

## ETHICS OF THE SINGLE TAX.

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### II. THE LAND AND THE GOSPEL.

A study of the land question is now absolutely necessary to an understanding of the field of modern Christianity. The whole science of ethics must be rewritten, and made to stand upon its proper basis. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a short expression for the sum total of forces that make for peace, happiness, and unity between man and man, and between man and God. There is no real good advocated by any human being on earth that is not a partial embodiment and expression of some phase of the good will of God toward the human race. All good is Christian, while all evil is anti-Christian. The problem is to find specific phases of the good to combat and displace specific phases of the evil so persistent and omnipresent in the world today.

Among the forces that make for the improvement of earthly conditions, and preparation for a future life, is that commonly called the single tax.

What is the single tax? It is a self-consistent, truly scientific and Christian theory of the solution of some of the most vexing problems of the civilization of today. That the truth contained in this theory would, if applied, transform the political, industrial, social, and religious conditions of today, other things being equal, is the growing conviction of thousands of intelligent men throughout the world. For one, I believe this with all my heart. Not only so, but, on the other side, I am convinced that society cannot be permanently improved morally or religiously, without the truth contained in the theory of the single tax.

Therefore, it constitutes, in my mind, an essential part of the truth of Christianity. It may seem strange to some that what is regarded by many as simply an economic theory should constitute part of a man's religion. Probably I shall be able to make this plain as I go on.

There are very many living issues today on which the Christianity of the church has nothing to say, but there is no living issue, and never will be, on which the Christianity of Christ will be silent or deaf. Analyzing our thought and getting back as

far as we can, we find we have three primitive ideas. These are God, the world, and man. How do we become possessed of these? We get them in either of two ways.

First, we assume the existence of an absolute cause, self-existent, eternal, and personal, as a necessary postulate. From this, the creation of the world and man follow as a logical consequence. Or, beginning from beneath with the psychological fact of self-consciousness, we find its correlative in the fact of world-consciousness, and through both these we arrive at the third primitive idea in God-consciousness. Now you will notice that whether you start from above or below, the intermediate term is the world. Thus, from a naturalistic standpoint, the world mediates between God and man. Through the world God comes to man, by a thousand avenues and in manifold forms of blessing. True theism, in opposition to deism, presents God as both transcendental and immanent. It is the divine immanence in the world that makes nature unspeakably sacred. Through the mediating world God not only comes to man, but man goes to God. God intended man to be happy, noble, and Godlike.

Second—It is as clear that man is constituted for happiness as that a watch is constituted for keeping time.

Third—It is self-evident that the world is fitted to provide the material conditions and elements through which, in large degree, that happiness, nobility, and Godlikeness are to be realized.

These three derivative ideas, again, all fit into one another in nature. God intended man should find nourishment for his physical powers ; these growing in strength were intended to provide the material basis for the growth and exercise of his intellectual and moral powers, and these evidently are intended to enable him to find, through the adequate interpretation of nature, the God who created him and loves him, by knowing and loving whom in return man was to find the highest good and the goal of his being.

Now, in the light of these facts, it is not easy to imagine anything more monstrous than that one man should shut out his fellows from the above twofold use of the world; that is, of nature. Those who are acquainted with the economic use of the term "land," know that it is equivalent to all natural forces. In other words, it is equivalent to the word "world." It is evident that on theological grounds, quite as much as on economic grounds, it is absolutely necessary that the mediating agency of the world, so far as known law is concerned, should be kept open equally to the use of all God's children.

Can this be done? We affirm that it can, and that by the simple act of taking the

unearned increment in land values for public uses. This is economically and theologically what the single tax proposes to do, and beyond a doubt it will do it.

The consequences that would flow to poor, suffering humanity from the adoption of this principle are so deep and far-reaching and subtle that no human being can begin to estimate the benefits. I will hint at a few of them.

First — It would forever solve the tenement house problem. If there is one crime on earth that cries more loudly than another to God for vengeance, it is that of the way the poor are crowded together and obliged to inhale the foul vapors that arise there day and night as the very fumes of hell. I can understand how incarnate devils, out of whom all sense of right had long been crushed, could treat human beings thus; but that men should so treat their fellows, and all for the love of gain, I cannot understand. I believe there is positively no other remedy for this evil and blot upon civilization. Benevolently disposed people sometimes propose building parks in the midst of these districts. The result of their aid is simply to raise rents in the neighborhood of the park, and thus drive back the poor and huddle them more closely together in some other quarter, and give the landlord the advantage of increased rents. The present method of taxation makes it profitable for the landlord to keep his tenement house out of repair and to have poor drainage. The single tax would make it absolutely necessary for him to construct good houses and give the best drainage. If the single tax did nothing more than this for our great cities, it ought to commend itself to every true follower of Jesus Christ.

Second — It would stop the unnatural flow of population from the rural districts to the cities, and make life in both healthier and nobler.

Third — It would provide the basic conditions for an equitable distribution of wealth. It is truthfully said that the millionaire is the complement of the tramp, and both a growing menace to civilization.

Fourth — It would provide abundant resources for all purposes, municipal, state, and national. This would do away with much political corruption.

Fifth — It would bring to an end the present awful struggle for existence, and enable men to live together as brothers, and as children of the same God and Father.

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