

PRESIDENT EMERITUS ELIOT AND
THE SINGLE TAX.

Chance comments are often more interpretative of the attitude of certain men toward economic movements than labored disquisitions on the same subjects. In a recent number of the *Atlantic*, ex-President Eliot dealt with the extensive subject of American discoveries and their relation to modern civilization. An active-minded Single Taxer, Mr. Hugo W. Noren, questioned Mr. Eliot as to why he had omitted from the list Henry George's proposal of the Single Tax as a solution of the economic problems pressing for attention, and was richly rewarded by eliciting from that distinguished publicist the following reply:

Cambridge, Mass.,
April 8, 1915.

Dear Sir:

I said nothing about the Single Tax in my article in the April *Atlantic*, because I am not sure that the Single Tax is a good thing. So far as one can now judge, it would have one pernicious effect, namely, to diminish the amount of grass land or garden about city houses, thus making cities more and more unwholesome and unattractive. Nobody could afford to hold any ground in a city uncovered by buildings.

Very truly yours,
Charles W. Eliot.

Doubtless the first sensation, which any one familiar with the subject derives from such an answer, is compounded of amazement, contempt and some discouragement. Of course it is no secret that the famous "five foot shelf" of all the books necessary for complete culture, did not contain "Progress and Poverty." But it was hardly believable that a man who had spent a generation at the head of our most famous institution of teaching, if not of learning, could have remained, as the reply would indicate, so totally unimpressed by the most significant movement of his time.

Hostility, or even denunciation might have been expected, for most of President Eliot's work for Harvard was devoted to the diversion of some of the ill-gotten gains

of predatory millionaires into the University's coffers. Living in such an atmosphere is not conducive to friendliness for any proposal looking toward economic freedom, but it does not necessarily involve so feeble an intellectual grasp of the issues at stake.

A movement, world-wide in its ramifications, ought certainly to have created, in a really cultivated mind something more important than the limitation of door-yards or house lawns or city grass plots. One stands aghast at the illimitable, invincible ignorance herein displayed. There is no reason to suspect any attempt on the part of Mr. Eliot to dodge the question. Had he any suspicion of the gravity of the issues involved he would have found a more respectable pretext for escaping the expression of an opinion.

In a busy career, such as President Eliot's, allowance must be made for the impossibility of a man's keeping abreast of all reforms proposed, but the American mind seems to expect of its conspicuous citizens the ability to pronounce with authority opinions on the most unrelated subjects.

President Eliot seems not to have grasped even in relation to the narrow aspects of the objection which he advances, the fact that open spaces play their part in the estimation of values. He does not understand that it is the private appropriation of land rents which militates against the existence of the open spaces for the multitude which he would conserve. Light and air are made merchantable commodities which are beyond the reach of millions of city dwellers. Just because the system which he condemns is not a part of our public policy, around all our cities, uncounted acres, which might furnish sites for wholesome houses for our swarming populations, are held out of use, serving no human purpose, in the hope of future gain by their holders. Thousands of small land speculators "sweat blood" in taxes annually, to hold back from less fortunate citizens than themselves the chance for a healthy and wholesome life. We have enlisted the irresistible power of human greed in the cause of congesting humanity. The chimera of ultimate large gains, most often never to be realized, lures them like

a will-o'-the-wisp, usually only to land them in the bog of financial disaster.

If it were not too late at his time of life to hope that he can see the truth of an economic theory to which he has given such superficial attention, we might urge President Eliot to really look into the principles underlying the Single Tax. If he could grasp them, it might change his attitude toward life. He might find in it a plan whereby even his beloved University could benefit in a nobler way than by being obliged to beg for the largess of vain-glorious plutocrats, who cherish the empty hope of saving their names from merited oblivion by endowments whose purpose they can only vaguely comprehend. When the universities serve the people, instead of being the bulwarks of privilege, the people will liberally support them. It will not then be necessary for university presidents to wait with bated breath on the alms of uncultivated, unsympathetic money-bags for the funds needful for higher education. Universities will not then be the resorts for the sons of the idle rich, on the one hand, or places where young men are taught how to most effectively serve the owners of the earth in their task of extracting from the poor all that they produce, over and above a scanty living, to pile up fortunes for the luxury of wastrels. Education will then be something else than a means of teaching men how to get a living without working for it, which it now too often is. Hence the distrust with which labor regards culture. Of course even our aristocratic universities and their systems cannot entirely stamp out of generous youth its aspirations for justice, and so out of these very hotbeds of privilege come many who will and do fight for the right as they see it, but so far as in them lies, these institutions do tend to reinforce those most dangerous antagonists of democracy, the esprit-de-corps of plutocracy, the Janissaries of privilege.

If the value which population confers upon land is appropriated to the use of the people by means of the Single Tax, President Eliot need have no fear that grass plots and lawns in city areas will disappear. On the contrary, instead of being the envied pleasures of a minute fraction of the popu-

lation, they will be at the command of every citizen whose appreciation of them is deep enough to cause him to make the small sacrifice necessary for their possession.

DEATH OF EDWARD MCHUGH.

(See frontispiece).

In another column will be found an "appreciation" of the life and services of Edward McHugh from the pen of Alexander Mackendrick. We do not publish the biographical details in the life of the veteran who died April 13 of this year in his home at Birkenhead, England. He was laid away in the cemetery in his native city, and present at the graveside were a large number of those who had been co-workers in the great cause to which he devoted his life and remarkable platform abilities. Telegrams and letters of sympathy poured in from all parts of the United Kingdom. These testimonials bore silent witness to the love and admiration in which the dead soldier of the great cause is held.

We shall long delight to recall our recollections of Edward McHugh in that campaign waged in 1897, in which Henry George fell a martyr to his whole-hearted devotion to humanity. In this campaign Edward McHugh took a foremost part, speaking everywhere in this city, now in halls and again from the tails of carts. We recall with a great deal of satisfaction that we followed him at one of these cart-tail meetings with the fate that overtook those who spoke "after Pericles." When Henry George died Mr. McHugh was with him, and in the few days of the campaign that followed, in which under the leadership of Henry George, Jr., the banner continued to be upheld, his voice would often break when he recalled the last hours of the master.

He was not an orator as we love to conceive of oratory, but he was a forcible and effective speaker, and remarkably clear in his presentation of our doctrines of which few had a more intelligent comprehension.

We cannot better conclude this slight reference to our old friend than by quoting from the words received from C. Caradoc Rees, of Liverpool, who said: