

FAIRHOPE CRITICISED,

Editor Single Tax Review:

Having lived in Fairhope, Alabama, in its "pioneer" days and been personally acquainted with its chief promoters, I have watched with interest the increasing publicity Single Taxers have recently been giving the colony, and wondered when some one would enter a protest; for it did not seem possible that the ignored facts regarding it should forever remain obscured. From my personal knowledge of the promoters and controllers of the Fairhope corporation, and my experience with them, I am the more easily inclined to believe that Prescott A. Parker might have put his case against them even more strongly than he did in the Winter Number of the Single Tax Review.

Replying to him, E. B. Gaston says, regarding "the administration of colony affairs by members of the colony corporation," that "it is an absolutely necessary condition . . . to ensure the administration of that land on Single Tax principles;" that "it must be controlled by Single Taxers." He says: "We came . . . to demonstrate the virtues of a well-defined policy. That policy has been steadfastly adhered to . . . and every proper effort has been made to acquaint all comers with that policy." Again he says: "Even if it were deemed advisable to commit hari-kari, by admitting non-Single Taxers to full voice in the administration, no one has ever shown a way by which it can be justly done." And, finally: "It is a remarkable man indeed whose actions are not consciously or unconsciously affected by his personal interests."

Seeing that the Fairhope management has been appealing to Single Taxers at large for the financial assistance, and utilizing them, their organizations and periodicals, for considerable free advertising, and posing as Single Tax demonstrators, it would seem that the Fairhope corporation managers can, in simple fairness, prove the sincerity of their claims by nothing short of giving the Single Tax public the names of the resident members of their *corporation*, stating how long each has been a Single Taxer. It is one thing to *say* that the colony *should* be "controlled by Single Taxers," and quite another *to prove that it is*.

When I lived at Fairhope, J. H. Springer, Henry C. C. Schakel, and George Pollay were also resident Single Tax members of the corporation. James Bellangee had not then arrived. John W. Ettel and Chas. Schalkenbach, two well known Single Taxers, lived on land near the colony. Ettel applied for membership and was refused admission. Can the zealous guardians of Single Tax principles within the corporation tell us why? Every Single Taxer on the ground, whom I knew, voted to admit him. At the same time the Mershons, brothers-in-law of E. B. Gaston, were members of the corporation, and boldly informed us that they came to Fairhope with the distinct understanding that they were not to be bothered about *principles* at all; that they knew practically nothing—and cared less—about the Single Tax; that they came there for purely family and business reasons. E. B. Gaston himself told me that his own ambition was to get away from the push and rush of the world, and have a cow and horse and garden, and be able to take life easy and comfortably.

In the effort which Single Taxers on the ground made to establish a democratic form of government—governed by town meetings instead of a representative (of corporation owners) "council," they were outvoted by the Gaston-Mershon families aided by the other non-Single Tax members, the non-resident members' sole source of information being through E. B. Gaston. Up

to that time none but corporation members were allowed residence in the colony. If, by admitting non-Single Taxers "to full participation in determining the policy of the colony or *electing the officers* to execute it," "there would not be any Single Tax colony," why were non-Single Tax members of the corporation so numerous as to be able to refuse admission to such a well known and unquestioned a Single Taxer as John W. Ettel? No one knows better than Gaston that Mrs. Sykes, Messrs. Coleman, Stimpson, and other resident members of the corporation (as well as his own family relatives), did not even claim to be Single Taxers at that time. And is it not a little strange that every Single Taxer who was in Fairhope at that time (1895) left, not only the colony, but much of their property and earnings besides? If that "well-defined policy," which "has been steadfastly adhered to," and of which "every proper (?) effort has been made to acquaint all *comers*," is the Single Tax as understood by followers of Henry George, why did the corporation refuse Ettel membership? or why did it so apply that "policy" as to make it to the interest of every Single Taxer who lived in the colony in 1895 to leave as soon as an opportunity offered, even at a sore financial sacrifice? If "no one has ever shown a way by which "non-Single Taxers" "could be justly" admitted "to full voice in the administration" of the colony affairs, will some one show the way by which the non-Single Taxers controlling the Fairhope corporation came to be admitted? Surely there must have been some *other*, and more effective test of qualification for membership in the corporation than that of being a Single Taxer, when the applications of well known Single Taxers could be rejected, by confessedly non-Single Tax members.

Before Single Taxers at large allow themselves to be sidetracked by E. B. Gaston's inferences as to the motives actuating Prescott A. Parker, let them take the precaution to obtain a full and unreserved history of the colony, especially that unwritten history of its pioneer days. If the details have slipped the memory of Gaston and other promoters of the colony, some of these details may be found in that issue of the Fairhope Courier which J. H. Springer edited—and the type for which I set up—and which Gaston did his best to suppress; or, if the present address of Messrs. Springer, Schackel and Pollay can be obtained, they can supply many important items regarding the methods of the colony management at that time. Let no Single Taxer think that the details of the past history of the colony have nothing to do with the application of Single Tax principles there; for they have everything to do with it, seeing that it was wholly a matter of principle which the resident Single Taxers were contending for when they were outvoted by the Gaston faction, which latter was a distinctly non-Single Tax element, an element which remains in control to this day. It would be no concern of Single Taxers at large how Gaston ran his little colony if he did not thrust it upon their attention as an illustration of Henry George's teachings, and appeal to them for patronage and support.

And now that some Single Taxers have been misled into serious attempts to imitate Fairhope, it is the more important that those who do not want the Single Tax doctrine to become a just subject of ridicule should be cautious how they commit, not only themselves, but the cause they advocate, to any colony experiment; especially in view of the innumerable illustrations extant of the difficulties and disappointments inevitable to all such experiments. Many things can be done in an out of the way place like Fairhope without attracting the attention of the general public, which, if done near such cities as New York or Philadelphia, would at once become matter of public comment, so that it might be as well for Single Taxers to make haste slowly until they are quite sure that what is applied under the label of "the Henry George Single Tax" does not turn out to be something altogether different. They should not be too easily influenced by what is called "success." That is a favorite word, just

now, with all kind of grafters, and needs more accurate definition than interested land owners are apt to give it. Perhaps eastern Single Taxers are excusable for a tendency to accept at its face value what they read or hear from real estate boom sources, but those who have lived in the land booming west should be sufficiently familiar with the tone and character of boom literature to be careful to seek for the glossed-over facts which are sure to underlie those flowery statements. Experienced real estate men are not inclined to over-state the unattractive features, and it is worth noting that the Fairhope corporation is not without its quota of men of that quality.

I have always understood that what Henry George meant by the Single Tax was that every person should pay as much for the privilege of holding land out of use as for putting it to its best use. When E. B. Gaston was appealing to a Philadelphia audience for more funds he remarked that the Fairhope corporation, *like any other landlord*, charged its tenants all the rent it could; but he did not add that, also like other landlords, its proprietors had no rent to pay on the land it held out of use.

It is conceivable that a real estate corporation might be organized which would agree to pay all the State, County, and local taxes levied against its tenants and its own land and property, and charge the whole up to the tenants in the form of rent. This might be *a* Single Tax, just as a tax on incomes might be *a* Single Tax, but that it would be *the* Single Tax which Henry George proclaimed is impossible.

Let E. B. Gaston tell the Single Taxers at large, to whom he is appealing so energetically for more funds, whether members of the Fairhope corporation pay any rent (or tax) for the corporation lands which are not in use; and if not, whether anyone who begins using such land is required to pay rent so long as there remains land along side unused which pays no rent; whether the State and County taxes assessed against the unused land owned by the Fairhope corporation are paid by tenants of the unused land, and if not, by whom are they paid.

Does any Single Taxer believe that Henry George conceived it likely that, under the Single Tax, there could be vacant lots of *valuable* land interspersed between used land? Could it be possible that, under any application of *the* Single Tax, valuable lots of unused and untaxed land could exist in the midst of used and taxed lots? What difference does it make to a man renting land of a corporation whether he pays the taxes levied against the corporation's unused land in the form of rent for the location he uses or in the form of a tax on his house? Would not the former be more apt to fasten on him the tax which should be paid by the owners of the idle land?

Do the Single Taxers at large think that the spirit of the Single Tax, as proclaimed by Henry George, could be recognized in a community of people, the majority of whom were totally disfranchised as to local public affairs, and where all such local affairs were conducted by a close corporation which owned the land on which the majority were mere tenants?

I think that my wife and I have had as thorough and varied an experience in propaganda work as any two other Single Taxers, and we wish to register most emphatically our opposition to the opinion of John De Witt Warner, that "five years of practical illustration," such as is possible by any conceivable colony, "would advance the cause more than fifty years of any conceivable propaganda by discussion about it." A *thorough* "propaganda by discussion" is an absolute prerequisite to any "practical illustration" of anything sufficiently radical to approximate really equitable conditions.

This is a very appropriate time for Single Taxers at large to sift this Single Tax colony business to its dregs, before many more of them are induced to try to imitate Fairhope's pretensions. The prominence given in the Single Tax

Review, of late, to the suggestions of Fairhope experiments near New York and Philadelphia, seem to call for the closest of scrutiny into the *principles* going by the name of the Single Tax.

Do Single Taxers at large understand that the payment of a rent in lieu of all other *direct* taxes—whether that rent be excessive or not, and regardless of the disposition of that rent fund—constitutes *the* Single Tax as conceived by Henry George? Do they think it possible to have *the* Single Tax where there are *any indirect* taxes? Are there any Single Taxers of the Henry George brand who think that it would be possible for any *valuable* land under the Single Tax to remain untaxed? Do they think that the settler on “the margin of cultivation”—that is, on the one side of whom is population and on the other is vacant (and therefore valueless) land—would have any taxes to pay so long as the lack of demand for land to use was shown in the idle condition of the land adjoining—just beyond “the margin?”

Does any one believe that tenancy on Fairhope corporation land brings such great benefits as to make land just inside the imaginary line which separates the corporation land from the land of outsiders' worth a great many dollars per acre so long as the outsiders' land—on the other side of the imaginary line—is worth \$1.25, or less, per acre?

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REPLY BY MR. GASTON.

I have no desire to engage in any controversy with Mr. Brokaw over myself or my wife's relations, and am so busy working for the Single Tax, as I understand it, that I have little time for argument with those who look at it differently.

If my work in connection with Fairhope, and the columns of the Fairhope *Courier*, are not satisfying evidence of my zeal for and understanding of Single Tax principles, I can rest quite content with my own approval.

As to my brothers-in-law—everyone who knows Fairhope knows of the important part they have played in its development. They are good enough Single Taxers and Fairhoppers to have invested every dollar they own here. It has always been, and is a matter of some pride and gratification to me, that I have been able to enlist so much support for Fairhope from my wife's relations. Petroleum V. Nasby was so patriotic in 1861 to '05 that he was “willing to sacrifice all his wife's relations,” and I was so much in earnest about Fairhope that I would have sacrificed all my wife's relations, and my own as well, upon its altar. I am glad, however, that it has in no sense proved a sacrifice to them.

Of the Single Taxers whom Mr. Brokaw mentions as having been here when he was, Springer, Schakel, Pollay, Ettel and Schakelbach, I know the whereabouts only of Schakel and Ettel, and am very glad to give their addresses, so that anyone who writes to them regarding those early days of Fairhope may do so. Henry C. C. Schakel may be reached at 1021 Union Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Fairhope has no better friend to-day than he. John W. Ettel is now at White Springs, Fla. The most cordial relations exist between him and myself to-day, in spite of the fact that I felt constrained to vote against him ten years ago.