

### A Retrospect.

BY JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

In happened in 1900. Just how it all came about is not clear, but the whole nation almost upon the instant was mightily stirred. It was one of those waves of popular enthusiasm which sometimes sweep over a people, engulfing every petty issue and inducing even in the dullest minds something akin to the rare and difficult process known in works on mental pathology as thinking. It is said—so at least the veracious chroniclers of that day report—that the college professors talked on the subject so that even the unlearned could comprehend with a little effort; but this, it may be assumed, is hardly credible. Some of the clergymen of the churches of various denominations began to apply certain texts in the Bible without demurring as to their evident meaning; and to many Christianity seemed actually to assume something of its ancient and defiant bearing toward injustice and privilege. It was certainly wonderful.

As for the initial force which set all this moral energy into being, I have already intimated my lack of knowledge. We merely know that it came, this lightning from the clouds, to all these modern souls of Tarsus, as other awakenings have come, out of the unknown, or, as one has said, out of "that power not ourselves that makes for righteousness."

Perhaps somebody started it by saying that one man had as much right on the earth as another. The doctrine spread like wildfire. Little children told it to one another in the streets; it was sung in songs in the theatres; it rolled on like a great wave. We are all earth born they said—we all have our earth rights one as much as another—one no more than another. The old cry uttered in a spirit of despair by Jean Paul Richter, whom Germans delight to call "der Einzige," "We are all orphans, you and I—we have no father"—the cry of the children of earth frightened at the darkness under the great blanket of the night—this cry has ceased to be heard. Another and gladder shout took its place: "We are brothers, you and I—we have indeed a father; and the earth is our bounteous mother."

And they said to the politicians "Give it to us—our right to the use of the earth." And the politicians almost fell over themselves in their effort to give it to them. Bills were introduced almost simultaneously in nearly every State

Legislature in the country abolishing taxes, and taking land values as revenue. Land began to fall in value with the very anticipation of the falling of the tax. The real estate agents were never so busy; land owners would ride in on them every hour in the day, saying "For heaven's sake sell my land for whatever you can get for it." But they seemed to be pleased, too. They called for contractors

and architects and urged them to be quick with plans for buildings; never was there such activity in the building trades, and there seemed to be no limit to the demand for houses, and tenants were demanding all sorts of improvements and landlords seemed equally eager to provide them. "Put bath-rooms on every floor," said one, "the tenants want them and will pay for them, and there is no extra tax for doing it." In the suburbs land values kept falling, but there was no complaint. Houses went up like magic, and wherever land fell in value, population spread out upon it, and as land value slowly rose again, there was again no complaint, for there was no speculation, and no land for which there was any demand and which therefore demanded a price, could be held out of use.

Everybody went around with a cheerful face and clapped his neighbor soundly on the back. "Great thing, this single tax," one would say; and the other fellow would smile and hurry along. "But where is it to stop?" said the croaker; "surely it can't go on forever. When all the homes that are needed are built, labor will be idle again." But it never did stop. Where a man had a house he soon wanted a better one; and men who had never dreamed of such things before, suddenly conceived desires for garden-houses, aviaries, vines, additions and improvements, piazzas, dormer windows—just like the rich. The enjoyments and refinements of the few had become, with the possible realization of these things to all, the desires of the many; and they would never be satisfied.

Men saw it all now. The barriers to development in more than one direction had been torn down. Men stood upright and walked free. It was wonderful to observe the proud, erect and elastic gait of men and women. A new fearlessness in the step, a new joy in the speech, a new note in the laugh, even of the girls and boys at play; and men and women had become in many ways more like children. Some social philosopher of that day went so far as to predict that in

fifty years—certainly in a hundred—men would be five or six inches higher in stature, and we know that that prediction has been verified.\*

There was one group who pooh-poohed all this—both the moral enthusiasm and the reasoning in it. These were the Socialists. They said, even if the proposed reform will accomplish all the whole world is claiming for it, it's no good anyhow. They said, the trouble is with the competitive system, and they instanced among the evils of competition such institutions as the Standard Oil, sugar, and steel rail trusts. Everybody laughed at this, but then the Socialists never knew what people were laughing at. To be a Socialist one must be proof against all that.

Not all the professors assented. One George Mutton, whom the irreverent called "mutton head," said that even though it were true that one man had the same right to land as another, this truth did not abrogate the right of some men to collect rent for land, since what was true in the abstract was not always so in the concrete, for circumstances often served to modify essential truths; private property in land, however, really did conserve the equal right to land, since rights are, however people may talk, really inseparable from ownership; and it was certainly ridiculous to talk about one man's right to land when the proposition—an absurd *non sequitur*—was to take rent from a few individuals and then to trust to everybody receiving his exact proportion—how much is that anyhow?—at the hand of the politicians in public benefits such as free libraries. Statistics showed that but a comparatively small proportion of the people patronized public libraries anyhow. No—the real remedy lay in the uninterrupted growth of great fortunes in order that in the administration of immense wealth, which in the hands of the laborer is practically inefficient and of no real use, would become productive of great good in distributed benefits. The laborer must in the meantime maintain his organization in order to be in a position to exact certain conditions, etc., etc. Then in some remote period all will be lovely.

\* Freer conditions unquestionably mean an increase in the physical stature of men. The armor of the middle ages is far too small for the man of to-day. The average height of Englishmen has increased nearly two inches since the abolition of the Corn Laws. T. D. M.

We know the effect of the law that was passed abolishing the artificial systems which had so long hindered industrial and social development, and by the most simple of changes establishing the natural order.

We know how the tenements were deserted as if by magic, we know how the manufacturers and storekeepers rejoiced; how poverty melted away, prisons emptied themselves, and how, in the outlying suburbs where land merged into the no-rent line, whole villages sprang up composed of the population of formerly congested centers.

The flotsam and jetsam of human society, the low class of Jews and Italians, who had festered in the city's slums, and lived close to the starvation line, suddenly assumed a new character. Much to the amazement of those who had clamored for the restriction of this class of immigration, these people suddenly became shockingly independent, refusing with impudent pretensions to equality, to work for anything less than the market rate of wages. The American workman was astounded that this former competitor for a job should have become so like himself in manhood; though it should have been clear to him at all times that no man will really take less in return for his labor than he can get. I remember meet-

ing my old friend Pat Donegan a year after the new law went into effect.

"What do you think of those Dagoes," said Pat, after he had rehearsed an incident to me. "It was at a job clearing out a cellar. You know how the demand for labor went up. We all stood around waiting for the boss to call upon us, and when we said we'd work for \$2.50 a day, just about twice as much as we used to get, the boss he laughed at us and pointed to a group of Dagoes coming across the street. We thought it was all up with us then, and we chinned together and agreed to work for \$2, for we know those bloody Dagoes of old, and that they's be ready to work for anything and thus take the bread out of our mouths. But when they learned how the case stood one of them came running over to us, terribly excited like, and wanted to know if we were going to help to reduce wages by working for \$2 a day? Just think of that! And then he said they were all on their way uptown where the bosses were most crazy for men to do cellar work at \$2.60 per day. And they begged us to stand out for \$2.50 at least. Why, we could

almost have hugged those fellows to our bosoms. It was wonderful, the change that had come over them."

Of course the reason was clear. Every lot of land within reach of a community is a natural opportunity for labor; every lot of land will give one man or a dozen a living, and as there are rather more lots than men, no man ought to be idle, no man ought to be poor. And so when every lot was thrown open, practically, by the tax which compelled its free and best use, the demand for labor kept pace with the demands of the laborer. The man out of a job who had determined the rate of wages having disappeared no man—Polack, "Dago," or Jew—would work for less than he could get. This truth, not at the time quite clear to my friend Donegan, is now of course clear to all the world.

But the greatest benefit of the change was in man himself. He stood erect once more, with the bold, fearless but kindly eyes we sometimes see in uncorrupted childhood. He feared no man, not even an employer. If he had opinions he did not hesitate to utter them; the relations of man with man, and of the sexes lost their former artificial restraint; over all the associations of men there was a comradeship of feeling and expression quite new in history. Strangers talked with one another without being introduced, and smiled and nodded pleasantly when they met in hotels, corridors, or at places of amusement. Jealousy and suspicion, if not wholly banished, ceased to be very obvious. Certain artificial regulations of what is known as the best society dropped away like the cerements from the ancient mummified dead. A new respect for the aged, a new interest in the young, and a new and higher courtliness for women began to be manifested. No one was reviled because he had a black skin, or because he was a Jew or Italian, or because his grandfather had fought on the other side in the Rebellion. Men differed as pleasantly as they agreed, and having leisure were avid for knowledge. Wealth ceased to wield undue influence; though a wealthy man, now that wealth could come only as the result of labor, of brain, or hand, was regarded with some honor in the country, as one who had made good use of the talents intrusted to him. These were the inventors and discoverers, the writers of great or useful books, the noted advocates and eloquent preachers. There were no Carnegies nor Armours,

nor Rockefellers. With the destruction of the great monopoly of land and the artificial laws tending to the concentration and greater power of wealth and the subordination of labor, the great fortunes of these men slowly crumbled. It is a curious fact, too, that the indifference with which the possession of the fortunes were regarded by the owners themselves helped to make such dissemination more rapid. Their indifference, of course, was due to the fact that as wealth ceased to be a form of power over men and served only for the satisfaction of human desires, it ceased at the same time to possess attractions for the ambitious who aspired to rule. As a dollar could not now buy against his better inclinations an hour of the service of the meanest individual in the community, it had lost for ambitious minds the dangerous fascination it had once possessed.

But all this is part of history now. I tell it again in this simple way that the gospel of freedom may sink more deeply into our hearts.