

## A. B. DUPONT—FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE OF HENRY GEORGE

By H. P. BOYNTON

(In the OHIO SITE TAXER, April, 1919)

*Editor's Note.*—A. B. DuPont left us on April 12th. Strong, vigorous, and healthy, we never thought of losing him. Complications from influenza were the cause. He had been treasurer of the Fels Fund Commission during the life of that commission; he was one of the organizers of the Ohio Site Value Taxation League; he had been a friend and advisor to both Henry George and Tom L. Johnson, and was known among site taxers in Ohio, the United States, Canada and England as a steadfast supporter of the cause. The untimely ending of his life is an international loss to the movement.

When Tom Johnson introduced A. B. DuPont to Henry George, the latter said, "I shall refuse to instruct this young man in single tax. His ancestor had the idea long before I was born."

George referred to Pierre S. DuPont, the gentlest and most luminous of the early physiocrats of France. Now that A. B. DuPont has fallen victim to flu and is gone thirty years ahead of his time, it is interesting to recall his kinship as it explains, in part, the blending of bold and almost errant idealism with hard business philosophy which went to make up the lovable and contradictory nature of the man who has left us. We are accustomed to associate the name DuPont with far-reaching business enterprise; we are less conversant with the family tradition of democratic pioneering. In both A. B. DuPont was a true exemplar of his name. In both he was a true associate of Tom Johnson.

DuPont came to Cleveland to run the municipal traction lines for Johnson, when the traction controversy seemed to be approaching a decision on the lines of municipal control and eventual municipal ownership. DuPont had never tasted personal abuse before. When he left Detroit, where he had been traction superintendent, a farewell banquet was tendered him at two in the morning by the motor-men and conductors as a testimonial to his popularity.

In Cleveland he was thrown into the midst of a ready-made row, with the whole upper strata of finance and society arrayed against him and his purposes. Organized labour also was enlisted to fight the new traction régime. Quick decisions had to be made and naturally difficulties and mistakes resulted. In this situation DuPont voluntarily cast himself for the rôle of a scapegoat. Hostile papers already had begun to harp upon his aristocratic name and southern accent. His lack of previous residence in Cleveland was text for appeal to provincial prejudice. So when the traction management was in hot water, as it frequently was, DuPont's motto became, "Blame me. I am unpopular anyhow," even though the mistake in question was not the result of his own decision, or even a decision made against his judgment.

In the ensuing failure he kept his head up to the last, knowing that his name had become a sort of club with which to cudgel the loyalty of the Johnson following; knowing, too, that thousands of ardent Johnsonites

reviled him as the mayor's evil genius. The failure was a lesson in the folly of campaigning for a cheap statistical shibboleth like three cent fare—the folly of involving a campaign for democracy too deeply in any side issue.

It is necessary to refer to this traction failure, because it furnishes the background for the A. B. DuPont of the last decade, the A. B. DuPont that most Single Taxers knew. In relation to his zeal for universal opportunity, his championship of the common fellow, it is extremely interesting to remember that the common fellow of Cleveland never reciprocated. If he thought of DuPont at all, it was to anathematize him. DuPont's uniform sweetness of temper and his utter lack of cynicism under these conditions is remarkable. He remained a loyal Clevelander, too, when he might, for business reasons, have moved elsewhere, showing that his friendships meant much and his antipathies little or nothing. He never challenged his own unpopularity, but accepted it as a part of himself. He became a sort of surreptitious reformer, hiding his connection with good movements in the fear that he would damn them. "Here's \$50," he would say, "but don't mention my name if you don't want to queer the whole thing." Then he would laugh. His personal contributions to one Single Tax periodical ran into the thousands, and the money he solicited for it probably made an equal sum. He was treasurer of the Fels Fund Commission and a silent, unstinting helper in dozens of democratic enterprises, with more or less direct bearing on the land and tax questions.

In contrast with the aristocratic tradition that hostile pens built up for him, DuPont was a man of the simplest tastes. He liked money only for the freedom it gave him, although he was by no means insensible to the joy of making money. He might have driven any machine on the market, but he chose a Ford! it was "good enough." He might have had a luxurious home, but his dislike for lace curtains and ornaments that required constant care was notorious. They grated on his sense of efficiency.

He had the record of twice refusing salaries of \$50,000 a year. Once the offer would have taken him to Havana; once to England. He preferred to remain an American. How many of the more noisy patriots have equally convincing evidence of their loyalty? "About a thousand a month is what I need," he often remarked. "If I make less, I am pinched; if more, it piles up and gets in the way."

His contempt for property was matched by his respect for ideas. No one paid readier homage to the merit of a new project or a new invention. He continually resented the idea that Single Tax would hamper the acquisition of wealth and said that any business man worthy of the name would make more under such conditions than now. He never blamed the man who took advantage of an unjust system to make money out of the public. "Sting the public," he would say with a laugh. "It is the only way they will ever learn."

"I don't blame my family for getting rich out of the civil war," he would add, "but I blame the government for making them rich. Uncle Sam should have said, 'DuPont, your powder mill is drafted. It is going to

fight for the union, the same as the boys with muskets. After the war he will give it back, if the enemy don't blow it up. Of course it will have to take its chances like the others. And you are drafted to run the plant. We will make you a lieutenant-colonel of powder-making at \$125 a month."

He worked vigorously at the time of America's entrance into the late war for a policy of conscription of capital and war materials, not because he was a pacifist, but because profit from war was abhorrent to him. Yet he had just come from an emergency job of re-organizing and rebuilding an explosive plant.

Utterly free from the class consciousness of upper strata, he talked jokingly of the time when the common people would "wake up and begin to cut throats." When that day comes, he declared, "I am going to change my name to Murphy."

Whimsical and contradictory, yet with a deep underlying vein of earnestness—his successor in the art of rough-and-ready controversy will be very difficult to find. And with due respect to his very considerable attainments and business, it is as a charming companion and loyal conspirator in right causes that he will be longest and most fondly remembered.

### NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT COMPETITION PRIZES AWARDED

Forty competitors took part in our Newspaper Advertisement Competition, and the United Committee have awarded prizes as follows:—

First Prize, £10 10s., to Miss Mary Waugh, 26, Hotham Road, S.W.15.

Second Prize, £5 5s., to Miss Margaret Calder, 27, Cannon Street, E.C.4.

Third Prize, £2 2s., to Mr. G. W. W. Somerford, Tenbury Wells, Worcester.

Six Prizes of 10s. 6d. each to:—

Mr. Geo. Frankland, Rectory Cottage, Farnham Royal, Bucks.

Mrs. F. L. Hine, 398, High Street North, Manor Park, E.12.

Mr. M. A. Bryan, 46, Bedford Row, W.C.1.

Mr. A. H. Weller, 5, Cross Street, Manchester.

Mr. Jas. Milne, 110, Onslow Drive, Glasgow.

Miss Alice Riley, 181, Moorside Road, Swinton, Manchester.

The first and second prize advertisements were printed on the back page of our August issue, entitled respectively "The Three Georges" and "God Gave the Land to the People." The advertisement which gained the third prize appears in the present issue, and is entitled: "The Case for Land-Value Rating." We regret that for lack of space we are not able to reprint any of the other prize efforts, but we hope to show them in our columns as occasion arises, after they have been chosen for use in our publicity campaign in the newspapers.

£75,000 is asked by the owners for the Mornington Crescent site of 4½ acres in Hampstead Road, St. Pancras, London, which it is sought to acquire for the public.—*The Star (London)*, August 15th.

### THE CAUSE OF THE TROUBLE

Caithness occupies a position peculiarly its own among the counties of Scotland. Not only is it the most northerly of the counties on the mainland, but its population is of Scandinavian rather than of Celtic origin, and its agriculture impresses the visitor by reason of its obvious dual character.

In the old bad days, as one who knew these things well recently put it to the writer, whenever a small farmer or crofter began to keep his place tidier than his neighbours, to clean his land well, and generally to exhibit signs of prosperity, it was concluded that he was making money. The equivalent of that was interpreted as meaning that his place was too cheap, and his rent was forthwith raised because of his own improvements. The alternative to acquiescence in the raising of his rent was eviction, and in most cases the former alternative was chosen. Hence two phases of the agrarian situation in the far north—the indifferent farming of the small farmer and crofter, and the strength of the movement for reform in land tenure. In no part of Scotland did what, for brevity's sake, may be termed Land League doctrine, take deeper root than in Caithness. There the whole political situation has, for at least forty years, been dominated by the demand for reform in land tenure, and in particular for security of tenure to the farmer and crofter so that he might not be at the mercy of those who did not hesitate, when they had the power, to raise rents or evict because an occupier had improved his holding.

Sometimes visitors from the south, or those who may go from the south to the north to find a home are surprised at, if not staggered by, the comparative indifference of the rural population of Caithness to questions of imperial politics. That attitude of mind may be indefensible, but it is quite intelligible to one who inquires deeply and probes the rural problem to its roots. Nor will there be any improvement in this respect until first of all the occupier of land has security of tenure and some legal guarantee that he or his, and not another, will reap the fruits of his industry.—*SCOTTISH FARMER*, July 20th, 1918.

In the same issue, the *SCOTTISH FARMER*, commenting on the need for greater production and the blessings of honest toil, says: "The harder a man works, the more work there is for his neighbour." This may not be disputed, but it is also true that the harder a man works the more leisure (unemployment) there is for the non-worker, if he happens to possess a patch of ground that is wanted for public purposes. That is manifestly what the writer of the preceding note had in mind when registering his complaint.

The advantages of utilizing the services of the Inland Revenue Land Valuers in negotiations for the purchases of land are becoming more fully appreciated by the promoters of housing schemes. Considerable reductions in price can often be obtained by this method. A return of nine cases in which the Board objected to the prices for land agreed upon between local authorities and land owners, and insisted upon valuation by a Government valuer, shows a saving in all of nearly £32,000. A summary of this return may be of interest. The prices asked and provisionally agreed upon between land owners and local authorities amounted to £101,680. Government land valuers estimated the value of the land at £64,502. The prices for the land finally agreed upon and approved by the Board amounted to £69,808, a saving on the original price of £31,872—the average saving per acre being £108. It was as high as £495 per acre in one case.—*From the L.G.B. Weekly Return on Housing*, July 4th.