

# D.C. MacDonald's

## PREFACE

### To Ogilvie's Essay

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This work was written between 1776 and 1781, about a hundred years before Mr. Henry George wrote his *Progress and Poverty*.

Both authors traversed the sorrowful jungle of Political Economy, and both discovered "the central truth". The independent testimony of the one is corroborated by the equally independent testimony of the other.

The same truth was revealed to John Locke between the years 1680 and 1690. And is there any doubt that it was seen by Moses, David, Socrates, and a host of prophets, poets, and philosophers, ages and ages before?

Do we not find the *Birthright of Man* stereotyped in the words "OUR FATHER"? The Faiths of the world, ancient and modern, whether considered natural or revealed, have all something in them, in common with genuine Christianity, which declares "*Equality of Rights*" between man and man.

"Whether," says Locke,\* "we consider natural reason, which tells us that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink and such other things as Nature affords for their subsistence, or 'revelation,' which gives us an account of those grants God made of the world to Adam, and to Noah and his sons, it is very clear that God, as King David says (Psalm cxv., 16), '*hath given the earth to the children of men, ' given it to mankind in common.*'

"As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He, *by his labour*, does, as it were, enclose it from the common.

"God gave the world to men in common ; but since He gave it for their benefit and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed He meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (*and labour was to be his title to it*) ; *not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.*" And adds Professor Ogilvie : "Nor yet that it should be appropriated in such a manner as that, when not more than half cultivated, the farther cultivation and improvement should be stopped short, and the industry of millions willing to employ themselves in rendering the earth more fertile should be excluded from its proper field, and denied any parcel of the soil on which it could be exercised, *with security of reaping its full produce and just reward*". "This title to an equal share of property in land" is declared by Professor Ogilvie to be a "BIRTHRIGHT *which every citizen still retains.*" We shall see how far he advanced the question towards the standpoint of *Progress and Poverty*.

"The reform," says Mr. Henry George, "I have proposed . . . is but the carrying out in letter and spirit of the truth enunciated in the Declaration of Independence – the 'self-evident' truth that is the heart and soul of the Declaration – 'That all men

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\* *Essay on Civil Government.*

are created equal ; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!

"These rights are denied when the *equal right to land* – on which and by which alone men can live – is denied. Equality of political rights will not compensate for the denial of the *equal right to the bounty of nature*. Political liberty when the *equal right to land* is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages. This is the truth that we have ignored."

Such being the disease, what is the cure?

"It is necessary," says the Philosopher of Pittensear, "that the object to be aimed at, and the means by which it may be obtained, should be again and again stated to the public in a variety of speculative views, and so rendered familiar to the understandings of men."

"Internal convulsions have arisen in many countries by which the decisive power of the state has been thrown, for a short while at least, into the hands of the collective body of the people. In these junctures they might have obtained a *just re-establishment of their natural rights to independence of cultivation and to property in land*, HAD THEY BEEN THEMSELVES AWARE OF THEIR TITLE TO SUCH RIGHTS, and had there been any leaders prepared to direct them in the mode of stating their just claim, and supporting it with necessary firmness and becoming moderation. Such was the revolution of 1688, at which time, surely, an article declarative of the NATURAL RIGHT OF PROPERTY IN LAND might have been inserted in the Bill of Rights, HAD THE PEOPLE AT LARGE BEEN BEFOREHAND TAUGHT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY WERE POSSESSED OF ANY SUCH CLAIM. Such also was the late convulsion in America (1776), the favourable opportunities of which are not yet exhausted."

It is interesting, as well as instructive, to notice the harmony that pervades the writings of these three Apostles of *Man's natural right to independence, his liberty to labour, and his Birthright in land*. John Locke stirred up the English Revolution of 1688, and in doing so he set a good example to the rest of the world, and raised his country to a glorious position among nations. We are only beginning to see this now. William Ogilvie was neither an idle spectator of the French Revolution of 1789, nor of the American Revolution of 1776. The man who regarded Revolutions as "favourable opportunities" for restoring the natural rights of mankind was, like John Locke, a practical philosopher.

Mr. Henry George, as a political philosopher, is equally practical. He is a child of 1776, *in spirit and in truth!* He is a Lockist as regards the right of labour – labour being the title and also the measure which alone can give to the individual an exclusive right of property in natural products. And he is an Ogilvist (which is only a logical development of the Lockist) as regards man's BIRTHRIGHT IN LAND – the basis of the SINGLE TAX, and the door through which LABOUR may freely enter into possession, and enjoy, not a mere portion of its fruit, which some tyrant may set apart, but "its full produce and just reward".

Sad and strange to say, amidst our boasted civilisation, our profession of the Christian Faith, and our avowed belief in one impartial God, all knowledge in regard to the just and equal right of mankind to participate in the bounties of Nature, has hitherto been systematically boy-cotted. Until recently, the teacher of such principles was treated by *Law and Order* as a dangerous criminal. John Locke had to take shelter in

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Holland. William Ogilvie had to conceal himself under a bushel in Scotland. Many a noble son of Erin had to mount the gallows, while thousands suffered imprisonment, and millions were exiled from that unhappy country – a country which is still held like a mangled corpse in the crocodile jaws of commercial landlordism ; and the monster will not let go its hold except on one condition, namely, to be allowed to gorge itself with British *blood*.

But why not utterly destroy this monster? What better service for our soldiers, blue-jackets, and policemen, than to employ themselves in destroying this common enemy of mankind? Parliament could do it, a royal warrant could do it, the sufferers have a right to do it, nay “every man hath a right” to destroy such monsters.

“In transgressing the law of Nature,” says John Locke, “the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of men for their mutual security, and so he becomes dangerous to mankind ; the tie which is to secure them from injury and violence being slighted and broken by him, which being a trespass against the whole species, and the peace and safety of it, provided for by the law of Nature, *every man upon this score*, by the right he hath to preserve mankind in general, may restrain, or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to them, and so may bring such evil on any one who hath transgressed that law, as may make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and, by his example, others from doing the like mischief. And in this case, and upon this ground, *every man hath a right* to punish the offender, and be the executioner of the law of Nature.”\*

The benevolent and magnanimous Professor Ogilvie had this passage before him when he wrote the first section of his Essay. In a foot-note he says: “It were unjust to censure the proprietors of land, however, for retaining and exercising, as they do, a right whose foundations have not been inquired into, and whose extent no one as yet controverted”. Then he goes on to explain that ignorance is the root of the evil. There were many cases to which the modified doctrine of Professor Ogilvie would apply, *e.g.*, the “humane landlords of England” of his own time, and some of the princes of ancient times, “who lived for the happiness of their people”. The *commercial* landlord, who, he tells us in the same note, is “of all citizens the most pernicious,” who burkes all inquiry into the foundations of his right, and who with the aid of lawyers and priests, fills the eyes of mankind with the dust of ignorance, he would leave to be dealt with in accordance with the principles approbated by Locke. We should not degenerate from these principles, and it is to be hoped that few readers will grudge the references here made to the once famous, but now forgotten – strangely forgotten – writings of one of the best of men, and one of the greatest philosophers the world ever produced, namely, John Locke.

Professor Ogilvie, who came after Locke, devotes himself in this treatise to one subject – *Birthright in land*, it may be called. And the Author may be justly styled – *The Euclid of Land Law Reform*. He was left little or nothing unsolved in connection with the Land Question. He has given us a true base line – man’s equal right to the raw material of the earth, to the air, to the water, to the rays of the sun, and all natural products – from which we can work out any problem, and by which we can test the “title and measure” of every man’s property.

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\* *The renowned George Buchanan, the great-grandfather of British Liberty, puts it even stronger than this. (See Biog. Notes).*

Resting on this base line – man's natural rights, – Ogilvie represents to us the perpendicular line of *man's right to labour*, "with security of reaping its full produce and just reward". Here we have the question in a nutshell. Take away the base line, and you have *no right to labour*, and *no produce or reward*, except what may be meted out by the usurper of your natural rights. You have to beg for leave to toil! We thus see clearly how the robbery of labour may be prevented, and how impossible it is to put a stop to such robbery while the industrial classes neglect to claim and exercise their natural right – their right to an equal share in the earth, and all its natural products.

Strikes against low wages, high rents, unjust taxation, absurd conflicts between capital and labour, rebellions against this or that form of government, are futile skirmishes, and very frequently are of the suicidal cock-fighting order, at which the real enemy, elevated on a grand stand, simply laugh. To contend successfully with these evils, society must learn to begin at the source thereof.

While labourers are content to remain deprived of their natural rights, they must pay whatever ransom the brigands who have seized these rights choose to demand. Not only is industry robbed, taxed, and crippled, but the brigand, as dog-in-the-manger, very often puts an entire stop to it, and thus the happiness and comfort of millions of mankind, who are willing to work, are curtailed or wholly sacrificed, and misery and starvation reign instead. I am somewhat afraid to say hard things against brigandage. An institution that is still propped up by *Law and Order*, and supported by (or winked at) on almost every hand by the avowed servants of Jesus Christ, must be touched with a "gentle hand". William Ogilvie has done so in the *Essay* now before us. Although a landlord himself, he did not disregard the truth, and it will be found that his pen was guided by an impartial and benevolent spirit. I do not require to introduce the author to the reader. He has written his own Introduction.

It may, however, be noted that the practical schemes propounded in the *Essay*, were intended only as "examples and beginnings of reformation," to use the author's own cautious language, and should be read as such, and in the light of the circumstances of his own time. Let the reader then peruse once more the closing sentence of the *Essay* and the author's note thereto, and ponder over the contents of the work, comparing his own ideas with those of the author, before coming to a hasty decision, and let no scheme for the happiness of mankind be rejected without at least attempting to substitute and promote a better one. The reader, in applying the author's principles to the present time, and having regard to present and future circumstances, will find that these principles are not of the hard and fast kind, but that they are in accordance with Natural Law, and therefore may be accepted as eternal and universal in their application.

When a child is born, we recognise that it has a natural right to its mother's milk, and no one can deny that it has the same right to mother-earth. It is really its mother-earth, *plus* the dew and sunshine from heaven and a little labour, that supplies the milk and everything else required for its subsistence. The monster that would deprive a babe of its mother's milk, or would monopolise the breasts of several mothers, to the exclusion of several children, is not more deserving of being destroyed than the monster who seizes absolute possession of more than his share of the common mother of mankind, to the exclusion of his fellow-creatures.

Now, as these monsters are comparatively few, and were always a very small minority of the human race, the question naturally arises, Why the vast majority submit – why, in short, they do not destroy such monsters without a moment's consideration? How are the monsters guarded? By policemen? – No. By soldiers? – No. By

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gunboats and blue-jackets? – No. By Law Courts and bailiffs? – No. By the magical of the sovereign? – No, we do not now believe in the divine right of kings. By what then?

In order to perpetuate landlord serfdom, it is necessary to keep our mothers systematically ignorant of their children's birthright. A theology is invented. By a most unchristian system of law and theology woman is regarded as an inferior being, while man is elevated to the position of a God – a Creator!\* Thus robbed of her natural position, and of her equal rights in her own sphere as a parent, she brings forth her children; and her children are treated as bastards, denied the right to draw one breath in their native land, unless the parents beg permission of the landlord. They have to pay for the right to live on *his* land. They are victims of humiliation and extortion from the cradle to the grave.

The strongest force connected with human nature is maternal affection. The pagan priests knew this – hence the reason why they always made it their chief business to subject womankind to ignorance, superstition and slavery. The Jewish priests treated women very much in the same way, notwithstanding the distinct commandment of Moses, who, by the way, must have *honoured* his mother fully as much, and deservedly so, as he did his father.

Were we to probe history properly, we would find how much the influence of women has had to do with all the great reforms – the great revolutions by which the world has been blessed. Jesus Christ attempted to raise woman to her natural position, but His followers have discarded His doctrines. The Apostle Paul seems to have been more of a Jew than a Christian in regard to the status of woman; and it suited European feudalism to follow the Apostle rather than Christ. Hence woman's position in the Christian Europe of today is much lower than it was among the pagan Celts and Goths, who, as Plutarch tells us, *honoured their mothers*, as well as their fathers, by giving them a place and a voice in their legislative assemblies.

Is it for the benefit of society that we have excluded maternal instinct and its immediate influence from our legislative Councils? Our brutal, unjust and unnatural laws will answer this question. Take, for example, our "Reform Acts", passed since 1832, as they now stand, and imagine if anything so hopelessly jumbled could be put together by an assembly of crazy old women. Our Land Laws, looked at as a sample of legislation by males, present to us a dense jungle of iniquity, full of thorns, briars and bitter fruit. What hold has an Englishman of his house while some lord owns the ground on which it stands? Our Land Laws furnish ample evidence that one section of humanity cannot adequately perform duties which naturally belong to humanity as a whole. To clear that jungle, to reclaim the land, and to settle the question of man's birthright, society must utilise the full strength, genius and natural instincts of undivided humanity, without distinction of sex. If men, in common with the males of other animals, are characterised by boldness and strength, do we not find that women, in common with the females of other animals, are in some respects superior to men in sagacity and instinct? Even in regard to boldness and strength the female should not be despised. The world has produced more than one Joan of Arc.

These thoughts are placed here before the reader because it is "devoutly to be

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\* This is a relic of paganism – the worship of males. The worship of the sun (*on sundays!*) had its origin in the belief that "he" pro-created new life every Spring. This very ancient religion is not British. The *grian* (sun) of the Celts is not a *he*, but a goddess with "golden locks", and so – with the *Bard of Avon* – *Juliet is the sun!*"

wished" that every girl as well as every boy, every woman as well as every man, and especially every mother, should read and carefully digest such works as Professor Ogilvie's "Essay on the Right of Property in Land". No social movement can be carried to a successful issue either by evolution or revolution unless woman joins heartily in it, and becomes a spur in the march of civilisation.

*"Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears,  
Her noblest work she classes, O:  
Her 'prentice han' she try'd on man,  
An' then she made the lasses, O."* (Robert Burns.)

Professor Ogilvie's *Essay* is a pastoral prose poem, through which we can realise this beautiful world, with its ample provision for satisfying man's instinctive and rational faculties of enjoyment. The "Sovereign Power" from which all blessings flow is manifested as a wise, just, and impartial Creator, who invites us to make His laws our laws, and who in these latter days has delegated to us some wonderful powers, by which – with equality of rights and freedom of labour – the comforts of this life, and the products of the world, may be multiplied more than a thousand fold, *purposely* (shall we not say?) to increase the happiness and virtue of mankind.

The sun never sets, and when one group of workers are retiring to rest, on his "going down," another group are rising with him. Light and labour thus go their incessant rounds; and so it is with the seasons of seed-time and harvest – the eternal law of revolutions seems to regulate all things! Human speech, borne on the mysterious wings of thunder, revolves round the earth, and "man to man the world o'er" can hold instantaneous converse. Man himself revolves round the world, carried by his fire-souled amphibious steed from places where he lacks food, raiment, or enjoyment, to more hospitable regions. Or he can, with magic-like power, cause the superfluous granaries, larders, and wardrobes, to move from one side of the globe, to feed and clothe the hungry and naked on the other. Nature seems to have decreed – "There shall be no more famines!" But although the sun shines ceaselessly, and man's labour follows him steadily in his course, the flow of blessings which such evolutions naturally produce is polluted and diverted by the influence of landlordism, which, like a upas tree, poisons the surrounding atmosphere, spreads desolation in the country, and crowds the town with vice, want, disease, misery, and crime, far beyond the power of churches, charities, hospitals, divorce courts, and police courts to cure. There is only one cure – "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?"

Aberdeen, May, 1891.

D.C. McD.