

PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND.

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THE most fundamental, the most powerful instinct of the human heart, which prompts our every act and directs our every endeavor, is the desire for happiness, a happiness all-embracing in its objects and unlimited in its scope. In a religious age the tendency of this desire is especially directed towards higher spiritual goods, whereas in a material age like ours, the spiritual naturally recedes to give way to a craving for the good things of this earth. The disparity in the allotment of the latter among the members of the human family and the hardships which it entails upon the less favored, have at all times prompted kind souls to devise means for the righting of those wrongs, which they consider due to the faulty construction of our social establishment.

In our days, these endeavors have resulted in an organized movement termed variously socialism or communism in accordance with the different means by which they propose to accomplish their social reforms. Among the philanthropists that have become conspicuous in this movement, Herbert Spencer and Henry George occupy a foremost rank. Being deeply impressed with the picture of luxury and extravagance of the rich, the suffering and misery of the poor, the arrogance of the monopolist and the bonded slavery of the laborer, they believe that suffering humanity called upon them to relieve its helpless condition. In response to this call they generously and earnestly devoted their more than ordinary abilities to this grand and noble cause.

But blinded by their zeal, as we will generally suppose, they rushed to the unwarranted conclusion that in the possession of private property in land was to be found the source of all the misery of our nineteenth century. By the power of word and pen they have spread their communistic teachings, throughout the civilized

world and have endeavored to establish a social system based upon the destruction of private property in land, termed technically land nationalization.

Many believe this doctrine to be of American origin: but falsely so. Such a system is not congenial to the people of this continent; it is contrary to the letter and spirit of our institutions. We have risen to what we are by individual exertion and enterprise. It needs no proof that individualism and not socialism or communism, decentralization and not centralization are at the bottom of our political and material prosperity. It is most probable that the germ of the Henry George theory, as it is called, was wafted across the ocean from some of the congested cities of Europe, where abuses of class privileges and limited suffrage prevail, and where honest and industrious labor often fails to find employment or fair wages. From such a source it would be more likely to emanate than from our free and prosperous continent, where every willing hand can find honorable and well-paid employment.

Fichte, the great German philosopher, in his work, "Materials for the Justification of the French Revolution," defines property as does Mr. George. In England, Herbert Spencer had taught the same doctrine, and more recently Henry George advanced his theories in America. His greatest work, "Progress and Poverty," is an embodiment of the whole doctrine and is the *chef-d'œuvre* of the system bearing his name. It is a well written work, light and attractive, and may be read with equal pleasure and profit by the workman or the scholar.

The whole work may be summed up in the following argument: The cause of poverty should be abolished. But the cause of poverty is private property in land. Therefore private property in land should be abolished. We all freely concede that poverty should be alleviated: but the reformer who undertakes to abolish it, will find his task more difficult than he had anticipated, for poverty will ac-