

SECOND PRIZE, THIRTY DOLLARS.

ELEANOR E. DUNN, STATE HIGH SCHOOL, ALBANY, N. Y.PRINCIPAL, JOHN M. SAYLES.

"All that is human must retrograde if it does not advance," we are told in different ways by many authors. In his book entitled "Progress and Poverty," Henry George has pointed out clearly and unmistakably an important step in advance, the effects of which will reach all classes of society.

In pondering the social condition of the world, and of the lower class in particular, whose wretchedness and misery no means hitherto tried have appreciably diminished, Mr. George realized that poverty advanced with the advance of wealth and material progress—that increasing civilization but increased the suffering and the number of the very poor. This is exemplified in the growth of every country, and in the largest cities and oldest centres of civilization today is found the deepest and most widespread poverty. Such a condition is explained in various ways by philosophers and political economists, and is termed a necessary "law of nature." But before charging the Creator with such an unnatural law Mr. George sought to lay the blame upon man and man's laws.

As this research lay in the field of political economy, in order to correct the errors of those preceding him he first sought out and tested the doctrines on which that science is based. One of the most widely accepted of these is that wages are drawn from capital, and hence wages constantly tend to become low, because "the increase in the number of laborers tends naturally to follow and overtake any increase in capital." Mr. George, however, proves that wages are not drawn from capital, but from the produce of labor. So it is seen that no plan which aims to increase capital will remedy the existing low wages; and one common explanation of the problem is eliminated.

The widespread and unquestioned belief in the Malthusian theory has also been the fruitful basis of unsound reasoning. This theory, which maintains that population tends to increase faster than subsistence, does indeed seem at variance with the provident love and care of the Heavenly Father, and Mr. George has also shown it to be at variance with all truth and circumstantial evidence. "In countries where poverty is deepest the forces of production are evidently strong enough, if fully employed, to provide for the lowest not merely comfort but luxury. Whatever be the trouble, it is clearly not in the want of ability to produce wealth." What is the trouble then? If there is more than enough for all in this world of ours, to what can the want and suffering of so many be traced?

The three factors in production are labor, capital and land. The produce is divided between the laborer, the capitalist, and the landowner. Whenever production increases, it is found that neither the laborer nor the capitalist shares the benefit—the landowner alone is the one to profit thereby. It is a fact that higher rent, not higher wages or interest, accompany material progress.

This is the worst aspect of the present condition—that, as material progress advances, wealth tends to be more and more unequally distributed between the three parties, laborer, capitalist and landowner, and greater become the extremes of poverty and wealth. Increasing population but increases rent; labor-saving inventions and improvements but increase rent; and land speculation, which ever accompanies material progress, increases rent. Wages and interest remain at a standstill or decrease.

We conclude that private ownership in land is manifestly the underlying cause of the distressing condition we are striving to remedy; private ownership in land—an institution so time-honored and unquestioned that the idea of abolishing it seems at

first almost inconceivable. How many of us there are who have never dreamed of the injustice of the custom, whose eyes have never been opened to the wrongs it has caused; and how many there are, alas, who would not wish their eyes to be opened to them! But when one really considers the matter, the injustice of private property in land seems evident, and he wonders why he never before realized it.

After reading Henry George's work the last doubter could not truthfully defend private property in land as being just. A man's right of ownership extends primarily to himself and the fruits of his own labor. That which he makes or produces is his own—"to enjoy or to destroy, to use, to exchange, or to give." Did the original landowners obtain their title in this way? No. They acquired the land by force or simple appropriation, and nothing—"let the parchments be ever so many, or possession ever so long"—can make valid a man's title to property originally gained wrongfully. "Nature makes no discriminations among men, but is to all absolutely impartial. The laws of nature are the decrees of the Creator. There is written in them no recognition of any right save that of labor; and in them is written broadly and clearly the equal right of all men to the use and enjoyment of nature. Hence, as nature gives only to labor, the exertion of labor in production is the only title to exclusive possession." This most assuredly denies the right of private ownership in land.

Moreover, private property in land does not result in the best use of land. Often owners hold valuable lots vacant and unemployed because of a mere whim, or to await higher prices. And are not lands now frequently worked under leases by other than their owners?

The remedy for the social problem before us stands forth clear and well defined: *We should make land common property.* Half way measures will not succeed. To remove the evil, the root and underlying cause of it must first be destroyed.

Writers before Mr. George have advocated similar theories, and have proposed abolishing all private titles and paying rent to the State; but to him belongs the credit of evolving a much simpler and more practical plan, namely, to abolish all taxation save that upon land values. While the former method would meet endless opposition as being too revolutionary, the latter would necessitate no radical change, yet would accomplish the same results. This tax would fall entirely upon landholders, and would in effect be requiring of them the amount they receive in rent. They would be perfectly secure in their occupation of the land, thus giving them opportunity for making improvements, while turning over the rent to society, the rightful owner of the land.

This method of taxation would prove much simpler, more effective, and just than the complicated system now in operation. The burden of taxes would be lifted from capital, manufacturers, media of exchange, and improvements of all kinds, and a new stimulus would be given to trade. Prices would necessarily fall. To the laborer and capitalist would be left their full reward, and the production of wealth would be enormously increased. It would no longer pay to hold land in idleness, and immense tracts would be thrown open to improvement. The selling price of land would steadily decrease, and land speculation and monopolization soon cease. With all the natural opportunities and resources thus thrown open there would be no such thing as "not enough work." Wages must rise, for employers would have to pay a sufficient amount to induce laborers not to become their own employers on the natural resources then open to them.

The greatest result of this wise reform would be the much more equal distribution of wealth. There would be fewer very rich, and the very poor would disappear altogether, all living in comfort if not luxury. When the fear of want should be removed some of the intelligence and energy now devoted to scraping together a bare living might be employed in far more useful ways and the march of progress would continue with unexampled strides.

The small farmer and landholder need not become alarmed. The Single Tax on their land would probably not be as great as the sum of the taxes which they now pay. In the end they would find themselves among the greatest gainers by the change. Of course the benefit to the wage earner and salaried man would be inestimable and even the large landholders, although they would lose much, would also gain much.

What a change would appear in the morals and social life of the community! With the fear of grinding poverty removed, much of the crime and vice which are the result of it would disappear, and prisons and poorhouses no longer dot our country so thickly. Men would have more time to devote to education, invention, and culture. How much better a place in which to live this world would be!

This remedy for social evils now existing could not be the true one were it not in complete harmony with the law of human progress and with other reforms. That it is in harmony with them Mr. George has demonstrated as clearly and effectually as he has his other points. "Association in equality" is the law of progress. Political liberty or equality was the motive of that great Revolutionary struggle in which our forefathers sacrificed themselves for the nation's life. The increasing sacredness of personal liberty—freedom of speech and of the press—complete freedom in religious worship—extension of the franchise—all marked the progress of equality in the early history of our country. The Civil War in breaking the bonds of slavery, was a great step forward toward the reign of absolute equality. Shall we not continue this march in the progress of equality? A fundamental step yet remains to be taken. Equality in the distribution of wealth resulting from equal freedom in the use of nature's bounties is yet denied mankind, and slavery of laborers to landholders increasingly threatens us. Shall we not remove the last great hindrance from liberty's triumphant path?

Listen to this note of warning!

"The civilized world is trembling on the verge of a great movement. Either it must be a leap upward, which will open the way to advances yet undreamed of, or it must be a plunge downward, which will carry us back toward barbarism." Which shall it be?

These are the principles involved in the Single Tax movement. This is the philosophy of Henry George. After reading "Progress and Poverty" one can no longer doubt that his remedy is the true one. He has laid the foundation of his argument on the bedrock of truth, has proven in detail every step, fortified strongly every position, met every obstacle, and brought the laws thus developed into complete harmony with all other economic and natural laws. It is just, it is practicable, it harmonizes with the law of human progress and with other reforms. It *must* be the true remedy.

The progress of all great reforms is slow and much opposed. However, it should be every earnest citizen's duty when convinced of the truth not only not to oppose it but to do everything in his power to advance it.

Henry Ward Beecher has said, "We should so live and labor in our time that what came to us as seed may go to the next generation as blossom, and that what came to us as blossom may go to them as fruit. This is what we mean by progress." Henry George has planted the seed and done much to convert it into blossom. It is made clear as our duty to pass it on to our sons and daughters as fruit. And, while working and waiting for the fruit to develop, we may indeed take for our watch-word that poem of Whittier's, which tells us that

"Never yet
Share of truth was vainly set
In the world's wide fallow;
After hands shall sow the seed,
After hands, from hill and mead,
Reap the harvest yellow."