

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

WE sometimes think that perhaps many of the difficulties in the world arise from the multiplicity of words. People were able to think clearer when there was only a small dictionary of perhaps twenty thousand words. Look at Shakespeare. He had all the vocabulary he needed; when he wanted a new word he invented it. If he had lived in this age of more words he might not have done so well; indeed he might have been overwhelmed with the weight and volume of them.

WE are not joking. We think much of the obscurity of present day writing by writers of innumerable books, much of their failure to think at all, are due to the dictionary makers. If you can substitute for an idea a word or two, or many words, that is so much to the good and where there are innumerable words there are that increased number of substitutes for ideas.

AND it must be remembered that these larger vocabularies are the possession of the few. They are therefore at the service of privilege. The masses have few words and fewer ideas; they are able only to understand what is conveyed in their limited vocabulary. When the authorities, the teachers and preachers, the statesmen and politicians, launch out at them with their formidable armory of words in books and newspapers, words that conceal ideas, they lose the power of thinking.

GOETHE once declared that the highest cannot be spoken in words. Conversely it may be held that the simplest truths—the lowest and most obvious, if you please, can only be expressed in the fewest words. They may have to be reiterated a number of times, but the words are few. Think of the simplest truth, for example, that all men have an equal right to the use of the earth. Now the opposite of this, if there be an opposite, requires a perfect avalanche of words, pamphlets, books, etc., to evade or conceal it. You do not have to deny it. Just write *away from it*; drown it with words drawn from many lexicons; write as if it didn't exist; talk in a stream; start the faucet of words and let it run on like Tennyson's "Brook." The method is well understood by writers of the modern school who know the admonition of the cynic that it is the purpose of language to conceal thought.

IT requires more words to write when one ignores fundamentals. The work of concealing thought calls for a largely increased vocabulary. To ignore certain factors and certain relations between these factors demands ever so many more words and what Al Smith calls "langwidge." Volumes are written on the relations of Capital and Labor. They are voluminous because in the desperate effort, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or by mere force of example, to avoid all mention of land—that third factor in distribution—they must for such avoidance substitute "langwidge" for ideas. We are confident that we owe much of the confusion in modern thinking to the multiplication of dictionaries and larger vocabularies.

OF course, the time never was when men wholly discarded the habit of talking and writing without thought. But the multiplicity of words increased their opportunities. The fatal facility of writing *around* a subject instead of *at* it was enormously increased by new terms, verbal additions, and the strange resemblance of words to ideas, all made necessary by a deliberate plan of avoidance. Take up almost any of the popular works dealing with social or economic problems and you will see what we are driving at.

IN a thoughtful article published recently, Bertrand Russell says: "I rejected the view that the origins of war are always economic, for it was obvious that most of the people who were enthusiastically in favor of the war were going to lose money by it."

According to Mr. Russell, "The question involves a story of malevolent passions and, in turn, the theory of education." It is evident here that Mr. Russell gives a too narrow interpretation to the word "economic." Yet he destroys his own thesis by implication in what follows, for he says: "With poverty eliminated, men could devote themselves to the constructive arts of civilization—to the progress of science, the elimination of disease and the impulses that make for disease."

WE agree with what Mr. Russell says of nationalistic passions and the need of international government in human affairs. But that is a part of the question of amicable relations between peoples. Mr. Russell says people fight because they wish to fight, yet he recognizes that the impulse to fear is what urges them to fight. He



is therefore confusing his causes, or employing them in a way not becoming a philosopher. For it is really fear that impels them to attack and not the mere love of fighting. That the rulers of the earth have sedulously cultivated this impulse to fear is obvious. Germans were told that they were "ringed round with enemies." In a way this was true, but these enemies had been taught to believe that Germany meditated an attack upon them. What is it then, the love of fighting or the fear of attack that leads to war? There must be some deeper contributing causes, and not the love of combat that leads nations to fly at one another's throats.

**T**HEY are battling in India over the age-old question of taxation. That, however, is but the superficial aspect of the struggle. The thing talked about is salt, as in Boston Harbor it was tea. These of course are but symbols of the meaning of which Mahatma Gandhi and his followers are perhaps only half conscious.

**A**LL great movements which stir the hearts of peoples seem to demand expression in symbols, often strangely insignificant and relatively unimportant. It is hard to believe that the tax on salt, which has been estimated as seven cents per capita, could have stirred a people so profoundly. Gandhi says: "The volume of information being gained daily shows how wickedly the tax has been designed. In order to prevent the use of salt that has not paid the tax, which is at times even four hundred times its value, the government destroys the salt it cannot sell profitably."

**T**HIS wanton destruction must seem to the people as part of the misgovernment of Great Britain in India. It must stand out prominently in the economic oppression of the Indian people. Henry George says in "Progress and Poverty," page 118: "Upon salt, an article of prime necessity everywhere, and of especial necessity where food is almost exclusively vegetable, a tax of nearly twelve hundred per cent. is imposed, so that its various industrial uses are prohibited, and large bodies of the people cannot get enough to keep either themselves or their cattle in health."

**T**AXES as high as the salt tax in India have been employed by people who did not have to wait for an alien people to impose them! We have taxes in this country which if not equal in percentage, nor as onerous by reason of our ability to bear them, are proportionately as baneful and exacting.

**I**T is impossible to enter a wholesale indictment of British rule in India. Its faults have been those of other "colonizing" countries. The defects of its rule have been those of internal governments everywhere. That the evils of the land system in India are any different, either

in kind or degree, from those the British people have so patiently borne, would puzzle even the friends of the independence of India to point out. And what under independence if granted are we to hope for? Nothing that the Mahatma has said is in the least reassuring. There is no country in the world where the caste system is so deeply ingrained; no country in which social or economic revolution is less to be anticipated.

**C**ASTE in India is no mere division of rich and poor, or titled and untitled. Caste is represented by a number of gradations hardened by centuries of inviolate custom and immemorial habits of thought. Economic equality, or equality of any kind, is unthinkable in India, and it is not conceivable that independence of British rule, in existing circumstances, would give the people freedom from onerous taxes, or excessive land rent charges. Mahatma Gandhi has no programme of social reform, though he talks vaguely of the poor and the unemployed. He insists that the salt tax must go. But other taxes would take its place. And there is yet no message of hope for the groaning millions of India.

**W**ITHOUT attempting to be facetious, it may be said that recent speeches of President Nicholas Murray Butler recall the best traditions of the Republican party when the *Chicago Tribune*, stalwart organ of the party, was urging a low tariff, and Garfield and Roosevelt were members of the Cobden Club, and when John Sherman, Republican leader, was saying in the U. S. Senate of which he was a member: "Every law imposing a duty upon imported articles is necessarily a restraint upon trade. It imposes a burden upon the purchase and sale of goods and tends to prevent their importation." "Every obstruction to a free exchange of commodities is born of the same despotic spirit which planted castles upon the Rhine to plunder peaceful commerce. Every obstruction to commerce is a tax on consumption. Every facility to a free exchange cheapens commodities, increases trade and production and promotes civilization." And we may say that while the Democratic party was dodging the tariff in the last election, and log-rolling for higher duties in the present Congress, it remained for a supposedly conservative Republican to voice his opposition to the tariff and to utter a real call to freedom.

**T**HE Single Tax system is a scientific discovery that will secure to each and every person his equal right to the use of the earth. There would be no other taxes to hinder the owner in developing the land he possessed on what would virtually be a perpetual lease, so long as he paid his taxes, that is, the annual value, to the Government.

—MARK M. DINTENFASS in Ft. Lee, (N. J.) *Sentinel*