

The Single Tax, September, 101

MR. STEAD ON THE SINGLE TAX. By Wm. Cassels

In the "Review of Reviews" for August, Mr. Stead, in summarising and criticising "The Lord of the Sea," by Mr. P. Shiel, says—

"Mr. Shiel appears to be of the school of Dr. Wallace and Henry George, or of some other of the numerous sects of land nationalisers. He is convinced that rent is robbery, and that the millennium would dawn if the rental was paid to the Governments, to be disbursed by them for the benefit of the people, instead of going into the pockets of landlords, to be used by them for the benefit of their families. This idea is not new, neither is it true, for it requires very little thinking to come to the conclusion that if the present Government, for instance, had the whole of the rent-roll of the United Kingdom to play with it would only have a larger sum to waste on wanton war and unnecessary expenditure. The very last thing it would do would be to inaugurate the millennium. Mr. Shiel or his hero appears to have persuaded himself that if land were nationalised and all rents paid to the Government, men would earn enough in one day to keep them in comfort during six; and that sin and sorrow and all the miseries of this mortal world would vanish as an evil dream before the wings of the morning. It is not necessary to argue this question. Mr. Shiel is not a political economist; he is a sensational novelist, and he has a right to choose his own standpoint."

We as Single Taxers do not care to be classed as land nationalisers, but if what is meant by land nationalisation is the ultimate taxing out of land values and the abolition of all other forms of taxation we have no objection to the name. But we decidedly object to be considered in favour of giving to any Government the values of land in addition to all the present revenues derived from very many crooked projects. And we certainly think that, in justice to the followers of Henry George, Mr. Stead should do a course of reading (and thinking) on the Single Tax question, as he invariably manifests an ignorance of the question that is painful to perceive. Not that it matters a great deal to the Single Tax cause what view Mr. Stead holds of it, as the said Mr. Stead suffers terribly from literary indigestion, does most of his thinking with his heart, and, by intemperance and exaggeration, generally hinders more than he aids the causes with which he is identified, but if

he could be induced to do a little thinking on the question it might be to his own everlasting benefit., The idea that rent is robbery is neither new nor true any more than wages are robbery, and do not find any school of land nationalisers, as Mr. Stead is pleased to designate us all, who hold such an idea. If rent is robbery does it cease to be robbery when it is paid to the Governments? What Single Taxers believe is that the private appropriation of rent is robbery, not rent, or the taking of rent, and we are certainly convinced that we would have taken a good step towards the millennium if the rental of land was paid to the Governments, to be disbursed by them for the benefit of the people instead of going into the pockets of landlords, to be used by them for the benefit of their families.

This idea, Mr. Stead informs us, is neither new nor true; granted that is is not new, that it is as old as More, Spence, Quesnay, Turgot, Ogilvie, Dove, or Spencer, what does that matter? But if it is not true that is a different thing. "It requires very little thinking to come to the conclusion that if the present Government, for instance, had the whole of the rent roll of the United Kingdom to play with it would only have a larger sum to waste on wanton war and unnecessary expenditure." It is quite evident that it does not require much thinking to suggest an argument like this. Does Mr. Stead do so little thinking that he cannot understand that the private rent rolls of the Rhodes', Beits', Salisbury's, &c., have been the chief cause of the war? Where would the present Government be but for its rent rolls? They hold position and power, not by ability, energy, and genius, but simply because they have rent rolls.

Would Lord Salisbury be Prime Minister? Would the Cecil family reign in St. Stephen's if private property in land were abolished? The truth is that the war spirit has always been fostered by the land speculators of the world. But let us put the question in another way. Suppose all the values of the land of Africa had been used entirely for public purposes, regardless of race or colony, would there have been such people as the Rhodes-Beit fraternity, and would there have been war? Let us suppose further, that we have no taxes anywhere, and that the value of land is the sole revenue of Governments, what interests will the land speculator then have in creating and fostering the war spirit?

We have referred to these remarks of Mr. Stead, not because he is the only one who uses such arguments, but because he has stated with his usual literary ability

the cast iron conception of the Single Tax of George Bernard Shaw, and the ordinary Socialist, and Socialistic reformer, who see in the Single Tax nothing but so much revenue. The taxation of land values means much more than the securing of revenues for State and municipal purposes. It means the breaking up of land monopoly and the utilisation of the land by the people. Give the people of these islands the right to use the land of their birth, and all the gold mines of the world will not tempt them to emigrate and increase the land values of African land speculators.

We are glad to say that, despite such misrepresentations as this in the "Review of Reviews," the cause of the taxation of land values, the only practical method of securing the common ownership of land values and the equal right to use the land, goes marching on.