

JAMES BUSBY



SECRETARY OF THE SCOTTISH LEAGUE, 1907-1924

Died at Glasgow, 28th March, 1924, aged 65 years

Hither, ye blind, from your futile banding !
 Know the rights and the rights are won.
 Wrong shall die with the understanding,
 One truth clear, and the work is done.
 Nature is higher than Progress or Knowledge
 Whose need is ninety enslaved for ten.
 My word shall stand against mart and college
 The Planet belongs to its living men !

John Boyle O'Reilly.

It is hard to realize that James Busby as we knew him in the flesh has passed for ever beyond our ken. His genial presence, his cheery greeting, his humour, his sympathy and understanding all combined to form a character in the Scottish movement that cannot very well be replaced. From the far north of Scotland to the south of England he stood high in esteem of our people. A Manchester friend writes: "It was always a pleasure to be in James Busby's company. I first met him in 1906 and have happy recollections of working with him on many campaigns. His humour was fine." A northern correspondent remarks: "I shall miss him at our national gatherings and so will many others." Yet another from a border town: "If I am spared to attend another Conference no matter where it may be held, I shall miss friend Busby. He was always so agreeable and made one feel so much at home." A Glasgow colleague who came to the League along with James Busby in the early 'nineties says: "The group that were together in those early days is thinning out, but we will all cherish memories of the sweetest kind in regard to this our latest loss." Another, who came as a mere youth to the League some twelve years later, cries out: "I have just been told the sad news and I feel hopelessly miserable and alone. We were great friends. I had a tremendous affection for him that took no account of the disparity in our years. I used to derive unutterable satisfaction from his good opinion and encouragement. I'll never forget the letters he wrote me during the war years. The League and all the shining ideals he worked for will be poorer for his absence."

These few tributes placed with so much heartfelt devotion at the graveside of James Busby but indicate how his colleagues and co-workers lament his loss. For full thirty years he served well and to the best of his ability. No man can do more. His memory will be treasured as one of the traditions of the League in its stand for the truth that once made clear will end the wrong that stands in the way of the Planet for its living men.

James Busby was a representative of a type to be found everywhere in the movement for economic justice. He came first to the office of the Scottish League a fresh man without knowledge or understanding of the underlying causes of want in the midst of plenty, but with a mind ready and eager for any inquiry. He was out for social

justice and in PROGRESS AND POVERTY, the salient points of which he quickly mastered, he found the economic basis for his belief in political adventure. That settled, the next question for friend Busby was how he could help in the propaganda. At once he took his place as a member of the executive of the League and speedily enough became one of its prominent and representative men. These were the halcyon days of his life. The rooms of the League he made his second home, and the propaganda his never ending source of recreation. He was in session in the evenings after his day's work was over, at week-ends and holidays as well. If there was anything to do at the office, or outside, he was ever at his post and with a cheerfulness that no one of his associates of those days and nights can ever forget.

When the United Committee began its mass meetings in 1907 in support of the Scottish Land Values Bill, James Busby was in his element. The time had come for action on more spacious ground and he simply revelled in the new opportunities, and when the 1909 Budget broke out in all its fury his reputation as a competent organizer had been firmly established. He was foremost in the fight and no one better enjoyed the experience. Later on, in the despairing days of Armageddon he showed the same unflinching courage in his splendid management of the successful National Conferences held at Glasgow and Edinburgh from 1916 to 1922.

He developed a passion for letters to the Editor, and his contributions to the GLASGOW HERALD and other local papers were quite a feature of the political life of the City. His matchless industry in this field of enterprise brought him many friends and admirers outside the League membership, who in turn were stimulated to so much welcome discussion, for and against the Land Value policy. It was a common experience in Glasgow in the course of a casual conversation to be told that Busby had a first-rate letter in some newspaper, or that he was holding his own in some interesting Press correspondence.

He was a keen politician with leanings towards the Left on most questions which he could defend in a masterly fashion and with a conviction that placed him in an unique position in any political controversy. He was officially attached to the Liberal Party and in Scottish Liberal circles he was known and respected as an uncompromising Single Taxer. But Liberal though he was, he had many close personal friends in the Labour Party who regarded him as an authority on the land question. When interviewed by a press representative last November as to how his local Liberal co-workers were likely to vote, he replied, without hesitation: "I don't know, but I am going to vote Labour." The Official Liberal Manifesto standing for land purchase settled that matter for him. He was justly proud of his trade union associates who never failed him when he sought their co-operation in the matter of some League Conference or public demonstration. The land question meant housing, employment, wages and prosperity all round and he could not understand a society standing for the workers' interests indifferent to his mission in life.

This writing could be extended and illuminated with many charming recollections of the man. His optimism and entertaining reflections on men and affairs, his knowledge of political and economic history and his love of good literature all combined to make an attractive personality. In the domain of poetry, Byron was his great favourite, and when in the mood he could with acceptance recite whole cantos from "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan."

What more can I say of our dear old friend James Busby? Our intercourse was something I shall always treasure as one of the rich gifts the movement has for those who come together in the spirit of Henry George's teaching. In this I know I speak for very many who, like myself, can affectionately linger by the wayside for a while in the presence of one whom it was a privilege to know and work with in the cause. He will be missed at the Scottish League; but the spirit of the man and the memory of his

comradeship and what he was given to accomplish is what counts. The movement is stronger to-day because of James Busby's unselfish devotion to it, and his colleagues can tell how he had his own reward in the development of the ideas he lived to see so firmly established in the public mind.

He was afflicted for years with a troublesome chronic illness that frequently retired him from his work at 67, West Nile Street, Glasgow, and which gradually reduced his strength. This might weaken, but his vision never grew dim, and his fine spirit was never once shaken. He was a sick man at the Oxford Conference last August, but he moved about the proceedings of that inspiring week with a glad recognition of all that it signified for our advance. "Cast your mind back to thirty years ago," he said to the writer of this halting tribute to his memory, "and try just to realize for a moment what it all means. The foundation is laid, the building will be erected. This representative gathering of Single Taxers is a powerful demonstration of our success." He said something else. I cannot write it down, but—well, we were the greatest of friends and I shall ever remember his affection for me, and for all who were with him in the days when we were building better than we knew.

We join in the sincerest sympathy with the family circle in their bereavement.

J. P.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

Address at Keighley by Mr. Andrew MacLaren

Mr. Andrew MacLaren, the ex-Labour M.P. for Burslem, addressed a public meeting in the Municipal Hall, Keighley, last Sunday evening on the subject "Social Implications of Christianity." The meeting (we quote from the KEIGHLEY NEWS report, 29th March), which was held under the auspices of the Yorkshire Land Values League, was presided over by Mr. Charles Smithson, president of the Yorkshire Northern Land Values League.

In the course of his address Mr. MacLaren said the working man of to-day was beginning to ask questions. In a natural state God provided every living creature, whether man or brute, with a home. No child was born on to this earth without a right, a personal right, to liberty, to food, to clothing, and to home.

The cause of the trouble was a faulty distribution of God's gifts to the community. Society was asking for a leader, thundering for some new vision. It was not that men were irreligious; but they did not consider that "religion" would relieve the congestion in those overcrowded areas in our towns. "You cannot hope to have men and women religious in the true sense of the word as long as they are constantly distracted with the curse of poverty," declared the speaker.

Referring to the work of Mr. Henry George, the leader of the land values movement, Mr. MacLaren pointed out that, though Mr. George's book on the subject, "Progress and Poverty," was written so many years ago, yet it was more applicable to present conditions than it was then, because "those who monopolize the soil must of necessity become more powerful and dominate the structure of society, and the worker who has no land monopoly becomes disinherited, not by God's law, but by man-made laws."

In concluding, Mr. MacLaren made a forcible appeal "You have wars because economic injustice is dominant," he said. "Wars will not cease, science will continue to become a fiend in the laboratory until the minds of men come back again to fundamental truths. A clear understanding of the land question will lead to a clearer understanding of every economic question which absorbs the interests of politicians of to-day."

After the address questions were submitted by members of the audience bearing on the land question, and these were dealt with at length by Mr. MacLaren.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

RATING OF LAND VALUES (No. 2) BILL

15th April

Sir John Simon : I beg to move, "That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the valuation of land and for the rating of land values and other purposes connected therewith."

The present system of rating is one which discourages development and handicaps building, and at the same time it often fails to secure for the community that contribution which ought to be made from land value created by the efforts of the community as a whole, and particularly by the expenditure of money out of the rates. The object of the Bill, therefore, is to encourage building and improvements by relieving those who undertake them in the future from the burden of the additional rates caused thereby and further to introduce a system of valuation which would enable a proper contribution to be secured from land values.

There are a number of cases in which, under the present law, properties either escape valuation or rating altogether on the ground that they are vacant or derelict, or are rated on an assessment which is substantially less than the full annual value of the land, because the use to which they are at present being put is altogether inadequate, and the rent which is obtained for them bears no relation to the true value which would be realizable if the property were sold. We who support this Bill believe that it is unjust that these values, which are not due to the efforts or expenditure of any individual but are due to the activities and the expenditure of the community, should escape in whole or in part the burden of the rates which falls on other property, and the first effect of this Bill would be to set up a valuation which would secure that, in future, rating should be based on a sounder principle. We believe that this would not only be fair, but that it would in itself have a considerable effect in bringing land into use, in encouraging building, in promoting the production of houses, and thereby in reducing the level of the rates.

The present system is wrong because it operates as an extremely heavy tax upon production. It is sometimes supposed that though this is true in towns it is not true in relation to agricultural land. I should like to put before the House a very brief extract from a great authority, an agricultural witness whom I call, the Duke of Bedford. The Duke of Bedford, in a book which he wrote on the story of a great agricultural estate, stated as follows:—

"I have established near Woburn an experimental fruit farm. An ordinary arable field was converted during the autumn and winter of 1894 into a fruit garden by the employment of capital and labour. The land was duly planted with a valuable stock of fruit trees and bushes, and after a few months there came up—I confess to my amazement, for I did not foresee this result of my experiment—the overseer. The parish overseer said, 'The employment of capital has wrought a great change in this spot, and it is my duty to return the same and treble your rates.'"

The Duke of Bedford went on:

"Well, I was in search of experience in the matter of fruit farming, and I am now in a position to record an important result. It is this. If you invest capital in a fruit farm, your rates will be trebled before you have any chance of a return for your outlay."

Therefore, I submit that alike in agricultural and urban areas this Bill is proposing what is useful in removing this tax upon output. In the case of buildings and improvements that have been already completed, no doubt the mischief is done; but the Bill proposes that no future buildings or improvements shall be taken into account in assessing property for rating purposes. If this had been done before the War it might have been said that it created an unfair distinction between one class of persons and