

A PIONEER OF THE "SINGLE TAX."

By L. H. B.

Democrats of all shades of opinion delight to honour the memory of those heroic souls who in the past have fought for freedom and equality of rights in the great, and still active, struggle with despotism and privilege. They would also do well to keep green the memories of those few philosophers who, in the privacy of the study, uncheered by the applause of comrades, and inspired only by the desire for the triumph of truth and justice, have striven to ascertain the causes of the unmerited sufferings of the masses of their fellows, and to formulate the measures by which these could be speediest and easiest removed. Prominent among such philosophers must be placed Patrick Edward Dove, whose masterly work on "The Elements of Political Science" appeared in 1854. Like many other independent thinkers, both before and since his time, Dove found the solution of the social problem in an equitable adjustment of the equal rights of all to the use of the earth; and he formulates his arguments and conclusions in a manner which may still be studied as a model of clearness, vigour, and thoroughness. And what is specially noteworthy is, that his work contains a clear and concise exposition both of the principles and of the benefits that would accrue to mankind from the adoption of the "Single Tax"; and as the work is now somewhat scarce, we feel we shall be rendering a not inconsiderable service to our readers by placing before them, not a review nor a criticism, but a brief resumé of its contents, quoting as far as possible the author's own words.

Dove seems to have clearly recognised the inseparableness of morality and politics. "If there be no truth and no falsehood in politics," he says, "every man may do what he has the power to do; but if there be a truth and a falsehood, that truth may be investigated on the same principles as any other science, and may be maintained before the world with as little hesitancy as the truths of geometry, geology, or astronomy. Nor can we hesitate to believe that whatever interests may be involved, whatever privilege of class, whatever advantage of the few at the expense of the many, the progress of true thought will continue to roll on, and to entail with it the absolute and complete destruction of every privilege and every institution that will not stand the calm and resolute investigation of reason."

And the same train of thought can be traced in the following words, in which he lays down the main object of his work.

"The truth we wish to inculcate is, that there are principles of immutable and never-changing justice, which by no government and no majority can ever be legitimately infringed. That these principles are capable of being ascertained and developed. That they are philosophical principles—that is axioms of the human reason, to which the human reason must give its intellectual assent wherever it clearly comprehends them. That the denial of the logical consequences of these principles by those whose pecuniary interests are involved, is no more a refutation of the principles themselves than the non-admission of the earth's motion by the Roman priests, or the non-admission of the circulation of the blood by the physicians of England.

That the political well-being, not only of Britain, but of every country on the globe—that is, of the whole race of mankind—depends on the definite ascertainment, universal acknowledgement, and universal reduction to practise, of these principles of equity. That however knowledge may increase, and, by its beneficial influence, gradually improve the condition of mankind, it is to the perfection of political science that we must direct our views if we wish to ascertain these laws of reason which, when carried into practice, would ensure a *stable*, because a *just* order of society."

But, as he points out, at the present time there is "practically no politics, no common groundwork or basis on which opinions are established; and if there be in reality a science capable of being expounded, of being taught as a branch of knowledge, and of being made the rule of legislation, either it remains to be discovered, or, if already discovered, is utterly disregarded."

Our clear-sighted author recognised that this is only what is inevitable from the fact that present society is but the product of a slow and gradual evolution from a time when might, not right, determined the relations of the members of the community; that the past political progress had been simply "a progress from the reign of power, that is, to *absolute equality of rights and absolute freedom of conditions*," and that this movement had not yet attained its goal. He sums up the present position as follows:—

"In Britain the struggle has been a long but a successful one. The serf has triumphed, and, so far as personal liberty is concerned, the serf is a serf no longer. But there still remains the question of *land*. Shall the lord still continue to possess it, or shall the same process of change that has continued so long in operation, still continue to operate, and at last place the emancipated serf, as regards the land, on the same footing of equality that he has attained as regards personal liberty? This question each one will answer prophetically, in the mode most suited to his hopes or his fears."

Before, however, himself proceeding to a consideration of this question, he devotes three chapters to a consideration of the principles of reasoning as applied to the moral science, and concludes the first portion of his work as follows:—

"At this conclusion we must therefore arrive, either that there are axioms of duty capable of being stated as indisputable truths, and capable of being put in systematic operation, or, if there be no such axioms, then there is no duty whatever (unless such could be derived from revelation), and all morals would be mere superstition, and all laws which retrained, controlled, or punished men, only superfluous infliction.

"If, however, there are axioms of justice from which a political system can be derived, and if such a system is capable of realisation, then that system is the great requirement of the world, for until it be carried into practice, confusion, disorder, pauperism, and social derangement must necessarily prevail. The social world can no more produce good without being constructed on the principles of truth, than the field of labour could produce its burthen of yellow grain were we to sow a heterogeneous mixture of seeds, thistles, briars, and weeds, mingled only with a few particles of the cereal we desired. In the axioms of justice may be hid a new arrangement of the social world, prolific of human benefit to an extent which now appears only as a fabulous dream, and as the fond imagining of fancy, roving untrammelled by experience of the present, and building its future with the deceptive materials of delusive hope. It may be so, yet even now the dawn of a better, freer, more peaceful, and more prosperous world may almost be seen faintly gilding the horizon, and heralding to the eye of expectation the daybreak of a golden age, in which the fruits of righteousness shall be peace, and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

That the reform necessary to bring about such a desirable state of things should come from the initiative of the privileged classes, Dove was too shrewd an observer to believe. As he puts it:—"The privileged classes will not produce change for the better, because they are either ignorant or corrupt. Either they do not know what change ought to be made, and are consequently ignorant, or they do know, and will not make them, consequently are corrupt."

But to paraphrase his own words, the sufferings of the disinherited masses make them feel their wrongs, and increased knowledge will teach them how these wrongs may be righted. And that the greatest wrong from which they suffered was being deprived of their natural rights to the use of the earth—locked out from the natural opportunities, natural bounties—was manifestly clear in Dove's mind. "In examining into the original and necessary relations of men," he says, "two prominent objects naturally arrest our attention—man and earth. On the one hand, we have the race of sentient and intelligent beings who are capable of acting *justly* or *unjustly* towards each other. With them lies the question of human liberty, its nature, its origin, its limits (if there be any)," and the form of society best suited to preserve to every man those natural rights which he inherited from the mere fact of

his being a *man*.

"On the other hand, we have the *earth*, the land, the sea, the air. This earth must be possessed, and with it lies the question of human *property*. How and on what principles is this earth to be divided and portioned out amongst its inhabitants?"

The liberty of each member of the community is manifestly limited by the equal liberty of his fellows; when these limits are passed, there is license, but not liberty.

After a clear and searching inquiry into this question, he arrives at the conclusion that "All living men are equal in their natural rights to the earth, that is, the earth belongs equally to the living generation of men who inhabit the surface of the globe; consequently, no disposition of the earth made by men who are dead can by any possibility affect the rights of the present inhabitants of their equitable share of the globe. Therefore, neither the land, the air, nor the ocean can by any possibility belong to any individual *allogically*. *Man is but the life-renter of the earth.*"

And in the concluding chapter of his book, he advocates the taxation of land values as the easiest and most effective means of securing to all their equal rights to the use of the earth.

"When political economy shall come to be better understood," he says, "it will be perceived that the rents of the soil paid to the non-labouring landlords, are neither more nor less than deductions made from the profits of the labourers of the country." And after further emphasis of the fact that "All men are equal in their right to the natural earth;" and of the absurdity and wrong of allowing a few to control the use and receive the rent of the land, he continued:—"To whom, then, *ought* the rents of the soil be allocated?"

"I do not hesitate to say, TO THE NATION. For the service of the nation, taxes must be derived from some quarter or other; and if the taxes had always been derived from the rents of the soil, there never would have been any tax upon industry, any Custom-house, any Excise, or any of those restrictive measures that repress industry, while they eminently contribute to separate nation from nation, and to prevent the commercial intercourse that ultimately would have abolished war. National *property* there must be *somehow*, and assuredly it is more *just* to take that property from the natural value of the soil, than from the individual fruits of labour. From one or other it *is* and *must* be taken; and if there would be injustice in taking it from the impersonal rent of the soil, there is certainly more injustice in taking it from the profits of individual exertion."

And later on he sums up the advantages that would accrue to the nation from the adoption of such a policy, as follows:—

Speaking of the policy adopted in Australia of selling the public lands, Dove says:—"To *sell* the land is unjust to all future generations, to every new colonist, and to every child that is born to labour. It is sacrificing *society* for the sake of individuals. Such is *not* the just mode of arrangement."

"Several special advantages would attend the allocation of the rents of the soil of the nation.

"*First*.—All Customs and Excise might be abolished. This would permit a perfectly free trade with all countries, and a perfectly free trade would unite the various nations in a bond of amity which would not be the less secure because attended by commercial and pecuniary advantage.

"*Second*.—It would make one simple tax, which could be collected without expense, as the renters of the soil should be ordered to pay the rents into district exchequers, and to be accountable for all expenses if they did not do so.

"*Third*.—It would unite the manufacturing and agricultural classes into one common interest. . . . The greater the revenue, the *more* for the nation."

"*Fourth*.—It would secure the utmost possible production that the soil was capable of affording.

"*Fifth*.—It would eminently tend to secure the education of the people.

"*Sixth*.—It would secure to every labourer his share of the previous labours of the community. . . . All the previous expenditure of Great Britain goes to swell the landlord's

Our Natural Storehouse, the Land, is Locked

rent, instead of tending to improve the condition of the labourer. On the contrary, if the rents were allocated to the nation, the condition of each man would improve, not merely through his own labours, but through the labours of all who had gone before him, which is fair and just, and which, in fact, constitutes a nation. . . .

"Seventh—The allocation of the rents of the soil to the nation is the only possible means by which a just distribution of the created wealth can be effected. . . .

"And Finally—It is the law of God, as declared in the constitution of the terrestrial world, and the law of Christianity, as declared in the written Scriptures, that the industrious man should be rich, and that the man who labours not should be poor. The whole economy of Britain is a direct infringement of this great law of property—of this great and fundamental principle which God established for the economical government of the world, when he made the earth to yield its riches in return for human labour. And their wealth is secured in such a manner that it descends from generation to generation, and goes on constantly increasing without any exertion on their part. Were they to sleep for a hundred years, they would wake more wealthy than ever; and if they did wake, they would wake only to encumber the industry of the country, to retard its progress, to prevent the amendment of its institutions, and to maintain a party warfare against its real prosperity. As a class they are antagonistic to industry, enemies to freedom and to progress, barriers to the civilisation of the world, living on the fruits of other men's labours, yet hating the toil which alone endows them with wealth. They are the evil remnants of the feudal system, who, in their faded power, have sunk into the bribers and corrupters of the electors of the country. . . . They are the true surplus population—ever consuming, nothing producing—fed, clothed, and sheltered at the expense of the nation, and returning to the nation nothing but hindrance to its welfare.

"Such a system—a shilling a day to a labourer who does labour, and a thousand pounds a day to a Lord who does not labour—such a system contains within itself the elements of national decay, or the elements of national disaster. Either the nation must be sacrificed to the landed interest, or the landed interest (composed of thirty or thirty-five thousand families, in Great Britain) must be sacrificed to the interests of the nation."

And he concludes his great work with the following strikingly beautiful and philosophic paragraph:—

"The great requisite, then, is to return to the laws of Nature, of Providence, of God—to let the skilful and industrious man be rich, and not to accord wealth to those who produce nothing for the welfare of mankind. If, as I have endeavoured to prove, the rents of the soil are only the common profits of the whole labours of the community, the rents of the soil are the only legitimate source of taxation—the only possible source from which the revenues of the nation can equitably be derived. To tax labour is to disunite society—it makes the nation only an aggregation of unassociated individuals. To tax the rents of the soil is to unite society—it makes the nation a community bound together by the ties of a common interest, and a common welfare. This is the true, and the only true, theory of a Nation—that the soil belongs to it in perpetuity, and never can be alienated from it; and that he who will give the greatest rent for the soil becomes the cultivator, and pays the rent to the nation for the benefit of the whole community. Then, but not till then, will labour reap its natural reward—the reward appointed by Providence in the divine constitution of the terrestrial economy. Then will the welfare of one be the welfare of all—then will men be banded together by a true citizenship—and then will the first great step be taken towards that mighty brotherhood which springs from our common parentage, and which is at once the promise and the prophecy of the Christian faith—

"And man to man the world over
Shall brothers be, an' a' that."

"The Story of My Dictatorship" has been translated and adapted into Japanese under the title of "The President of China."

THE LIVING WAGE.

(To the Editor of The Single Tax.)

SIR,—Social reformers who have made up their minds that the best and most natural way to solve the various labour problems (that of wages included), the sum of which form the great and all absorbing social problem, is to break the bonds of land monopoly and allow labour room to expand its operations, find the road of progress bestrewn with many obstacles. So many allurements are there to tempt them from the straight gate and so numerous are the side tracks inviting them to explore their intricacies, that much time is lost in calling a halt to consider whether it were wise to turn aside from the main track or to go straight ahead.

Of such a nature is this question of a living wage, for wage earners being admittedly the class in need of elevation, any legislative proposal likely to affect their conditions must have a special interest for true social reformers. In considering this question I take it as granted that any attempt at adjusting wages can only be looked on as a makeshift pending the entire solution of the question of work and wages. For if that fundamental principle of political economy which declares that labour produces all wealth be admitted, no scheme which stops short of securing the entire product of labour as wages can logically be considered.

Arriving now, as I have, at the conclusion that a living wage is but a palliative, the next question to be considered is whether it will really palliate. To this I am inclined to answer no! As it seems to me as clear as that two and two make four, that so long as present economic arrangements obtain, wages must constantly tend towards subsistence point. For so long as there remains one unemployed man so long will there be a competition for the lowest wages; for this competition for an opportunity to work always converges towards the lowest point of the social structure when it does not actually begin there. This will readily be seen when you consider that the competition for work becomes less and less intense as more and more skill is required, until you come to the professions where the highest wages are obtained. Thus it becomes possible for the outcast in the highest grade to compete successfully against those of a lower grade, and so on till we reach the bottom, where the competition is felt in all its intensity because of the impossibility to find an outlet for it, owing to the artificial barriers set up by landlordism in refusing the use of more land on which to expend this surplus energy.

But it will be said that while this is true, it is also true that governing bodies who employ labourers have it within their power to pay a living wage to their employees, and thereby set an example to individual employers. But as we have seen wages are not fixed by example but by competition, and it may fairly be questioned whether these administrative bodies were acting within their rights in creating a privileged class of labourers, seeing that these enhanced wages would be obtained by taxing the sweated and already over-taxed labour of the general community.

The function of government is not to create privileges for any class within its jurisdiction but to arrange and maintain equal rights for all; and it would be more to the purpose if these governing bodies would turn their attention to the cause of low wages. In landlordism they will find the force which has taxed wages down to subsistence point: the force which has produced want and the fear of want in a land of plenty, and which has taxed labourers off the land and into the ranks of the unemployed by a persistent and insidious system of rack-renting. They could then begin to raise the status of every wage earner by taxing the landlord off the land and allowing the labourer to get on again. Then would wages rise, for no man would compete for an opportunity to earn a subsistence wage in a sweating den, when he could earn more by his own unaided exertions directly on the land. Then would freedom of contract be something more than a name. Wages would then be fixed by what a man was able to produce instead of by the competition of native aliens as at present, when Monopoly and Hunger seals the bargain.—I am, &c., W. R.

A CRITICISM.

To the Editor of the Single Tax.

SIR,—I have always deemed it my duty to do all that my limited ability would enable me to do to get readers for the *Single Tax*. I may say that I feel proud of our paper, not only for it being *Single Tax*, but also for its merit as a literary production. Nearly every one to whom I gave a copy of it gave expression to their appreciation of it in flattering terms.

I have been in the habit of getting a number of copies every month since it was first published and giving them away. Some of those to whom I gave it voluntarily promised to get it every month. But I found that, for men who have not learned to know its full value, a month is a long time to keep it in mind, and through this and the inconvenience of getting it, they failed to do so. Therefore, when anyone consents now to become a reader I offer to get it for him. "GO THOU AND DO LIKEWISE."

I am pleased to see that the *Single Tax* has always something about socialism or Socialists. I would recommend a more aggressive attitude by *Single Tax* men towards socialism in the future than has been in the past. It is not enough to act on the defensive, because by doing so the *Single Tax* is placed to a disadvantage by it being made the object of attack before men whose reasoning faculties are not properly developed. It takes less ability to attack than to defend, and Socialists seem to know this. Socialism should be assailed from first principles, because from these premises it is indefensible. I believe many well meaning people, ignorant of human nature, and not thinking of first principles, are misled into socialism under the erroneous impression that the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of modern socialism are identical.

Glasgow, I am, &c.,
April 10th, 1895. ARCHIBALD M'DONALD.

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