

CHAPTER I

Natural Rights

THE BASIC ASSUMPTION on which the following discussion rests is that we live in a world governed by Natural Law. The consistency with which natural laws operate has made it possible for man to use them to do many marvelous things. Illustrations of this are to be seen in the manner in which we now cross the ocean in a few hours of time in machines that are heavier than air. Having discovered certain laws, we now have perfected instruments of communication so that millions of people can hear and see the President of our country when he makes a speech. These and many more things have been accomplished because we have discovered the laws found in nature, and are living in obedience to them.

Furthermore, the argument in this treatise rests on the assumption that man is a part of nature, and that as such he possesses certain natural rights. Along with his natural rights, there are also natural laws governing the relationships between men everywhere. Part of natural law in social relations is expressed in the Commandments "Thou shalt not kill," and "Thou shalt not steal." The Commandment "Thou shalt not steal" means "Thou shalt not take what belongs to someone else either by legal means or outright theft."

In our Declaration of Independence there is a statement that human beings have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Properly conceived, governments are or should be organized to preserve the rights of the individual. In other words, governments, when living in conformity to the demands of natural law, will recognize all the natural rights of everyone. Justice will be done and the moral law obeyed. If justice is done, governments as well as individuals have to obey the moral law. This is another way of saying that man-made laws must be just and right, as well as individual action.

10 *Ground Rent, Not Taxes*

This book is written to call attention to the fact that men as individuals, and governments representing the community, both have natural rights not recognized by our present man-made laws. One individual right not recognized will be treated in the chapter on "Natural Rights of the Individual," and the rights of government will be treated in the chapter on the "Natural Rights of the Community." The rights of the individual and of the government that are not recognized by our man-made laws at the present time are of controlling importance. If one finds it hard to believe that there are important rights existing and not recognized by our man-made laws, let me call attention to the fact that it is less than one hundred years ago that slavery was abolished in the United States.

It is generally assumed that the Bill of Rights contains all of the rights of the individual and that our man-made laws take all of his rights into proper account. Furthermore, it is generally assumed that natural rights and legal rights are one and the same thing.

Our man-made land laws, like our slave laws, are descended from the dawn of history. We would expect that laws existing three or four thousand years ago might contain errors and injustices. Our land laws are the same as the land laws of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, and the fact that they have not been changed indicates they should be examined with suspicion.

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the rights of the slave to liberty were not recognized; but the great majority of people now living in the United States are quite sure that they now have perfect liberty and that justice will prevail if the people will obey our man-made laws. There is a large amount of error in the foregoing assumptions to which I wish to call the reader's attention in the discussion that follows.

The writer holds firmly to the conviction that the laws and customs of the United States give to its citizens a greater measure of liberty than do any of the other present-day nations of the world. But he also is sure that there are rights of the individual,

almost as important as the right to life, which are not properly recognized by our man-made laws.

In the following discussion, I will attempt to show that our man-made laws operate in such a manner that every year billions of dollars are taken from the majority of the population and given to a minority, and that this minority does nothing in the way of production to entitle it to what it gets.

My contention is that what is produced by the community belongs to the community for its own use. This fund produced by the presence and activity of the community amounts to many billions of dollars every year. Here is the natural source of revenue for the community. If the community were to collect this fund and use it to defray the expenses of government, I hold that it would be possible to abolish taxation of wealth.

Furthermore, I wish to call attention to the fact that our man-made land laws are the same as the land laws of ancient times, when everyone was sure that the earth was flat and the world was the center of the universe. I am trying to make it clear that some of our man-made laws do not recognize reality any more than the ancient geographers who had to assume that Atlas or someone else was necessary to support the world.