

SINGLE TAX V. CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY.

— Yours, &c., PERCY R. MEGGY,  
Secretary Single Tax League, 169 Phillip-street.

To the Editor of the Daily Telegraph.

Sir,— In your issue of December 27 appeared a letter under the above title from the pen of B. A. Byrne in which Mr. John Farrell is taken to task for "seeming to claim" on behalf of Henry George "that he alone has discerned that the poor are oppressed, and that he alone, after painting things in their real condition, proposes any remedy." It is perhaps almost needless to say that neither Mr. Farrell nor anyone else has ever set up such absurd claims on behalf of Henry George. The serf-like, miserable condition of the laboring classes all over the world has been the constant theme of writers for time out of mind, and it is "playing it rather low down," to use a familiar but expressive phrase, to presume for a moment that a literary man— let alone such a powerful writer and omnivorous reader as many of us know John Farrell to be — is ignorant of Carlyle's famous work. "Past and Present" is a book which single taxers are never tired of reading, for it is one of the grandest indictments against the existing state of society which the present century has seen. With marvelous insight the Seer of Chelsea probed into the very root of the evil which threatened and still threatens to drive England headlong "with nameless throes and fire consummation to the devils," from which dreadful doom, unless some drastic remedies were carried out, Carlyle could see no possible escape. The first and last parts of the work show in the clearest terms how the toiling millions are robbed by the non-toiling few through the possession by the latter of the soil which is necessary for the existence of all.

"In the midst of plethoric plenty the people starve," and "What shall we say of the idle aristocracy, the owners of the soil of England, whose recognized function is that of handsomely consuming the rents of England?" These are the twin texts from which the Prophet preached a sermon that stirred all England to the very depths. With that keen, penetrating vision of his he saw, what we single taxers want to impress upon the world today, that deep down beneath the thousandfold complexity of existing chaos the real basic cause of the degradation of labor is the shifting of the burdens formerly borne by the landowners on to the shoulders of the people. The terms on which the land was originally held were that services should be rendered in return, and the most significant fact in English history is that the owners or their descendants or assignees still retain possession of the land, while the services which they swore to render are performed by other hands. The feudal aristocracy, says Carlyle, "did all the soldiering and police of the country, all the judging, law making, even the Church extension, whatsoever in the way of governing, of guiding and protecting could be done. It was a land aristocracy; it managed the governing of this English people and had the reaping of the soil of England in return. It is in many senses the law of nature, this same law of feudalism— no right aristocracy but a land one! The curious are invited to meditate upon it in these days.

Soldiering, police and judging, Church extension — nay, real government and guidance, all land in return for their land. How much of it is now done by them — done by anybody?" In the

following paragraph Carlyle points out that the whole of the expenditure for government is now raised from the general masses, the landowners only paying a very small part, and he goes so far as to hint that "our first Chartist Parliament" will know where to lay the new taxes of England, although even if the landowners were made to bear the whole burden again it would be of no avail, he says, unless government were undertaken as a sacred duty instead of as now merely for hire.

But while the great Scottish Peer probed England's wound as no one had ever probed it before, and touched the very core of the disease, what was the remedy, or rather what were the remedies he proposed? Legislative interference between the workers and the master-workers, sanitary regulations, public parks, the education of the people, an "effective system of emigration," the organization of labor under captains of industry, permanence of contract, and lastly some hazy and altogether undefined

method by which the "Aristocrat Worker" --- or in other words the do nothing landowner--- "would in like manner see his work and do it," under penalty, by "gillotines, Mendon Tanneries, and half-a-million men shot dead," of having it done for him. That is to say, deep though his insight was, keen though his penetrating vision, it was not given to Carlyle to do more than describe in trumpet soul-stirring tones the symptoms of the disease. For the specific remedies proposed above were of the most superficial kind, such as would suggest themselves to the most ordinary observer, and everyone of which has been carried out to a greater or less extent since then, with what effect, or with what want of effect, the world knows. How completely unavailing any mere organization of labor has proved, and "must ever prove so long as the land on which labor must work is in the hands of the few, is shown in a masterly manner and in a passage of quite exceptional power by John Farrell in *The Daily Telegraph* of Saturday last, in his article on "The Philosophy of the Single Tax."

All these minor remedies proposed by Carlyle and others were visibly required and bound to accomplish themselves as time went on. But the greatest problem of all — how to make the Aristocrat Worker see his work and do it-- was what neither Carlyle nor anyone else in those days knew how to accomplish, for political economy was only then forging the weapon which would bring this about, and the supreme value of the life-work of Henry George lies in this, that he was if not the first to discover at any rate to perceive in its fullest significance and declare to the world what a wonderful weapon a tax upon land values is, and how it is the only one by which the Gordian knot binding the Giant Labor to the ground can be effectually cut. Firm in the faith that springs from belief in a noble cause, strong in the hope that our dreams will be realized in the coming years, and awaiting the presence among us of our great leader Henry George, we can say in the words of Goethe, with which Carlyle brings his famous book to a close—

The future hides in it  
Good hap and sorrow;  
We press still thorow.  
Nought that abides in it  
Daunting us, ---- onward.