

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SINGLE TAX.
BY J. FARRELL

No. II. THE NEED FOR REFORM.

The speaker with whose words I closed my paper of last week went on to say that if the followers of Henry George occasionally gave some reason for the very common accusation that they regarded their leader as an economic pope that pope had, at least, learned his business. But as a general rule there is no foundation for such a charge other than the density of those who make it. Of the prominent supporters of the single tax in these colonies, there is not one, I believe, who is not quite prepared to state his case from start to finish and justify every point of his belief with cogent reasons, and anyone who is conversant with the literature of the subject in the United States and England can readily believe that it is the same there. Whatever doubt existed in the minds of those who were at first inclined to accept "Progress and Poverty" as the revelation of a new truth was dispelled by the attempts made to controvert the writer's positions. After Arnold Toynbee, W. H. Matlock, the Duke of Argyll, and others less widely known, but in some cases infinitely more worthy to be heard, had spoken, it began to be realized that no coherent argument in opposition to the single tax theory could be put forward. But there has not been a blindfold acceptance of the whole belief of Henry George. His teaching has been very closely scrutinized indeed, and no better proof of this could be given than that a large number of the most diligent students of it, while holding his demonstration, that by taxing away land values poverty may be finally abolished, to be complete, refuse to accept his views with regard to the matter of interest. The point here at issue is highly problematical and perfectly immaterial, as it is one which must bring its own solution with it, but it is the only part of the work that those who have pored closely over the whole of it hesitate to endorse. The wonder is that such a stupendous task as the evolving of order and sequence out of the chaotic mass of contradictions which passed as a science a dozen years ago and was called political economy, should have been so well performed by one mind, not that one or two errors may have been made. It was superhuman work to undertake, such a work as a college of trained specialists, rather than an individual, should have engaged in. And, looking upon the result and knowing of the care and the patience and conscientious effort of the writer, and his great ability, it is surely about a fair thing to feel impatient when economists of the Teohey calibre undertake to declare that the single tax is unjust or unworkable. Here in Sydney there are dozens of people who tell you that they advocated land nationalization long before George was heard of, and can suggest a number of improvements upon his scheme. Others there are, credited, too, with considerable knowledge of the subject who profess a belief in Henry George's plan of land nationalization, but strongly oppose the single tax, which they regard as an innovation. In view of these things patience may at times cease to be a virtue.

The need for reform — not mere local reform each as is involved in the passing of laws to regulate the conditions of life in particular colonies or countries, but reform which would utterly revolutionize the whole social system — is the assumption upon which Mr. George's inquiry is based. The central fact which urged him to seek so earnestly for its explanation is one that is visible to us all. Legislation has not anywhere made less obvious or less terrible the truth that an enormous proportion of the human race remain in the position of actual slaves to a small part of

it. Legislation here and there has rent asunder the visible chains of servitude and bidden thralls to be free, but invisible chains have escaped it and men have remained in bondage as before — a bondage ever growing heavier. Here is an allegorical picture of the highest civilization of today, drawn by the hand of a master of similitude, which seems to me perfect —

"A high heavily-buttressed wall supports the foundation of an esplanade from which arise stately palaces and porticos. Reclining around a well-covered table a party of revellers raise high their goblets as they toast each other, while, preceded by cymbals and trumpets and carried in couches resting on men's shoulders and sheltered by peacocks feathers, other guests are approaching. On the coping of the wall a jester has stretched himself as if for a nap; and a coquettishly-dressed serving-maid, who has set down a tray of refreshments, stands in a listless attitude beside him, both looking with a most languid interest on what is going on below. There a group of emaciated, half-naked wretches bend in resigned adoration or prostrate themselves in prayer before the face of the wall. Mounted on a ladder, reaching from the lower ground tenanted by the starving wretches to the top of the wall, a monk of one of the preaching orders, whose burly form prevents anyone else from climbing up, is standing painting. He has painted a maze of angels' wings and clustering heads of cherubs, and is engaged in filling in a figure of Christ, while over all he has painted the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." A picture this to shudder at as representing the best that we have done, the most advanced point to which human progress has reached. A bitter harvest this from ages of martyrdom and brave endeavor and loving self-sacrifice. A few sitting apart on the heights, out of sight of the famishing faces and out of hearing of the cries of pain, served with all luxury and having no need to think of the morrow, while ecclesiasticism limns on the wall a glory of symbol and promise, which divert the eyes of the miserable millions from examining too closely the barrier that rises between them and their earthly lords. Endurance of the kingdom of hell here, for prospective reward of the Kingdom of Heaven hereafter is for them. The picture has no exaggeration in it. On the contrary there is an avoidance of detail in the darker parts; a veiling over of the hideousness. The lives of the dense human multitudes who swarm at the base of the wall are not clearly shown in their naked fearfulness. It may be well to take England as it is today and compare it with what is above written; to place a photograph side by side with an ideal sketch. I choose England because it is the fountain-head from which civilizing influences have flowed out over the earth; because it is the home of the race which has dominated the world and led the way in everything that is good; because it has furnished the best examples to mankind. I choose it, too, because revenue tariffists — men who seem to think that with the repeal of the corn laws the last possibility of free trade has been achieved — do not hesitate to use it as an illustration of what a reasonably perfect nation should be. The party politician, far less concerned to deal in exact truth and give an honest presentment of things as they really are than to glorify his own side and "dish" the other, deals sonorously with exports and imports and takes a firm stand upon the advantage of getting raw material from the cheapest possible source. But when forced against the ropes, so to speak, by direct and persistent query regarding the condition of great masses of English workers, he roars you as mildly as any sucking-dove, and says that no system can be devised under which distress will not be found to exist. I know Mr. Carruthers to be very much more than a party politician, and believe him to be honest in his advocacy of revenue tariffism. I believe with him that even that is much better for the majority of the people of England than a protective tariff could be. But I would not marvel much at the growth of protection if I had no better object lesson of the advantages of free trade to offer than the present state of the workers of Great Britain. And if I thought that such a state was ordained by the Creator of the universe,

and was outside the power of man's interference, I would regard the world only as a place to trample or be trampled upon in, and if it suited my own interest adopt the selfish policy of protection without compunction. Any kind of morality would do for a world where everyone was his brother's enemy.

One of the speakers who followed Mr. Carruthers, instead of attempting to explain the condition of the wage-earners of England on the grounds of preordination, referred to it with a candor which deeply moved the audience, as a thing incredible and shocking, and a disgrace to Christianity and civilization. The same might be said, with some difference but equal truth, of the condition of the non-wage-earners, the revelers in the palaces above the wall who, producing nothing, enjoy everything until enjoyment becomes a weariness. Of these I shall not say much here, for most of my illustrations of the need for reform will be taken from outside the barrier that shields their nobility. But by way of contrast to what is to follow, I would call my readers' attention to the recently-issued *Wedding Graphic*, a publication devoted to describing the nuptials of the Earl of Fife with a daughter of Queen Victoria. In dwelling upon the greatness and magnificence and grandeur of everybody concerned in this (except the British taxpayer who was called upon to pay a huge sum out of his earnings to enable the exalted couple to start in at housekeeping), the *Graphic* says, "Near the mausoleum in the grounds of Duff House is a tombstone erected to the memory of four or five pet dogs of the House of Fife. 'Bevis' and 'Barkis' seem to have been the favorites, or why should coronets crown their names?" An illustration of the monumental marble that guards the sacred dust of the departed pugs accompanies this glimpse of the home of one of the rich whom they will always have with them in England, unless they get understanding. There are many others there like the Earl of Fife, greater or less in degree than he, who have never added to the general store of wealth, but have inherited what the ignorance of the people recognizes as a right to take abundantly from it, even though the real producers are left in the direst want. Not only do these suffer deprivation of what they earn, but some of them are robbed of manliness, virtue, honesty, everything that makes living even endurable, and condemned for life and death to the kennels and gutters. Never in any age or place was bondage and degradation and shame among human creatures worse than that existing outside the walls that guard the splendor and refinement and magnificence of Great Britain. Primitive savagery could yield no such records; before the coming of Christ, when strife among mankind was unrestrained by hope or fear beyond the hour and its consequences, there was no such preying of man upon man. What a bitter truth of description, there is in these lines, which Tennyson wrote long ago: —

Sleep must lie down, armed, for their villainous centre-bite
Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of the moonless nights,
While another is cheating the sick of a few last gasps as he sits;
To pestle a poisoned poison behind his crimson lights.

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And chalk and alum and plaster are sold to the poor for bread
And the spirit of murder lurks in the very meaning of life.
And what a passion of thrilling appeal in these, among the latest from his pen:
Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in the time,
City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?
There among the glooming alleys, Progress halts with palsied feet,

Cold and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on the street;
There the sordid master scrimps the haggard, sempstress of her bread;
There a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead;
There the smouldering fire of fever, creeps across the rotted floor
To the crowded couch of incest, in the warrens of the poor.

Is it well that within easy distance, as the crow flies, from Duff House, where noble mourners rear over the remains of poodles whom they may never again meet in this world costly slabs of carven marble, daughters should need to sell their souls for the pence which hold their mothers from starvation? Is it well that women, semi-nude and with all womanliness bruised and beaten out of them, should toil amid the heat and grime of roaring forges, to secure such a livelihood as no savage would envy? Is it well that stunted and unhealthy children, knowing nothing of the joy and lightheartedness of childhood, should take their places among men and women, made beastlike with unrequited toil, and set their young hands and minds to work, with no hope before them but to reach such manhood or womanhood? Cradley Heath is in England, and the workers there should be sure of inheriting the kingdom of Heaven if poverty of spirit is the key to it. Bankside is part of the very metropolis and centre of the world's civilization and Christianity. Near Windsor and near Westminster and "under the cross of gold that shines over city and river" droves of women, hardly recognizable as human beings, work from morning till night, when they are fortunate enough to have full employment, at sifting refuse and manure, for a wage of from five to six shillings per week! Exposed to all weathers and engaged in toil as laborious as it is filthy and repulsive, young girls and old women fight for the chance of engaging in this indescribable slavery. It is necessary to have brave hearts, too, and to hold up well, for those who faint at the work are bidden to come no more. A leading London chemist, writing a few months ago in a leading medical journal, stated that there has of late arisen a great demand for hair dyes. One would think it was the unemployed within the sacred enclosure, not those without, who were trifling with these things, but it is not so. Desperate men, standing in ranks to be chosen from for some employment, on which hangs life or death for them or those dear to them, have earned the potency of hair dye. It is important, when the coldly critical eye of an agent or employer who must exact the last possible grain of labor in return for the wage paid is fixed upon an applicant, that that applicant should stand erect and show none of the signs of coming age or weakness. I think nothing more tragic than the simple statement of that chemist can be found in the annals of labor, which are all sufficiently tragic.

It is true that the portion which labor receives as its reward, and for its share, of the wealth which it brings into existence has become less and less in England just the same as elsewhere, in proportion with largely increased productive power. Professor Thorold Rogers, who may be called the Mulhall of labor, makes this very apparent in his admirable "Six Centuries of Work and Wages." Touching this part of my subject, however, I will have something to say further on; it is sufficient for the present to point out that in these volumes of Professor Rogers there is conclusive evidence — evidence which, I believe, no one has attempted to dispute — that while invention and progress enormously increase the productive force of labor, the repayment to the laborer — or in other words, his wages — has not kept pace with the increase. Some power has intervened to prevent him, the producer, from getting his rightful portion. That intervals of

comparative betterment for the worker have occurred here and there I am aware. With these and their causes and with wider diffusion of wealth now claimed to be taking place in England I will also deal hereafter, only asserting here that there is a power existent which reduces the wages of labor until they press on the limits of subsistence. Not only in England has this happened, but everywhere. The power, whatever it is, is one which fiscal laws have not yet found strength to annul. In America, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Australia, under widely varying conditions of life and national character, and under different fiscal systems, it can be seen in full work. It is the power which bids men depart to make way for game; which depopulates counties and congests towns and cities with unhealthy life; which says to the worker, "The whole of the raw material upon which you could work is *mine*, and only whoever will hand over to me the largest part of what they produce from it will be permitted to go to work." That is a sufficient power to make life what it is for the lower strata of labor everywhere. Just in proportion to the number asking for access to the stores of raw material and the avenues of natural opportunity will be the price exacted, and the consequent misery and despair of those unable to pay it. It is the ratio between applicants and opportunities for work that determines the general condition of workers, and no other thing. I think I will prove that by and by. I think I will show that under any fiscal policy private ownership of land and its potentialities means private ownership of those who live on the land, body and soul. And the more of them there are to the acre the cheaper they are — body and soul.

It was well Henry George did undertake his great inquiry — well for us all, and among us for those who as yet are by no means thankful to him. The need for reform was urgent everywhere, and angry men, burning with a knowledge of their great wrongs, were inclining a willing ear to angry counsel. Radicalism, the voice of protest against the continuance of unjust conditions, was beginning to make no uncertain sound in the United Kingdom, and throughout Europe something sterner and more deadly was beginning to ferment. The Irish struggle being at last recognized as the struggle of labor everywhere, suddenly won the world's sympathy, and an insistent force of change, the units of which scattered widely apart began to signal to each other, came into existence. Current statesmanship feeling this, swung into line to the best of its ability. Mr. Gladstone became convinced of the justice of Home Rule for Ireland, while Bismarck and other European rulers took various steps, more or less successful, for the alleviation of the growing discontent. But the remedies used or suggested, when free from the suspicion of quackery, were merely palliatives. Speaking of the great distress and depression existing among the East Anglian farmers, who, having big rents to pay, were utterly unable to compete against importations of grain from huge American farms, whose rentals were but nominal, Mr. Gladstone had no better advice to offer than, that "spade husbandry" should be more largely resorted to; that the future hope of English agriculture lay in the direction of strawberries and cucumbers!

This was advice which, even from between the revered horns of the grand old man's shirt collar, the disconsolate farmers declined to accept as oracular. And just about then Lord Salisbury, disturbed by the growth of conflicting elements, expressed confidence in the very mild herbal treatment of primroses. "The growth of the Primrose League," solemnly asserted the Prime Minister of England, "is transcendentally more valuable than party interests or than the solution of

current questions, as it will be the means of cementing classes together." Thus the two political leaders of the House of Commons, in the face of grave and imperative problems affecting the well-being of millions of people. While the conditions which induced a hundred thousand men to rise in a rebellion that might have meant widespread insurrection and bloodshed but for judicious management and the timely help of public sympathy were ripening they had no more to say than that! And the archbishops counseled thrift and abstinence on the part of the poor, from alcohol, marriage and tobacco in any form, and a more sedulous cultivation of that humility which might entitle them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, while the monks on the ladders worked harder than ever and laid the paint pretty thick on the angels' wings.

But another ladder had been reared against the wall. Slowly and with infinite care Henry George climbed up this, trying the strength of each rung and minutely examining the wall as he went. Anon he reached the coping and climbed over it and stood among luxurious idlers in the palaces, the first envoy from the dark ranks waiting below who had ever penetrated into that place. He examined the gems and hangings of silk and purple; they had the private brand of Labor on them all. He peered into treasure chests and found that labor had filled them; choice wines and viands and rare creations of art and science he identified as belonging to labor, and more than reasonably supposed to have been stolen, and put in a claim on behalf of labor for these things. He came back half-way down his ladder again and began to paint upon the wall also. But there was no doubt or mysticism about his brush. The figures drawn were human, and the story told was clear. So clear it was, and so splendid for the myriad standing down in the gloom, that all their eyes are beginning to turn towards the picture. Even the friar leans over and looks and understands, and will paint like it by-and-bye. It tells those who are weary and heavy laden that there is yet hope for them. It says that the wall of privilege which supports and fends the few who live in careless ease and riotous luxury upon the earnings of the wretched workers has been builded by craft and fraud, not by natural law, and that the hands of justice will make short work when they begin upon it. It tells all who have striven and suffered in sorrow and brutalism that God has not pre-ordained their suffering, and that the divine will no more decree that he who works shall not eat than that he who does not work shall eat. It justifies the ways of God to man with proofs before which sophistry grows mute. It bears a message of hope here and hereafter, one very different from those of the practical statesmen. And one that, mayhap, has not come too soon, for the small boluses of the family physicians would hardly much longer delay the inflammation of the world. Dropping allegory altogether I will next week endeavor to decipher that message.