

LAND VALUES.

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"OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacred to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—*Henry George.*

ANCIENT LIGHTS AND ANCIENT RIGHTS.

"Light is not the exclusive property of any one, but every one has the common right to enjoy it. Nobody, however, has a right to more than his share, and as the common stock is more limited in a town than in the open country, we all have to put up with limitations."—THE LORD CHANCELLOR OF GREAT BRITAIN, House of Lords, May 2, 1904.—*The Times*, 4/5/04.

IN the above suggestive words the House of Lords, through its highest legal representative, delivered a judgment of the greatest importance and most far-reaching scope. The question the highest judicial authority in Great Britain was called upon to decide was, to use the words of *The Times*' report, based on the Lord Chancellor's summary of the real point at issue:—Whether after an enjoyment of light for twenty years the owner of the tenement in respect of which that enjoyment was possessed would be entitled for all time to all the light without any diminution whatever at the end of such a period. . . . The contention virtually was that if A allows B for twenty years more light than B allows A, then A shall not be allowed an equal or even an inferior enjoyment of his own property." "Common sense," *The Times* continues, "pronounces such a contention absurd . . .

and by its decision the House of Lords has reverted to common-sense and the ancient principle of English law."

So far so good. We feel convinced that our readers will welcome and appreciate this rigorous application and vigorous upholding of this wholesome and common-sense ancient principle of English law on the part of the House of Lords, as well as its pronounced endorsement by that most ardent supporter of all ancient privileges and abuses, *The Times*. But surely there are other things to which this principle is at least as applicable, and its application to-day far more necessary than any question of Ancient Lights. Unlike the Roman Law, by which, however, unfortunately, it has been greatly influenced, the ancient principle of English Law, as well as of common-sense and of common justice, recognises no absolute rights of property in land. In the eyes of the English law there are no landowners or landlords, but only land holders. In theory, or in the abstract, at least, the ancient principle of English law realises and recognises that the land belongs in usufruct to the living; that the land of a country is the inalienable inheritance and common property of the people of the country, not of some, but of all. Hence we may confidently hope, when "some intrepid persons insist upon fighting some phase of this question to the last," and bring it before the highest tribunal of the land, that some future Lord Chancellor may awaken the public mind and stimulate the public conscience to the realities of the case, by asserting the ancient rights of the people, and declaring, to use the words of the present Lord Chancellor, that, according to English law—

"Land is not the exclusive property of any one, but every one has the common right to enjoy it. Nobody, however, has a right to more than his share; and as the common stock is limited, we all have to put up with limitations."

This would be a full and true presentation of the legal, as well as of the moral, aspect of the case; and would, in truth, tend to compel the British nation to reconsider its prevailing land laws in the light of the ancient principle of English law, which, whether they are cognisant of it or not, in the abstract at least, sufficiently safeguards the ancient and inalienable rights of the people. In its light they may yet learn to realise, that though for upwards of three hundred years the British people, A, may have more or less passively suffered the British land holders, B, to appropriate to themselves the control of their property and its value, yet this does not debar them from an equal enjoyment, as soon as they are sufficiently enlightened and intelligent "to insist upon fighting this question to the last." For, as the Lord Chancellor well expresses it—"Nobody has a right to more than his share."

It is, then, in the light of this equitable and legal view that the prevailing system of land tenure will

have sooner or later to be revised. The exclusive possession of land is a necessary condition of modern civilisation, is the best means of securing the fullest possible freedom to the individual, of assuring to him the fruit of the trees that he planteth, that he shall reap what he hath sown. But exclusive possession, as we now know, is by no means incompatible with the recognition and enforcement of the common rights of all. It is the highest merit and greatest claim to originality and immortality of our great master, Henry George, that he showed all future generations how the advantages of exclusive possession could be reconciled to the demands of social justice.

Again, to use the words of the Lord Chancellor, 'the common stock is limited; hence we all have to put up with limitations.' And the only limitation it is necessary to make in order to do justice to all and to secure the common rights of all, is to demand, *not* that each landholder should forthwith relinquish his exclusive possession, but that he shall recognise the claims of his fellow citizens by paying annually into the necessary public or common treasury the value of the common stock he is being privileged to control. Under such conditions the mere ownership of land would cease to confer any advantage on the individual; hence no one would care to control a single acre of land unless he was desirous of utilising it and putting it to the best use of which it is capable. Under such conditions there would, indeed, be room in this world for us all, aye, even though our numbers increased beyond the dire fears of Neo-Malthusians. Under such conditions the common rights of all would be safeguarded in accordance with the ancient principle of English law; and the necessary fruits of our common presence and our common activities, the annual rental value of the land on which we live and work, would accrue, as in equity it should do, to the common benefit of all.

If, in truth, as the poet expresses it, "The world is rolling Freedom's way," it is in this direction that it will have to roll, it is in this direction that the land laws of every country claiming to be civilised, more especially where these have been modified by the Roman law, will have to be altered. Nor do we doubt but that this will be done, and much more speedily than the majority of us have hitherto dared to hope. For, to use the telling words of a recent writer on the subject*—"There is no mistaking the fact that in the realm of economic thought a fierce battle is being waged. There is no concealing the fact that this battle will soon leave the field of thought for the field of action. There is no denying the fact that the established order is on trial at the bar of public opinion, and that this trial will go on until a final judgment has been reached and a rehearing has been denied. . . . Private property in natural opportunities and private property in public utilities

under the present system, are upon trial, and must make defence or die."

In view of the recent verdict of the House of Lords, of the decision of the highest judicial authority of our empire, there is manifestly no defence for private property in natural opportunities as it to-day prevails in our midst. For, according to this decision, natural opportunities are not the exclusive property of any one, but everyone has the common right to enjoy them. Nobody, however, has a right to more than his share. Let us hope, then, that in the near future the British nation will see to it that the prevailing social customs, laws, and institutions shall be made to conform to this equitable and far-reaching judgment. For thus, and thus alone, can we hope to lay the foundations of a social system based upon social justice, upon the recognition and enforcement of the equal claims of all to life, which is the necessary first principle of peaceful and equitable social life.

L. H. B.

ENGLISH NEWS AND NOTES.

[All communications respecting this column should be sent to the General Secretary, English League for the Taxation of Land Values, 376 and 377 Strand, London, W.C.]

Henry George was born on September 2nd, 1839. All over the world, this month, meetings will be held to celebrate this anniversary, and at most of them, no doubt, reference will be made to what is probably the most remarkable event in connection with the movement during the past year—the passing of the second reading of Mr. Trevelyan's Bill by a majority of 67 votes in a Tory House of Commons.

* * *

The celebration, in the case of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values, will take the form of a dinner at the Villa Restaurant, Gerrard Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, on Thursday, September 22nd, at 7.45 p.m. Mr. J. H. Whitely, M.P., president of the League, will take the chair. It is hoped that there will be a large attendance of members and friends of the League. It is requested that early application for tickets (3/- each) be made, with remittance, to the general secretary.

* * *

Mr. Skirrow has arranged two meetings in connection with the commemoration, viz., on Friday, September 2nd, in the Victoria Hall, York, at 7.30., to be addressed by Mr. Peter Burt of Glasgow, and Mr. F. Skirrow, with Mr. B. Seeborn Rowntree in the chair; and on Saturday, September 3rd, at 7 p.m., in the Devonshire Hall, Keighley: Speaker, Mr. Burt; chairman, Mr. F. H. Bentham, chairman of the Bradford Board of Guardians. A programme of music is being arranged for the latter meeting.

* * *

A full report of the annual meeting appears in another column. We are mainly indebted to the *New Age* for it. The London Liberal papers, for some reason best known to the editors, ignored the meeting. Yet, if the vigour and earnestness of the speakers counts for anything, the meeting represented a movement which must be reckoned with and taken note of. Mr. Shaw (whose "fighting" speech made a deep impression upon all who were privileged to hear it) and Mr. Trevelyan came on from the 26 hours' sitting of the House of Commons. Mr. Billson came up specially from Owestry, and Mr. Whitley from the country, while Mr. Hill made a special journey of 150 miles each way to im-

* Oliver R. Trowbridge—"Bisocialism," p. 31.