

## AN OPEN LETTER TO REV. HENRY VAN DYKE.

REV. AND DEAR SIR:—Your Book "*Essays in Application*" lays on the table before me as I write. I have read it carefully and enjoyed it much. Its author stands on high ground, handles a facile pen and evidently writes as a Christian minister should with an honest purpose to serve the cause of truth and righteousness, and with the exception of the chapter "Property and Theft" he serves it well. To that chapter I must take exception, for though you certainly are aiming for the truth and for the truth as taught by the great teacher of moral truth, yet you certainly shoot wide of the mark. I find that therein I am charged with advocating a principle of social action which amounts to a breach of the Eighth Commandment and a subversion of all social order. A self-respecting, loyal, Christian American citizen finds himself classed with thieves and robbers. My dear sir, it is not pleasant to hear, especially so when the charge comes from a Christian minister of high standing and like yourself. John Ruskin once wrote to one of his friends engaged in literary work in this wise; "I have just written an article for the — Magazine in which I have very severely criticised your article that appeared in the number of the month last past. But I think that this need not disturb the cordial relations that hitherto existed between us." By return mail he received the reply which read thus: "The next time I see John Ruskin I shall punch his head, but I think that it would not necessarily disturb the cordial relations hitherto existing between us." Now I am not disposed like John Ruskin's friend to show fight in the way of punching the Van Dyke head, but inasmuch as the aforesaid book has gone abroad to thousands of readers with your ideas, supported by the rhetoric and beauty of your style and your great name, I am constrained, if I can do no more than to utter my feeble but most earnest protest. Now to be more explicit, the main point of difference between us as shown in your book is that you affirm the right of private ownership in land no matter what the practical results may be, while I and those of like way of thinking deny that right and declare with all the force of enlightened conviction the monstrous injustice of that vast amount of human suffering and misery in low life, and lordly monopoly and luxurious crime in high life which logically and inevitably follow. To come to the book. On page 186 you say, "A candidate for the Mayoralty of New York City (an honorable man), who polled 67,000 votes, affirmed that every man who owned his home was practically a robber of the community." This, of course refers to none other than the late Henry George. I don't believe he ever said it and I know he never wrote it. I have within easy reach every book that Henry

George ever wrote and everything in the line of newspaper editorials that came from his pen, and no such idea can be found on any of his pages, and ought not therefore to be found on the pages of your book, or the book of any other man.

It was the sight of hundreds of thousands of American citizens—honest, patriotic, Christian men—crowded into cities by some irresistible but invisible force to take refuge in damp cellars or in hot, musty attics high up toward the sky—a sight to make angels weep. This it was that inspired Henry George to devote his life to the elevation of the lowly and to spend three years of hard work in poverty and obscurity to bring out that great work of economic philosophy which is and is to be such a mighty factor in bringing about the establishment of the Redeemer's Kingdom on Earth. No communism did he teach, but the right of every individual to walk the earth a free man, with opportunity for full development in every line that makes life enjoyable and human conditions happy. Again to quote from same page: "*The Animus of the New Testament*." This is an inferential slur upon the character of that great and good priest, Dr. Edward McGlynn, who loved his fellow men, who loved truth and righteousness, and had the courage to defy the power of the moneyed autocrats who invoked the hand of Episcopal authority to force him to silence. Of the stuff of which martyrs are made was the soul of Edward McGlynn. Green are the sods that cover both philosopher and priest, but well worn converging foot paths leading toward each green grave bear strong though silent testimony to the affectionate regard and loving memory in which their names are held by thousands of men and women. Again on page 189: "*But suppose that poverty and wretchedness do not spring from any single fault in the social order but from the selfish and wilful evil that dwells in the human heart*." It is a common habit on the part of many ministers to whom I have listened to look for the causes of poverty and consequent suffering in the selfishness and perversity of the human heart, and that the only mode of procedure for the salvation of society is the regeneration of the individual. Of course, if all men were good then no man would be bad. If government enacted none but good laws then we should have no bad laws.

Convert every whiskey distiller and every saloon keeper and liquor manufacturer and they would all go out of business immediately, and the liquor question would be settled at once without any law. Let every gambler and bucket shop proprietor become a transformed man, the whole brood of sharpers would go out of business forthwith. If supposable, let a miracle of grace find its way into the first national bank on Wall St., and for a shining mark subdue to humility and restitution the mighty president of the great institution, and then be

found working inside the imposing front of 26 Broadway, among the Rogers and Rockefellers and Pierces. Without doubt several hundred millions of good money would be forthcoming to the great delight of hundreds who had been cheated of their little all. No, I cannot agree that social suffering is properly and directly the result of individual perversity. It is unjust law and social maladjustments that mainly are the cause. Where is the wisdom in always declaiming against the sinful human heart and remaining dumb about the social conditions, the false philosophy, the entrenched injustice that so intensify a thousand times the avarice and the pride that dominate society. The question often arises, Do you propose to change human nature by statute law? No, but human motives, for human action is very largely determined by social conditions. Each of a company of men sitting at a well spread table at a state or aristocratic dinner will sit in courteous patience knowing full well that his plate will surely be filled and his rights as a guest considered. But put that same company of men on a ship in mid ocean without water or food, and for a cup of water and a loaf of bread, they would fight like dogs and tigers. The spirit of "*fair play and wise love*" seen at the state dinner would be gone at the bare table of the ship surrounded by its starving company. There is—there must be a law that had its origin in the divine mind—a law which if followed must inevitably result in the highest material welfare of the people and communities that observe it. To deny this is to impeach the wisdom of the Creator and most assuredly that law cannot have been or be now the law that might makes right, but must be the complement of the Golden Rule and in harmony with the Declaration of Independence and the "*Our Father*" of the Lord's prayer. Again to the book. Passing over several passages that are more irritating than otherwise I come to page 204. I find "*But when he says that Real Estate that has become private property ought to be practically confiscated by taxation he is teaching us to call theft by a longer name.*" Real estate is really only land, and the question arises how can or does or did land become private property? Who signed the original deed. If private property in land is right and just then you are right in your inference and conclusions. If private property in land is wrong and the fruitful source of human misery, as Mr. George and his followers believe, then instead of teaching righteousness in your book you are supporting an old time vested wrong that was conceived in selfishness and cruelty, the direct cause of an aggregate human suffering greater than that of all the wars and pestilences since time began, for it is not intermittent but continuous. If Mr. Rockefeller holds his great estate on the Hudson River by a title not only from the state of

New York, but by a title founded on ethical truth, then it would be perfectly right for him to own, if he had the power, the whole county, or even the great Empire State itself; every other man would be living on sufferance as a trespasser. What would hinder the Astor estate from spreading out over the Bronx to City Island, purposely to squeeze the future mechanic or artisan to the rate of a score of dollars per square foot? Is it comforting to you to see these monstrous estates in our country? The Farwell Ranch in Texas, thousands of acres larger than the State of Connecticut—22,000 square miles of the Miller estate in California, equal to 5 states like Connecticut, with a title as good as any? Are you sure that Naboth had a title in fee-simple to his vineyard? Not one of the old progenitors under the laws of Moses owned in fee-simple a single rod of Caanan's soil.

Is it pleasant for you to see Irish Landlord Scully with half the State of Illinois as his own tenanted by his obsequious slaves, while he sojourns in luxury and dignified idleness, in the Emerald Island? Note the millions of acres of our own country now in possession of English lords held either for speculative purposes or to reproduce on American soil conditions similar to those on their English estates; call to mind, if you will, the same infamous land grabbing game prevalent in Australia twenty years ago, and in New Zealand, and now going on in Cuba, involving a discouraging prospective burden for all incoming laboring humanity. Listen to the heartbreaking cry of the Russian peasantry for land on which to live and support their families; poor slaves of aristocratic ducal lords who own vast tracts on which these poor creatures must live and labor to support the lordly owners of the soil. Look at Italy, the land of great estates and millions of peasantry raised but little above the beasts of the field. Find similar conditions in Spain, and over in merry England. Observe the vast ducal estates and vast tracts held for game preserves and other foolish purposes, with the yeomanry driven into the cities to bid against each other for a chance to earn their bread, with hundreds of thousands of moral and physical degenerates who in spite of Christianity, in spite of the supposedly highest civilization, forces upon British statesmen a problem that is their despair. Are these things pleasant for you to ponder? They are the direct result of this one final error at the foundation of society, the awfully disastrous idea, to wit, the right to really own a single square rod of the bosom of mother earth and to all this you are by voice and pen and personality a contributing factor. Now it is useless to talk about correcting this great social mistake by teaching the golden rule. With this economic sin at the bottom of the social structure, were every man a saint, conditions like the present would soon or later inevitably appear. Now you think

to tax land to the amount of economic rent is to steal from the land owner. The rent of the land on Manhattan Island is at least one hundred millions of dollars annually which arises solely and entirely from the presence of two millions of people living and doing business on it. Remove the people and the value would revert to twenty four dollars for which the Indians sold it to the Dutch. In Heavens name, what can be more just than to take the millions of value that are the direct product of the community as such to meet the city's expenses, to say nothing of removing the awful burden now bearing with crushing weight on the shoulders of production. It does not follow that because I believe in the common right of every man to his native soil that at heart I am a thief or in intellect a fool. Sir, you will find that in your position as defender of the landed aristocracy of the world you are opposed by such names as Lord Coleridge of England, the trained jurist Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, John Stuart Mill, a paragon of knowledge, Thomas Aquinas, the "Founder of Moral philosophy," and Blackstone, who says that governments have no power to convey on paper a just title to a single acre of land. All these, and many more of acknowledged authority in matters of law and justice, and truth, as well as by the followers of Henry George. What they want is justice not charity or mercy or special privilege, but justice, the central idea of our Christianity, and furthermore I beg you to believe that in the rapid course of events this whole matter will soon force itself on you and demand your attention, and although the so called upper circles of society may be willing enough for you to descant indefinitely on any phase of Christianity that possesses no practical application they will object strongly to our public considering subjects of economic reform. Yet you will be by public demand forced to declare your self. You will not be allowed to ignore it. May your lips speak only for righteousness.

I close this letter by quoting your own true and beautiful words, beautiful because true: "*With politics, that is so far as that has to do with the strifes of parties or rivalries of candidates the church has no concern, but with ethics, political ethics, the moral aspect of the life of the State, the church must speak both frankly and fearlessly. When she evades or neglects this high office of public prophecy, when she gives her strength to theological subtlety or ecclesiastical rivalry or clerical millinery, and stands silent in the presence of corruption and indifferent to the progress of reform her own bells will toll the death knell of her influence, her sermons will be the funeral discourses of her power and her music will be the processional to the grave of her lost honor. But when she proclaims to all people without fear or favor the necessity of a thorough going conscience and the*

divine law of righteousness in every sphere of human life, the reverence of men will crown her walls with praise."

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#### THE SINGLE TAX A BASIC REFORM.

My appreciation of the great value of Single Tax as an economic reform, is constantly growing. Various other measures advocated by many good people seem to be palliative only, and not (as is the Single Tax) remedial; and often such as relieve present distress, but do not affect the cause of the trouble, or produce a permanent cure.

The importance of the land problem first came to me through the reading of Henry George's essay on Moses. The denial to the Jews of individual ownership in land longer than the time between each Jubilee year—a provision which prevented land monopoly and consequent poverty, was made clear and became an interesting and important fact. After that reading, came Progress and Poverty, the discussions with the Duke of Argyle, the wonderful Letter to the Pope, the Perplexed Philosopher, Social Questions and other writings. The suggestion that, although I had yet found no unsoundness in Mr. George's argument, perhaps the elegance of his diction, which I soon began to admire, and his rhetoric, might be mistaken for logic and for truth, was met by the recollection that most, if not all, the great writings of the past were clothed in elegant simplicity, in fine settings of language which made more charming the jewels of thought therein contained. Such were Cæsar's Commentaries, the four Gospels with the discourses and parables of Jesus, the Magna Charta of England, the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's Second Inaugural and his Gettysburg speech, and General Grant's Memoirs. After this reading came lectures on Single Tax by Louis F. Post, John Z. White, Raymond Robins, Prof. H. B. Loomis, Senator Bucklin of Colorado, and others.

The great interest in Single Tax manifested in Great Britain and Germany, and the marvelous, almost miraculous, work done by it in New Zealand, where only a partial application of the Georgian principle has been made, all combined to establish me as a firm believer in the doctrine; and now cause me to compare it with other reforms. This comparison, as already stated, always shows the superiority of Single Tax.

We see charitable associations growing up in our great cities, all of which, in their application to individual cases, are doing much good; but we also see that the evils which called these societies into existence are increasing, rather than diminishing. Some of this increase actually grows out of the defects inherent in the unnaturalness of these organizations. We are learning