling in any part of the Commons of England, without buying or renting land of any, seeing every one by agreement and covenant among themselves have paid taxes, given free-quarter, and adventured their lives to recover England out of bondage? We affirm they ought.

“(8) Whether the laws that were made in the days of the King do give freedom to any one but the Gentry and Clergy?”

Winstanley then puts a similar string of questions to “Public Preachers that say they preach the Righteous Law,” as follows :

QUESTIONS TO PUBLIC SPEAKERS.

“First, We demand Yea or No, whether the Earth, with her fruits, was made to be bought and sold from one to another? And whether one part of mankind was made a Lord of the Land, and other part a servant, by the Law of Creation before the Fall?

“I affirm (and I challenge you to disprove) that the Earth was made to be a Common Treasury of Livelihood for all, without respect of persons, and was not made to be bought and sold. . . . And this being a truth, as it is, then none ought to be Lords or Landlords over one another, but the Earth is free for every son and daughter of mankind to live upon. . . .

“Secondly, I demand whether all wars, bloodshed, and misery, came not upon the Creation, when one man endeavoured to be a Lord over another? Your Scriptures will prove this sufficiently to be true. And whether this misery shall not remove (and not till then) when all the branches of mankind shall look upon themselves as One Man, and upon the Earth as a Common Treasury to all, without respecting persons; everyone acknowledging the Law of Righteousness in them and over them, and walking in His light purely. . . .

“Thirdly, Whether the work of restoration lies not in removing Covetousness, casting that Serpent out of Heaven (Mankind), and making men to live in the light of Righteousness, not in words only (as preachers do) but in action, whereby the Creation shines in glory? I affirm it.

“Fourthly, Whether is the King of Righteousness a respecter of persons, Yea or No? If you say No, then who makes this difference, that the elder brother shall be Lord of the Land, and the younger brother a Slave and a Beggar? I affirm it was and is Covetousness since the Fall, and not the King of Righteousness before the Fall. . . . The Law of Righteousness would have every one to enjoy the benefit of His Creation; that is, to have food and raiment by his labour freely in the Land of his Nativity. But Covetousness will have none to live freely, but he that hath the strongest arm of flesh, all others must be servants.

“Fifthly, Whether can a man have true peace by walking in the Law of Covetousness and Self, as generally all do; or by walking in the Law of Universal Righteousness, doing as he would be done by? I affirm that there is no true peace, till men talk less and live more actually in the power of Universal Righteousness. . . .

“Sixthly, Whether does the King of Righteousness bid you love or hate your enemies? If you say ‘Love them,’ then I demand of you, why do some of you in your pulpits, and elsewhere, stir up the people to beat, to imprison, put to death, or banish, or not to buy and sell with those that endeavor to restore the Earth to a Common Treasury again? Surely, at the worst, you can make them but your enemies; therefore, love them, win them by love, do not hate them, they do not hate you.

“Seventhly, Whether it be not a breach of the National Covenant to give two sorts of people their freedom, that is the Gentry and Clergy, and deny it to the rest? I affirm it is a high breach; for men’s laws make these two sorts of people the Anti-Christian taskmasters over the Common People; the one forcing the people to give them Rent for the Earth, and to work for hire for them; the other, which is the Clergy, forcing a maintenance of

Tythes from the people—a practice which Christ, the Apostles and Prophets never walked in. Therefore, surely you are the false Christs and false Prophets that are risen up in these latter days.”

Winstanley concludes this pamphlet with the following heart-stirring words, with which this first notice of him and his writings may fittingly close :

“Thus I have declared to you and to all in the world, what that Power of Life is that is in me ; and knowing that the Spirit of Righteousness does appear to many in this land, I desire all of you seriously, in love and humility, to consider of this business of Public Community, which I am carried forth in the power of love, and clear light of Universal Righteousness, to advance as much as I can. I can do no other, the Law of Love in my heart does so constrain me ; by reason whereof I am called fool and madman, and have many slanderous reports cast upon me, and meet with much fury from some covetous people ; under all of which my spirit is made patient, and is guarded with joy and peace. I hate none ; I love all ; I delight to see everyone live comfortably ; I would have none live in poverty, straits, or sorrows. Therefore if you find any selfishness in this work, or discover anything that is destructive of the whole Creation, I would that you would open your hearts as freely to me, in declaring my weakness to me, as I have been open-hearted in declaring that which I find and feel much life and strength in. But if you see Righteousness in it, and that it holds forth the strength of Universal Love to all, without respect to persons, so that our Creator is honored in the work of His hands, then own it and justify it, and let the Power of Love have his freedom and glory.”



PROGRESS AND RESULTS OF THE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT.

BY HAMLIN RUSSELL.

ADDRESS READ BEFORE THE WOMAN'S HENRY GEORGE CLUB, AT CIVIC HALL,
128 EAST TWENTY-EIGHTH STREET, NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 9, 1902, AND
THE NUTLEY, N. J., SINGLE TAX CLUB, MARCH 13, 1902.

“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens, and he spied an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren, and he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”—BIBLE.

Moses was the unacknowledged son of a slave mother and of a father whose life had been made “bitter with hard bondage in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field.” The slaves of the Pharaohs were increasing too fast in numbers ; their masters were alarmed ; they said in effect : our bondsmen outnumber us ; we own all the land, thanks to the statesmanship of Prime Minister Joseph, and we control them by force. On our side is the law, the power, and all the institutions of society. We are masters, they are the slaves. At present we rule by virtue of our superior intelligence. It begins to look, however, as though we ourselves have in our greed sown the seed that will eventually bring forth a crop of men who will be able by their very numbers and the sum of their united intelligence to overthrow us. For these reasons the Pharaohs sought a remedy—a means of defence. If the spirit of foreign conquest and of “world power” had been dominant in the breasts of the ministers in Pharaoh's cabinet, a mighty army of superfluous Hebrews might have been raised which would have relieved the pressure in the congested labor centres, and in the name of Egyptian sweetness and light this army could have been sent abroad to “benevolently assimilate” foreign continents and islands, and diffuse the blessings of civilization among people sitting in darkness. But political measures were simpler in the days of the Pharaohs than they are now.