

it and we begin to suspect the common sense of those who can. And yet, there's some point in what they say about the unwisdom of putting taxes on things that we all want more of—houses, for instance. But what other way is there? We can't afford to exempt anything because we are getting too little revenue as it is. When any one suggests that a system which exempts most things may be made to produce more revenue or enable the government to get along with less, the natural result is the creation of the belief that the suggester is a visionary. We prefer painless dentistry in taxation to any proposal for a wholesome dietary.

Advertising the Single Tax

THE subways of New York at the present date show a large and attractive poster advertising a very popular play, "Nightie Night." It is a reproduction of one of Dr. Crane's terse little essays, entitled, "The Use of Nonsense." Referring to the serious essentials of life, Dr. Crane alludes to the Single Tax humorously and tactfully:

"We are supposed," he says, "to need a lot of things in this vale of tears: as, for instance, money and love, meat and beer, religion, Single Tax, taking down a peg, hair cuts and new hats.

"For man is an omnivorous wantner.

"But the thing we perhaps want as much as anything else is a good laugh."

Not a few men may make their first acquaintance with the Single Tax through reading this quaint subway poster.

Mining Property Assessment in Ontario

THE mining interests of the Province of Ontario, Canada, evidently understand the ethics of taxation as affecting their own industry, as witness the following clauses which they caused to be inserted into the Assessment Act (Revised Statutes, 1914, Chap. 195, Section 40):

"Section 40,

4—The buildings, plant and machinery in, on or under mineral land, and used mainly for obtaining minerals from the ground, or storing same, and concentrators and sampling plant, and, subject to subsection 8, the minerals in, on or under such land, shall not be assessable.

5—In no case shall mineral land be assessed at less than the value of other land in the neighborhood used exclusively for agricultural purposes.

8—Where in any deed or conveyance of lands heretofore or hereafter made, the petroleum mineral rights in such lands have been or shall be reserved to the grantor, such mineral rights shall be assessed at their actual value."

We fail to find in the Assessment Act of Ontario any similar tax exemption applying to farm buildings, machinery

and improvements. But it is to be presumed that the recent victory of the United Farmers in the Ontario elections and the nomination of a farmer to the premiership is only the forerunner of similar fiscal readjustments in relief of agriculture. The large contingent of Labor men elected to the Ontario Legislature, and now allied with the farmer representatives, should also assure similar relief to all other industries in that Province.

Trying to Pay Paul Without Robbing Peter

ONTARIO has her difficulties in endeavoring to solve the problem of housing her population. In June, 1918, a committee was appointed to report on the housing situation and to make recommendations. It has just completed its labors and the result is a volume of 185 pages, flanked by a heavy supporting battery of house plans which adds considerably to the weight of the work, if not to its popular value.

Much information has been collected and intelligently condensed; yet the net impression is one of futility because its compilers have not dared to face the real lion in the path. Indeed this weakness characterizes most of the activities proceeding from the amiable Town Planning Movement. It wishes well to humanity and would mitigate bad conditions, but it is generally supported by people whose interests would be prejudicially affected by public absorption of the annual value of land and so no real progress is made. This fact is the more surprising because probably no line of political, intellectual study brings more strongly into view the inherent evil of land speculation. Wherever a fine town-planning scheme is projected stand the social blackmailers waiting to be bought off before the plan can succeed, and the blackmailers, so often, are otherwise irreproachable and public-spirited citizens. Town-planning schemes for the betterment of the living conditions of the poor too often resemble the admonitions of health officers to residents of squalid tenements to avoid worry, use light and nourishing food and to indulge in sunlight and fresh air.

In the report before us there is a chapter devoted to Land and Taxation, which advances some admirable principles. It scathingly indicts "The iniquity of our land system" and points out the inevitable consequences that flow from it. A good phrase is the following: "It (our land system) makes and unmakes fortunes which consist of nothing more substantial than capitalized optimism," but what is really capitalized is other folk's necessity. The hypothesis is advanced that the community may claim what the community creates; then the means of doing so are considered; the exemption of improvements is discussed but is found to have one serious disadvantage, it offends the *principle* of taxation according to ability to pay. When did this fallacy become a principle? A man buys all other services on the basis of what they are worth, but justice, forsooth, requires that he shall buy government according to the

size of his fortune. If such a theory were the correct one, then indeed might we surrender all hope of ever achieving a scientific scheme of either government or taxation.

Another objection is that it would encourage the erection of the largest possible buildings on the least possible land. This criticism has been frequently made by otherwise intelligent critics of the exemption of improvements. Do these gentlemen ever stop to consider that that is precisely what the existing system does? Any change from a system that makes possible the Equitable Building and the seventeen story elevator apartment and the six story New York "walk-up" flat must necessarily be an improvement. Full value assessment of buildings at high rates of taxation will never keep buildings down as long as speculative land values keep rising. The sky scraper is merely the material expression of excessive land value due to speculation and monopoly and the private appropriation of publicly produced value. Further on the report sapiently remarks "when too heavy burdens are placed on idle or partly used land, the difficulty is that the tax tends to impair the value of the property." Perhaps this sentence has a meaning, but it escapes us. All taxes impair the value of the property from the owner's standpoint. Land value taxation means precisely what its name implies, taxation of land according to its value. If it has no value, it bears no tax.

The report favors partial exemption of dwellings of limited value, a plan open to the objection of class favoritism and which smacks of pauperization. An elaborate plan for a surtax based on *excess* unearned increment is put forward as a possible alternative. There is only one point upon which the report is quite positive—that the primary purpose of taxation is not "the discouragement of idleness or the encouragement of industry;" that the secondary effect of our present system is the encouragement of idleness and the discouragement of industry does not seem to have crossed the Committee's mind. The only salvation for the homeless lies in State subsidies.

Such is the scope of the Committee's practical recommendations as to the best method of bringing suitable land within the reach of the user. The Committee awarded two prizes for essays on the subject to Mr. Albert H. Leake and Mrs. J. E. Wetherell. Mr. Leake's essay indicates a strong grasp of the Land Question and a recognition of the fact that it is hopeless to try to solve the Housing Question until the Land Question has been settled. Not being a politician, he dares to set forth the truth, and he does not seem to be worrying about the ability-to-pay theory. The Committee is to be congratulated on having accepted and printed his able article.

The whole question of housing and the very word itself predicates a population incapable of taking care of itself in the important matter of providing its own homes. Ability to furnish his family with food, clothing and shelter was once the measure of a man. As civilization has advanced, man as an individual has become more impotent. Because society permits socially created values to be privately appropriated, it condemns men to accept alms in

the form of State aid in order that they may have decent homes. There is no more use in pretending that State aid is not alms, than there is in pretending that the alms-house is a home to which everyone should have recourse joyfully and as a matter of right and that its occupancy inflicts no social stigma.

Because Ontario has permitted some men to become rich by appropriating common property, she has made it impossible for others of her people to live decently, but it would never do for a parliamentary committee headed by a knight to admit a suspicion of such an underlying cause. And so they say, as so many of their ilk have said before, "Let us do everything for the poor but get off their backs. Horses need good stabling to enable them to pull their loads. Let us see that they get it, so that we may get more and better work out of them."

OWEN MERRIHUE.

Some Objections to The Single Tax

Single Tax is bad because:

- (1) It will bring in too LITTLE revenue; it must be clear to the merest amateur in economics that you cannot finance an expensive modern government by a tax upon only one form of property.
- (2) It will bring in too MUCH revenue; the absorption into the public treasury of all the vast land values of the country will tempt government officials to acts of fraud and corruption.

Single Tax is bad because:

- (1) It is a discrimination against the poor; it enables the rich banker and millionaire bondholder to escape taxation while penalizing the poor, struggling farmer.
- (2) It is a Socialistic attack upon the rich; it proposes to confiscate the riches accumulated through generations of thrift and industry and puts a premium upon idle poverty.

Single Tax is bad because:

- (1) It stimulates an excessive concentration and congestion of the population; if the land in the center of a large city is rendered equally accessible to all the people, then every one will crowd in toward the middle, and unwholesome living conditions will result.
- (2) It tends toward an excessive diffusion of the population; if the land in the center of a large city is to be burdened with a specially heavy tax, then all the people will flee to the remote suburbs in order to escape taxation.

Single Tax is bad because:

- (1) It is premature; the sense of community interest among the people has not yet developed to the