

## THE RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF HENRY GEORGE

(Final Meeting of the International Conference in Edinburgh, Sunday, 4th August, Bailie Peter Burt, J.P., presiding)

Speakers: REV. MERVYN J. STEWART, REV. M. L. PERLZWEIG and REV. HERBERT S. BIGELOW

BAILIE PETER BURT, J.P. (Chairman): "Ladies and Gentlemen,—We have met to-night for the purpose of having addresses on the teaching of Henry George, and we have with us to-night the Rev. Mervyn J. Stewart, Vicar of Manuden (Essex), the Rev. M. L. Perlzweig, who is from the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London, and the Rev. H. S. Bigelow, of Cincinnati, America. I think to a Scottish audience it will be most interesting to know and to hear what they have to say about Mr George's religious teaching in connection with the gospel of freedom which he himself preached."

THE REV. MERVYN J. STEWART: "Henry George, I am satisfied, believed that there was a personal Creator. To that extent he was, we may say, fundamentally a deist. He believed that that God had a personal regard for mankind. It is quite clear from his point of view, and one of his greatest disciples defined Henry George's teaching as the making room at God's table for all His children. Henry George taught a message which is profoundly different in its basis from what has been well called the pessimistic materialism of the present day. If you think that the Almighty was so incompetent that the arrangements of society could not be ordered without a number of skilful men at high salaries sitting in a Government office and telling everybody what to do—well, if you think that, you rate the Almighty power at a very, very low level. (Hear, hear.) If you look back, not a thousand years, but two hundred years, you will see, coming down from time immemorial, just a reasonable system of land tenure, which was broken up by brutal violence. The people submitted to that wrong two hundred years ago, and now year by year they are being cleared off from the homes of their ancestors. They are crowding into the slums of your great cities and towns."

"Let us consider the goodness of God as shown in His provision for social requirements. Where population is very scarce, where culture in the technical sense is at a low level, public requirements are very trifling and the monopoly value of land and the opportunities of access to the gifts of the Creator are trifling in a corresponding degree. As things become more complex life becomes more complex. More and more opportunities are opened out. There is greater sub-division of labour, leading to greater skill and greater output. The social costs become greater and greater until, as we know, in such cities as Glasgow and Edinburgh, millions of pounds require to be spent every year in order to provide for the necessary requirements of the people. Wherever civic expenses are high, larger and automatically in the same proportion there is a fund which rises which has nothing to do with the earnings of any individual. The provision is there. The progress of civilization is assured where this fund is taken for public requirements."

THE REV. M. L. PERLZWEIG: "I think I ought to begin, and I do so with great sincerity, by expressing my sense of the privilege which has been conferred upon me in the invitation which I have received to speak to this large and important meeting to-day. I am very glad that my friend Mr Stewart gave you some outline of the religious ideals which lie behind Henry George's writings. The Hebrew Scripture, which is the source and the foundation on which Henry George's teaching was built, said that God created man in His own image. I know of no patent of nobility which can equal this

in its value and in its wonder, and yet it is a patent of nobility in which each one of us, rich and poor, strong and weak alike, shares. That is what Henry George believed. He believed that those who suffered, that those who bore the burden of poverty, that those who were degraded by the conditions under which they lived, were the victims of a social system which was a challenge to the belief in God, which was a form of active blasphemy, a form of active denial of God.

"There is a hunger for the land among the Jews. They are leaving the cities. They are leaving the factories. They are leaving the banks. They are leaving the counting-houses, and they are going back to the land. Men and women with high intellectual attainments are going back to the land. When they go back on to the land they will discover what Henry George discovered, that it is not easy to go back to the land. The Zionist Movement has been in operation for thirty years. We have had to buy land from absentee landlords. We have had to irrigate the land. We have had to take the stones out of the soil, to be gathered together, under the rule of a Government which is now happily at an end; and with every bit of land that we buy, and with every bit of land that we improve, what do we find? That the next bit of land is very much harder to buy. We are putting the price up against ourselves. Well, about twelve days ago I went with a colleague as a deputation from the Zionist Movement in this country, and I went to see the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir John Chancellor, who happens to be on a visit to England, and we put certain complaints before him, and this is one of the things that I took upon myself to say to him. I said: 'Don't you realize that this present system, by which the value of the land that we have to pay for is increased, is unjust?' He said: 'Yes, I know it is unjust, but that is what happens everywhere.' I retorted: 'But isn't it right that in this land of all lands, the land of the prophets, some attempt should be made to consider whether it is not possible to find a way out of the difficulty?' The High Commissioner said: 'I know what you are; you are a follower of Henry George.' (Applause.) I agreed that I was a follower of Henry George. Well, it would not do to make me any promises, but he said: 'I will at any rate say this:

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I have some experience in colonization; I was Governor of Southern Rhodesia, and I will promise you that my Land Department shall make inquiries into the experiments which have been made in the taxation of land values, and if anything can come out of these experiments of use to Palestine, then you may rely upon my sympathetic desire to put them into practice."

"If I may say a word to you, ladies and gentlemen, it is this. I don't know what your resources are. I don't know what you can do, but I know that a very dear friend and co-religionist of mine has made certain things in the way of publications possible for you, and I would suggest to you that possibly through that Foundation you might bring Henry George's gospel to the young Jews of Palestine who are eager to learn. They are anxious to learn. If you will supply them in their own language, in the language of the prophets, in the Hebrew language, with Henry George, you might be doing a great work for the propagation of your ideas." (Applause.)

THE REV. HERBERT S. BIGELOW: "Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, . . . Henry George spiritually was indeed in the line of the great Hebrew prophets. (Applause.) The Hebrew prophet cried out, 'Away, away, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City.' And the Britisher thinks of London as the Holy City, and the American thinks of Washington as the Holy City—on both sides of the ocean. We look upon government as merely a matter of expediency. We keep religion in one compartment of our minds and politics in another. To us they are separate and distinct things. But to the Hebrew prophet they were not separate and distinct things. To him citizenship was a sacrament. Patriotism was religion in action. The State was the organized service of God, and Jerusalem the capital was the Holy City, and that union of religion and politics was the faith of Henry George. A famous British novelist in his book, *The Way of All Flesh*, described once a Church congregation here in Britain as a group of people who would be equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted or seeing it practised.

"On one occasion I was introducing, or about to introduce, a member of the British Parliament to my Church congregation in Cincinnati. During the music he turned to me on the platform and said, 'Bigelow, what do you consider your job here?' 'Why,' I said, 'I think my job is to Christianize politics.' (Hear, hear, and applause.) 'Oh,' he said, 'I have a harder job than that. My job is to Christianize the Church.' (Laughter.) Henry George taught me to comprehend the gospel of the Nazarene. I read the glowing book some thirty years ago, and for these thirty years I

have striven to preach that gospel of inspired politics which he preached to me.

"If Henry George were now the Prime Minister of Great Britain and had the support of a friendly Parliament and the approval of public opinion, this is what he would do. He would first cause an accurate scientific assessment to be made of every piece and parcel of land on this island, assessing each piece and parcel of land separate and apart from the value of the improvements thereon. He would ascertain what funds were needed to carry on the services of Government, knowing the total aggregate value of the land of Great Britain as unimproved; and knowing the needs for public revenue, he would arrive at the necessary rate of assessment, how many pennies in a pound it would be necessary to levy against this value to provide the revenues of Government. He would set in motion the necessary machinery to carry out this valuation and this levy, and having thus derived the necessary revenues of Government from this source he would abolish all taxes of every description on all forms of labour producing wealth and industrial activity on these islands. (Applause.)

"But it was for us to-night to speak rather of the religious idealism at the back of this programme. I don't know, outside the Bible, any chapter that was ever written that glows more with the fervour of a mighty faith than that chapter on the Individual Life at the end of *Progress and Poverty*.

"All Christians must agree that, whatever else their religion may be, it should at least stand the test of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus certainly meant to teach by that parable that the warm-hearted deed of the Samaritan was better than the creed of the priest. That generous action is more important than correct opinions about religion. But we miss the deeper significance of this parable and its teaching if we make a narrow and limited application of it. Not many of us are likely to find on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, or from Edinburgh to Glasgow, victims just like this, the victims of lawless banditry. But what we have the world filled with to-day are the victims of lawful banditry. What the world suffers from chiefly is the iniquity that is authorized by law. We cannot bale out the ocean of human misery with the spoon of charity. What do we want but social justice, well thought out social justice and adequate citizenship? We in this Conference believe that nowhere in the world is there offered any remedy to save poor humanity from the miseries of modern civilized life but the programme outlined in this book, *Progress and Poverty*." (Loud applause.)

MR ASHLEY MITCHELL: "I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, before we part, to pass a hearty vote of thanks to Bailie Burt for his services in the Chair to-night." (Applause.)

THE CHAIRMAN: "That finishes our proceedings as far as the meeting is concerned. I hope everyone will do what he can, if you have been impressed by the meeting to-night and by the addresses you have heard, to help on the cause which we have so much at heart. That will be the best reward to those who are interested in this cause, as far as Scotland is concerned."

This concluded the proceedings of the International Conference in Edinburgh.

A correspondent has sent us the Election Address of the Rt. Hon. Philip Snowden, M.P., standing as municipal candidate in November, 1899, for the East Ward, Keighley, Yorkshire. The first plank in Mr Snowden's platform then was "The Taxation of Land Values."

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