

The American Farmer and the Single Tax

PERHAPS the chief reason why, after nearly 50 years of agitation on behalf of the principles laid down in Progress and Poverty, there has been so little accomplished toward securing the adoption of the Single Tax, is the utter failure of its advocates to adjust their propaganda so as to insure its acceptance by the American farmer. While the application of the essential doctrines linked up by Henry George would unquestionably benefit the farmers more than any other class, the melancholy fact remains that only an infinitesimal fraction of the millions living and working on the land have been enlightened as to the nature of the changes that would be brought about in the economic structure of society by the shifting of taxation from productive industry. So far as practical results are concerned, it appears to one who is familiar with farmer sentiment in various regions of the country that the farmers know nothing, and care nothing, about the one effective remedy for all the evils of which they so loudly complain.

Looking back over the records of the past movements to convert the noble ideals of Henry George into reality, the impartial historian will be struck by the fact that these have all been practically city efforts, addressed to the factory and other workers of the cities and industrial centers. I am familiar with all of the various agitations promoted by zealous Single Taxers since 1889. With the single exception of the circulation of "Protection or Free Trade" by its publication as part of the Congressional Record, we have been about as far removed from the actualities of conditions to which they referred, as though they were addressed to the people of Mars.

Through a deep-rooted misunderstanding of the practical operations of the Single Tax, most of its advocates came to regard it as a solution of what was termed the "Labor Problem," which was generally narrowed down to the problem of the city workers. Of course there was no justification for this view of the relation of wise taxation to social and economic justice, but as nearly all the Single Taxers were city dwellers, their outlook was colored by their surroundings. Even to this day we hear the old story of the immense benefits to labor that would result from freeing vacant land for use, ignoring the very evident fact that the farmers, owning their land, are in a far more deplorable condition than most of the industrial workers. The one fact, that farm tenantry is increasing, either in the shape of rented farms, or of farms so heavily mortgaged that they are practically owned by the mortgagee, proves that access to land under present conditions does not mean prosperity.

I have never believed that there was the slightest chance of bringing about the adoption of the Single Tax by appeals to that imaginary creation "Labor." What labor? The members of trade unions are concerned only with their own selfish affairs, trying to shut out immigration, cut down

the number of apprentices in their trade, and by strikes getting the highest possible wages. They care nothing about the farmers who feed and clothe them, nor would they be willing to give up a cent of the higher wages that have been made possible through oppressively high tariff taxes on what the farmer buys. As the boys used to say 40 years ago, it is time for the Single Taxers to "quit kidding" themselves into the belief that labor, organized or otherwise, will ever do anything to aid in abolishing special privileges that seem to help the industrial worker.

And here I wish to repeat that, despite the drooling of little mutual admiration societies—the Single Tax has not in the United States exercised any perceptible effect on legislation relating to economic conditions. Here and there in some communities there may be trifling steps toward the concentration of taxation on land values, but as a practical proposition it does not exist. That in Denmark there has been some real progress is due almost entirely to the fact that the reform has been brought about by the small farmers, and not by the city workers.

Single Taxers might as well wake up to the fact that they have been working on wrong lines. Their patter about freeing labor by freeing vacant land doesn't touch the agricultural situation; which is,—that in the past five years nearly 2,000,000 American farmers and farm workers have left the farms to get a living in the towns and cities. When workers in the building trades are getting from \$12 to \$15 per day, the average return to the farmers of the country is less than \$3.00 per day. Of what use is it to try to convince labor that trade unions cannot permanently raise wages, when the facts of wage advances, beyond the increase in cost of living, are so apparent? I know all about the bunk of "prosperity" that is being so widely preached by a press that supports every form of privilege and extortion. There is mighty little real prosperity, even for the favorite ones of labor who are getting nominally high wages. But whatever of prosperity there may be for the urban dwellers, there is none for agriculture.

Here, then, is the real issue for those who have seen the vision of a social order based on justice and human brotherhood: How can we so present the case for the abolition of each and every form of monopoly and special privilege so that the farmers will understand and accept it? Any one who thinks that labor will give up its advocacy of tariff protection that seems to give it higher wages, is a deluded dreamer. Not thus are the workers of this country constituted. I am convinced that so far as getting anyways toward the Single Tax the industrial workers are as hopeless as are the direct beneficiaries of protection and other forms of privilege. As well expect Judge Gary to give up extorting exorbitant prices for steel from the farmers!

Knowing the active Single Tax workers as I do, I say frankly that I do not expect that they will agree with me as to this diagnosis of the situation confronting those who hope for an early realization of their dreams of justice and

fraternity. The futility of all the past organized efforts to promote a better knowledge of elementary economics should show the folly of continuing to work along the same lines. Possibly the case is one where dreamers of wonderful things to do, "all to be done by wishing we could", will prefer to hug the delusion that they are really doing something to promote the cause in which they profess to believe.

—WHIDDEN GRAHAM

Fairhope Now Thirty-two Years Old

FAIRHOPE celebrated the thirty-second anniversary of its founding on the first of this year. Two hundred and fifty colonists and their friends sat down to an attractive menu, the Fairhope orchestra played, and the history of the colony was reviewed by several of the speakers.

Fairhope, as most of our readers know, is the Single Tax Colony on the shores of Mobile Bay. It is the nearest approximation to the Single Tax permitted to a colony under the present laws of Alabama, and it has had a long and interesting history. The past year has shown extraordinary activity in building and most of this as heretofore has been on Colony land.

The *Fairhope Courier*, which is an interesting paper published weekly and edited by E. B. Gaston, comments on this building activity:

"The Town Clerk's record of building permits issued shows a total of 62 of an estimated cost \$1000. or more, of which 50 were on Colony land. Of 33 new dwellings, 24 were on Colony land. Of 13 alterations and additions 10 were on Colony land. Of 13 commercial or industrial constructions all but one were on our land. Of a total valuation of improvements listed amounting to \$102,385, \$84,360 was on Colony land. Within a radius of less than 500 feet of where we are, there have been erected eight new business buildings, with a ninth, the new bank building now well under way; all on land of our Colony; and all of substantial, modern, fire-resisting construction. In all parts of town there has been residential construction, including some of the best yet erected.

All this increase in taxable values, will mean, of course, more taxes to be paid; but along with this development has come increased land value; which we will draw on to meet the taxes on the improvements, leaving the improvers scatheless. And our lessees, regardless of whether members of the corporation or not, have heartily joined in approving rentals which meet the need."

An interesting address was made at this anniversary dinner by our friend, John Emery McLean, who was a personal friend of Henry George and who is now a resident of Fairhope. This address is printed in full in the *Courier* and we cite the following paragraph:

"Henry George regarded both Altruism and Utopia as the vaguest sort of dreams. Though lacking the technical advantages of a systematic collegiate education, he confounded some of the world's ablest scholars. He was equally at home in challenging the Pope, in refuting Herbert

Spencer, in addressing audiences of negroes in the 'black belt' of Harlem, New York City, and in talking to street crowds of foreigners on the lower east side of the same metropolis, where several thousand human beings often exist within the confines of a single block. In that vast city six million people occupy an area less than one-eighth of one per cent. of the habitable land of the country which is increasing in population at the rate of 5,000 a day.

It may interest our readers to know that at a meeting of Colony lessees to receive report of a committee appointed by them on rent appraisalment, a vote to ask the Colony to change its policy by limiting the amount of taxes to be paid for any lessee to the amount of his rent, received the support of only the mover and seconder; the appraisalment of the Colony Council, carrying increases averaging nearly if not quite 25%, was approved by unanimous vote, and a motion offered by a non-member lessee thanking the Council for the consideration shown the lessees also received unanimous support.

This after 32 years is naturally gratifying; as is also the fact that after meeting all tax obligations the Colony will have a cash balance of several thousands at the close of the year.

Who Made the Natural Bridge?

ON a motor trip from San Francisco to New York last spring, the three of us, my husband, little son, and myself, found ourselves in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, on the direct route to the Natural Bridge and the famous Caverns.

I was delighted at the thought of seeing these natural wonders. The pictures in the geography books were the nearest I had ever come to seeing them before and now I would have the satisfaction of looking at realities instead of mere pictures.

We came to the Natural Bridge first. Signs by the highway told us of our approach, and we actually drove over the top of the bridge. But what could we see? The bridge is so huge—about 100 feet in width,—that with trees growing along the highway, all view of the jump-off to the valley 215 feet below is obstructed. So we crossed the bridge without knowing it and came down a short hill to a circular parking space. Signs informed us of a path leading up the canyon to a wonderful view of the Natural bridge. We parked and followed the path. It passed through a small toll house where each person, desiring to look at this seventh wonder of the world, had to pay \$1.10. This meant \$3.30 to our family and because of unexpected automobile trouble in North Carolina, costing us \$100.00, it was a sum which we couldn't afford. I was sorrowful.

I questioned the man in charge about the management, expecting to learn that it was a government reserve and that the money was used to build good roads or for some other public service. But no! I learned that a private