

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

NEXT month Thomas Jefferson's birthday will be celebrated. Leading Democrats who confuse him with the Jefferson who "played Rip Van Winkle superbly" (Mark Twain's favorite joke) will eulogize him as the founder of the party to which they belong and go back to Congress and vote for protective duties in which their constituents, or some of them, are pecuniarily interested. Jefferson has the unique distinction of being the only man who founded a party whose policy is the direct opposite of his own beliefs.

NOT quite unique, perhaps. Another party, cradled in a great movement for human liberty known as the Free Soil Party, will keep its policy of silence on the great questions involving human freedom. The Hardings, the Coolidges, the Hoovers, will have none of them. If there is a land question they never heard of it. That the question goes straight to the nerve center of the whole industrial organism—why, it has never occurred to them. That there is a philosophy of social reconstruction growing ever more clamorous for recognition produces in them no evidences of apprehension.

PIERRE SAMUEL DU PONT DE NEMOURS wrote to Jefferson in 1801: "Though I respect your nation I fear you are too big for her. \* \* \* The inhabitants of your country regard—wrongfully, it is true—Indians and forests as natural enemies which must be exterminated by fire and sword and brandy, in order that they may seize their territory."

WHO was this du Pont de Nemours? He belonged to the group of teachers comprising Quesnay, Mirabeau, Turgot, Condorcet—to whose memory Henry George dedicated his "Protection or Free Trade"—the group "who in the night of despotism foresaw the glories of the coming day." Du Pont de Nemours was a friend and disciple of Turgot and no less an admirer of Jefferson. He had sometimes to be set right by Jefferson, the greater democrat, but he had more than a glimpse of the civilization that is possible. An affectionate regard must go to the memory of the man capable of this passionate exclamation: "I need to be free, I need to be useful, I need to live with men with lofty feeling."

COMMENTING on the slowness with which true political economy advances, he writes thus to Jefferson: "My friend, we are snails and we have to climb the Cordilleras. By God, they must be climbed!" Jefferson constantly throughout their correspondence reassured him when his faith seemed to be shaken. The greater democrat had to remind him that "the right to property is founded on our natural wants. \* \* \* Justice is the fundamental law of society." And if his friend waned in his belief in the progress of righteousness, Jefferson reminded him: "Enlighten the people generally and tyranny and oppression will vanish like dark spots at the dawn of day."

THE distinguished Frenchman had a keen sense of the realities. At the very beginning of the experiment to levy high taxes on the manufacture and sale of liquor he wrote to Jefferson: "I was told that levies or taxes or excises had been recently introduced to cover the work and the products of your distilleries. This would be the beginning of the worst kinds of taxation that could be adopted—a tax unequal in its assessment, costly in its collection, vexatious in its form."

SO WROTE one of the noblest men of his time. The physiocrats, who in some degree anticipated Henry George, numbered him as well as the great Turgot among its members. Some of our readers know that the du Ponts who came to this country now number among their descendants more than one devoted follower of Henry George. Thomas Jefferson, whose birthday we celebrate in April, may well be linked in memory with this Samuel du Pont de Nemours, and Henry George himself. For Jefferson had declared that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living, and the dead have no right nor claim over it." That is, that property rights vested only in the "natural wants of men," and that we must indeed disregard all title deeds.

THE theory which regards progress as one continuous development, and which up to a short period ago was quite generally accepted and formed the basis of an optimistic social creed, can no longer be entertained. Community life may remain stationary, progress may be retarded by stagnation, positive decline or decadence may set in. Changes not for the better but for the worse may occur in all stages of civilization.

THERE have been civilizations seemingly as stable as ours, whose achievements were comparable to ours. Yet the winds of centuries have swept their desolated cities, the melancholy birds wheel and circle over the ruins of proud palaces, and at the gates of their once populous streetways the beasts of the forest peer curiously in. Where is the Egyptian glory, the grandeur of Nineveh, of Persia and of Babylon? They live alone in the poet's imagination. Now, is there for all these dead civilizations the same secret and identical cause of decay?

CENTURIES of stagnation marked what we know as the dark ages. What are the causes that interrupt social progress and tend to the decay of states? In his work, "Decadence," Mr. Balfour confesses himself as bewildered and unable to account for such decadence by those historical events which usually accompany them and by some are associated as causes. He seems to regard the decline and death of civilizations as proceeding from some mysterious malady of the spirit.

MR. BALFOUR enumerates "civil dissensions, military disasters, famines, tyrants, tax gathers, growing burdens," etc., as insufficient in themselves to account for national decadence and death. But taken together and in their completeness they may indicate something of the totality of those interferences with the law of progress which Henry George has summed up as "association in equality." Conversely, the cause of the decline of civilizations is to be sought in the denial of this association in equality, and is acted upon by those events which this scholarly philosopher thinks, and rightly, do not furnish a complete explanation therefor. Mr. Balfour, despite his great competency as a philosopher, misses the real explanation in a search for some natural law analogous to the life and death of the individual. No such law really exists. There is no analogy between the life of man and the life of a nation or civilization.

ASSOCIATION in inequality. Henry George has given us the reason for the decline and death of nations. The achievements of Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome, though indeed magnificent, were based on serfdom and slavery. That is the explanation of their disappearance. Association in inequality. It is this that is eating the heart out of our present civilization. It is evidenced in the breakdown of our industrial system, in the frivolity of our amusements, in the weakening of religious ties, in the failure correctly to appraise the catastrophe of collapse, and the childish remedies prescribed by economic doctors, running from juvenilia to senilia. Civilization as based has failed, but worse still, the contemporary mind of man has failed and is hopeless in its incompetency, helpless in its attitude, but still vain, strutting pompously, instead of what it should be, humbled and appalled at the catastrophe that has overtaken us.

## City Management—And After!

THE prevalence of corruption in the government of American cities has long presented a social phenomenon of grave import. Remedies have been offered from time to time and have enlisted the efforts of earnest minded but mistaken reformers. More to our regret many disciples of Henry George have permitted themselves to be led away in these by-trails.

Direct primaries were urged as a remedy for municipal corruption. Once secured, boss-ships and civic dishonesty we were told, would be checked. Then came "commission government for cities," and what rosy predictions heralded its advent! Did municipal bosses flee from the avenging hand? Did the new devices restrict their powers by even so little? Were the promises made to the ear broken to the hope? Most of our readers know the answer.

Now we are asked to welcome another fair daughter of reform who naively tells us all will be well, municipal problems will be solved to the general satisfaction, and corruption banished, if we extend her a cordial welcome and install her in our home. Her name is City Management. We are not at present fully informed of her credentials, but she comes highly recommended and it is the intention of her eminent sponsors to commend her to the nation for universal adoption. We fear Single Taxers will again be led astray.

While the absurdity of political divisions in city elections on national lines, Republican and Democratic, is sufficiently obvious, we cannot, in view of our experience get up any enthusiasm for this new device. We have seen too many and have been deluded too often. *There are no purely mechanical devices of government capable of bringing about any really important betterment.* These are the ignus fatui that men pursue. It is a never-ending chasing of shadows and makes the heart sick with disappointment.

Crooked bosses, dishonest politicians, government corruption in city and nation, the cynical apathy of an indifferent citizenship looking on—from what do all these spring? From Want and the Fear of Want. In a civilization in which the privileged and unprivileged must live side by side, we know which element will determine the course and character of government. No improvement in the machinery will suffice. The element of the population economically the stronger will control—will, in order to serve its own purposes, destroy all safeguards, and through local bands of freebooters operating as Tammany or under other names, make of government the instrument to further the aims of privilege or reward its janizaries.

In a society such as ours we cannot hope for honesty in government. Here and there some strong individual may rise independent of his surroundings; but in a civilization where economic inequality prevails, where the mass of men are beholden to other men for a living, where permission to live at all save in the jail or almshouse is to