

A NEGLECTED DEDUCTION FROM A RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE

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The doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood and human brotherhood has succeeded at last in abolishing chattel slavery from almost the whole globe. Men to-day almost universally agree that the owning by one person of another person's body is indefensible and intolerable. But there is another necessary deduction from the same religious doctrine, just as incontrovertible, just as self-evident to an open mind as the first, to which custom still blinds them. This article is an attempt to state that deduction in as simple and elementary terms as possible, and to show its logical results.

THE EARTHLY HERITAGE OF GOD'S CHILDREN

When Paul speaks of certain people as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" he doubtless refers to their spiritual heritage, in time and eternity. But there is a material world to which God's children are heirs no less than a spiritual. It is this planet called Earth, which their Father created for the abode of the human race. Every man is placed upon it without his own consent, and is commanded to stay upon it until his Father sees fit to remove him. It is the nursery in which his Father keeps him for the earlier part of his deathless career. In order to maintain physical life he must use what he finds in it. Everything he eats, drinks, wears or handles in any way, shape or manner, is drawn from the planet. Denied access to its surface his life ceases. On it he lives and moves and has his being.

NO PRIMOGENITURE AMONG GOD'S HEIRS

Now given these conditions—on the one hand a race of beings all equally the children of one Creator-Father; on the other hand a world made by him for the habitation and support of that race of his children-beings—and if we were to view the situation without previous bias or prejudice I do not see how we possibly could escape the conclusion that all the members of the race in question are equally heirs to the surface and resources of the planet created for them. Unless the Creator had definitely specified some members of that race as entitled to certain portions of his planet to which others are not entitled, I do not see by what possible ethical standard a system of individual, private ownership of the surface of the earth, and of its mineral supplies, could be established. And no one ever yet has produced such a specification in his own or another man's favour. We shall see in a moment that this reasoning involves neither communism nor socialism, in the ordinary usage of those terms. But if it did, I do not see how that would destroy its validity. John Stuart Mill stated it axiomatically years ago: "The land is not of man's creation, and for a person to appropriate to himself a mere gift of nature not made to him in particular, but which belonged to all others until he took possession of it, is *prima facie* an injustice to all the rest."

FAMILY USE OF A HOUSE

"But," someone says, "if the father of a family builds a home he gives John one room, Mary another, Tom a third, and so on. They do not all use the rooms promiscuously." Thanks for the illustration. The father grants to John the use of a room, not the ownership. And he does not allow John to pre-empt two rooms and charge little Charlie, when he comes of age to need it, a price for one of them—as is done with the rooms of our planet-house.

THE BIBLE LAND SYSTEM

This example of the house exactly illustrates the system which the Old Testament writers represent Jehovah as having enjoined upon the people of Israel. On taking possession of the land of Canaan they were to divide up its soil among them by lot. (Num. 26; 52-55.) The

tenure was to be inalienable so that each estate should remain in the same family "by perpetual entail." Thus "no Israelite could be born who did not inherit a piece of land from his progenitors." The classic on this subject is Leviticus 25th, which describes the provision of the Jubilee, by which all lands must revert to the original owners every half century, so that "a sale of land was only a lease for at longest forty-nine years." And land sold thus was open to redemption at any time. According to the writer, God said (v. 23): "And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

Now whether Leviticus was written by Moses or by the millionth "redactor"; whether its land system was given by inspiration of God and was practised by Israel for a millennium, or was devised by a late scribe to rectify unjust conditions which had existed a thousand years, the fact remains that it corresponded to our illustration of the use of a father's house by his children. It secured to Reuben, Ezra and Amos each his own portion without allowing them to freeze out Abigail and Nahum. While neither communistic nor socialistic, it recognized the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

THE DISINHERITED CHILDREN

Let us now illustrate a different system, namely, that in vogue. Suppose that in Germany, where such families actually occur, a wealthy gentleman has six children from two to seven years of age. He has a well-appointed nursery with a fine "nursery governess" in charge. One day the oldest two children, Hans and Hedwig, enter the room before the rest, and while building block houses on a table, concoct a thrifty scheme. They gather all the toys into the middle of the room, surround them with the little chairs which they themselves are not using, and make the enclosure tight with cord. Then when the younger children come, wanting seats and toys, they say: "You must pay us ten pins for each chair, or five pins for each toy—all but Baby Fritz, who must give ten kisses for each thing he wants." But Baby Fritz has his eye on a pretty string of beads, and objects to the formalities of kissing. When the price is demanded he sets up a mighty howl just as the governess enters the room. The other expropriated children also make indignant appeals to her. On learning the situation she says: "Why, no, Hans and Hedwig, your papa provided these things for all his children, and you have no right to ask the others a price for them." Elated by this decision small Gretchen makes a dash to appropriate the house of blocks which Hedwig had built. But here Fraulein again interferes: "No, no, Gretchen, the things which a child makes with his fair share of the materials are for him. The rest can have materials to make things with too."

We all are little children of the Heavenly Father. He has provided our nursery, Earth, with abundant materials on which we are to exercise our energies. But we permit some of the brothers and sisters not only to take an undue share for themselves, but also to tie up vast quantities of the heaven-given materials, which they cannot possibly use, and exact payment from the other children for access to them.

Communism and socialism propose to remedy these evils by making common property, not only the heaven-given materials, but whatever any of the children may produce out of them—as Gretchen wished to profit by Hedwig's ready-made house of blocks. Brotherly individualism proposes to grant all the children equal access to the heaven-given materials, but to allow each to keep what he may produce from them—remembering to safeguard the weak from over-reaching by the strong. It would also make

common property such public utilities as are necessary for the common use, just as the plumbing, heating, hallways and stairways of a dwelling are used in common by all the family.

RESTORING THE CHILDREN'S HERITAGE

But how is this condition to be brought about? At present mankind are divided into units called nations, presided over by governments. It is the duty of each government to secure to all its citizens their equal rights as regards that portion of the planet lying within its own boundaries. Well, then, shall it go back to the Pentateuch and divide its soil equally among its citizens? No. But if men living before Christ could devise a land system which recognized the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, twentieth-century Christian governments ought not to be helpless to solve the problem. In some form suited to our intricate modern civilization they must apply the principles on which the Bible system was based—leaving men secure to use and improve land in severalty, so as to reap the fruits of their toil, while preventing them from exacting revenue from others for the same privilege.

FAIR COMPENSATION FOR PRIVILEGE

Stated in barest outline, that proposal is that those of us who use the bounties of nature, which belong to all, shall pay a fair sum for the privilege. To accomplish this nothing more revolutionary than a change in our system of taxation is advocated. Our government is ourselves in collective capacity. If those of us who use the earth's surface, its water fronts and mineral deposits, pay for the privilege in taxation to the collective body, no one can complain. The government tax must be such that no one can hold out of use a resource of nature in order to levy a private tax on his brother men for access to it. This would throw on the market all unused parts of the planet, now held for a rise in value, naturally making it easier for the average man to get a footing. The exemption from taxation of everything produced by labour would seem likely to stimulate industry; while the very denial to capital of the privilege of sleeping on unused land until the needs of society bring it large profits for its idleness, would force it into productive enterprises and start the jobs to hunting for men. Since the amount of the tax would depend solely on the location of the piece of planet taxed, absorbing only the value added to it by the presence of society, and none of the value added to it by the owner, taxation would be heaviest where society is densest, in the largest cities, and would scale down to almost nothing in sparsely settled farming districts. It would seem the squarest kind of a square deal all around. The abundant revenues raised in these ways would remove all excuse for further filching from the people under the guise of tariff "protection," while the ease of assessing taxes on the site-values of portions of the planet would promote purity and economy in government.

OBJECTIONS TO THE REMEDY

Most of the objections to the Singletax remedy fall under three heads.

One set is based on the false assumption that the private use of land involves its private *ownership*—and that men will not use land unless they can own portions which they do not use in order to draw revenue from others for using them! In reply we point to the fact that in millions of houses children use rooms without owning them; and to the fact that under our present system men constantly use lands which they do not own—often leasing lots for long periods and erecting fine buildings on them.

Another set of objections is based on the financial havoc and suffering which would follow the adoption of the new system—always arguing as if it had to be adopted *in toto* overnight, without a moment's notice. Having formed the habit of regarding the rights of those children of God who have appropriated the common heritage as being more important than the rights of his expropriated children, why should we not avoid suffering among the former by allowing a long time for securing the rights of the latter? It would seem that a period of ten years in each State, in which to accomplish the shifting of taxation, would permit such adjustment to the new system as to prevent undue suffering. Of course, an emancipation act always

entails some loss on slaveholders, and the restoration of their heritage to the people must cause some loss to landlords.

Thirdly. A friend whom I recently asked whether he had investigated the Singletax, replied: "No, it is put forward as a panacea for all social ills, and I distrust panaceas." Probably in an age when private ownership of men seemed as natural and proper to most people as private ownership of the planet seems to most people to-day, those who advocated universal personal liberty were inclined to think that the adoption of that single measure would solve all social problems. The fact that they were mistaken did not justify perpetuating slavery. Nor does the fact that the Singletax will not accomplish all that its more enthusiastic advocates claim for it justify perpetuating the disinheritance of the majority of God's children. Professor Edwin R. A. Seligman, of Columbia University (that egregious beneficiary of the present system) has tried to prove by figures that the Singletax would not much improve the condition of the poor. Years ago some tried to prove by figures that freedom would not improve the condition of the slaves—and it was demonstrated by figures that no steamer could carry coal enough to get across the Atlantic Ocean! Let us establish justice, let us grant the equal claim of all men to the planet which God has given them, and bravely take our chances on the results.

Always character is greater than things, and the spiritual higher than the physical. Hence the effort to transform men's lives by the religious appeal, and to lead them to act as behoves immortal beings on whom the Infinite has bestowed the great patent of nobility of calling them sons and daughters, to the writer's mind, always will be the supremely important line of effort in establishing the kingdom of heaven. But if there existed a nation composed exclusively of so-called "converted" people, or professed Christians, which still practised or tolerated slavery within its borders we should feel sure that the answer to the prayer, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," had not been achieved in that nation. Even so if all the people of our own or any other country were to "get religion" to-morrow, without at the same time getting a clear enough sense of justice to recognize the equal right of all their number to be on the planet where God has placed them, and the consequent equal right of them all to its surface and resources, the kingdom of God would not yet really have come in that country.

It may be said that the supremely important part of an automobile is its motor. But with one of its four wheels lacking it will not be a successful car. So the supremely important element in the coming of the kingdom of heaven is the religious, but without the restoration of their material heritage to the expropriated "heirs of God" it never can be claimed that that kingdom really has come on earth.

The Brighton and Hove Parliamentary Debating Society holds its meetings weekly at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, and has had the Land Value Policy before it on several occasions. Following the debate led by Mr W. R. Lester early in the autumn, Mr Duncan Cuthbertson has done much canvassing among the leaders of the parties and the members. On 4th December the "Liberal Government" carried by a good majority its "Finance Bill," which provided for a straight tax of a penny in the pound of the capital land value of all land in the country.

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