

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY GEORGE,  
JR., ON THINGS JAPANESE.

INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS—SYSTEM OF EDUCATION—REAL FRIENDLINESS FOR AMERICA—JAPAN'S TAX SYSTEM, AND PROSPECTS OF EARLY REFORM.

Mr. Henry George, Jr., on his return from Japan a few days ago, paid a visit to this office. He is looking even younger than when he went away. In answer to inquiries put to him by the REVIEW he showed how his habits of keen observation and cautious statement influence both his written and spoken word.

"Will you tell the readers of the REVIEW something of the actual industrial conditions of Japan?" was asked.

"It would be impossible to do that in a few words. Japan is in a transition state; and what might be said of such conditions to-day would not in all probability apply to-morrow. Changes are rapid in that country. The people are throwing off the old and taking on the new. They are learning of the foreigner, and they are no doubt learning the bad along with the good. But great and momentous changes may be looked for."

"Much has been said of the condition of the working women of Japan to whom are apportioned tasks usually reserved to men."

"Yes, this is true. At Kobe women load coal on steamers; women work very commonly in Japan, pulling wagons and carrying weights; at Tokio a viaduct is being built, and most of the piles are driven by women. Women work in factories with children strapped to their backs; and the hours are long in factories."

"Will you tell the REVIEW something of the Japanese system of education?"

"Education is very general in Japan. The country has a fine common school system, primary and kindergarten; education is compulsory and there is a very general attendance. There is a regular system of instruction in the Chinese classics, and in Tokio and Yokohama English is one of the compulsory branches for young children."

"What about wages in Japan?"

"Wages are rising in some particular lines; but the cost of living has been enormously increased, and rents in the cities have advanced by leaps and bounds; the common things of life cost much more. New taxes have been imposed on account of the war, and the tariff has been increased. Supporters of the government say this tariff is not protective, but the Japanese minister of revenue says they are getting incidental protection, which is inevitable."

"Is there a war spirit abroad in Japan?"

"It is hardly fair to use the term 'war spirit.' There is little evidence of that. But there is compulsory military service lasting seven years."

"What is the feeling toward this country? Can you say anything to offset the reports by American jingoism of Japanese animosity toward America?"

"Baron Takiki, founder and head of the Charity Hospital of Tokio, said at a banquet given in that city to Dr. Takimine, that America must always be regarded by Japanese as Japan's father and mother. I find this spirit throughout Japan, although it mystified me to hear the Japanese praise Commodore Perry for bringing civilization to their doors, when as it seemed to me he brought little else than a great black vessel with shotted guns into their harbor. But however that may be the Japanese regard Americans as their oldest and best friends, and feel that they have received from America most of that knowledge which has made their progress so signal throughout the world. I did not discover that the Japanese looked to America for any remarkable or extraordinary demonstration of friendship relative to the Japanese in California. But the great body of the Japanese have only asked that their country be treated as a first class civilized power, not to have any undue favor, but to receive justice. Mr. Roosevelt jumping into the California matter very early, implied that the Japanese had treaty rights relating to education in California which the federal government would see maintained. And this was really what embarrassed the whole matter, for there is nothing in the treaty which conceded education in California schools, and there is nothing in the 'favored nation' clause which can be so construed. The higher Japanese officials fully understood that our federal government can agree by treaty to do only that which is within its jurisdiction; education in California is not one of these things. But while the Japanese higher officials understand the limitations of the federal government the Japanese common man who is reading the newspapers and thinking for himself does not. He sees only that the American President guarantees that Japanese students shall receive education in California—at least he so construes it."

"Now, Mr. George, a question that will most vitally interest the readers of the REVIEW. Is there anything resembling a Single Tax movement in Japan? and what of her system of taxation?"

"It cannot be said that the Single Tax idea looks to be in a very forward state in Japan."

For a number of years Dr. Wookichi Taguchi, member of the House of Representatives of the Imperial Diet, and editor of the Tokio *Kaizai-Zasshi* (the Tokio *Economic Gazette*) earnestly and persistently taught the faith. He was a man of much learning, high character and wide influence, and many listened and understood. But great was the confusion in the workshop of the nation that was melting down the old

and from it forging the new civilization. War clouds gathering over Korea drew men's attention away from economic discussion, and during the years that led up to this conflict, first with China and then with Russia, the primary truths of taxation were, so far as the public at large were concerned, entirely obscured.

It was then that Dr. Taguchi died, yet he left disciples, and in Tokio there exists what is called the Tochi-Fukuken-Doshi-Kurai (The Land Right Restoration Society), of which Mr. Ito Nitaro is manager.

This organization does not pretend to be large in membership or rich in purse, but it is to the best of its ability making appeal "to the brothers and sisters on earth" to witness the truth of the "great right of humankind" to the land.

If this is the state of the Single Tax movement in Japan, it is also the fact that no country on earth is faster being prepared by general conditions for a large application of Single Tax principles, and unless the accident of a foreign war intervenes, look for a marked advance toward it within a short time. The circumstances to which I refer are briefly these:

One of the first of the important men I had the honor to meet shortly after reaching Tokio was Mr. Yoshiro Sakatain, Minister of Finance, a man of 46, the youngest man who had held that very responsible position since the organization of the Imperial government. Using perfect English, he told me, as a preface, with what I judged to be approval, that he had read "Progress and Poverty" some years before. He then said that under the Shogunate government approximately nine-tenths of the revenue had come from land, whereas now only a tenth came from that source, all the rest falling on production. The needs of revenue had enormously increased with the advancements in the new civilization, but little more was to be obtained from the rice grower who paid on his land a tax estimated on its average yield. This tax formed a considerable proportion of the annual yield. I thought the Minister of Finance implied what is certainly the truth, that this land tax so far as the rice grower is concerned, is practically an industry-tax, since the economic value of the rice lands taken as a whole is very low, and much of it of no value whatever. Yet the tax burden these rice growers bear is really very heavy.

The tax burden on the other and better land of Japan is relatively much lighter, and in the cities the tax is ridiculously small. Indeed, as Mr. Sakatani said, the land tax is levied on one assessment made twenty-five years ago.

There really is some excuse for this when it is realized that the land tax is not a local but an Imperial impost, and that there exists no machinery for assessment. The valuation of a quarter of a century ago was made with a machinery that was after-

wards abandoned. The idea of a periodical assessment does not appear to have occurred to the reorganizers of the revenue system when the old garb of government was being changed for the new following the fall of the Shogunate and the issuing of the Mikado from retirement.

Mr. Sakatani observed that to make a new assessment would involve a large expense, but that nevertheless he himself had recently drafted such a measure, and presented it to the House of Representatives, which passed it; but that it was beaten in the House of Peers. "The Peers," he remarked, significantly, "are large landowners."

Thus the House of Nobles in Japan, like the House of Nobles in England, stands against even a fair application of the present land tax rate and will doubtless vehemently resist every effort to have rich landowners bear their just burden. But land in the cities, where the peers have their main holdings, is notoriously advancing so greatly in value, and such large fortunes are being made through land speculation, that the masses cannot much longer suffer the injustice, the more especially as their own case from increasing house rent and advancing prices of food, clothing and all the other products of labor, due to war taxes on production, is becoming hard and bitter.

Great industrial speculation has followed in the wake of the recent war. A period of collapse and reaction may soon be looked for. Most industrial activity will for a time be brought to a stoppage and many workmen will be thrown out of employment. The condition of the heavily taxed masses will then be hard, indeed. Large revenue is required to meet the great war debt and the continuance of the policy of heavy armament. If the masses are not to continue to carry this load whence shall the revenue come? Whence, obviously, but from land values, which have in all men's eyes grown so extraordinarily in the fast expanding cities within the past three decades?

As I have said: Minister of Finance Sakatani can see clearly. But he is helpless to act. His is a compromise cabinet—that is to say, the Saionji Government, of which he is a member, depends upon the support of the large landowners for its political life. Were it to force a fight on a reassessment bill it would find the landed interest against it, would lose its majority in the Diet and would fall; and this without giving place to a new government that could accomplish any more in that direction, even had it the inclination.

Time will pile up volcanic forces that will tear away obstructions and that soon. It is my firm belief that before many years have passed over the world will witness a great struggle in Japan over a reassessment bill, in the victorious train of which will quickly follow a very substantial measure of the Single Tax."