

TOLSTOY ON HENRY GEORGE'S TEACHING.

Letter to the Single Tax Leagues of Australia, and to the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values.

The following letter which Count Tolstoy has addressed to the Federation of Single Tax Leagues in Australia, and to the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values, in reply to an address of respect and good wishes presented to him on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, has been communicated to Reuter:—

Dear Friends,—Your address has deeply touched me. To my regret I have done too little for the cause so dear to you and me which unites us. Of late I have been thinking more and more about it; and should I yet be afforded power for work I will endeavour to express the teaching of Henry George, who has as yet been far from appreciated according to his merits, as clearly, as briefly, and as accessibly to the great mass of land workers as possible.

The injustice and evil of property in land have long ago been recognised. More than a hundred years ago the great French thinker, Jean Jacques Rousseau, wrote:

"The one who first fenced in a plot of land and took upon himself to say, 'This land is mine,' and found people so simple-minded as to believe him, that man was the first founder of the social organisation which now exists. From how many crimes, wars, murders, calamities, cruelties would mankind have been delivered had some man then uprooted the fences and filled up the ditches, saying, 'Beware! do not believe this deceiver. You will perish if you forget that the land cannot belong to anyone, and that its fruits belong to all.'"

The injustice of the seizure of the land as property has long ago been recognised by thinking people, but only since the teaching of Henry George has it become clear by what means this injustice can be abolished. In our time the realisation of this teaching has become specially necessary not only in Russia—where the land problem is, unfortunately, being solved in a way most contrary to justice, to the people's consciousness, and to reason—but also in all so-called civilised States. This problem—that is, the abolition of property in land—at the present time everywhere demands its solution as insistingly as half a century ago the problem of slavery demanded its solution in Russia and America.

This problem insistingly demands its solution because the supposed right of landed property now lies at the foundation not only of economic misery, but also of political disorder, and above all of the moral depravation of the people. The wealthy, ruling classes, foreseeing the loss of the advantages of their position inevitable with the solution of the problem, are endeavouring by various false interpretations, justifications, and palliatives, with all their power to postpone as long as possible its solution.

But the time comes for everything; and, as fifty years ago the time came for the abolition of man's supposed right of property over man, so the time has now come for the abolition of the supposed right of property in land which affords the possibility of appropriating other people's labour. The time for this has come, and is now so near at hand that nothing can arrest the abolition of this dreadful means of oppressing the people. Yet some effort, and this great emancipation of the nations shall be accomplished.

I therefore particularly sympathise with your cause, with the efforts you are exerting, and will be very glad if I shall be able to add my small efforts to yours.

LEO TOLSTOY.

"Yasnaya Polyana," 2-15 Sept.

The letter from the Scottish League was in the following terms:—

Honoured Sir and Master,—We, the followers of Henry George in Scotland, united together in the Scottish League

for the Taxation of Land Values, take the opportunity on the occasion of your 80th birthday of expressing our profound thankfulness to you for your many services to the world, the cause of the oppressed, and especially to our cause, which is the hope of the oppressed. We remember gratefully that when there was a conspiracy of silence against Henry George, your voice rang clear over Europe and the world in favour of the man and the cause. In "Resurrection" and in "The Great Iniquity" we have noble additions to our literature. We admire in you the genius; the author of "Anna Karenina" and "War and Peace"; but we are glad to think that you were not content to work and toil merely as a man of letters for the applause of the well-to-do; we appreciate specially the heart and mind which enabled you to plunge into the depths of the social problem, and to speak for the great cause of the equal right to the use of the earth. That you may still add many years to the long life spent in the service of uplifting men, is the sincere wish of your Scottish admirers and, indeed, of your admirers everywhere.

JAMES FAIRLIE, *President*,
JAMES BUSBY, *Secretary*,
DAVID CASSELS, *Treasurer*.

SYNOPSIS OF ADDRESS BY ALEX. MACKENDRICK TO THE SCOTTISH LEAGUE FOR TAXATION OF LAND VALUES, AT THE HENRY GEORGE COMMEMORATION MEETING, GLASGOW, September 2nd, 1908.

The lecturer opened with a short review of the speculative outlook prior to the publication of "Progress and Poverty." For some generations previous to the early eighties, the social outlook for thoughtful lovers of the human race had been of the most gloomy description. The science of Political Economy had richly earned for itself the name by which Carlyle had christened it, that of "the dismal science," for it had utterly failed to provide any light for governors and legislators that was better than darkness. Under its guidance or no guidance there had arisen that strangest of spectacles, an unprecedented increase in the wealth of the country, accompanied by Manchester insurrections, Chartist rebellions, and widespread pauperism, all of which the logic of the economists seemed to justify as inevitable.

The melancholy conclusions reached ought to, and probably would, have discredited the orthodox economy, had not the teaching of Malthus lent it support by laying the woes of humanity upon the broad back of natural causes which could not be evaded. The conclusion was thus forced upon the minds of our grandparents that poverty and unemployment were natural and inevitable things, and that there was no wisdom in grumbling at them.

In addition to this we had been for a long time living under the shadow of Calvinism, that depressing doctrine which taught us the total depravity of human nature. And just when beginning to throw off the tyranny of this depressing creed we came under the influence of Carlyle, who informed us that the British Empire contained so many million people, "mostly fools." We were thus placed in the awful predicament, that not only were we rogues and fools by nature, bound by natural law to suffer all the consequences of our roguery and folly, but in addition we found ourselves caught in a patent rat-trap from which there was no escape and which condemned about half of our number to perpetual grinding poverty.

The revolt from those gloomy theories produced some curious reactionary effects. On the purely intellectual side there arose the rationalistic materialism of the middle of last century, with its mechanical theory of the universe, a theory which professed to explain all life and phenomena