

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES*

Henry George's followers cannot but be indebted to Professor Young for his sympathetic survey of the origin and growth of the single tax movement in the country of its birth. A large portion of the ground is, of course, covered in the *LIFE OF HENRY GEORGE*, but that work is a picture of the man in all his activities both in the United States and abroad.

Commencing with a brief survey of the main forerunners of Henry George, of whom only two are American (Edwin Burgess, whose *LETTERS ON TAXATION* will be familiar to many of our readers, and the unnamed group who succeeded in Iowa in 1840 in having enacted a short-lived law providing for the assessment of land at its true value apart from improvements), Dr. Young proceeds to describe the peculiar conditions of California which so impressed on Henry George the significance of land monopoly. When Henry George arrived in that thinly-populated country the land had already passed for the most part into the hands of a very small number of persons, and this condition gave rise to an active agitation, in which the idea of special taxation on land was occasionally broached. *OUR LAND AND LAND POLICY*, which Henry George published in 1871, was, however, the only comprehensive attempt to explain the advantages of this solution of the problem.

The next period we pass over lightly, for it recounts the familiar story of Henry George's long preparation and hard struggle while writing the book which was to contain the full and adequate presentation of his great idea. Then follows an account of the reception of the book and the rapidly growing fame of the author up to the New York Mayoralty campaign of 1886. Professor Young here incidentally remarks on the attitude of the professional economists, notably Sumner and Walker, who attacked the book in the most violent language and without that scientific impartiality which should distinguish an economist.

The entrance of the single tax into the realm of practical politics in 1886, the break with the Socialist section of the United Labour Party and the attitude of Dr. McGlynn, are well described. The remaining two-thirds of the book are devoted to a study of the various campaigns undertaken by the single taxers from the single tax experiment in Hyattsville in 1892 (quickly decided by the Courts to be unconstitutional) and the "invasion of Delaware" in 1895-6 down to the New York Lower Rents agitation in 1915 and the Oregon and other campaigns backed by the Fels Fund Commission. Dr. Young pays a well-deserved tribute to the activities of the Commission while making some sympathetic criticism of some of the methods employed. He proceeds to a detailed examination and criticism of single tax tactics. This is more a matter of interest to our American colleagues than to us, and the conditions of political life in the United States are so different to ours that there is little in Dr. Young's criticism that will be of practical assistance to us.

A section is devoted to attempts to modify Henry George's doctrine which have been made by those within the movement. These criticisms are associated with the names of Thomas G. Shearman and C. B. Fillebrown, both of whom have contributed some very remarkable works to the literature of our movement. Their "reinterpretation of Henry George" has been on conservative lines

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and the claim is made that the Shearman-Fillebrown tactics avoid as far as possible the raising of initial prejudices which are fatal to calm discussion. Mr. Fillebrown's contention that the taxation of land values is consistent with the existence of private property in land we discuss in some detail elsewhere. The other characteristic contention of Shearman and Fillebrown is that the taxation of land values should not be carried so far as to take all land value in taxation, but only so far as the need of the government for revenue requires. We do not think that this limitation will bring much comfort to landowners. No one can set any limit to what the government may consider it necessary to raise in revenue. It is very likely that the land value of the United States is vastly in excess of present governmental expenditures, local, State and National. But how long would that continue if, say, the United States became involved in such a war expenditure as this country is faced with? It should also be remembered that, although many branches of expenditure which now absorb vast sums will become unnecessary when freedom of opportunity has destroyed the poverty which is their reason and excuse, the great factor limiting governmental expenditure now is the difficulty of raising money by present methods of taxation, not any lack of desire to embark on fresh undertakings. But this is for the most part an academic question.

Dr. Young concludes by a survey of what has been achieved in the United States by the single tax movement. He rightly points out that this is in no way measured by the legislative success attained, but by the acceptance gained for the idea. "The movement has exercised a most important influence upon opinion. How widely this influence has been diffused is evident from the tremendous circulation of Henry George's writings and from the extent of the single tax propaganda." Professor Young says that "the single tax movement has had a most important effect in moulding opinion upon social problems," and he quotes what Professor Ely wrote in 1890: "Henry George and others like him are helping to protect the property of the public, and for this the millions whose rights are too often overlooked ought to be grateful."

In conclusion, we may quote the final passage of this able and discriminating work: "Through the propaganda of Henry George and his followers hundreds of thousands have been led to consider how the condition of mankind may be ameliorated. . . . Whatever be the fate of the remedy for which he so earnestly contended, one thing is sure. Henry George made it plain that no true civilisation can avoid the duty of finding a means to 'extirpate poverty' and 'to lighten the burdens of those compelled to toil.'" This is in truth the spirit which animates our movement. Its object is not to alleviate poverty, but to put an end to the monopoly of natural resources which is its cause and so destroy it utterly.

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THE WORKERS GARDEN*

This little book will be useful to all amateur gardeners, and especially to those who in view of the food crisis are taking up gardening for the first time. The information seems to be adequate and is clearly and concisely stated. Sections are devoted to the preparation of the soil, plant diseases and parasites; the cultivation of the various garden crops is described and advice given as to the proportion of each to be grown, regard being paid to the food value of the produce.

*THE WORKERS GARDEN. By Gerald W. Butcher and Cyril Harding. Published by The Vacant Land Cultivation Society, 14, Buckingham Street, W. C. 6d. net.