

A SOUTH AMERICAN WORK IN ECONOMICS

"THE LAND LEGISLATION OF BERNARDINO RIVADAVIA," BY DR. ANDRES LAMAS

A modest little book of 166 pages, which has just been edited under the above title by the South American Single Tax Committee, of Buenos Aires, is already creating an impression throughout the Argentine, Uruguay and Brazil, and must, before long, attract the attention of North American intellectuals, particularly those who make a special study of economics.

The author of the work, Dr. Andrés Lamas, is an outstanding figure in South American history. The service he rendered democracy in the Southern continent is not likely to be forgotten: The Argentine lay bleeding under the heel of the tyrant, Rosas. That dictator's ambition extended to the neighboring Republic, Uruguay; and Montevideo was already in desperate straits, having endured the horrors of a seven years' siege by land and sea. An alliance between the Brazilian monarchy and the Argentine tyrant had isolated Uruguay from all succour and its downfall seemed assured.

At this critical moment in the fortunes of South American democracy, the Minister of Government of Uruguay entrusted Dr. Andres Lamas with a confidential mission to Brazil. The genius and tact of the young diplomat succeeded in breaking the alliance between Brazil and Rosas, an event which was immediately followed by the revolt of the tyrant's general-in-chief, Urquiza, acting in collusion with the Uruguayan government. Thus collapsed the great conspiracy against the political liberty and integrity of Latin America. Thirty-eight years later, the Brazilian monarchy itself gave way to a Republican form of government.

But though down to his later years Dr. Lamas continued to serve his country as Minister to the Argentine, he was always much more than a diplomat. A great scholar and student, with probably the largest and most valuable library ever brought together in South America, he realized perfectly the limitations of purely political achievement, and the dangers awaiting American democracy unless its economic constitution was fundamentally altered. He studied anew the history of South America from the economic standpoint and had then the courage to tell his generation the initial error to which, in the confusion and conflict of the revolutionary period, the new society had been committed.

His work, which is now for the first time collected and published in one volume, is a tribute to a yet greater genius, Bernardino Rivadavia, the first Argentine President. Rivadavia comprehended from the first the superficial nature of political freedom unless founded on economic independence. Trained in economics in Paris, a friend of Humboldt, Lafayette and other intellectuals of that period, he undertook the Presidency of the new Republic with a clear conception of the task before him. He was determined to conserve for the new democracy the common right to the soil upon which it was to erect its political and economic future. Hence arose the remarkable experiment in agrarian legislation, to an analysis and defense of which as the true polity of America, Lamas devotes his work.

His illness and death shortly after the publication of his economic writings, together with the political agitations in the Argentine and Uruguay, explain the absence of any echo in contemporary opinion.

But the vindication of Rivadavia and of Lamas had not long to wait. In 1913, a brilliant Uruguayan publicist, Dr. Manuel Herrera y Reissig, in a widely read book, "The Land Tax," called attention to the work of Lamas and the legislation of Rivadavia. The Argentine Single Tax League, formed in the following year, published and circulated extensively in pamphlet form several chapters of Lamas's book. Argentine opinion began to be stirred. The gov-

ernment resolved to save for the nation the remaining public lands, over 200,000,000 acres, and decreed that they should no longer be sold, but only let on lease. This return to the agrarian policy of Rivadavia responds to a growing sense of the failure of the system (inherited from Europe) of the private and absolute property in land.

The complete edition of Lamas's work now published is introduced by a scholarly prologue by Dr. Herrera y Reissig, and contains, besides, a biographical sketch by Dr. Benjamín Fernández y Medina, the present Uruguayan Minister to Spain, both distinguished writers, and vice-presidents of the South American Single Tax Committee.

The action of the Argentine government in the direction of rectifying the mistaken land policy of its predecessors, is by no means an isolated indication of new economic ideals in South American governments. Three great States of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, Sao Paulo and Minas Geraes, have declared frankly for placing the taxation burden upon the economic rent of the soil, according to the fiscal formula advocated by Henry George.

The work of Lamas is interesting, not merely as an historical link between the economic ideals of South America's revolutionary epoch and the remarkable economic legislation now becoming general throughout all Latin America. Lamas was a financial and economic writer of repute; and his analysis of the theories of standard Economists may be read with profit today.

Published now, when the calamitous fruits of Europe's economic methods, quite as much as the failure of her political regime, are patent to the dullest understanding, the effect of Lamas's work is to intensify the natural revolt against the discredited economic doctrines of Europe, while outlining a clear and distinctly democratic economic policy for America. Only when such a policy has been adopted and definitely carried out, can democracy be considered as really safe in our Western hemisphere.

READ (page 313) what they are saying of the Single Tax Year Book.