

The Single Tax Review / Spring, 1906

### **Fillebrown's Article on Private Property in Land**

From SAMUEL BRAZIER.

Editor of the Single Tax Review :

Mr. Fillebrown, in his article on Private Property in Land in your January issue, says: "Able men sometimes assert that the end in view of the Single Tax movement is the complete subversion and overthrow of the institution of private property in land." Exactly so: This is precisely what we aim at, and I presume the great majority of Single Taxers have the same end in view. It is certainly the end which Henry George desired when he declared, "We have examined all the remedies short of the abolition of private property in land and have found them all inefficacious or impracticable. We must make land common property.

In palpable contradiction to this proposition, we have Mr. Fillebrown's assertion that land will never become common property, but will continue to be, and ought to be, private property forever. Mr. Fillebrown says "The wrong of private ownership" is a phrase that violates and confuses the moral sense of people who hear it. Henry George says: "The primary and persistent perceptions of mankind are that all have an equal right to land and the opinion that private property in land is necessary to society is but the offspring of ignorance as artificial and baseless as the divine right of Kings." "The common right to land has everywhere been primarily recognized and private ownership has nowhere grown up save as the result of usurpation."

In opposition to Mr. George and every Single Tax writer that I know, including Herbert Spencer, Mr. Fillebrown declares: "It is not individual proprietorship of land, but private appropriation of ground rent which is chargeable with maintaining industrial slavery." I venture to assert that the very opposite of the statement is true. It is not the private appropriation of ground rent, but individual ownership that occasions industrial slavery. Private appropriation of ground rent robs the public of hundreds of millions of dollars yearly, but it is not this loss which

enslaves the workers, it is the fact that the man who owns the land owns the people who must live and labor on it., he owns them' body and soul, they can only use the earth, they can only live on the earth by his permission. The capitalist and the laborer are equally his slaves, and can only create wealth on his terms. It is the control of private owners and corporations over vast areas of land in this country, that is the prime cause of the tyranny and corruption, and the poverty and misery that threaten the nation.

Landlordism, not the private appropriation of ground rent, is the real cause of social slavery.

We could well afford to throw ground rents into the sea, if thereby landlordism could be abolished. The movement for land reform is weakened seriously by degrading it to a mere matter of dollars and cents, ignoring or belittling its grander moral aspect.

When Mr. George says plainly: "Private property in land is unjust" Mr.

Fillebrown wants to persuade us that he meant "private property in land values." When George says: "Private property in land is a bold bare enormous wrong, like chattel slavery," we are led to believe that he did not mean exactly that but something else!. Language cannot be plainer than that which Mr. George uses: "If chattel slavery be unjust, then is private property in land unjust."

Mr. Fillebrown teaches that private property in land is only wrong under certain circumstances, like those existing to-day. Mr. George says: Let the circumstances be what they may—the ownership of land will always give the ownership of men." Again: "It is not private appropriation of ground rents, it is the ownership of the soil that gives the ownership of the men who live upon it." In the plainest words possible to use he affirms: "If private property in land he just, then is the remedy I propose a false one; if, on the contrary, private property in land be unjust, then is this remedy the true one."

One more quotation from Mr. Fillebrown: "Private ownership of land is no injury to anybody to-day nor has been at any time." The untaxed private ownership of land values as it exists

to-day is unjust." I confess this statement appalls me. I call to mind the hundreds of thousands of homes destroyed by crowbar or by fire, their inmates driven out to perish from hunger and exposure by thousands; all by the sole will of landlords, one man alone expelling 80,000 people from the homes they had built and the fields they tilled, for what was called "improvement of the estate." These terrible scenes occurred in Great Britain and Ireland, and have been enacted even in this country; not because ground rents were not paid into the public treasury, but because one man who owned the soil was able to destroy, and did destroy, the wealth and the lives of those who lived on his land.

Private Property in land is an institution which stands condemned at the bar of history and by the natural conscience of mankind. "There is no power on earth," says Mr. George, "which can rightfully make a grant of exclusive ownership of land."

Samuel Brazier.