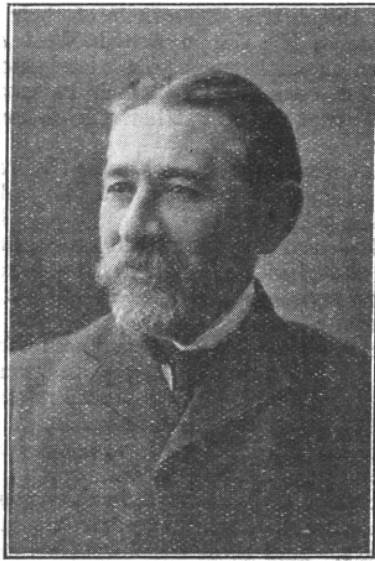


IGNATIUS SINGER



1853-1926

Those who were fortunate enough to come into personal contact with the subject of this writing will appreciate my difficulty in this brief effort to do justice to his character. As student, author and speaker he was a man of considerable standing in public life. He lived for several years at Keighley, where I first met him as a young man, just as I became interested in politics.

Mr. Singer was one of those who met Henry George and spoke with him on the same platform. Mr. Singer was among the first of the pioneers of the English Henry George movement for the taxation of Land Values. He lived in Australia for several years, where along with his friend and colleague, Lewis H. Berens of grateful memory, in the town Adelaide he edited a Single Tax (1886) journal, named OUR COMMONWEALTH. He also resided in New Zealand for a time. His old-time friends of Australia thought highly of the man and his work in the movement there.

He had a mind well trained and a sympathy for the down-trodden. Justice for all implies broadmindedness to a degree, and no one was quicker to see what might result from radical land reform carried by politicians who knew nothing about first principles.

During a discussion at the tea table at one of the Conferences I attended many years ago I heard him say :

"If I could feel sure that my children would have equal chance in rights to life and liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness, I would not attempt to make provision for their future in the shape of Insurance or saving of money because I would know that is all that is required. Anybody with an *equal* chance who does not make good then the fault is theirs. And if you people could realize the forces for good that would be set at work if men's minds were free of this idea of making special provisions for their own old age and so give a start in life for their children what a pleasant life this on earth could be."

THE STORY OF MY DICTATORSHIP was written by Mr. Singer and Mr. L. H. Berens in collaboration years ago and I need say little as to the usefulness of this publication known and read all over the world. It has been translated into German, Danish and Japanese. The book never brought its authors a penny piece of profit, but the benefit to the land values movement cannot be estimated.

There is another book by the authors of THE STORY OF MY DICTATORSHIP which I know he thought had not had the recognition it deserved, GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE, published in 1895. It worked out a system of Government in harmony with Democratic ideals.

In 1912, Dr. E. A. Schäfer was President of The British Association which met at Dundee, and in his Presidential Address discussed the original of life, and prophesied so great an advance had to be made by scientists in probing into this question that they would soon be able to produce life by chemical means. Mr. Singer occupied an important position as a chemist in one of the dyeworks afterwards absorbed by The Bradford Dyers Association, and he therefore had the scientific turn of mind as well as the philosopher's mind with which we all are so familiar.

I well remember his reply to Dr. Schäfer, which appeared during October, 1912, in THE YORKSHIRE OBSERVER, afterwards published in book form under the title of THE PROBLEM OF LIFE (Daniel). I was surprised to see how little notice was taken of this able statement.

Mr. Singer, like the practical chemist he was, offered Dr. Schäfer an egg containing all the chemical parts and defied him to produce that which had been proclaimed as imminent.

In this book the scientific side of Mr. Singer is revealed ; the following extract from this reply shows the philosophy of the man :

"With head bent and awestruck humility I answer I do not know. I may explain the mechanism of life ; I do not know what *it* is that makes *it*. Materialist and mystic are on either side of me, the one calling out jubilantly, 'It is matter and nothing else,' and the other droning, 'It is a spirit like myself, only bigger, more powerful and cleverer.' I may not heed either, for scanty as is the information afforded by the facts it is sufficient to contradict both materialist and mystic. As I contemplate the problem before me I am spellbound by the display of what I have called the mysterious power 'persistence' or 'habit.' Men more learned in Greek and Latin than myself will be able to suggest some more pretentious, more classic sounding, perhaps even a more appropriate name. But it will not help us to pierce the secret."

I have shown that Mr. Singer in his writings could speak for the scientist and the philosopher. He set out to rescue the Churches from their difficult position by offering them a closely reasoned analysis of their position in his last great work, THE RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES OF JESUS AND PAUL, and in the booklet, THE THEORY OF JESUS. The latter dedicated to "all sincere and earnest Ministers of Religion," and the former dedicated "To all lovers of their kind, without distinction of race, creed or colour." In these works he gave the Churches material wherewith to re-establish themselves in the eyes of the world, and as his friend and admirer I hope to see these books receive a wider recognition so to enable me to see why it is that organized Christianity has failed. The author clearly established the fact that the teachings of Jesus contain a religion for all men and for all times.

The booklet was published in 1918, followed in 1919 by THE RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES. I had the privilege of reading nearly all the newspaper comments and many private appreciations and criticisms of this book, and can say that on the whole its reception was friendly ; criticism was confined to details not very important.

In his introduction the author said :

"I hope to depict (I believe now for the first time) a

sage about whose historicity there can be no doubt; whose philosophy will stand the severest scrutiny of modern science; and whose postulates—so much derided even by his professed followers—are the only possible foundation for a sound philosophy.”

In the concluding chapter he says:

“A new outlook and a new hope would infuse life into the Churches, and a new and wider sphere of action be opened to the clergy. Relieved of the incubus of an enforced belief in obsolete and irrational doctrines they could preach the ‘Kingdom of God’ in sincerity and in truth. They could prepare the people for ‘the life which is to come’ and teach them how this better life is to be realized—not in the clouds but *here on earth*.”

Space will not permit me to say much more about our departed friend. He was a many-sided man and had always a fund of good stories at his command. He had lived in Australia and America, was a forty-years naturalized Englishman who, while regarding England as the best of all countries, had sympathy with and high hope for any reforming movement wherever started. He was a competent platform speaker, and although he spoke a pleasant sort of broken English, he could get the ear of any English audience in a very short time.

A LETTER FROM DENMARK

We are indebted to an opponent, “Loyola,” in the IRISH WEEKLY AND ULSTER EXAMINER, for a telling explanation of Danish conditions, appearing in the issue of the IRISH WEEKLY, for 12th June, from the pen of our colleague, Jakob E. Lange.

The letter is in the following terms:—

“It is difficult to discuss matters in a serious way with a writer who is evidently hopelessly ignorant of the subjects he writes about. ‘Loyola,’ in the IRISH WEEKLY, surprises even the modest boundaries of tale-telling in what he says about conditions in Denmark.

“He writes: Over 95 per cent of the population of Denmark are farmers (in another place, smallholders). ‘No taxation of land values is needed there for land distribution,’ declares ‘Loyola.’

“The plain facts are that not 95 per cent, but about 36 per cent of the population belongs to the agricultural part, including agricultural labourers, etc.

“The total number of farms is about 206,000 in a population of 3¼ millions, and out of this total number of 206,000, some 44,000 fall below the eight-acre line, averaging five acres; some 65,000 more below the 27-acre limit, that is to say, one-third of the farms are too small for a family to live on without supplementary work. If ‘Loyola’ can grasp these hard facts he perhaps will begin to understand that even in Denmark land values taxation is required to promote a better distribution of land. But if that be not sufficient for him, I add that all the 109,000 small farmers (53 per cent of the total number) do not own more than one-ninth of the cultivable area.

“The next postulate of ‘Loyola’ is that taxation of land values is the method of the great dairy and meat trusts to get hold of the land of the farmers. It is difficult to understand how a man without a whole swarm of bees in his bonnet can allow such nonsense to flow from his pen. As everybody knows, almost all our butter and bacon production is co-operative: the dairies, the bacon factories are mainly owned by the local farmers, including the smallholders, and the com-

I once heard him explain why the great body of people are so difficult to persuade on Single Tax lines; they have, he declared, an inverted moral sense that inclines them to pity the landlord when spoken to about the evils of landlordism. He illustrated this fact by the story of a man who took his boy to a museum, and amongst the objects of art was the statue of Prometheus who was condemned to have his vitals plucked out daily by the ravens: the vitals grow again each night. The father hoped to get an expression of sympathy and understanding from his son, but at the conclusion of his father’s little talk, the boy exclaimed, “Poor ravens—same breakfast every morning.”

Small in stature, fine head and frail body, how he was loved and respected by young and old with whom he came into direct contact I cannot adequately describe, but I venture to say that Ignatius Singer has left a spirit at work in his books and in the minds of his associates that will long remain. I can offer our readers no better food for thought, help and encouragement than a perusal of his writings.

We extend to Mrs. Singer and her family our deepest sympathy in their bereavement.

J. C.

paratively few private factories and dairies have no landed interests whatever.

“The laws of 1922 and 1926, which introduce the principle of land value taxation and rating respectively, were not, as ‘Loyola’ thinks, promoted by the big financial interests and combines. This principle was originally chiefly advocated by the organized husband or smallholders with farms from next to nothing up to twenty acres. The Bills were supported in Parliament, first by the Radical Party, whose main support are the said husband; secondly, by the Social Democratic Party, chiefly representing the industrial workmen and part of the agricultural labourers and smallholders; thirdly, by a considerable majority of the Moderate Liberal Party, the great body of which are peasant proprietors with from 20 to 200 acres of land. The bitter opponents were the Conservative Party, big landed proprietors, factory owners and capitalists in general, and more especially by all the representatives of real estate interests. These interests were strong enough in the Upper House to prevent the carrying of a pure Land Value Taxation Bill to replace the present real estate tax and rating in town and country, but not strong enough to prevent the carrying of the Bills altogether. And we certainly shall not cease from this fight until we have freed all houses, buildings, improvements, etc., from all kinds of taxation and laid it only on land values.

“If ‘Loyola’ does not think this sufficient, I shall be glad to see him over here. Perhaps that will settle the question in his mind.—I am, etc.,

JAKOB E. LANGE.

“Husmandsskolen ved Odense,

“Denmark.

“30th May, 1926.”

JOSEPH FELS: HIS LIFE AND WORK. By Mary Fels. Cloth, reduced price, 1s.

THE STORY OF MY DICTATORSHIP. By I. Singer and L. H. Berens. Paper covers, 6d.; cloth, 1s.

A GREAT INIQUITY. By Leo Tolstoy. 6d. post free.

From our Offices.