

## THE TRUE PRINCIPLES

### A new Textbook by Prof. Gunnison Brown

Although the raising of public revenue is the most important and universal undertaking in which sound economic principles should be applied, the absence of practical and coherent textbooks on the subject has long been evident to students of current economic writing.

It is not too much to say that the treatises which the academic world has provided in late years suffer from two equally grievous faults. They are either overloaded with wearisome and trivial discussions of minor points, padded out with voluminous but insignificant statistical data; or else they are devoted to abstract discussions of nebulous ideas of such vague generality that they afford no practical guidance.

A further fault of still more significance is the deliberate avoidance of any ethical judgment upon the existing or proposed systems of taxation. The only principle of morality which emerges from these discussions is the false one of respect for "vested rights."

Professor Harry Gunnison Brown, in his *Economic Basis of Tax Reform*,\* has undertaken the task of providing a textbook which is not a mere condonation of things as they are, but a critical examination of the faults of the existing system coupled with positive proposals for practical reform.

It is possible that this book will not be popular in academic circles, especially in the United States, for Professor Brown does not hesitate to expose in clear cut and almost ruthless fashion the fallacies to be found in other textbooks, which are in popular use in that country. This was, nevertheless, a task which required to be done.

As William Graham Sumner says (in a passage quoted by Professor Brown): "The educated classes are the victims of the phrase. Phrases are rhetorical flourishes. They are the artifices of suggestion. They are the same old tricks of the medicine man adapted to an age of literature and common schools." Professor Brown has exposed the hollowness of many of these shibboleths, such as

\* *The Economic Basis of Tax Reform*. By Professor Harry Gunnison Brown, Professor of Economics in the University of Missouri. Published by Lucas Brothers, Columbia, Mo., U.S.A. Price \$2. Obtainable also from the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, Ltd. Price 8s., post free.

"ability to pay," "broadening the tax basis," "tax relief for real estate," and many others.

He has also dealt in trenchant manner with the "vested rights" argument, pointing out how this deceptive phrase is always used to bolster up existing wrongs, and especially to oppose any attempt to relieve the producers of wealth from unjust tax burdens by placing the burden upon the unearned value of land.

Another feature of the book is the careful discussion of what meaning may rightly be attached to the phrases "earned incomes" and "unearned incomes," and the proper conclusions to be drawn from this distinction.

Whatever his victims may say of Professor Brown's criticism, they cannot deny his competence for the task he has undertaken. His clear and accurate analysis of the basic economic principles applicable to the problems of taxation deserves the highest measure of praise. Nor does he leave the slightest doubt in the mind of the reader as to the practical proposals he advocates for placing the tax system upon an equitable and reasonable basis. He is not a hesitating friend of minor patches on the system, but a bold protagonist of a radical change, sweeping away present oppressive taxes and substituting them by a tax on land values.

Although the outlook of the book is naturally American, this work deserves the widest circulation in every part of the world. It is an invaluable armoury for those who desire to give sound economic reasons for their support of land value taxation and who sometimes, perhaps, find it difficult to spot the fallacy in the "rhetorical phrases" which pass for reasoning.

F. C. R. D.

Mr Charles Bevan, whose name is known in political circles in London, South Wales and Lancashire for his consistent advocacy of Georgist principles, has produced a booklet on "Public Speaking" for which the Hon. Cyril Asquith has written a Foreword. The keynote of this publication is expressed in the words: "To be effective as a speaker one must know the right way to speak," and its principal virtue is that it goes straight to the point. "The prime purpose," says the author, "is to help beginners; but perhaps there may be found some speakers of experience who will be willing to compare notes with one who has been through the turmoil of a few political campaigns." Published by the Liberal Publication Department, price 1s.