

## MR. WILLCOX ELABORATES HIS VIEWS

## EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM:

The following are reflections stirred by a reading of Miss Caroline G. Nations' article, "The Common Wealth," in your last issue.

Nature, the land, does nothing for man. Its forces act and its processes operate wholly independent of man, or of consideration for him. With knowledge of these forces and processes, all man can do

is to labor if he is to benefit from them, if he is to manipulate these forces and processes in his own interest. When these forces have acted and these processes have reached a certain stage, the consequences of which are suitable to man's needs and uses, then man must labor to obtain any benefit from them.

If, due to lack of knowledge, he labors too soon in connection with them, or if he delays his labor until these processes have gone too far, his labor will not yield its full possible return to him. In the latter case, if too long deferred, his labor will go for naught; and the forces and processes of nature will return nature's materials, whatever the form these may have assumed, again to their elements. Also, if man has insufficient, or inefficient, tools with which to manipulate these forces and processes of nature, or their results, his labor will be increased to his detriment, yielding less for the same exertion. Labor, not land, yields everything with which man can become possessed; without labor, man can have nothing.

The tools man uses to increase the yield of his labor (to "save" him labor) are also the product of man's labor in connection with these same forces and processes; without labor directed by his knowledge and skill these tools would not exist. Thus appears the advantage to man of knowledge of these forces and processes and the skill to manipulate them—the sufficient reason for man's seeking enlightenment, his true education.

Since man's situation and condition is wholly dependent upon his labor, and without labor nature yields man nothing, problems connected with his situation and condition are labor problems; problems which are to be solved only by, and in proportion to, his recognition that it is his labor, modified by the use he makes of his knowledge and skill, which yields him anything. It is therefore desirable, by study and insight, that man discover the laws of nature which determine his instinctive reaction to labor and, as a corollary, to the products of labor.

There is an axiom with respect to human nature that man always takes the easiest road, within his knowledge and skill, to the satisfaction of his desires. In many cases, perhaps most, he does not know that road, but so far as he can discern it he will take it. Hence, for any labor he expends directly in his own interest, he will accept whatever results his labor yields as his compensation. For any labor expended in the interest of others, at their instigation, he will expect and demand compensation for his share of labor in producing the results desired. He will not assent to another's receiving "pay," as is said, for his efforts; for another's receiving pay for the labor which he himself has expended for services or instruments of production which his labor have provided.

This is so fundamental a reaction of man with respect to his labor that recognition of it is universally accepted as the only honest and legitimate basis of all business transactions involving an exchange of labor or the products of labor, wherever the factors in these transactions are clearly defined and recognized. So instinctive is this reaction in man that the child perceives its justice. Whoever, and to whatever extent, a man expends his labor in the interest of another, the latter, by the same token, expects and is in duty bound to pay for this labor, and to pay him who expended it, not another.

There remains only to note the few categories of human relationships in which the obligation to make compensation exists. These relationships comprise those between man and man; and between the individual and any group (such as partnerships or corporations) serving him in any capacity. Among these groups are those social organizations known as cities, counties, states, the nation, etc. For the convenience and use of all services provided and made available by any division of government of which the individual avails himself—for the labor involved in providing or performing these

services—each individual is obligated to compensate that government, as he would any other creditor, which by its services makes the road to the satisfaction of his personal desires easier.

It is the worth to him of these aids to his progress along that road for which he willingly pays Rent; not for the existence of the forces and processes of nature, the land, which has no value to man, though it comprises all natural utilities essential to man's labor. The idea that the difference in Rent between one place and another is due to the relative productivity of the land arises from the failure to note that, in seeking the easiest road to the satisfaction of his desires, not only, but naturally, will man seek the best land to be found for his special purpose; but that in order to make such land useful to him in the highest possible degree, he will *there* provide and make available helpful services of all sorts. If wise, he will not expend labor to provide services out of proportion to the productivity of his labor at places where the forces and processes of nature, the natural utilities of the land, are poorly adapted to his uses. Hence, it is not the relative, natural utility of the land for which Rent is paid, but for the services provided and made available for utilizing the forces and processes of nature at that place; and the Rent will be in proportion to the worth of the labor expended in producing these services, or saved by their use.

It is for these services provided at the cost of labor for which Rent is paid. No man owes, nor rightfully can exact payment of another (and in fact, he never does) for the use of the *land*. That he thinks he pays Rent for the use of the land is a result of that "mind-set" of long standing referred to, which, unfortunately, has blocked progress toward the goal of Henry George, the public collection of the Rent as a governmental revenue policy.

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