

The Arena, Volume 21 January, 1899

## ETHICS OF THE SINGLE TAX.

### III. ITS BREADTH AND CATHOLICITY

By C.B. Fillebrown

The appeal to reason of this doctrine of Henry George, whether as a moral philosophy, or as a system of taxation, is as universal as is the natural tax (ground rent), which has been in automatic and irresistible operation for centuries, in every civilized country under the sun. A response to this universal appeal only awaits the precipitation of a mass of relative ignorance and error now held in solution in the public mind regarding the author and his doctrine. The Massachusetts Single Tax League aspires to be the reagent in this mental precipitation, and has set its heart upon it that Henry George shall be painted as he is, and that there shall be substituted a true likeness for the miserable caricature which so often disfigures the column of the newspaper, the wall of the library, and the tablet of the student's mind.

This doctrine of Henry George is broad and catholic like the air, the sunshine, and all other bounties which heaven sends alike upon the just and the unjust. It knows no distinction of race, denomination, party, sect, or creed. It knows no socialism, individualism, communism, anarchism, Greek, barbarian, bond, or free. It is under all these. Where it leaves off, these begin. A single taxpayer may be any of these. All of these should be single taxpayers.

There is in the single tax, or natural taxation, nothing of technical socialism, which means the assumption by society of functions that, to my mind, are primarily individual. It is rather a re-socialization of that which by its own nature, in its inception and in its growth, can be nothing but socialized, but which has been artificially de-socialized. There is in natural taxation no communism, if by communism is meant the compulsory pooling of the products of human labor. Such taxation is, however, the Divine communism of the common enjoyment of a natural bounty bestowed upon all in common. There is in natural taxation no taint of the anarchism of disorder. It is the recognition of ideal anarchism of law so perfect, self-adjusting, self-operating, that no external force is needed to carry it into execution.

Its appeal is no less to the Catholic than to the Protestant; no more to the Christian than to the Jew, or the Mohammedan, or the Pagan; it appeals to Republican, Democrat, and Populist, alike. Being a veritable load-stone,—all attraction, no repulsion, and with the whole arsenal of arguments on its side,—why should it not

quickly gather to itself a victorious host?

Economically, the single tax proposes the displacement of an unjust distribution, by a just distribution of wealth. Instead of distribution according to special privilege, and taxation according to ability; it proposes distribution according to ability, and taxation according to special privileges, chief of which is the private appropriation of ground rent. Morally, it offers itself as a fundamental bond of unity to re-enforce the great accomplishments already made, and greater efforts to be made along the line of Christian agreement.

Henry George offers to the world, not only a political philosophy that will stand the test of the gospel, but a religious philosophy also, that removes a great beam from the eye of the Christian Church, enabling it to see clearly where it now confesses blindness, and adding to its light a warmth and a radiance which the indifference of the world could not resist. Hence the persistent disciples of Henry George ask Christians to consider this doctrine; to gather to the standard of the single tax, and to follow that standard, not as the hound follows the fox, winding and redoubling upon its own trail, but as the bee flies, and as the carrier-pigeon flies, by the instinct of principle, in the straight line that lies between right and wrong.

C. B. FILLEBROWN.  
Boston, Mass.