

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

CHAS. S. PRIZER, a subscriber and well-known Single Taxer of this city gifted with some imagination, writes us as follows: "Your quotation from alleged remarks of Abraham Lincoln on the land question is the most sensational news of the year. I wish to believe that the quotation is authentic but I respectfully ask you to produce proof of its authenticity. Hundreds of biographers have for many years prosecuted an unremitting and most intensive search for data on Lincoln. How is it that a recorded declaration more important, more fundamental than any other ever made by Lincoln on any economic question has remained so long undiscovered and unknown?"

TO refresh our readers' minds with the memorable words of Abraham Lincoln cited in March-April LAND AND FREEDOM we again quote them:

"The land, the earth God gave to man for his home, sustenance and support, should never be the possession of any man, corporation, or unfriendly government, any more than air or water, if as much."

THEN followed our comment:

Lincoln saw the land question. He would have dealt with it in the big way. To him there was no such thing as property in land any more than in air or water.

He had no doubt of the principle he laid down. Of the method to be pursued he was not so certain. He said: "A reform like this will be worked out some time in the future." He knew the movement would meet with opposition and he knew the kind of opposition it would meet. Very forcibly he says:

"The idle talk of idle men that is so common now, will find its way against it, with whatever force it may possess, and strongly promoted and carried on as it can be by land monopolists, grasping landlords, and the titled and untitled senseless enemies of mankind everywhere." Thus spoke the Prophet-President!

FOR our authority for these statements of Lincoln we are indebted to a work in two volumes by Robert H. Browne, M. D., "Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time." For the discovery of this remarkable revelation we are indebted to W. D. Lamb, of Chicago. The work is little known though it is in the Jersey City library of which the brother of the editor of LAND AND FREEDOM, Edmund W. Miller, is librarian.

DR. ROBERT H. BROWNE was born in New York, was an abolitionist associated with Lovejoy and read law with Davis, Lincoln and Gridley at Bloomington, Ill. He was an assistant surgeon in the war of 1861 to its close, and after the war practiced medicine in Kirksville, Mo. He was a member of the Missouri State Senate 1870 to 1874. We do not find a record of the date of his death.

LINCOLN was early employed in Danville and Springfield in helping the settlers in their struggles against the extortions and stealings of the land sharks. His name was a terror to the infamous crew who as soon as a settler filed his claim filed counter claims and compelled the bona fide settlers to yield up a fee to retain their land and thus save litigation. "I respect," said Lincoln, "the man who properly named these villains land sharks. They are like the wretched ghouls who follow a ship and fatten on its offal."

THROUGH this early experience Lincoln was learning the land question. It is to be remarked, too, that he had more than a merely dim perception of the evils of land speculation. Because one cannot be a voluntary beneficiary of an evil institution and maintain the same attitude toward it, he shrank, with a moral instinct that was a part of the genius of the man, from direct participation in it. Offered the opportunity by his friend Gridley, eager to help him, of the purchase of a quarter section of land, which his friend assured him would double in value in a year, Lincoln said:

"I am thankful to you and appreciate what you do for me in so many unselfish ways that no one knows save myself. Nevertheless, I must decline this kind offer of yours, which would no doubt profit me and harm no one directly as I view it. I have no maledictions or criticisms of those who buy, sell and speculate in land, but I do not believe in it, and I feel for myself that I should not do it. If I made the investment it would constantly turn my attention to that kind of business, and so disqualify me from what seems my calling and success in it, and interfere with the public or half-public service, which I neither seek nor avoid."

LINCOLN saw the oppression to which the masses of men were everywhere subjected. That keen brain and tender heart were alive to the sufferings of mankind due to economic injustice. That he would have led

the movement for the restoration of the rights of men to the earth they inhabit, and that he would have brushed aside the subtleties of those who oppose it and gone straight to the heart of the problem, is clear from what he had to say, and from what we know of the statesmanlike courage and the peculiar directness of that keen and penetrating intellect. But the question of chattel slavery lay like a stone in the way. That removed, the monster of land monopoly was to be overthrown. And that there may be no doubt of the keenness of his apprehension of the nature of that struggle, the following words in connection with what we have already quoted furnish conclusive proof:

"On other questions there is ample room for reform when the time comes; but now it would be folly to think we could undertake more than we have on hand. But when slavery is over and settled, men should never rest content while oppression, wrongs and iniquities are in force against them."

IT is pleasant to know that the spirit and mind of Lincoln are of us and with us. He was a man who dealt with elemental things. He saw the land question, saw it clearly; he saw the miseries that come from treating land as unrestrained private property; he would have dealt summarily with the evil institution, and in this he expected to have the opposition of the senseless enemies of mankind everywhere.

IT would be a task ungracious to the memory of Lincoln to point out any shortcomings in his statements on the land question. He was not an economist. Undoubtedly, when he used the word "possession" he used it in the sense of "ownership." His practical mind would readily have seen that any system of land tenure designed to secure the right of man to the land, which he declared was as much a right as that to "air and water," must include at the same time the right of private possession—security of occupancy. This requirement the Single Tax, or the taking of the economic rent for public purposes, insures.

SIXTY-SIX governments are now devoted to economic nationalism—most all, including our own, to experiments within themselves that take no note of the international dependence of these units one upon another. The old doctrine to secure any kind of cooperation between nations is now thrust into the discard. Adam Smith and the old political economy are out-dated. Cobden and John Bright are forgotten. Cordele Hull is the only hopeful note in the administration's mixed chorus worth listening to, and his is a voice crying in the wilderness. All else is chaos.

OUT of the weltering mass of incoherent doctrine in which the common man is the helpless victim of governmental experiment, war looms as a very imminent

probability. National and racial hatreds burn afresh, and are fed by the blundering ignorance of political leaders seeking temporary advantage. The discontented masses who have no rights in the land they inhabit, who are interlopers and intruders on the earth, afford plastic material for the cruel machinations of designing demagogues, of whom all governments seem more or less composed. The landless man may live only by sufferance of the earth-owner. He is the helpless victim of every rascally government that seeks to exploit him.

LET us not disguise it. They who own the earth own the men upon it. The man without land is a helpless slave to whoever cracks the whip. No silly laws of regulation, no benevolent intentions though accompanied by kindly smiles and soothing words, are of any use. There is no freedom where men are not free to use the earth. All else is mockery.

AND the way to perfect freedom is to take the economic rent of land and abolish all taxes. How often must this be said? Nature has provided a way. Cavil as we may about natural law, it is a significant manifestation of such law when, as the needs of government arise, a value arises simultaneously to meet them. And in exact proportion to these needs.

NOTE how the real rights of property are involved. Men feel that what they earn is theirs. We would take nothing due to the exertion of labor and capital. But from the exercise of labor and capital a bye-product arises—nature's contribution to the national treasury—land value. That comes ear-marked as a governmental contribution created by government to pay for government. It is so plain that the man who runs can read.

NOR is it an irreverent connotation to link this law with the law of God. "God wills it" may well be the cry of the New Crusade. To see God's hand working in the social arrangements of men is to see his hand in other manifestations. God's in His Heaven and all may be right with the world—if we but follow His Law. With that faith comes the vision of a society in which God's Law shall govern and the progress of man move steadily to its goal—for if there be not design in the universe, God is not trifling with His creatures, if He is not mocking them with ineffectual dreams, then there is indeed a land of promise for mankind at the end of his long journey.

WHEN Robert Louis Stevenson wrote one of his baby rhymes

"The world is so full of a number of things  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings,"

he was of course in error. We cannot all be as happy a