

W. M. R. PRINGLE



In the death of W. M. R. Pringle, which occurred suddenly at his home in Putney, London on 1st April, the advanced wing of the Liberal Party has lost one of its ablest and most promising leaders. Entering Parliament first in 1910 Mr Pringle soon became known for his fighting qualities, for his perseverance, his resource and staying power in Parliamentary debate. A keen student of history and politics, he could be relied upon on all occasions for advice and counsel. He has been named a brilliant back-bencher; in 1924 his leader, Mr Asquith, moved him to the front bench and with general approval. The compliment was well deserved, though the general election of that year brought disaster to the Liberal Party and Mr Pringle was not again returned to Parliament.

He was a loyal and devoted Liberal and a tireless worker in the House or on the platform and could play his part in any emergency. He was a master of Parliamentary practice, and from 1918 to 1922, without a seat, he was the appointed adviser of the small group of Liberals then returned who courageously upheld the standard till the Coalition Government went to pieces in 1922. Again, out of Parliament in 1924, Mr Pringle was active in forming the Liberal and Radical Candidates' Association. He was one of the founders of the recently formed Liberal Council and a constant contributor to its monthly publication.

In the passing of Mr Pringle the cause of land value taxation has lost an able supporter.

At the Liberal Party Conference in London, January, 1925, he moved to bring the Taxation and Rating of Land Values up from the fifth to the first place in the Party Programme. In the course of a stimulating, well-phrased speech he said: "The reform has been a distinctive principle of the Liberal Party; that it was inadequately and ineffectively put into the Budget of 1909, but it was because of that principle the Liberal Party was able to win two General Elections." The resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority. It reads:—

We desire to undertake a radical reform of the land system, which is largely responsible for the present state of agriculture and of our rural population and for the cramped and ugly condition of our towns.

The aims of the Liberal land policy are: To bring about by the Taxation and Rating of Land Values a reasonable transfer of public burdens from buildings and other improvements to the unimproved value of land, and thus to cease penalizing enterprise.

Mr Pringle's last service to the Land Value policy appears in the February-March issue of *Burdens on Industry*. He strove to call his colleagues back to the seemingly deserted and more radical outlook expressed in the Nottingham resolutions of 1921 adopted on the recommendations of the Liberal Industrial Policy Committee of that time. Those resolutions embodied a uniform national tax on site value over the whole country and legislation requiring local authorities to levy a rate on site value in reduction of the rate as levied on existing rateable value. With that declaration is contrasted the "meagre and hesitating statement" in the summary of the new Liberal Industrial Inquiry that "an alleviation of the burden imposed by the present system of rating *might* (the italics are the reviewer's) be obtained by the rating of site values."

Referring to the proposal of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry to transfer the cost of certain services from local to national taxation, Mr Pringle wrote: "The Committee suggest that the Treasury should take over the charges for main roads and for the able-bodied poor and make increased grants-in-aid. In short, the local authorities are to be relieved of one-third of the existing rates. This subvention suffers from all the vices of the universally condemned coal subsidy. It goes equally into the pockets of rich and poor, of deserving and undeserving.

"In our view the Report magnifies the position of the expert and depreciates the value of representation and discussion; it is timid and Conservative compared with the Nottingham Resolutions of 1921; it is on the side of the 'big battalions' rather than the small undertakings; it is too pessimistic as to the prospects of the export trades; it would aggravate the difficulties of these trades by depressing credit; and its only proposal for their relief would operate as a bonus to landlords, increase national taxation and retard the return to Free Trade. We therefore plead for delay and deliberation before Liberals assent to a policy which may have these unfortunate results."

Mr Pringle was a House of Commons man with a passionate belief in its standing as the great constitutional agency through which all political progress must evolve. He had hosts of friends throughout the country, and not a few enemies as well. But the enemy was political, not personal. He had his place in life as a captain in the army of reform and knew how to take a reverse. In one of his impressive speeches at a social gathering of the United Committee, referring to a defeat at the polls, he quoted these lines:—

"I am wounded but I am not slain;
I'll lay me down and bleed awhile,
And then I'll rise and fight again."

He has lain down this time to rise again no more; not in the flesh, but certainly in the spirit. In that ever enduring and uplifting pilgrimage he will be with very many, so long as they live to raise their voice and give their vote for the ideals that inspired their leader and friend.

In his private life Mr Pringle was the happiest of men, with the undivided love and devotion of his wife and four children. We mourn the loss of this high spirited and strenuous worker for the common good, as we extend our sincerest sympathy to Mrs Pringle and her family.