

THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

By PATRICK EDWARD DOVE

The following is taken from Patrick Edward Dove's book *The Theory of Human Progression* (1850). The life sketch of him in the *Dictionary of National Biography* says of it: "The main principle is that all progress is conditioned by the development of true knowledge; it maintains the doctrines of liberty and equality and argues that rent ought to belong to the nation. It thus anticipates Mr. George who praised it at a public meeting at Glasgow (*British Daily Mail*, 19th December 1884).

Patrick Edward Dove was born at Lasswade, near Edinburgh, in 1815. As a young man he travelled widely, and lived for a time in Paris and London. About 1840 he came into the family property in Ayrshire, and lived there until 1848, when an unfortunate investment deprived him of most of his fortune. Shortly after this he married and went to live at Darmstadt, in Germany, where he studied, wrote, and lectured. In 1850, the same year in which Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* appeared, enunciating similar conclusions, Dove published his *Theory of Human Progression and Natural Probability of a Reign of Justice*. It was the first part of a work entitled *The Science of Politics*, of which the second part, *The Elements of Political Science*, appeared in 1854. The first part was acclaimed by Thomas Carlyle, Sir William Hamilton, Professor Blackie, and Senator Charles Sumner who circulated many copies in the United States, but it never secured general public attention. A second edition, edited by Mr. Alexander Harvey, was published in New York in 1895, and subsequently an excellent abridgment by Miss Julia Kellogg was published by Isaac H. Blanchard & Co., New York and reprinted by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York. The second part had even less attention, and is now exceedingly scarce. After publishing his book Dove lived for a time in Edinburgh, and later in Glasgow. He wrote extensively on economic, religious and philosophic subjects, and interested himself in military science. In 1860 he was stricken with paralysis and went to Natal in a vain search for health. Returning to Scotland, he died in 1873 and was buried in the Grange Cemetery in Edinburgh. . . .

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PATRICK EDWARD DOVE'S HISTORIC STATEMENT

THE QUESTION is upon what terms, or according to what system, must the earth be possessed by the successive generations that succeed each other on the surface of the globe? The conditions given are—*First*, That the earth is the common property of the race; *Second*, That whatever an individual produces by his own labor (whether it be a new object, made out of many materials, or a new value given by labor to an object whose form, locality, etc., may be changed) is the private property of that individual, and he may dispose of it as he pleases, provided he does not interfere with his fellows; *Third*, The earth is the *perpetual* common property of the race, and each succeeding generation has a full title to a free earth. One generation cannot encumber a succeeding generation.

And the condition required is, such a system as shall secure to the successive individuals of the race their share of the common property, and the opportunity without interference of making as much private property as their skill, industry, and enterprise would enable them to make.

The scheme that appears to present itself most naturally is the general division of the soil, portioning it out to the inhabitants according to their number. Such appears to be the only system that suggests itself to most minds, if we may judge from the objections brought forward against an equalization of property. . . .

Men must go forward, never backward. To speak of a division of lands in England is absurd. Such a division would be as useless as it is improbable. But it is more than useless—it is unjust; and unjust, not to the present so-called proprietors, but to the human beings who are continually being born into the world, and who have exactly the same natural right to a portion that their predecessors have.

The actual division of the soil need never be anticipated, nor would such a division be just, if the divided portions were made the property (legally, for they could never be so morally) of individuals.

If, then, successive generations of men cannot have their fractional share of the actual soil (including mines, etc.), how can the division of the advantages of the natural earth be effected?

By the division of its annual value or rent; that is, by making the rent of the soil the common property of the nation. That is (as the taxation is the common property of the State), by taking the whole of the taxes out of the rents of the soil, and thereby abolishing all other kinds of taxation whatever. And thus all industry would be absolutely emancipated from every burden, and every man would reap such natural reward as his skill, industry, or enterprise rendered legitimately his, according to the natural law of free competition.¹ This we maintain to be the only theory that will satisfy the requirements of the problem of natural property. And the question now is: how can the division of the rent be effected? An actual division of the rent—that is, the payment of so much money to each individual—would be attended with, perhaps insuperable inconveniences; neither is such an actual division requisite, every requirement being capable of fulfillment without it.

We now apply this solution to England. England forms a State; that is, a community acting through public servants for the administration of justice, etc. In the actual condition of England, many things are at present unjust; and the right of the Government to tax and make laws for those who are excluded from representation is at all events questionable. However, we shall make a few remarks on England as she is, and on England as she ought to be; that is, as she would be were the rules of equity reduced to practical operation.

¹ We have no hesitation whatever in predicting that all civilized communities must ultimately abolish all revenue restrictions on industry, and draw the whole taxation from the rents of the soil. And this because the rents of the soil are the common produce of the whole labor of a community.

1st. The State has alienated the lands to private individuals called proprietors, and the vast majority of Englishmen are born to their labor, minus their share of the taxation.

2nd. This taxation of labor has introduced vast systems of restriction on trades and industry. Instead of a perfectly free trade with all the world, England has adopted a revenue system that most materially diminishes both the amount of trade and its profit. And, instead of a perfectly free internal industry, England has adopted an excise that is as vexatious in its operation as can well be conceived. Both the customs and excise laws, and every other tax on industry, have arisen from the alienation of the soil from the state; and had the soil not been alienated, no tax whatever would have been requisite; and were the soil resumed (as it undoubtedly ought to be), every tax of every kind and character, save the common rent of the soil, might at once be abolished, with the whole army of collectors, revenue-officers, cruisers, coast-guards, excisemen, etc., etc.

3rd. Taxation can only be on land or labor. (By land we mean the natural earth, not merely the agricultural soil.) These are the two radical elements that can be subjected to taxation, capital being originally derived from one or the other. Capital is only hoarded labor or hoarded rent; and as all capital must be derived from the one source or the other, all taxation of capital is only taxation of land or of labor. Consequently all taxation of whatever kind is; first, taxation of labor—that is, a deduction from the natural remuneration which God intended the laborer to derive from his exertions; or second, taxation of land—that is, the appropriation of the current value of the natural earth to the expenses of the State.

Now, labor is essentially private property, and land is not essentially private property, but, on the contrary, is the common inheritance of every generation of mankind. Where the land is taxed no man is taxed, nor does the taxation of land interfere in any way whatever with the progress of human industry. On the contrary, the taxation of land, rightly directed, might be made to advance the condition of the country to a high degree of prosperity.

4th. For the expenses of a State there must be a revenue, and this revenue must be derived from the taxation of labor,

or from the rent of the lands. There is no other alternative; either the rents of the soil must be devoted to the common expenses of the State, or the labor of individuals must be interfered with; and restrictions, supervisions, prohibitions, etc., must be called into existence, to facilitate the collection of the revenue. . . .

The political history of landed property in England appears to have been as follows:—

1st. The lands were accorded by the king to persons who were to undertake the military service of the kingdom.

2nd. The performance of this military service was the condition on which individuals held the national land.

3rd. The lands were at first held for life, and afterwards were made hereditary.

4th. The military service was abolished by the law, and a standing army introduced.

5th. This standing army was paid by the king.

6th. The king, having abolished the military services of the individuals who held the national land, resorted to the taxation of articles of consumption for the payment of the army.

The lands of England, therefore, instead of being held on condition of performing the military service of the kingdom, became the property of the individuals who held them, and thus the State of England lost the lands of England. And the military service of the kingdom, instead of being performed by those individuals who held the national land, was henceforth (after the reign of Charles II) to be paid for by the general taxation of the inhabitants of the country.

Therefore the present system of taxation, and the national debt, the interest of which is procured by the forcible taxation of the general inhabitants of England, are both due to the alienation of the lands from the State, inasmuch as the national debt (incurred for war expenses) would have been a debt upon the lands, and not a debt upon the people of England. If, therefore, the legislature had a right to abolish the military services of those who held the national land, and thereby to impose on the general community all the lia-

bilities of the military service of the kingdom, the legislature has the same right to abolish the general taxation of the community, and to allocate to those who hold the land all the expenses that have been incurred, and that are still incurred, for the war charges of the kingdom.

The alienation of the land from the State, and its conversion into private property, was the first grand step that laid the foundation of the modern system of society in England—a system that presents enormous wealth in the hands of a few aristocrats, who neither labor nor even pay taxes in proportion to those who do labor; and a vast population laboring for a bare subsistence, or reduced sometimes by millions to the condition of pauperism.

So long as this system is allowed to continue it appears (from the constitution of the earth, and of man's power to extract from it a maintenance) an absolute impossibility that pauperism should be obliterated; inasmuch as the burden of taxation necessarily falls on labor, and more especially as the value of labor is necessarily diminished wherever there is a soil allocated to an aristocracy.¹ . . .

The abolition of the military tenures, however, did not complete the great evolution by which the lands of England have been transformed into the property of a few thousand aristocrats. That evolution consisted of three great facts.

1st. The allocation of the church lands to individual proprietors.

2nd. The abolition of military tenure, and the substitution of the taxation of articles of consumption, in other words, of the taxation of labor.

¹ Political economists have insisted much on the *small* matters that affect the value of labor. By far the most important is the mode in which the soil is distributed. Wherever there is a free soil labor maintains its value. Wherever the soil is in the hands of a few proprietors . . . labor necessarily undergoes depreciation. In fact, it is the disposition of the land that determines the value of labor. If men could get the land to labor on they would manufacture only for a remuneration that afforded more profit than God has attached to the cultivation of the earth. Where they cannot get the land to labor on they are starved into working for a bare subsistence. There is only one reason why the labor of England, Ireland and Scotland is of so little marketable value, and that reason is the present disposition of the soil. Were the soil disposed of according to the laws of equity there cannot be the least doubt that the labor of the laboring classes would at once rise to at least double its present value.

3rd. The enclosure of the common lands, whereby vast numbers of the peasantry were ruined, deprived of their legal rights, which were quite as valid as the entails of the aristocracy, and, being separated from the land, were sent to propagate pauperism in the towns and villages. . . . And though the manufactures of England, taking an expansion altogether unprecedented in the history of the world, were able to consume the redundant population, the time must come when the rate of increase will diminish, when the population shall find no maintenance either in the towns or in the country, and social changes attended with a more equitable distribution of the sources of wealth will result in spite of all that men can do to prevent them. . . .

No truth appears to be more satisfactorily and more generally borne out by the history of modern Europe than that the progression of men in the matter of liberty "is from a diversity of privileges towards an equality of rights"; that is, that the past progress has been all in this direction since the maximum of diversity prevailed in the aspect of individual lord and individual serf. And if this be the case, it cannot be an unreasonable conclusion that if sufficient time be allowed for the evolution, the progress of change will continue to go on till some ultimate condition is evolved. And that ultimate condition can only be at the point where diversity of privilege disappears and every individual in the State is legally entitled to identically the same political functions. Diversities of office there may be, and there must be, but diversity of rights there cannot be without injustice.

Such, then, is the theoretic ultimatum that satisfies the reason with regard to its equity, and such is the historic ultimatum that the reason infers from the past history of mankind. Such, then, is the point towards which societies are progressing; and when that point is reached the ultimatum of equity is achieved and the present course of historical evolution is complete.