

## Chapter VI— More Letters

WITH this Mr. Spencer endeavoured to withdraw, and no wonder. But letters from Mr. Greenwood, Professor Huxley, and a number of new participants, including Auberon Herbert for the defence, continued to appear in *The Times* for some time longer, and Messrs. Greenwood and Huxley succeeded in dragging from him another brief confession.

Professor Huxley made him give up his illustration from physiological principles, and Mr. Greenwood, pressing him as to whether, as averred by Mr. Laidler, he had ever said that to right one wrong it takes another, first made him declare that he did not remember to have said it, and then, pressing him still further, made him declare he had not said it and to repudiate it if he had.

Although this is a mere side-issue, perhaps it may be worthwhile, even at this late date, to vindicate Mr. Laidler and refresh Mr. Spencer's memory. In *Social Statics*, Chapter XXI, 'The Duty of the State,' Section 8, may be found the doctrine which Mr. Laidler referred to, when, in citing Mr. Spencer against Mr. Morley's objection to land nationalization, he said, as reported by *The Times*—

Mr. Spencer has said that the land had been taken by force and fraud. That gentleman had also said that to right one wrong it takes another.

This in effect, if not in exact words, Mr. Spencer certainly does say in Chapter XXI, Section 8, in combating the doctrine of non-resistance. He declares all coercion immoral in itself, but (using the same terms in the same sense as Mr. Laidler) justifies government when "it uses wrong to put down wrong." He adds:

The principle of non-resistance is not ethically true, but only that of non-aggression.... We may not carelessly abandon our rights. We may not give away our birthright for the sake of peace. ... We may not be passive under aggression. In due maintenance of our claim is involved the practicability of all our duties. ... If we allow ourselves to be deprived of that without which we cannot fulfil the Divine will, we virtually negative that will.

I thus take the trouble to refresh Mr. Spencer's memory and vindicate Mr. Laidler, for, although the latter gentleman was allowed one letter in *The Times*, it was afterwards that the question was raised

by Mr. Greenwood, and I do not suppose that Mr. Laidler got another chance, *The Times* speaking of him contemptuously, as a Mr. Laidler, and printing his letter in smaller type, although it was he who first brought out Mr. Spencer, and provoked the whole discussion.

Mr. Laidler's letter, of which neither party to the controversy seemed to care to take notice, was published by *The Times* on the same day as Mr. Spencer's second letter. He said—

*To the Editor of The Times.*

SIR: As one of the deputation of members of the Newcastle Labor Electoral Organization who recently waited upon Mr. John Morley, M.P., to ascertain his opinion on certain political and social topics, I was entrusted by my fellow-members of the deputation with the question of the nationalization of the land, and this subject I discussed with Mr. Morley. In doing so, I sought to back up my position by quoting the ninth chapter of *Social Statics*, by Mr. Herbert Spencer, and I certainly thought I had a good case when I found on my side the most distinguished authority of our time. To my great surprise, I now find that in the letters which he has addressed to you, Mr. Herbert Spencer appears to be very anxious to repudiate the doctrines which he preached so eloquently in 1850. Now, although it is a common thing for the politician of to-day to repudiate principles and deductions which he formerly warmly espoused and to adopt others which he once energetically condemned, one does not expect the same vacillation on the part of a distinguished philosopher like Mr. Herbert Spencer. I find it difficult to understand his position, which seems to be this—that while adhering to his general principles he abandons certain deductions therefrom. Now, to my mind, the ninth chapter of *Social Statics*, which deals with 'The Right to the Use of the Earth,' seems as true, as logical, and as unanswerable an argument in favour of the nationalization of the land as it doubtless appeared to Mr. Herbert Spencer on the day it was written. Let us trace the course of his argument through the ten sections of which the chapter is composed.

Giving a short abstract of these ten sections of Chapter IX Mr. Laidler continued—

In the foregoing digest, beyond one or two connecting words, the language is that of Mr. Herbert Spencer himself. Does it not constitute an unanswerable argument in favour of the nationalization of the land? If the author would permit it to be reprinted, what an admirable tract the ninth chapter of *Social Statics* would be for the propagation of socialistic<sup>11</sup> principles! But

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. Laidler uses the term "socialistic" in the vague way in which it is so commonly used in England, and doubtless means land nationalization principles.

he now seems to repudiate the offspring of his own genius! We have, however, a right to ask that, instead of a vague repudiation in general terms, Mr. Herbert Spencer should tell us specifically what deductions he has abandoned and why he has abandoned them. We might then endeavour to answer his answers to his own propositions. Yours,

JOHN LAIDLER, Bricklayer.

How far Mr. Spencer has tried to answer his own propositions, we shall see in *Justice*.