

## NATIONAL SINGLE TAXER.

**Poverty—Its Cause and Remedy, in the Light of the Bible.**

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There is a great deal of interest in these days in the social problem, as we see from numerous articles in dailies and periodicals, and in such works as those of Josiah Strong, and in recent works as "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," and other writings. We shall consider this question scripturally.

In the law of Moses there were many regulations in the interests of the poor—Lev. xxv, and Deut. xv. There was provision for the poor in the gleanings of the fruit trees and harvest fields. There was release to debtors, liberation of slaves, etc., etc.; but the great provision was the division of the land, so that every Israelite could "sit under his vine and fig tree and none make him afraid."—Micah iv: 4.

Lev. xxv: 23. "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." In Joshua we read of the division of the land among the people. Awful curses were pronounced against Ahab and Jezebel for their action in robbing Naboth of his vineyard. Isa. v: 8, "Woe unto them that join house to house and that lay field to field till there be no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." Neh. v, "And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews, for there were that said We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore, we take up corn for them that we may eat and live. Some also there were that said We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards and houses that we might buy corn because of the dearth. There were also that said We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards; yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children (no blue bloods), and lo! we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already. Neither is it in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and our vineyards." Nehemiah calls an assembly of the people and compels the nobles to restore the lands and vineyards and other plunder, and require nothing of them (i. e., no compensation).

In ancient China, there was a division of lands among the people according to the character *tsing*, or well. This character shows a center square surrounded by eight squares. Each of these squares represented a hundred *mu* of land, or fifteen of our acres. Eight families cultivated the eight respective squares of land for themselves, and together cultivated the center square for the government tax in kind. This good system lasted till two hundred years of the time of Christ, when by a bad law land was considered personal property and capable of being bought and sold. An attempt was made later to restore the ancient method, the claim being that pauperism, crime and robbery were so prevalent, because the rich and powerful secured so much land that the people "had not enough land to stand an awl or gimlet on." Nehemiah said, v: 9, "Ought ye not to walk in fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen, our enemies." Poor heathen China could not throw off the burden of landlordism, as the Israelites did, "In the fear of their God," and so suffer yet.

Tolstoi, during the famine of Russia, told an assembly of nobles met to discuss the poverty question, that all that was needed was for them—the nobles—to get down off the people's backs. The history of all nations shows that land was considered the property of all of the people—"The earth hath he given to the children of men."

Psalms xxxvii: 25, David said: "He had not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." Jesus saw Lazarus and perhaps many Lazaruses die at the door of Dives. Why is this seeming contradiction? In David's time the Israelites still had their land, and the Ahab and Jezebels had not yet arisen to rob them of their birthright. In Jesus' day he saw Pharisees robbing even widows' houses, and for a pretense making long prayers, as some of our modern Pharisees do.

We do not propose a redivision of the land among the people. Our plan is simpler. When two or more own a horse, they do not need to cut the horse into pieces and divide it. They can rent it and divide the proceeds; or sell it and divide the value. If a man bequeathed a thousand acres to be divided into equal

sized hundred-acre plots for each of his ten sons, the division might not be just. One might have a sandy farm, another a rich loam; one a dry farm, one well watered; one far from a center, one embracing the corner of a town or village, and prices ranging from \$10 an acre up to \$10,000 an acre. A perfectly fair division could be made by each of the boys taking a hundred-acre plot and putting the value in a pool or lump, and then dividing the money equally; or putting the yearly rental in a pool and dividing it equally. The one with the most valuable farm would put the most money into the common lump, but would have a better site. The man with the poor farm would put less into the pool, but draw more out. We propose not to divide the land, but the land values or rent, and we do not propose each to take our share of the division, but to put it into the common purse for common uses. The words of Ecclesiastes, v: 9, seem to agree with this plan: "Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." How does the teaching of Jesus agree with this plan? We read in the standard political economies of the

Malthusian theory and the terrible "struggle for existence and survival of the fittest" theory of Darwin; of war and pestilence and famine being necessary to limit population. Jesus says, Matthew vi, "Lay not up treasure on earth," "Take no thought for your life," "Consider birds and lilies, your heavenly Father feeds and clothes them," and "Knoweth that you have need of these things."

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you," Jesus spoke to Jews who knew of God's righteousness from the good law of Moses, and the division of lands and the possibility of Israelites "sitting each under his own vine and fig tree." Let us imagine an Israelite with his light considering birds and lilies. Wild birds and wild flowers revelling in God's sunshine and light, drinking of God's free rains and dews, and getting nourishment from God's free earth. Surely this is sitting under one's own vine and fig tree, and no landlord to make one afraid; or, as the Chinese say, "Digging a well and drinking the water, plant-



ing a field and eating the crop, naturally and without thought following the law of God." If there were landlord birds, birds would fare as badly as tenants do among men. The great Paley said that if we saw birds working hard and piling up heaps of grain before a lazy bird that did nothing, we would think it strange; but such a condition exists among men.

Let us consider political economy, and see if science agrees with the Bible. According to the theory of Ricardo, the law of rent is as fixed as that of gravitation, and John Stuart Mill calls it the *pons asinorum* of political economy. The law is: "The rent of land is determined by the excess of its produce over that which the same application can secure from the least productive land in use." This law is best illustrated in the following way:

Assume that there are four different blocks of land; that on the first block a given quantity of labor will produce ten bushels of potatoes, on the second block twenty bushels, on the third thirty bushels, and that the same amount of labor will produce forty bushels on the fourth block. In a new country as long as there is abundance of the 40-bushels-to-the-acre land, newcomers will pay no rent, nor will they buy land, as there is plenty free to all. And even this best land has no selling value. When all the 40-bushel land has been monopolized, newcomers can only get the 30-bushel land, and are then willing to pay 10 bushels as rent to get the 40-bushel land. When all the 30-bushel and 20-bushel land is occupied, labor can only get free employment on 10-bushel land, and all above this 10 bushels to the acre is rent. On the 40-bushel land, 10 bushels then go to labor and 30 is rent. On the 30-bushel land, 10 bushels go to labor and 20 is rent, and so on. In city land and mine land, the value may be hundreds and thousands of times as great as in farm land, and rent is very high. The "margin of rent" is that point below which no rent is charged, and all above which margin goes to rent and all below to labor, or to labor and capital, where capital is used. In other words, produced wealth is divided among the three—land, labor and capital—in the shape of rent to land, wages to labor and interest to capital. In present conditions, the landlord takes a large slice as rent and the remainder is divided up between labor and capital. We have seen that the Lord gave the earth to the children of men, and

not to favorites, and we see from the law of Ricardo that population or society gives the value to the land; so we say, "Render to the community what belongs to the community," and then there will be no need of taxes, such as duties, tariffs, stamp taxes, rates, etc., which act as fines on industry. It would not be to the interest of anyone to hold land except for its use, were the rental taken by society, and so all unused land would be thrown open to use.

Labor could employ itself directly and be free, and then we could obey the command of Jesus and call no man Father nor Master (Matt., xxiii: 8-10). The rate of wages is fixed by the margin of rent, as the laborer can only get as much as he can raise on the poor free lands which have no landlords; and the amount of produce on these poor lands fixes the rate of wages for all unskilled labor. For instance, if working on 10-bushels-to-the-acre land gives a return of one dollar a day, then one dollar per day is the rate of wages for unskilled labor even in the cities. For if the workers in cities could get more than one dollar per day on land, there would be a tendency of labor to apply itself directly to land, and a readjustment of wages would follow. The rate of wages for small farmers and unskilled laborers fixes the rate of wages for skilled labor, professional and business men. For example, in America, say unskilled laborers get a dollar a day, and preachers, doctors, lawyers, five dollars a day; skilled workmen two dollars and three dollars a day. In China, unskilled laborers get ten cents a day and skilled laborers twenty and thirty cents a day; teachers and doctors twenty cents to fifty cents a day. The fact is that the masses of men—the unskilled laborers—employ the professional and business men and skilled laborers. If the masses of men are poorly paid, there are hard times in business and professional men are badly supported, and even preachers have difficulty in getting employment. We serve our best interests in trying to improve the condition of the masses.

The division of rent is much better adapted to these times of machinery and large cities than the land divisions of ancient times. One desires a site for busi-

ness, another desires a site for manufactures or for an office, while others want a larger place for farming. The site is secured and the rent is paid to the community. What can we now do in China? The system we advocate is an outgrowth of gospel progress, as was the anti-slavery movement. We might try something on the lines of Mayor Pingree, of Detroit, or General Booth on the Thames. Pingree set the poor to raising potatoes and vegetables on the vacant lots of the city, and in one season 1,000 families raised \$30,000 worth of crops. Booth has taken hundreds of penitentiary escaped convicts and given them employment on a 1,000-acre farm. In this way he reformed 75 per cent. of them. A parliamentary investigation of the New South Wales penal colony demonstrated that 97 per cent. of these erstwhile convicts were leading respectable lives as a result of being given employment and free opportunity. All industrial methods except giving the unemployed access to lands must be a failure, as there are too many unemployed now in every occupation. Our Kuling conference showed this clearly. I believe the time will come when we must establish colonies of our unemployed Christians. Booth has demonstrated that 200 men directly producing from land give employment to at least that number of tradesmen, artisans, etc., but to teach Christian children trades only increases the number of unemployed tradesmen.