

**TOWARD THE LIGHT:
ELEMENTARY STUDIES IN ETHICS AND ECONOMICS.**

BY LEWIS H. BERENS.

There needeth not the hell that bigots frame
To punish those who err: earth in itself
Contains at once the evil and the cure;
And all sufficing nature can chastise
Those who transgress her law—she only knows
How justly to proportion to the fault the punishment it
merits.—SHELLEY.

"THIS is all very well!" exclaimed one of our friends, to whom we submitted the manuscript of this book; "and I have read or heard much the same thing before. But what do you suggest as the first, immediate, practical steps towards the realisation of your ideals? In other words, what do you suggest as the easiest, safest, and most efficacious way out of our present difficulties and sorrows?"

To answer this most pertinent and suggestive question is the sole purpose of the present chapter.

In the first place, let us briefly recapitulate the conclusions our inquiry has compelled us to accept; they run as follows:

1. That men work in order to enjoy, in order to satisfy their wants, to minister to their desires, whatever these may be.
2. That of the means available men will always select the one by which they deem the desired end may be attained at the least cost of exertion, pain, or discomfort. In other words, men will always act on the line of least resistance, or, what is equivalent, of greatest attraction.
3. That to the working of this fundamental principle of all Political Economy that is rational may safely be attributed, not only the adoption and continuous development of co-operation and division of labour, the extension of which marks every advance in social organisation; not only the invention and almost continuous improvement in tools, and of all auxiliaries of production; not only the adoption and continuous expansion of that system of reciprocal exchange of services known as barter, trade, or commerce; but also the very existence of social life.
4. That a reciprocal exchange of services is the animating principle of all peaceful voluntary association, the inspiring principle of all social life.
5. That men serve one another either *directly*, by direct service, or indirectly, by assisting in the production (including distribution) of material commodities capable of satisfying wants or ministering to desires.
6. That all such commodities minister either *directly* to men's enjoyments, as "enjoyable wealth," or *indirectly* only, by aiding and facilitating future production, as aids to and auxiliaries of production, or "serviceable wealth"; and that this latter is the only *real* "capital" in the sense this most mysterious and mystifying term is generally used.
7. That Nature and Labour, or, in other words, since the control of the land gives control of Nature, Land and Labour are the two sole indispensable elements or factors in the production of all commodities, of all "wealth," whether "enjoyable wealth" or "serviceable wealth."
8. That hence, the well-being and contentment of every community, as well as the equity or non-equity of the social relations of the citizens composing it, will necessarily be mainly determined by the equity or

non-equity of those customs, laws, and institutions determining their relations towards the great natural and national home, work-shop, and store-house, the land of the country they are occupying and utilising.

9. That their industrial habits and instincts are constantly impelling mankind to enter into social relations with their fellows, into social relations based upon a reciprocal exchange of services. That this reciprocal exchange of services beyond the more or less arbitrary and artificial limits of separated communities, known as barter trade, or commerce, constantly tends to impel such communities to enter into social relations one with the other, and to weld the whole of mankind into one vast, harmonious social union, to the common benefit of all.
10. That the influence of the Industrial Habits and Instincts, or, as they might justly be termed, the Social Habits and Instincts, are constantly checked and thwarted by certain opposing habits and instincts, impelling mankind to prey upon their fellows, to gain some control of the lives and of the fruits of the labour of their fellows, to be able to command services from them without being called upon to render equivalent counter-services; which instincts may justly be termed the Predatory or Anti-Social Instincts.
11. That, seeing that the Predatory Instincts were, at one time, the predominant Instincts, it is probable that some of the customs, laws, and institutions we have inherited from past generations may be attributable to these Anti-Social Instincts. That they were never the products of reason or of necessity, but have been imposed upon the industrial classes, who form the majority in every society, by a conquering predatory class or caste.
12. That at all times and in all places mankind have to choose between a Social Polity, or Constitution, or System of Customs, Laws, and Institutions, recognising and enforcing the *equal* claims of all to life, and all that this involves; and one recognising and enforcing the *special* claims of some. In other words, their choice is, and for ever must remain, between Justice and Privilege, between Liberty and License, between Freedom and Slavery.
13. That the former alone is in accordance with the civilising Industrial or Social Instincts; the latter with the brutalising Predatory or Anti-Social Instincts.
14. That the former is the product of Reason, and can be maintained by Reason; the latter the product of Force, and can only be maintained by Force.
15. That Co-operation, Civilisation, Peace, and Progress are the typical fruits of the social or industrial instincts; Slavery, War, Devastation, and Poverty the typical fruits of the anti-social, predatory instincts.
16. That the conception of Justice—which is nothing more than the recognition of the equal claims of others—is an ethical rather than an economic or political conception. And that hence in the Science of Ethics it is that we have to seek the fundamental principle or principles of the Art of Economics or Politics, of the Art of Governing, of Shaping and Regulating the Social Relations and Inter-relations of Mankind.
17. That hence, in order to conform our social customs, laws, and institutions to our industrial or social requirements, we must seek to ascertain what Justice, the Law of Liberty, the Law of Equal Freedom, or the Golden Rule of Righteousness teaches us we may claim for ourselves as *rights*, and, conversely, it is our *duty* to respect in others, to concede to others, as *rights* also.
18. That if we should obey the dictates of Justice, then:
 - (a) Each should be left free to dispose of his own activities as he may deem most conducive to

his own happiness, *provided only he in no way infringes on the equal freedom of others.*

(b) Each should be left free to dispose of the fruits of his own activities, of his own exertions, of his own acquired or inherited capabilities and faculties as he may deem most conducive to his own happiness, *again with the above proviso.*

(c) Each should be left free to avail himself of the bounties and opportunities of Nature, or, as some may prefer to express it, to share in those blessings and bounties the great Creator, the Father of All, has lavished upon His children. Or, in other words, the claims of all to the use of land must be recognised as a right, and sacredly respected.

19. That the fundamental principle upon which the Institution of Property is founded, and by an appeal to which, when attacked, it can alone be defended, is the desire and necessity to guarantee to each and every man the undisturbed possession, and fullest and freest enjoyment of the fruits of his own activities.
20. That, though this applies to all commodities that have been produced by human labour, as well as to all improvements in and on the land, it cannot apply to what is not the result of human labour, viz., the natural bounties and opportunities inherent in the land, which form the primary and indispensable element of all life and industry.
21. That by extending the Institution of Property to things to which it does not apply (*e.g.* slaves and land), we thereby destroy those advantages that might accrue to Society by the Institution of Property itself. For by so doing we secure to some the control of the lives and of the fruits of the labour of others; or, in other words, by so doing we enable some to command services from their fellows, without rendering equivalent counter-services.
22. That hence, though the Institution of Property has long, and, as we believe, correctly, been regarded as an indispensable condition of social life and social progress, yet, in so far as it has never been made to conform to the demands of the principles upon which it rests, it cannot be said to have had a fair trial, a proper opportunity of demonstrating the benefits to society which might accrue from strict obedience to its demands. In other words, seeing that, owing to the promptings of the predatory instincts of the race, the great Ethical Command, "Thou shalt not steal!" has never yet been entirely or strictly obeyed; that it has only been enforced on some, but not on all; it cannot be said to have even been properly tried.
23. That, under equitable conditions—that is, under conditions conforming to the dictates of the Law of Liberty, the Law of Equal Freedom—the revenues of a progressive community, as well as the advantages and enjoyments it could secure to all its members, as well as the earnings of each and every individual citizen, that is, the services and gratifications each and every co-operating worker could command in return for his own labour and services, would be constantly increasing.
24. That, under equitable conditions, the unimproved land value, or site value of land, due as it is to the presence, necessities, and united activities of all, would provide a common fund whence all necessary public expenditure could be derived by every community without infringing on the individual earnings of any of its members.
25. That, under equitable conditions, Competition would ensure, not only that all material commodities or

services should exchange one for the other, according to the amount of labour they respectively represented, and thus, that any improvement in any branch of industry would be distributed among all the co-operating workers, but also that the earnings in all branches of industry should tend toward a natural level, viz., toward the level of those engaged in the primary industries, in producing direct from Mother Earth.

26. That thus, under equitable conditions, there would be a constant and irresistible tendency toward a condition of social equality, or rather toward an equality of social conditions.
27. That, under equitable conditions, what is called "Interest," *i.e.*, the premium now obtainable for the use of "Wealth," would disappear, and solvent borrowers would only be called upon to repay the thing, or the exchange value of the things, they had borrowed.
28. That, under equitable conditions, the present system of burdening the industry, and pledging the fruits of the labour of future generations, known as National Debts, would not be necessary nor tolerated, save under the pressure of very exceptional circumstances.
29. That the remediable social evils that are the inevitable accompaniment of our present civilisation, including the deepening of poverty, with its attendant train of misery, brutality, immorality, ignorance, vice, and crime, are due exclusively to our ignoring the demands of Justice, to our disobeying the dictates of the Law of Equal Freedom.
30. That they can be removed only by removing the causes to which they are due; in other words, by conforming our social customs, laws, and institutions to the demands of Justice, to the dictates of the Law of Equal Freedom.

Thus, then, as it seems to us, the question our friend asked has already been sufficiently answered. The first necessary step towards the establishment of the reign of Justice, or, as some may prefer to express the same idea, toward the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, is to recognise and respect the claims of all to the use and enjoyment of the earth; and to frame social conditions that will secure to all opportunities of applying their labour on equitable terms to the great natural store-house, the land. Thus, and thus alone, can we commence the reformation of our social customs, laws and institutions in accordance with the demands of the Law of Equal Freedom; thus, and thus alone, can we hope to harvest the blessings of Justice, social peace, harmony, contentment, well-being, and true civilisation.

As we have already shown, this could be secured by gradually appropriating for public purposes that which is essentially the creation of the whole community, the annual unimproved rental value of land. The first practical step in this direction would be, of course, to have the whole land of the community carefully valued, its unimproved annual rental, or site, value, or its capitalised or selling value, estimated, and to impose a uniform tax of, say, either two shillings in the pound of annual rental value, or of, say, threepence or sixpence in the pound of selling or capitalised value on all land, whether occupied or vacant, whether in use or withheld from use. And let it be publicly and solemnly proclaimed that it is intended that this tax shall be increased, say, every ten, twenty, twenty-five, or even every fifty years, until the whole unimproved value of the land is appropriated for the joint and common benefit of those to whom in equity it belongs, of those to whose presence, necessities, and united activities it is due, viz., the whole community.