

the higher, so high indeed that there will be no possibility of liquidating the debt. Walras after an exhaustive study concludes that "when the normal price is paid it is impossible out of the rent to establish a sinking fund to pay off the purchase price" (p. 327). Unfortunately he himself falls into a somewhat similar error in arguing that the State might by various arrangements influence the course of value and make it greater than it would have been under private control.

I have referred at length to the teachings of Gossen and Walras because they were among the earliest exponents of the doctrine that value depends on marginal utility, and because they deduced from that theory many of the conclusions that Henry George arrived at by a very different train of reasoning. It is not unimportant to remember this, as many of the present-day adherents of the marginal utility theory imagine that their doctrine is irreconcilable with the single tax theory when, in fact, the contrary is the case. We cannot, indeed, call Gossen and Walras single-taxers because they differ from Henry George as to the method of bringing about the reform we would establish through the taxation of land values, but at almost all other points the agreement is complete. They recognise that the present system of private property in land is the main cause of the maldistribution of wealth, and they contend that the only satisfactory solution is to make the rent of land the revenue of the State.

## PETTY AND GRAND LARCENY

By Henry H. Hardinge

Time was, no doubt, in the history of the human race when the term larceny, or any equivalent of it, meant nothing whatever; but in the grand sweep of human events there came a time when the institution of property in some of its forms (and it has had many) became necessary for the preservation of human life.

The first forms of property were, of course, the products of human industry and related to wearing apparel, and things used in the primary industries, like fishing and hunting. It must have been many thousands of years before artifice and artificial habits of thinking so blunted the primary instincts of the race that they could see nothing incongruous in making *property* of the forest and stream as we do to-day, and placing them in the same category as they did the game killed in the hunt.

As this instinct was generated by necessity, and became fixed by custom, property in these primal necessities became a fixed fact in even primitive society, and was finally safeguarded by civil laws and the intricate and elaborate legal machinery which makes it a crime or serious misdemeanor for any member of society to take these things *in retail* from any other member without rendering an equivalent, either legal, moral, or physical.

To such a degree have we carried this custom that in pioneer communities in the West horse-stealing was considered the greatest of crimes. It was greater, in fact, than man-killing, because in such communities a horse was much more valuable, measured in terms of money, than a man, and hence horse-stealing was punished by death. There was a hideous lack of a sense of proportion in this, but modern society entertains many of the same foolish notions about property rights as our forebears. Our moral sense as to property rights has been developed only in a retail sense. We have outlawed petty larceny as far as it can be outlawed, and we have prohibited the poor from robbing the rich; but we have not prevented the rich from robbing the poor.

We punish the retail transgressions of property rights only; we do not treat, we do not grasp, we do not punish, the wholesale violations of property rights which are incorporated into the very texture of our social fabric.

The poor cannot steal in wholesale; if they steal at all it will be in a very raw, crude, angular, unscientific and inartistic fashion, wholly shocking to the refined tastes of educated people.

This kind of theft we have outgrown and tabooed. While it is still practised under a pressure that is compelled and sustained by the colossal and wholesale frauds everywhere perpetrated by institutionalised property wrongs, we do not give countenance to the "Bill Sykes" style of freebooter. We are much more refined in our methods.

We say that the poor must not rob the rich or the well-to-do, and we have devised the most elaborate machinery imaginable to prevent them from doing so; yet the fact remains that, if the rich were as rigorously and religiously forbidden to rob the poor as the poor are forbidden to rob the rich, there would be far less rich, there would be no social problem of consequence, and no involuntary poverty at all.

In our social view we care nothing for property rights in general; for property rights in particular we care everything.

The property rights of property owners are safeguarded as is nothing else in the world. But the property rights of the property producers are ruthlessly sacrificed, indeed. The major element in the property holdings of the property-owning classes is *the capitalised power to levy tribute upon the property produced by human toil*, in factory, mine, forest and farm, as fast as it is changed from a raw state into finished products.

Ground rent in private hands to-day represents this very power. "Ground rent" is not property in any legitimate sense. If it could be utterly destroyed there would be just as many good, useful and beautiful things in the world as ever. Ground rent is not useful to-day in any large way, it is not made by human hands, as is a spade; nor does it embellish life as a picture.

It has none of the qualities of real property, nor will it satisfy the simplest human desire, as does a loaf of bread; yet ground rent *in private hands* has a power under the law to absorb these things on a scale that is so stupendous that the brain recoils in very weariness at the attempt to grasp the total of its takings.

This is the "big thing" in so-called property rights of the present day; it is the ultimate source of economic power, it is around this "sacred" institution that the "State" has reared its highest fences and built its most formidable barricades.

This is the great modern "sacred cow" before which we all prostrate ourselves and upon whose altar we still make human sacrifice, as did the ancients. The conservation of property rights on this extended scale is, and has been the great national religion. On this subject there is no jesting. Here sincerity rises to the surface and shines resplendent, as in no other human institution.

This is the great American economic Joss. Jew and Gentile, Baptists and Presbyterians, Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Dowieites, Holy Rollers and Protectionists, all doff the hat and bow the knee to this fair-visaged yet merciless and inflexible tyrant. The hem of her luxurious garment spreads out over the world, and her stygian shadow permanently engulfs myriads of worshippers in darkness.

It was ever thus with false gods. We have extended the domain of this tyrannic institution over a territory so large that the earth no longer has standing room for great multitudes of men; so they swarm into cities, to congest, rot, die, and go to the potter's field. The struggle and the strife have reached such dimensions to-day that millions just manage to live, other millions barely exist, and great multitudes simply cannot give themselves away.

In no other department of the known world, animate or inanimate, can be found a parallel to this. In no other

market save the labour market is there such unspeakable congestion. Chattel slaves could always find buyers, just as stock in the cattle and horse market. Man, alone of all created or manufactured things, can in uncounted instances find "no takers." Everything else has a price.

This is worse than a challenge, worse than an indictment; it is a crime; the worst of crimes; because it nurtures to successful accomplishment a myriad of individual transgressions which under more favourable auspices would never be committed.

These wholesale infractions of the moral law are the logical resultants of muddled thinking. *False thinking* has buttressed all of the idolatries, political, religious and economic, and there is but one remedy.

All of the swamps and bogs in which the human mind has floundered in the past and present are due to this one serious social fault, and at its base lies faulty education.

The products of labour were the first, as they will also be the last and only kind of property recognised by civilized men.

Capitalized ground rent will yet be used as the great social savings bank, the great old age insurance fund, the one and only source of public revenue, and the great universal horn of plenty in which we all can share alike in public benefactions.

The private appropriation of that which is socially created is the greatest and most disastrous of larcenies, because it robs great multitudes of men of their natural inheritance. It robs women of joys and gives back tears. It robs children of happiness and gives back desolation. It robs babes of life and gives back nothing. It is the great universal infraction of the injunction "Thou shalt not steal," either in the name of the law, or outside of its genial and comfortable ministrations to the physical well-being of the property-owning classes.

If human life is sacred, it should be protected, not only against the assaults of the evilly disposed, but it should be made immune from the invisible and evil influences which, in subtle and subterranean fashion and with resistless force, visit unspeakable miseries upon such a large portion of the human race. Invisible forces are the hardest to combat, because the hardest to detect; yet out of the "great invisible" there comes the electric energy that is playing such a marvellous part in the social economy of the modern world, and is doing it so generously, harmoniously, and silently, just because the laws of the "subtle current" are largely understood. So it is in the political and economic affairs of men; and the resistless economic forces which, operating in and beneath our political life, are re-writing platforms, shelving politicians, disintegrating parties, compelling some statesmen to "recant" and others to retire, and completely rearranging our whole political structure from top to foundation.

The inventor is the greatest of revolutionists; and the tremendous mechanical and economic agencies now at work in the world, directly resultant from the great inventions and discoveries of the last two centuries, are bound to have an equally powerful influence in recasting our methods, our public policies, our statecraft and our civil and economic life.

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By the early institutions of Europe, property in land was a public function, created for certain public purposes, and held under condition of their fulfilment; and as such we predict, under modification suitable to modern society, it will come again to be considered.—J. S. MILL.

Let it be observed that when land is taxed, no man is taxed; for the land produces, according to the law of the Creator, more than the value of the labour expended on it, and on this account men are willing to pay a rent for land.—PATRICK EDWARD DOVE.

## LANDOWNERS AND TITHES

By J. Dundas White, M.P.

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The Agricultural Rates Act, 1896, the similar Act for Scotland of the same year, and the Tithe-Rent Charge (Rates) Act, 1899, relieve those who are liable for rates on agricultural land and on tithe-rent charge attached to a benefice from half these rates, and cause the deficit to be made good from the Exchequer. Enacted originally for a limited time, these Acts have been continued from year to year by the Expiring Laws Continuance Acts. They ought not to be continued any further. The two first now cost the taxpayers rather more than £1,500,000 a year, and the cost of the third for the present year is estimated at about £180,000. Thus the discontinuance of them would save the Exchequer about £1,680,000 a year.

### RATES ON AGRICULTURAL LAND.

These Acts were not based on any economic principle, and did not constitute any reform of the rating system. They were passed on the plea of relieving agricultural depression; but that cannot be pleaded now. The demands of the war, the shortage of ships, and the great rise of freights, have greatly increased the prices of both imported and home-grown produce. The official average price of British wheat per Imperial quarter, which was 23s. 1d. in 1895, the year before the Agricultural Rates Acts, and 26s. 2d. in 1896 when these Acts were passed, was 31s. 8d. in 1913, 34s. 11d. in 1914, and 52s. 10d. last year. Even on that ground alone, the agricultural interests ought now to pay the whole of their rates, and the taxpayers who have so many other burdens ought to be relieved from this one, the more so as they are hard hit by the increase of prices from which the agricultural interest is reaping a rich harvest.

The payment of half the rates on any tithe-rent charge cannot benefit agriculture, as it does not diminish the amount of tithe-rent charge which has to be paid. The landlord puts capital, and the tenant puts labour, into the land, but the owner of tithe-rent charge does nothing to assist production. His charge is not an agricultural interest, but a burden on the agricultural interests. How great that burden is in some cases may be inferred from the need for inserting in the Tithe Act, 1891, the provision (Section 8) that where the tithe-rent charge on a property exceeds two-thirds of the annual value of the property as assessed for Schedule B of the income tax, the excess should be remitted.

### RECENT INCREASE IN VALUE OF TITHE-RENT CHARGE.

As is well known, the annual amount of tithe-rent charge varies, being based for each year on the official average prices of British corn (wheat, barley, and oats) during the seven preceding years, and is quoted in relation to the standard of 1836, when the commutation of tithe into tithe-rent charge began. In 1899, the year when the Tithe-Rent Charge (Rates) Act was passed, the value of £100 tithe-rent charge was £68 2s. 4½d. For 1910 it was more than £70, and it has been rising ever since. For 1914 it was £75 16s. 4d., for 1915 it was £77 1s. 4½d., and for the present year it is £82 3s. 6¾d., or more than twenty per cent. higher than it was when the Act was passed. The Act, as already said, applies only to tithe-rent charge attached to a benefice. But the owners of that, like the owners of other tithe-rent charge, without any effort or expenditure on their part, have had their charge increased owing to the increased prices of grain. The time has certainly come when they should pay the