

The Public 1905-02-25:

JUSTICE THE HIGHER LAW.
By William Lloyd Garrison, Jr.

Address of William Lloyd Garrison, at the twenty-fifth anniversary dinner of Henry George's "Progress and Poverty," Hotel Astor, New York city, January 24, 1905, in response to the toast: "Its Plea for Justice."

With all my heart I respond to the toast allotted me. Holding with the newly elected governor of Missouri that "where no principles are involved there is nothing to fight for," I contend that the paramount, overshadowing Issue underlying the teachings of "Progress and Poverty" is the clear principle of human justice. However eloquently and wisely Henry George had discoursed upon the fiscal perfection of his scheme, without his insistent, lofty plea for equity his book would now be gathering dust on neglected shelves.

Because it touched the primal need of man's nature, basing its plea upon the sense of abstract right in every enlightened soul, it has entered into the vital circulation of the world's thought. Never more alive than to-day, it is as fresh in spirit and matter as at the hour of its birth. Criticism has not withered nor censure staled its regenerating truth. Unlike the economic writings which pour from the printing press in showers that neither warm nor moisten, "Progress and Poverty" needs no revision for adjustment with new facts or circumstances. Its spirit thrills the reader as of yore. Its statement of social conditions in 1879 is verified by those prevailing in 1905. Its prophecy of a progressive decivilization while land monopoly holds sway has been fulfilled to the letter. Its law of parallels stands intact; for while material progress has marched with accelerated stride, poverty, close as the shadow to the substance, has held an equal pace.

The benefactors who live in the minds of men long after their generation placed their reliance upon the moral forces of the world. The permanence of justice and the transient nature of evil laws and institutions are revealed to such by inspiration. They revive the Gospel of Jesus when religion is smothered in formalism and the dead churches are absorbed in the worship of material gods. Like an evangel, "Progress and Poverty" revived despairing faith and awakened disciples. Illumination poured into darkened minds. To many overshadowed lives came a glory like the flush of dawn. Hope revived and uplifting activities resulted. The lone voice crying in the wilderness a quarter of a century ago now finds its multiplied echo in Tolstoy, who urges the gospel of Henry George upon the unwilling ears of the Czar.

Benevolence is a safety valve for kindly natures, and Charity, in the sense of almsgiving, is a fashionable and convenient virtue. Both seem to be compatible with injustice. Certainly they find signal exemplars among the men and classes powerful through ill-gotten wealth. Yet while the most unexampled giving to libraries and universities goes on, public morals are at their lowest and democratic government trembles in the balance. The magnitude of gifts to Institutions is equaled only by the unblushing abjectness of recipients. Tainted money finds no lack of

respectable outstretched palms.

With what fine scorn did Henry George view the costly efforts to lessen the suffering victims of legal injustice. Monuments of civic pride to the unthinking, to him they revealed ulcerous social conditions, evidences of shame and humiliation. To pluck a few brands from the burning, while adding fuel to the flames, to succor individuals while impoverishing the masses—what is it but insensate folly?

Amateur economists or retained professionals find public favor, because squarely confronting the obvious they fail to see it. They study and catalogue minutely every growth of social evil, but for the poisonous root they have no eyes. Henry George lacked genius for circumlocution. His mind sought truth straight as a line of light, and what so disturbing to a world of pretense resentful of plain speech? Hence he was
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So he could be the nearer to God's heart.

It is natural for lovers of darkness to hate light and the light-bringers. When "Progress and Poverty" revealed the hidden predatory forces at work upon society, alarm was immediate. The monopolist saw only vested interests threatened, tariff licenses for general pillage revoked, private toll-gates controlling natural fields of production challenged. The disturbing reformer saw only the poor and disinherited sacrificed to unholy greed. The cries of the helpless and betrayed would not let him rest.

We celebrate an event which marks the beginning of a new and far-reaching agitation. It will be a favorite subject for future historians, this unknown and dauntless youth challenging the constituted authorities on political economy, clothing with flesh its dreary skeleton and "creating a soul under the ribs of death." Fearless of the powerful privileges he assailed, undisheartened by public indifference or private bitterness, Henry George made his "grand appeal of Truth to Time." Academic critics flouted his theory, or noticed his monumental work with all the condescension of littleness. He took both in the same unwavering mood.

Sentiment aside, what, in the white light of events, can give the single taxers cheer? How can this boasted influence of "Progress and Poverty" be demonstrated? Apparently a fly exerts more power upon a wheel than this philosophy upon social welfare. Is protection dead? Its iron grip was never more painful. Is the landlord's domination weakened? He still seems Lord of all. Have the folly of war and the grinding burdens of naval and military establishments abated? Behold the country of Henry George vying with the kings and kaisers in foreign conquests of weaker peoples.

When our leader was' living lip service was paid to the traditions of liberty. Where now are the national ideals, the Declaration of Independence, the wisdom of the fathers? In the dust heap with the Decalogue! The force of reaction has gone so far since his death that peace and justice have been eliminated from Christianity and the moral law placed in the category of myths. Some

who have worn priestly garments are now professing to have lost the ethical Deity they worshiped. Where once they pictured him with awful clearness on Mount Sinai, they see only a vanishing vagueness. Again "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" and moral standards are impertinent.

Nevertheless, the times are full of cheer for the followers of Henry George. "Among the faithless, faithful only he" when the cause started amid universal unbelief. He refused to accept the gospel of mud and kept his vision fixed upon the stars. They in their courses do fight against moral transgressors and the reformer who hitches his wagon to a star has a sure guide.

We are not dismayed because the expected is happening. Confusion and social upheaval? Have we not steadily pointed out year after year that such consequence must follow land monopoly? The overruling power for righteousness that is making itself manifest confirms faith and banishes distrust. The most powerful monopolies on record must shake the continent in their expulsion. Such times of readjustment are common throughout history. Old prophecies recur and signs of confusion in the ranks of the mighty mark the advent of a new order. The thieves are, by the ears and frenzied charges and countercharges hurtle through the air. We are ignored in the fray that makes for the destruction of privilege, a disability we suffer with joyful resignation. Trouble has come to its own. and the morning light is breaking.

Though Justice is dethroned in the market place her reign in the universe is unshaken and unshakable. Henry George has passed from the petty judgment of his day into the secure possession of history which duly rights contemporary wrong and crowns the genuine king. The soul of our leader is marching on. The powers of thought unloosed by him have gathered strength and numbers, a host to be reckoned with by tyranny as the conflict grows.

With our substantial cause for jubilation let there be no compromising concessions, no ceasing to demand full and ultimate justice. We have to reaffirm the grand declaration of "Progress and Poverty." "to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow truth wherever it may lead—if the conclusions run counter to our prejudices, let us not flinch; if they challenge institutions that have been deemed wise and natural, let us not turn back."

"If we trust Liberty and follow her." no evil can befall us or our movement. But before even Liberty. Justice is essential and to that highest court of appeal known to humanity, "grandeur than Benevolence, more august than Charity," we submit our sacred contention.