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## **THE RELATION OF THE LAND QUESTION TO OTHER REFORMS.**

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WHEN, a few years ago, the intelligence was flashed along the wires that Henry George and his associates had organized an Anti-Poverty Society, the world greeted the announcement with a laugh. Today we find his followers greatly multiplied; thousands have taken up the cross of the new crusade with a zeal seldom equalled in any other cause, and the claim is stoutly made that the single tax is a fundamental and essential preliminary to all other reforms. This claim is worthy of our careful examination.

Two ideas have in recent years made wonderful progress in the thought of the world, and have done much toward clearing the way for an appreciation of the single tax in its true relations. The first of these is the recognition of the fact that every reform is related to every other reform, and, to be successful, must take into account other reform forces working with it towards a resultant end. This idea has found most complete recognition in the history of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which, beginning with the single reform of temperance, now embraces more than forty departments of reformatory work.

Again, thoughtful reformer are recognizing that the domain of the moral is not confined to the sphere of individual action, but that the higher growth of the soul is inseparably connected with the social and economic conditions that surround the body. We are beginning to hear from the most enlightened pulpits such sentiments as these: "Every economic question is a political question; every political question is a social question, and every social question is a religious question." With this broader view of the forces of civilization, comes the thought that God has a purpose and a plan in the development of our economic and social life, and that a failure to follow that plan will bring individual deterioration and national decay. The old theory that life is a state of probation, in which good and evil spirits struggle for the mastery of souls weighted with the burden of depraved natures, has utterly broken down, and the world stands to-day confronted with the alternative of the skepticism of despair, or the discovery of some faith that shall give practical recognition to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. How opportune, then, is the discovery and setting forth of a principle in political economy, which, while recognizing the infinite bounty of a God of love, distributes that bounty to all mankind with a father's impartial hand, and

establishes as the fundamental relation of men, that equal brotherhood which the highest instincts of religion teach.

We hold that God's gifts to man inhere in the land upon which we must live ; that each child of God has a right to an equal share in that bounty, and, hence, that human law concerning the tenure of land should secure that equal right. To preserve that equality, society should take by taxation from each, for the common benefit of all, such a sum as is needed to make the holdings of each of equal value. Thus by the simplest of means, not only is equality established, but it is preserved through those changes which are brought about by the increase of population, and the advantages which social and industrial development bring. Since the rise in value of land and the need of public utilities both spring from the increase of population, it follows that the public revenues for common use can best be supplied from that fund which must be taken in order to preserve the needed equality of individual opportunity.

Again, equality having been established by means of a tax on land values alone, it follows that to tax any other forms of wealth, which are created by men in the enjoyment of that equality, disturbs the equilibrium and is therefore subversive of justice. Hence we plead for a single tax on land values only as at the same time the simplest and most just system possible.

There are those who see in this system merely a measure of fiscal reform, but there is in it much more. Grand as it is when viewed in that light, it is still grander in its moral aspect. Its chief claim to our enthusiastic support, as well as the strongest proof of its divine origin, is the fact that it establishes that equality of opportunity which renders impartial God's bounty and conforms to that strict justice which should exist between man and man.

By the application of this truth, every relation of life, stripped of those artificial conditions which spring from the unequal distribution of natural opportunities, undergoes a beneficial change. The arrogance of the landlord is no longer met by the fawning sycophancy of the tenant. Labor, free to employ itself, no longer sells its birthright for the pottage of a miserable existence ; and genius, no more the pampered prostitute of power, rises in the dignity of its own intrinsic worth to bless the world with its godlike creations. A democracy, such as the world has never seen, takes the place of the aristocracy which now curses society with its social arrogance. The equality of man is expressed in a new equation, from which is eliminated the selfish egotism of the present, and in place of the formula, "I am as good as you are," we have the nobler one, "You are as good as I am."

In the light of this truth the dark passages of the revealed word take on new meaning. The prophetic inspiration of the Scriptures receive new interpretation, and

their blessed promises are enriched by a deepened sense of God's wisdom and goodness. Providence is relieved of the dark imputation of a fateful cruelty, and, with the clearer vision of a stronger faith, we see no more the arbitrary vengeance of an angry God, but the loving tenderness of a heavenly Father. I think much of doubt comes to all of us, who, seeing the misery of the world, the degradation, crime, and filth which are the inheritance and unavoidable lot of many under existing conditions, cannot reconcile their fate with the theory of an overruling Providence which parcels out to each his lot in life. But when we comprehend God's impartial purposes, and realize that society alone is to blame for the maladjustments of life, how quickly does the perspective change, and the elements of responsibility, duty, and reward arrange themselves in a new alignment.

What, then, can be more fundamental in the work of reform than the establishment of a system that shall distribute impartially the gifts of God to His children, and guarantee to each an equality of opportunity in working out the problem of individual life? Under such a system, must not every element of good that God has implanted in our natures find the conditions most favorable to its highest development?

But we are told that the struggles of life are given for our discipline, and that by contentions with difficulties our powers are strengthened. This is true only so far as it applies to our relations with nature. When man contends with his fellow-men, the results are evil only, and instead of the better elements of his nature being strengthened, his natural and God-given appetites become abnormally developed into fiendish passion.

In his dealings with the elements of nature, in his mastery of the resources that God has placed within his reach, there is much to call forth his greatest efforts and his noblest powers. Hope lures him on. Success fires his ambition to attempt greater things, and temporary defeat but sharpens his weapon for the final conflict. In this struggle with nature there is nothing that embitters the heart or destroys the powers of mind or body, but with each successive victory, his faculties are enlarged, and his faith is strengthened by fresh testimony to that all-pervading love which is the source of all life.

But in his battle against injustice it is not so. In that conflict the generous qualities of his nature become atrophied by disuse, and the passions are stimulated to an abnormal development. Defeat brings a discouragement which weakens, and success an excitation which narrows the sympathies and hardens the heart. Envy, revenge, and hatred supplant the nobler sentiments of cooperation, confidence, and love, and distrust of his fellow-man is soon followed by doubt of the goodness of God. Where injustice prevails, human governments are mocked and religion is despised. Where the streets are full of beggars, the churches are full of hypocrites, and earnest men begin

to ask, " Is there a God?" Can it, then, be doubted that the establishment of a condition that guarantees to all equality of opportunity, will bring into play the better attributes of man's nature, and go far toward checking the growth of those evil passions whose abnormal development has rendered necessary many of the reforms which are to-day pressing for solution?

From whence comes the evil passion of greed? From what soil does avarice spring? Come they not from that condition of society which gives to one the fruits of another's toil, and makes success, not the reward of merit but the gift of chance and favoritism? And whence comes that indolence and sloth which destroy the natural energy of man, and transform him into a beggarly tramp'? Do they not come from a denial to him of his birthright of equality? Did the merited reward of duty well performed ever beget sloth'? Did pride, avarice, and ostentation ever spring from a condition where equal merits were sure of equal pay? By no means. These passions are the inevitable fruit of that system that destroys equality of opportunity and confers special privileges.

With equality guaranteed, with equal access to the storehouse of nature secured to all, human energy would find no occasion for the clash of interests, no scope for the passion of greed. With the disappearance of want, avarice would cease, and ostentation would give place to magnanimity. The desire natural to each human breast to win the approbation of his fellows, would find employment in the promotion of good works rather than in the accumulation of riches. The almighty dollar would be dethroned and nobility of mind proclaimed. Envy would disappear, for where all might enjoy the blessings and luxuries of life, each would rejoice in the prosperity of others, and the waste of energy now expended in maintaining our position in the shifting sands of favoritism and chance, would be employed in the cooperative upbuilding of a noble civilization.

I have dwelt at length upon this phase of the single tax, because it is not only its central idea, but it is the line along which it touches all other reforms. Not only is equality essential to the free play of those natural forces which make for the right, but since every blessing that can be brought to mankind becomes quickly localized, its benefits attach at once to the land, insomuch that until opportunities are equalized, the coming of any good thing, even a reform, will but emphasize the inequalities that now exist.

A moment's reflection suffices to show that everything that makes a community a more desirable place in which to live or a more profitable place in which to do business, is at once reflected in the values of land and is added to its rent or selling price. Every dealer in real estate knows what the churches and schools of a

community contribute to the price of land, and how much more readily property will rent or sell in neighborhoods where culture and sobriety give character to the social life. It is not claimed that the single tax would hinder this advance in rent. But since it would be wholly absorbed in taxation, it would go to a common fund for the use of all instead of into the Dockets of land holders.

Under our present system, since wealth alone can secure locations free from corrupting influences, many an honest and decent man or woman is compelled to live amid contaminating surroundings, simply because poverty forces them to chose localities where rents are cheapest. Thus with our present system, the rich, who are able to seize with their wealth the most desirable locations, by that means monopolize the good things of earth which God has given, and the benefits which come from the labor, skill, and intelligence of man as well.

It is clear that whatever would equalize the benefits which inhere in the land, would also equalize those which inevitably attach themselves to the land. Thus the brotherhood of man will be exemplified in the same system that shows forth the fatherhood of God. Are we, then, claiming too much when we say that the single tax is the divinely appointed way through which justice can be established upon the earth, and that because it is divinely appointed it is an essential preliminary to all other reforms, and must be established before their benefits can be fully utilized for the blessing of all? Are we claiming too much when we maintain that until such equal distribution of benefits is secured the advent of any reform will, by accentuating the inequalities which now exist, produce by injustice evils as great as the one it has sought to cure?

We may not claim that under a condition of absolute equality of opportunity the evil passions would wholly die, but it is beyond question that many of the forces which under our present system act as powerful stimulants and promoting causes of crime would be wholly wanting. Take the evils of licentiousness and intemperance. How are they related to the reform we advocate? I believe the Scriptures are right when they say that the love of money is the root of all evil, and I believe that in the end these questions will be found to be economic questions, and their solution most easily effected by bringing about conditions of economic justice. With equality of opportunity guaranteed to all and the vast storehouse of nature utilized for the benefit of all, there will be no need for any to engage in a business so revolting as keeping a saloon or brothel. From that side, surely, much of the pressure toward evil will be removed, while on the side of man's depravity much will be accomplished by

removing the causes which stimulate his passions, and building up the hope and ambition which always spring from a just reward of honest effort.

I believe the conditions of society now existing, creating classes of the very rich and very poor, produce debauchery on the one hand and degradation on the other, augmenting the forces of intemperance beyond the power of prohibitory or restrictive law to subdue or check. Can we expect sobriety and restraint to be the effects of an economic system like ours, founded on the ethics of the hog-trough and dominated by a competition that knows no limit but the death of the competitor, no law but the demands of success, and no restraining influence that is not measured in dollars and cents? Can we expect moderation and purity of life from men gorged with wealth that has been wrung from the toil of others? Or that the discouragement and defeat of ill-requited labor will make men manly and strong to resist temptation?

With the single tax in operation every reform would be more easily established and become more fully operative. While it stands in the way of none, it will greatly assist them all. But there are some reforms which are capable of at least a partial success without the single tax. By way of illustration I will mention such changes in our franchise laws as the ballot for women, proportional representation, the initiative and referendum, and the election of our chief executive and senators by direct vote of the people. All of these, it will be observed, have for their object the securing to the individual his equal political rights; while the single tax seeks to secure equal distribution of benefits, these aim to distribute equally the powers of governing. Their claim to our support lies in the justice of that equality.

Again, there are other reforms which will be imperatively needed under the single tax system, but which until that fundamental condition is supplied, will be either of only partial utility or positively injurious. Of these I may mention government ownership of the instruments of commerce and the transmission of intelligence. It is undoubtedly true that equal rights and justice require that public functions should be carried on at public expense for the public benefit. But since these public services render more valuable the Lands of a community in which they are exercised, it is clear that until land values are equalized by the single tax their benefits will be unequally distributed. It is also clear that landed interests will seek to control the development of these government functions to the advantage of land speculation. This corruption in government would be stimulated, and the solidity of the superstructure would be destroyed by the insufficiency of the foundation.

The same observation applies, though in a much less degree, to improvements in nuance. Undoubtedly the single tax would forever remove the curses of the land-mortgage system; but it is folly for us to maintain that it would cure the evils of a depleted currency, or stay the ruin that must come upon the business world by a sudden and enforced contraction of credit, such as we are now experiencing.. Even were the single tax in operation, these evils would have to be met and overcome. With our financial system founded upon debt and our business customs in open defiance of the divine command to owe no man anything, what wonder that our folly should terminate in an utter collapse of confidence, and a sudden though disastrous destruction of that system of credit through which the elements of our business life have been placed in unnatural relations?

But what shall we say of the merits of socialism as a rival of the single tax system? Both claim as the object of their effort the establishment of equality, and, consequently, of justice ; and because of such claim both are entitled to our profound respect.

To my mind, socialism ignores that principle of individual action and development, which seems to be the key of God's government, and the importance of which He has emphasized, not only in His dealings with His creatures, but in the strong and indestructible love of liberty that He has implanted in their hearts. It seems to me that socialism, seeing the evils which spring from competition caused by artificial conditions, seeks to remedy those evils by making life more artificial rather than less so. It seems to me that socialism ignores the two fundamental truths of creation, viz., God's love and man's equality. It ignores God's love in so much as it would supplant the laws that God in infinite wisdom implanted in the nature of man, and institute in their place the imperfect regulations of human wisdom. It ignores man's equality in so much as it would destroy his individual liberty and subject him to arbitrary regulations.

It is not the effort of man to gratify his wants in an unrestricted field, where nature's bounties have far outrun his necessities, that has given to competition its bloody and relentless aspect, but it is the restriction of that field and the monopolization of those bounties. All of the monstrous injustice expressed in the word monopoly, all of the fierce hatred that finds its exercise in the boycott, and all of the filth, degradation, and vice that are the concomitants of poverty, spring not from the innate wickedness of men, but from a denial of their natural rights, and call not for restrictive measures, but for the repeal of unrighteous statutes.

One lesson, however, all nature teaches, and that is the lesson of unity — the correlation of every existence with every other existence. It is taught by every leaf that yields to the influence of a passing breeze, by every bee that carries the fruitful pollen from flower to flower, as well as by the radiant star whose constant light guides the belated traveller through the trackless waste. All true evolution must be along this line. Antagonism and destruction cannot be the highest expression of human energy. If love be the fulfilling of the law, then cooperation and mutual service will be its highest expression in the realm of human activity.