

TOLSTOY ON THE LAND QUESTION.

His Unqualified Endorsement of the Single Tax.

"TO THE WORKING PEOPLE OF ALL COUNTRIES."*

"Want can exist only in a society of people living according to the animal law of mutual strife."—*Tolstoy.*

The above words of Tolstoy might well be chosen as the motto of all his social and economic writings, as they certainly reveal their key-note and inspiring motive. The little pamphlet now before us, from which they have been taken, seems to us the most clear, logical, and convincing of all those that have issued from his prolific pen. It is addressed "To the working people of all countries," and contains the Russian seer's latest and most mature views as to the best, if not the only practical, means by which they can deliver themselves from the evils which to-day are their inheritance. And our readers will rejoice to know that Tolstoy discerns the road to social justice and social salvation in the scheme and policy mankind owe to the genius of our great teacher, Henry George. The pamphlet contains, in fact, Tolstoy's expression of appreciation and unqualified endorsement of what is known as the Single Tax Philosophy.

The Social Injustice.

With more than his usual directness, Tolstoy places the subject matter of his latest utterance before his readers on the very first page, and in the following words:—

"That you, working-men, are compelled to pass all your life in want and heavy work unnecessary to you, whereas other men, who do not work at all, profit by all you produce—that you are the slaves of these men, and that this should not be—this is evident to everyone who possess eyes and heart."

Proposed Remedies—Force.

"But what is to be done that it may not be so?" This is the question Tolstoy asks his readers to consider, and to the consideration of which he devotes the present pamphlet. Force, which some twenty years ago had far more advocates than it has to-day, he at once discards as no remedy, in the following true, telling, and convincing words:—

"By endeavouring with violence to strive against violence, you, working-men, are doing what a bound man would do were he, in order to get free, to pull at the ropes which bind him; he would only further tighten the knots which hold him. So it is with your attempts to obtain by force that of which you are deprived by force."

Socialism.

With the philosophy and tenets of what our author terms "the fashionable teaching called Socialism," he is also not in sympathy, in fact, has but little patience, though he evidently endeavours to place it fairly and impartially before his readers. He sums up their position as follows:—

"Men are in need of land, but they are told that in order to obtain it they should first abandon it, and then, by a complicated process, foretold by the Socialistic prophets, they will again recover it, together with mills and factories they do not need. . . . The Socialists, having quite erroneously decided that land is an instrument of labour similar to a mill or a factory, advise working-men, suffering only from want of land, to abandon the land, and to occupy themselves in taking possession of factories producing cannons, guns, scents, soap, looking-glasses, ribbons, and various articles of luxury; and only after that—when these working-men have learnt to manufacture well and quickly looking-glasses or ribbons, but have become incapable of working the land—to take possession of the land also."

*"To the Working People of all Countries," by Leo Tolstoy. Publishers, *The Free Age Press*, 13 Paternoster Row, London, E.C. Price, One Penny; post free, 1½d; or Five Shillings per hundred, carriage forward, from Fred. Verinder, 376-77 Strand, London, W.C.

The Root Evil.

Like ourselves, Tolstoy finds the root evil in the Land Question. "One thing is necessary," he well says, "that the land, which is now usurped by the great landowners, be placed at the disposal of the working-men. In Russia, ask any peasant you meet, or any workman in a town, what is the reason he is so badly off, and his answer will invariably be one and the same:—'There is no land, nothing to which to apply one's hands.'" And he contends "that the land—the freeing of the land—is the only means of improving their position, and liberating themselves from slavery; this all intelligent Russian working-men understand." "The only indubitable means of improving the position of the workers," he says in another place, "which is at the same time in conformity with the will of God, consists in the liberation of the land from its usurpation by the landlords."

Views of a Russian Stundist.

In support of this view, Tolstoy quotes approvingly from a letter written to a friend by an unlearned Russian peasant, a Stundist, from which we, too, feel impelled to take the following passage. He writes:—

"If a revolution is to be contrived, but the land is still to remain private property, then certainly it is not worth contriving for. . . . Land is the primary necessary which the people should endeavour to obtain. Mines and factories, it seems to me, will of themselves pass over to the workers. When the labourers shall obtain the land, they will work on it, and freely live upon their labour. Then many will refuse to work in factories and mines, therefore there will be less competition amongst the workers. Then wages will increase, and they will be able to organise their unions, co-operative funds, etc., and to compete with the masters; then the latter will find no advantage in keeping factories, and they will enter into agreements with the workmen. Land is the chief object of contention. This should be explained to the workers. Should they obtain increase of wages that will last only until their enthusiasm cools down. Then, again, the conditions will change, if instead of one dissatisfied there are ten men waiting to occupy his place. In that case how can they expect increase of wages?"

Views of the Russian Peasants.

Subsequently our author summarises the views of the Russian peasant in the following interesting and suggestive passage:—

"Even in the time of serfdom the peasants used to say to their masters: 'we are yours, but the land is ours,' that is, they recognised that however unlawful and cruel is the possession by one man of another, the right of possession of land by him who does not work it is still more unlawful and cruel. It is true that latterly some Russian peasants, imitating the landlords, are beginning to purchase land and trade with it, regarding its possession as lawful, and no longer fearing that it may be taken away from them. But only a few light-minded men, blinded by greed, act thus. The majority, all genuine Russian agriculturists, firmly believe that land cannot, and should not, be the property of those who do not work upon it, and that, though at present the land is taken from the workers by the non-workers, the time will come when it will be taken from those who now possess it, and become, as it should, common property. In holding that such will be the case, and that probably very soon, the Russian peasants are perfectly right. The time has come when the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of the possession of land by those who do not work upon it have grown as obvious as fifty years ago were the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of the possession of serfs. Whether it be that other methods of oppression have been abolished or that the population has increased, or that men have become more enlightened, all those who possess land

as well as those deprived of it, now clearly see what formerly they did not see—that if a peasant, who has been, and is, working all his life, has not sufficient bread owing to his having no land to sow in, if children and old people have no milk because they have no pasture, if they have not their own piece of wood to repair their rotten hut and warm it, while by their side a non-working landlord, living in his enormous park, feeds puppies with milk, builds pavilions and stables with plate glass windows, breeds sheep, and grows woods and parks upon thousands of acres, spends and eats up in a week as much as would have maintained the neighbouring starving village for a whole year—that such an organisation of life should not be. The injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of such a state of things now forces itself on the eye of everyone, as formerly did that of serfdom. And as soon as men recognise the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of any of their institutions, that institution, one way or another, inevitably comes to an end. Thus ended serfdom, and thus property in land is bound to cease, and very soon.”

Our Reform Inevitable.

“Property in land must inevitably be abolished,” Tolstoy declares, and that “because the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of this institution have become too obvious.” “The question,” he contends, “is only how will it be abolished?” And it is to this question that he devotes the latter half of his pamphlet. He summarises the real inwardness of the problem, the real difficulties to be solved, as follows:—

“Most of us think that one need only reclaim the land from the non-workers, and that then all will be right. But this is not so. It is easy to say: take away the land from the non-workers and give it to the workers. But how can this be realised so as not to infringe justice, and not to give the rich the possibility of again buying up large spaces, and, in this way, again keeping the workers in their power? To allow, as some of you now imagine, each separate worker, or community, the right of moving or ploughing wherever he or they choose—as used to be the case in olden times, and is still amongst the Cossacks—is possible only where the population is scarce and the land abundant and of one uniform quality. But where the population is greater than the land could feed in this way, and where the land is of various qualities, it is necessary to discover another method of exploiting it. To distribute it according to the number of souls? But if this be done, land will be allotted also to those who do not know how to cultivate it, and these non-workers will lease it, or sell it, to wealthy buyers, and there will again appear individuals possessing large quantities of land without working on it. To forbid the non-workers to sell or lease their land? But then the land belonging to those who do not wish to work, or cannot work, would remain idle. Besides this, in distributing the land according to the number of souls, how should it be equalised in quality? There is fertile loam, and there is barren, sandy and marshy land; there is in towns land which returns a thousand roubles and more per acre, and there is land in remote places that does not give any profit. How, then, can the land be distributed so that its possession by non-workers could not again arise, that no one's interest should be injured, and that no dissensions, quarrels, and strife should ensue? For a long time people have been occupied with the consideration and solution of these questions, and many plans have been devised for the correct distribution of the land among the workers.”

The True Solution.

After briefly considering various methods that from time to time have been proposed, he finally expresses his firm conviction that “the most practical scheme is, in my

opinion, that of Henry George, known as the Single Tax scheme.”

The Henry George Scheme.

Tolstoy then places this scheme before his readers in the following words:—

“Personally, I regard Henry George's scheme as the most just, beneficent, and, above all, practicable, of all the schemes I am acquainted with. It may be illustrated in miniature thus: let us suppose that, in a certain locality, all the land belongs to two landlords—one a very rich one living abroad, the other, not a rich one, living at home and farming his land—and to a hundred peasants possessing a small portion of the land. Besides this, in the same locality, there live, as hired workmen, and in lodgings, several scores of persons without land, artisans, tradesmen, officials. Let us suppose that all the inhabitants of this place, having come to the conclusion that all the land is common property, have decided to dispose of the land in accordance with this conviction.

“How should they act?”

“Take away all the land from those who possess it, and to allow everyone to use the land which may please him, would not be practicable, as there would be several volunteers for one and the same plot, which would involve interminable disputes. For all to unite into one party and to plough, mow and to harvest all together and then divide, would not be convenient, as some possess ploughs, horses, carts, whilst others do not, and, besides that, some of the inhabitants have neither the necessary experience nor the knowledge to cultivate the land. To divide the land, according to the number of souls, into allotments equal in quality, would be very difficult. If for this purpose the land were to be divided into a number of small allotments of different quality so that each individual would receive a separate portion of good, average, and poor land, of land for ploughing, mowing, and woodland, then there would be too great a number of small allotments.

“Besides this, such a division of land is dangerous in that those who do not wish to work, or are in extreme want, may surrender their land to the rich for money, and there would again develop large landowners. Therefore, the inhabitants of this locality decide, whilst leaving the land in the hands of those who possess it, to bind the landowners to pay into the common treasury a sum which represents the value of the income which the land at their disposal affords its possessors (according to any valuation not founded on the amount of labour put into the land, but upon its quality and position), and this sum they decide to divide equally between themselves.

“But as such a collection of money from those who possess lands, and then its equal distribution to each inhabitant is complicated, and, moreover, all the inhabitants pay money for common needs, such as schools, churches, fire engines, shepherds, road repairs, etc., and these payments are always insufficient for the common needs, the local inhabitants, instead of collecting money from the land income, distributing it between all, and then again collecting part of it for taxes, decide to collect and use all the income from land on common needs.

“Having come to this arrangement, the inhabitants demand from the landlords the payment corresponding to the amount of land in their possession, and also from the peasants who possess small portions of land; whereas, from the few scores of individuals who do not possess any land, nothing is demanded, they being allowed the free use of all that is instituted by means of the land revenue.

“Such an arrangement leads to this, that one of the landlords who does not live on his land, and produces

little from it, finds it disadvantageous to continue to hold his land under such taxation, and resigns it; whereas, the other landlord, who is a good farmer, resigns only part of his land, and conserves such a portion of it as will enable him to produce more than is demanded of him for the land he is using.

"Those of the peasants who possess little land, also those who have many working hands and insufficient land, as well as those without land who wish to feed themselves by labour on the land, take the land deserted by the landlords; so that, according to this solution, all the inhabitants of the locality obtain the possibility of living on the land and feeding from it, and all the land gets into or remains in the hands of those who like to work on it, and are capable of producing much from it. Meanwhile the local public institutions improve, as more money than before is received for public needs. And, above all, all this transformation in the possession of land is realised without any disputes, quarrels, shocks, or violence, but by the voluntary surrender of land by those who are not capable of cultivating it with advantage. Such is Henry George's scheme as adapted to separate States, or even to the whole of mankind.

"This scheme is just and beneficial, and, above all, easily put into practice everywhere; in all communities, whatever may be their present instituted system of ownership of land. Therefore, I personally regard this scheme as the best of all existing schemes."

We feel we need not apologise to *The Free Age Press* for having quoted at such length from the pamphlet we owe to their public-spirited labours. The warning, "No rights reserved," which appears on the title page of their productions, should convince the most sceptical that their sole desire is to give the widest publicity possible to the views of the great Russian Apostle of Individual Freedom and Social Justice, whose disciples they are proud to avow themselves. We trust this notice may do something, however little, to assist their efforts. In conclusion, we would strongly advise our active co-workers to supply themselves with copies of this pamphlet, and would strongly recommend the Executives of both the associated Leagues to stock it, and give it a permanent place in their lists of literature on the question.

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Scottish Notes and News.

[Scottish readers of *Land Values* are invited to send news for this column. Reports of meetings, or any reference by public men, or public bodies, to the land question, or the taxation of land values will be appreciated.]

Notice of Meeting—

A Meeting

WILL BE HELD

In the BRIDGETON PUBLIC HALL, Main Street,
On Thursday, 2nd February, at 8 p.m.

SPEAKERS—

Mr. JOSEPH DOBBIE, M.P., Ayr Burghs.
Ex-Bailie PETER BURT, J.P., Glasgow.

Chairman, Mr. W. R. LESTER, M.A., President
of the League.

Doors open at 7.30. Musical Programme at 7.40.

* * *

We appeal with confidence to our Glasgow readers to join in making this meeting a success. Cards announcing the meeting as above can be obtained at the Rooms, 13 Dundas Street, for distribution among friends, and at public works in the neighbourhood.

Mr. H. S. Murray spent a week in January among his future constituents at Govan. There was no delightful music on the 'cello this visit, but the impression grows stronger that Mr. Murray is the right man in the right place. There will be a house to house distribution presently in the Govan Division of his well-known and highly appreciated Galashiels "Address on the Land Question."

* * *

It has again been suggested by two of our comparatively new enthusiastic members (George Stenhouse and Matthew Gemmell) that good missionary work could be done by visiting the residents of Glasgow with a view to informing those who can be reached and interested, verbally, and by distributing literature of the nature and scope of our aims and policy. This is a splendid idea, and was set forth in our columns by Mr. Archd. M'Donald with some spirit some three years ago, backed up with the practical experience of Mr. F. Batty of London, in the direction of letters to the newspapers and subsequent posting of explanatory literature.

As we stated at that time—"the League is but an organised body of men and women devoted solely to the work of education and guidance. All within its ranks welcome all outside to join in making it strong and more potent to carry on the propaganda; but every effort outside the organisation is heartily appreciated and welcomed. We have never contended that all who see and believe in the Single Tax must proclaim it in, or through our organisation. It must be proclaimed in the highways and byways, and on those who see the truth must rest the responsibility of making others see and believe. Our organization exists to encourage and assist all who are active in this work. We welcome all individual and organised effort. We are deeply conscious that the League is not so powerful as it ought to be, and we cordially invite all