

TEN MINUTES IN THE TRAIN

WE HAD not met for some time, and consequently our unexpected encounter at the railway station was a great pleasure. We got into the same train, and he told me that he was going to an exhibition of which he was one of the directors. As soon as we had taken our seats we began to chat.

"Tell me, now, you who have dedicated your life to Land-Value Tax propaganda, what exactly is this thing? I read your article on improvements, on the limitation of mortgages and their reform; but, to tell you the truth, it is not at all clear to me what you are trying to advocate in it, or it may be the Land-Value Tax which is not clear to me."

"Very likely," I replied, "since there are particular points for the complete comprehension of which a knowledge of the principle you refer to is indispensable."

"Very well; give me an explanation of this principle."

"Good heavens, sir! In the ten minutes that we are going to be together you expect me to explain an economic problem about which more than 200 books and pamphlets have been written?"

"Yes, but you know that business men have a natural aversion to purely theoretical discussions. A sure and fundamental proposition ought to be capable of brief and clear definition, and if so ten minutes should be sufficient."

I replied that I wished to satisfy him as completely as possible, that he was quite right, since, indeed, ten minutes would be more than sufficient for a brief explanation. But in the first place I would like him to tell me something about his exhibition.

As may be supposed, he discoursed eloquently on this subject; and gave an animated description of the plans of the buildings and of the advantages to his business which he expected to result from the exhibition which would give the exhibitors an opportunity of displaying their wonderful inventions.

At this point I interrupted him: "How is the cost of this enterprise met?"

"The principal source of income is the rent of each stand."

"But isn't it difficult to allocate the stands justly, so as not to give, consciously or unconsciously, one exhibitor an advantage over another?"

"More theories! When a business man does a thing, he always sets out from a clear and simple point of view. The stands are let to those who offer most. The man who wants a stand near the entrance, for which there is a considerable demand—for instance, a corner site with good light—must pay more than he would for a site less in demand."

"Then you don't let out the stands according to area?"

"No, sir! According to their value. Would not a tenant put the same value on a corner site with good light as on a stand three times as large at the rear of the building?"

"Yes; but let us suppose that the man who rents this excellent site is not able to do any business."

"That's his look out. He who has it must run the risk and submit to his good or bad luck according as he pleases the public taste or no; whether his goods are in much demand or are worthless is his lookout. We cannot do more than give him the same opportunity as the rest. The man that wants much must pay much, but what each individual may make with the chance thus acquired will be determined by his own intelligence, by his personal care and ability. What he is able to get by it will be for his exclusive benefit, and the community has nothing to do with it."

At this moment the train began to slow down.

"I have to leave you at the next station," said my friend.

"I am so glad to have met you, and would have been just as glad to have had you give me some explanation of the

Land-Value Tax, while I have done nothing but talk about our exhibition and the way we let out the stands there."

"No, I have said nothing about the Land-Value Tax, because you have yourself done it better than I could. Imagine the land of a country apportioned in exactly the same way as you apportion the stands at your exhibition, and you will understand the principles of the reform I advocate. The taxes, rent or contribution, whatever you like to call it, should be divided according to the demand of each individual for the land. What each can make from the land he uses is his affair, and his application, talent, and economy should not be penalised by taxes. How did you put it? You said yourself: When a business man does a thing, he always sets out from a clear and simple point of view. Exactly. Look at our municipal and national life from the same point of view, and you will be an advocate of Land-Value Taxation. Good day—and think over that!"

By the late Dr. A. Damaschke, leader of the German Land Reformers: reprinted from Land Values, June, 1913.

MR. F. C. R. DOUGLAS Appointed Governor of Malta

HIS MANY friends in the Henry George Movement will join in felicitating Mr. F. C. R. Douglas on the distinction which the Government has conferred on him by his appointment as Governor of Malta, a post which he is taking up immediately. They will recognise the loss that will be felt, particularly on the Board of the United Committee and in the offices of LAND & LIBERTY, by his absence abroad. Mr. Douglas has been called to his high post in the service of the country in recognition of his outstanding abilities and his capacity as a civilian administrator. The task he is undertaking is one of great responsibility in what awaits him in Malta. The island has to be pulled out of a shattered economic condition and a new constitution now being drafted by Malta's assembly has to be established. But he brings to it his talents as an economist, his experience of municipal government, his reforming zeal in matters of land tenure and taxation and his understanding of constitutional law.

Mr. Douglas has been a member of the United Committee since 1910 and has been its assistant secretary and associate Editor of LAND & LIBERTY since 1933. His work in that capacity and as assistant secretary of the International Union fills a place in our records which is beyond estimation. He was elected president of the English League in 1942. His appointment as Governor of Malta caused his retirement from Parliament where he has represented North Battersea since 1940. He has served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary of the Board of Education, and to the Home Secretary (Mr. Chuter Ede), as member of the Public Accounts Committee, the Railway Assessment Committee, and the Public Works Loan Board, and was chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on the Estimates. At the last General Election he was returned with 14,070 votes, being a majority of 9,101 over his Conservative opponent. He has been a member of the Battersea Borough Council for 26 years and a member of the London County Council for 12 years, where he was chairman of the Finance Committee from 1940 to 1946.

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