

THE LABOUR QUESTION A RELIGIOUS QUESTION

By W. A. Douglass, Toronto, Canada

Delivered in the Pulpit at Bala, on Labour Sunday

The problem is essentially a religious question. Some people say it is *the* religious question.

God has given us this earth to administer. How are we doing it? The speaker then related a parable of a mother in Scotland, trying to unfold to the mind of her child the glories of God's creation. She told him of the stars, the sun and the moon, the sea and the land. Then the lad asked: "Did God make the land?" "Certainly," said the mother. "Did He make the land that belongs to the duke?" "Of course He did," was the reply. "And did He not make any land for us?" What reply could that mother make? Either an eternal falsehood or an eternal injustice.

The religion we are teaching by our administration of the land is that God created this earth for the special ownership of a few favourites, so that they can live lives of luxurious leisure, but that for the great mass of humanity He made no land, no forests, no mines, that this disinherited part of humanity must do all the work, and then surrender a large part of that they produce for the opportunity of living and having their being in the heritage furnished by the Eternal Father. So long as by our laws we practically declare to the dispossessed, that God made no land for them, what respect or confidence can they have in a religion of that character?

The crop of wheat in this Dominion this year will have a value exceeding \$300,000,000. The value of the land of Toronto amounts to upward of \$300,000,000. A year hence what will be the value of that crop? Nothing. It will be consumed. What will be the value of the land? Will it be consumed? Of course it won't. It will be greater and so on year after year, instead of disappearing and having to be reproduced, it will grow greater and greater, so much so that if it increases in the next sixteen years as it has in the past, there will be an addition of five hundred million dollars.

Is there any one here who cannot see the infinite difference between the crop that passes away yearly and the value of the land which never wears out? Is there any one who cannot see how the farmers must toil year after year, generation after generation, to keep up the supply of food, while the value of the land passes not away, but stays with the population and grows with every addition to that population?

What God has put asunder, let not man put together. The value of the land and the value of the products of industry is as different as a debt is different from a credit. And yet in our legislation this essential difference hitherto has been almost wholly ignored. What is the result? Industry spends its strength grinding at the wheel, and receiving only a fragment of its due, while the "lily white hand never knows want, though it never has toiled." It revels in luxury and leisure, by the oppression and impoverishment of the toiling masses. That is the abnegation of brotherhood.

Do you ask what is our duty to labour? I ask you to look a few minutes and see how we treat industry as if it were a crime. Labour clears the forest, erects the fences, puts up the buildings, drains the swamp and converts the wilderness into a garden. I ask you to put this fact in your memory: For every improvement he makes we impose an additional tax as though he were an injury to be suppressed. The speculator adjoining makes no improvements, he renders no service, but let a town grow on that land and he may easily, without the first productive act, get as much in one year as the toiler can get in a hundred years.

Why this terrible miscarriage of justice?—industry producing abundance and getting scarcity, while the non-producer revels in wealth he has not earned. The error arises in our mistaken method of taxation. Instead of placing our taxes so as to encourage every man to do his best with his opportunities, and so as to remove the power to use land for extortion, we penalize the benefactor, the industrious producer and reward the man who uses his land for spoliation.

Would it not be a wise and proper thing to cease to do evil and learn to do well?

"NOTHING UNFAIR IN THE POLICY"

It is the presence of people on an area called Dumfries that creates these land values, and it is the expenditure of the ratepayers' money that maintains and increases them. What the crowd makes the crowd should have, and no man's personal earnings need be touched for local rates. The rent or annual value of land is the proper and just fund to rate for local purposes.

Besides, new sources of revenue would be tapped. There is plenty of land lying about this town which at present is only rated on its agricultural value of perhaps £1 an acre per year, but immediately the Town Council want it, say, to erect workmen's dwellings, or the Educational Authority desires a site for a new school, the price goes up to perhaps £100 an acre annually. We propose to rate landowners on the high value which they themselves put upon vacant sites. There's nothing unfair in that, is there?

Look at the effects of this rating of idle land on its true value. Landowners would compete with each other for occupiers, and sites would be easily and cheaply got. We could gradually abolish the rates on houses and business premises. Ask any builder what would be the effect on his trade if we exempted buildings from all local burdens. He will tell you that houses would spring up everywhere as if by magic; that house rents would fall; that labour would be in brisk demand everywhere; and that the wages of labour would rise. Why, you can't even build a pigsty without employing labour of some kind. In town and country, idle acres mean idle men.

For years our Dominions overseas have led the way on this question, and last month progressive little Denmark set Europe an example by inaugurating the taxation of land values. Let not Dumfries and our own beloved Scotland linger behind in the world's march of progress.—*John Cameron, in the DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY STANDARD, and in DUMFRIES COURIER AND HERALD.*

Now Ready.

Special Reprints of

HENRY GEORGE'S ADDRESSES

Price One Penny each

(Postage extra one halfpenny)

THE CRIME OF POVERTY
"THOU SHALT NOT STEAL"
"THY KINGDOM COME"
"MOSES"

LAND AND PEOPLE
SCOTLAND AND SCOTSMEN

AND

THE LABOUR QUESTION—an abridged
edition of THE CONDITION OF LABOUR

In Quantities—5s. per 100 post free

Apply to the

UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE TAXATION
OF LAND VALUES

11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1