

The Single Tax, July, 1897

Dreams are not Idle; Dreams have Saved the World

By William Lloyd Garrison

The following is from an article in a recent edition of the *Philadelphia Bulletin*:--

"How can you buy the right to exclude at will every other creature made in God's image from sitting by this brook, treading on that carpet of flowers, or lying listening to the birds in the shade of these glorious trees—how can I sell it to you? is a mystery not understood by the Indian, and dark, I must say, to me."

Thus wrote N. P. Willis more than fifty years ago, to the unknown purchaser of his beautiful estate of Glenmary, then offered for sale. Appreciating what bounties of nature land includes, he adds:—

"Lord of the Soil is a title which conveys I your privileges but, poorly. You are master of waters flowing at this moment, perhaps, in a river of Judea, or floating in clouds over some spicy island of the tropics, bound hither after many changes. There are lilies and violets ordered for you in millions, acres of sunshine in daily instalments, and dew nightly in proportion. There are throats to be tuned with song, and wings to be painted with red and gold, blue and yellow; thousands of them, and all tributaries to you. Your corn is ordered to be sheathed in silk, and lifted high in the sun. Your grain is to be duly bearded and stemmed. There is perfume to be distilled for your cloves, and juices for your grasses and fruits. Ice will be here for your wine, shade for your refreshment at noon, breezes and showers and snowflakes; all in their season, and all 'deeded to you for forty dollars the acre.' Gods! what a copyhold of property for a fallen world."

He reflects that he sells not only the present blessings to fall upon that bright spot of earth, but all that shall fall thereafter, confessing, " I know not whether to wonder more at the omnipotence of money, or at my own impertinent audacity toward Nature."

This doubt of Willis regarding the right of private ownership of land was not a new one. Through the ages its echoes come down to us.

"The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is mine," says the Jewish Jehovah, and the books of the Brahmins affirm:—"To whomever the soil at any time belongs, to him belongs the fruit of it. White parasols and elephants mad with pride are the flowers of a grant of land."

Thomas Jefferson takes up the protest:—"The earth belongs in usufruct to the living; the dead have no right or power over it," and the Indian Black Hawk joins in:—"The Great Spirit has told me that land is not to be made property like other property. The earth is our mother."

What, sell land? Why not sell the air, the sea, and the sky?" said Red Jacket.

The great Pope Gregory affirms that "the earth is the common property of all men."

"There is no foundation in nature or in natural law why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land," wrote Sir William Blackstone. And the chorus swells as we near our own day."

I feel called upon in behalf of rational nature, which I represent," says Emerson, "to declare to you my opinion, that, if the earth is yours, so also is it mine. . . . It is God's world and mine; yours as much as you want, mine as much as I want."

Carlyle is equally clear on the subject:—" Properly speaking, the land belongs to these two—to Almighty God and to all the children of men that have ever worked well on it, or that shall ever work well on it."

"No man made the land," says John Stuart Mill. "It is the original inheritance of the whole species."

"Abolish slavery to-morrow and the land monopoly would pave the way for its reestablishment," was the striking prophecy of Gerritt Smith, himself a great land owner.

"Equity does not permit property in land," said Herbert Spencer.

"He who has no clear, inherent right live somewhere has no right to live at all the conviction of Horace Greeley.

“Landlordism is the cause of poverty,” says Dr. Colthurst and the Right Rev. Dr. Nulty, Bishop of Meath, insists that “the land of every country is the common property of the people of that country.”

John Bright and Richard Cobden, although they paused at the abolition of the Corn laws, were yet near enough to the land question to feel the explosive possibilities wrapped within it. "The landowners have unlimited sway in Parliament and in the provinces," said Bright in 1845. "In the great contests in which we have been engaged we have found that this ruling class have taken all the honours, while the people have taken all the scars."

Cobden earnestly warned landowners "against forcing upon the attention of the middle and industrial classes the subject of taxation. For, great as I believe the grievance of the protective system, mighty as I consider the fraud and injustice of the Corn laws, I verily believe you will find as black a record against the landowners as even the Corn law itself. I warn them against ripping up the subject of taxation."

And he adds: "If they want another league at the death of this one—if they want another organisation and a motive—then let them force the middle and industrial classes to understand how they have been cheated, robbed, and bamboozled."

All these premonitory symptoms preceded the advent of the Single Tax agitation. It was impossible for this seed of the centuries not to germinate in the fullness of time.

"The gems of mighty thought
Must have their silent undergrowth,
Must underground be wrought."

The land question has reached the burning stage. Declarations against land monopoly that excited no notice in the centuries gone by are now incendiary. Words which were innocuous in the mouths of the great men whom I have quoted are freighted with danger when used by Henry George. Why? For the same reason that made Lundy's scheme of gradual emancipation harmless, and Garrison's demand for immediate and unconditional emancipation as vital as an earthquake. Because the hour is ripe and the champion has appeared who sounds

the bugle blast for the unconditional surrender of the fortress. Therefore, the siege is on.

The simple statement of the Single Tax is this: If all have an equal right to the use of the earth, it is wrong for a few to claim its ownership and demand a price of others for its use. Monopoly for exclusive use. is therefore a privilege, and as such should justly be paid for. But to whom? Logically to whom it belongs. As it belongs to all, the payment must be made to all. Is that possible? Nothing easier.

Where there are no people there are no land values, and no government. When people arrive and increase, land values spring up and grow. Land heretofore worth nothing acquires a rental value, a preferential price, which users would rather pay than occupy other land without price. Land or rental values are therefore made by the community collectively, not by the individual. They then belong to the community.

With society, government becomes necessary. A revenue is essential to support it. Where should government look for its revenue? Naturally, to the fund which belongs equally to all the people, the rental value of the land. It is now taken by landlords who have no defensible right to appropriate it. \Y hen the government takes it it is simply the people taking it themselves for their own use, for it is spent as they direct for the benefit of all.

What a blessed exchange for the present plan of supporting the government, which wrings from individuals their earnings for public use, and allows individuals to take the property of this community for private use. The annual rental value of land is sufficient to support government without taxation. Nature plants the nettle and the plantain side by side; where one stings the other heals. Governments cannot live where there are no land values. To take the latter to pay the expenses of the former is as natural as the arrangement of the plants.

Out of this confirmation to nature and justice shall come not only good government, but happy social conditions and a distribution of earning according to deserts, such as no artificial devices can effect. The golden age may be a dream, but Single Taxers hold to its possibility when justice lessens the necessity for greed. "Dreams are not idle; dreams have saved the world."

