

An Example of the Fatuity of Privileged Classes.

At this crucial time, when the landed interests of Great Britain are arrayed against the industrial interests, and a proposal to tax land values is exciting the landed interests to madness, they would do well to recall some of the warnings of Richard Cobden.

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In a speech in the House of Commons on the 14th of March, 1842, Mr. Cobden epitomized British fiscal history in words that every British citizen should learn by heart:

Honorable gentlemen claimed the privilege of taxing our bread on account of their peculiar burdens in paying the highway rates and the tithes. Why, the land had borne those burdens before corn laws had been thought of. The only peculiar state burden borne by the land was the land tax, and I will undertake to show that the mode of levying that tax is fraudulent and evasive, an example of legislative partiality and injustice second only to the corn law itself. . . . For a period of 150 years after the Conquest, the whole of the revenue of the country was derived from the land. During the next 150 years it yielded nineteen-twentieths of the revenue; for the next century down to the reign of Richard III. it was nine-tenths; during the next 70 years to the time of Mary it fell to about three-fourths; from this time to the end of the Commonwealth, land appeared to have yielded one-half the revenues; down to the reign of Anne it was one-fourth; in the reign of George III. it was one-sixth; for the first thirty years of his reign the land yielded one-seventh of the revenue; from 1793 to 1816 (during the period of the land tax), land contributed one-ninth; from which time to the present (1842) one twenty-fifth only of the revenue had been derived directly from land. Thus the land which anciently paid the whole of taxation, paid now only a fraction or one twenty-fifth, notwithstanding the immense increase that had taken place in the value of the rentals.

At the present time, to give keener point to Mr. Cobden's words of nearly seventy years ago, it should be said that the land tax of 1692, to which he alluded, yields, not 1-25th of the total revenue—as in his day,—but 1-186th.

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It was to that history of the great land-grafters of England, that Mr. Cobden referred, when at a later day he distinctly warned the landed interests of what seems to be coming to them now, and coming fast:

I warn ministers, and I warn landlords and the aristocracy of this country, against forcing on the attention of the middle and industrial classes, the subject of taxation. For . . . mighty as I consider the fraud and injustice of the corn laws, I verily believe, if you were to bring forward the history of taxation in this country for the last 150

years, you will find as black a record against the landowners as even in the corn law itself. I warn them against ripping up the subject of taxation. If they want another League at the death of this one—if they want another organization and a motive—then let them force the middle and industrial classes to understand how they have been cheated, robbed, and bamboozled.

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To Abolish Custom Houses.

John Bigelow's suggestion to Governor Hughes serves to further emphasize the fatuity of privileged classes. Mr. Bigelow endeavors to enlist the interest of Governor Hughes, and through him of the public generally, in a plan for improving existing conditions without disturbing vested interests. It is in line with the historic efforts of a certain class of anti-slaveryites to arrange for buying out the slave-owners. Their well meant efforts met with slaveholding opposition, because the slaveholders wanted the power that slavery gave them more than they wanted a price for giving up the power. So was it when Cobden admonished the British landlords that they would be wise to submit to land value taxation. It met with aristocratic sneers, because the landlords wanted the power, which would be questioned and weakened by their yielding to a tax upon their privilege. Mr. Bigelow's proposal of a substitute for tariffs will likewise be disregarded, because the beneficiaries of tariff taxation stand by the system, not to sell out their individual privileges at a price, thereby ending the system, but for the advantages which the system itself affords them. As a monarch's throne is never for sale, but must be pulled from under him before he will consent to the abolition of thrones, so with all other special privileges from greatest to least.

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Mr. Bigelow's plan contemplates the total abolition of custom houses, and "the opening of every port and harbor of the United States freely to the commerce of every nation of the world without any tax or tariff." And he would accomplish this without confiscating any vested rights. That is to say, in order to provide for public revenues he would make the people stockholders or silent partners in every profitable enterprise hereafter authorized by the State or nation—their share to be so regulated and appropriated as not to interfere with the enterprise in its day of small things. Tested by fundamental principles the plan is crude. But crudity is an ineffective objection to plans for abolishing privilege. A plundered people are too impatient to consider the elementary accuracy of proposed readjustments. They would rather "do