

"The Digger" Rediscovered

By BENNETT CHALLIS

A REMARKABLE man of the genus Prophet had been forgotten, it seems, after 250 years, by his own England, but was rediscovered in 1906 by L. H. Berens, himself no mean crusader for social-economic truth. In his book, *The Digger Movement At the Time Of The Commonwealth* (1650) Mr. Berens found the scathing indictment of Private Land Ownership—the "Leitmotif" of Winstanley's life and work—identical with that of Henry George. The latter's simple, infallible remedy seems never to have occurred to Winstanley, however, in fact he probably felt no need of it, since in his plan wealth as well as land was to have been common property. Nevertheless Berens considered Winstanley the first of the forerunners of Henry George in semi-modern times, i.e., a half-century before John Locke. Nor was Berens the only one; John E. Grant, e.g., in *The Problem Of War And Its Solution*, quotes repeatedly from Winstanley in the same sense.

The book is available in the library of the Henry George School, and will prove entertaining and worthwhile to all interested readers. The following excerpts will demonstrate to what extent—as far as his "Inner Light" then led him—Winstanley deserves the name of "first forerunner of Henry George." First, however, a brief comparative testimonial by the author: "Behind every movement that has ever influenced the thoughts of mankind, there is always some master-mind, a Lao-tse, a Gautama, a Jesus of Nazareth, a Wiclif, a John Wesley, a Darwin, a Tolstoy, or a Henry George. And it is in the comparatively unknown Gerrard Winstanley that we shall find the master-mind, the inspirer and director, of the Digger Movement, . . . the fundamental principles which inspired and animated his political writings were in all respects identical with those that during the past quarter of a century have been so honorably associated with the name of Henry George."

Alas, How True

"And this is the beginning of particular interest, buying and selling the Earth from one particular hand to another, saying 'This is mine', upholding this particular proprietary by a law of government of his own making, and thereby restraining other fellow-creatures from seeking nourishment from their Mother Earth. So that though a man was bred up in a Land, yet he must not work for himself where he would, but for him who had bought part of the Land, or had come to it by inheritance of his deceased parents, and called it his own Land. So that he who had no Land was to work for small wages for those who called the Land theirs. Thereby some are lifted up in the chair of tyranny, and others trod under the footstool of misery, as if the Earth were made for a few, and not for all men." (p. 70).

"But be it so that some will say, This is my land, and call such and such a parcel of land his own interest . . . Therefore, if the rich still hold fast to this propriety of Mine and Thine, let them labor their own lands with their own hands. And let the common people, that say the earth is *ours*, not *mine*, let them labor together, and eat bread together upon the commons, mountains, and hills." (p. 75).

"Divide England into three parts, scarce one part is manured. So that there is land enough to maintain all her children, yet many die of want, or live under a heavy burden of poverty all their days. And this misery the poor people have brought upon themselves by lifting up particular interest by their labors." (p. 77).

"For it is not lawful nor fit for some to work and the others to play; for it's God's command that all work, let all eat. And if all work alike, is it not fit for all to eat alike, have alike, and enjoy alike privileges and freedoms? And he that does not like this, is not fit to live in a Common-wealth. Therefore weep and howl, ye rich men, by what vain name or title soever; God will visit you for all your oppressions. You live upon other men's labors, giving them bran to eat, extorting extreme rents and taxes from your fellow-creatures. But now what will you do? for the people will no longer be enslaved by you, for the knowledge of the Lord shall enlighten them." (p. 82).

"Hereupon the Earth (which was made to be a Common Treasury of Relief for all, both beasts and men) was hedged into enclosures by the Teachers and Rulers, and the others were made Servants and Slaves. And the Earth, which was made to be a Common Storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept within the hands of a few, whereby the Great Creator is mightily dishonored, as if He were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some, and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others." (p. 96).

"All this falling out and quarrelling among mankind is about the Earth, and who shall, and who shall not enjoy it, when indeed it is the portion of everyone, and ought not to be strived for, nor bought, nor sold, whereby some are hedged in and others are hedged out. Far better not to have a body than to be debarred the fruit of the Earth to feed and clothe it. And if everyone, did but quietly enjoy the Earth for food and raiment there would be no wars, prisons nor gallows." (pp. 139-140).

Final Comment

Such, then, was Winstanley's final attack on the body of teachings he, rightly or wrongly, hated and despised as the main supporter of the prevailing social injustice. Correct thought he realized to be the necessary precursor of right action; and he knew that correct thought is impossible so long as old, inherited false ideas are unquestioningly accepted and hold undisputed dominion over the human mind. Winstanley seems to us to have realized that it was the ignorance of the many that, in truth, maintained the privileges of the few; that the masses themselves forge the fetters for their own enslavement, which, though apparently as strong as iron bands, are, in truth, but things of gossamer, easily to be broken by those who themselves have forged them.

We women do talk too much, but even then we don't tell half we know.—LADY ASTOR.