

THE ABOLITION OF POVERTY BY THE RESTORATION OF EQUAL RIGHTS TO THE USE OF THE EARTH.

AN APPEAL TO THE WHITE SLAVES OF LANDLORDISM.

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Roman law knew nothing of the many degrees of rights to the home land; it recognised only slaves and tenants on the one hand, and the unrestricted, unbridled owner on the other. Roman law converted the mild dependence of the Middle Ages into the bitter serfdom of post-Reformation times. In the towns the citizens were, it is true, too rich and too powerful to be forced into the yoke of serfdom; but in the country the lords of the land left no means untried to extend their own powers, and to despoil the peasantry of all their ancient rights. A mass of documents of the times tell us how the peasantry were cheated of their rights and their freedom by cunning interpretations of old German Law in accordance with Roman Law. Where the tricks of the lawyers failed, the Lords had resource to forgery and force. The growing pressure of the feudal magnates resulted in the great Peasants' Revolt of 1525, which simultaneously broke out all over Germany. The peasants demanded that they should not be forced into serfdom, that those who had already been made serfs should be enfranchised; that their ancient rights should be restored to them, that the meadows, the woods and the running water should be made common property, and their use made available to all upon equal terms and conditions, that new duties, tithes, etc., contrary to ancient custom, should

not be constantly enforced upon them; that the feudal magnate should not usurp the right of inheritance to the possessions of his dependents; that new and arbitrary punishments should not be inflicted upon them, but that they should be judged according to their old laws and customs; and so on. All these demands were clearly directed against the Roman Law.

However, after the Peasants' Revolt had been put down with an iron hand, the Roman Law continued its triumphant course throughout the whole of Germany. Civil and spiritual princes rivalled one another in the oppression and plundering of the people. Thousands of estates, hitherto in the joint possession of the feudal lords and the peasants, were now claimed as the private property of the feudal lords. Hundreds of thousands of German peasants were forced into serfdom. In the provinces of East Germany the free German peasants were degraded to the outlawed condition of their Slavish neighbours. The landowners of these districts publicly declared that according to the Roman Law the peasants were slaves. The men whose forefathers had conquered the land and had made it fruitful, were sold like cattle. While the mind of the people was kept occupied with fruitless theological and communistic subtleties, their substantial rights were being annulled by the continuous Romanising of the Old German Law, or being robbed by force. To the ordinary man the law became unintelligible, a sealed letter, and he was deprived of any opportunity of influencing either the judgment, of the law or the making of the law. Innumerable are the complaints of the confused conception of ideas of rights, and of the oppression of the people through the "abominable lawyers" of the Roman Law, which served only as an instrument to promote the absolute power of the princes, and to pander to their greed and covetousness. New taxes and new duties were constantly imposed upon the people. The sturdy character of the people, the original German spirit of freedom and independence, was gradually suppressed or rooted out. The fertility of the German mind, which hitherto had borne fruit in epoch-making discoveries and inventions, in noble creations in architecture, poetry and painting, dried up as if under a spell. The most capable wasted their efforts in empty theological discussions and quarrels, in mean attempts to glorify wrong and force; or lost themselves in the deceitful fog of socialistic Utopias. The German mind became incapable of simple and rational thinking, the solid German taste changed to tawdry vulgarity, German art to an indiscriminate imitation of the foreign. To the Germans of the Middle Ages absolute power was strange and unheard of; it was the Roman Law which made the Princes absolute, and caused Germany to be governed according to the whims and fancies of a thousand petty despots.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the burden of absolute power became unbearable. All progress was hindered, every free movement was made impossible. Ever louder became the protest against the old order, ever more powerful grew the movement to sweep it to one side. Freedom and Equal Rights for all was the Standard under which Liberalism rallied against the common enemy. With this appeal to the sense of justice and free-

dom, it succeeded in upsetting the old order of things throughout the whole of Europe.

But when the freedom and equality of liberalism had been attained, it was soon evident that the people had again been cheated. The rich and cultured who had led the Liberal movement limited Liberty and Equality to their own interests. They were quite willing to secure to the people equal rights in all ideal and intangible things that were to be had for nothing. In doing so they believed, and still believe today, to have done enough, and to have behaved nobly. They never dreamt that there must be an equal right to the good things of this earth, so far as they had not been produced by human labor; that there could be a freedom which demanded monetary sacrifices from them. Their conception of freedom went rather in the direction of freeing the possessing classes, more especially the land owners, of all duty and responsibility towards the State and Society. It was quite compatible with their ideas of freedom that workless weavers should starve, but it was incompatible with their idea of equality that land owners should pay rates and taxes. Just at the moment when the value of the land was being enormously increased by the building of railways and the growth of our large towns, and unheard of gains were accruing to the land owners, in the name of freedom and progress all public burdens were taken off the landlords and imposed upon the industry of the landless people. The last remnants of the people's property in land were divided up and dissipated. For the loss of the last relics of their substantial rights the people were compensated with a paper equality, that had the advantage of flattering their vanity, of inculcating illusion that they were free and independent, an equality that had the additional advantage of being dirt cheap. Never, in the history of mankind have the people been more successfully deceived.

To their honor be it said there were a few liberal thinkers who pointed out that the equal right of all to life involved the equal right of all to the use of the earth. But of such a right the covetousness of the possessing classes would hear, and will still hear nothing. Rather than that, let the very idea of equal rights be thrown in the dust heap. The wise and learned men who serve the rich have now renounced it almost entirely. While formerly they represented the recognition of the equal rights of all as the only natural and rational foundation of social life, today they prefer not to talk about it. Instead of frankly, and without reservation, carrying the doctrine of equal rights to its logical conclusion, which would stamp them as earnest and real thinkers, it is fashionable among the wise and learned men of our days to represent the idea of the equal rights of all as vain and childish imaginings, above which they have long lifted themselves.

The doctrine that there is no such thing as a natural right, that right is but an expression of the power to enforce it, found ready acceptance among our learned German professors. He who has not the courage to make a sacrifice for the sake of truth and justice, is only too glad if he can find a theory that will excuse him. But the acceptance of a theory that opposes the natural

feelings of justice, indicates not the rise but the decline of a Nation. Every period and every generation formulates theories according to its character. But the equal right to the use and profit of the earth is such a fundamental and vital right as necessarily to determine the destiny of a nation, the social, industrial and political conditions of the people. We of the German race still bear the brand of serfdom, because we have rejected the law of our ancestors, because we have sold the inheritance of our people for a mess of pottage. The petty and unimportant reforms with which so many well-meaning people would fain cure the evil symptoms of our enslavement, must necessarily remain ineffective. To inculcate in them a higher consciousness of justice, our people must be shown a reform that touches their immediate interests, that will deepen their political insight, and that offers them something real, something substantial and something just.

For the equal right of all to the use of the earth many of the wisest have lifted up their voice, many of the noblest have fought and suffered. But private property in land has no prophets and no martyrs. It has not been achieved by heroic fighters for freedom and justice, but by the covetousness of insatiable greed. It has not come to us along the straight road of equity, but along the crooked road of oppression and intrigue. Through murder and assassination, through fraud and forgery, have those powers been created, which today are presented to us as "the well earned rights" of the owners of our land. Verily they are ill advised who attempt to justify the private ownership of land by an appeal to history.

(To be continued.)

EDMONTON AND HOW IT GREW TOWARD THE SINGLE TAX.

FROM A HUNTING TRAIL TO A CITY—THE ADOPTION OF THE SINGLE TAX A MERE PROSAIC MATTER OF BUSINESS—EDMONTON'S TAXATION SYSTEM EXPLAINED.

(For The Review.)

By WM. SHORT, Ex-Mayor of Edmonton.

The adoption of the Single Tax System has been an unqualified success here and it is with pleasure that we speak of it.

Edmonton's adoption of the Single Tax System was, however, a prosaic matter of business. We were near the beginning of things, the basic facts were clear and vested interests did not take fright at what seemed only fair.

To begin with, this was a rather choice spot on an old hunting trail. The rain which drifts over from the mountains brought plenty of verdure and plenty of streams. Big game and small was, therefore, to be found in abun-