

2. TAXATION.—(a) In the case of land not feued the owner would contribute according to the value of his land alone; and (b) in the case of land feued the superior would contribute by paying to the owner according to the amount of the feu duty or ground annual, and the proprietor or feuar would contribute for any surplus value of the land over and above the feu-duty or ground annual.

RECOMMENDATION.

Your committee would therefore recommend (1) that you should co-operate with the Glasgow Police Commissioners in the matter with the view of petitioning Parliament in favour of legislation on the lines indicated in the report; (2) that you should tender evidence to the Royal Commission on the Incidence of Taxation in favour of the proposals in this Report; and remit to the Parliamentary Bills Committee to carry out the former, and to this committee to carry out the latter recommendation.

JOHN T. COSTIGANE, *Chairman.*

This Report reflects great credit on the special sub-committee of the Lanarkshire County Council. They deserve well of the county, and of all land and taxation reformers, for such an explicit elucidation of the pros and cons of the question. They have made the issue clear, and their pronouncement should be as a beacon light to many similar bodies groping in the dark on the subject of local taxation.

The L.C.C. would render a great service to the country if they would only send this Report to all other County and Parish Councils of Scotland, and seek their co-operation in agitating in favour of the reform. It would do some of them good if they only read it, and many of them might adopt it.

The Creed of the Levellers: or, the Land Question in the Seventeenth Century.

BY L. H. B.

Every student of English history must have heard something of the levellers; a comparatively small body of men, it is true, but one which every writer on the stirring times of the Commonwealth finds it necessary to mention, even if only to load them with abuse, or to dismiss them with a sneer. They formed, indeed, the extreme left, the irreconcilables, of the Puritan or Independent Party, in whose glorious struggles and victories many of them assisted. But, being opposed to all compromise, they stood in the way of that "settlement of the nation" which was, at all events in the practical minds of Cromwell and his supporters, the most pressing necessity of the hour. Hence, the iron hand of Cromwell fell upon them, and, in the sacred name of "law and order," they, as a body, as a living factor of the politics of the time, were swept out of existence. Though the great Ironside had foresight enough to see, and courage enough to avow that "if there be any one

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that makes many poor to make a few rich, that suits not a Commonwealth." Yet to him the principles of the levellers seemed only to tend "to make the tenant as liberal a fortune as the landlord."

It was mainly these last oft-repeated words that awakened in us a keen curiosity to ascertain what the teachings of these levellers really were. Moreover, when all those in authority unite in disparaging and condemning any body of teachings which have profoundly moved and influenced the minds of "the common people," as the teachings of the levellers undoubtedly did, it is generally safe to infer that they contain some germ or sub-stratum of truth. Manifestly in such a case the earnest inquirer can never accept as reliable what any third person may proclaim these teachings to be or have been; he must seek his information from the fountain head. Behind every such movement there is always some master-mind—a Jesus of Nazareth, a Luther, a John Wesley, a Tolstoi, or a Henry George. And to obtain any true insight into the principles of the movement you must, wherever possible, put yourself into communion with its inspirers. For some years our research in this direction was unavailing, but quite recently there has come into our hands a small pamphlet, of some ninety pages, published in the year 1652, though written some years previously, the author of which,

A CERTAIN JERRARD WINSTANLEY

was admittedly one of the leaders, or "prophets," of this movement, and which to us seems to contain the information we were in search of.

To place before the reader the contents of this most remarkable pamphlet is the object of this essay; for it certainly deserves to be better known to all students of social, political, and religious problems.

Of the writer himself we have as yet been able to learn little or nothing. But the most superficial perusal of this pamphlet suffices to show that one is in presence of a mind of no common order; a mind singularly free from superstitions of any kind, well stored with the learning of his time, original, logical, penetrating, uncompromising, permeated by a love of humanity, and a desire for progress, distinguished and animated by a hatred of cant and hypocrisy, and a love of sincerity and truth.

His political ideas might be summed up as follows:—Two forms of government are open to mankind—King's government, and Commonwealth's government. King's government, which is based on conquest, secures the control—"the freedom"—of the earth to some few. Commonwealth's government, "which is the original righteousness and peace in the earth," secures the use of the earth equally to all; for, as he repeatedly expresses it, "true Commonwealth's freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth." This, however, gives so little insight into the breadth of view and profoundness of thought of the pamphlet, that we propose to place before our readers, not a review or a criticism, but a brief summary of its contents, quoting, as far as possible, the author's own words.

The title of the pamphlet runs as follows:—

"THE LAW OF FREEDOM IN A PLATFORM: OR, TRUE MAGISTRACY RESTORED."

On the title page it is "Humbly presented to Oliver Cromwell, General of the Commonwealth's Army in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and to all Englishmen, my brethren, whether in church-fellowship or not in church-fellowship, both sorts walking as they conceive according to the order of the Gospel; and from them to all the nations of the world."

Evidently our author had faith in his principles, deeming them, like all other true principles, not of particular but of universal application, and hence presenting them to "all the nations of the world."

The book begins with an OPEN LETTER TO OLIVER CROMWELL, in which, after a brief allusion to the recent victories, the author at once plunges into the heart of his subject, by pointing out:—

"That which is wanting on your part to be done is this: to see the oppressor's power be cast out with his person, and to see that the free possession of the land and liberties be put into the hands of the oppressed Commons of England. . . . For (he continues) now you have the power of the land in your hand, you must do one of these two things:—First, either set the land free to the oppressed commons . . . and so take possession of your deserved honour. Or, secondly, you must only remove the conqueror's power out of the king's hand into other men's, maintaining the old laws still; and then your mission and honour is blasted for ever; and you will either lose yourself, or lay the foundation of greater slavery to posterity than you ever knew."

A prophecy the full truth of which we are only now commencing to recognise. And then follows this solemn warning:—

"The righteous power in the creation is the same still: if you, and those in power with you, should be found walking in the king's steps, can you secure yourselves and your posterities from an overturn? Surely no. The Spirit of the whole Creation (who is God) is about the reformation of the world, and He will go forward in His work: for, if He would not spare kings, who have sat so long at His right hand, governing the world, neither will He regard you, unless your ways be found more righteous than the kings."

He then refers to

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made and embodied in Acts of Parliament, by which the people were induced to assist in the late wars; and argues that the mere removal of the king's person, though necessary, is as nothing unless the kingly laws and power be also abolished. The liberties of the commons—"who were called subjects while the kingly conqueror was in power"—he contends, has not yet been granted them. The burthens of clergy, lawyers, and landlords—the one interfering with liberties of conscience and freedom of speech; the other sitting "in the conqueror's chair," maintaining the king's power though the king be removed; and the last-named claiming dominion over the earth—still press heavily on the people. And, as he expresses it, "the main work of reformation lies in this, to reform the clergy, lawyers, and law, for all the complaints of the land are wrapped up within them three, not in the person of a king."

After which follows the following beautiful and logical analysis of the whole Land Question:—

And is not this a slavery, say the people, that though there be land enough in England to maintain ten times as many people as are in it, yet some must beg of their brethren, or work in hard drudgery for low day wages for them, or starve, or steal, and so be hanged out of the way as men not fit to live on the earth . . . well this is a burthen the creation groans under; and the subjects (so-called) have not their birthright freedom granted them from their brethren, who hold it from them by club-law, but not by righteousness . . .

But you will say is not the land your brother's? and you cannot take away another man's right by claiming a share therein with him. I answer: It is his either by creation right or by right of conquest. If by creation right he call the earth his and not mine; then it is mine as well as his, for the Spirit of the whole creation, who made us both, is no respecter of persons. And if by conquest he call the earth his and not mine, it must be either by the conquest of the kings over the commons, or by the conquest of the commons over the kings. If he claim the earth to be his from the king's conquest, the kings are beaten and cast out and that title is undone. If he claim title to the earth to be his from the conquest of the commons over the kings, then I have a right to the land as well as my brother, for my brother without me, nor I without my brother, did not cast out the kings, but both together assisting with person and purse, we prevailed, so that I have by this victory as equal a share in the earth, which is now redeemed, as my brother, by the law of righteousness.

ON THE QUESTION OF COMPENSATION

he is very emphatic. He says:—

When Tithes were first enacted, and lordly power drawn over the backs of the oppressed, the kings and conquerors made no scruple of conscience to take it, though the people lived in sore bondage for want of it; and can there be scruple of conscience to make restitution of this which hath been so long stolen goods? It is no scruple arising from the righteous law, but from covetousness, who goes away sorrowful to hear that he must part with all to follow righteousness and peace.

The people, he argues, must be subject either to law or to men's will; but if to law, then all men ought to be subject thereunto.

You may say (he continues) must be subject to the ruler. This is true, but not to suffer the rulers to call the earth theirs and not ours, for by so doing they betray their trust and run into the line of tyranny, and we lose our freedom, and from thence enmity and wars arise. A ruler is worthy double honour when he rules well; that is, when he himself is subject to the law, and requires all others to be subject thereunto, and makes it his work to make the laws obeyed, and not his own will; and such rulers are faithful, and they are to be subjected unto as therein, for all commonwealth rulers are servants to, not lords and kings over the people. True Christianity this; for did not Christ teach—"Whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

On the question of riches he is equally clear—

No man can be rich (he argues) but he must be rich either by his own labours or by the labours of other men helping him. If a man have no help from his neighbour, he shall never gather an estate of hundreds and thousands a year. If other men help him to work, then are those riches his neighbours, as well as his; for they be the fruit of other men's labour as well as his own. But all rich men live at ease, feeding and clothing themselves by the labours of other men, not their own, which is their shame and not their nobility; for it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive. But rich men receive all they have from the labourer's hand, and what they give, they give away other men's labours, not their own. Therefore they are not righteous actors in the earth.

He then points out that in his pamphlet will be found a "Platform of Commonwealth's Government, wherein is declared a full Commonwealth's freedom according to the rule of righteousness, which is God's Word. At the first view you may say, this is a strange Government; but I pray, judge nothing before trial. Lay this Platform of Commonwealth Government in one scale and lay Monarchy or Kingly Government in the other scale, and see which gives the weight to righteous freedom and peace. There is no middle path between these two, for a man must either be a free and true Commonwealth's man, or a monarchical tyrannical Royalist."

Winstanley, however, was too broad-minded a man to desire that his proposals should be forced upon the people, or to hope that they would be accepted in their entirety by them. In the pamphlet itself, after having placed his views in detail before the reader, he continues, "but even if the people desire to continue their established habits, of buying and selling, this same platform, with a few things subtracted, declares an easy way of Government of the earth for the quiet of people's minds, and preserving of peace in the land."

And he concludes his epistle to Cromwell—

I do not say nor desire that everyone shall be compelled to practise this Commonwealth's Government; for the spirits (habits) of some will be enemies at first, though afterwards will prove the most cordial and true friends thereunto. Yet I desire that the Commonwealth's land may be set free to all that have lent assistance, either of person or purse, to obtain it; and to all that are willing to come in to the practice of this Government and be obedient to the laws thereof. And for others who are not willing, let them stay in the way of buying and selling, which is the law of the conqueror, till they be willing.

(To be continued).

"Are you in favour of Taxing Land Values?"