

## "EQUAL RIGHTS TO ALL; SPECIAL PRIVILEGE TO NONE."

To Hon. A. W. Terrell:

Sir—From your annual address to the Texas University, published in The Statesman of June 16, 1898, I make the following quotations:

First—That which a man acquires by labor or fair trade from another, whether it be land or water, is segregated from the general fund bestowed by Providence, and is his.

Second—If it be land, his labor, his title deeds and occupancy impress it with all the insignia of ownership; and whenever he is deprived of it without compensation the act is robbery.

Third—If it were possible to put in force the theory that all land should be confiscated and held for the use of all men, regardless of individual ownership, the chief incentive to industry would cease, and civilization, deprived of its main reliance, would disappear.

Fourth—Equally disastrous would be the scheme of Henry George, which would tax the homestead out of sight by compelling the owner to pay rent on it for the benefit of the good and the bad, the industrious and the indolent alike.

Fifth—The right of property once vested represents human labor, and whether it becomes more or less valuable should not concern those who did not work for it.

Sixth—Society will not contribute to make good a bad investment in property, and it has no right to ask for a division of profits in a good one.

Seventh—When vested rights, acquired either by labor or fair trade are destroyed without compensation, the act is wicked and tyrannical, and the government that would tolerate it is a mockery.

From your above statement of the principle of the single tax theory it is evident that you have signally failed to comprehend both the object to be attained and

the method to be pursued and its results in the grand theory of Henry George. Except the above quotations your entire address is an able appeal for the ideal object of the single tax—the recognition of the inalienable right of every human being to the bounties of provident nature—man's right to live on and out of the earth by his own efforts, without having to obtain the consent of any other man. The great wrong to the toiling masses of landless men by our present iniquitous system of land ownership, that allows the appropriation by the individual owner of the values created wholly by the community, and thereby encourages the forestalling and monopoly of the bounties of nature by capital, and forming the basis and power of all monopoly, and which denies to labor, except with the consent of capital, access to those bounties of nature intended for the use and benefit of all mankind, should be vividly apparent to a mind so clear as yours, and whose utterances show you to be an able advocate of the dignity and rights of labor.

It was never the intention of our munificent Mother Nature that one part of her children should be the slaves of others; yet, such is the direct result of our present customs.

Thomas Jefferson, the great democrat, referring to man's tenancy of the earth, has said: "The earth belongs in usufruct to the living; the dead have no power over it." Again he said, and this is the foundation of all true democracy, "Equal right to all; special privileges to none." Perceiving the justice of this doctrine, our forefathers uttered that declaration: "All men are born equal, with the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the grandest, sublimest principle that ever emanated from the human heart.

Herbert Spencer, the great Englishman, says: "Given a race of beings having like claims to pursue the objects of their desires; given a world adapted to the gratification of those desires—a world into which such beings are similarly born

—and it unavoidably follows that they have equal rights to the use of the world. For, if each of them has the freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other, then each is free to use the earth for the satisfaction of his wants, provided he allows all others the same liberty. And conversely it is manifest that no one, or part of them, may use the earth in such a way as to prevent the rest from similarly using it. Equity, therefore, does not permit property in land. For, if one portion of the earth's surface may justly become the possession of an individual, and may be held by him for his sole use and benefit, as a thing to which he has an exclusive right, then other portions of the earth's surface may be so sold; and eventually the whole earth's surface may be so held, and our planet may thus lapse altogether into private hands. Observe the dilemma to which this leads—supposing the entire habitable globe be so held, it follows that, if the land owners have a valid right to its surface, all who are not land owners have no right at all to its surface; they are trespassers—save by the permission of the lords of the soil they can have no room for the soles of their feet. It is manifest that an exclusive possession of the soil necessitates an infringement of the law of equal freedom. For, men who can not 'live and move, and have their being,' without the leave of others can not be equally free with others."

Do you believe that nature intended that one generation of her children should have the power to take from another generation the right to live on the earth? And yet, to recognize the absolute "fee simple title to land" is to consign to hopeless slavery and beggary the great mass of landless humanity; for every man who is not free to work when he wills is, in every sense of the word, a beggar and a slave; and, when employed by another, is a slave of the other to the exact extent that his necessities require him to retain that job. It is a matter of common knowledge that, in the last

election, many a so-called freeman cast his unwilling vote for the presidential candidate endorsed by his employer—because to shout or vote otherwise meant starvation for his wife and babes. Do you say such men are free? You fail to discern how the "fee simple to land" makes a slave of every landless man whose necessities require him to work for another man for wages.

Take the case of Robinson Crusoe. Suppose he has received a "fee simple title" from the government to his little island. A ship is wrecked upon his shores and the crew reach the land in safety. Now, if these castaways recognize Crusoe's right to the exclusive ownership of the island, may he not make such stipulations as he wills as conditions precedent upon which they may use his land? Without using his land how can they live? Are they not practically his slaves? Are not their very lives dependent upon his will? Has he not the legal right to order them off his land? Another example: Two families, each composed of man and wife, are cast upon an uninhabited island; they procure from the government a "fee simple" title to this island, and then partition it between them. One man is energetic and economical, the other is lazy and wasteful; and, rather than manage his own land, sells it to the other man and works for him for wages. Each man raises a family of children. These children, brought into this world by nature without any volition on their part, have an equal and inalienable right to make their living upon and out of the earth. What right have the parents of one set of these children to dispose of the interest of these children in the earth—in the only means they have of life?

Can a father deed away the right of his child to live? Can he sell his child into eternal bondage? Is it not apparent that the children of the landless man will be the absolute slaves of the other man's children? Cannot the landowners say to the landless, "Give me all of the proceeds of your labor, or get off of my island?" What recourse will the land-

less have? And is not this said by the employer today, who hires a man for the starvation wages that are now the market value of the laborer's hire: "Give me all the proceeds of your labor except enough for your bare subsistence?"

Do you not know that justice requires that each party to a contract be free from restraint? Is the laborer free in making a contract to work for another man for wages when the lives of those he loves depend upon the acceptance by him of the terms offered by the employer? When to refuse means all the tortures and terrors of gaunt hunger for wife and babes? When the inalienable right to freely earn his living out of the bounties provided by nature for his use is denied to him by the unjust laws of his country?

Where does the manufacturer get his millions? Is not his fortune the difference between the values that his factory hands create and the wages he pays to them? How much more than a living do they get? How much of the wealth that they produce does he get? Why should they not share equally in the wealth they produce?

This world is nothing more than a large island, and instead of one or a few landowners we have many; the rule that applies to a part equally applies to the whole. The man whose necessities require him to earn his living off the land of another is beyond doubt more absolutely the slave of that landowner than ever was the negro the slave of the white man.

When William the Conqueror wished to provide servants for his courtiers he did not give them men—he gave them the land on which men had to earn their living. Of all the dark pages of history there is not a clearer proof of the abject enslavement of the masses by this unjust system of land ownership than that foul blot on the manhood of our race, the feudal "right of the first night." What abject slavery, what ignominy is expressed in that monstrous crime—

Blackstone says: "The earth is the gen-



eral property of all mankind in common, and no part of it is the permanent property of any man in particular. Accurately and strictly speaking, there is no foundation in nature or in natural law why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land."

Herbert Spencer says: "It may be and by be perceived that equity utters dictates to which we have not yet listened, and men may learn that to deprive others of their right to the use of the earth is to commit a crime inferior only in wickedness to the crime of taking away their lives or personal liberties."

John Stuart Mill says: "Land never was and never can be a proper subject of private ownership. When the sacredness of property is talked of it should always be remembered that such sacredness does not belong in the same degree to landed property. No man made land. It is the original inheritance of the whole species."

William E. Gladstone says: "Those persons who possess large portions of the earth's surface are not altogether in the same positions as the possessors of mere personalty. Personalty does not impose limitation on the actions and the industry of man, and on the well-being of the community, as possession of land does, and, therefore, I freely admit that compulsory expropriation is admissible and even sound in principle."

James Anthony Froude says: "Land is not and cannot be property in the sense that movable things are property. Every human being born upon this planet must live upon the land, if he lives at all. The land in any country is really the property of the nation that occupies it."

Alfred Russell Wallace says: "So long as man can be evicted and banished from the local community at the will of the landlord, there can be no independence and no possible freedom worthy of the name. By recognizing private property in land the state has set up in its midst a number of petty lords more powerful than the government, and whose decrees, whatever injustice they may do or whatever misery bring to the British

subject, no court of law or equity is able to reverse."

William Brodwick, M. P., says: "The landlord of the parish or district is invested with clear authority over its inhabitants which neither the Saxon chief nor the Norman lord in the fullness of their power ever had the right of exercising; for the means of living and the very right of the people to life itself are equally under the control of those who are the exclusive owners of the land, which the Creator clearly gave for the equal sustenance and use of all, and without which no human being can live."

For your reconsideration, let me state concisely our reasons for the faith that is in us.

We single-taxers believe that every human being born into this world is the joint and equal heir of every other human being to the bounties of nature. That the tiniest babe of the humblest workman is coequal with the dimpled darling of royalty.

We hold, with the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal, with the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

That by his nature man has certain physical wants on which depend both his moral and physical development, and to satisfy these wants nature has provided the land of the earth, out of which by his labor man can satisfy all his needs, and without which man must die.

Being the equal creatures of nature and equally entitled to life, liberty and the satisfaction of their wants, all men are equally entitled to the land; and to deprive any man of this right is to rob him.

Man having the sole right to his life and his limbs, it follows that he has an exclusive right of property in the thing that his labor creates.

This right is anterior and superior to human law—it attaches to those things produced by labor, but never to the bounties of nature.

In the language of Henry George—the greatest intellect of all the centuries—

"If a man take a fish from the ocean, he acquires a right of property in that fish, which exclusive right he may transfer by sale or gift; but he can not obtain a similar right of property in the ocean so that he may sell it or forbid others to use it. If he set up a wind mill, he acquires a right of property in the things such use of wind enables him to produce; but he can not claim a right of property in the wind itself so that he may sell it or forbid others to use it. If he cultivates grain he acquires a right of property in the grain his labor brings forth; but he can not obtain a similar right of property in the sun which ripened it or in the soil on which it grew."

As to the use of land, we recognize the fact that to enable man to reap the fruits of his industry, he must have, under just regulations, the exclusive right to the use of that portion on which his labor is expended, provided he pays to the agent of the community the annual rental value of the land he monopolizes—they then get their share of the land just as they had used it. Regulations for the use of land may justly be fixed by human laws; but they must secure to all the equal participation in the advantages of natural bounties.

We believe that each man should pay to the government—the agent of the people—the annual rental value of the land he monopolizes, irrespective of the uses to which he puts it.

The value of land, irrespective of the improvements on it or the use to which it is put, increases each year with increases of population, and this value is termed by all political economists "the unearned increment of land." How does this value arise, and to whom does it rightfully belong? Is it the product of the land owner's labor? Assuredly not. The value of a piece of land, you must concede, is produced solely by the presence, the energy and the enterprise of the entire community; for, were there no community and no prospect of one, the land would have no value whatever.

Suppose for example, a wide expanse of frontier prairie uninhabited. Under

the belief that immigration will tend in that direction a speculator lays out a town—of what value is any lot in that town? None! A railroad is projected and built in that direction; the location being desirable for a town, people begin to come, and the lots assume a value. At the end of, say ten years, the population has increased to 5000, and the lots, some of which are still unsold, have increased to \$1000. Can there be any doubt as to what has produced that value of \$1000? Suppose the entire population of this town to move away, never to return—what then will be the value of this \$1000 lot? The community not only creates all the land value, but maintains it from day to day.

Now then, if the owner did not create that value, and the community did create it, by what theory of justice will you decide that the one man the land owner may take for his exclusive use those values created solely by the community? If you say "vested rights," we reply "vested wrongs." No man can have a "vested right" in the robbery of his fellow men. If the land owner bought on the supposition that the people would continue to allow the appropriation by the land owner of the values created by the community, then he was speculating upon the credulity of the people, and they would do him no wrong when they stop the spoliation. We do not propose to make the land owner disgorge his ill gotten gains—we simply propose to stop the robbery now and here.

We believe that a man should have all that he earns, and that he should earn all that he has. In the last analysis of humanity, there are only three grand divisions of mankind—"working men, beggar men and thieves." A man who reaps where he has not sown—who receives something for nothing—must of necessity fall into one of these last two classes. It is not the individual land owner that we attack—he is but a creature of circumstances—it is the vicious, unjust social laws, that makes possible the existence of such persons that we are fighting to the death.

A practical application of the single tax would in no wise alter or change the present method of holding or conveying land. We propose to leave the land as it now is in the private possession of individuals, with full liberty on their part to sell, convey or give it away as they now do. We would simply require each owner to pay to the government the yearly rental value of the land he monopolizes, irrespective of the improvements he puts upon it or the uses he puts it to. Knowing that then each man will put his land to its best use (for its speculative value will be gone), or will let some one have it who will so use it. There will then be work for all who will, and no one need suffer who is willing to work.

You may tell us that, by acquiescence for a long time, the custom of allowing the land owner to take for his own use the values created by the community has become merged into a "right of property," and that it would now be wrong to abolish this right. How many years does it take for a wrong to become a right? At what rate per annum does the transformation take place? You tell us that the custom having existed from "time immemorial"—"so long that the mind of man runneth not to the contrary"—hence it must be right for the individual to take what belongs to the community. "Vox populi, vox Dei."

It used to be thought right to burn witches; it used to be thought right for man to own his fellow man—the purchaser of a slave had the right to tear the sobbing babe from the bursting heart of the slave mother. But I will say to you that "the hand writing is upon the wall;" there is a great light in the east, and across the gloom of the superstitions and ignorance of the past we can read in shining, glittering letters of flame the grandest proclamation of liberty to man. "Equal rights to all—special privilege to none."

PAUL M'COMBS,  
Austin, Texas, June 17, 1898.