

BULLETINS FOR SOCIALISTS

THE LAW OF FREEDOM

by

Gerrard Winstanley

1652

Price 6d.

NUMBER 7

MAY 1942

Introductory Note to
THE LAW OF FREEDOM
BY
Gerrard Winstanley.

Gerrard Winstanley was born in 1609, at Wigan. He was engaged in some branch of the cloth industry, and became bankrupt as a result of the civil wars. He married Susan King in 1640. His first pamphlets, published in 1648, are concerned with his own religious conversion. Soon, however, he became convinced that supernatural religion was the opium of the people, and that it was necessary to institute a communist society. In January 1649 he records that he received in a trance the command to "work together; eat bread together;" and in April of the same year, at Cobham in Surrey, he, with half-a-dozen companions, began to dig the common-land, with the intention of founding a communist settlement.

The Diggers were persecuted by local landowners and attacked by the military; but they grew in numbers, and were not finally dispersed until April 1650.

The Law of Freedom, the longest and most important of Winstanley's numerous pamphlets, was addressed to Cromwell, in the hope that he would found the communist society of which the Diggers had dreamed. The peculiar interest of the pamphlet lies in Winstanley's conception of religion. It was a natural development from the conviction expressed in his early theological pamphlets; but by the time of the Digger experiment, he had completely rejected dualism and supernaturalism. He had come to believe that the "divining spiritual Doctrine" was a cheat, designed to blind men's eyes to the injustice of the economic system. He thought that the function of true religion was the maintenance and extension of community; and he would have agreed with Macmurray that the failure to recognize that the real world and the supernatural are the same is the main falsification of religion. Winstanley did not cease to be a Christian when he became a communist. To him communism was merely the application of Christianity in the actual world of political and economic relationships.

THE LAW OF FREEDOM IN A PLATFORM
OR
TRUE MAGISTRACY RESTORED

To His Excellency, Oliver Cromwell...

Sir,

God hath honoured you with the highest Honour of any man since Moses' time, to be the head of a People, who have cast out an oppressing Pharaoh... That which is yet wanting on your part to be done is this, To see the Oppressor's power to 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 the Crown of Honour cannot be yours, neither can those Victories be called Victories on your part, till the Land and Freedoms won be possessed by them who adventured person and purse for them.

Now you know Sir, that the Kingly Conqueror was not beaten by you only as you are a single man, nor by the Officers of the Army joined to you; but by the hand and assistance of the Commons, whereof some came in person, and adventured their lives with you; others stayed at home, and planted the Earth, and paid Taxes and Quarter to maintain you that went to war. So that whatsoever is recovered from the Conqueror, is recovered by a joint Consent of the Commons: therefore it is all Equity, That all the Commons who assisted you should be set free from the Conqueror's power with you: As David's Law was, The spoil shall be divided between them who went to war, and them who stayed at home.

And 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, who assisted you, and paid the Army their wages: and then you will fulfil the Scriptures and your own Engagements, 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 Wisdom and Honour is blasted for ever; and you will either lose your self, or lay the Foundation of greater Slavery to posterity than you ever knew...

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'. You have the eyes of the People all the Land over, nay I think I may say all neighbouring Nations over, waiting to see what you will do: And the eyes of your oppressed friends, who lie yet under Kingly power, are waiting to have the possession given them of that Freedom in the Land, which was promised by you, if in case you prevailed. Lose not your Crown; take it up, and wear it. But know, that it is no Crown of Honour, till Promises and Engagements made by you be performed to your friends. He that continues to the end, shall receive the Crown. Now you do not see the end of your work, unless the Kingly Law and Power be removed as well as his person. (v)

Sir, I pray hear with me; my spirit is upon such a lock that I must speak plain to you, lest it tell me another day, If thou hadst spoke plain, things might have been amended...It may be you will say to me, "What shall I do?" I answer, You are in place and power to see all Burthens taken off from your friends, the Commoners of England. You will say, "What are those Burthens?" I will instance in some, both which I know in my own experience, and which I hear the people daily complaining of, and groaning under, looking upon you and waiting for Deliverance.

Most people cry, We have paid Taxes, given Freequarter, wasted our Estates, and lost our Friends in the Wars, and the Taskmasters multiply over us more than formerly. I have asked divers this question, Why do you say so? Some have answered me, That Promises, Oaths, and Engagements have been made as a Motive to draw us to assist in the Wars; That privileges of Parliament and Liberties of Subjects should be preserved, and that all Popery, and Episcopacy and Tyranny should be rooted out; and these promises are not performed: Now there is an opportunity to perform them.

(vi)

For first, say they, The current of succeeding Parliaments is stopp'd, which is one of the greatest Privileges (and people's Liberties) for Safety and Peace; and if that continue stopp'd, we shall be more offended by an hereditary Parliament, than we were oppress'd by an hereditary King. And for the Commoners, who were called Subjects, while the Kingly Conqueror was in power, have not as yet their Liberties granted them; I will instance them in order, according as the common whisperings are among the people. For say they, The burdens of the Clergy remain still upon us, in a three-fold return. First, If any man declare his Judgment in the things of God, contrary to the Clergy's report, or the mind of some high Officers, they are cashiered, imprisoned, crushed, and undone, and made sinners for a word, as they were in the Pope's and Bishops' days...Secondly, In many Parishes there are old formal ignorant Episcopall Priests established; and some Ministers, who are bitter Enemies to Commonwealth's Freedom, and Friends to Monarchy, are established Preachers, and are continually buzzing their subtle principles into the minds of the people, to undermine the Peace of our declared Commonwealth, causing a disaffection of spirit among neighbours, who otherwise would live in peace. Thirdly, The burden of Tithes remains still upon our Estates, which was taken from us by the Kings, and given to the Clergy, to maintain them by our labours: so that though their preaching fill the minds of many with madness, contention, and unsatisfied doubting, because their imaginary and ungrounded Doctrines cannot be understood by them, yet we must pay them large Tithes for so doing; this is Oppression.

(vii)

And indeed the main Work of Reformation lies in this, to reform the Clergy, Lawyers, and Law; for all the Complaints of the Land are wrapp'd up within them three, not in the person of a King...I have asked divers Soldiers what they fought for; they answered, they could not tell; and it is very true, they cannot tell indeed, if the Monarchical Law be established without Reformation. But I wait to see what will be done; and I doubt not but to see our Commonwealth's Government to be built upon his own Foundation.

(viii)

Now saith the whisperings of the people, The inferior Tenants and Labourers bear all the burdens, in labouring the Earth, in paying Taxes and Freequarter beyond their strength, and in furnishing the Armies with Soldiers, who

bear the greatest burden in the War; and yet the Gentry, who oppress them, and that live idle upon their labours, carry away all the comfortable livelihood of the Earth. For is not this a common speech among the people, We have parted with our Estates, we have lost our Friends in the Wars, which we willingly gave up, because Freedom was promised us; and now in the end we have new Taskmasters, and our old burdens increased: and though all sorts of people have taken an Engagement to cast out Kingly Power, yet Kingly Power remains in power still in the hands of those who have no more right to the Earth than ourselves. For, say the people, If the Lords of Manors and our Task-masters hold Title to the Earth over us from the old Kingly power, behold that power is beaten and cast out.

(ix)

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 day wages for them, or starve, or steal, and so be hanged out of the way, as men not fit to live in the earth, before they must be suffered to plant the waste Land for their livelihood, unless they will pay Rent to their brethren for it? Well, this is a burthen the Creation groans under; and the subjects (so called) have not their Birth-right Freedoms granted them from their brethren, who hold it from them by club law, but not by righteousness. And who now must we be subject to, seeing the Conqueror is gone? I answer, we must either be subject to a Law, or to men's wills. If to a Law, then all men in England are subjects, or ought to be, thereunto: but what Law that is in which every one ought to be subject is not yet established in execution. If any say the old King's Laws are the Rule, then it may be answered, That those Laws are so full of confusion, that few know when they obey and when not, because they were the Laws of a Conqueror to hold the people in subjection to the will of the Conqueror; therefore that cannot be the rule for every one...And again if we must be subject to men, then what men must we be subject to, seeing one man hath as much right to the earth as another, for no man now stands as a Conqueror over his Brethren by the Law of righteousness? You will say, We must be subject to the Ruler; it 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 of double honour when he rules well, that is when he himself is subject to the Law, and requires all others to be subject thereunto...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 Kings' Conquest, the Kings are beaten and cast out and that title is undone. If he claim the Title to the earth to be his from the Conquest of the Commons over the Kings, then I have 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...

And now, say the people, is not this a grievous thing that our brethren that will be Landlords right or wrong, will make Laws, and call for a Law to be made to imprison, crush, may put to death, any that denies God, Christ, and Scripture; and yet they will not practise that golden Rule, Do to another as thou wouldst have another do to thee, which God, Christ, and Scriptures hath Enacted for a Law? are not these men guilty of death by their own Law, which is the words of their own mouth? is it not a flat denial of God and Scripture? O the confusion and thick darkness that hath overspread our Brethren is very great, I have no power to remove it, but lament it in the secrets of my heart; when I see Prayers, Sermons, Fasts, Thanksgiving, directed to this God in words and shews, and when I come to look for actions of obedience to the Righteous Law, suitable to such a profession, I find them men of another Nation, saying, and not doing...I will say no more, but groan and wait for a restoration.

Thus Sir, I have reckoned up some of those burdens which the people groan under. And I being sensible hereof was moved in myself, to present this Platform of Commonwealth's Government unto you, wherein I have declared a full Commonwealth's Freedom, according to the Rule of Righteousness, which is God's Word. It was intended for your view above two years ago, but the disorder of the Times caused me to lay it aside, with a thought never to bring it to light...But this word was like fire in my bones ever and anon, Thou shalt not bury thy talent in the earth, therefore I was stirred up to give it a resurrection, and to pick together as many of my scattered papers as I could find, and to compile them into this method, which I do here present to you, and do quiet my own spirit. And now I have set the candle at your door, for you have power in your hand, in this other added opportunity, to Act for Common Freedom if you will; I have no power. It may be here are some things inserted which you may not like, yet other things you may like, therefore I pray you read it, and be as the industrious Bee, suck out the honey and cast away the weeds. Though this Platform be like a piece of Timber rough hewn, yet the discreet workman may take it, and frame a handsome building out of it.

(xii)
Is not buying and selling a righteous Law? No, It is the Law of the Conqueror, but not the righteous Law of Creation: how can that be righteous which is a cheat? For is not this a common practise, when he hath a bad Horse or Cow, or any bad commodity, he will send it to the market, to cheat some simple plain-hearted man or other, and when he comes home, will laugh at his neighbour's hurt...When Mankind began to buy and sell, then did he fall from his Innocency; for then they began to oppress and cozen one another of their Creation Birth-right...Therefore this buying and selling did bring in, and still doth bring in, discontents and wars, which hath plagued Mankind sufficiently for so doing. And the Nations of the world will never learn to beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and leave off warring, until this cheating device of buying and selling be cast out among the rubbish of Kingly power.

But shall not one man be richer than another? There is no need of that; for Riches make men vain-glorious, proud, and to oppress their Brethren; and are the occasion of wars. No man can be rich, 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 Neighbour's as well as his; for they be the fruit of other men's labours as well as his own. But all rich men live at ease, feeding and clothing themselves by the labours of other men, not by 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.

(xiii)

But shall not one man have more Titles of Honour than another? Yes: As a man goes through Offices, he rises to Titles of Honour, till he comes to the highest Nobility, to be a faithful Commonwealth's man in a Parliament House. Likewise he who finds out any secret in Nature, shall have a Title of Honour given him, though he be a young man. But no man shall have any Title of Honour till he win it by industry, or come to it by age, or Office-bearing...

Shall we have no Lawyers? There is no need of them, for there is to be no buying and selling; neither any need to expound Laws; for the bare Letter of the Law shall be both Judge and Lawyer, trying every man's actions: And seeing we shall have successive Parliaments every year, there will be Rules made for every action a man can do. But there is to be Officers chosen yearly in every parish, to see the Laws executed according to the letter of the Laws; so that there will be no long work in trying of Offences, as it is under Kingly Government, to get the Lawyers money, and to enslave the Commons to the Conqueror's prerogative Law, or Will...

If any say, This will bring poverty; surely they mistake: for there will be plenty of all Earthly Commodities, with less labour and trouble than now it is under Monarchy. There will be no want, for every man may keep as plentiful a house as he will, and never run into debt, for common stock pays for all.

(xiv)

If you say, Some will live idle; I answer, No: It will make idle persons to become workers, as is declared in the Platform; There shall be neither Beggar nor idle person. If you say, This will make men quarrel and fight: I answer, No: It will turn swords into ploughshares, and settle such a peace in the Earth, as Nations shall learn War no more. Indeed the Government of Kings is a breeder of Wars, because men being put into the straits of poverty, are moved to fight for Liberty, and to take one another's Estates from them, and to obtain Mastery. Look into all Armies, and see what they do more, but make some poor, some rich; put some into freedom, and others into bondage: And is not this a plague among Mankind?

-(6)-

(xv)

To the Friendly and Unbiased Reader.

Reader,

It was the Apostle's advice formerly, to try all things, and to hold fast that which is best. This Platform of Government which I offer, is the Original Righteousness and Peace in the Earth, though he hath been buried under the floods of Kingly Covetousness, Pride and Oppression a long time...

To prevent thy hasty rashness, I have given thee a short Compendium of the whole. First, Thou knowest that the Earth in all Nations is governed by buying and selling, for all the Laws of Kings hath relation therunto. Now this Platform following declares to thee the Government of the Earth without buying and selling, and the Laws are the Laws of a free and peaceable Commonwealth, which cuts out everything that offends; for there is no pricking Briar in all this holy Mountain of the righteous Law, or peaceable Ruler...The Earth shall be planted, and the fruits reaped, and carried into Store-houses by common assistance of every Family: There shall be no idle person nor Beggars in the Land.

And because offence may arise from the spirit of unreasonable ignorance, therefore was the Law added. For if any man abuse his neighbour, by provoking words, by striking his person, by offering offence to his neighbour's wife or children, or to his house or furniture therein, or to live idle upon other men's labours, there are Laws to punish them sharply, and Officers to see those Laws executed, according to the right Order of Commonwealth's Government, for the peace of every family in the Land.

(xvi)

Therefore Reader here is a trial for thy sincerity: Thou shalt have no want of food, raiment, or Freedom among Brethren in this way propounded: See now if thou canst be content, as the Scriptures say, Having food and raiment, therewith be content, and grudge not to let thy brother have the same with thee.

Dost thou pray and fast for Freedom, and give God thanks again for it? Why know that God is not partial; for if thou pray, it must be for Freedom for all; and if thou give thanks, it must be because Freedom covers all people, for this will prove a lasting Peace.

Every one is ready to say, They fight for their Country, and what they do, they do it for the good of their Country. Well, let it appear now that thou hast fought and acted for thy Country's Freedom. But if when thou hast power to settle Freedom in thy Country, thou takest the possession of the Earth into thy own particular hands, and makest thy brother work for thee, as the Kings did, thou hast fought and acted for thy self, not for thy Country; and here thy insidious hypocrisy is discovered. But here take notice, That common Freedom, which is the rule I would have practised, and not talked on, was thy pretence; but particular Freedom to thy self was thy intent. Amend, or else thou wilt be shamed, when Knowledge doth spread to cover the Earth, even as the waters cover the Seas. And so Farewell.

CHAPTER I.

The great searching of heart in these days is to find out where true Freedom lies, that the Commonwealth of England might be established in Peace. Some say: It lies in the free use of Trading, and to have all Patents, Licenses and Restraints removed: But this is a Freedom under the Will of a Conqueror. Others say it is true Freedom to have Ministers to preach, and for people to hear whom they will, without being restrained or compelled from or to any form of worship: But this is an unsettled Freedom. Others say: It is true Freedom to have Community with all Women, and to have liberty to satisfy their lusts and greedy appetites: But this is the Freedom of wanton unreasonable Beasts, and tends to Destruction. Others say: It is true Freedom that the elder Brother shall be Landlord of the Earth, and the younger Brother a Servant; And this is but a half Freedom, and begets murmurings, wars and quarrels. All these, and such like, are Freedoms: but they lead to Bondage, and are not the true Foundation-Freedom which settles a Commonwealth in Peace.

True Freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment (xviii) and preservation, and that is in the use of the Earth: For as a man is compounded of the four materials of Creation, Fire, Water, Earth and Air, so is he preserved by the compounded bodies of these four, which are the Fruits of the Earth; and he cannot live without them: for take away the free use of these, and the body languishes, the spirit is brought into bondage, and at length departs, and ceaseth his motional action in the body. All that a man labours for, saith Solomon, is this: That he may enjoy the free use of the Earth, with the fruits thereof.

Do not Ministers preach for maintenance in the Earth? The Lawyers plead causes to get the possessions of the Earth? Doth not the Soldier fight for the Earth? And doth not the Landlord require Rent, that he may live in the fullness of the Earth by the Labour of his Tenants? And so, from the Thief upon the highway to the King upon the Throne, do not every one strive, either by force of Arms, or secret cheats, to get the possessions of the Earth from another because they see their Freedom lies in plenty, and their bondage lies in poverty?

Surely then, oppressing Lords of Manors, exacting landlords and Tithe-takers, may as well say, their brethren shall not breathe in the air, not enjoy warmth in their bodies, not have the moist waters to fall upon them in showers, unless they will pay them Rent for it: As to say, their brethren shall not work upon Earth, nor earn the fruits thereof, unless they will hire that liberty of them: for he that takes upon him to restrain his brother from the liberty of the one, may upon the same ground restrain him from the liberty of all four; viz. Fire, Water, Earth, and Air.

A man had better to have had no body than to have no food for it; therefore this restraining of the Earth from brethren by brethren, is oppression and bondage; but the free enjoyment thereof is true Freedom.

I speak now in relation between the Oppressor and the oppressed; the inward bondages I meddle not with in this place, though I am assured that if it be rightly searched into, the inward bondages of the mind as covetousness, pride, hypocrisy, envy, sorrow, fears, desperation, and madness, are all occasioned by

the outward bondage, that one sort of people lay upon another.

And thus far natural experience makes it good, That true Freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the Earth.

If we look into the old Scriptures, We find, That when Israel had conquered the Nations, he took possession of the Enemy's Land, and divided it by lot among the Tribes, counting the enjoyment of the Earth their perfect Freedom(xix).. So that we see by Scriptures proof likewise, the Land is that which everyone place their Freedom in.

If we look into the practise of Kings, and Conquerors, Since the Scriptures of Mosca were writ, we find they placed their freedom in the enjoyment of the free use of the earth...

The first Officer was the Lawyer...(xx) The next Officer was the national Clergy; and their work was to persuade the multitude of people to let William the Conqueror alone with a quiet possession and government of the earth, and to call it his and not theirs, and so not to rebel against him... But in after times, when this National Ministry appeared to the people to be but hirelings, and as the people grew in knowledge they discovered their hypocrisy more and more, as they do in these days: Then this Clergy (the spirit of the old Pharisees) began to divine and to deceive the people by a shew of holiness, or spiritual doctrine, as they call it, difficult to be understood by any but themselves; persuading the people to believe or fancy, That true Freedom lay in hearing them preach, and to enjoy that Heaven, which they say, every man who believes their doctrine, shall enjoy after he is dead: And so tell us of a Heaven and Hell after death, which neither they nor we know what will be: So that the whole world is at a loss in the true knowledge thereof, as Solomon said, Who shall bring him to see what shall be after he is dead?

The former hell of prisons, whips and gallows they preached to keep the people in subjection to the King: but by this divined Hell after death, they preach to keep both King and people in awe to them, to uphold their trade of Tythes and new raised maintenance: (xxi) And so having blinded both King and people they become the god that rules: This subtle divining spirit is the Whore that sits upon many waters: . . . For so long as the people call that a Truth which they call a Truth, and believe what they preach, and are willing to let the Clergy be the keepers of their eyes and knowledge...then all is well, and they tell the people they shall go to Heaven. But if the eyes of the people begin to open, and they seek to find knowledge in their own hearts, and to question the Ministers' Doctrine, and become like unto wise-hearted Thomas, to believe nothing but what they see reason for: Then do the Ministers prepare War against Man or men, and will make no Covenant of Peace with him, till they consent to have their right eyes put out, that is, to have their reason blinded, so as to believe every Doctrine they preach, and never question anything, saying, The Doctrine of Faith must not be tried by Reason: No, for if it be, their Mystery of Iniquity will be discovered, and they would lose their Tythes...

Now if the Earth could be enjoyed in such a manner as everyone might have provision, as it may by this Platform I have offered, then will the Peace of the Commonwealth be preserved, and men need not act so hypocritically as the Clergy do,

and others likewise, to get a living: But when some shall enjoy great possessions, and others who have done as much or more for to purchase Freedom, shall have none at all, and be made slaves to their brethren, this begets offences. (xxii)

Some hearing of this Common Freedom, think there must be a Community of all the fruits of the Earth whether they work or no, therefore strive to live idle upon other men's labours. Others, through the same unreasonable beastly ignorance, think there must be a Community of all men and women for Copulation, and so strive to live a bestial life. Others think there will be no Law, but that every thing will run into confusion for want of Government; but this Platform proves the contrary. Therefore because that transgression doth and may arise from ignorance and rude fancy in man, is the Law added.

That which true Righteousness in my judgment calls Community, is this, To have the Earth set free from all Kingly Bondage of Lords of Manors, and oppressing Landlords, which came in by Conquest; as a Thief takes a true man's purse upon the highway, being stronger than he. And that neither the Earth, nor any fruits thereof, should be bought or sold by the Inhabitants one among another, which is a slavery the Kingly Conquerors have brought in... And though this be, yet shall not men live idle; for the Earth shall be planted and reaped, and the fruits carried into Barns and Storehouses by the assistance of every family... Every man shall be brought up in Trades and labours, and all Trades shall be maintained with more improvement, to the enriching of the Commonwealth, more than they now be under Kingly Power. (xxiv)

Every Tradesman shall fetch Materials, as Leather, Wool, Flax, Corn, and the like, from the public Store-houses to work upon without buying and selling; and when particular works are made, as Cloth, Shoes, Hats, and the like, the Tradesmen shall bring these particular works to particular shops, as it is now in practice, without buying and selling. And every family as they want such things as they cannot make, they shall go to these shops, and fetch without money, even as now they fetch with money, as hereafter is shewed how in order...

Therefore I desire a patient reading of what hereafter follows... For you For you must either establish Commonwealth's Freedom in Power, making provision for every one's Peace, which is Righteousness; or else you must set up Monarchy again. Monarchy is twofold; either for one King to rule, or for many to rule by Kingly Principles, much murmuring, grudges, troubles, and quarrels may and will arise among the oppressed people upon every gained opportunity. But if Common Freedom be found out, and ease the oppressed, it prevents murmuring and quarrels, and established Universal Peace in the Earth.

Chapter II (xxv-xxxii)

In the second chapter Winstanley discusses the nature of government, and he contrasts monarchical government with commonwealth government. "Kingly Power is the oppressor, and the maintainers thereof are called oppressors by the ancient writers of the Bible."

"The Winter's past, the Spring-time now appears,
Be gone thou Kingly Tyrant, with all thy Cavaliers.
Thy day is past, and cure thouedost appear
To be the bond-man's son, and not the free-born Heir."

For the King's Power lies in his Laws, not in the Name: and if either one
King rule, or many rule by King's Principles,

Commonwealth Government, on the other hand, "depends not upon the Will of any particular man, or men; for it is seated in the spirit of Mankind, and it is called the light, or son of righteousness and peace. The Tyrants in all ages have made use of this man's name, while he hath lye buried, to cover their cheating mystery of Iniquity: for if common Freedom were not pretended, the Commoners of a Land would never dance after the pipe of self-seeking wits".

CHAPTER III (xxxii - xl)

In the next chapter Winstanley shows that laws spring either from common preservation or self-preservation, and that the latter lead to tyranny. He provides a number of reasons why it is necessary for the officers of a commonwealth to be elected each year.

CHAPTER IV (xl - xlvi)

Winstanley then proceeds to describe the functions of the different officers: Peacemakers (who were to settle disputes before they came into court); Overseers (who were to look after questions of employment, production and distribution); Soldiers (who in peace-time were to act as a police force); Task-masters (who were to look after those who have been deprived of their freedom through misconduct, and who endeavour to reform delinquents); Executioners; Judges; and Parliament.

"So then, a Parliament is the head of Power in a Commonwealth, and it is their work to manage public affairs in times of War, and in times of Peace; not to promote the interest of particular men, but for the Peace and Freedom of the whole Body of the Land, viz. of every particular man, that none be deprived of his Creation Rights, unless he hath lost his Freedom by Transgression, as by the Laws is expressed."

The passage which follows is the most interesting in the book. Its attack on the "divining spiritual doctrine" is a natural development of the passage in an earlier pamphlet: "And if any poor enslaved man that dares not stoop, begins to mourn under that bondage and saith, Wo that work most have least comfort in the earth, and they that work not at all, enjoy all; contrary to the Scripture which saith, The poor and the meek shall inherit the earth;

Presently the tithing Priest stops his mouth with a slam and tells him that is want of the inward satisfaction of mind which the poor shall have, though they enjoy nothing at all, and so poor creatures, it is true they have some ease thereby, and made to wait with patience, while Kingly power swims in fullness, and laughes at the other's misery."

The work of a Commonwealth's Ministry, and why one day in seven may be a Day of rest from Labour.

If there were good Laws, and the People be ignorant of them, it would be as bad for the Commonwealth as if there were no Laws at all. It is very rational and good, that one day in seven be still set apart for three Reasons. First, That the People in such a Parish may generally meet together to see one another's faces, and to get or preserve fellowship in friendly love. (lvi) Secondly, to be a day of rest... Thirdly, that he who is chosen Minister (for that year) in that Parish may read to the people three things.

First the affairs of the whole Land, as it is brought in by the Postmaster, as it is related in his office, hereafter following.

Secondly, to read the Law of the Commonwealth: not only to strengthen

the memory of the Ancients, but that the young people also, who are not grown up to ripeness of experience, may be instructed, to know when they do well, and when they do ill; for the Law of a Land hath the power of freedom and bondage, life and death in its hand, therefore the necessary knowledge to be known, and he is the best Prophet that acquaints men therewith.

And thirdly, because the minds of people generally love discourses, therefore that the wits of men both young and old may be exercised, there may be speeches made in a three-fold nature.

First, To declare the acts and passages of former ages and Governments, setting forth the benefits of freedom by well-ordered governments, as in Israel's Commonwealth, and the troubles and bondage which hath always attended oppression and oppressors, as the State of Pharaoh and other Tyrant Kings, who said the earth and people were theirs, and only at their dispose.

Secondly, Speeches may be made of all Arts and Sciences, some one day, some another, as in Physick, Chirurgery, Astrology, Astronomy, Navigation, Husbandry, and such like. And in these speeches may be unfolded the nature of all herbs and plants, from the Hyssop to the Cedar, as Solomon writ of. Likewise men may come to see into the nature of the fixed and wandering stars, those great powers of God in the heavens above; And hereby men will come to know the secrets of Nature and Creation, within which all true knowledge is wrapped up, and the light in man must arise to search it out. (lvi)

Thirdly, Speeches may be made sometimes of the Nature of Mankind, of his darkness and of his light, of his weakness and of his strength, of his love and of his envy, of his sorrow and of his joy, of his inward and outward bondage, of his inward and outward freedoms, etc. And this is that at which the Ministry of Churches generally aims but only that they confound their knowledge by imaginary study, when anyone takes upon him to speak without experience. Now this is the way to attain to the true knowledge of God (who is the Spirit of the whole Creation), as he hath spread himself forth in every form, and more eminently in man.

And if the earth were set free from Kingly Bondage, so that everyone were sure to have a free livelihood, and if this liberty were granted, then many secrets of God, and his works in Nature, would be made public, which men now-a-days keep secret to get a living by; so that this Kingly Bondage is the cause of the spreading of ignorance in the Earth: But when Commonwealth Freedom is established, and Pharisical or Kingly Slavery cast out, then will knowledge cover the Earth as the waters cover the Sea, and not till then.

He who is the chosen Minister for that year to read, shall not be the only man to make Sermons or Speeches: but everyone who hath any experience, and is able to speak of any Art or Language, or of the Nature of the Heavens above, or of the Earth below, shall have free liberty to speak when they offer themselves...

...And everyone who speaks of any Herb, Plant, Art or Nature of Mankind is required to speak nothing by imagination, but what he hath found out by his own industry and observation in trial... (lxviii) And thus to speak, or thus to read the law of Nature (or God) as He hath written His name in everybody, is to speak a pure language, and this is to speak the truth as Jesus Christ spake it, giving to everything its own weight and measure. By this means in time men shall attain to the practical knowledge of God truly; that they may serve Him in spirit and in truth; and this knowledge will not deceive a man.

Ay, but with the zealous but ignorant Professor, this is a low and carnal ministry indeed; this leads men to know nothing but the knowledge of the earth and the secrets of Nature; but we are to look after spiritual and heavenly things.

I answer: To know the secrets of Nature is to know the works of God; and to know the works of God within the Creation is to know God himself; for God dwelle in every visible work or body.

And indeed, if you would know spiritual things, it is to know how the spirit or power of wisdom and life, causing motion or growth, dwelle within, and governs both the several bodies of the stars and planets in the heavens above; and the several bodies of the earth below; as grass, plants, fishes, beasts, birds and mankind. For to reach God beyond the Creation, or to know what he will be to a man, after the man is dead, is any otherwise than to scatter him into his Essences of fire, water, earth and air, of which he is compounded, is a knowledge beyond the line or capacity of man to attain to while he lives in his compounded body.

And if a man should go to imagine what God is beyond the Creation, or what he will do in a spiritual demonstration after a man is dead, he doth, as the proverb saith, build castles in the air, or telle us of a world beyond the moon, and beyond the Sun, merely to blind the reason of man. I'll appeal to yourself in this question, what other knowledge have you of God but what you have within the circle of the Creation?

For if the Creation in all its dimensions be the fullness of Him that fills all with Himself; and if you yourself be part of this Creation; where can you find God but in that line or station wherein you stand?

God manifests Himself in actual knowledge, not in imagination; He is still in motion, either in bodies upon earth, or in the bodies in the heavens, or in both; in the night and in the day, in Winter, in Summer, in cold, in heat, in growth, or not in growth.

But when a studying imagination comes into man, which is the devil, for it is the cause of all evil, and sorrows in the world; that is he who puts out the eyes of man's knowledge, and telle him that he must believe what others have writ or spoke, and must not trust to his own experience: (lix) And when this bewitching fancy sits in the chair of Government, there is nothing but saying and unsaying, forwardness, covetousness, fears, confused thoughts, and unsatisfied doubtings, all the days of that man's reign in the heart.

Or secondly, examine yourself, and look likewise into the ways of all Professors, and you shall find, That the Enjoyment of the Earth below, which you call a low and carnal Knowledge, is that which you and all professors (as well as men of the world, as you call them) strive and seek after. Wherefore are you so covetous after the World, in buying and selling? counting yourself as a happy man, if you be rich, and a miserable man if you be poor. And though you say, Heaven after death is a place of glory, where you shall enjoy God face to face, yet you are loath to leave the Earth to go thither.

Do not your Ministers preach for to enjoy the Earth? Do not professing Lawyers, as well as others, buy and sell the Conqueror's Justice, that they may enjoy the Earth? Do not professing Soldiers fight for the Earth?... Do not all professors strive to get Earth, that they may live in plenty by other men's labours?..

And it being thus with you, what other spiritual or heavenly things do you seek after more than others? And what is in you more than in others? If you say, there is; then surely you ought to let these earthly things alone to the men

of the world, as you call them, whose portions these are, and keep you within the compass of your own sphere, that others seeing you live a life above the world in peace and freedom, neither working yourself nor deceiving, nor compelling others to work for you, they may be drawn to embrace the same spiritual life by your single-hearted conversation. (lx)

Let us now examine your Divinity, which you call heavenly and spiritual things, for herein speeches are not made to advance knowledge, but to destroy the true knowledge of God; for Divinity does not speak the truth, as it is hid in every body, but it leaves the notional knowledge of a thing as it is, and imagines, studies, or thinks what may be, and so runs the hazard true or false: And this Divinity is always speaking words to deceive the simple, that he may make them work for him, but he never comes to action himself to do as he would be done by; for he is a monster who is all tongue and no hand.

This divining Doctrine, which you call spiritual and heavenly things, is the thief and the robber; he comes to spoil the Vineyard of a man's peace... And this Doctrine is two-fold. First he takes upon him to tell you the meaning of other men's words and writing by his studying or imagining what another man's knowledge might be, and by thus doing darkens knowledge, and wrongs the spirit of the Authors who did write and speak those things which he takes upon him to interpret. Secondly he takes upon him to foretell what shall befall a man after he is dead, and what that world is beyond the Sun, and beyond the Moon... And if any man tell him there is no reason for what you say, he answers you must not judge of heavenly and spiritual things by reason, but you must believe what is told you, whether it be reason or no:

There is a three-fold discovery of falsehood in this Doctrine. For first it is a Doctrine of a sickly and weak spirit, who hath lost his understanding in the knowledge of the Creation, and of the temper of his own Heart and Nature, and so runs into fancies, either of joy or sorrow. And if the passion of joy predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal God, personal Angels, and a local place of glory which he saith, he, and all who believe what he saith, shall go to after they are dead. And if sorrow predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal Devil, and a local place of torment, that he shall go to after he is dead, and this he speaks with great confidence.

Or Secondly, this is the Doctrine of a subtle running spirit, to make an ungrounded wise man mad... (lxi) He strives and stretches his brains to find out the depth of that doctrine and cannot attain to it; for indeed, it is not knowledge, but imagination; and so by poring and puzzling himself in it, loses that wisdom he had, and becomes distracted and mad: and if the passion of joy predominate, then he is merry, and sings and laughs, and is ripe in the expressions of his words, and will speak strange things; but all by imagination. But if the passion of sorrow predominate, then he is heavy and sad, crying out, He is damned, God hath forsaken him, and he must go to Hell when he dies, he cannot make his calling and election sure: And in this distemper many a man doth hang, kill or drown himself; so that this divining Doctrine... torments people always when they are weak, sickly, and under any distemper; therefore it cannot be the Doctrine of Christ the Saviour.

For my own part, my spirit hath waded deep to find the bottom of this divining spiritual Doctrine: and the more I searched, the more I was at a loss and I never came to quiet rest, and to know God in my spirit, till I came to the

knowledge of the things in this Book: and let me tell you, They who present this divining Doctrine are the murderers of many a poor heart, who is bashful and simple, and that cannot speak for himself, but that keeps his thoughts to himself.

Or thirdly, This Doctrine is made a cloak of policy by the subtle elder Brother, to cheat his simple younger Brother of the Freedoms of the Earth: For saith the elder Brother, "The Earth is mine, and not yours, Brother; and you must not work upon it, unless you will hire it of me; and you must not take the fruits of it, unless you will buy them of me, by that which I pay you for your Labour: for if you should do otherwise, God will not love you, and you shall go to Heaven when you die, but the Devil will have you, and you must be damned in Hell."...Well, the younger Brother, being weak in spirit, and having not a grounded knowledge of the Creation, nor of himself, is terrified, and lets go his hold in the Earth, and submits himself to be a slave to his brother, for fear of damnation in Hell after death, and in hopes to get Heaven thereby after he is dead; and so his eyes are put out, and his Reason is blinded. (lxii)

So that, this divining spiritual Doctrine is a cheat; for while men are gazing up to Heaven, imagining after a happiness, or fearing a Hell after they are dead, their eyes are put out, that they see not what is their birthright, and what is to be done by them here on Earth while they are living: This is the filthy Dreamer and the Cloud without rain.

And indeed the subtle Clergy do know, that if they can but charm the people by this their divining Doctrine, to look after riches, Heaven and Glory when they are dead, that then they shall easily be the Inheritors of the Earth, and have the deceived people to be their servants.

This divining Doctrine, which you call spiritual and heavenly, was not the Doctrine of Christ, for his words were pure knowledge, they were words of life; for He said, He spoke what he had seen with his Father, for he had the knowledge of the Creation, and spake as everything was. And this Divinity came in after Christ to darken his Knowledge; and it is the language of the mystery of Iniquity and Antichrist, whereby the covetous, ambitious and serpentine spirit cozen the plain-hearted of his portions in the Earth.

(lxiii-lxvii) In the remainder of this chapter, Winstanley discusses the Post-master and the Army in the new commonwealth. In every Parish there should be chosen two Post-masters, whose function was to collect news which they despatched to the City. This news was to be published in a book which would be distributed throughout the country.

An Army is two-fold, a ruling army or magistracy, "keeping the Land and Government in Peace by Execution of the Laws", and a fighting army, whose function "is to beat down all that arise to endeavour to destroy the Liberties of the Commonwealth."

With an obvious reference to the actual Commonwealth army, Winstanley attacks armies which fail to keep their promises:

"For what difference is there between a professed Tyrant, that declares himself a Tyrant in Words, Laws and deeds, as all Conquerors do, and him who promises to free me from the Power of the Tyrant if I'll assist him; and when I have spent my estate and blood, and the health of my body, and expect my bargain by his Engagements to me, he sits himself down in the

Tyrant's Chair, and takes possession of the Land to himself, and calls it his, and none of mine, and tells me he cannot in Conscience let me enjoy the Freedom of the Earth with him, because it is another man's right? And now my health and estate is decayed, and I grow in age, I must either beg or work for day wages, which I was never brought up to, for another; when as the Earth is as freely my inheritance and birthright, as his whom I must work for; and if I cannot live by my weak labours, but take where I need, as Christ sent and took the Ass colt in his need, there is no dispute, but by the Kings and Laws, he will hang me for a thief."

CHAPTER V .

(lxxviii-lxxxi) Winstanley next discusses education. He is anxious to avoid the separation between scholar and worker:

"But one sort of Children shall not be trained up only to book-learning, and no other employment, called Scholars, as they are in the Government of Monarchy, for then through idleness, and exercised wit therein, they spend their time to find out policies to advance themselves to be Lords and Masters above their labouring brethren... which occasions all the trouble in the world. Therefore, to prevent the dangerous events of idleness in Scholars, it is reason, and safe for common peace, that after Children have been brought up at Schools to ripen their wits, they shall then be set to such Trades, Arts and Sciences, as their bodies and wits are capable of; and therein continue till they come to forty years of age... Then from forty years of age to fourscore, if he live so long... they shall be freed from all labour and work, unless they will themselves."

Winstanley next discusses what trades mankind should be brought up in. He re-emphasises that there shall be no buying and selling of the Earth, nor of the fruits thereof. He describes the common store-houses and shops:

"Now this same free practice will kill covetousness, pride and oppression... Come hither now, all you who challenge your brethren to deny Christ, as though you were the only men that love Christ, and would be true to him. Here is a trial of your love: can you be as ready to obey the law of liberty which is the command of Christ, as you would have others to obey your Kingly laws of bondage? It may be you will either storm, or go away sorrowful. (lxxxi-lxxvi)

CHAPTER VI

(lxxvi-lxxxix) In the final chapter of the book Winstanley discusses the laws of the new commonwealth. He shows that the old laws are inappropriate to the new society, because they were an instrument of class domination: "the written law hath not been to advance Common freedom and to beat down the unreasonable self-will in mankind, but it hath been framed to uphold the self-will of the Conqueror, right or wrong; not respecting the freedom of the Commonwealth, but the freedom of the Conqueror and his friends only."

To avoid legal chicanery, Winstanley makes his laws short and pithy. The sixty-two laws which conclude the book are a natural corollary to the general principles of the Law of Freedom. They lay down absolute religious toleration. "That men may be tender of one another's bodies" he who "strikes his Neighbour shall be struck himself by the Executioner blow for blow." Scandal-mongers and those who "give reviling and provoking words" are to be admonished, whipped, and in severe cases, temporarily deprived of their freedom.

There are laws against idleness, against buying and selling, except by the state with foreign countries, and against coinage. Those who try and acquire private property are to be put to death as traitors. Those who lose their

freedom by crime can regain it by good conduct.

Winstanley forbids funeral services in order to discourage concentration in an after-life. "Every man and woman shall have the free liberty to marry whom they love... If any man lie with a maid and beget a child, he shall marry her." The marriage ceremony consists of a simple declaration in the presence of neighbours.

Those who waste food are to be publicly reprov'd, and for a third offence "he shall be made a servant for twelve months under the Task-master, that he may know what it is to get food."

--- --- ---
Here is the righteous Law, Man, wilt thou it maintain?
It may be, ia, as hath still, in the world been slein.
Truth appears in Light, Falsehood rules in Power;
To see these things to be, is cause of grief each hour.
Knowledge, why didst thou come, to wound and not to cure?
I sent not for thee, thou didst me injure.
Where knowledge does increase, there sorrows multiply,
To see the great deceit which in the World doth lie.
Man saying one thing now, un saying it anon,
Breaking all's Engagements, when deeds for him are done.
O power, where art thou, that must mend things amiss?
Come change the heart of Man, and make him truth to kiss:
O death where art thou? wilt thou not tidings send?
I fear thee not, thou art my loving friend.
Come take this body and scatter it in the Four,
That I may dwell in One, and rest in peace once more.
--- --- ---

Bibliography

- The Works of Gerrard Winstanley,
edited by George H. Sabine (Cornell University Press, 1941)
- Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War
by David Petogorsky (Gollancz - Left Book Club - 1940)
- English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century
by Gooch and Laske (1927)
- Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution
by E. James (1930)
- The English Revolution
by James and others (Lawrence and Wishart, 1940.)
- Christianity and the Social Revolution
edited Lewis (Gollancz, 1935.)
(See Chap. VI. by Joseph Noedham)
- --- ---