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JUSTICE OF THE SINGLE TAX.

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IF justice be a moral attribute, it follows that any change in an established system, in order to be commended, must be proven to be just.

We have had the "Single Tax" explained, and the question naturally arises, would it be right, would it be just? What, then, is justice? It goes without saying that Nero's conception of what he considered just would have differed widely from that of Abraham Lincoln. We would hardly expect the noblest savage that Cooper ever painted to agree with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Francis Willard on the woman question, and yet, each might be perfectly sincere in his or her conviction. Our conceptions of right, and truth, and justice in the abstract, are ever vanishing ideals; the error of yesterday becomes the truth of today; the heretic of today the saint of tomorrow:

"Yet, I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs, And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

We must, therefore, in judging a proposed reform of today, endeavor to weigh it on scales of the latest and most approved pattern.

A fair statement of the most modern ideas of what would constitute a just social system, is, I think, embodied in the phrase, "the greatest good for the greatest number," believing, as I do, that if such a system could be established it would result not only in the greatest good to the Greatest number, but in the greatest good to All, without exception. I have no faith in the idea that a thing may be right in theory but wrong in practice. If the "Single Tax" is unjust in theory then it should be opposed by those who believe in justice. If just it can not be brought into operation too soon, neither can all the forces that oppose it prevent its ultimate acceptance. We are not to suppose, however, that all error will cease with its advent, or that it will leave us "with

no more worlds to conquer."

The great practical question is, whether or not it is the next round in the ladder of social evolution, and time alone can prove this.

It is claimed that every man, woman or child has an equal right to the use of the earth — to its land, its water and the air that surrounds it — limited only by the right of every other man, woman or child to the same thing. It is denied that they at present enjoy that right, owing to a system that has enabled the few to monopolize the natural rights of the many, resulting in their practical exclusion from the enjoyment of those rights. It is proposed that our lost heritage be restored to us. It is asserted that many are now living in luxury from the "sweat of other men's brows," and it is affirmed that this being unnatural and unjust, we should establish some method whereby every one would be enabled not only to obtain the means of subsistence without being compelled to ask somebody for the privilege so to do, but that he would also be able to enjoy the product of his labor. In other words, that his "inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," should be taken out of the realm of fiction and established in the world of fact.

It is not the object of this article to explain the "SingleTax," but to treat of it from the stand-point of ethics. To those who are really desirous of understanding it, we extend a cordial invitation to the perusal and study of "Progress and Poverty," with the positive conviction that you will be richly paid for your trouble. A simple statement of what the "Single Tax "is, must, therefore, suffice. We believe that all that is necessary to restore man to his natural right to the use of the earth is a mere change in our system of taxation, and this is the proposed change: "We are in favor of raising all public revenues for national, state, county and municipal purposes by a single tax upon land values, irrespective of improvements, and of the abolition of all other forms of direct and indirect taxation."

The simplicity, to say nothing of the audacity of this proposition, is somewhat staggering at first, but the more it is studied the clearer it becomes, and the "fools who come to scoff," if they remain long enough, generally "remain to pray."

And now for the crucial test. Admitting that it could be brought about, and that it would result as we predict, would it be just?

How about the "vested rights" made "sacred" by centuries of possession? How about

the thousands of innocent purchasers who have paid for their share of this "footstool" in good, hard coin, accumulated by years of toil? How about the poor widow and helpless orphan whose sole income is rent? What have you to say as to the justice of "confiscation?" Do you mean to tell us that it would be just to dispossess the few that the many may revel in a brief saturnalia of riotous living? In your blasphemous rebellion against the All Wise Providence that has for your own good cast your lot among the lowly of the earth, will ye tempt that Providence by rashly up-rooting the foundations of society? And if ye are fixed in your lawless purpose stop and consider at least one thing, will ye not at least compensate the innocent purchasers of lands by paying them the amount of their purchase money? Answering the last question first, the seemingly hard-hearted "single taxer" calmly replies: No, Brothers. Most emphatically No! Hard as it may seem to you, it is impossible, it would be unjust! Impossible because it would have to be paid out of the funds that now pay rent. And, as the payment of rent now leaves the majority with but a bare subsistence, how could they possibly increase the amount so as to pay you for the land itself? Unjust because it would be compensating you for something that never was and never could be rightfully yours. If any one should be compensated it is the millions of the disinherited who, throughout the ages, have toiled that you might reap. But we know that that is also impossible. So let us drop the question of compensation altogether, and let us reason awhile together. Perhaps even without compensation you may not be as badly off as you think.

In the first place do not consider that we hold you as individuals so greatly to blame, and if you find us speaking somewhat harshly at times, try and remember that our just wrath is not directed against you, but against the system that you uphold. If you are sincere, until the scales fall from your eyes, and you see the hideous wrongs that that system produces, it would be as foolish to blame you for upholding it as it would be to blame the savage for defending the right to torture his captive. We feel confident, however, that if we can but convince you that you are in error, and give you reason to believe that our "theory" has its foundation in justice, that the divine instinct implanted in all of you will do the rest. Most men and women trained in the modern school of ethics, are ready to admit that if a social system founded in equity — a system in which all would share equally in the bounties of nature, and in which no one would be able to appropriate the fruit of another's toil — if such a system could be established it would necessarily result in a much better civilization than we can now boast of, and might eventually result in that "Universal Brotherhood" of which poets have dreamed and seers have prophesied throughout the ages. The great difficulty seems to be to locate the trouble and apply the remedy, and the average man is content

to drift along in the old way, selfishly trying to get the most he can, easing his conscience by occasional acts of so-called charity, if he be one of the successful, and cursing the whole system and everything connected with it, and ending by advocating bloody revolution, if he be one of the unsuccessful. It is too often the case that the rich, as Tolstoi has so well said, "are willing to do everything for the poor except to get off of their backs," while the idea that is paramount with the poor is the desire to change places with the rich and do some of the riding themselves. It is manifest that neither is actuated by the true feeling, and there is little hope of reconciliation until we can find some common ground upon which both sides can meet and say we have all been wrong; what we need is not to pull one class down and hoist the other to its place, but to establish justice for all. As Henry George well said: "What we want is not to free the 'laboring man,' but to free men." Our reform, therefore, means more than a mere beneficial change in the method of collecting taxes. It is a philosophy broad and deep, founded upon the clearest principles of justice. It says to the defender of "vested rights:" What you are really defending are "vested wrongs," which time or usage can never justify, but which pile iniquity upon iniquity as the years increase. It says to him who raises the cry of "confiscation:" Who are the real confiscators? Those who are willing that each shall have the right to what he produces, or those that uphold special privileges, who profess to believe that because they are in possession of more than their share of nature's bounties they have the God-given right to farm them out and collect an ever increasing toll from those who are obliged to submit to their terms or starve? It says to those that would have men content with poverty because God has willed it so: You are the blasphemers! It is not God, but selfish, wicked, ignorant man with his unjust and damnable laws that is the culprit. It denies that a just and loving Father would ever approve such inequality among his children. To the innocent purchaser who asks compensation, it says: Have you any better right than those who all their lives have been paying tribute to such as you? Does the state make good the losses of a man who fails in business? You have gone into the land business, innocently it may be, and you have failed. Your title has simply proved defective. But all you are really deprived of is the power to make men pay a tribute to you that they should not pay; the land is still yours to use and occupy as long as you pay to its joint owners for the privilege of such monopoly. Is not that fair? Nothing more is asked of you than is asked of each and every member of the community. We do not even ask you to refund any of the tribute that you may already have received. All we ask is that the levying of this tribute, being unjust, that the further collection of it shall cease. And finally, as to the widow and orphan plea, it is, pardon the slang, "the same old chestnut" that the defenders of negro slavery sprung when all other arguments failed them, and immediately excites the suspicion that it is really not so

much solicitude for the widow and orphan that suggests it, as it is the prospect that their own income will be curtailed. "We believe it a sufficient answer to say, that when social conditions become such that all shall have access to natural opportunities the great forces of production being relieved from the bondage that has so long prevented their natural development, the wealth per capita will be so enormously increased — all able-bodied members of the community being engaged in active employment at wages that would now be considered exorbitant — that we have no fear that those who are unable from weakness or infirmity to contribute their share to the general prosperity that must ensue, will fare worse or even as badly as they do now. The reign of Justice will widen the perceptions, quicken the sympathies, and thus cultivate the sentiment of true Brotherhood, and in time usher in that kingdom of righteousness which has been promised us these eighteen hundred years.