

The Greatest of These Is Justice

By JOHN HANNA

THE Georgeist movement was distinguished in its early years by the Crusade of the Anti-Poverty Societies under the leadership of Henry George and Father McGlynn. The emphasis was placed on the demands for Justice in the affairs of men. The establishment of Justice would, it was claimed, abolish involuntary poverty and would obtain for all men equal opportunity to work and to achieve. This Crusade kindled a flame in the hearts of many—a flame which may be less brilliant now, but is still steady and strong. However much men may differ in their opinions and methods in advancing the reform, its supporters are impelled by the same noble motive.

There has developed considerable divergence of opinion about the proper method of advancing the movement, as well as much hair-splitting discussion regarding the Law of Rent and the Nature of Interest. Such discussions may be of some value and may afford some intellectual play, but are to be regretted when they absorb energy which might be devoted to the advancement of the primary purpose. The danger is that the whole movement may be divided and its vigor lost in factional adherence to non-essentials, in the same way that the Christian Church has been split and its effectiveness impaired by its division into sects; some emphasizing one interpretation, some another, apparently forgetting, in their doctrinal zeal, that the real purpose of religion is to bring men to "deal justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God" that they "may have Life and have it more abundantly." Such divergences are an example of the human tendency to let doctrine overshadow principle. A divided force is a weaker force—which must give comfort to those who are interested in keeping things as they are.

If there is any basis for universal appeal in the effort to abolish the present system of taxation, it is in the direction of establishing Justice in the relations of man to man, and man to society. Most of us will agree that when this is accomplished many of the evils from which humanity is suffering will disappear or be materially lessened and many of the vexing questions in which so many confused and broken threads have been woven will unravel themselves.

Our critics are fond of asking, Pilate-like, "What is Justice?" Without attempting any academic definition, let us abolish the very flagrant *injustice* in the present system of taxation, and Justice will show herself and men will know her as they know the air they breathe without knowing anything about its component parts of oxygen and nitrogen.

We *know* that industry, enterprise and labor are taxed and hampered by the present system. We *know* that

ownership of land confers the privilege of collecting rent for the use of land. We *know* that the presence of population and the services that are consequently supplied by the population are the factors which create the land value or ground rent—whichever term you may prefer. These are facts which to state provoke the question:— Would it not be in the interest of Justice to take this ground rent to pay for the services which the population renders; thus having the community collect its own earnings and leave to capital and labor their own earnings?

Thus it will be seen that Justice is the very core of the whole matter, the supremely vital nerve center from which radiate impulses for good or evil, as Justice is accorded or denied. Sometimes one wishes that we could recapture the fervor of the Anti-Poverty Crusade which was, in great degree, directed not only against poverty in material things but the greater poverty of mind and spirit which is the natural offspring of injustice everywhere; blighting and distorting human life. The appeal was for the abolition of poverty, not by any man-made scheme of pension or welfare relief with all their attendant evils of indolence and loss of self-respect and bureaucratic regulation, but by recognizing man's fundamental natural rights on a basis of Justice to all.

Let us unite in the attack on the injustice of the present system, each in his own way! If we cannot have uniformity of method we can maintain the force which comes of unity. Even some who do not go all the way with us are still doing valuable work in exposing the errors of the present system. To approach the subject by way of Science is good. To approach from the standpoint of Business is good. To approach by way of Ethics is good; so long as the fundamental error is shown and the Justice of the proposed remedy proclaimed. One may search the pages of history and find no great reform accomplished by philosophical or scientific argument, but when mankind has been moved by the plea for justice an irresistible motive force is set into action. Science and Philosophy serve as governor and fly-wheel for emotional force but they do not drive. Many who are left cold by the intricacies of fiscal or scientific argument will warm up to the demands of Justice.

The advocate of Justice may have high regard for scientific deduction and for empirical knowledge, but if he finds primarily that a proposal is just, that its denial results in distortion of the social fabric, in an aristocracy of wealth, in blighted and stunted lives he is content to make his decision on the basis of Justice leaving the subtleties of economic speculation to those who enjoy them; to say with Emerson "Whoever fights, whoever falls, Justice conquers evermore."

To paraphrase St. Paul: *And now abideth Science, Pragmatism, Justice but the greatest of these is Justice.*