

The Philosophy of the Single Tax.

By J. Farrell.

X. IN CONCLUSION.

I have endeavored in the course of these articles to explain in a condensed form, and divested as far as possible of technicalities necessary to a textbook but unfamiliar to the general reader, the doctrine expounded by Henry George in "Progress and Poverty," and all his subsequent writings. Here and there, perhaps, I have been too prolix or too concise. I have been to blame, may be, for undue repetition or insufficient demonstration. That this should happen is unavoidable in matter written hurriedly, and sometimes at the last moment before its publication. Any consideration of questions of political economy should be couched in terms of the utmost exactitude, every definition should be arbitrary, and every sentence clear and capable of but one interpretation. As in "Progress and Poverty" itself every line should be read and reread, every obscurity removed and every unnecessary word pruned off. But although conscious of failing in this respect here and there, I feel confident that I have not in any essential point diverged from Mr. George's teaching.

The conclusions reached by Henry George in the course of a profound examination into the causes of poverty, misery and crime are shortly these: That labor is the producer of all things; that capital, a tool shaped by labor's own hand, can only be used to assist it; and that monopoly of the matter or material from which these two partners could produce everything requisite for the satisfaction of human needs is alone responsible for the shocking social conditions that now exist throughout the world.

He has shown that the exchanging of commodities between different producers and nations is a means of securing to both exchanging parties the highest possible wages, as wages are in reality the usable things produced by labor. He has made plain and clear beyond question and set forth in a manner more striking than any other writer, the truth that just as every individual earner produces what he consumes, every country, no matter from what quarter it may import commodities, really produces them within itself by the work of its own people.

He has demonstrated that the restriction of trade is dishonest, cruel, and only effective for evil, and a principle altogether false and barbarous, which can only receive the support of economic ignorance or conscienceless individual cupidity. He has made it apparent that freedom of exchange is but the smallest half of free trade and that until the veto is removed from the source of all trade nothing permanent can be done towards enlarging the welfare of mankind. He has proven that the beneficence of nature, the mighty growth of invention and progress, the operation of wise and advantageous laws and every other cause of human advancement, is in a large degree annulled by the power monopoly possesses to forbid everything on pain of getting the greatest

part of the proceeds. He has diagnosed the disease and prescribed the remedy. Monopoly must go.

If the fertility of the earth, with all its potentialities, had been increased a hundredfold during the past two centuries that would probably not count for more of good to mankind than has been achieved by the intellectual mastery of man himself over his surroundings. If where an ear of wheat rewarded the toil of our forefathers a hundred ears were the harvest of ours the gain would hardly be greater than knowledge has borne us in chemistry, steam, electricity and applied physics generally. A man does not now need more food or clothing than he did two centuries ago, but he can with the same labor as then produce many times more. And yet more men in proportion to the whole population now go hungry for want of food, or cold for want of clothes, than then. Surely this is a strange thing to happen. Two hundred years ago, with the smaller knowledge and ruder appliances of that time, a man could from a few acres of land directly produce all the food and clothing required by himself and his family. The day when the actual wheat grown became the bread of the grower, and the wool of his sheep was woven into cloth and fashioned into garments in his own home, is not long gone by. Could not the men who starve in England today do what their forefathers did? Plainly they could do more. They have the sinews of giants and the knowledge of gods as compared with them. But the strength and the understanding dare not break through park railings or stone walls with broken glass on top of them to grow wheat or tend sheep on acres that someone else wants for pleasure; so they stay without, fighting like human wolves for the bones of charity flung out to them, or tumbling over each other in a rush to do some service for their masters, whose reward will be food whereby to live. The strength and the understanding can only buy their way to such acres as are open at any price by a guarantee to the sellers of all they may produce except what will keep them alive to go on producing. Those walls will have to come down.

It is a common thing with some of the Sydney critics of Henry George's principles to fall back in occasional intervals between personal calumny and studied misrepresentation, upon the assertion that the conditions of landownership here are different from those existing elsewhere. They point out that in England, for instance, lands have been inherited from those who practically seized them from the people, while here they have been obtained by purchase from the State, and that land monopoly has not yet begun to interfere with our prosperity. We have no concern with how the land was obtained from the State. If the State sold it, it sold to some the right to prey upon others, just the same as if it had sold them an authority to commit highway robbery or levy an annual tax upon the whole community without rendering any service in return. Our case is that absolute private ownership of land is no more compatible with public equity than similar ownership of air or water or any other thing not fashioned or modified by human labor and pre-existent to man would be. Our case is that if one man, or 20,000 men, had vested in them absolute ownership of all the available water in a country he or they could extract from the others for permission to get water all their earnings to the limit of bare subsistence, and in some cases beyond it, compelling them to perish for want of water. Whoever can prove that access to land is not as essential to human life as access to water may find a flaw in our reasoning, and whoever will show that any man can have the same title to land as to any form of wealth that is the

product of man's labor — the title of having produced it or given value in return for it to the producer — can upset our claim altogether.

As to the contention that value is given to the community for the purchase of land, I may mention parenthetically the fact that enormously the larger part of the most valuable land in New South Wales, the part that under the single tax would furnish most of the revenue, changed hands for a very small return indeed. Whatever of service or money was rendered or paid for it represented its value then, not its value now. The claim that anything done for the community years ago by most of our richest land-owners is fair compensation for the wealth that has since accrued to them from the community is not one that calls for a moment's consideration. And the evil effects of monopoly are just as apparent here as anywhere else, in proportion to the degree of its growth. The rent, or the purchase money, fleeces labor and capital, and the time draws nearer and nearer when, as in England, Belgium and elsewhere, labor will offer itself for a few pence per hour and capital be provided in millions for any safe investment that returns an interest of 2 or 3 percent. No one can mark the ominous increase of large holdings and the accompanying decrease of small ones in this colony, the heavy purchases of land being made by English and other buyers, the trade depressions, the unemployed and the business failures without seeing the work of monopoly. Our farmers and graziers are driven to using wretchedly unsuitable land because the difference between it and better land is eaten up by rent or purchase money; our mines are drained of their gold, or silver, or coal, or copper, by proprietary rights, or closed to industrial uses altogether. Our city sites yield fortunes to their owners, but very seldom more than an ordinary subsistence to their users. I know a room— one room --- having a frontage to George-street, for which the tenant pays £500 a year, and from the proceeds of the business done in which he manages to live and pay his way from year to year without saving anything. The cost of the building of the room in question (of which the tenant has supplied all the fittings) would certainly not exceed £200 (I do not think it would reach £100). But assuming it to cost £200, an interest of 10 percent on this outlay would be a fair thing as interest goes at present. That would be the reward of the "landowner's capital," not rent but interest — a sum of £20 yearly. The additional £480 per annum is pure rent — ground and value — value ground out of the community. A similar room, costing the same to build, in an up-country town might bring in an annual rental of £30 to £40 a year; and the tenant could make a living. In George-street the tenant does, say twelve times the business — in order to pay twelve times as much for permission to do it! Thus, in every business monopoly renders the best site as unprofitable to the user — to the man who serves the community and works — as the worst in similar use. It keeps labor and capital at the brink of destruction, so that any sudden hardening of conditions, such as drought, a tightening in the money-market, or a protective tariff, now and then pushes them right over. Let anyone take the city of Sydney, or any of our cities or towns; let him find the value of all improvements effected by capital and deduct a fair interest upon this from the rents paid by the tenants and the remainder will be the fleecings of monopoly — the sum that the single tax would divert into the pockets of its rightful owner, the community, through the channel of the Treasury. Let him consider the amount of wealth in any such city or town received by labor and capital in return for ministering to public requirements and the amount received by land monopoly for impeding them, and if he can think in a straight line he will realize what monopoly is doing here

among ourselves and what the single tax would undo.

But it is the larger aspect of the gospel preached by Henry George that has most deeply stirred the mind and heart of humanity. With an analytical faculty like that which Edison brings to bear upon physical science, he has explored the mazes of political economy, made lucid and firm what was dark and doubtful, and lighted all the road to social regeneration. That is a great service, but it involves a greater. He has cast down the Dagon of despair, whose worship chilled and terrified the world, and set true deity in its place. He has justified the ways of God to man with the voice of a new St. Paul. The old shameful faith that the Creator of the universe pre-ordained and made inevitable the misery and suffering of millions of his creatures fell into dust at his touch. The Malthusian theory is dead and will be heard of no more. The dreadful thought that menaced and appalled, "God wills it," is seldom spoken now in extenuation of what goes on about us, and we are learning the lesson that "man is man and master of his fate." Instead of being doomed to a world in which one must crush down and kill another in order that he may himself live, Henry George has shown that a few of us have blindly submitted to be pent in one corner of a world that is almost empty—a world in which, though our numbers were increased a millionfold, there is ample room not only for us all to live but for each of us to develop what is highest in him and do what is best — a world capable of infinite expansion as knowledge climbs above knowledge and discovery succeeds discovery.

He has aroused Christianity from a sleep, and in tones that have vibrated across the whole earth has proclaimed that the highest maxim of human wisdom, as well as the loftiest mandate of moral law, is "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you!"

More and more the best thought of our time inclines to the belief that moral nature grows co-ordinately with physical nature: that environment molds each. That this is true in some degree no one can doubt. Place the kindly, refined, unselfish man of ordinary life on a raft where there is not sufficient food for himself and his comrades and the spiritual part of him is lost in the animal. He will even devour the others at the last. Or, to give a milder illustration from the pages of "Progress and Poverty," observe the difference between the saloon passengers of a steamer, each of whom has an appointed place and ample provision, and the steerage passengers, where the good old rule and the simple plan of "first come first served" is pretty absolute. In the one case courtesy, mutual attentions and forbearance; in the other a rush as of swine to a trough, a jostling and a triumph of the strongest elbows. Is it not so all through? Almost anyone will cheerfully give whoever asks him a match to light a pipe or some tobacco, but would he do so as readily if doubtful where he might get the next light or the next tobacco for himself? "We have made this world a training school for all the worst impulses; we have done it ourselves. There is no one else to blame; everything we need may be produced from the illimitable store of material all round us; we have strength given us to produce it, and yet we let a few of our craftiest fence us off from the material, and we have spent our strength in fighting one another, instead of in combining to overthrow them, and have pointed accusing fingers at the Creator instead of looking around us.

It seems a proof of something of the divine in human nature that, under the forcing of the conditions we have permitted to grow up around it, it has not become wholly demoralized. Think what the conditions are. To possess material wealth is now the controlling desire of all mankind. Whoever would not sink down to the hideous levels of the miserable and debased life visible around him nearly everywhere must secure wealth. Every wretched man and ruined woman and ragged child he sees says to him, "Get wealth, or you will be like us!" Every man who, through the attainment of wealth, is honored and set in the highest places, or is enabled to live a life refined and intellectual says to him, "Get wealth and you may be like us!" He must of necessity make choice, and the world becomes a place in which men grapple with men for wealth. We teach our children the precepts of morality without hoping that they can follow them, for whoever seeks to "succeed in life" must harden his heart. Compassion, benevolence and true integrity are no part of the equipment for such success in these days. He must make sharp bargains and shrewd sales to his own advantage; he must foreclose and sell up, regardless of tears and suffering; he must misrepresent and extol and crawl and lie, and if he succeeds without losing every emotion but self-interest he may in the end gratify his long-suppressed benevolence. Here and there a dealer or manufacturer practicing the strictest honesty possible becomes notable by contrast, but such successes are few. Wealth is the beginning and the end of mankind's chief effort; all that is high and noble in him must remain subsidiary. Yet the true light, darkened but not quenched, shines out at times. In a time of national danger Tennyson says: "The snubnosed, smug-faced rogue would leap from his counter or till and strike, were it but with his cheating yard-wand, home." The thief or the ruffian, lifted beyond the influences that have made them so, sometimes become patriots and heroes. In any time of calamity when all but the strongest feelings and passions are forgotten men in dozens come forward eagerly and risk their lives to save those of others who, in the ordinary way of business, they would grind down to misery and perhaps to death without caring. In the dens and kennels of life among lost women and embruted men there is always left some bud that, with tending, might bear fruitage of beauty and holiness. There are touching devotion and self-sacrifice even there, and at times a fidelity that will go to the gallows rather than betray. Rufus Dawes and Jean Valjean and Nancy are no unreal types, and the best of us had better not undertake to judge Bill Sykes, for with such heredity and environment as his we might have been as bad or worse. Even in the lowest penny gaffs where the scum of London gathers, as Ingersoll has pointed out, villainy is hissed and virtue applauded. Human nature is all right — it is landownership that is wrong.

Wealth might be as plentiful as water under just laws. Every man, woman and child might with the merest tithing of their present exertion satisfy every reasonable want. Nothing is plainer than this. With freedom of trade and of production anyone who considers the matter should see that after the barriers of monopoly are pulled down and all men left free to use their tremendously increased productive abilities production would be unbounded. By work and by work alone should anybody live, and with everyone free to work what want need remain unsatisfied? And in a properly-adjusted world there would be no such thing as over-production, for human desire is ever changing, and productive power left freed from impediment would follow it closely. There never was over-production; what seems to be is under-consumption. People have unsatisfied needs, because they cannot get permission to produce the things to give in return to others anxious to

exchange with them for what they want. Suppose that any morning it were known that every store, warehouse, factory and hotel in Sydney was to be thrown open free of charge, so that all people might take what they chose for their own use, would there be much left untaken at sunset? Probably nothing, and if the people had freedom to produce the things which the owners of all these wares want in return the emptying process would soon begin. Under the single tax all men, producers or non-producers, landowners or landless, would be placed in a perfectly equitable relation to each other; all would be exempt from taxation, and whoever produced most would receive most, and everyone could produce so much that the possession of special wealth by any one would not attract much notice. Some other quality than the capacity for making money would be required to entitle a man to high esteem and power. The present state of things secures to some extent the survival of the unfittest. It is seldom the worthiest among men who attain the wealth that so often carries rulership with it.

With the means of living placed easily within the reach of all, how different a condition of life would begin. There would be no more millionaires living on the earnings of others, and no others unable to live on their own earnings. "To remove want and the fear of want," says Henry George, "to give all classes leisure and comfort and independence, the decencies and refinements of life, the opportunities of mental and moral improvement, would be like turning water into a desert. The sterile waste would clothe itself with verdure, and the barren places where life seemed banned would ere long be dappled with the shade of trees and musical with the song of birds. Talents now hidden, virtues unsuspected, would come forth to make human life richer, fuller, happier, nobler. For in these round men who are stuck into three-cornered holes, and three-cornered men who are jammed into round holes — in these men who are wasting their energies in the scramble to be rich; in these who in factories are turned into machines, or are chained by necessity to bench or plow; in these children who are growing up in squalor and vice and ignorance are powers of the highest order, talents the most splendid. Consider the possibilities of a state of society that gave that opportunity to all. Let imagination fill out the picture: its colors grow too blight for words to paint.

Consider the moral elevation, the intellectual activity, the social life. Consider how, by a thousand actions and interactions, the members of every community are linked together, and how in the present condition of things even the fortunate few who stand upon the apex of the social pyramid must suffer, though they know it not, from the want, ignorance and degradation that are underneath. Consider these things and then say whether the change I propose would not be for the benefit of everyone — even the greatest landowner. Would he not be safer of the future of his children in leaving them penniless in such a state of society than in leaving them the largest fortune in this? Did each a state of society anywhere exist, would he not buy entrance to it cheaply by giving up all his possessions?"

Surely he would, and it is worth the while of our opponents to note the fact that already a considerable number of landowners, both large and small, are among the strongest advocates of the single tax in New South Wales, while in England and America the same is the case. Indeed, the upholders of the single tax doctrine would willingly trust its fate entirely to the decision of

the landowners of this colony, or of the world, if the latter but understood it.

The landowners of the world form a very small percentage of the people; the landowners who would run any risk of material loss through the operation of the single tax are extremely few in deed. All we have to fight against is ignorance, and, here, at least, the fight is going on satisfactorily. There is no reason to doubt that Mr. George's forthcoming lecturing tour will greatly stimulate the interest that is now being taken in a question which in every civilized country is being recognized as one of the greatest that has yet arisen. We have been blamed by many who feeling, however vaguely, that land monopoly is an evil, yet cling to the protective tariff idea for making our platform too narrow for them to stand upon with us. No platform is wide enough for truth and error to occupy as co-workers. Free trade is the very essence and meaning of the single tax. If land value belongs to the people no one but the people has a right to any of it, and it follows that value created by individuals belongs to them and the State has no right to any of it. If trade is for mutual and general benefit it should be made free if not it should be prohibited. If the traffic in intoxicating drink, for instance, is a good and beneficial thing it should be made free; if not it should be made penal and abolished. There is no more morality in receiving a revenue from the sale of intoxicants, if the general well-being is thereby lessened, than there would be in licensing any other kind of criminality.

It will be comparatively but a few days, all being well, until Henry George is here to speak for himself, and I trust that in the meantime all who oppose free trade and the single tax will examine his works carefully so as to question him about what may seem to them to be false conclusions. That the antique problems of what we are going to do about foreigners who deluge us with cheap goods and refuse to take anything from us in return, or how we are to put up with producers who are not consumers, are sure to be presented for solution, and Mr. George will probably be told that he is a liar and asked how much he makes by traveling on the game. But outside the professional protectionists there are many who, not having deeply studied principles, are protectionists because only the outward and laudable skin of "encouragement to local industries" has allured them and who are honest inquirers rather than unreasoning partisans. I know some of these who are confident that upon the grounds of morality, logic and equity the system of protective duties may be defended against anything that Mr. George can advance and who look forward to a debate on the subject between him and any chosen representative of protection with keen interest. I trust that some such debate may be arranged, and would suggest that the scoring of a few points against the author of "Progress and Poverty" would stimulate the coming of protection considerably. Whether or not this is done there will be enough debating in the newspapers to throw a light upon the fiscal question by which voters should be able to see which are the proper names to obliterate from the ballot papers at the next election. And I feel sure that a warmhearted reception and an attentive hearing will be accorded to one who, whether he be right or wrong, has given his life to the work of lifting up and helping his fellowmen and urging the right of labor to all that it produces, and whom hundreds of thousands regard as among the highest types of mind that the human race has evolved and the most noble soldiers of humanity that have ever lived.