

# THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform  
Throughout the World.

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## TOLSTOY AND HENRY GEORGE.

(*For the Review.*)

By ERNEST CROSBY.

Count Leo Tolstoy is enjoying the experience of being called every opprobrious name under the sun by almost all the leading journals of Christendom, ranging from "common scold" to "anarchist," on account of his recent political letters, but the fact remains that these same journals with one accord devote leading articles to him, and the Nestor of them all, the *London Times*, from time to time gives up whole pages to the publication of his essays verbatim, an honor which they would hardly pay to any other man alive. Tolstoy can afford to disregard the rude remarks of his editors so long as they permit him to say what he likes to the greatest audience ever provided for a private citizen attacking all the conventions of his time.

It is his letter on the land question to which I wish to draw particular attention. (Note: Extracts from this letter appear elsewhere in the Review.) This question has always held a prominent place in Tolstoy's mind. When, as a lad of eighteen, he entered upon the management of his estates, he was puzzled by the difficulties of the situation. It seemed impossible to be a good landlord. It was an inhuman relation which prevented him from getting *en rapport* with his tenants. They suspected his motives and resisted his efforts to introduce new machinery and to improve the methods of agriculture. He could do nothing with them, and he found relief in writing a little novelette entitled "A Russian Proprietor," which rehearsed the trials of the young Prince Nekhludoff upon his inherited estates—which name was another for Leo Tolstoy. It was as a revelation that the books of Henry George came to him in the early nineties. When I visited him in 1894 he urged me to become acquainted personally with Henry George, and expressed his great admiration for him and his theories, and not long after in a letter to me he declared that if he were Tsar he would establish the Single Tax, call a national convention and then abdicate. When his last great novel "Resurrection" was written, it is significant that he picked out the same Prince Nekhludoff, the "Russian Proprietor" for his hero, and now he represents him as a thorough convert to the principles of Henry George, applying the Single Tax as well as he could to his own property. This has always been the first political and economic reform in Tolstoy's opinion—not only in importance, but chronologically. It must come before the national convention and the overthrow of the autocracy. It must precede all other legislation of a

remedial nature. And the reasons are not far to seek. Slavery was abolished in America and in Russia at about the same time. In Russia it required the signing of the name of the Tsar. In America it necessitated four years of horrible warfare. Landlordism is a kind of slavery. Is it worth while to set up institutions deliberately which will make its overthrow as difficult in Russia as it is in America? Russia really has the advantage in facing this reform. The vast prestige which attaches to the name of the Tsar, the religious superstition with which the mass of the people regard him, can easily be used to establish just relations between man and the soil. Would it not be wise to take this step first? A Russian parliament, composed in large part of landed proprietors, would be as little likely to establish the Single Tax as the Senate of the United States. Even if the parliament were composed of peasants, it is not probable that they will have more intelligence than American farmers, and see the benefit to agriculture itself arising from such a measure. The one kind of body which would be most likely to consider the proposition favorably would be a commission of experts, such as the Tsar always appoints in such contingencies, and such as before now (in the case of the abolition of serfage, for example) have had the patriotism to report measures which seemed to be opposed to the interests of their own class. Tolstoy is right when he advises the Russians to deal with the land question first.

And is he wrong in speaking rather contemptuously of other liberal reforms in comparison? I hardly think so. America and Western Europe have enjoyed them all for a century, and yet the fundamental need of securing to every man an opportunity to work and the full value of his labor is as yet unsatisfied. Man cannot live upon ballots and free speech alone, and as methods of securing justice they have certainly been a disappointment. Tolstoy has been called an imbecile by some of our newspapers, and they have denied to him all right to a respectful hearing because he calls Nicholas, William, Edward and Roosevelt all tyrants by the same title. This is a superficial kind of criticism. Mr. Roosevelt is not much of a tyrant, personally, it is true, this side of the Pacific, but perhaps Nicholas is not much of a tyrant personally either. But each of these gentlemen is the figure-head of a system which involves a good deal of tyranny. The essence of tyranny is tribute. We threw off our allegiance to King George on account of a trifling tax on tea and enunciated the principle, "Not one cent for tribute, millions for defence." But we are paying tribute in America to-day at every turn. On every thousand feet of gas we buy in our cities, we are mulcted at least half a dollar as pure tribute. For every telegram, for every express parcel, we pay at least twice the value of the service. We are held up in the same way by telephone, railway, electric light and various other companies. What would Benjamin Franklin and Sam Adams think, I wonder, if they came to New York to-day and found themselves obliged to pay five cents for a two-cent trolley ride, and then, instead of occupying the seats for which they had paid, were forced to hang to straps for dear life while the breath was almost crushed out of their bodies by their fellow-sufferers—what would they think, I wonder, of their degenerate descendants? A tax on tea, indeed! Why, we are paying a tenfold tax on almost everything. All the other commodities, except tea, that Franklin and Adams bought, had their prices fixed by a free, open and healthy competition in which they took part, and that in a country in which there was plenty of free land and raw material; and we may be sure that they rarely were obliged to pay for anything more than it was worth. With us all these elements of

a free contract are absent. Monopolies hedge us in on every side and exact what tribute they please. We actually consider dollar gas as a great legislative achievement, when everyone knows that gas can be furnished at a profit at less than fifty cents. Monopoly fixes prices without competition, and it is the right to compete which we ought to enjoy in the fixing of prices. The fixing of prices by monopoly without competition is the new taxation without representation, and it calls for a revolution with far more reason than any tyranny which we suffered in 1776. This tyranny is economic and that was political, perhaps you answer. But what is the difference to the man who pays the bill? And the economic tyranny exists by the permission of our political system, by the favor of legislation and friendly courts, by the grace of constitutional provisions upholding vested wrongs and the obligations of unjust contracts, by the alliance with political parties and election contributions and the hierarchy of political bosses big and little. A tax on tea! Why, how absurdly sensitive our ancestors were! The surface government at Washington is not the true government. Let us not deceive ourselves. The President and Cabinet are the gilded pipes on the organ, which never emit a sound. Dig in Pennsylvania Avenue and you will find the pavement of Wall Street underneath. Wall Street is the real king, the real tyrant, and it is entrenched behind monopoly, and the fundamental monopoly is the monopoly of land, of situation, of elbow-room, where the value of elbow-room is counted in gold dollars. And it is to this that a century and more of free press and free speech and free elections have brought us. Is Tolstoy so far wrong when he says that the Russians need some other kind of reform?

The question presents itself more simply in Russia. Their civilization is not so complex as ours. Fewer people have crowded into the cities, and the vast mass of the population is still agricultural. They see wealth from day to day coming out of the ground. They know that the earth is the mother of riches and that to control the soil is to control the people who live on it. City people are the most ignorant of men. I remember once, when I was a very small boy, announcing my intention to do something very grand when I grew up. "Where will you get the money?" asked a sceptical by-stander. "Out of my pocket," I answered triumphantly. And so in town men think that money comes out of banks, and food out of restaurants, and other things from stores and markets, and it is easy to fool them. But the countryman knows that it all comes from the land. So it is at least in Russia. For our country-people have already been contaminated by the town-people, and they are now possessed by the idea that there is a goose in the city that lays golden eggs, and the young men desert their homes for the city as soon as they can, hoping in some way to get something for nothing, and those who succeed do harm to the country instead of good, and usually become parasites instead of producers. And so it is that the Russian people, with all their ignorance, see clearer than we do on this one question of the land, and if they only insist upon having it settled first, it is not impossible that they may show the rest of the world how to treat it and thus take the lead of humanity, instead of bringing up the rear. And for this I fervently hope.

To Count Tolstoy the Single Tax seems to be almost exclusively an agricultural matter, viewing it as he does from the standpoint of a Russian landlord. I find here in America that Single Taxers often fall into the same way of talking, and thus give an opportunity to our opponents to say that we desire to turn back the wheels of progress and

return to the primitive world of individual tillage of the soil, and to throw away all the benefits of large co-operation, machinery, etc. Now as a matter of fact the Single Tax does not commit itself to any particular future method of production. It is a mathematically accurate method of putting an end to the inequalities and iniquities of monopoly, and it would work just as well in the city as in the country. In fact, the most glaring evils of the private absorption of unearned increment occur in our cities. While it would be possible under the Single Tax for a dissatisfied workman to find plenty of land on which to set up for himself, I do not anticipate that at first, at least, very many would have recourse to this outlet. The very fact that they could would assure them good terms in the employment in which they were already engaged, and for a long time there might be no great change in the system of production, except that all would find work and be well paid for it, and that no one could live without working. The future character of industry would ultimately depend upon the tastes of mankind. When monopoly-profits become impossible, a good deal of our present production may become undesirable. When things are made chiefly for use and not for sale, and when all the present methods of stimulating business are dropped, industry will become more natural, and we may prefer to go without a great mass of shoddy, brummagem and pinchbeck stuff which our factories now turn out to meet a degenerate demand. At the same time, when it is discovered that a man cannot fleece his neighbor better in the city than in the country, it is not unlikely that the flow of country-people into town may grow less and less until our over-swollen cities dwindle to the healthy dimensions of ordinary sea-ports and market-towns. All this would eventually involve a much larger agricultural population, but such prophecy is guess-work at best. If the contrary results prevail and under the Single Tax cities grow larger and combinations of capital greater and more powerful, and the complexity of our civilization becomes still more complex (all of which is most improbable) still, even in such an event, the simple device of Henry George would, under such circumstances, or any other, afford an easy and practical method of securing economic justice. Let it be said once for all that the Single Tax does not necessarily imply the cultivation of the soil by small occupiers nor anything of the kind. It implies nothing but a "square deal," and men will then live as they prefer in a square civilization.

Some critics of Tolstoy say that if the peasants are crowded now in their half of the surface of Russia, they would soon overrun the other half if it were given to them. This criticism overlooks the fact that it is a question of justice which we are facing, and that if justice requires the turning over of the surface of Russia to its people, we are not to worry over the results. It is the old Malthusian argument again, which nature has a way of its own for answering. It is clearly a law of nature that as people become more intellectual and refined, they become less prolific. It is a little odd that while half our philosophers lie awake at night in fear of the overpopulation of the world, the other half are worrying over race-suicide! The great reproductive strength of the Russian moujiks is largely due to their poverty and ignorance, and when they have land enough to improve their condition, it will diminish of itself.

We all owe a vote of thanks to Tolstoy as Americans for fixing the attention of the world upon our more or less neglected fellow-citizens. He once performed this service effectively for Garrison. I am ashamed to say that this great man was merely a vague name to me until I read about



him in Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," and then pursued the subject in the admirable "Life of Garrison" by his Children, one of the most fascinating of books. And now Tolstoy is doing the same service for Henry George. And I think that Tolstoy is pretty nearly right, too, when he says that the teachings of George have fallen into great neglect. Compare for a moment the Single Tax progress with that of socialism and you will see what he means. In England they are only beginning to talk of taxing land-values at all—not of taking the whole unearned increment, mind you, but of taking a small fraction of it, such as we have always collected in America. We Single-Taxers who see our few journals and hear our few speakers are apt to have the idea that we are cutting a pretty large figure in the great world. But it is a mistake, and most people know nothing of us or our movement. It is hardly worth while to conceal the fact. The prospects for the Single Tax seemed far brighter twenty years ago when Henry George was a candidate for Mayor of New York than they ever have since. When it triumphs, it will probably be after some great economic deadlock (like the great coal-strike, only much greater), when our leaders will be the only people with a simple and practicable plan of action. Such a crisis may occur first in Russia, and the autocracy of Nicholas is easier to handle than the autocracy of Roosevelt. Hence let us hope that Tolstoy may be able to bring the advisers of Nicholas over to his views, and let us welcome him as a powerful ally in the work of arousing the rest of the world to the fundamental importance of the land question in comparison with all other industrial questions whatever.

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## THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE IRISH LAND QUESTION.

(*For the Review.*)

By THOMAS SCANLON.

It is difficult to write about Irish affairs from the standpoint of pure political economy, seeing that in that country the working of economic laws is so much obscured by artificial influences. Parliament is always doing something with Ireland, or with Irish land, to be more literal, and in addition the people themselves are always doing something of a nature to disturb the equilibrium of economic forces. Between agitation and legislation there is little chance for the normal operation of supply and demand. If legislative activity led to happiness, Ireland ought to be the most happy part of the British Empire; every session of Parliament is largely an Irish session and every year there is a fresh agitation to remedy something which previous legislation has left undone. Unfortunately this tendency to "pitch into" the government, and to regard it as being at the bottom of all Irish miseries, has reached limits which no friend of progress can contemplate with satisfaction; the important part which individual initiative and enlightened social co-operation can effect in moulding a nation's character is undervalued. Mr. Horace Plunket in his recent book on "Ireland in the New Century" lays great stress on this national