

THE POPULATION QUESTION

Dr Vere Pearson's new book* deals exhaustively with the causes that underlie the growth and erratic distribution of human population on the surface of the Globe. The introductory and the succeeding chapter seem to have been written around the idea that is central to the doctrine of Professor J. S. Haldane, that an organism and its environment are one, and cannot properly be thought of separately; that their action and re-action upon each other are constant and intimate; that, in short, they mutually "condition" each other. In searching out the influences that have determined the migrations and local settlements of population Dr Pearson brings to bear considerations of geographical contours, climate, fertility of soil, water supply, means of transport, primitive and modern systems of land tenure, and finally Man himself, his mind, his primitive impulses, his reflective faculty, his moral and æsthetic senses, his gift of reason—all that part of him indeed that is covered by the word Psychology. Thus, out of the large store of information offered to us we can see Man having his character shaped and moulded by Circumstance, and in return gradually remoulding his environment "nearer to his heart's desire."

It is assuredly from no under-estimate of the value of Dr Pearson's voluminous statistics and comparisons, taken from the public records of many countries, that we are constrained to admit that our chief interest in this book centres upon the obvious fact of his whole-hearted devotion to the Gospel of Henry George. In the course of a richly-informative survey of "developments in Agriculture" and social conditions prevailing in India, Africa, and the Far East, and occupying many chapters, the author's belief is evident that the movements of population have not been what they ought to have been or would have been had not a malign influence been at work deflecting these movements from their proper direction. That influence he finds everywhere the same—the tendency of men in all ages and at all degrees of intellectual culture to fence in portions of the earth, and on the plea of ownership obstructing the healthy and natural movements of the people. Persons of a Theological cast of mind may perhaps trace this tendency back to that ubiquitous poisoner of the wells of Truth—the Devil; for there seems no limit to what cunning may achieve under existing conditions in laying hold of mankind's common heritage Economic Rent, as is shown later in the chapter on "Town and Country Planning."

In the chapter headed "Rural Depopulation" and in many of the foregoing pages the author sets forth with great lucidity the case for a sane system of land tenure, and exhibits the evils that still result, as in the days of the Hebrew Prophets, from the "laying of field to field so that the people have no room." Among these evils we deplore with Dr Pearson the decay of artistic handicraft which inevitably follows from the compulsory trek of the villager to the city factory; but the faith persists in the minds of those who have discovered the root-cause of rural depopulation, that, given the light work, ample leisure and sense of security that will fall to each man's lot when the social heritage is rescued from the grip of monopoly, the artistic sense will revive, the creative impulse reassert itself, and at last we shall have "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." But as a counterpoise to the tale of depopulated villages and distressful conditions in other countries like our own, it is cheering to read of Northern Nigeria, of which

it is said that its tranquillity and commercial prosperity are amazing. This fact, a very notable one in the troubled world of to-day, is due to the fact that for 25 years neither landlords nor speculators nor tax-collectors of the vulgar sort have disturbed the tranquillity or checked the prosperity. For why? The land of Northern Nigeria belongs to the people of Northern Nigeria, and the rent paid by its occupiers (revisable at intervals not exceeding seven years) is applied to the public services.

That the maldistribution of population results from the existing fiscal system Dr Pearson has amply demonstrated, but the title of the book includes a reference to the *Growth* of population and we are not clear whether he still fears that population will always tend to outrun the means of subsistence, notwithstanding altered conditions and the disappearance of poverty. Or (we ask ourselves) does Dr Pearson believe with Herbert Spencer that advancing civilization brings with it a self-acting principle which slows down the rate of increase in proportion as the civilizing forces become effective? This assumed automatic principle is expressed in the formula that "Individuation and fecundity vary inversely" and is illustrated by the fact that if we begin our observations with a shoal of herring where individuation is almost nil and fertility very high; and work upwards in the evolutionary scale, we find that with every advance in individuality in the animal creation there comes a decrease in the reproductive tendencies. Does this principle hold good of mankind in society? Does the development of individuality that comes with education, culture, leisure and economic freedom, tend towards a natural, unconscious and effortless reduction in the number of offspring? If so, it surely brings a lively hope that with the advent of equal opportunity and the spread of culture with the development of personality that will certainly follow, the ghost of Malthus will at last be laid.

The chapter on "Birth, Death and Marriage Rates" will interest all who have a sense for statistics and averages. For the ordinary man the interest will lie chiefly with what Dr Pearson calls "the differential birth rate" as between the poor and the well-to-do. It is, and ought to be, distressing to be assured by the figures given, that the *majority* of the next generation (if existing conditions remain) will be born in slums, denied the civilizing influences of education and culture, and exposed to the demoralizing tendencies of the worst environment it is possible to imagine. Dr Pearson, however, believes that the sensitiveness of human nature to the impact of favourable conditions is as keen as its reaction to the unfavourable and will override inherited tendencies. He, therefore, entertains a generous belief in "the unbounded possibilities of improvement if equality of opportunity were opened up for all classes."

The section which deals with sex-love and its corollaries opens the door upon a region into which even angels may fear to tread. On one point, however, we are again in complete agreement with Dr Pearson—that economic factors are the chief causes of these "difficulties," and that economic ills cannot be cured by other than economic methods.

Limits of space forbid more than a reference to the excellent chapters that follow, on Garden cities, Town and country planning, Ground values and property appraisals, etc. In all the instances given of the efforts of public authorities and private bodies to beautify towns or preserve country amenities, to facilitate transport or to house the poorer classes, the sinister

* *The Growth and Distribution of Population.* By S. Vere Pearson, M.D., M.A. George Allen and Unwin. 12s. 6d. net.

influence of unrestricted landownership is shown and illustrated by figures. The land-reform movement is indebted to Dr Pearson for having given this book to the world, and *Land & Liberty* will gratefully acknowledge its value.

ALEX MACKENDRICK.

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In his foreword Dr Pearson acknowledges the assistance of the Rev. Mervyn Stewart, whose word after reading the published book we also have and we quote from his commendation:—

“For many years the Georgist movement has been under increasing obligation to Dr Vere Pearson, but only his closest friends could have foreseen the result of his meditation in a work as deep and broad as its title. How humanity has or has not increased, why folk have moved or not moved to attractive locations—this is surely to state the Social Problem.

“A vast number of admitted authorities are cited. The first quarter, say six chapters, is a study of population groups from early conditions, with special chapters on Asia and Africa which draw out the results of varying systems of land tenure. The duty of the Government of every country is repeatedly stressed—to collect all the land value and expend it for common good with beneficial effects on public health and prosperity. The causes of the rises and falls in vital statistics, births, marriages and deaths, are dealt with.

“Special consideration is given to Town Planning and Garden Cities and the last part discusses ground values and property appraisals, traffic troubles, housing, and emigration, with the physiocratic ideal of co-operation in liberty for the future most powerfully expressed.

“It is not easy for one who has contributed some pebbles which a craftsman has cut into jewels to assess this work. Dr Pearson has given us a book indispensable to our workers and breaking new ground.”

PROPERTY

In his *Public and Private Property** Mr John Z. White deals with a subject which is a frequent source of confusion to writers on economics. He points out that “property is a legal term.” The fact that the law recognizes something as property is no proof that the law is a good or a desirable one, any more than the existence of any other law proves that it is beyond amendment.

The law recognizes “two kinds of property, wholly different in nature and origin—products of industry and products of law.” The products of man’s labour are instinctively recognized as property, but “legal privileges also are property, such as a right of way, a copyright, a patent, an estate in land, or other grant of power or authority from the State.” Every institutional writer on law recognizes that there is a distinction, but the distinction is soon obscured. Arguments founded upon the right of the producer to what he has produced are applied to what has not been produced.

In addition, as Mr White points out, contracts are confused with grants of privileges, and arguments in favour of freedom of contract are used in favour of the private beneficiaries of the sovereign power.

The errors which arise from these confusions are illustrated by an examination of a number of leading cases decided by the United States Supreme Court. It is a clear and brilliant piece of analysis which will appeal both to the lawyer and to the layman.

The confusions which afflict the lawyers are also shared by the economists. Every text-book of economics

* The Beaver Press, Greenville, Pennsylvania. Price \$2.

which opposes land value taxation does so on the vested rights theory—that land is property and that the State should not discriminate between one form of property and another. Yet these same writers condone the confiscation of produced and self-earned private property. Some of them indeed condone or advocate policies which result in the creation of private monopolies.

Our laws are still dominated by wrong thinking on this subject. As Mr White points out, the framers of the constitution of the United States regarded property as being as important as liberty, but there is no indication that they saw any distinction between property in labour products and property in legal privileges, or that there is and must be a constant warfare between the two kinds of property.

This is a valuable and stimulating book and we wish it a wide circulation.

F. C. R. D.

FRANK STEPHENS

Eloquent tributes to the work and memory of Frank Stephens, who died on 16th June, have appeared in Delaware, Pennsylvania and other American newspapers and journals. He has been honoured as a great citizen and a great social reformer. He had the deepest and widest interest in all that concerns the advancement of human liberty, economically, politically and socially. But among the adherents of the Henry George teaching his loss will be felt most greatly, who in and far beyond the centre of his immediate activities in his later years held him in the highest esteem. His friends speak of his simple and lovable character, his courage, the appeal he could make to the minds and hearts of all with whom he came in contact. The impression he made upon the Oxford International Conference in 1923 which he attended with a large contingent of American Single Taxers will be fresh in the memory of all who were present at that impressive gathering. Philosopher and lover of art, an artist himself, he captured his audience and one felt, as he spoke, that victory for the cause could not be long delayed. He spoke like a prophet inspired, and it was the vision of the civilization that is possible that led him along in what he tried to achieve. With the late Will Price and Joseph Fels he founded the “Single Tax Enclave” at Arden in Delaware, which was started in 1900 on a farm of 162 acres and in 1922 the sister town of Ardentown was founded, both together having a normal population of 300, but during the summer months the population at least doubles. Besides his many other activities as protagonist of the Henry George movement, on the platform and with his pen, he was a member of the Robert Shalkenbach Foundation and was associated with practically every Single Tax activity in America. Annual Conference and Conventions always found him in place to add his strength and counsel and there he will now sadly be missed.

Frank Stephens was born in Rahway, New Jersey, on 28th December, 1859. To Mrs Stephens and to his two sons Donald and Roger we offer our sincere condolences in their bereavement.

A. W. M.

MR ANDREW MACLAREN IN DURHAM.—The Secretary of the Houghton-le-Spring (Sunderland) Divisional Labour Party writes to *Land & Liberty*: “We had a very good meeting which was held in the Welfare Hall, Herrington, on Thursday, 18th July, and addressed by Mr A. MacLaren, who kept the audience interested for about one and a half hours dealing with taxation of land values, rating, and its effect upon the people. At the conclusion of the meeting a wish was expressed for a return visit from Mr MacLaren. About 250 people were present.”