



WILLIAM McLENNAN

*Vice-President of the Scottish League and Member of Committee of the Henry George Institute, Glasgow, under whose auspices Henry George delivered his famous Sermon "Thy Kingdom Come," on Sunday evening, 29th April, 1889.*

The Henry George Institute carried on its meetings and related propaganda for some eight years (1886 to 1894). Its activities were subsequently merged in the wider organization now known as the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values. It was the literary work of the Institute that gave birth to *Land & Liberty*.

William McLennan in those early days gave generously of his time and his talents to the cause. He was a leading spirit on the intellectual side of an aggressive campaign that made Glasgow a City on a Hill, in the Henry George movement. One of the early pamphlets in this Campaign, if not the first, came from Mr McLennan's pen, being entitled "The Land Question by Apollonius." It was an all-embracing statement of the case for land restoration and a powerful argument for land value taxation.

We take the following selection from another literary contribution by our colleague, an essay that he read at a meeting of the Scottish League.

#### THE IDEAL THAT IS BEFORE US

BY WM. McLENNAN

Much that is preached to us to-day by those that we look upon as leaders in society, is an appeal to the lower element in man. For what is the ideal that is set before us to-day; it is an ideal of supremacy, a case of "beggar my neighbour." "Let us introduce efficiency into all our departments of life," says the wise man. Let us build colleges and endow technical schools, so that our children may be more thoroughly equipped for the battle of life than we have been, so that we may outstrip our rivals in the struggle for place and power, for command of the markets and control of the earth and the sea. Now efficiency is a good thing in itself, and it is just possible that we stand in need of such advice, for it may be that we are lacking in strenuousness in these latter days. But this ideal of efficiency as it is preached to us to-day seems to me to begin at the wrong end.

Let us suppose for a moment, however, that we rose to the occasion, that we established this perfect efficiency both in public and private life, that we did all those things we are continually being told we should do if we wish to retain our position as a world power; does anyone really suppose, that, say after ten years from

the time we had established efficiency, and done the things that were considered necessary, that social conditions would be any easier, that wages would be higher, that it would be easier to make a living, that life would be more secure, that the poverty and crime of our great cities would be any less, that bread to eat and raiment to put on would be more easily secured. No, I venture to say that, though we do all we can to secure efficiency and prevent waste, if we leave the storehouse of nature in the possession of private individuals, that the conditions of life for the vast mass of the people will be worse, that wages will be lower, that life will be less secure, and our children will find the battle of life even harder and sterner than we have found it.

But if we keep before us an ideal of justice, and strive to realize it, if we seek first that righteousness which is of the essence of the kingdom of God, all these other things will be added unto us.

What hope is there, it may be asked, of carrying into fruition, of translating into legal enactments this ideal of justice that we have set before us. This is the work of the politician or statesman. Now when any great work is to be done, when any reform is to be effected that goes deep down to the roots of things, and challenges powerful interests the politician is in a very painful predicament. But he is pretty much what he has always been, and some two thousand years ago a great artist flashed him upon his canvas for the delectation and the amusement of posterity. "For when they were called they all began straightway to make excuse." One man has purchased a yoke of oxen and has gone out to plough in a lonely furrow, and begs to be excused. Another has a comfortable seat upon a fence, and though sympathetic, really cannot see his way. A third has bought a quarter of an acre of backyard. He claims to be the champion of all the widows and of all the orphans, and more especially such of them as have speculated in a safe thing on a rising market, and cannot possibly come. Others again are engaged in solving some of the more abstruse problems of life, of which there are many. One is trying to determine (by the aid of the higher mathematics it may be, or perhaps by the simpler method of counting skulls) at what precise age a boy or a girl may safely be entrusted with the bringing home of the dinner beer. Another is doing some necessary decimal work, calculating—by rule of thumb or precedent—whether nine or thirteen inches is the proper thickness for the wall of a housing commission tenement, or gauging—with that fine artistic instinct that runs to a wealth of detail—the relative merits of Greek, or Gothic, or Renaissance, as a suitable style of architecture for a model "doss-house."

These are the spade-workers, digging holes in the sand, allowing the water to run in, pumping out the water, and filling up the hole. They are like children playing in the market-place, and every now and then they turn round and snarl, "we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced, we have mourned, and ye have not lamented." Oh, no doubt they are the people, and according to their own estimate the chances are that wisdom shall die with them. Others again there be that look upon these things in much the same fashion as the cultured Baalites at the court of King Ahab looked upon the prophet of God, but they also (I doubt not) will have their day upon Carmel.

"Watchman, what of the night? Where is our promised land? Will the golden age ever dawn for us? Shall we behold the ideal city of which we have dreamed so long?" Through the gloom there comes the answer, "Keep ye the ramparts manned and the

watch-fires burning. An accident may bring about a crisis that will carry you in upon the flood tide," and I hope, I trust, nay, I believe there are men now among us, who, as victors, shall pass within the shadow of the golden gates, and walk the streets of the city of their dreams.

### "THY KINGDOM COME"

At the Annual Meeting of the Scottish League this year a few friends resolved to come together on Sunday, 28th April, to commemorate the Fortieth Anniversary of Henry George's famous sermon, *Thy Kingdom Come*. There were eleven present—Miss Nellie Harrison and William Harrison (daughter and son of Wm. Harrison, who along with Norman McLennan reported the sermon for publication), Mrs McGrowth, R. C. McGhee, Robert Logan, A. C. Munsie, A. J. Mace, Wm. Wright, Alexander McKendrick, Wm. Reid and Wm. McLennan.

So far as I know, Wm. McLennan and the present writer are the only two living who served on the Committee of the Henry George Institute, under whose auspices the sermon was delivered, though two disciples, Richard McGhee and Peter Burt, who can still answer *adsum*, were on the platform. Wm. McLennan had been previously associated with the Scottish Land Restoration League. The sermon was the occasion of my first experience of active participation in the work.

The little commemoration meeting held in the rooms of the League was quite of the nature of a reunion, with its own spiritual influence. Wm. McConnor writes: "I was the only one present who was also present at the meeting in 1889. When one comes to our time of life, 'the sear and yellow leaf,' one has not the recuperative power one had in youth and the resiliency of bygone days have disappeared; but after listening to Wm. Reid's fine restrained reading of Henry George's forty-year-old sermon, I still believe in the possibility of saving humanity, and that it is still worth while." It is well said, for such is the power of truth.

As I write I can see the preacher in the full vigour of his strength and hear his eloquent, burning, challenging words, words that over and over again hushed the great audience into a deeply religious mood and into a silence that was impressive to a degree. It was good to be there, and, as Wm. McLennan suggests, "to be young was very heaven" that in essence brought the Christian Gospel into the stream of life. There was no compromise with the sin of injustice. The truth was related to the condition of the people in a manner that a child might understand. It was like the opening to life and sunshine. It was a new rendering of a fundamental truth that had been cast aside and trampled upon for ages. To the great audience the preacher was in himself the standard-bearer of a new crusade.

We quote a passage from the sermon:—

Early Christianity did not mean, in its prayer for the coming of Christ's kingdom, a kingdom in heaven, but a kingdom on earth. If Christ had simply preached of the other world, the high priests and the Pharisees would not have persecuted Him, the Roman soldiery would not have nailed His hands to the cross. Why was Christianity persecuted? Why were its first professors thrown to wild beasts, burned to light a tyrant's gardens, hounded, tortured, put to death by all the cruel devices that a devilish ingenuity could suggest? Not that it was a new religion, referring only to the future. Rome was tolerant of all religions. It was the boast of Rome that all gods were sheltered in her Pantheon; it was the boast of Rome that she made no interference with the religious

brotherhood of man. It struck at the very basis of that monstrous tyranny that then oppressed the civilized world; it struck at the fetters of the captive, at the bonds of the slave, at that monstrous injustice which allowed a class to revel on the proceeds of labour, while those who did the labour fared scantily. That is the reason why early Christianity was persecuted. And when they could no longer hold it down, then the privileged classes adopted and perverted the new faith, and it became, in its very triumph, not the pure Christianity of the early days, but a Christianity that, to a very great extent, was the servitor of the privileged classes. And, instead of preaching the essential fatherhood of God, the essential brotherhood of man, its high priests engrafted on the pure truths of the Gospel the blasphemous doctrine that the All-Father is a respecter of persons, and that by His will and on His mandate is founded that monstrous injustice which condemns the great mass of humanity to unrequited hard toil. There has been no failure of Christianity. The failure has been in the sort of Christianity that has been preached.

Mrs Harrison writes: "My mother, who on account of illness could not be present at our little commemoration meeting, was present at the meeting in April, 1889. She says she 'can hear Henry George's fine clear voice ringing yet, and recalls the remarkable silence of that great assembly as they hung on every word. 'It was so hushed' she says, 'you could hear a pin drop.' I would not have missed the commemoration meeting for worlds. Willie Reid read the sermon in a quiet impressive way. Willie McLennan, it was easy to see, was living that memorable Sunday evening all over again. Mr McKendrick recalled Henry George's manner of speaking, his wonderful simplicity and clearness. It was a night with Henry George."

The sermon was printed at once, and during the intervening forty years, in pamphlet form, it has been in continuous circulation. In the English-speaking world there have been countless editions, and there have been many editions in other languages as well. *Thy Kingdom Come* is one of the most popular pieces of our permanent literature. The searching radical note it strikes never fails to appeal to the newcomers. It will live for ever as one of Henry George's noble and uplifting platform addresses. J. P.

"I think we can be proud of Birmingham's 'Land Values' M.P.," remarks Mr Chapman Wright, Secretary of the Midland League, in sending us the report of an interview given to the local Press by Mr G. F. Sawyer, the newly-elected Member for Duddeston. We quote a notable extract from Mr. Sawyer's statement:—

"I'm going to Westminster determined to do my best for Duddeston, for Birmingham and for the country as a whole. I shall work for the full Labour Party programme. And I want particularly to help forward the movement for the taxation of land values.

"The land," said Councillor Sawyer, "should be the people's. I want it taxed, by easy stages, whether used or not, up to 20s. in the £. If you tax the land you won't want any fancy schemes for dealing with the unemployment problem—it will right itself. And land taxation will yield all the revenue the Labour Party needs for carrying through its reforms.

"At the present time, if a municipality cuts a new road it is bled white for the purchase price, and the landowners on either side reap a golden harvest out of the Corporation's enterprise. Everywhere one is obstructed by the landowner holding out for a fortune for land he pays taxes on at the low agricultural rates."