

## PASTORIZA, CHAMPION OF THE PEOPLE

BY PAUL C. EDWARDS IN THE "PUBLIC," July 20th

When Joseph Jay Pastoriza was elected mayor of Houston the people gained a leader who was one of them. If ever a man rose to public life through the sheer dominance of his own personality and through unremitting devotion to a high ideal, that man was the humble, homely, ungainly patriot who died a few days ago in that growing Texas city, victim to an intense passion for service to humanity.

Pastoriza's life was lived for one great purpose. He lived and laboured to emancipate humanity from the curse of poverty, not by giving alms, not by founding institutions, but by uprooting a false economic system. He was ready at any time to sacrifice his life to this cause, and that is exactly what he did.

Neither loss of health nor fortune swerved him from his course. He fought steadily, doggedly, patiently, cheerfully, always toward the goal. The memory of him to-day is a monument to his wonderful perseverance.

Of Spanish parentage, he came to Houston when but a child. He was not endowed with wealth. His first venture into business was as a newsboy.

I do not know just when the great light of truth shone upon him from the works of Henry George. But from the time he grasped the justice of that doctrine until the day of his death I do know that he never overlooked a chance to further the cause. His philosophy threw him into contact with the late H. F. Ring, a resident of Houston and known to Singletaxers all over America as the author of *THE CASE PLAINLY STATED*. For many years Pastoriza and Ring, as devoted disciples of the cause, worked shoulder to shoulder to carry the gospel to every part of the south-west.

But Pastoriza was not content to be a mere advocate. He wanted to translate his beliefs into action. He definitely planned to take public office in order to put his philosophy into actual administrative government.

That is how he came to run for tax commissioner of Houston. And the way he conducted his campaign was typical of the man. He purchased newspaper space, used it liberally to state his principles, and asked those who believed as he did to vote for him and those who differed from him to vote for somebody else.

He did not begin his reforms at once. The common opinion of him in the minds of his city hall associates was that he was a harmless crank. He was clever enough to take advantage of this wrong impression. He began a campaign of education. By slow degrees he worked forward. When he had finally convinced many men of standing in the community that tax valuations on property were very unequally administered he was ready for the first step. That was to install the unit system of valuations.

The small home owner had been bearing a wholly disproportionate share of the tax burden. The new system brought this injustice to light. The result was that Pastoriza became the idol of the small property holder. And it didn't take the big property owner and the big land owner long to discover that they had been outwitted.

It was the signal for the battle to begin on this humble man who had risen to a position of authority in the city hall. That warfare was kept up to the very day that Joe Pastoriza died.

He proved himself an adversary worthy of their steel. They did not frighten him. They could not influence him. He kept his eyes turned ever on his ideal. His next step was to reduce assessments on improvements, stocks of merchandise, personal property and other products of labour, to take the tax off money in the bank, and to increase the assessments on land values. His inclination was to throw the whole burden upon the landowners, but Pastoriza was too keen to make the change all at once. He planned to do it by degrees.

The landowners, however, were soon roused. They predicted ruin. But events belied their words. Houston entered upon an era of building and growth that it has not since equalled. The physical facts could not overcome the landlords' cupidity, though, and finally they carried the matter into the courts, attacking the so-called Houston plan of taxation on the grounds that it was contrary to the constitution of Texas. Pastoriza's answer was characteristic.

"If you want constitutional taxation, gentlemen," he said to them, "I'll give it to you. But it will mean everything you have will be taxed *at its full value*."

Needless to say, it was not constitutional taxation they wanted. They desired a return to the old system, where the small home owner paid the biggest share and big real estate holder got off with "what he thought was right."

They won. A court decision knocked out the Houston plan of taxation. Pastoriza saw his work shattered.

But he did not stop the fight. He began all over again to instil into the hearts of his fellow citizens the principles of common justice. He was elected tax commissioner a second and a third time. He saw the old city hall ring shattered and an entire new régime installed. He was the only survivor of the old commission. The people believed in him. They knew he was sincere and honest. The most influential men in the city could call him a crazy man and a destroyer all they wanted to. The common people paid no heed. They knew him. They welcomed a chance to vote for him.

When Pastoriza entered the mayoralty campaign the selfish interests of the city were mobilised to bring about his defeat.

"That man mayor of our fair city! Never!" was their attitude. The campaign against him had never been equalled in Houston for vituperation, slander and crookedness. But the people were still with Joe Jay Pastoriza and he easily outdistanced three opponents. The dream of his newsboy days was realised.

He took office last April. He set about at once to inaugurate a period of economy in the city government. It was not long before his enemies were barking at his heels, however, and every day of his administration he was harassed. They didn't want him to have a chance.

Pastoriza had a frail body and a weak constitution. He kept going on nerve power. The strain was too great. He succumbed. He left his office one morning, feeling ill, and went home. His life suddenly flickered out as he was preparing to go to bed for a rest.

That's the mortal story of this remarkable man. But behind him he left plenty of milestones to mark his ascendancy toward the goal he had set.

He taught Houston the principals of the Singletax. One of his famous examples was a log cabin he erected years ago far on the outskirts of the city. He told his fellow citizens to watch that cabin and some day, without his having ever done one thing more to improve it, the land would be worth several times what he paid for it. Of course his prophecy was more than fulfilled. The log cabin stands to-day in the midst of a populous and fashionable residence district.

He was the most progressive citizen Houston had. He travelled extensively to learn what other cities were doing in betterment. He even went to Europe to study governmental methods.

His great ideal was the Singletax, his great love was for his devoted wife, his great pride was for his boy, now grown to manhood and a promising young electrical engineer.

By his death the Singletax movement in America has lost a valuable and untiring advocate, and one of its most interesting figures.