

# DONAHOE'S MAGAZINE

*A Monthly Journal,*

CONTAINING

TALES, BIOGRAPHY, EPISODES IN IRISH AND AMERICAN HISTORY, POETRY, MISCELLANY, ETC.

*A BOOK FOR THE PEOPLE.*

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VOL. XVIII.

JULY, 1887, TO JANUARY, 1888.

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BOSTON:

THOMAS B. NOONAN & COMPANY.

1888.

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Vol. XVIII.

BOSTON, JULY, 1887.

No. 1.

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"THE future of the Irish race in this country will depend largely upon their capability of assuming an independent attitude in American politics." — RIGHT REV. DOCTOR IRELAND, *St. Paul, Minn.*

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## Henry George, the Socialist.

MR. HENRY GEORGE has come out of the West with a theory which is to do away with poverty. He calls it "the land for the people." But that is a misnomer. It ought to be named "the land for nobody," because it takes away the land from the people and vests it in the community at large.

I. Mr. George's theory is that the land is the common property of mankind; that it ought therefore to be "nationalized," by having its title withdrawn from individuals and turned over to the state, which is to become landlord of all creation. When this has been done, the merchant can rent a town lot or the farmer a field, but no one can own a foot of earth. The government will then raise its revenues by taxing ground values. It will not tax improvements of any description; so that the money that is now raised by annual assessments on the millionaire's mansion, the corporation's palatial office, and the mechanic's cottage, will be collected from the land in the shape of ground rents. The state will then utilize the "unearned increment," or appreciation in the value of certain tracts owing to the foundation of cities and other settlements, to take care of those members of the community who are not able to provide for themselves.

There are three objections to Mr. George's theory right at the start. In the first place it is based on the principle that nothing can be property which is not "the product of human exertion;" if then an individual cannot own a lot, how can the nation or mankind own the whole earth? In the second place, if the land were "nationalized," how many nations would possess it? Let us say fifty. Then fifty individual states would own fifty individual parcels of the earth's surface. You have virtually private ownership of land, even if on a large scale; you

have conceded the principle of individual ownership, because each one of those fifty commonwealths excludes the others from its possessions. In the third place, as Rev. W. Hackner says, "if Mr. George admits a socialistic state, how large must that state be? How many inhabitants may it have? Perhaps fifty millions; why not ten? and if ten millions, why not one? and if one million, why not a hundred thousand? and if a hundred thousand, why not ten thousand, or one thousand, or a tribe? why not a hundred, or ten, or a family, the foundation of society? if a family, why not two persons? if two persons, why not one person, or an individual, who stands and acts independently — the social integer? Thus we come down to individual ownership and we are forced to it, because the 'state' is nothing but an *individuum morale*; and if a certain state owns, ownership, be it of land or anything else, is individualized, is property individual."

2. Mr. Henry George claims that the destruction of private property in land would abolish poverty. Well, either his claim is false or his theory will never be adopted, because we have God's own word for it that the poor we shall always have with us. While men have free will and passions, want will never be absent from the world; the idle, the vicious, the sick, the maimed, and the unskilled will always be at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence, and social inequalities will endure until the end of the world. As Bishop Herbert Vaughan says: "Poverty is a direct consequence of original sin. No political, social, or philanthropic course of action will ever destroy its presence in the world. . . . Poverty, indeed, serves more than one purpose in the economy of God's providence over the world. It exercises an important influence both in the natural and in the supernatural order. Were poverty banished out of the world the consequences to mankind would be deplorable. In the natural order the mere apprehension of poverty spurs men to lives of continual industry. Its approach, and, still more, its biting pains, stimulate the indolent to exertion and the selfish to victory over self. . . . While Christ respected the state of poverty in the economy of fallen nature, He declared the rich and the poor to be supplementary one of the other, even in the order of grace and salvation."

3. The foundation principle of Mr. Henry George's system of social economy is that private ownership of land is unjust. His own words are: "If private property in land be just, then is the remedy I propose a false one; if on the contrary private property in land be unjust, then is this remedy a true one."

This principle is: 1, contrary to Holy Writ; 2, opposed to the practice of the Catholic church; 3, in violation of the teachings of Catholic doctors and bishops; and 4, condemned by the Pope.

If Mr. George had confined his contention to arguments in favor of the common ownership of land as a more advantageous social policy than is individual ownership, the note of heresy or proximate to heresy would not have to be attached to his theory; but he builds on the principle that private property in land is *unjust*, he rests his condemnation of that system of ownership on a moral objection — that it is against justice. So doing, he puts the decision into the hands of the Church which has sole jurisdiction over faith and morals, and is at once the supreme court and chief justice, whose decisions are without appeal. And the Church, while it freely admits that a city, or a state, or a nation may own land, denies that private property in land is unjust.

Mr. George's basic principle is contrary to Holy Writ. He quotes Scripture in favor of it and brings these three texts to support it: "God hath given the earth to the sons of men;" "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;" and "You shall not sell the land for ever, for the land is mine, saith the Lord." But his interpretation of these texts is not the interpretation of them made by the Hebrews themselves nor by the Catholic Church. God has given the earth to the children of men, but He never ordered that they should own it in common. The earth is His and the fulness thereof, which includes the fruits of the soil, to which Mr. George holds that a man who produces them has a perfect right; the fulness includes also gold and silver, which Mr. George himself has no objection to owning, in spite of the fact that they are the Lord's, since they are a part of the earth's fulness. And when God declared to the Israelites that they should not sell the land forever, but only at most for fifty years, that was special and national legislation exclusively for the chosen people, framed to keep the tribes separate, in order that the priestly functions might be confined to the descendants of Levi and in order that the genealogy of the Messiah might be kept clear, because He was to come from the tribe of Juda. But even while that law was in force private ownership was recognized, because the tribes had their exclusive tracts of land, and the families composing them had their own share allotted to them, which they were to own forever, because God forbade them to sell it forever — they might part with its use for a time, but in the jubilee year it reverted to them. So that this text is a boomerang when used by Mr. George — it returns to hurt his principle. Besides, even while that law was in force, Cornelius a Lapide says that "when the Jews bought land outside of Judea, even from other Jews, they obtained such land forever, and were not bound to return it to the first heir in the jubilee year." But that regulation became inoperative after the captivity of Babylon, because as only the tribes of Juda and Benjamin, with a few members of the other tribes returned, its reason of existence ceased.

But the Book of Genesis records in chapter xxiii, verse 20, that Abraham bought a field, wherein was a double cave, as a burying-place for Sara, his wife, and himself.

The Book of Numbers, chapter xxvii, treats of the law of inheritance, and shows that by the Mosaic code a man's portion of the land passed after his demise, not to the community, even when he had no children nor paternal uncles, but always to the next of kin, no matter how remote.

The first Christians were Hebrews who knew the Old Testament and the meaning ascribed to it by their fathers better than does Mr. George. Yet they themselves owned land. Our Lord said nothing against private property in land, although that was the manner in which Palestine was owned when He walked the earth. The apostles received the price of the land sold by some of their first converts; now, if these had no right to sell, and could not give a just title to the parties whose money they took, the apostles would not have accepted the price. St. Peter, as is chronicled in chapter v of Acts, reproached Ananias for lying about the amount he had received for his land, saying: "Whilst it remained did it not remain to thee?" The land was yours, why didn't you keep it; but if you pretend that you have sold it for the benefit of the Church, and that you are going to cast in your fortune with those who have put everything in common, why do you lie about the amount in order to withhold a part of it?

So the Bible is against Mr. Henry George.

Mr. George's basic principle is opposed to the practice of the Catholic Church. From the earliest days the Church has accepted the principle of private property in land and has acted on it. Everywhere the Church, by purchase or gift, owns the ground on which it builds. If Mr. George is right, the Catholic Church is wrong.

So the practice of the Church is against Mr. Henry George.

Mr. George's principle violates the teaching of doctors and bishops of the Catholic Church. St. Thomas Aquinas declares: "Ownership of property follows from the nature of the thing itself." "He says," according to Bishop Chatard, "the ownership of property is a deduction of reason, and belongs to the positive natural law,—the *jus gentium*, or law of nations; and this law, quoting from the words of the Jurisconsult Caius, he says is 'what natural reason has constituted among all men.' He gives also practical motives for the judgment regarding the ownership of land: the greater interest a man takes in working for himself than for the community; the necessity of order in taking care of and using things; finally, peace among men requires it."

St. Augustine traces the legal title of individual property to God

Himself, inasmuch as the legal authority is instituted by God, and acts, therefore, in the name of God and according to His will.

Suarez says that "personal ownership is founded either in priority of occupation, or in various contracts, or in other causes approved by the civil law."

Archbishop Corrigan says :—

"Undoubtedly God made the earth for the use of all mankind; but whether the possession thereof was to be in common, or by individual ownership, was left for reason to determine. Such determination, judging from the facts of history, the sanction of law from the teaching of the wisest and the actions of the best and bravest of mankind, has been, and is, that man can, by lawful acts, become possessed of the right of ownership in property, and not merely in its use. The reason is because a man is strictly entitled to that of which he is the producing cause, to the improvement he brings about in it, and the enjoyment of both. But it is clear that in a farm, for instance, which one has, by patient toil, improved in value; in a block of marble out of which one has chiselled a perfect statue, he cannot fully enjoy the improvement he has caused unless he have also the right to own the subject thus improved. He has a right—and evil are the laws and systems which ignore it—either to ownership and enjoyment or to a full compensation for the improvement which is his. To strive to base an argument against ownership in land by reasoning on the universal distribution of air and light is only a freak of the imagination. Human industry cannot scatter a cloud from before the face of the sun, nor lift a fog that might be freighted with damaging vapors; we take the air and the light as God gives them, and we owe Him thanks for His bounty. It was only the earth which fell under the primeval curse when man had sinned, and only the earth, not the air or light, which man's industrious toil can coax back to something like its original fruitfulness. When he has done so his just reward is to enjoy the results without hindrance from others. Even in such a necessary, abundant, and free commodity as water, if a man, by artificial means, congeals a portion of it into ice, is he not entitled to enjoy its exclusive ownership? Can he not demand for it with justice a compensation equivalent to his industry? Once deny the right of ownership and you sow the seed of stagnation in human enterprise. Who would burrow the earth to draw forth its buried treasures, if the very mine he was working were at the mercy of the passer-by whom its riches might attract? Who would watch with eagerness the season when to sow and to reap and to gather the harvest which is the very fruit of his labors, if he is told that those who stand by the wayside idle are equally entitled to its enjoyment?"

Bishop Herbert Vaughan says : "The false principles current both as to poverty and wealth, the neglect of mercy and charity by the well-to-do, and the war waged by socialists against wealth, social inequality, and even against *the lawful rights of individuals to hold estates in land*, render opportune a consideration of property as a condition of life and of our duties to the poor."

Bishop Chatard says that "the cardinal principle of socialism is community of goods, the denial of the right to own property, and the assertion that land is common property."

Bishop Kilian C. Flasch says : "There appeared, lately, a new

theory in this country, though it is not new in the world, which denies the right of private ownership in land. It is the state or the community, they say, which should own all the land within its boundaries; others want all things equally divided among men. These think they have found the solution of the social problem which at present agitates the world. They think they can make all poverty disappear in the world. But these greatly deceive themselves."

Archbishop Lynch says: "Another serious question at the present time regards the ownership of land. . . . The land, therefore, is for the children of men, but once an individual gets possession of it by first allotment from the patriarch or head of the community or by purchase or inheritance, then the land is his and it would be robbery to take it from him without fair compensation."

So doctors and bishops of the Church are against Mr. Henry George.

Mr. George's first principle is condemned by the Pope. In his encyclical *Quod apostolici muneris* he denounces socialistic errors, saying, "they assail the right of property, which is sanctioned by the natural law; and by a stupendous crime, while they seem to provide for the wants and to satisfy the desires of men, they strive to seize and hold in common whatever has been acquired either by lawful inheritance, or by mental or manual labor, or by one's own economy. . . . For while socialists traduce the law of property as a human invention repugnant to the natural equality of men, and, desiring a community of goods, hold that poverty should not be endured with a contented mind, the Church much better and more usefully recognizes the inequality that exists among men, who differ by nature in strength of body and mind, as they do in worldly possessions, and *commands that the right of property and ownership, derived from nature itself, be held intact by all and inviolate.*"

So the Pope is against Mr. Henry George.

No Catholic, therefore, may accept the principle that private property in land is unjust, nor advocate any social system that is based on it.

4. When Mr. Henry George ascertained that his unsound doctrines would not be adopted by Catholics he attacked the Church, sneered at Pope Leo XIII., assailed the cardinals of the Propaganda, heaped insults on the archbishop of New York, urged Catholics to abandon their religion, and endeavored to stir up prejudice and bitterness towards the Church among the non-Catholics of America.

He attacked the Church. Over his own signature, in the coolness and publicity of print, he stated that the Catholic Church "has been used to bolster the power of tyrants and to keep the masses quiet under social injustice;" that through those "who control the ecclesiastical

machinery . . . the Church is the foe of human liberty—the sometimes stealthy, but always persistent enemy of real progress.”

He jeered at the Holy Father. He alluded to him as “the worthy gentleman who lives in the twelve-hundred-roomed palace called the Vatican.”

He assailed the cardinals of the Propaganda. They are, he said, “a set of Italian Bourbon politicians, bitterly opposed to everything savoring of freedom and progress;” and again “the Roman ecclesiastical authorities are politicians, and politicians of the most reactionary type;” and, once more, they are “a knot of reactionary Italians,” who are the agents of “ecclesiastical tyranny.”

He heaped insults on Archbishop Corrigan. He said that “Archbishop Corrigan is a representative of the ‘Castle Catholics’ of New York;” that “if Archbishop Corrigan and Cardinal Simeoni do truly represent the Catholic Church, then Catholicism *is* utterly inconsistent with free institutions, and in it we have in our midst a secret, irresponsible political machine, which may be used by domestic schemers or foreign enemies to undermine and destroy the republic,” and so on, through column after column of abuse.

He urged Catholics to abandon their religion. He declared that “if American Catholics have not more spirit than to submit to this, then is Catholicism indeed utterly inconsistent with free institutions;” that he is “confident that there is too much spirit in American Catholics to submit to such dictation;” that “it is clear that the organization of the Catholic Church in this country is not such as self-respecting Catholics ought to be contented with,” etc., etc.

He endeavored to inflame sectarian animosities against the Church, saying that its organization is not “suited to the genius of our institutions;” that it supports political “rings;” that “it is notorious that in New York the Catholic Church has for a long series of years been more or less allied with Tammany, and that this influence, for which a *quid pro quo* has been paid by grants of public property at nominal prices and lavish appropriations of public money, has been one of the many sources of the strength of the rings that in this city have degraded the name of democracy.”

These are Mr. Henry George’s own words, taken from his own signed articles in his own paper. They are only a few of the outrages and calumnies he has hurled against the Catholic Church and its bishops. Surely after reading them no self-respecting Catholic can consort with Mr. Henry George. Let him go his way in peace. His way is not open to Catholics. For them to enter upon it would be to dishonor their Church and to deny their religion.

L. W. REILLY.