

On William Ogilvie's Essay

by Shirley-Anne Hardy

As I write these words, Scotland has just taken a momentous first step towards the restitution of her full independence. Dealing, in his Essay, with the fundamentals of injustice, which he saw to be rooted in false land tenure, Ogilvie knew that, if there is to be a restitution to the Scots of their land, then "the will of the collective body of the people" must be brought into operation to accomplish it.

Why is this? Because more is caught in the term "land reform" (is it to be *radical* land reform) than meets the eye — and certainly something more than the nation's "petty cash"! It was, of course, only radical land reform that interested Ogilvie — for his perceptions were radical. And is it not that *radical clear seeing* that we are so in need of today?

The whole of the political process, with all its sickening corruptions, has grown up out of, and fattened itself upon, the apparently insoluble conundrum of the continuing economic slavery of the vast majority, under whatever political flag. Clearly then, this matter of the economic structure under which we live needs examining to its roots. And if we in Scotland would do this, we are fortunate, for we find that we have a child of our very own to address us — and who speaks his blazing message to us, across two hundred years, for this very time. For William Ogilvie shows how the political will can be transformed into the truly national will, by taking the economic question in its stride.

Is it not
that *radical*
clear seeing
that we are so in
need of today?

Ogilvie showed us that the root of power in the political struggle is always economic — and that it is out of this economic root that political power springs. Therefore Ogilvie, in his Essay, addresses himself to the root of the economic question. And where does he find this root to lie? Where else could it possibly be found to lie, but in that word doubly emphasized by Mark Twain: "Get land, young man, get land — they don't make it any more!"

Land — which no human hand made, land — which we all need for our very survival here, and which indeed *was* here, waiting for us when we arrived, like a mother with open and welcoming arms: how come we have allowed some to carry title-deeds to this Earth-Mother of ours, empowering them to hold others to ransom for a very living?

"To whomsoever the soil at any time belongs, to him belong the fruits of it. White parasols and elephants mad with pride are the flowers of a grant of land" (Translation of an Indian grant of land, found at Tanner)

What, exactly, are “the fruits of it”? All that can be taken from one who labors on that land, above what is yielded where the land is marginal — as the laborer, if not actually starving, is nevertheless at the bottom end of society’s scale.

This is the Law of Rent! This law operates in industrial Britain just as in rural India! In Britain, where great masses of people at the lower end of the social scale, while not outwardly starving, are so drastically starved of real nutrition — and so, sickening in countless ways — that they are more and more collapsing upon our social services, which are less and less capable of acting as a safety net under the weight of a society gradually collapsing under land rent robbery.

To return to those “white parasols, and elephants mad with pride”. Today’s Cadillacs and trips to the sun? How marvelously summed up are our more homely political prostitutions, just the same! To Ogilvie, it was all an open book: the intricate, destructive interweavings of the Law of Rent through the whole social fabric — and the tragic stranglehold that such an economic power base always exerts upon the political one.

It was therefore plain to him that the uprooting of such an economic order would require nothing less than one of those rarest of historical events: a time when “the decisive power of the State is thrown for a while into the hands of the collective body of the people”. He saw, moreover, that even given that rarest of moments, the uprooting of such a powerful economic structure can only be achieved — through insertion, in a new constitution, of the necessary bill of right — by a people who knows what they are doing.

Scotland is now poised at just such an extraordinary moment in her history. But do the Scots yet really know *what it is that they must do if they would truly win their freedom?*

With labor so exploited still in every land, under cruel land tenure laws — how many are the oppressed that wait for Ogilvie’s country to shine her beacon of hope across the world?

Her Saltire! For is our Saltire to speak only for Scotland? Only for a political independence? Or is it to carry a broader message — to blazon across the world, through its national symbol, the possibility of the *economic freedom of every dweller on this earth* — because an economic freedom already made our own, and woven through every strand of our flag? Hence, a national flag like no other — *like no other flag ever flown?* **GJ**

(From Birthright in Land... and the State of Scotland Today, the outstanding compendium of Gaian and Georgist wisdom compiled and edited by the author.)