

THE LAND LAWS OF LYCURGUS

In his life of Lycurgus the early Spartan lawgiver, Plutarch, after describing the changes that Lycurgus made in the constitution of Sparta, goes on to say :—

"A second and bolder political enterprise of Lycurgus was a new division of the lands. For he found a prodigious inequality, the city overcharged with many indigent persons who had no land, and the wealth centred in the hands of a few. Determined, therefore, to root out the evils of insolence, envy, avarice and luxury, and those distempers of a State still more inveterate and fatal—I mean poverty and riches—he persuaded them to cancel all former divisions of land, and to make new ones, in such a manner that they might be perfectly equal in their possessions and way of living. Hence, if they were ambitious of distinction they might seek it in virtue, as no other difference was left between them, but that which arises from the dishonour of base actions and the praise of good ones. His proposal was put in practice. He made nine thousand lots for the territory of Sparta, which he distributed among so many citizens, and thirty thousand for the inhabitants of the rest of Laconia. But some say he made only six thousand shares for the city, and that Polydorus added three thousand afterwards: others, that Polydorus doubled the number appointed by Lycurgus, which were only four thousand five hundred. Each lot was capable of producing (one year with another) seventy bushels of grain for each man,* and twelve for each woman, besides a quantity of wine and oil in proportion. Such a provision they thought sufficient for health and a good habit of body, and they wanted nothing more. A story goes of our legislator, that some time after, returning from a journey through the fields just reaped, and seeing the shocks standing parallel and equal, he smiled and said to some that were by: 'How like is Laconia to an estate newly divided among many brothers.'"—(Langhorne's Translation.)

How far this story of the division of the land by Lycurgus is historical and how far legendary is a matter of doubt; Grote (HISTORY OF GREECE, Part II., Ch. 6) is inclined to the latter view, and Plutarch begins the LIFE by saying, "Of Lycurgus the lawgiver we have nothing to relate that is certain and uncontroverted," and that there is not any agreement even as to the time when he lived. He appears to have lived some time about 800 B.C.; and Plutarch's LIVES were written probably about A.D. 100. Even in Plutarch's account the divisions of the land are in round numbers, and it is manifest that constant re-division would be required to secure continued equality. To divide the land equally, and to keep it equally divided continuously, are manifestly impracticable, even in the most primitive community. In any community the equal rights of all to the land can best be secured and maintained by treating the land as common property and requiring each who holds a portion of it to pay to the community a rent corresponding to the market value of the portion that he holds, apart from the improvements on it, whether he is using it or not. However impracticable may have been the method described by Plutarch, his description—based upon older traditions—serves to show that in his own time, and probably for centuries before, there was a clear recognition that the unfair appropriation of the land was at the root of the unequal distribution of wealth, and—as suggested by the concluding words of the passage—that equal rights to the Mother-Earth are the economic foundations of human brotherhood.

J. D. W.

* By a man is meant a master of a family, whose household was to subsist upon these seventy bushels.

DANIEL KIEFER

We regret to announce the death of Dan. Kiefer, which occurred at the home of his son in Takoma Park, Maryland, N.S., on 18th August, due to heart failure. Mr. Kiefer was best known in the United States, though his name was familiar throughout the movement as chairman of the American Joseph Fels Fund Commission.

We have the news of Mr. Kiefer's passing, as we go to press, from Mr. Samuel Danziger, who writes, Baltimore, 19th August :—

He was born in Cincinnati on 29th January, 1856, and resided in that city until 1917. Until the year 1901 he was engaged in manufacture of clothing and until about two years before that date was a typical conservative business man. When finally he became convinced of the truth of the single tax he put the movement before all material interests. As a result this led to disagreement with his business partners and his retirement from active business.

His activity for the movement began with putting on its feet financially the local church headed by Herbert S. Bigelow and making of it a centre of single tax and other progressive work. He followed this by rushing in to save THE PUBLIC when Louis F. Post had announced its prospective suspension. The Public Sustention Fund was the result which kept the paper going from 1908 until given over to Mary Fels in 1917. Tom L. Johnson said of this achievement that if Kiefer had done nothing else this work would have been credit enough.

When Joseph Fels started the Joseph Fels Fund in 1909 he made his first condition that Daniel Kiefer accept the chairmanship of the proposed commission to administer his contributions and raise additional amounts. The condition was accepted, although it entailed considerable personal sacrifice. He gave to the work of the commission all his time and energy, positively refusing all offers of remuneration, and neglecting his own affairs which—at no time in a very flourishing condition—had sunk to a low ebb.

When, two years after the death of Joseph Fels, the Joseph Fels Fund was discontinued and the Commission disbanded, Daniel Kiefer was unanimously chosen chairman of the National Single Tax League to continue the work on which Mr. Fels, during his lifetime, had set his heart. He accepted this new and heavier task although he had hoped to be relieved by the choice of some other man. He succeeded in putting the League on a firm financial footing, although cut off from the large donations that Joseph Fels had made.

With the entrance of the United States into the European War there came dissension in the movement.

Finally, the strain involved in this contest sapped his physical strength, and finding himself no longer able to give the work the attention and effort required he called a meeting of the National Committee and resigned the chairmanship. It was regretfully accepted and Professor Lewis J. Johnson chosen in his place. From that time until his last illness he continued his work for the cause in an individual capacity. At the time of his death he was Treasurer of the International Free Trade League, and a member of the National Committee of the National Single Tax League. His last work was to raise a fund to send one delegate to the International Conference at Oxford, representing the latter organization.

In the course of active political work Kiefer was associated with Tom L. Johnson during the whole of his memorable nine years fight. He also co-operated with William J. Bryan so long as that chameleonic politician appeared a liberal and progressive.