

was not advocated at North-West Norfolk, nor at any other recent by-election, and Mr. Hemmerde was right in saying that the Single Tax was not the issue, but the Taxation and Rating of Land Values, as put forward in the Land and Taxation Reform Memorial, was the deciding feature in his election; and every argument used by Mr. Hemmerde and by those who supported him were arguments which the Single Taxer uses in advocacy of the Rating and Taxation of Land Values. In that sense it was a straightforward Single Tax fight.

Mr. Hemmerde made it clear that while he was in favour of the demands of the Agricultural Labourers' Union their objects could not be attained until the Rating and Taxation of Land Values was established, for any legislation which attempts to raise wages and provide cottages, without first depriving the landowners of their power to withhold land and charge fictitious prices for it, must fail ignominiously.—Editor, LAND VALUES.]

## BOOK REVIEW.

### MODERN DEMOCRACY.\*

#### A Study in Tendencies.

To the budding politician, Liberal, Labour or Conservative, eager to gain even a second-hand insight into the political problems of the immediate present, this book may prove useful, even very useful. But we fear it will be of little or no value to the more serious student, desirous, impartially and objectively, to study the social problem of our days—the problem of poverty in the midst of plenty—as a whole, to ascertain the continuously acting cause or causes to which this strange phenomenon is due, by removing which they know they alone can hope for its effective and permanent solution. Whilst those who have agonised over the problem of poverty, who have been saved from cynicism, materialism or even despair by the repeated demonstration that is due, *not* to the niggardliness of Nature but to the blinding greed, selfishness and ignorance of man, and hence is remediable, will find themselves irritated by the superficial cleverness of the book, as well as by its manifest incompetence to grapple with the very problems it raises. Its inadequacy, however, will serve to confirm them in their own “preconceived notions,” as our author terms them, as well as to strengthen their conviction that without some guiding and directing compass, some basis of accepted principle, ethical or political, all political writing on behalf of any “ism,” Conservatism, Liberalism, or even “Guarantism,” is largely a waste of time and effort.

The position of our author may be briefly summarised. He realises that “the condition of the people question” is the paramount all-absorbing question of modern politics; and in this respect he does well to emphasise the fact (p. 25) that the present condition of the vast majority of our industrial fellow-citizens, “while normal enough throughout the last century or more of Western civilisation, is quite abnormal in the history not merely of human but of animal life in the world”; and that, consequently (p. 28), “those Socialists are right who contend that the ‘proletarian,’ the man who depends from week to week upon his wages, and who is face to face with absolute destitution as soon as his uncertain employment stops for a week or two, is something quite new in the world.”

Quite so; and this being so one might reasonably have expected that the man who recognises this as true would at once have proceeded to probe for the cause or causes to which this abnormal phenomenon is due. For surely until this preliminary task has been successfully accomplished, we may seek in vain for any practical and effective, radical and permanent remedy, and may go on from generation to generation with remediable, patchwork palliatives, which is the policy of opportunism, dignified in this book by the title of “Guarantism,” of which our practical author seems hopelessly enamoured. Even though others in his opinion may have failed in this attempt, this does not excuse a man who poses as a political teacher from emulating their example. Even though it were true, as he assumes (see p. 232), that Karl Marx ignored the fundamental importance of the Land Question—which he didn't, but emphasised repeatedly that the expropriation of the workers from the

soil is the basis of the present industrial system (see CAPITAL, p. 739). Or that Henry George ignored the special evils popularly attributed “to the private ownership of industrial capital”—which he also did not do, though he did show that they were really due to established privilege and monopoly, to recognised and legalised social injustice. But even assuming that both these great pioneers of modern social and political thought failed in their noble endeavour, this should not prevent others attempting the same urgent task, and profiting by their mistakes, real or imaginary.

Surely it is but begging the question to plead, as does our author (p. 232), that “the social problem is not abstract at all.” No problem which confronts us in practical life is “abstract at all”; but to attempt to solve them without some knowledge of abstract principles, the fruits of careful generalisation from what is already known, is generally an impossible task. The problems which confront the dyer in his daily task are not “abstract at all,” but to solve them he has to have recourse to the abstract principles of chemistry, to generalisations from already known facts. So, too, the problems which daily confront the engineer are not “abstract at all”; but to solve them he has to have recourse to the abstract principles of physics and mechanics. So, too, the social problem which to-day confronts society may not be “abstract at all”; but our only guide to its effective and permanent solution is in our already acquired knowledge of abstract social principles—which are ethical principles, principles established in that abstract science whose function, to use Professor Huxley's telling words, is “to furnish us with a reasoned rule of life, to tell us what is right action and why it is so.”

The basis of the Single Tax philosophy—at which our author ventures repeatedly to sneer†—is that ethical principles, the commands and dictates of Ethics, are as applicable to the community as to the individual, and offer the one reliable guide to collective action as to individual action. To the “doctrinaire mind” of the Single Taxer, unillumined by the new (?) philosophy of Guarantism, alias Opportunism, the Law of Justice is just as “despotic” (see p. 59) as the Law of Gravitation. Men may ignore them, men may disobey them, despite our author's dictum to the contrary, but only at their peril. “Nature is not conquered save by obedience.” She little cares whether we recognise and follow or disregard and disobey her laws. But as we sow so also shall we reap. Hence, just as the wise man studies to obey the Law of Gravitation when building his individual habitation, so a wise people will study to obey the Law of Justice when building its social habitation, which dominates the lives and shapes the character and relations of all within its shelter.

The Single Tax philosophy claims for all equal rights to the use of the land, of the natural sources, forces and opportunities, the use of which is necessary to the maintenance of life, because this is in accordance with the Law of Justice, with the recognition of the equal claim of all to life, in accordance with the first principles of Ethics, with the Moral Law, “Thou shalt not kill!” It claims that all should share in the value of land, or, in other words, in the natural advantages of any holding of land, because it is the simplest and most effective way in which the equal rights of all to the use of the land can be enforced; because every step taken in this direction will make the use of land the first necessity of life and industry, more available to the land-users, in both town and country; and, finally, because this step, too, is in accordance with the first principles of Ethics, with the Moral Law, “Thou shalt not steal.” Hence its position is not touched by our author pointing out (p. 63) that taking the period from 1895 to 1909 the earnings, profits and interest of those controlling the home and foreign business of the community, and drawing interest upon its National and Municipal Debts, as revealed in Schedule D., shows a greater increase than that accruing to those controlling the use of the land of the country, as revealed in Schedule A. Nor by his repeated emphasis (pp. 65-80) that the somewhat rash statement of our good friend Mr. Edwin Adam that—“the land value of any country *always* is sufficient to meet the cost of good government,” cannot be accepted as strictly true. And these are the two points he, in his chapter on “The Single Tax,” raises to destroy the validity of the Single Tax Philosophy.

L. H. B.

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† Mr. Villiers' knowledge of our philosophy and of the teachings of Henry George may be gathered from his contention (p. 89) that —“Henry George found a panacea for all social injustice in State Landlordism!”