

SOCIAL PROGRESS.

When our good friend Kiefer got me to promise to come here and talk to you I was at a loss for a subject, and asked my friend MacLean to suggest one. He said "Progress," and it occurred to me that the subject was eminently proper on such an occasion as this in loving memory of our leader, and furthermore at a time when it seems to many of us as though our cause was making little or no progress. A few days later a copy of the *Public* for that week came in and I read in its columns an address on "Social Progress" delivered by Louis F. Post last June. This address treated the subject in Mr. Post's clear and convincing style, and at first I felt like selecting some other subject, but, on second thought concluded that nothing could be better than to center your attention upon Mr. Post's speech.

It is difficult to determine that which does the most to hasten or retard social progress. That which seems to be an advance may be a step backward, when all its effects are understood.

I well remember a lesson taught me when a boy; my father took me into a printing office where the men were setting type. My attention was attracted by one compositor who seemed to work with wonderful speed, every muscle in his body was in action. I remarked to my father that that man must set more type than any other in the shop. "Oh! no!" was the reply, "there is the fastest compositor." He pointed to a man who seemed to me the slowest one in the office, and then and there gave me a lesson on the conservation of energy that I never forgot, excepting for a short period when I had the "Howling Dervish" stage of the Single Tax fever.

So while we watch events as they transpire from day to day, and conclude that this or that marks rapid or slow development of social progress, the sensational and spectacular are apt to draw our attention, and we lose sight of more potent forces working steadily but quietly toward the same ends.

Then, again, many fail to consider the reactionary effects of those acts which abrogate rights that we have won in the past and thought secure. Mr. Post's address treats particularly on this feature of the Colorado miners trouble. He says: "Men who are in the whirlpool of social disturbance at any time in the world's history cannot know whether the world is at that time progressing or not. Living generations never know whether their social disturbances are carrying them forward or turning them backward. All they are positively aware of is the disturbance. They cannot be sure of its tendency; they can only infer.

"And their inferences are not always rational. When social motion lifts one's own interests to the top, he naturally fancies that the disturbance implies social progress. But if the social motion jostles him 'out of the swim,' he as naturally fancies that it implies social decadence. It is the same with one's pet reforms. If our own theories happen to be tossed up into popularity, we think the world is progressing because our cause seems to be winning. But if our theories happen to be submerged, our cause seems to be losing, and we think there is no God in Israel.

"Let us not be deceived by appearances. A sailing yacht is none the less truly moving forward though it turns from its course to beat against the wind. Driftwood floating down the Mississippi is just as surely on its way to the great southern gulf when it follows the river's current around a bend and toward the north as when it turns another bend and floats toward the south. The piston rod of a locomotive drives the iron horse forward as truly by its backward as by its forward stroke. And so with social phenomena. We must never be swift to infer from any backward social motion that the social movement is backward. Rational inferences depend upon further circumstances, upon wider observation, upon clearer thought.

“Considered simply in themselves, most of the social phenomena of our day discourage inferences of social progress.”

With the foregoing words as an introduction to his subject, Mr. Post goes into the history of the Colorado troubles.

“But make no pessimistic mistake. All this does not necessarily imply social decadence. The social motion is indeed backward, but the social movement of which it is part may nevertheless be forward. To me, at any rate, there is more to hope for in such great backward manifestations, discouraging and alarming though they be in themselves, than in all the little manifestations of progress which side-parties in politics and segregated reform associations are able to show. Notwithstanding that in themselves the great social phenomena of our time give little encouragement to infer social progress, those phenomena take on a different aspect when we consider them in the light of wider experience and closer observation.

“In the very excesses of social reaction I see some of the strongest assurances of social progress.”

Now in the light of Mr. Post's philosophy let us consider some past history in the Single Tax movement. When Henry George, believing Grover Cleveland to be sincere in his Free Trade professions, led Single Taxers to his support, only to their betrayal and disappointment, was it a step in advance or was it backward? Who can say? Seemingly the cause of Single Tax was checked for the time, and bitter was the disappointment.

When the Single Taxers throughout the whole country were led to contribute of their scant means, and many went down into benighted Delaware in the expectation of carrying that State for the Single Tax, many of us thought the adoption of our principles near at hand.

For one, I thought, we should carry the State, and with the Single Tax in operation in Delaware we should soon have it in Ohio. The defeat was very discouraging at the time; I am satisfied now that we gained more in defeat than victory would have brought us.

When Henry George was nominated for mayor of New York and made that memorable campaign which closed with that Christ like utterance, “I am for men,” many said that the Single Tax cause had died with Henry George. Single Taxers, of course, knew better, yet many of us felt that its progress had met with a serious check, but I doubt if the cause has ever taken so great a stride forward as it did in the days following the death of our great leader.

The Single Taxers turned again to the movement in the State of Washington. Then to Colorado, and lastly to the Tom Johnson campaign of a year ago in Ohio. Defeat everywhere. Was it failure? I say most emphatically, NO! And I believe that had we accomplished what we set out to do, in any one of the campaigns mentioned, that is, had we succeeded in our primary objects, the cause of Single Tax would not be as far advanced as it is to-day.

Don't reason from what I have said, that I would not favor any one of the campaigns mentioned, and that in the light of the present knowledge would not go into them again. I thought they were wise when projected and I think so now, and under the same circumstances would repeat them, but, what I do mean is that they were the best methods we could adopt at that time to further the cause and that we have advanced farther in defeat than we could have done in victory. Our mistakes were not mistakes as to methods, but in the motives and sentiments that actuated our fellow-men.

I am not discouraged as to the future, but, feel as Mr. Post says, that the “backward social motion” is like the piston rod of the engine, and that the social movement is forward.

It was my good fortune to hear the late John P. Altgeld deliver what is said to have been his greatest speech. It was at Columbus only a few weeks

before his death. In it he made use of the following words, with which I may fittingly conclude:

"I am not discouraged; things will right themselves. A pendulum swings one way and then another, but the steady pull of gravitation is toward the center of the earth. Any structure must be plumb if it is to endure. So it is with nations. Wrong may seem to triumph; right may seem to be defeated; but the gravitation is upward to the throne of God. Any political institution, if it is to endure, must be plumb with the line of justice."

Following are a few of the communications received and read. They are from those who have become eminent in the movement and are all of them sufficiently characteristic of the abilities and personal traits of the writers to hold the interest of our readers.

From William Lloyd Garrison.

To my regret, I cannot be with you September 2nd, to celebrate the 65th birthday of Henry George. As this year also marks the 25th anniversary of the publication of "Progress and Poverty," the occasion is most suggestive. It was an event whose magnitude the world is slowly recognizing.

I wish it were possible to express my personal indebtedness to the great reformer and his regenerating gospel. To me a new life was opened, faith in ultimate triumph of the moral law was strengthened, my intelligence was informed, my spirit exalted by contact with the author and his inspiring works.

Although born into the historic struggle for the abolition of American slavery, witnessing its trials and rejoicing in its accomplishment, I shall ever be grateful for the instrumentality that summoned me from the contemplation of past deeds and heroes to the recognition of a still wider conflict for human rights. Negro emancipation was but a step in the world-wide advance of individual freedom.

The Single Tax movement was the natural sequence of the overthrow of chattel slavery, an evolution necessarily delayed until the grosser form of bondage was destroyed.

I recall Henry George's expressed recognition of the fact and his gratitude to the abolitionists who had cleared the way and made his own propaganda a possibility. While the buying and selling of human beings was a legalized custom of the nation it was impossible to attract attention to that subtler form of slavery resulting from land monopoly.

I recall also an evidence of Henry George's breadth of vision in his modest disclaimer of belief that the Single Tax was the final work for humanity. I had quoted Wendell Phillips' remark deprecating ridicule of so-called spiritual manifestations. "They may be," said Mr. Phillips, "the refraction of some great truth yet below the horizon." Impressed by the spirit of the utterance, Mr. George, after a moments' reflection reverently said:—"I wonder what next great truth will appear above the horizon when the Single Tax has reached success!" The thought was parallel with his oft-quoted declaration; "I do not claim that the Single Tax is a panacea for social evils, but freedom is, and the Single Tax is in the line of freedom."

It is an inexpressible satisfaction to me that Tolstoy, who more than any living man speaks to the conscience of the world, has linked in his regard the memory of my father and of Henry George. They are the pre-eminent names spoken with veneration by the great Russian. The likeness of the two in moral vision was recognized by Tolstoy in his recent remark to Michael Davitt: "Henry George was right. Compensation to landlords is morally wrong. It is rewarding a class for the successful robbery of the public," precisely Garrison's view regarding the compensation of slaveholders.