

A PIONEER OF THE SINGLE TAX—1859-1860.

EDWIN BURGESS, OF LONDON AND OF RACINE,
WISCONSIN, U.S.A.

By L. H. BERENS.

(Continued from August number).

From our author's third letter we feel compelled again to quote at some length. After summarising his objections to the taxation of personal property, he continues:—

"If our Legislators would exempt all personal property from taxes, I would say Amen; because then there would be the greatest inducement for industry and economy, and the tax would then only be burdensome to the land monopolist, who, in consequence of his land monopoly, is the greatest burden society has to support; and society is quite as much to blame as the land monopolist, for it almost literally makes him a monopolist by making it his interest to be so; and as soon as he relinquished the land which should belong to others, the land tax would cease to be burdensome to him; and until land monopoly is abolished there can be no permanent prosperity for mankind. While one man owns the land of a landless brother, he, to a certain extent, owns the labour of the man. If all owned what land they needed to cultivate by their own labour, they could be self-employing, and would not need to sell their own labour or produce for less than they could buy that of others, then we should no longer feel the degradation of 'begging a brother of the earth to give us leave to toil,' as Burns beautifully expresses the dependent condition of the wage slave."

From the fourth letter we will only quote one short but telling passage, which might well have been worded by Henry George, he says:

"Do not suppose for a moment that I wish to make any point against farmers, or any other class whatever, for I would not tax any personal property, or product of industry in any form, but the land alone according to its market value, irrespective of all improvements."

In letter five, after pointing out that "it will be safe to estimate that one half of the personal property existing is never taxed at all, while the conscientious who pay must pay more for the exemption of the cunning who escape," he again asserts his fundamental belief as follows:

"Not that I have any point to make against merchants or any other class, for I firmly believe that no product of industry should ever be taxed in any form whatever, but the land alone, according to its relative value, as the least injurious means of raising revenue, and to prevent the evil of land monopoly by making that monopoly unprofitable; and for the reasons named I take the affirmative of the land tax, and the negative of every other tax, and invite any one to take the negative of the land tax and the affirmative of any tax or tithe which he thinks better."

Our author then sets forth the far-reaching beneficial effects of the Taxation of Land Values in the following admirable and convincing manner:—

"If all taxes were on the land, would railway monopolists want to steal the land (the birthplace of all) by millions of acres, while they deny to the landless and moneyless any land on which to get their daily 'bread'; while they hire ministers to open their robbery meetings in Congress by prayer, and ask the blessing of the Creator on the robbery of his creatures? Do they not know that it is only by keeping the workers landless that they can buy their labour for the smallest portion of its produce, and if all had what land they

needed their plundered land would be almost valueless for sale, though its value for production and human sustenance would be undiminished."

"If all the taxes were on the land, and all owned their share, the tax for all would be equal but not oppressive. But if one almighty monopolist should own the whole of the land, unless one person should suffer for the act or wrong of another, then all should live as well by the labour of the monopolist as they could by their own labour on their own land; and if the land tax will not provide the best remedy, I shall be duly grateful to any one who will show me a tax that will, or any better legal remedy whatever."

"If all the taxes were on the land, and none on improvements, then there would be the greatest encouragement for improvements and industry; then farmers and merchants would not turn land speculators, and run all over creation to buy land at ten shillings per acre with the produce of their toil, but make and enjoy the comfort of life with their families at home, instead of being a curse to the landless and their families elsewhere; they could then have no fear that their children would suffer for want of land whenever they might need it."

"Were all the taxes on the land, and the people's land free to the landless—as it should be—then none would be driven into the wilderness to suffer the changes of climate and want of society, but those who desired could then settle nearer to their kindred and friends, and enjoy the blessings of friendship, love, and home with much less cost and inconvenience."

"Were all the taxes on the land, and the people's land free, then the hitherto landless could soon build their own homes on their own land, and raise all they needed to consume or to exchange, and no longer need the land, houses, or capital of others; then rent, interest, and even usury would cease for want of poverty to sustain them, for the curse, land monopoly, being removed, the effect would cease with the cause. Thus would the happiness of mankind be immeasurably increased, and misery be proportionately diminished; then would the earth be redeemed from the giant sin of land monopoly, and the Paradise of the present or future be as far above that of the past as the intelligence of the philosopher is beyond the ignorance of the child."

In letter six, after quoting from a report of the Secretary of the Treasury, dated December 6th, 1858, he continues—

"Now, while fully admitting that taxes should be raised to 'produce the required revenue, by imposing on the people at large the smallest and the most equal burdens,' I distinctly deny that any tax on imports, or any tax on the produce of labour whatever, or any tax but the Land Tax, can possibly do it."

After showing the iniquity and the costliness of customs tariffs, and that all such taxation falls ultimately, plus interest and profit, on the consumers, Mr. Burgess probes deep down to the root of the whole question in the following passage:—

"Who are the consumers? Is it not safe to say that two-thirds of the imported goods are consumed in the Free States, and a greater portion by the hard-working, ill-paid, landless labourers and producers of the nation's wealth? Do not all such taxes go directly to promote the profit of land monopoly, and man monopoly (or slavery)? Does it not take the taxes out of the pockets of the toiling consumers, and by exempting the land from so much taxes, enable the landlord to sell or rent his land for so much more? Do people buy these imported goods in proportion to the land they hold, or in proportion to the slaves they hold? If not, who

pay the taxes, and make landholding and slaveholding profitable."

Then occurs three passages which we cannot refrain from quoting in full: passages which to our mind proclaim their author as a man free from the moral cowardice which inevitably leads to mental dishonesty, as one of the most profound and far-seeing, as well as the most courageous, philosophers of his time. They read as follows:—

"Land monopoly is really the parent of chattel slavery. For if no person owned the land of others, or more land than they needed to cultivate by their own labour for their own support, they would not covet their fellow-man as slaves; but having obtained the land of others by legal or illegal robbery, they crave their fellow-man as slaves to work it for them: and Africa must be robbed and slaves be bred, and men, women, and children reduced to bondage, to maintain in luxury and idleness a land-robbing and man-robbing aristocracy, a nobility, forsooth, based on the lasso, the manacles and the lash, the gag, the fetter and the thumbscrew, the whipping-post, the chain and ball, the man-stealer and the blood-hound."

"But," he continues, "remember that this land-stealing and man-stealing are done, not only by the sanction of our laws, but by our method of taxing, which has made both evils doubly profitable. The law might sanction slavery to all eternity if it was unprofitable, and no law-worshippers would be patriotic enough to hold slaves any more than they would carry white men to Africa for slaves at a loss. Let us then remove this cause or temptation which is the profit by putting all taxation on the land, and the effect will assuredly cease. I shall endeavour to show that the land-tax would make slavery profitless also."

"People, finding land-robbery and man-robbery profitable, their priests ransack the laws of Moses and the teachings of Christ to sanction the robbery and to prove the piety of the institution; and patriotic politicians quote their political ancestors to justify the wrong—as though evil grew venerable by age, and wrong right by authority; and as though we had no standard of right but the law of the priest and politician. While slavery is profitable there will be no lack of patriotism and piety to sustain it; the trinity of profit, patriotism, and piety will be in perfect unity; but take away the profit of slavery, and the patriotism and piety will be nowhere."

"How many in the love of wrong will seek a law or creed,

A custom or authority to sanctify the deed;

But that which gives the highest joy to all of humankind

Needs no command to justify, no human law to bind."

(To be concluded).

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Colonial and Foreign News.

Portsmouth. The annual meeting of the Portsmouth League for the Taxation of Land Values was held in the Co-operative Hall, Garnier Street, on January 9th, when the following gentlemen were elected as officers for the present year:—President, Mr. T. Hardwick; Vice-Presidents, Messrs. J. Erving and S. Cole; Hon. Secretary, Mr. J. H. M'Guigan; Assistant Secretary, Mr. H. Stoakes; Financial Secretary, Mr. R. Lee; Treasurer, Mr. E. Cole; Committee, Messrs. S. Morgan and F. Satterthwaite. The auditor's report showed a balance on the right side. A hearty vote of thanks to the retiring officers brought the meeting to a close. Our President, Mr. Hardwick, addressed the Mile-End Literary and Debating Society on January 16th on the subject, "Is Socialism Practicable." I have arranged to give an address at a meeting of the Gosport and District Friendly Societies Council, on February 14th, on "The Taxation of Land Values as affecting Friendly Societies."

—J. H. M'GUIGAN.

South Africa. Mr. Arthur W. Madsen writes:—"You may be interested to know that at last a few of us have gathered together with a view to forming a League here. It is too early to say anything about our usefulness, but if there is a satisfactory development I will certainly keep you informed." We are always glad to hear that the taxation of land values is finding friends and workers, and there is no place where the principle would work greater good than in South Africa.

The meeting addressed by the Solicitor-General, under the auspices of the local Liberals, the Young Scots Society, and the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values, at Kilmarnock, was of the most brilliant description, and will long be remembered by those who were privileged to be there. The hall was lavishly decorated, which lent quite a gala aspect to one of the most successful meetings Mr. Ure has addressed in the course of his long and arduous campaign. The platform was specially decorated with floral wreaths, and the walls of the vast hall were hung with festoons of evergreens and roses. Interspersed were numerous banners and flags, while thousands of flags and bannerettes were hung in streamers from the roof, which, waving among scores of electric lights, gave the hall a gay and festive appearance. These, combined with a large and enthusiastic audience, and one of the ablest expositions of the principle of taxing land values Mr. Ure has delivered, gives the Kilmarnock meeting a prestige which will be hard to eclipse.

We have pleasure in acknowledging from Australia, through Mr. John S. Higgs, for campaign fund, £1.

The donor of this does not wish himself personally known, but, in view of the work which lies before us, we shall have the greatest pleasure in acknowledging such substantial and necessary help to the cause here.

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AND
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