

LEWIS HENRY BERENS

JUSTICE is the very criterion, the ultimate judge, the only valid test and touchstone of all human customs, laws and institutions . . . Justice . . . involves Liberty: a liberty which finds its natural limitations in the equal liberty of others. . . . The enfranchisement of the land is, in truth, the first necessary step towards Social Justice and Economic Freedom; it is the step which will make all other necessary reforms both easy and effective, but without which nothing can permanently and materially improve the condition of those "hewers of wood and drawers of water," the toiling masses of the community, upon whose impoverishment and degradation our present civilisation is founded. —LEWIS H. BERENS, in *TOWARD THE LIGHT*, pp. 93, 233, 174.

There lies before me as I write a letter written by an unknown friend in Budapest, enclosing a donation for the English League. The writer says:—

I am sorry to read in *LAND VALUES* about the serious illness of Mr. Berens, and I should really be very glad to hear soon that this champion of your noble cause, for whom I feel much sympathy, has perfectly recovered. Allow me to join the subscription [started at the recent Annual Dinner of the League] made in honour of his name . . .

The letter is dated November 12th. Ten days earlier, after a long illness, bravely and patiently borne, Lewis H. Berens, had quietly passed to his rest. His remains were cremated, in the presence of a small group of relatives and of his colleagues in the "United Committee" and "the English League," at Golder's Green on November 5th. To those who for many years past have been privileged to work in close association with him his death brings a sense of grievous personal loss, which will be shared, as the letter just quoted goes to show, by a great multitude of friends, known and unknown, in all parts of the world. For it is safe to say that "L. H. B." of *LAND VALUES* was known and honoured wherever two or three Single Taxers are gathered together.

He was born in Birmingham in 1855, and thus died, as his great teacher, Henry George, did, at the early age of 58. He was educated at a private boarding-school at Edmonton, near London, and subsequently went to Germany and Brussels. Returning to England in 1872, he spent four years in his father's business, and in 1876 he went out to Sydney, New South Wales, to take part in a branch of the same business in that town. During his stay in Sydney he studied John Stuart Mill's *PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*, and, as he used to say, not being able to follow its teachings, and distrusting his own judgment when opposed to such a great authority, he put the book aside under the belief that it required a mind differently constituted from his own to understand it. Later, he went into partnership with his brother, and in 1879 they started in

business on their own account in Adelaide, South Australia, where for some years he devoted himself almost exclusively to his business. In 1883, a short visit to the Old Country quickened his interest in social questions, and, on his return to Adelaide, a copy of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* came into his hands. Turning to his old well-marked copy of Mill he found all his old doubts justified—and explained. After carefully reading and re-reading George's book, he became an ardent convert to its teachings, and remained an enthusiastic advocate of them to the last day of his life. He was fond of telling how he wandered about the streets of Adelaide in the evenings, wondering whether it was he or the rest of the world that was mad: a doubt (he would add, with a touch of his grim humour) that had not yet been entirely removed. However, a few weeks later he attended a meeting of the South Australian "Land Nationalisation" League (afterwards and still known as the Single Tax League), then some weeks old, and there met its most active spirits, Henry Taylor, an old worker in the Joseph Arch movement of the 'seventies, and Ignatius Singer, a

distinguished chemist of Hungarian extraction. This "Triumvirate," as they came to be called, kept the cause moving in Adelaide for some years. In 1886, they brought out a little weekly paper, *OUR COMMONWEALTH*, the motto of which was: "They are slaves who will not dare All wrongs to right, all rights to share." It was edited by Singer, and the first number appeared on May 22nd, 1886. Berens married in 1889, and two years later, in 1891, he returned to England. Mr. Singer, who, better than anyone else, could have told the story of those strenuous years in South Australia, is unfortunately out of England just now, but we may glean something of the esteem in which Berens was held by those who had worked with him from the two Addresses presented to him when he left the Colony.



PRESENTED TO MR. LEWIS HENRY BERENS
BY THE MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC CLUB
ADELAIDE, APRIL, 1891.

"Government of the people, by the people, for the people."
TO LEWIS HENRY BERENS.

DEAR SIR,

We the Members of the Adelaide Democratic Club hear with much regret of your approaching departure from South Australia.

We cannot permit you to leave us without some expression, however inadequate, of the high respect, esteem and affection in which you are held by our members.

You were one of the founders of our club and have been unceasing in your endeavours to ensure its success and further the objects for which it was established.