
Henry George's Land Tax

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stain nor goadmark. Roguery, not honesty, requires a system. Nobility of soul is as simple as sunshine ; it is in trickery and knavery where complications are. To have the name of one's Creator constantly on one's lips, and to make no further demonstration that one ever thinks of him, may be all that the system of worship requires ; but there is room for doubt as to whether this is the sort of religion which a dying man will turn to, in his last moments, for consolation and comfort.

Perhaps my judgment is perverted, and, perhaps I am stubborn ; but I doubt if the man whose religion consists entirely of public worship, and the constant whining of the name of the deity, ever feels any actual reverence for the sacred name he says so often.

I do not wish to be understood as in any sense crying down public worship. None, I am sure, respect it more than I do. In the present condition of human affairs, it is a most valuable and necessary institution. Notwithstanding the revolting crimes and sins which it seems to approve, cloak, and sanction, we should be infinitely worse off without it. We must keep it and sustain it until we have something to substitute for it, which, generally speaking, will be better than it. As for me, I am of the opinion that the day will come when the ecstasies of religion, like the ecstasies of love, will be surrendered to in secret—without the profaning gaze or presence of scoffers and hypocrites. All prayer will then be straight from the heart to its Creator ; and His name will be held in such reverence and awe that devotees will only whisper it in their souls. Its common mention and use will then be punishable as a crime, and sacred things will no longer be made a matter of form, system, and lightness.

Moral and spiritual health may then be possible ; laws will, possibly, be something more than empty words, embracing and clothing heedless formulas ; and the penalties of transgression may be taken into account. The saying of prescribed rites being discontinued, there will be less opportunities for hypocrisy. Fewer persons will profess being followers of that which the divine law demands and compels, but more will possess actual religion. Seeming, rather than being, according to the present state of things, will be reversed into being, rather than seeming : and so the good old Roman aphorism will once more become something else than a mere pretty thing to quote.

If I am blind, and all wrong—if system and form, and parade and show, are, after all, really wisest and best, I have the consolation of knowing that no one whose views are antagonistic to mine will be apostatized by what I have said. And there is, also, the still pleasanter thought that I may have helped and encouraged some one who shares with me the feelings which I have tried to express.

GEORGE SAND.

II.

HENRY GEORGE'S LAND TAX.

THE theory of Henry George, that land should be taxed for all public expenses, and that all other property should be relieved from taxation, has recently come into such prominence that it certainly demands serious attention. Mr. George is acknowledged, on all hands, to be perfectly sincere in his teachings. It is everywhere admitted that he is a man of remarkable intelligence and ability. His bitterest opponents credit him with the best of intentions. Is it not reasonable, therefore, to suppose that his economic doctrine of land taxation, whether right or wrong, is closely allied to some great truth ? How else could he have impressed it upon thousands of minds, throughout Europe and America ?

Again, if Mr. George is in error, he must be understood before he can be cor-

rected. Neither he nor his followers are men to be cured by throwing adjectives at them in the dark. The wise thing to do, then, is to find out exactly why Mr. George entertains his special economic theory of land taxation, and exactly whence he derived it. By following him closely, we may observe some matters that he has not seen, and new facts may lead to new conclusions.

Mr. George said recently that it was not necessary to hunt in obscure places for the basis of his doctrine, as it was contained in the first chapter of the Bible: "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth." Mr. George meant, of course, that, as God made the heavens and the earth for all mankind, a few men have no right to monopolize the common gift. When the science of political economy was born, Aristotle, the father of it, defined what is called "natural wealth"—the earth, the air, the water—as "the bounty of nature." This bounty of nature, not being produced by man, but being a general gift equally essential to the very existence of all human beings, the profoundest political economists of the world—among them Mill, Spencer and George—pronounce it common property. Did my lord Blackstone do the same thing, when he said: "I see no reason, in nature or in natural law, why a deed upon parchment should convey the dominion of land?"

Now, Henry George, in his "Progress and Poverty," defines "land" as precisely synonymous with Aristotle's "bounty of nature." "Land," says Mr. George, is "the whole material universe outside of man himself." The term "embraces all natural materials, forces, and opportunities."

It appears to me that Henry George makes no improvement on Aristotle, in calling the whole bounty of nature "land." But one thing is certain, and Mr. George cannot escape from it. If "land" includes all natural wealth—all the bounty of nature—and if land is to be specially taxed as common property, then a tax on merely the *ground* is not a *land tax* at all. To be a land tax it would have to be placed on all "natural wealth"—the whole "bounty of nature."

The truth is that "land," according to Mr. George's broad, economic definition, and according to the fact itself, is the universal base and raw material of everything that human beings touch, improve, work up, or in any way produce. Every stone and timber in a house is just as evidently a piece of natural wealth, a segment of the common bounty of nature, as the ground whence it came; only the raw wood or stone has been modified by labor. But Henry George would not tax the natural wealth in the timber or the stone. He would not tax a house, but the plot under it. He would not tax a lump of gold, but the hole out of which it was dug. Thus, to state Mr. George's own position in regard to land is to overturn his land tax.

But he arrives at his conclusion by two ways. We have followed him through one of them. Let us now take the other.

What gives increasing value to land? he asks. His answer is that population does it—all society. In a new country, where land is had for the asking, it has no value. Let some Daniel Boone isolate himself from the world, who will give him a cent for the ground on which he settles? While he is *alone* it has no value, though it may have utility, in so far as it supplies his individual wants. But when society comes about him his farm turns into a fortune. It was not Daniel Boone, says Mr. George, who put the value into that property: the whole community did it. And why should they not tax out the unearned increment?

Well, the trouble here, too, is that Mr. George sees only one-half of a great economic fact. It is not merely land—the ground—that increases in value through the general presence of society, but everything else is subject to precisely the same law. Every piece of land has been made more and more valuable by the presence of population. But so has every house that has been built on

the land. As population gathers about the house, and other houses are built up, every brick in the first one—yes, and every stroke of labor that went to make the brick, or put it in position—is raised in value. In other words, there is no such thing as value without society—two persons, at least—one who has something that the other wants. In this respect, therefore, a house, and even the labor that builds a house, is precisely like the land under it. Lands, houses, and the labor put upon them, all depend for their value on population, society, the commonwealth. Thus a house would be common property, by the same right as a piece of land, and the fruits of individual labor would be common property as rightfully as either the land or the house. The bounty of nature is a part of every one of them, and all increments of value depend on supply in proportion to population. In short, the natural and moral tenure to land differs in no way from the natural and moral tenure to any other kind of property.

In 1883, the wealth of the United States was estimated thus :

Land.....	\$10,750,000,000
Houses.....	13,900,000,000
Railways.....	5,450,000,000
Cattle.....	1,890,000,000
Sundries.....	9,205,000,000
Total.....	\$41,195,000,000

According to this table, our land value, in this country, is not much more than one-quarter of all values. Yet Mr. George would make this one-quarter of wealth bear all the public burdens of the other three-quarters, in addition to its own. Could a more unjust tax, or a much worse monopoly, be imagined ?

And now let us find, if we can, what has caused such a startling gap between Mr. George's premises and his conclusions. I believe the explanation is easy.

With the world's greatest political economists, and more vividly than all the rest of them, Henry George sees that natural wealth, or rather what Jefferson called the "usufruct" of it, always belongs to mankind as a birthright—to society as a whole. At the same time, he is no socialist, no communist. He sees that individuals are rigidly entitled to the fruits of their labor, their economy, their industry, their capacity. Through his land tax, he honestly and earnestly tries to separate the people's natural share in wealth from the shares of individuals, according to their work. But when land (the bounty of nature) has been taken out of land (the ground) for thousands of years, and transformed into the varied wealth of all civilization, a land tax, in the sense of a mere ground tax, touches only about one-quarter of the wealth it ought to reach. Yet Mr. George's "Progress and Poverty" is so superb a work, so persuasively constructed, and so full of great, needed truth, that he has almost overwhelmed the very elect with one of the most glaring and disjointed non-sequiturs that ever broke itself in two with its own logic.

But is there no way, then, to separate the value of natural wealth—the people's heritage—from the value of improvements made on it by individuals?—giving the whole people their due, and rendering also to every individual the exact compensation for his work, his enterprise, his ability and economy? I think there is a clear way to that end, and that the end can be reached by the collection and public use of a proper tax. In fact, I see very clearly that scientific taxation will yet be, not only the cure of economic wrongs and distresses, but the antidote, also, for socialism, communism, and the many economic poisons that are now held up as remedies. In the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* of July last, I attempted to propound and explain such a tax. Something of the kind will come in due time. But let the public never forget that, if Henry George has made one great logical and prac-

tical mistake, he has inaugurated the correct tendency of a whole epoch. He has earned all his laurels, and more.

EDWARD GORDON CLARK.

III.

ARE THE HEATHEN OUR INFERIORS ?

It is no trouble for Gail Hamilton to make any subject interesting. Whatever she touches emits electric sparks. But even her charming pen rarely flames with such a volume of electric *light* as she pours into her contribution to the December REVIEW, entitled "Heathendom and Christendom Under Test." What a neat rebuke it is to that monstrosity—that "Frankenstein" of our English and American self-conceit—that we are the only people fit to be glorified, and all other peoples are only fit to be damned.

When young and innocent, I spent a good many years in the study of theology, not with the retainer of any sect in my pocket, and the implied promise never to move out of a given rut, but from the impulsion of intense necessity to know the truth. One conclusion that I came to, as the result of those years, was that there is no shadow of authority in the teachings of Jesus for the vulgar impression that any special division of humanity is God's cohort, or that any other special division has been expropriated of His love and light. Jesus was too busy establishing the general "fatherhood of God," and "brotherhood of man," and in dissecting the Scribes and Pharisees immediately around him, to think of the "Good Samaritan" as a "heathen." The "Son of Man" looked upon all other men as His brothers. Feeling full of God's truth, and believing that He truly represented the Father, Jesus did insist that all men and women must approach God in the spirit of love and self abnegation, of which He felt himself to be the incarnation and example. But that is all an erect, healthy mind can find in His actual inculcations. The rest has come from the cross-eyed, hump-backed, club-footed souls that have looked out at Jesus through their own deformities. The pious *mirage* that God looks upon one nation of His creatures to bless them, and another to curse them, has risen out of the egotism—the hard, narrow egotism alone—of theological crusaders who mistake themselves for the Good Shepherd's meek and gentle lambs. It has just the same foundation as the puerile exclusiveness which used to prompt the North-End boys of Calvinistic Boston, in the old times, to sling stones at the South-Enders, and which still arrays the children of one block in Brooklyn, "the City of Churches," against the children of the next block.

But I wish that Gail Hamilton would go a little farther with her brilliant and caustic analysis. "Mrs. S. L. Baldwin, a missionary of the Methodist Board in China," petitions our United States Congress to let her import a Chinese servant, because Christian servants are so much inferior to the heathen. Gail Hamilton naturally feels that the heathen servants ought not to be damned hereafter, for being better than the Christian servants here. But, looking at matters in her practical way, are the Christian nations of the world, to-day, superior to the heathen nations anyhow, except in force of intellect, enterprise, and *wickedness* ? "Chinatown," in San Francisco, is commonly depicted as concentrating all the depravity of Joss-house civilization. But is not every vice of Chinatown duplicated, two to one, in New York ? In point of actual, not hypocritical morality, for instance, in the ordinary sense, is London better than Constantinople, and is Washington any better than Salt Lake City ? Gail Hamilton's analysis and criticism are capable of extension.

JOSEPH HEWES.