

## SPAIN AND SOUTH AMERICA

Address by Antonio Albendin (Cadiz)

(At the Oxford International Conference on 15th August)

Before I refer to the work accomplished by the Spanish League and place before you the results of my own experience, allow me to express the great pleasure and the pride I feel in finding myself amongst you on the solemn occasion which I look upon as the inauguration of the true League of Nations—the League which is out to inaugurate a new civilization and to bring the reign of peace on earth to all men of good will.

I bring to this meeting cordial greetings from all my Spanish colleagues; they have been unable to come in person, but they are here in spirit, and they follow our deliberations with great interest and with great hopes.

I also want to pay homage to the memory of those who fought by our side in this new crusade and now dwell in another world where they enjoy the blessings which are reserved for those who had thirst of justice and worked for the liberation of the oppressed.

Greetings to all that are gathered with us in this momentous occasion whether actually or in spirit, and that have been brought here by the dynamic force of the Henry George teaching; the importance of this meeting speaks well for the future of the movement, not only in England but in all other countries as well.

Spain is a country where liberty in all its aspects, and specially where land is concerned, has a long and honourable history. There are still whole regions where the land is to this day common property. The province of Zamora is a case in point, and I have had there occasion to study the system of land tenure which has been handed on from generation to generation without a break, in spite of the invasion by the old Romans, who introduced in Spain the system of private land property.

The literature on the land question in Spain is both ancient and interesting. In the year 1670 Sr. Centani published a pamphlet entitled "Tierras" which means Land. A copy of this exists in the National Library in Madrid, which leave was obtained by the Spanish League in 1915 to reproduce in order to issue a fresh edition, maintaining scrupulously the original text. From the year 1670 up to the publication in 1893 of the first translation of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* into Spanish, there has been abundant literature on this subject, and Sr. Costa in his book referred to has an absolute full record of every author and publication, including even a short abstract of the latter.

The French Physiocrats in the year 1770 formulated a doctrine which found an echo in every country, and there is scarcely one in which this doctrine did not bring forth a man of conspicuous ability who raised its standard and even endeavoured to carry it into practice, and so we see within fifty years after 1770 men such as Franklin in the United States, Rivadavia in the Argentine, Turgot in France, Flores Estrada in Spain, trying to shepherd their fellow-countrymen on to the road of economic justice.

The French Revolution then, as the Great War now, set the clock back on land reform, and the vested interests which thrive and prosper under the reign of injustice succeeded in banishing from the Universities as well as from the Parliaments the very memory of these brilliant economists whose ideas they denounced as dangerous and no longer in fashion.

And so we come to modern times and to the epoch-making discovery of Henry George which was first made accessible to the public in Spain from a French translation of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* by Le Monnier, mentioned by Joaquin Costa in his book and later on through a Spanish translation by Don Magin Puig of Barcelona, brought the public in closer touch with Henry George's doctrine. It may be interesting here to say that the translator of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* concealed his identity for many

years, living in fear of being prosecuted by the authorities owing to the turbulent period reigning in Barcelona at the time of the translated publication. It did not sell in spite of all the efforts of the translator, and one of the good results of the Ronda Meeting in 1913 was not only to bring this translation into circulation but to cause two more cheap editions being printed which were sold out.

At the present time a further edition of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* has a great circulation in Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries, although not at a cheap price.

Reverting to the first Spanish translation of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, we may say that the reports of the Ronda Meeting in the daily papers reached the ears of the translator's widow, who offered the whole unsold lot of her husband's edition at cost price to the Spanish League. The offer was accepted at once, and the book was passed on to the public at a very reduced price, and the available stock was disposed of in a very short time. As a result of this propaganda supported by the Spanish League's Journal, the light of Georgism was spread not only in Spain but also in the Spanish-speaking countries of South America, where Doctor Felix Vitale, who had already sown the first seed, works strenuously and successfully in the vanguard. He has already published under the title of *POVERTY AND DISCONTENT*, an admirable book in which he gave in original form a résumé of the Henry George doctrine. In the same volume is included a translation into Spanish of Henry George's *CONDITION OF LABOUR*.

One of the first to accept Georgism in South America as a result of Dr. Vitale's propaganda was Dr. Herrera Reisig, and these two gentlemen with the co-operation of Mr. Robert Balmer and Mr. C. N. MacIntosh (whose premature death is a great loss to our cause) founded in the Argentine, Uruguay and Brazil many organizations which did so much good work that the Single Tax theory counts to-day in those countries with the active support of a brilliant army of writers, orators, professors of universities, barristers, business men—in a word, men in all walks of life, the list of whom would take too much time to cite.

Much the same may be said of Spain, where the doctrine we defend has the support of a host of brilliant men. It will be quite impossible to name them all in the short time I have at my disposal. I must however mention a remarkable book entitled *ON THE BRINK OF THE AVALANCHE*, due to the pen of Don Juan Moreno Molina, a brave defender of the cause, and who has been one of us since the very beginning. I must also mention Don Julio Senador Gomez, a convert to the Single Tax doctrine since the year 1917, and in this short time he has published a large number of volumes in which in a fearless and powerful manner he expounds the doctrine, as a result of which his contributions are eagerly sought after by the Press in Spain and South America.

Nor must I omit to mention Don Baldomero Argente, a prolific and powerful writer who has translated the works of Henry George, but who unfortunately has been taken away from the rank of militant Georgists by his political activities.

The Georgist literature in Spain is very abundant. Besides the works published by the Spanish League, there is a firm of publishers issuing on their own account the works of Henry George, and they are publishing shortly the famous work of Max Hirsch, *DEMOCRACY VERSUS SOCIALISM*.

With such elements and the constant spade work carried out by the League the Spanish Single Taxers have sown the seed which time will ripen.

In the political field little has been achieved so far. Yet there is a proof that our propaganda has had practical results in the fact that since the days of the Premiership of Canalejas in 1913 a tax was imposed upon all vacant land for building purposes. But to show you the power and vigilance displayed by the monopolists, as soon as

the law taxing vacant sites had been passed, they succeeded in reducing the tax to its lowest limits. When the regulations for the practical carrying out of that law were being drafted, they succeeded in amending them so that instead of contributing in accordance with the selling value, those vacant sites should contribute on the same basis as the best agricultural land in the district. And that is how they are assessed now; but the present Finance Minister is reported to have the intention of re-establishing the selling value as the basis of assessment.

As the Minister said: "The number of vacant sites in the towns is positively scandalous. In the very heart of Madrid, close to the Puerta del Sol, there are vacant plots worth one hundred million pesetas which pay taxes as agricultural land. The owners can thus afford to keep that land out of use; but as soon as we tax them on the full value of the land they will see the advisability of building on them."

Another instance of the power of the monopolist is shown in a case in Zaragoza. There (thanks to the efforts of our colleagues and specially of those of Don Manuel Marraco, who sent to the Ronda Meeting in 1913 a motion which was carried) a resolution to tax vacant town plots was passed by the Town Council for the specific purpose of wiping off the town's debts. More than two years ago this enactment was sanctioned by the Central Government in Madrid, but to this day it has remained a dead letter. Such is the power of the vested interests which, when afraid of fighting openly, exert themselves in the dark, and under cover.

Coming now to South America, our movement has made gigantic strides. We have no positive information as to whether the taxation on land values is in operation in any municipality beyond the very good news we heard here in this hall two days ago concerning Mendoza and Buenos Aires, but we know this much, that there are a great number of Municipal Councils in the Argentine and in Brazil where propositions and schemes have been put forward with the object of taxing land values, sometimes at the instigation of Mayors or Governors and other times through the instrumentality of the Single Tax organizations supported by public opinion. As you can see from my statement, there is not the slightest doubt that Georgism has taken a deep root in the fertile soil of those countries, and we look forward to the day when the taxation of land values will be put into practical operation by all the municipalities in South America.

The work carried out by the Georgists in that part of the world is deserving of the highest praise and is highly encouraging to us in this hemisphere.

I believe that this International Conference could create an organism which would enable the active co-operation of the Georgists of all the world towards the advance of the idea in Denmark and the Argentine. It would be necessary to organize a permanent International Committee, either in London or in any other town.

I also believe that our meetings should be held at more frequent intervals. From the first International Conference presided over by Henry George in Paris in 1889 to the second one held in Ronda in 1913, 24 years elapsed. From the second meeting to the present one there has been a gap of ten years. I have the pleasure to suggest that all Georgists should meet in an International Conference every three years. At each meeting the date and place of the next Conference would be agreed upon. If you approve of this suggestion, I would further propose that the next International Conference be held at Copenhagen in August, 1926.

It only remains for me to put on record the great satisfaction it gives me to find myself once more amongst so many faithful friends in this Conference, upon which I look as a first meeting of the true League of Nations, and I take this opportunity to send cordial greetings to all the friends who have been unable to join us and a

tribute of respect to the departed who worked with untiring faith in the propagation of the gospel which was given to the world by the great Master, Henry George, whose memory we revere at all moments, and to whom our love and gratitude are due for having opened our mind and our heart in the midst of the horrible darkness which enshrouds this corrupt civilization.

## CAMBRIDGE

### Mr. A. H. Peake on Housing

Mr. A. H. Peake (member of the Oxford International Conference) gave an address on Housing under the auspices of the Cambridge Borough Liberal Association, 10th October, Councillor J. S. Conder, Chairman of the local Housing and Town Planning Committee, presiding.

In the course of his remarks (we quote from a column report of the CAMBRIDGE DAILY NEWS) the speaker said:

The evil of the housing shortage was admitted in all quarters, and the extreme urgency of the problem was making many people desperate, and willing to adopt any means, whether just or unjust, if only they could do something to remedy the shortage soon. How strange it was that men were needing houses, while the raw materials necessary were all around them in abundance; building land, clay for bricks, gravel, limestone, coal and ironstone, etc., while many men remained unemployed, and some were in danger of becoming unemployable; and at the same time the progress of science had made possible the use of methods and machinery undreamt of when the stones, say, of King's College Chapel, were quarried one by one by hand labour alone.

What, then, prevented the solution of the housing problem? Was there some root cause, some radical injustice, which kept the hatches locked against the would-be users? If there was such an injustice, then no amount of tinkering and no legislation which did not deal with the injustice could be satisfactory or prevent evil fruit from being produced. In the speaker's opinion, such a fundamental injustice existed in land monopoly, which gave power to certain individuals to say as the hatches were opened, "This is mine." This monopoly was bolstered up by our present rating system, and would be broken down by the abolition of this system and the substitution therefore of the taxation of land values.

There is no need to inquire into the use to which the land is put, whether the owner possesses one plot or many, whether he be rich or poor, living here or abroad, etc. Experience of the system abroad shows that the peaceful co-operation of the owners is easily secured. They understand at once that they have only to see whether the market value of their sites is fixed in right relation to that of their neighbours, and to that of the remoter sites. We have Lord Northcliffe's evidence that Sydney, where the system is in operation, is a remarkable city, entirely free from slums, and plentifully supplied with great open spaces.

It was commonly stated that in the matter of housing private enterprise had failed. Had it ever had a fair chance? Was it not time that the incubus of the rating system was removed, and land monopoly broken down, to give it a fair chance?

The true function of government was to take care that justice was the foundation stone of the political system, so that men should be free to house, employ and feed themselves. The aim of politics ought to be the same as that of religion, that men might have life, and have it abundantly. An interesting discussion followed, and the speaker answered fully questions put to him by Mr. A. J. Winship, Dr. G. P. Bidder (who announced himself as a convert to taxation of land values), and by others.