

## "I Saw A Great Light"

(A STIRRING PARAGRAPH OR TWO FROM  
HERBERT QUICK'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY\*.)

"TAKE it and read it," said Reverdy Miller as he handed to Herbert Quick, away back in the 80's, a paper edition of "Progress and Poverty."

"I looked at it with contempt," says Herbert Quick, "for it was a book greatly reprobated in the crowd with which I had been training; a book never read by those who condemned it; a book already known in most civilized lands, and often answered . . . . ."

"Yet I took it and read it."

"The preface, dated November 1880, while its sweeping generalizations rather took away my breath, was so calm, so quiet, so free from that blatancy which marks the howl of the demagogue that I went on to the Introduction, entitled, "The Problem" with half my hostility removed. This man appealed to thought rather than to passion. But in the introduction, I began to feel the swell of a suppressed fervor, and I sensed the confidence of the writer in the fact that he had attained to truth. He spoke calmly of the failure of political economy as then taught to explain, to say nothing of proposing a remedy for, the social evils which every one could see. This failure he urged came not from the inability of the human mind to solve the problem, but from false steps in the various more or less accepted explanations.

"The writer was Henry George, and the book was Progress and Poverty."

"I have often wondered whether many men have passed through such an experience as mine in the reading of this book. I found the very foundations of my philosophy in the process of dissolution. Like the foundations of the Cathedral of St. Paul's, they turned out to be nothing but sand and rubble, and the structure of conviction and theory so dear to me was tottering to its fall; but the book did not destroy alone. It poured into the rotten base the concrete of a new and perfectly correlated doctrine, which has stood firm and unshaken ever since. But these foundations of belief which were moving, dissolving and undergoing reconstruction, were those of my very life. The dome which was trembling was that of the convictions which I had publicly proclaimed before my little world. Consistency is a very precious jewel, especially to him who even in a modest way has been a speaker and a writer; and I saw that if these were veritable truths which I was drinking in, I should be forced to repudiate my doctrines which I had held, and which constituted the bond between me and many dear friends. I was facing a crucial test of character, or I was being misled.

\*This work is one of the best autobiographies ever written. Readers of LAND AND FREEDOM know of the late Herbert Quick as the author of Vandermark's Folly and other best sellers in which our principles are not neglected.—Editor LAND AND FREEDOM.

"I knew that my mind was at close grips with an intellect of the first order, moved by an apostolic fervor. I said to myself in effect, that if this were really truth, I should be a lost soul if I rejected it; for it was not only a call to the discipleship of truth, but the most completely redemptive truth ever set before the world. It was true that all history was strewn with the wrecks of civilizations. It was true that progress had always been associated with growing poverty. It was true that all civilizations which had possessed the power of protecting themselves against destruction from dangers from the outside, had eventually rotted from within. It was true that the increase of wealth had been accompanied by the increase of poverty in America."

"And here was an analysis of the factors which were not only at work in our society, but must inevitably have been at work all through history, which not only had produced the disease in the past everywhere, but must generate it in us as surely as decade should follow decade. Here was at last a perfectly plain and irrefutable exposition of the way in which wealth is distributed as it is produced. As every one has agreed, it fell into the divisions of interest, wages and rent; but George, for the first time, defined these three so that each included no portion of either of the others. He gave perfect definitions of interest, wages and rent. Then he showed that as rent increased with the increase of population, and the progress of the arts and sciences, it is always subtracted, and must in the nature of things be subtracted, from the portions of wealth produced going into wages and interest.

"He demonstrated that with land reduced to private possession, the economists before him had been correct in asserting that rent is measured by the superior productive capacity of any land in question, in site value in cities, and in farming value or the like in the country, over the least desirable land in use. In other worlds, rent depends upon the margin of cultivation, as Ricardo, Mill and others had said. But George showed that interest also depends on the margin of cultivation, as it must take its share of what is left after rent is satisfied; and that wages also depend upon it for the same reason. Thus the land question became the fundamental fact in economics as well as in sociology.

"I was surprised to find here a reformer saying a good word for interest; but George proved not only the necessity, but the righteousness of interest. He showed that rent is at the expense of interest, and thus takes from capital a part of a larger share which it should have. But the crux of his demonstration lay in the proof that it is rent which crushes labor down to the returns from the poorest land in cultivation, and that this really means down to the smallest wage on which labor can live and reproduce. He was not content with the really mathematical demonstration of this. He proved it inductively, and deductively. He scanned history for evidence. He stated all

the objections which have ever been made against his system in a stronger form than they have ever been stated by his opponents; and answered them beforehand. And he proposed a remedy for the social disease of increasing poverty with the development of a civilization which was simple and just.

"He showed that rent arises in the nature of things. No one is to blame for it. As land in a new society is occupied the superior land must bear rent. But rent comes, not from labor of the owner, so far as the mere land is concerned; but from the progress of society. Hence, morally, it belongs to society. Therefore this "unearned increment" of land values, in city and country, should be collected yearly by the government as belonging to the whole people. All public expenditures should be paid for with it. No one under such circumstances would hold land for any purpose except use, and he would pay only what the use was worth. All wealth produced by human activities would be untaxed. Nothing would be taxed save that which was created by the taxing power. Really the single tax would not be a tax at all, in the ordinary sense, since it would be merely a payment to the whole people for a benefit enjoyed. All titles would remain as now. There would be no disturbance of any occupation. Things would gradually readjust themselves. Wages and interest would rise to their proper level. The problem of poverty and want would be cured, and that without revolution. People freed from the trammels of a rigid land system could readjust themselves to any system of public order they might choose. Even the benefits claimed by socialism could be realized in so far as they might be realizable through voluntary cooperation, without the tyranny of state socialism. This is in a very sketchy form the vision which dawned on me as I read 'Progress and Poverty.'"

"A perfectible society, and the obvious means of perfecting it. The ancient riddle of ruin solved at last. The abolition of involuntary poverty in view. Eternal racial life attainable for us of the end of the century, under terms of freedom, and with no need for revolution. I moved for days in a plane of exaltation such as I have never experienced before or since. I was uplifted to the skies. Again I suffered. It was the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep, and the opening of the windows of my spiritual heaven. I can not wish any young reader a better thing than some such experience. I have never for a moment lost that something like a transformation which came to me then.

"Said Reverdy Miller, when I went back to him with the book and with a new light in my face: 'Nobody can refute it. It's the real stuff.'"

**I**RVING FISHER says that 80 per cent. of our people barely earn a living. The truth is that they earn an excellent living, but it is the twenty per cent. who get it.

—*The New Yorker.*

## Wrong Notions About Taxation

**O**PPONENTS of the idea that all taxes should be raised by the appropriation of the "unearned increment," or the taxation of the value of land, are generally guilty in their argument of a strange mixture of admitted fact and faulty reasoning. We base this statement on an article published in a recent issue of a farm paper in which the writer, presumably a farmer, contends that there is just as much "unearned increment" in a store, a farm paper or other publication, or a factory, as there is in his land. To quote a paragraph from the article:

What would The Iowa Farmer or Bishop's store be worth if they were located in a howling wilderness which extended hundreds of miles beyond the printing plant or the store? If it is the presence of population that gives value to my land, what is it that gives value to The Farmer or to the store? Yes, it is the people who have put the value into my farm, but it is just as certainly the people who create the value of stores and factories and all kinds of publications.

As a statement of fact as to the source of all values the above is undoubtedly true. As a process of reasoning advanced to show that books and magazines and papers, stocks of goods and factory equipment should be taxed the same as the "unearned increment" of the political economists, it is all "wet" and a fair sample of the lack of logic upon which is based the current defense of the general property tax, not only in Iowa, but in Ohio and every other state that stifles an enormous amount of potential prosperity by unscientific and unjust tax laws.

And the above, instead of being what its author meant it to be, an unanswerable defense of the general property tax, affords the best proof imaginable that our present method of taxation is as wrong in theory as it is unfair in practice. There are still men living in Iowa who, as young men and pioneers, purchased land at government prices. Let us assume that the writer of the above is one of these. He paid \$1.25 an acre for, let us say, a quarter section. His 160 acres with good buildings is doubtless worth today 200 times that much, or \$250 an acre. Had he in his youth merely proved his claim, then abandoned it and let it lie fallow until the time of writing the above letter it would still be worth perhaps 100 times as much as he paid for it, altho never reduced to cultivation.

Would time do as much for the owner of a store, a factory, a printing plant? Could an Iowa manufacturer erect and equip his plant, lock the door, move out of town and expect Father Time to enhance the value of the plant, regardless of how many people moved into the town or the state, as the quarter section of land increased in value? Could a merchant open and stock a store or a publisher start a paper, then abandon it and hope to come back at