

Land and Freedom

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Current Comment

DR. FRANK CRANE is occasionally a gladness but more often an irritation. In one of his recent articles he says:

The best method of taxation, the one that has the most reason and common sense behind it, is what is known as Single Tax. I do not think, however, that it would be practical to attain Single Tax at present, as our property system is so complicated and the mass of prejudice against this form of tax is at present so great. No matter how sensible and logical a system is we have to take into account the material we have to work with, which is the public mind. And just now the public mind is both incapable and unwilling to consider the arguments of Single Tax.

Perhaps if believers in the Single Tax as the "best method of taxation" would preach it rather than the Sales Tax, which just now is absorbing Dr. Crane's activities, the public mind would be more willing to consider it and maybe adopt it in preference to the sales tax swindle. Why not try preaching what you believe in, Doctor?

THE Philadelphia *Public Ledger* speaking of the Platform of the Commonwealth Land Party says it "sounds like the advertisements on patent medicine bottles—good for what ails you. By this time the world is a little suspicious of political and economic panaceas * * * * * The failure of experiments with these universal cure-alls does not, however, discourage their followers, who go bravely on."

The taking of the rent of land would not provide a cure-all. There would still remain some unsettled questions. But if the land question is not the fundamental question then all thinkers on the social problem are mistaken. If we do not begin with the material universe out of which all wealth is produced and from which all men must live, we are not likely to get far with schemes for social reform. Nothing is easier than to sneer at the Single Tax as a universal cure-all. When Henry George was asked if the Single Tax was a cure for every ill, he replied, "No, but Freedom is." And the taking of the rent of land for public purposes is the first and necessary step on the road to freedom.

EDUCATORS throughout the country have a great respect for Prof. John Dewey, of Columbia University. By many of these he is considered the foremost scholar in America. It is therefore with great pleasure we are per-

mitted to print the following letter addressed to Mr. E. B. Swinney by Prof. Dewey:

"In reply to yours of the 28th, I would state that for many years, ever since first familiarizing myself with the principle of the so-called Single Tax, I have regarded it as both theoretically and practically sound, and an indispensable basis of much needed social reform.

I may add that I am a great admirer of the general social philosophy of Henry George, whose contribution to intellectual thinking about social matters, even quite apart from his practical proposals, does not seem to me to have received the recognition it deserves among thinking people.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) JOHN DEWEY

ANOTHER gentleman of distinction in New York City contributes his quota to the misinformation that is now very much in evidence. He is Lewis E. Pierson, President of the Merchants Association, and this is what he says:

"Taxes on land have increased the cost of property on which houses can be built. Taxes on the lumberman and on the brick manufacturer have increased the cost of the floors and walls. Taxes on steel and iron have increased the cost of the metal going into the house. Taxes on the manufacturer of tiles have increased the cost of the roof. Taxes on the manufacturer of plumbing and electrical fixtures have increased the cost of the interior. And whether the man who occupies the house purchases it or rents it he must pay not only for the actual labor and material in the building, but also for an invisible but expensive addition built out of Government taxes."

A simple inquiry into the matter would have acquainted him with the fact that taxes on land are not added to the cost of land, but tend instead to decrease its cost. Seeing the tendency of most of the taxes which he enumerates to increase the cost of the thing taxed, he jumps to the conclusion that this is also true of taxes on land. It is probably an entirely honest conclusion, but Mr. Pierson needs enlightenment.

CONGRESSMAN OSCAR E. KELLER, of all persons in the world, must add to the general confusion in an otherwise excellent speech delivered in the House. He says:

"A tax on inheritances is not a tax upon industry and does not have an injurious effect on business. Instead, it actually will increase business and add more capital for productive purposes by taking money which otherwise would be held by individual heirs or trusteeships, generally in the form of tax-exempt securities, and diffusing it for productive purposes."

It would be hard to crowd more amusing errors in a single sentence.

A RECENT visitor to these shores was Rev. Studdert Kennedy, who is chaplain to Britain's King. The literary chap who makes hurried visits to America and goes away to write books about us, usually composed of mush and hokum, might be spared for a few of the type of Mr. Kennedy. He did not threaten us with a book some time in the future. Instead he had something more important to say, and from a recent interview in the *World* is quoted as saying:

"Our God is the God of everything or He is nothing. He is not the God of the church alone; He is the God of the factory, the skyscraper and the lamp post just as truly as He is the God of the stars. Any one can believe in the God of the stars, but get men to believe in the God of the factory and the mine, and our Christianity will amount to something.

"The church that does not concern itself with men ground down, impoverished, in rags, but only talks of men's souls has no right to exist. The civilization which produces at the top men decaying in selfish luxury and at the bottom men ground down in rags is rotten. It must perish.

"Business men are the apostles of Jesus Christ among the nations, and commerce is either a holy communion or a damnation. Your nation is the strongest in the world. May you lead us aright! The only hope lies in reason, but reason must have a vision as its basis."

And he concluded as follows:

"Let us have one supreme passion, which shall harmonize and unify all our impulses—the passion for humanity. What we need is a passionate humanitarianism which makes men patiently reasonable. What was the secret of Lincoln's glory and power? That he was humanitarian, touched with the fire and passion of God, who believed that men were the children of God."

Pretty good for the King's chaplain! But what is he willing to do about it?

THE CONSUMER'S UNION

ALARMED at the steadily increasing cost of living, the consumers followed the example of the labor unions, and formed organizations for their mutual benefit and protection. By buying food, clothing and other necessities at wholesale prices, and selling to themselves without profit, they found at the end of the first year that they were able to save about twenty-five per cent. of their incomes. This was fortunate, for about that time the Landlords' Union raised rents just twenty-five per cent.

WHIDDEN GRAHAM in *Life*.

WHY should organized labor champion old-age pensions and similar devices? The Bismarcks and Gladstones will give them to us when it is necessary to allay discontent.

The Futility of Side Issues

DURING the land war of the early eighties, which was waged as the result of the efforts of Irish tenants to secure their holdings, the story goes that a certain Irish Peer, entering his club on Pall Mall one morning, was accosted by a member with the remark, "Well, I see they have been taking pot shots at your agent in Connemara again." To which the Peer replied, "If those fellows in Ireland think that they can intimidate *me* by shooting at my agent they are jolly well mistaken." The story illustrates, as well as another, the mental attitude of people who are entrenched in the central and fundamental privilege of land monopoly, towards the efforts made at various times to attack the outlying redoubts of the central fortress.

How many of our associates, during the past forty years, have expended their energy in attempts to reform subsidiary evils in the hope that, when the minor positions fell, they would find their method of approach to the fundamental evil made easier. How many of us thought that Free Trade would be an admirable rallying cry, which would enable us to gather together the forces opposed to special privilege. To how many did the shibboleth, "Municipal Ownership and Operation," seem to promise possibilities worthy of achievement? How many worthy men, whose memories we now revere, thought that they found in electoral reform, whether of elections or primaries, the key to emancipation?

In favor of the proposals of these groups there was much to be said, but their theories were based upon a supposition now demonstrated to be erroneous. They believed public opinion was intelligent enough to declare itself in favor of so obviously correct a policy as the public appropriation of land rent, and that it was only the machinations of the politicians who thereby control the election of candidates and determine their legislative policies, which prevented public opinion from voting as the reformers would have them vote. Now we know that this was nothing but a baseless delusion. We know that on the whole, the elected representatives of the public are more enlightened and intelligent than the average of the voters. We know that the elective representatives do not enact the measures which we think that they should enact, not because they are inherently opposed to them, but because the people had given no expression of any desire of wanting them. Hence it is rather difficult to grow indignant any more over the prostitution of the ballot to partisan desires. Even the case in a New York Assembly District, under our carefully guarded ballot, in which three judicial candidates got three hundred votes apiece on the toll sheet, no more and no less, and none of the other candidates got any, fails to arouse public interest. It may be possible that the election inspectors will be fined or will go to jail; but even this is not certain, because the law, while well intentioned, was so loosely drawn, that it is extremely difficult to bring