

"THE RIGHTS OF INFANTS."

(For the Review.)

BY HENRY GEORGE, JR.

(See page 11.)

It was in 1775, one hundred and thirty-two years ago, that Thomas Spence, a bookseller in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, delivered before the Philosophical Society of that town a lecture on what we now call the Single Tax, and for the printing of which the society, to use his phrase, did him the honor to expel him. He followed this with several other pamphlets, all bearing on this subject. One of these was called "The Rights of Infants." It appeared in 1797.

Recently while sorting and arranging a mass of papers coming to me from my father, I found a manuscript copy of this latter pamphlet, written partly in ink and partly in purple pencil, but not in my father's handwriting. On the outside page was this explanation: "Copied from a pamphlet in the Reference Library, Manchester (England), October 6, 1882."

This copy was evidently presented to my father at the close of his first trip to Great Britain in the fall of 1882, and was apparently mislaid, as he doubtless would have been glad to print it in *The Standard* or elsewhere during the years of agitation on the land question. It is therefore with extreme satisfaction that I now offer it for publication in *THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW*.

The splendid vigor, the clear weight, the scorn of pretence and sham, revealed in this little pamphlet, show Spence to have been a true crusader for natural rights to the earth. And if his method was not in all respects the same as the modern Single Taxer, it was, in his own words, "Well digested" and so "very simple" as for that reason "to prove the greater perfection."

Among the things the manuscript shows the title page of the pamphlet to have borne were the following:

"The Rights of Infants, or the Imprescriptible Rights of Mothers to such a share of the elements as is sufficient to enable them to suckle and bring up their young. In a dialogue between the Aristocracy and a Mother of the Children; to which are added, by way of preface and appendix, strictures on Paine's Agrarian Justice.

"By T. Spence, author of the Real Rights of Man, End of Oppression, Reign of Felicity, Pigs' Meat, etc.

"Printed for the author at No. 9 Oxford Street, lately removed from No. 8 Little Turnstile, 1797. London."

In the preface Spence notes that Paine has "at last * * * thought fit to own, with the Psalmist and with Mr. Locke, that 'God hath given the earth to the children of men, given it to mankind in common,'" but deprecates Paine's manner of application as not to be "in any measure just or satisfactory," going on to say:

"The principle is without doubt incomparably grand, and the very first maxim in the law of nature and in the science of right and wrong, and is fraught with all the blessings that can render mankind happy. But O dire disappointment! Behold! Mr. Paine instead of erecting on the rock of ages an everlasting temple of justice, has erected an execrable fabric of compromisory expediency, as if in good earnest intended for a swinish multitude.

"The poor beggarly stipends which he would have us accept of in lieu of our lordly and just pretensions to the soil of our birth are so contemptible and insulting that I shall leave them to the scorn of every person conscious of the dignity of his nature, not detaining the reader from the perusal of the following little tract on the Rights of Infants, where men who dare contemplate their rights may see them portrayed boldly at full length.

"The more I contemplate human affairs the more I am convinced that a landed interest is incompatible with the happiness and independence of the world. For as all the rivers run into the sea, and yet the sea is not full, so let there be ever so many sources of wealth, let trade, foreign and domestic, open all their sluices, yet will no other but the landed interest be ultimately the better.

"In whatever line of business or in whatever situation the public observe men thrive, thither every one presses, and in competition bids over each other's head for the houses and shops on the lucky spot, thereby raising the rents till the landlord gets the whole fat of their labors. It is the same in respect of the farms; for if a profitable market, foreign or domestic, spring up for the

produce of the earth, then farming will be the rage and everyone will overbid another for farms, till they can hardly live by them. Nay, even abolish the tithe, and the rents of the farms will immediately so advance that the whole advantage shall center in the landlords.

"Thus all things work together for good to those who love God, which seems to be fully accomplished in the landed interest, who are the visible elect. Yes, for theirs are all things, whether the State, the government or the dignities, the principalities or the powers. All dominion is rooted and grounded in land and thence spring every kind of lordship which overtops and chokes all the shrubs and flowers of the forest. But take away those tall, those overbearing aristocratic trees and then the lowly plants of the soil will have air, will thrive and grow robust.

"Nevertheless, take care you leave not any roots of those lordly plants in the earth, for though cut down to the stump like Nebuchadnezzar, yet if any vestige of the system remain, any fibre of the accursed roots, though ever so small, lie concealed in the soil, they will sprout again and soon recover their pristine vigor to the overshadowing and destruction of all the undergrowth. Thus do philosophy and the purest philanthropy compel us to eradicate this baneful order from human society.

"Whether my plan of enjoying man's rights, which I have been publishing in different ways for more than twenty years be objectionable or no, it is certain it has never been answered; neither have I seen or heard of any arguments on the subject but what have only more effectually convinced me that no system can be more universally just even to those it seems most to militate against; more easily established, because it is the interest of every one not to oppose it; nor of course more likely afterwards to be more peaceful and permanent.

"If I am wrong let me be confuted; and if I am not let mankind for their own sakes pay attention to what I say. They ought at least to give me credit for my disinterestedness in this scheme for according to it I can have no private landed estate, no tenants to work for me, nor claim any privilege above my fellow citizens. Wherefore, before any be so ungenerous as to condemn

me as presumptuous, I hope they will candidly weigh my several arguments which they will find in the various little things I have published, which are neither many nor dear, and in the following Rights of Infants.

(Signed) "THOMAS SPENCE.

"London, March 19, 1797."

So much for preface to the little pamphlet reproduced on another page of the REVIEW on the Rights of Infants.