

LAND & LIBERTY

(Incorporating "LAND VALUES.")

Twenty-sixth Year. (Established June, 1894.)

Monthly 2d. By Post 3s. per annum.

(United States and Canada, 75 cents.)

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Here are two simple principles, both of which are self-evident:

I.—That all men have equal rights to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by Nature.

II.—That each man has an exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labour.

There is no conflict between these principles. On the contrary, they are correlative. To secure fully the individual right of property in the produce of labour, we must treat the elements of Nature as common property.—*Henry George: "Protection or Free Trade,"* chapter 26.

"KEEP YOUR EYE ON PAISLEY"

By the death of Sir John McCallum, Liberal M.P. for Paisley, a by-election is, as we write, in course of progress there. It is a three-cornered contest. Mr. Asquith, late Prime Minister, is the Liberal candidate, Mr. J. M. Biggar, Labour, and Mr. J. A. D. McKean stands for the Coalition Government. In his opening speech in the campaign Mr. Asquith made a bold enough pronouncement on the Taxation of Land Values. Plunging right away into the question of finance, the need for reducing expenditure was not enough, he said, you must increase your revenue. He ruled out all forms of protective finance, and expressed the belief that we could not raise additional revenue by adding to indirect taxation because that would but add to the burdens borne by the consumer. Where are we to go? he asked, and answered with the statement printed on page 45.

In passing we venture the opinion that if the Liberal candidate had not forgotten in the stress of the recent election storm to unfold this old-time belief in radical land reform he would have still been member for East Fife, for, as a Liberal contem-

porary, not by any means reputed for its advocacy of the reform, honestly puts it: the Taxation of Land Values, now, as always, is the passionately pursued ideal of Scottish Radicalism.

Mr. Asquith stands for the Taxation of Land Values. The Labour candidate is not so certain. He speaks with two voices and we have dealt with his views elsewhere. The Coalition candidate is not worth serious consideration. As a supporter of the present Government he is placed in position which his opponents can cogently enough reveal to even the dullest elector who stands for public safety.

Mr. Asquith has a past on the question. It does himself as a man no credit, and it has helped largely to drive from the party he leads a countless number who gave it loyal service and whose only ambition was to make the party in our day and generation equal to the call for wider opportunities. The Liberal Party had no definite economic creed as to questions of employment, housing, wages, etc., when these came to occupy a foremost place in the mind of the people. In quest of an answer to such questions Mr. Asquith and his colleagues took to Land Values Taxation. They explored the question, or confessed they did, twenty years ago, and declared it to be sound in principle and as expedient as it was just. "It is impossible to suppose," said Mr. John Morley, "that the system (land monopoly which stood against the growth of towns) will not be vigorously, powerfully, persistently attacked." "Taxation of Land Values is an important question," said Sir William Harcourt, "and had I remained in office I should have tried my hand at it." And in a fit of unwonted enthusiasm Sir Edward Grey affirmed: "The party which first masters this question, which first makes it its own, and is really prepared to deal with it, and is not going to let itself be hampered by vested interests to exercise its intelligence upon it freely—that party will have a great and solid ground upon which to appeal to the country."

This is but the briefest glance at the former Liberal chart on Land Values Taxation, but those who have "mastered the question and made it their own," and who have spent long years in tireless energy, to say nothing of sums of money amounting in all to a vast fortune to make others understand, can be pardoned if they look askance at this latest declaration.

Twenty-five years ago Mr. Asquith sensed the value of the question to the Liberal Party, and as a means, we believe, to the advancement of the commonweal. He then contended that the owners of the ground benefit, and will continue to benefit, by improvements in our social and municipal life, and pledged the party when it was again entrusted with the control of legislation to a well-considered scheme which would free the municipalities, and open an avenue to a new source of social and industrial development. Inspired by this and similar Liberal pledges the well-directed agitation took root in the municipal life of the country, bringing with it the dawn of a better day, the day of emancipation from the tyranny and the unjust exactions of land monopoly. It was the opening of an exciting and promising chapter in the book of democratic progress, and the vision no less than the great argument brought new strength and high courage to Liberalism.

Let us not delude ourselves, nor allow anyone else to delude us. We were caught once before. If thy friend deceive thee once, shame on thy friend; if thy friend deceive thee twice, shame on thee. To the man in the street, or in the club, to the man in a hurry, the Paisley statement appears to be quite sound and good enough to go on with, but coming from Mr. Asquith we can only ask, as we are entitled to ask, does it mean anything more than another turn of the increment tax, or some other plant of the same species and character? He said Taxation of Land Values before, and in the open light of day he turned it into a moving bog, and there it is still to be found, the handiwork of Liberal statesmanship, the shame and the disgrace of all concerned.

The Boer war intervened, and after Liberal Imperialism had done its best or its worst to lower the party in the eyes of liberty-loving people at home and abroad, the Taxation of Land Values, particularly in Scotland, emerged in unbroken triumph to bind the party once again to the call for fundamental reform. Scottish Liberals continued to agitate the question at their Federation Conferences, on the platform and in the Press. In their eyes it took precedence of all other questions. It was carried by Liberals outside their own organization into the Trades Union movement, and in 1902 the Scottish Trades Union Congress passed unanimously the following resolution:—

“That whereas the land question lies at the root of the labour problem; that land monopoly forces labour into involuntary idleness, and thus creates an unemployment class; and whereas Land Values are created by the presence, industry, and growth of the community, this Congress is of the opinion that the Taxation of Land Values merits the support of all who stand for industrial emancipation.”

A new Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, came on the scene. A man's voice spoke on the land question and Liberals from Land's End to John o' Groats stood to attention. The slogan was that the value of land was to be a source of public revenue; the hostile tariff on our industries in the form of rates on houses and improvements was trenchantly exposed as the abiding cause of the trouble, the land was no longer to be a pleasure-ground for the rich but the treasure-house of the nation. This was the reply of the Liberal leader to the demand for tariff reform. Notwithstanding Free Trade, the common people were still the despairing victims of unemployment, low wages, hard times. Quite true, said Sir Henry, and his cure was more Free Trade, not less. He stood for the liberation of the land so that Free Trade in production might be linked up with Free Trade in exchange. He was out in deadly earnest with the Taxation of Land Values as the weapon to effect this sweeping change in industry and commerce. It was the yawning chasm which separated the Liberals from their opponents. His last public speech was devoted to a passionate appeal to his supporters to present a firm demand for this remedy for social wrongs and to urge that it be applied without delay.

The General Election of January, 1906, swept the Liberals into an overwhelming “control of legislation,” and the following month Mr. Asquith, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was brought face to face with what

he termed “an imposing deputation” of 150 local councillors representing 115 municipalities, wanting to know why the subject of Land Values Taxation had not been mentioned in the King's Speech. Mr. Asquith pleaded for time and patience. “I hold the same views,” he affirmed, “without any modification or qualification of any sort or kind. I believe we shall arrive at a more satisfactory and more permanent result if we allow ourselves a little time and patience for the consideration of this problem than if we were to introduce a comparatively small and piecemeal instalment of the reform we all desire.” The time allotted was taken up with the Select Committee on the Land Values Bill for Scotland. The Bill was rejected by the Lords, and in turn the principle underlying it made the Lords bite the dust. Patience is still taken to be the virtue of a long-suffering public.

The Select Committee proposed to abolish the rates on houses and improvements, and to take the value of the land as the standard by which to measure the citizen's contribution to the rates. Fourteen years later Mr. Asquith comes to Paisley to reject this Liberal recommendation and proposes that only a proportion of the rates should be raised on a Land Values basis. What proportion he does not say. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman knew what proportion was needed. It was one (to quote his own words) that would break down the ring fences established round our towns by owners who withheld their land from building. He described the rating system in burning words as a tax upon industry, upon enterprise, upon improvement; a tax that was the direct cause of much of the suffering and overcrowding; and boldly declared that nothing short of Taxation of Land Values would suffice to get at the root of the matter. The great Liberal leader passed to his rest in 1908 and Mr. Asquith became Prime Minister.

He now tells his Paisley public: “I have always thought that land should contribute, though not in the sense of a penalty.” What does this “qualification” portend? When talking to the municipal deputation in 1906 he called for *severe* taxation to cope successfully with the owners of vacant land ripe for building development. Would he explain what he means by the difference between *severe* taxation and taxation that does not *penalize*? His municipal deputation understood him to mean that *severe* taxation meant taxation that would make it bad business for the land speculators, and the speculators in turn understood the speaker to mean a tax that would *penalize* them without any regard to their feelings in the matter.

The weakness of this 1920 statement is that it stands by itself in splendid isolation, quite unrelated to cognate questions such as were embraced in the Campbell-Bannerman scheme, though some of those relationships were once upon a time well within Mr. Asquith's comprehension. He thinks we can get something substantial from a tax on Land Values, but it must not penalize. We are not so certain of the money value, for the tax is presented by its votaries as a substitutionary one—the more from Land Values the less from industry. But there is no doubt as to the penalty. The lesson here is that the landowner holding for a rise penalizes the community, stunts its natural growth and develop-

ment, and the tax is intended to penalize him so that his occupation of dog-in-the-manger will be no more. If the tax fails to effect this ejection then all the revenue there is in Land Values may as well stay where it is.

Mr. Asquith is against the nationalization of industry, but he seems bereft of any alternative. He answers with a negative and trusts to luck or to the Whitley Councils to see him through. It is a deeper cut that is needed, and this he has in his own hands; it is named and known as a penalizing tax on Land Values, guaranteed to widen the field of employment, open up the way to the solution of the housing question and go a long way to meet the man who rightly stands for a drastic alteration in the laws and customs that throttle the community and drive decent men and women into want and despair.

Mr. Asquith affirms the case in bold type and in expansive terms. He says, Taxation of Land Values, and we are asked by a prominent Liberal supporter to play the game. We shall, but not the Liberal game, nor the Labour game. We shall play the game, and we mean to play it fair. Let Mr. Asquith, who knows the game, and those who profess attachment to it, play it as fairly as we do, and there need be no further misunderstanding.

We made the first step, Mr. Asquith says, in the 1909 Budget. Is he really proud of that performance? If so, then he either will not, or cannot, do justice to the case for this reform as it has been and is represented by Scottish Radicalism. As we have shown in pre-Budget days he advocated boldly enough the Taxation of Land Values; but in the 1909 Budget he betrayed the Radical principle, substituting for it the unworkable increment tax and the pettifogging, partial and discriminating tax on some undeveloped land. This blank shot is put down in some quarters to Mr. Lloyd George. That is as it may be. Nobody whose opinion is worth having gives our present Prime Minister credit for any thinking capacity on economic problems. His gifts lie in an altogether different direction. The point is that in 1909 Mr. Asquith in the House of Commons and in the country expounded the increment tax as a tax on Land Values. In his mind they were interchangeable terms.

The false coin of the Budget Land Duties was substituted for the true currency of Land Values Taxation and eloquently passed on to the Statute Book as a triumph for Liberalism. The imposture was used to bridge the yawning chasm against the better judgment of the few who were, unhappily, too weak to make effective protest, and who sought what solace they could find in the reflection that once the valuation was made the due and proper taxation to be placed upon it was assured. But, alas, for such expectations. The Budget Land Duties have long been in a state of well-merited suspension. They cannot be made to work, and a Select Committee of the House of Commons, recently appointed to consider their fate, and we suspect to consign them to the scrap-heap, have in despair handed the job back to Parliament itself. So perish all Liberal measures, begotten in ignorance and framed to meet the requirements of those who believe in democracy with the bit in its mouth.

We accepted the fancy Land Duties for the sake of the valuation, but which, we know now, were it ever to see the light of day without adequate amendment and serious revision, would not be worth the paper it was written on.

And this is the end of the great Budget and its promising campaign, which, without any doubt in the slang of the politics of the day, stopped the rot in the Liberal Party, and drove its opponents into hourly fits of depression. "I will confess to you," said Mr. Asquith, in one of the proudest moments of his political experience, "That when the Budget saw the light of day I believed it would drive all other political topics out of the field, but I am free to confess that I had no conception of the kind and character of the reception which awaited it." Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman asked and pleaded insistently for the necessary driving power. Had he lived to enjoy the unstinted measure of it given to his successor, evoked by the Land Values part of the 1909 Budget, the Liberal Party, Liberal principles, and the general well being of the community would have given the historian the chance to put on record, even in this dark hour, the triumph of forces making for sound and enduring progress.

In all this conflict of opinion and criticism we are not unmindful of the resolute stand Mr. Asquith made in the struggle with the Lords in their insolent claim to veto the Budget. The pity is that all the strength and purpose of this high tide of democratic opinion was wantonly wasted on piffing Fabian schemes, settling nothing, and leading nowhere, while never a word was heard of the question that floated the Budget to safety. On the contrary, when the fortunes of the party commenced to wane and a Liberal land campaign was put on the stocks, in 1912, the "spell-binders" were openly instructed to keep Land Values out of the picture.

So much for the official Liberal conception of the very marrow of the Budget. We are still out for the Taxation of Land Values and without modification of any sort or kind. It is for the devoted adherents of this radical doctrine to stand firm, to place their trust, not in the politicians, influenced by other issues, but in their own knowledge of it and its far-reaching effects for good. If the value of the land is a communal value, as Mr. Asquith once declared it to be, then the individuals comprising the community are entitled to a due and equal share of it; and if industry and enterprise are entitled to what it produces, then it follows that the non-producer is not entitled to share in the gain. That is our case. We seek to set free the raw material of all industry, and the policy to this end is the Taxation of Land Values and the corresponding untaxing of the work of man's hands. How much of such taxation do we demand? As much as we can get.

The statesman's first duty is to know the principle at stake, to embody it in his Bill and to defend it against any kind of opposition. It is for the people to say how far the policy may be carried. They are not strangers at the door step of this man or that, begging for a favour. They are the sovereign people of the land with the right which none can dispute of settling for themselves what they shall or shall not accept. The people of Scotland, certainly, are ready for a big

enough measure of Land Values Taxation. They would have had an instalment of it long ago but for reasons which we have made plain.

There are three leading questions on the subject that should be put to Mr. Asquith:—

1. When you say Taxation of Land Values do you mean this as it is advocated by the Scottish Liberal Federation, or do you mean some elaboration or new interpretation of the 1909 Budget Increment Tax?

2. Are you in favour of scrapping the Budget Land Duties in favour of a flat tax on the unimproved value of all land?

3. Would you, if returned, without delay, revise the Valuation by empowering the Valuation Department to compel owners, where necessary, to give a declaration of the present value and character of their holdings?

Let him play the game and give a straightforward answer to these questions. Let us not be fobbed off with any abstract formula got up to enable public bodies to buy land on the cheap. Valuation for public purchase of land on the basis of what it contributes to the rates and taxes is but a fancy apology for the genuine article. Without the taxation and rating of land values and the untaxing of improvements, it would be a barren formula; with the fuller policy in operation this land purchase expedient would be more ornamental than useful. Under the new dispensation anyone, public bodies included, would be able to purchase land at its publicly declared value. If an owner raised the price beyond this he would naturally be handed over to the rate collector or to the civil court. If there is still some doubting Thomas let him be presented with a working model from Australia and be for ever silenced.

This Paisley contest has shown once again that the cause of radical land reform lies deep in the affections of the people. Mr. Asquith has had a good press for his contention that a substantial sum to meet the needs of government can be obtained from land values. He is playing that game, and playing it, we are confident, to his own advantage at the polling day. But let him answer our questions. The Labour candidate is also playing the game and getting to know as the campaign proceeds the significance of the question, and the place it holds in the estimation of the public outside the hurdy-gurdy Fabian school of economics. He stands for Land Nationalization. Does he mean by purchase, and if so where does the Taxation of Land Values come in, as the instrument for "slackening the hold of the landlord"? He stands as a Co-operative candidate. In his scheme for nationalizing the land is he arguing that the patches of land owned by the Co-operative Society should be forthwith taken from their direction and control and handed over, with or without compensation, to an administrative department of the Government of the day? Whatever he means, has he the consent and approval of the Co-operators for this policy? In any case it is all to the good to have the Liberal and the Labour candidates competing for the support of those who make the Taxation of Land Values the first and foremost item of their political creed.

J. P.

HOUSING NOTES—continued from p. 331.

need change hands. The owners of the land can give their title deeds and draw from the ratepayers £6 or £7 per acre in interest on the selling price of land, in respect of which only a few shillings had been paid annually in rates.

Cost of Building Materials.

The remarkable increase which has taken place in the prices of the principal building materials in London, as compared with pre-war prices, is shown in a memorandum, issued on January 7th, to be presented to Parliament. We publish the table, omitting particulars of the prices as in December, 1918.

Material.	Class.	Unit.	July, 1914.	Nov., 1919.
Bricks	Fletton ..	1,000 ..	£ s. d. 1 14 0	£ s. d. 2 17 0
Do.	Stocks (best)	1,000 ..	1 16 6	4 1 6
Sand	Thames ..	Yd. (cube)	0 7 0	1 0 0
Ballast	Do. ..	Do. ..	0 5 9	0 16 6
Portland Cement	Best ..	Ton ..	1 17 0	3 13 6
Lime	Stone ..	Do. ..	0 14 0	2 15 0
Do.	Blue lias ..	Do. ..	1 0 0	2 16 0
States	20" x 10" best blue Portmadoc.	1,200 ..	11 13 0	27 10 0
Tiles (roofing) ..	Broseley ..	1,000 ..	2 10 0	6 7 6
Do.	Yorkshire (red).	1,000 ..	1 10 0	3 4 0
Tiles (hip and valley).	Broseley ..	Dozen ..	0 4 0	0 14 0
Timber	Carcassing ..	Standard ..	15 0 0	45 0 0
Do.	Yellow deal	Do. ..	22 0 0	55 0 0
Floor boarding	1" plain ..	Square of 100 ft.	0 15 0	2 2 0
Damp proof course.	Callender's bitumen.	Ft. (linl.) for 9" wall	0 0 1½	0 0 3½
Lead	Sheet ..	Ton ..	23 0 0	48 0 0
Do.	Pipe (in coils)	Do. ..	23 15 0	48 10 0
Glass	21 oz. fourths quality.	Ft. (super)	0 0 3	0 0 8½
Rainwater goods	2½" down pipe	Yd. (linl.)	0 0 11½	0 3 0½
Do.	5" gutter ..	Do. ..	0 0 9½	0 2 9
Baths	5 ft. taper ..	Each ..	3 3 0	8 0 0
Kitchen range	36"	Do. ..	1 16 0	7 2 0
Mantel registers	12" fire ..	Do. ..	0 9 3	1 4 6
Rim locks	6"	Do. ..	0 1 2	0 3 4½
3" butts	Pressed steel	Dozen prs.	0 1 3	0 3 3
Nails	Cut nails ..	Per ton ..	12 5 0	32 0 0
Drain pipes ..	Untested 9"	Yd. (linl.)	0 2 4½	0 6 11½
Closets	Pedestal with seat	Each ..	1 0 6	2 2 6
Sinks	30" x 18" x 5" (cane).	Do. ..	0 5 10	0 16 0
Stone	Portland ..	Ft. (cube)	0 2 4½	0 3 6½
Do.	York ..	Do. ..	0 2 10	0 7 0
White lead	—	Ton ..	29 15 0	75 0 0
Red Lead	—	Do. ..	28 10 0	50 0 0
Boiled linseed oil	—	Gallon ..	0 2 4	0 9 7
Raw linseed oil	—	Do. ..	0 2 4	0 9 9
Linseed oil putty	—	Cwt. ..	0 9 0	1 11 3
Knottling	—	Gallon ..	0 10 6	1 11 0
Turpentine	—	Do. ..	0 2 10	0 11 0
Varnish	Pale copal oak.	Do. ..	0 10 6	1 1 6
Plasterer's laths	Sawn single	Bundle	0 0 9½	0 3 9
Plaster	Second's (white).	Ton ..	1 4 0	2 10 0

Increasing House Famine.

The Ministry of Health, in its weekly circular of 31st January, states that "the total number of houses represented in all the plans now submitted is 95,820." Such is the progress of housing—on paper. On 1st January the number of houses in course of building under the schemes promoted by the Government was 4,485, whereas the number of working-class houses being built outside the auspices of the Government or its Housing Acts was about 5,000.

In 1918, when the great housing campaign was undertaken by the bureaucrats, the shortage of houses was said to be anything from 500,000 to 1,000,000. When it is considered that the normal annual requirements in the way of new houses is at least 50,000, it appears that the house famine is steadily becoming worse than ever