

Lincoln and the Land Question--Prophesied the Coming Issue--His Conscience Would Not Permit Him to Speculate in Land *

ALLAN McCURDY, of the Committee of 48, tells us that in a speech made before an assembly of ladies, he injected a quotation from Lincoln, not stating that the words were those of the martyred president. He was surprised, and not a little shocked at the storm of hisses that greeted the radical utterance of the great abolitionist. Mr. McCurdy told his hearers the source of his statement, and said he never expected that the words of the immortal Lincoln would be hissed by an American audience.

NO OCCASION FOR SURPRISE

Mr. McCurdy need not have been surprised. There are American audiences that would hiss Isaiah and Jeremiah. Lincoln was a radical. He saw clear to the heart of things. He spoke the language of radicalism, and used words to express his convictions, strong, direct, sententious. Such vision, and the bold words that go with it, always affright the timid. The hesitant and coward creep under the bed when the Georges, the Garrisons or the Lincolns speak. If they belong to the same school of belief, these—the well-meaning, though hesitant and coward—will spend much time in explaining their beliefs in innumerable “ifs” and “buts” with which they seek to clothe the naked truth. They will urge the need of going slowly so as not to frighten the people, though it is they, and not the people, who are frightened, or are likely to be. The people *do* respond to justice, and for the most part do not understand the tergiversations of the timid. It is not the people, but the protagonists of a great cause who sometimes seek to minimize their demands—frequently from perfectly admirable motives and at the call of expediency. But they are mistaken, nevertheless. A truth travels faster as it is boldly enunciated, in all its fullness, without compromise, or evasion, or curtailment.

LINCOLN'S EARLY BATTLE WITH THE “LAND SHARKS”

Lincoln was early employed in Danville and Springfield in helping the settlers in their struggles against the extor-

* For the extracts from statements of Lincoln made in this article we are to credit a work in two volumes, “Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time,” by Robert H. Browne, M.D. and for the discovery of this remarkable revelation, W. D. Lamb, of Chicago.

Dr. Robert H. Browne was born in New York 1835, was an abolitionist associated with Lovejoy, and read law with Davis, Lincoln and Gridley, at Bloomington, Ill. - He was acting assistant surgeon in the war of 1861 to its close, and after the war practiced medicine in Kirksville, Missouri and was a member of the Missouri Senate, 1870 to 1874. We do not find a record of the date of his death, but he was at least living down to 1901.—*Editor Single Tax Review.*

tions and stealings of the land sharks. His name was a terror to the infamous crew who as soon as a settler filed his claim filed counter claims and compelled the bona fide settlers to yield up a fee to retain their land and thus save litigation. Other tricks were resorted to which made it a series of battles between the home-seekers and the designing and grasping men who sought to victimize them. “I respect, said Lincoln, “the man who properly named these villains land sharks. They are like the wretched ghouls who follow a ship and fatten on its offal.”

He, more than any other man at the time, helped to break up this system. These home-seekers were his special consideration. He served them for small fees, frequently for no fee at all.

LEARNING THE LAND QUESTION

Through this early experience Lincoln was learning the land question. What he saw of the evils of land speculation and the greed born of private control of natural opportunities, made vivid object lessons. Nor were they lost upon that wonderfully observant mind. As one cannot be a voluntary beneficiary of an evil social institution and maintain the same attitude toward it, he shrank with a moral instinct that was part of the genius of the man, from direct participation in it.

Offered the opportunity by his friend Gridley, eager to help him, of the purchase of a quarter section of land, which his friend assured him would double in price within a year, Lincoln said:

“I am as thankful to you and appreciate what you do for me in so many unselfish ways that no one knows of save myself. Nevertheless, I must decline this kind offer of yours, which would no doubt profit me and harm no one directly, as I view it. I have no maledictions or criticisms of those who honestly buy, sell, and speculate in land: but I do not believe in it, and I feel, for myself, that I should not do it. If I made the investment, it would constantly turn my attention to that kind of business, and so far disqualify me from what seems my calling and success in it, and interfere with the public or half-public service, which I neither seek nor avoid.”

PREDICTED THE COMING ISSUE

Lincoln saw the oppression to which the masses of men were everywhere subjected. That keen brain and tender heart were alive to the sufferings of mankind due to economic injustice. That he sensed the cause is made plain in words that are unmistakable. That he would have led the movement for the restoration of the rights of men to the earth they inhabit, and that he would have brushed

aside the subtleties of some of our later day SingleTaxers and gone straight to the heart of the problem, is also clear from what he had to say, and from what we know of his statesmanlike courage and the peculiar directness of that keen and penetrating intellect.

But the question of chattel slavery lay like a stone in the way. That removed, the monster of land monopoly was to be overthrown. And that there may be no doubt of the keenness of his apprehension of the nature of that struggle, the following words furnish conclusive proof:

"On other questions there is ample room for reform when the time comes; but now it would be folly to think we could undertake more than we have on hand. But when slavery is over and settled, men should never rest content while oppression, wrongs and iniquities are in force against them."

NO PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND

That Lincoln saw the absurdity of treating the planet as private property is proved by these words:

"The land, the earth God gave to man for his home, sustenance and support, should never be the possession of any man, corporation, society, or unfriendly government, any more than the air or water, if as much. An individual, or company, or enterprise requiring land should hold no more than is required for their home and sustenance, and never more than they have in actual use in the prudent management of their legitimate business, and this much should not be permitted when it creates an exclusive monopoly. All that is not so used should be held for the free use of every family to make homesteads, and to hold them as long as they are so occupied."

When Lincoln turned, as George did, to a method that would conserve the rights of man to the earth, he did not turn to taxation. But this is immaterial. It is enough to know that the method he stated would have followed the principle laid down—that the earth is the property of all mankind. That is after all the essential thing. The Single Tax has too long been made a fetich of by many of us. The method has grown to obscure the thing aimed at. That it is the best method for the attainment of the aim is very likely true. It avails itself of existing machinery, and it follows customs made familiar by experience. But that is all. If it will not establish equality to the use of the earth, it is only an interesting and not very important reform in methods of revenue.

LINCOLN SAW THINGS IN THE BIG WAY

Lincoln, of course, saw it in the bigger way. He would, therefore, have dealt with it in the big way. There would have been no half-way treatment. He would have announced the freedom of mankind, the New Declaration of Emancipation, by announcing, as he does so plainly, that there is no such thing as private property in land, any more than in the air and water, "if as much," a clause that has a strange significance.

He had no doubt of the principle he laid down. Of the method to be pursued he was not so certain. He said: "A reform like this will be worked out some time in the future."

He knew the movement would meet with opposition and he knew the kind of opposition it would meet. He characterized those who would oppose it in terms which will seem to some of the more timid souls amongst us as shockingly offensive.

"The idle talk of foolish men, that is so common now, will find its way against it, with whatever force it may possess, and as strongly promoted and carried on as it can be by land monopolists, grasping landlords, and the titled and untitled senseless enemies of mankind everywhere."

LINCOLN IS OF US

It is pleasant to know that the spirit and mind of Lincoln are of us and with us. He was a man who dealt with elemental things. He saw the land question, saw it clearly; he saw the miseries that come from treating land as unrestricted private property, and he would have dealt summarily with the evil institution, and in this he expected to have the opposition of "the senseless enemies of mankind everywhere."

JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

A Nineteen-Year-Old Girl's Budget

A YOUNG woman whose great-uncle owned land in Pennsylvania will be allowed by an order of the Surrogate to draw \$24,000 a year for her support from the income of the estate.

On this land anthracite coal was discovered. This coal is sold as it lies in the ground on a royalty basis, the royalty depending on the price which anthracite coal brings at New York harbor.

Last year the royalties amounted to \$60,000. The higher the price of anthracite the more royalty this nineteen-year-old girl will receive. As soon as she is twenty-one years old she can spend the whole income as she pleases.

The items for this young girl, according to her station in life, were submitted to the Surrogate. They are: Rent, \$5,000; servants' wages, \$3,500; food, \$5,000; clothing, \$3,500; education, \$2,500; automobile, \$2,000; traveling, charities, amusements and incidentals, \$3,500.

So, that's where the money goes! N.Y. *Evening Mail*.

Years Have Not Lessened His Influence

BETWEEN the home of the Whites and the church there lived for many years Henry George, a writer and economist, whose fame the passing years have thus far failed to lessen. Few men of our times have exerted a greater influence on contemporary thought than did the author of "Progress and Poverty," nor is it unlikely that in the years to come the world will accept some of his ideas on the subject of land taxation. A near neighbor of Mr. George was Mr. Tom Johnson, later a citizen of Cleveland. —JAMES L. FORD, in *N. Y. Tribune*.