

THE FARMER AND THE SINGLE TAX

[(For the Review)]

By WESTERN STARR

The bald economic demonstration of the Single Tax philosophy, with all its social implications, has been so often and so convincingly repeated, it would appear that nothing new could be said: that no new facts could be submitted, or any new arrangement of known facts be possible. There are hosts of men who have no conception of the meaning of this gospel, that will, within the time of living people, change the entire structure of our social order.

It is the same philosophy wherever presented, whatever the life or association, by whatever occupation one procures a livelihood, the principles of the Single Tax idea bear directly upon his economic status. It is as pervasive as gravity, as rigid as the laws of mathematics. One would not discuss nets with bankers, or discounts with fishermen; but the price one pays for life is a matter of interest to every one.

It is specially of interest to farmers, as they provide the primary basis of all civilized life—the food—the clothing without which life is impossible.

The price the farmer pays for the grade of life he gets attracts attention by reason of its bearing on the lives of those who are not farmers. It is a sorry tale one hears, once he comes close to the heart of the farmer. With slight exception the great majority who are expending their lives in farm labors, feel that it is a waste of effort. Unconscious of the troubles of their brothers in the infested tenements of cities, and the nerve shattering labors of factories, they understand only that they are just where they started years and years ago; fortunate if they have held their own; and they flee from the farm to the city and the factory with a vain hope to procure a higher grade of life at less cost of life.

This is a general condition; it is not local, merely, or dependent on the season, the crop, the market, or some spasmodic financial pinch. It is chronic and becoming more and more acute.

Masses of tabulated statistics graphically indicate the seriousness of a situation that contradicts every instinct of belief in the wisdom or justice of a system underwhich existing conditions and tendencies are possible.

A nation established by farmers, a government founded by farmers to establish justice and to secure the blessings of liberty, i. e., to obtain and to retain the blessings of liberty for themselves "and their posterity," finds in four generations of posterity less than 40% instead of 97% farmers or living on farms. And of this number a trifle more than half, even nominally, own the soil they till, and of this half, another half are bondsmen to their mortgagees, while landless farmers, tenants and farm laborers outnumber all the others.

The drift away from the farm, reducing the number of producers and increasing the number of consumers, very naturally begins to affect the prices of farm products, increasing prices materially—which increase is reperculated into increase in the prices of all products—farm or otherwise. Government begins to be aware that something is wrong; that the farmer is quitting his job. Government shows interest; establishes a Department of Agriculture, undertakes to organize farm experience to promote technical development and increase quantity and quality of production. Will even promise the farmers a monopoly of his American market, thereby letting him “hold the bag” in an international snipe catching expedition. (The poor fool is holding it yet). Government will multiply appropriations, from three to twenty millions, in sooth and encourage the farmer. Gives him an Interstate Commerce Commission, a Rural Free Delivery, a Parcel Post, Promises him Rural Credits, Aid for Rural Roads. Will even go so far as to revise a tariff schedule and throw the door on importations of farm products wide open. And during the years of this coddling programme the conditions continually grow more difficult; the drift becomes a flood and the cost of living leaps toward panic prices. Government becomes greatly interested; starts farm schools, as it were, in every county where local farms will help in the cost. Even advances money (at 3%) to bankers to be loaned to farmers (at from 6% to 15%); even enacts homesteads laws, by which one may acquire a square mile of land by living on it a little while. Government will do any thing, everything but the *one* thing, the *only* thing, necessary to solve the entire problem, of which the farmer problem is only one part.

All through the continuous vaudeville of Govt. Punch and Judy juggling, the proverbial density, the impermeability of the farmer type of mind, recalls the ancient experience formulated by the Hebrew prophet when he asked, “How shall he get wisdom who holdeth the plow and rejoiceth in the goad, who driveth the oxen and is occupied with their labors, whose talk is of bullocks? He giveth his mind to make furrows and dilligently to give the kine fodder.”

If the destruction of the poor is their poverty the destruction of fools must be their folly. Therefore, it must go hard with those who unite in one individual the prime characteristics of folly and poverty. A glance at the origin of the farmer group will show that the farmer is not responsible for the great handicap under which he labors. It is universal experience that the beginning of the division of labor was by the subjection of the farmer group to other groups, whereby, as Lincoln said, “the one eternal question was who should make and who should eat the bread.”

This was the symbolism of the tragedy of Cain and Abel, reenacted in every social order down to our own time.

The instrument by which the subjection of the farmer group—as of all others—was established, and is now maintained, is the ownership of the land by one group, always relatively small in number. Through this they are able to

impose conditions on the lives of the many, who are compelled by their necessities to cultivate the soil for their own subsistence.

The few, more vigorous, more courageous, more adroit took on themselves the functions of Public defence, made war, captured slaves, divided spoils of lands and goods, cattle and such forms of wealth as began to accumulate when communities became sedentary. These functions involved the imposition of conditions of labor, soil cultivation, road making, other forms of public work, upon the subject class that continued till abolished in France, by the Revolution. Class lines yielded less freely then than now to conspicuous qualities and individuals passed between groups, in both directions.

The subject groups—the landless—have always been much larger, universally than the land-owning group. Their long failure to bring about equitable conditions derives from their isolation and the scattered, diffused character of their habitation. They were ignorant of each other, having nothing in common but a common occupation. Insufficiently coherent to form a "class," and opposed by a compact, highly organized, municipal society, their status could not be other than it has always been, at the bottom of the industrial scale, the foot of the social establishment.

Farmers are beginning to know that they have no monopoly of unhappiness, that there are hosts of others who cry out against the same enormous fact that is his own grievance. They even as does he grow weary of "letting down buckets into empty wells and growing old with drawing nothing up." They strain and strive in the strength of youth to prepare for the wants of age; they incur the obligations imposed by the nature of things only to find, as the days go, strength goes with them, while the wealth they produce under the lash of their own ambition vanishes like the rainbow.

The typical farmer is obsessed by superstitions; social, political, religious; his mind is bowed, as his shoulders. It is painful to him to look at the sun at full noon, or to allow the full truth to pour into the chambers of his mind. Still, as gunpowder dissolved the coat of mail, printing dissolves the superstitions, and the tiller of the soil is more and more rapidly coming to see that he and the factory hand are brothers in slavery; that both are brothers to every slave that ever lived; that the chain of their servitude, however called, is forged of the same metal.

Following up the track of the vanished wealth he created for his own use, he finds it drawn into the same center with that produced by his brother, the factory hand: into the hands of the group that fixes the terms on which both exist: the group that controls jobs: the landowning group. He finds no difference in principle, through a vast difference in pressure, between giving out jobs on the busy corner lots of great cities, or on Railroads, or anywhere, so long as any wanting a job is compelled to ask some other man for it. And at the last point, it is always the land-owning man who has the job to give.

The farmer finds wealth beyond his dreams owned by landowners who

never created wealth enough to salt their bread; and he sees bread lines passing the door of the one conspicuous example in all the world of those who created breadlines by controlling jobs.

It is a promising indication that the farmer is now wrestling with a broadening sense of some vast injustice, practically all the sure-enough farmers have arrived at that station on the way out. The lack of organization, that has held back progressive thought and action by farmers, is being overcome.

The Grange, the Farmers' Union, Equity Society and similar organizations have discovered that economics is not politics and that ethics is not religion. Until very recently, farm journals scrupulously avoided the remotest possible suggestion of anything beyond the technicalities of Agriculture. Notable exceptions begin to appear, and valuable space is devoted to broad discussions of Single Tax and other fundamental ideas.

Recently a Farmer's publication has preempted the field of politics for the farmer. It has nothing to say on the technique of agriculture; but it develops views on legislative policies and has progressive opinions. The farm telephone constitutes a web that binds farmers together and unites them to the municipality; the auto no longer terrifies the countryside; indeed, every farmer who sees one hopes some day to own one and forthwith becomes an ardent good-roads man. The Producers' Exchange, the Creamery, the Community Breeding Circle; any and everything that tends to bring farmers into closer association and develop the principle of organization, is paving the way for the new order of things. Farmers begin to understand that every fact or condition of which they as a group complain, exists as the result of political action; and that the only channel through which relief can be secured is by political action. Divided and so neutralized by false issues, baffled by astute agents of special privilege masquerading as patriots, the farmer is only now beginning to see that there is nothing for him in the present order of things. He is asking for a way to reach the growing "overhead expense" of farming as a business; how to arrange it that he will not be compelled to expatriate his children in order to equip them for the battle of life; that they may be able to find "jobs," places, when they can set free the passionate energies, ambitions and spirit of service that are the glorious endowment of youth, without being compelled to pay more for the right to live than the living they get is worth.

The waste of life that is so striking a feature of our economic history flows from a lack of conscious responsibility, of premeditation in our development. The farmer cannot escape the penalties of ignorance for which he is in part responsible. But he begins to understand that his industry, as the foundation of all industry, has to support not only his own burdens but those also borne by all other industrial groups. To illustrate: one begins to see the lie in tariff legislation, the iniquity in watered stocks of transportation securities. He expects to sell his surplus in a world market and buy his necessities behind a tariff wall of artificial prices; but when he found out that the world prices fixed

his home price, and that he had to pay the cost of marketing, including transportation, he started a yell for government-owned ships, government-owned railroads, in order to escape paying double rates to support dead capital: two and one half per cent. of the total national commerce being based, in normal times, on ocean traffic in agricultural products, has cost the American farmers enormous sums. It has robbed him coming and going, on what he sells, on what he buys. But vast as this tribute has been the one form above all others from which he suffers as an industrial factor, comes as a curse in disguise, welcomed by him as an expression of fortune's favor: that is, the inflation in the value of his little patch of land. As a speculator in farm land he rejoices; as a cultivator of the soil he groans. He forgets that he must labor more severely, in almost geometric ratio, with every increase in the value of his land, to keep it moving as a going concern. He forgets, also, that every increase in the value of busy corner lots in the great city must be supported by tribute ultimately wrung from the group of which he is a member. All the improvements that add to his convenience or facilities, all that helps him to cultivate more land, the good roads, telephones, autos, tractors, mail delivery, simply capitalize themselves in higher land values; make it just so much more difficult for the landless farmers to find his job, his patch of land on which to make his living.

Every belief in design or governing principle, in the physical universe, is supported by evidence less convincing than that which supports a belief in a similar order in the social universe. Since it is unbelievable that natural processes are painful, i. e. destructive, a self-destructive social order cannot be a natural social order. Theory and experience unite in declaring that land-monopoly has been the cause of social decay in every instance of a degenerate social order.

To exterminate land monopoly, then, is to remove the cause of the incipient degeneracy that has laid hold upon the Republic; to arrest the process of social decay and put an end to conditions that are growing more distressing to all and which have practically made serfs of a majority of American cultivators of the soil.

There is but one method remaining by which land monopoly can be reached that has thus far never been applied on any extended scale, or to its full extent. It is to require that land monopolists, the real owners of the country, pay the expenses of running it. They have always been able thus far to run it, but they have made the rest of us pay the bills. It should be evident that no one will try to hold on to land, i. e. opportunity, that he cannot make profitable: which means that every man can then hold just so much land as he can make profitable. It is believed that the American farmer, with an intelligence equal to understanding the problems of chattel slavery, as related to himself, and educated by half a century of experience with the most subtle devices that ever developed in a moral vacuum, will be able to understand the problems of the industrial feudalism of which he is the primary victim.

In a warfare of ideal there can be no reprisals. In a new era, past piracies will be forgotten. The resilience of free industry, that means free men on free land, will so flood the world with wealth that every son of Adam may have, may enjoy, all he cares to create. Anxious for action and results, Single Taxers realize they are building, not for to-day, not for themselves; but for the ages and for the race of men.

Never, since that day, "When the embattled farmers stood by the rude arch that spanned the flood, and fired the shot heard round the world," has the appeal been made in vain to the patriotism of the American farmers. And when the record is made up he will be found to have done his part.

AESTHETICS AS A FACTOR IN SOCIAL REFORM

(For the Review)

By **ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK**

The part that may be played by the Aesthetic sense in the evolution of sweeter manners and nobler laws, and of public morals generally, has probably never been adequately appreciated by our society-reconstructors and social reformers. It has indeed been recognized by poets and others that the sensitiveness to the ideals of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful act and react upon one another. Some have even affirmed their identity and maintained the impossibility of conceiving one member of the Trinity in isolation from the other two. Such recognition, however, of the relation between the three constituent elements in human virtue has for the most part been confined to those thinkers who stand apart from the rough work of the social uplifter, and who live on a plane of thought above that of ordinary mortals. In a general way it may be affirmed with confidence that the artistic faculty, the sense that distinguishes between acts, relationships, and things that are ugly and those that are beautiful, has hitherto been regarded by the social reformer as the Cinderella of the family—the negligible member of the tri-sisterhood of senses on whom we rely for our standards of conduct. The moral pointed by the familiar fairy-tale of the nursery may be not without some bearing on the stage we have now reached in the evolution of human relationships. It may be that the future fortunes of the household are to be retrieved by this Princess in disguise whom we have left sitting among the ashes and regarded as of no account; and it will not be the first time in the history of a family, a nation, or a race, that salvation or rescue has come from an unexpected quarter.

Mankind has probably never been entirely without some vague or sub-conscious perception of an ultimate check upon conduct; a high court whose judgments are irreversible and which delivers its verdicts only after the laws of right and wrong or truth and falsehood have been violated; a judiciary that