

The Single Tax as a Moral Question

ADDRESS OF REV. A. W. LITTLEFIELD AT THE HENRY GEORGE CONGRESS, SEPT. 14, 1927

MY first interest in Land Reform was aroused during a summer spent in England, 1906. Immediately, I began the reading of "Progress and Poverty." The profoundest appeal of Henry George to me was his intense spirituality and moral fervor. The studies of many years convince me that no reform can succeed unless spirituality and morality be at the heart of it. Certain it is that Mr. George's spirit, together with his engaging personality and ethical insight, drew to him devoted friends and disciples. Since his death these qualities have been somewhat obscured by the necessary development, in detail, of his ideals. Is it not time to re-emphasize his spirit among us? We know his message; we are faithfully active in giving increasing dissemination of that message. But why not reinvigorate and reawake in us, today, his spirit and moral qualities? I believe we need to do so. More love and reverence and fidelity to the "power greater than ourselves that makes for righteousness," a sterner insistence upon the application of the moral law is needed, to bring to fuller fruition the gospel of Henry George! However highly evolved the mechanism for promulgating the principles and practise of Land Reform, the primary motive power to keep the engine in operation must never be neglected.

For myself, after twenty-four years of effort in this reform along the pathway pointed out by Henry George, I have come to lay chief emphasis upon the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal!" For it is well nigh the crux of all the commandments; covetousness, false witness, adultery, murder, trampling upon the sanctities of home and sacred institutions, as well as disrespect for Divine Authority, are all species of theft.

Specifically in the matter of taxation, under our present laws, robbery by "process of law" is prevalent. We commit double robbery:—the community robs the private individual of his labor-values; the private individual robs the community of its economic rent of land. Wealth belongs to its creator,—labor values to the laborer, economic rent to the community. Economic rent should be used to meet the public expenses, without levying upon private earnings to meet governmental expenses, as is now the practice. Let us say to the community, with all the moral emphasis of Henry George, Thou shalt not steal private wealth by "process of law" (taxation); to the land speculator, Thou shalt not steal by permission of law (permission to absorb economic rent) the economic rent of the community! When these principles are put into practice, land reform will no longer be necessary.

The time has arrived, I believe, when another great principle must be established: namely, create a Liturgy of Land Reform.

No great and vital truth has ever yet been given creative power unless embodied,—incarnated,—in tangible form, i.e. truth set forth in forms of beauty, looking to righteousness in action. "The good, the true, the beautiful," was the thought of the Greek; or, reversing it, "The True, The Beautiful, The Good." For our purposes, the truths taught by Henry George, the liturgical beauty of those truths, and the moral goodness derived therefrom.

These principles are eternal law, necessary for the full manifestation of the powers of the human soul,—"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." "The spirit without a body is a ghost; the body without a soul is a corpse." "All good things are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul."

Thus far, the message of Henry George, as disseminated by the majority of his disciples, has not been fully incarnated; when it shall have been embodied as truth incarnated in beauty inspiring to righteousness of action, then it will shine among men, filled with grace, persuasiveness, and divine loveliness, irresistibly drawing most men unto it! Through the heart to the head out into the hand,—this is the immutable order. Such would the Liturgy of Land Reform accomplish, in my judgment. Time and again, in human history, such a marvel has been wrought! Luther declared, "The Reformation was far more sung into the hearts of the German people than preached into them." The Prayer Book of Edward the Sixth consolidated the reformation in England; the Liturgy of Lutheranism had its mighty effect; the Missal of Roman Catholicism gathered, and now holds, the devotees of that great church as nothing other could; after the death of Jesus, the little free communions,—which, by the way, as Renan says, "presented faultless models,"—gathered in his name, established liturgies embodying the teaching and visions of their master, especially that group of liturgies known as the Liturgies of St. John, giving form and tangible content to the spirit of their beloved Friend; in Palestine, in Egypt, Babylon, and the Far East, great truths all had liturgical incarnation. It is the law of the soul, underlying all Art, that gives rise to vital expression of truth, in all Ages. Most collective movements of our day have established liturgies embodying their ideals and purposes as the chief means of disseminating them. It is worthy of note, as an impressive instance, that the only agricultural organization, since the Civil War, that has survived is the Grange,—Patrons of Husbandry,—established to "educate and elevate the American farmer." Its ideals are elaborately set forth in its ritual, without which the order would have become extinct long ago. All of us know that the many fraternal orders cohere and live because of their rituals, especially,

the Masonic Order; probably it would have vanished long since but for the fact that it embodied its principles in enduring form, devotedly revered, the world over, by all Masons.

I recommend, therefore, that all of us who are working for Land Reform, under the inspiration and leadership of Henry George,—especially, since the formation of the "Henry George Foundation of America,"—gather our ideals and aspirations and missionary spirit into a Liturgy to be known as the "Henry George Memorial Mission." Peace through Justice based upon Land Reform, to be its object. The universal and the particular, —Peace and Land Reform,—thus become logically and vitally correlated, giving noble purpose to Land Reform, eventuating in Peace; this was precisely Henry George's vision, "Peace on earth among men of good-will." Also, it was that of the Christ and his disciples.

This Liturgy should consist of Biblical and other ancient passages bearing upon the endeavor, with corresponding readings from "Progress and Poverty," associated with beautiful hymns and other sublime utterances,—poetry and noble prose,—accompanied by an address upon the progressive development of the great Cause of Peace on earth through Justice based on Land Reform. "Pax vobiscum," the early Christians saluted each other; so may we, also! I further suggest that the "Henry George Foundation" take steps toward the official formation of such a Liturgy.

Speaking for myself, only, I intend to make a draft of such a plan; and, if opportunity offers, to take it, sometime, to the nearest city, and hold just such a service, using the liturgy prepared, with local Single Taxers, or more appropriately, Georgists of my acquaintance. In any event, I hope to submit a draft to the authorities of the Foundation for their consideration.

This liturgical incarnation of the spirit and teachings of Henry George I conceive to be the best available "next step" in organized dissemination of our ideals; and I believe that we should make it a lasting memorial to our prophet. In time, we should come to love such a form, and find ourselves at home wherever such meetings might be held. There would be little of the confusion of controversy connected with it, but a tremendous emphasis upon mighty, universal truths. In my judgment, it would accomplish just what such methods have always effected, the world over. Even singing together some great hymn would attract thousands, where "literature" necessarily only reaches hundreds; for, after the *inspiration* would come the *desire* for reading and information. To conduct such services would not require ordained clergymen; we know men and women among us gifted in such possibilities. "Wherever two or three are gathered together," in Henry George's name, there would be his spirit and message for human welfare among them; as of old it has

always been and always will be among those who seek the liberation of their fellow beings!

Shall we not try this suggestion? And go forth to the "Father's Work" with the same proclamation as animated prophets and the Christ and all Missioners of the Word of Life and Light in all Ages:—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord!"

Then may come to pass the still more ancient, yet ever living vision of Micah:—"In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it."

And many nations shall come and say, Come let us go up to the mountains of the Lord, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid.

For the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

The "bold creators of the ancient Ages" wrought mightily in their day. Shall we not likewise build anew the foundations and the temple of Peace and Justice in our time?

A Puzzled Editor

SOME kind but anonymous friend has sent this column an article from a publication called LAND AND FREEDOM. The composition is entitled *Natural Law in the Economic World*, and it tells how happy all of us would be if we had free access to the land. It so happened that *State Press* owns a small piece of land to which he has free access, as he understands it, but he doesn't care to utilize his privilege. And if it would make anybody happy, he will give the unhappy one free access to said land. All the accessee would have to do to be joyful would be to clear the timber off the ground, plant crops and be happy. The actual owner would require nothing of him but remuneration to an amount equal to the taxes the occupant would have to pay if land alone were taxed. That is what is demanded by those who insist that free access to the land could be had by taking the taxes off everything else and putting the whole burden on "ground values." In that case S. P.'s land ought to fetch him ten or fifteen dollars an acre annually, instead of nothing. Nothing is what he now gets, and if there are as many land-hungry people as the Single Taxers assert, some land hungerer can get an awfully good trade out of this proprietor.—*State Press in Dallas Morning News.*