

WILLIAM S. U'REN, LAWGIVER OF  
OREGON AND SINGLE TAXER.

W. S. U'Ren, the "lawgiver of Oregon," has attained national reputation because of his connection with the fundamental steps taken by the people of his State, first to obtain and then to use the democratic tools of the Referendum and the Initiative. Many do not know that he is a Single Taxer, but during all these years he has steadily worked with that end in view as the goal of the contest with the forces of special privilege and plutocracy.

He was born in Wisconsin in 1869 of English parents. His father was a blacksmith and farmer, and his ancestors were blacksmiths, farmers and preachers. U'Ren was early taught to make tools at the forge, and he has been making tools from the fires of popular discontent for the use of coming generations. He is still making tools for the people out of the tangled mass of rubbish and fine metal called law.

U'Ren had his attention called to the land question at the early age of 13 when in a western school district a meeting was called to devise ways and means of making the absentee land owners and speculators pay more toward the support of the school. He puzzled over it for some years, as did many others, until the remedy was found by him in Progress and Poverty.

He began the study of law in Denver, Colorado, in 1880, and also received there his first lessons in politics, which disgusted him with the methods followed, and ultimately led him to be a firm advocate of Proportional Representation. He did not read Henry George until about 1888, and he first began to grasp the ideas of Direct Legislation by the people about 1889. He is called "the father of the Initiative," but it had many fathers. In 1884 and 1885 the writer urged it in Oregon through the then virile Knights of Labor, and in a paper called *The Oregon Vidette* at Salem. U'Ren has that peculiar and wonderful power of getting people to drop non-essentials and pull together for fundamentals. He is not a boss nor an originator. He is a combiner of men. None of his work has been done alone. He has always been willing that the honors and credit should go

to others. All he wants as reward is the result for the advancement of better government.

He came to Oregon in 1889 in search of health, which he has never enjoyed since early manhood. He at once began the knitting together of the forces of men working for better things. Hampered by poverty, illness, and the doubts of men he began to "fight the devil with fire." His quiet and unassuming manner concealed power. Wanting nothing but legal tools for the people and caring not a rap for honors, wealth, office or credit he began to play a part in the legislature of Oregon that had never been seen there before. Knowing what he wanted and knowing that the game must be played out to the end with men who stacked the cards, he did some shrewd stacking too, and he stacked well. The stakes he was playing for, however, were different. Others helped him with devotion. Their names are too numerous to mention. But one man, then a Single Taxer, as now, was A. P. Nelson who is still in the ranks, a veteran of the early struggles of the Henry George men. He it was who in a democratic convention moved that on every candidate's card should be printed the words "I am for the Referendum and Initiative." The other parties had to follow suit, and it won the day.

U'Ren followed up the attaining of the referendum and initiative with the direct primary law; the corrupt practices act; the extension of the principle of direct legislation to cities and towns; the Recall; forbidding the legislature to call a constitutional convention without consent of the people; the famous Statement Number One, by which candidates are pledged to vote for the popular choice for U. S. Senators; and an amendment instructing them to do so. *Every bill or amendment U'Ren has been connected with and endorsed that went before the people has been adopted by the people by enormous majorities.* At each election since the passage of the direct legislation measures, U'Ren has been urged to take up the fight for the Single Tax. "First get your gun," he would reply. The stuffed club of the old ballot became a knotted club, the knotted club became a

flintlock and the flintlock a rifle. Still he says "first get your gun," for the enemy have gattling guns and strong fortifications. He is now working for Proportional Representation, further limitation of the legislature in its power to enact or repeal tax laws without the consent of the people. The people must be armed. It would be no use to enact a fundamental step in taxation with a mis-representative legislature that would repeal it before it could be applied.

The Single Taxers of Oregon, accustomed to active campaigning, chafe under their leader, but they listen and co-operate as well as any body of men could be expected to do who are by inclination and mental made up individualistic. From time to time they see that he is capable, honest, unselfish and a foundation builder. His enemies dubbed him some time ago in derision and hate "The Great Pussyfooter." He goes quietly and vaunteth not, either before or after the battle.

In a short but thrilling speech before the Oregon State Federation of Labor last January he told them that the first great economic step would come in 1912. By that time the power of the people to govern and to tax themselves would be secure.

Opposition? Yes, indeed. U'Ren is bitterly opposed. His opponents are the politicians and the hangers-on of the plunderbund. They make a great deal of noise. In a speech before the Peoples Forum in Portland recently U'Ren compared the violent contortions of the opponents of the rule of the people and the improvement of government to the lone coyote on the plains that creates the impression in the minds of the eastern visitor that a whole pack of wolves are at his door. The leading papers of Oregon at different times have called him a fool, and he has been cursed by the politicians at every step. At each election it has been loudly proclaimed that the people would have no more of U'Ren, that they were sick of his cranky, fool, foreign, untested, absurd radical steps and proposals. But at each election the quiet and undemonstrative Lincoln Republicans have come forth at his appeals to their intelligence and love of justice and endorsed the measures.

The same fight is going on now, and anything he endorses is denounced as the worst possible thing for the State, and yet, when the ballots are counted next November, we will probably see all his measures endorsed once more, and the machine politicians discomforted. Of course, he and his friends and co-workers realize that through prejudice, mis-conceptions and machinations of the special privileged the people may be led astray. As he recently declared, however, "Our critics do not trust the people, but I do."

Among a group of men consulting over any public matter U'Ren would not be taken for a leader. He has little to say, and is very much in evidence in the rear ranks. He is not "chesty," and bears no ill will toward any of his opponents. The writer has seen him severely "badgered" and taken to task for his sins of omission and commission, but it seemed impossible for him to lose his temper. However, it is said that some years ago a co-worker applied a vile epithet to him and straightway had some teeth loosened—all of which may be a fable.

Different persons have noticed a slight resemblance in U'Ren in certain attitudes and expression to Abraham Lincoln. The writer, having a childhood recollection of Lincoln, has noticed it at different times. He has a quiet smile and a peculiar way of standing that calls up some memory chord of Lincoln.

We may have U'Ren with us for years, but his body is frail, although his spirit is strong. He hopes to live to see the people of Oregon take the first decisive steps toward economic freedom, and then to obtain it.

U'Ren is never a president of anything, never a brass band orator; his organizations are usually very loose in form and there are no state secrets. An opponent sometime ago said that all U'Ren had to do to carry any measure was to be elected secretary of some organization and then he bought and used a bale of postage stamps in sending out literature. That is his method, somewhat caricatured. He said sometime ago in the writer's presence in answer to some severe strictures on his methods by a friend, that he "never went

hunting deer with a brass band." He never does.

In the fall of 1908 Mr. U'Ren accepted the position of Secretary of the Oregon Single Tax League, and he has been engaging no brass bands since, but he has been hunting deer.—A. D. CRIDGE.

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#### MR. HALL RESIGNS THE PRESIDENCY OF THE AMERICAN SINGLE TAX LEAGUE.

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Editor SINGLE TAX REVIEW:

I accepted the Presidency of the American Single Tax League with reluctance, because my forte has never been organization work. I have not the inclination for the system or the capacity for detail that is necessary to make a success of such an Association.

Mr. John J. Murphy would have been the natural president only for the feeling that he could not be spared as Secretary.

I disliked to see so important and honorable a position go begging, and in the absence of those who would be best suited to filling it, I accepted. For the same reason I retained the Presidency by the request of the other officers, when my own judgment was that it would be better to give place to some one else.

Now, however, I feel that I can leave the League in good hands, and with a fair start; and I have therefore resigned.

BOLTON HALL.

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In the *Signal*, of Babylon, L. I., T. E. Lane, an old time Single Taxer, has been carrying on a controversy on the subject of the Single Tax with Judge Henry A. Brown, evidently a judicial oracle of the countryside, but whose objections to our principles take us back to the early days of the movement before the schoolmaster of our cause had gone much abroad. In setting Judge Brown right Mr. Lane has been ably seconded by Mr. J. K. Rudyard, another Single Taxer of Long Island.

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THE title of a new book is "Was Shakespeare a Gentleman?" Impossible. He worked.

#### NEWS—DOMESTIC.

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##### RHODE ISLAND.

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COMMITTEE ON TAXATION REPORTS ADVERSELY TO THE LEGISLATURE ON LOCAL OPTION—REPORT OTHERWISE PROGRESSIVE—SEPARATE LISTING OF GENERAL PROPERTY—JOS. FELS EVERYWHERE AT ONCE IN PROVIDENCE—WORK OF JOHN S. CROSBY.

The Committee on Taxation Laws, appointed a year ago, has just made its report to the State legislature. About one thousand corporations and leading business men having petitioned the legislature for local option in taxation; the committee devotes nearly four pages of its report to the matter.

It sums up its conclusion in the closing sentence with the words, "Under the circumstances, your committee feels that it cannot recommend local option in taxation." Owing to rumors which were circulated previously, this adverse report upon the main issue had been discounted by the Rhode Island Tax Reform Association. We felt that not enough educational work had been done to lead the influential petitioners, or the voters generally, to demand aggressively the immediate passage of the law. On other phases of the taxation question the Report is progressive. The recommendations are of especial interest and in full are as follows:

##### RECOMMENDATIONS BY TAX COMMISSION.

The enactment of a law creating the office of State Tax Commissioner with a salary not exceeding \$5000. annually, providing the manner for his appointment for such a term of years as will admit of an effective execution of his duties, and carrying substantial advisory and supervisory powers over local assessments.

A law levying a State tax on collateral inheritances, with rates and exemptions approximating the provisions of the Massachusetts law.

A law imposing a State tax on domestic incorporated companies, which shall be assessed upon the capital stock of such corporations at the rate of 48 cents on each one hundred dollars of the fair cash value