

A DESERTED VILLAGE

By James Wallace

On the backbone of Scotland midway between the Irish Channel and the North Sea lies the parish—and what was once—the village of Walston. The kirk is there—a quaint elongated structure of which the fore half is pre-Reformation; the manse with its garden is there—a cosy century-old building; the glebe is there with its rich carpet of verdure on which some bonnie cattle are browsing; but where is Walston itself for which spiritual provision has been so richly made? You see a couple of large farm steadings by the road-side, and a cottage or two for a roadman or shepherd, but nothing in the nature of a village. That Walston must have had for centuries a palpable existence is impressed on you by the list hung up in the Church Vestry of the ministers without a break since the Reformation.

There you see the name of the worthy man who was exiled for his attachment to the Covenant, when that adulterous devotee, James the Seventh—then Duke of York—was trying to govern Scotland with the thumb-screw and the bootkin; and there you see the worthy man's name restored to its place, when Dutch William landed at Tor Bay and brought a happier time.

The historical sense tells you that such things are quite out of harmony with the poor skeleton of a place that now inherits the ancient name.

And the historical sense is right, for Walston up to recent times enjoyed a substantial existence, and the village, where the rude forefathers lived their life who now lie sleeping in the kirkyard, was composed of 26 cottages with their separate crofts and was vocal with the hum of a vigorous and healthy life. The ploughboy whistled and the milkmaid sang, while the weaver rattled his shuttle and the blacksmith struck music from his anvil. Now you may hear the whaup and the peewit, but neither blacksmith's hammer nor weaver's shuttle mingle the voices of nature with the cadences of human life.

Walston is not alone in falling a victim to this social phthisis, and from the top of Tinto (a Lanarkshire hill) and Culter Fell many a bleached skeleton of a village is to be seen that once throbbed with a vigorous life.

Not far from Walston is Elsrickle that has escaped the epidemic of consumption that has attacked the villages of our land and stands as a representative of what a Scottish village once was and what to some extent it ought to be. It has its village church and hall, and its dozen or more of cottages that line the road—some with crofts attached—bear that aspect of individuality that Ruskin so admired in the chalets of the Swiss peasants, showing itself in porches and touches of beauty, and that he maintained we could not gain in our land until men felt they had some fixity of tenure in the houses they lived in.

In Lord Selborne's appeal for more men to fill the ranks he makes special appeal to men reared in the country, but in Walston and many another village the difficulty is not to persuade men to enlist but to find any men at all—and that too in hamlets that once would have yielded many a stalwart recruit. And this village decay has come about not by any social necessity but simply under the delusion that big farms would enlarge the laird's revenue and swell the factor's salary.

Walston's 26 cottages and crofts have been swept away and her earnest sons sent to Canadian prairies or Glasgow slums not because it had to be, but that on rent day the factor might put in his pocket a bigger handful of greasy banknotes.

Under one of our old Scottish kings such a thing would have been impossible. An Alexander the Third in his devotion to the small farmers of Scotland would have summoned the laird before him and stripped him of his

estates, while a James the Fourth would have hung him over his castle wall.

This awful war with its appeals on every tramcar and railway station for men to fight for their country brings home to our minds that the men who all over our land have left of villages like Walston nothing but the name, were traitors to their country, and the only excuse that can be made for them is that they did not realise what they were doing.

WOMEN'S HENRY GEORGE LEAGUE

Address of MARY WARE DENNETT at the Annual Dinner, New York.

In most Single Tax discussions I find myself longing for another set of terms, for a "lingo" less misleading to the average person, who is a latent Single Taxer, but who as yet doesn't know it. We want our movement to march on, and to do it as quickly as possible, therefore we must have nothing in our way that can be avoided.

We know that we can't win the Single Tax, till a large number of people want it, and it is our business to multiply that number with all possible speed. Many of you were present at the recent dinner of The Lower Rents Society and heard Surgeon-General Gorgas say that even if he did believe in the Single Tax, if he had the power to bring it about as he had had the power to achieve sanitary conditions by military authority, he would not exert that authority, and his audience cheered him as a good democrat. Single Taxers generally agree with him that democracy, to be the real thing, must be consciously achieved by the people, not thrust upon them by any beneficent powers.

The best and only way to hurry the Single Tax is to get it understood. So, when we undertake to explain our message to the people, we must have as few obstructions as possible in our phraseology. When you say "free land" to the average man, he can't help thinking at once of taking up homestead claims in the Far West. When you say "labour" to him—particularly in connection with land, he sees "the man with the hoe," and if he doesn't just naturally love hoeing, he is not charmed with the picture. Tell him that "all wealth is produced from labour and land," and he immediately sniffs some palliative back-to-the-land scheme and will have none of it.

I often wish there were some sort of little caddy or other who would trot around after Single Tax speakers and deliver slips to their listeners, explaining that when they say "land," they do not mean merely garden plots, farms and city lots, but the entire area of the country and all the natural resources including every useful ingredient to be found in the water, the air and under the earth; and that when they say "labour" they mean not only the exploited wage-slave, but the ten thousand dollar a year business manager, the actor, the editor, the architect, and all who earn money by producing and distributing things that people need or rendering services that people want.

One of the best Single Tax stories I ever read was written by Mary Marcy in the INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW some months ago. It was about a tribe living in the midst of South America in the rubber district. Life was remarkably easy for these people. Their food grew all about them, to be had for the mere taking. It was so warm they scarcely needed clothing, and for the same reason the question of shelter was no particular problem. Probably also on account of the climate, they were not specially ambitious mentally, and so had few intellectual needs that required labour for their satisfaction. Thus they lived peacefully until foreign capital appeared upon the scene, determined to make large profits from the rubber business. Capital offered the native wages for gathering rubber. But that proposition did not interest the native. Why

should it? Didn't he already have all he needed, plenty of food and such little clothing and shelter as his circumstances required? And as he had not developed a taste for such luxuries as the foreigner enjoyed, of what use were the wages to him? The native was perfectly content with the situation as it was, but the capitalist was anything but satisfied. The capitalist could not import foreign labour for it was too expensive and beside the climate was unfavourable to the white man. So he must find some way to make the native gather rubber for him. Of course he found it. It was easy. It was the way of the exploiter the world over. He secured possession of a vast tract of territory, drove all the natives into one small spot, and kept them there till they came to terms, which they were obliged to do in short order. The terms of course were so much rubber per day for so much opportunity to procure their natural food from the nature that had been freely theirs before.

The Socialist author, curiously enough, laid this crime to capitalism, not perceiving that had those men acted as capitalists only they might be there pleading yet with the natives to work for them for wages, but they acted as monopolists as well, which is quite another matter. It was only as monopolists that they had an atom of power. As capitalists they were harmless curiosities, but as monopolists they were all-conquering enemies.

Of course it is easy to see, in primitive life, that fair access to natural resources is a fundamental necessity, but not quite so easy in the complex life that most civilized people know. However, the principle is precisely the same and the necessity every bit as pressing. Not only does it hold for big undertakings involving many people, like mining, manufacturing, running stores, theatres, etc., but it holds equally for the individual—the salesman, the doctor, the lawyer, the secretary and for every single person who lives and works in the community. The direct connection with nature may seem to be very slight in these instances of the individual, but if there is any unfairness, any monopoly in the use of natural resources anywhere in a given community, the welfare of everyone in that community is menaced and the natural results of their work are lessened. It warps things all along the line. Monopoly of places and resources not only cripples the worker who gets his sustenance direct from nature, like that South American native or the farmer, but it also cripples the worker who exchanges the results of his effort for the product of those who utilize nature directly for their livelihood. In the use of nature, an individual may need much space like a farmer, or very little like the inhabitant of a hall bedroom in a city boarding-house, but every one needs some space, some footing. Even if people took to houseboats and aeroplanes by the thousand, they would still have to moor the things somewhere at intervals, and so would be subject to whatever arrangement prevailed in the community for the use of that space.

What the Single Taxers claim is that that arrangement must be fair, that it must not give one fellow a huge unearned advantage over another nor must it give an equally unearned handicap to anybody, which is exactly what happens every time monopoly steps in. So what we stand for is the absolute abolition of monopoly by an equitable use of natural resources. Of course no programme can make it possible for two people to actually occupy the same space at the same time, but there is a programme by which, when one place is more desirable than another, the person who occupies the more advantageous spot shall pay for the privilege, and pay enough to make his opportunity no bigger than that of the other fellow. And the payment must go to those who made the place valuable, that is, the people of that community, for nothing makes any place valuable except the clustering together of people.

Nothing but the complete rooting out of monopoly can make labour free. Free labour, unlike free land, is a term

which needs very little explanation. It is thrilling to think of what really free labour may mean to the future without monopoly clutching at its throat with a strangle hold. It will mean that unemployment will disappear for ever. Nothing in the world is more utterly needless and artificial and disgraceful than unemployment. You remember Louis Post's sage remark that "while Robinson Crusoe doubtless had many unsatisfied wants, he was never unemployed."

It is shocking to a degree that people should ever be driven to such a degenerated state of mind as to have to feel grateful for mere employment. Our gratitude should be saved for other things than this—for the opportunity to be really useful, for the ability to create beauty, for friendships, happiness and a thousand and one joyous things, but to be grateful to some other human being who has the outrageous power to give you work or to withhold it, is a fearful depth of immorality which means patronage on one side and servility on the other, instead of a dignified business exchange which means a mutual benefit to all concerned.

We must look forward to and insist on a time when labour-saving devices will really save labour for the labourers, when ingenuity and efficiency will really produce some leisure, not as now for a leisure class who have too much of it, but for everybody, so that each normal adult person can be sure that a reasonable amount of work will produce a reasonable return, and that as time goes on, it will produce more and more return, in proportion to the effort expended.

At a mass meeting not long ago, an exasperated labour leader rose after listening to an account of various welfare schemes as practised by philanthropic and somewhat canny employers in the hope that the workers would presently subside into contentment and not always be wanting something—and he burst forth with this: "What does labour want? I'll tell you what labour wants. It's more wages. And when it's got it, then it wants more wages, and when it's got that, then it wants more wages and so on. That's all." Then he abruptly sat down, while the welfare contingent looked sort of sick.

Nothing short of the utter abolition of exploitation will be satisfactory. That and that only will produce a situation in which it would not seem incongruous for the girl who now sells bargain shirtwaists in the stuffy basement of a department store, to earn enough to be able to take a taxicab home when she is tired, and when it would be the customary thing not only for a person seeking a new job to give letters of recommendation to the employer, but for the employer to do the same to the employee vouching for his character as an employer.

Real day-by-day hole-proof democracy is what we are after, and our programme must be to make it an achievement as well as a dream.

Taxation may create monopolies, or it may prevent them; it may diffuse wealth, or it may concentrate it; it may provoke liberty and equality of rights, or it may tend to the establishment of tyranny and despotism; it may be used to bring about reforms, or it may be so laid as to aggravate existing grievances and foster hatred and dissension among classes; taxation may be so controlled by the skilful hand as to give free scope to every opportunity for the creation of wealth or for the advancement of all true interests of States and Cities, or it may be so shaped by ignoramuses as to place a dead weight on a community in the race for industrial supremacy.—Prof. R. T. ELY, *TAXATION IN AMERICAN STATES AND CITIES*.

The nature of landed property, invariably limited, what, ever may be the demand of the producers or consumers gives it the power of a monopoly.—SISMONDI, *ESSAY ON LANDED PROPERTY*.