

Interpreter of the divine law. The Pope, to whom Mr. George primarily directs his letter, would naturally hesitate to abdicate his own office in this important regard. Faithful Catholics would equally naturally prefer him to Mr. George. The remainder of mankind, given over to the notion that all human reason is fallible, would still have a penchant for their own conclusions, if they differed, as for the most part they do, from Mr. George's. So that for practical purposes we shall have to dismiss, or at least disregard, Mr. George's plea for his scheme as a product of heavenly wisdom.

If we take it up in the guise of a "cunning device of human ingenuity," we shall not get far in the process of applying it without meeting with very grave difficulties. In the first place, however beautiful it might be when once set up, it would involve, to begin with, a stupendous confiscation of what is now, under the law of our own and of every other civilized nation, private property in land, and that confiscation cannot be effected under American law without fair compensation to present owners, unless, indeed, the Constitution could be changed to permit it; and this, again, could not be done without a large majority vote, which clearly could not be got without the votes of the victims of the confiscation. So great a practical obstacle to the application of a system of taxation might very well justify most of us in this busy world in ignoring it as purely academic, not to say lunar, statesmanship.

But the American people, like all those of Germanic blood, have a decided fondness for ethical discussion, sometimes in direct proportion to the unlikelihood of its ever producing action. For that reason Mr. George's very forcible and sometimes eloquent writings attract much attention, and it is worth while to look a little further into this theory of his. If we suppose that it can be put in operation, what would be the scope of its consequences? It would be a serious error to think that it would be confined to the rich owners of valuable land. The effect on these would be most obvious, but such owners would be outnumbered a thousandfold by the smaller owners, to whom confiscation without compensation would be ruin, and to whom any compensation would be very difficult. For instance, on the outskirts of New-York, as of every other large city, there are, within a radius of twenty miles from the centre of the town, almost innumerable small plots of ground devoted to market gardening, and owned by the men and women who cultivate them. Owing to the nearness of the great city, these lands are worth many times what like lands, say, 200 miles from a city would be. The difference may easily be as \$1 to \$50, or even \$100. Now, if a tax, say, of 5 per cent., a very low estimate of the annual value conferred by the nearness of the city, is to be paid by the owner of these lands, he will be nearly or quite ruined. That is a concrete injury—in our judgment an injustice—which can in nowise be excused.

We indicate this as a simple example of the scope of the consequences of this amazing scheme. There is another consideration that cannot be ignored. The income yielded by this scheme would be enormous. The collection, administration, and application of it to "public uses" would be a work before which that of the Federal and all the State and Municipal Governments in the land would be as simple and easy as ditch digging. Is there any human agency by which it could be honestly, wisely, and safely administered? Is there any known means of insuring responsibility and integrity in the agents to whom it is to be intrusted? We are aware of none. It is, to our mind, entirely clear that the attempt, supposing it possible to get so far as the mere attempt, would rapidly bring into activity an amount of corruption, favoritism, and general demoralization that would be simply appalling. That, if nothing else, seems to us absolutely fatal to Mr. George's theory. We need hardly add that the plan of imposing the taxes necessary for the economical administration of the Government upon land, chiefly or solely, is a very different matter; but Mr. George himself dismisses this moderate step with an air of amiable superiority bordering on contempt. And we must close this notice of his pamphlet by a cordial recognition, not only of his sincerity, but of the admirably terse, clear, and nervous English in which it is written.

HENRY GEORGE TO THE POPE.
THE CONDITION OF LABOR. An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII. By Henry George. With Encyclical Letter by Pope Leo XIII. on the Condition of Labor. New-York: United States Book Company.

We should say that it would be difficult for any one to read this book without cordial recognition of the writer's candor, of the sincerity and depth of his conviction, and of the courtesy and tact with which he maintains his part in a controversy against so eminent an authority. The tone of this book throughout is admirable, and we can commend it especially to some of the single-tax writers and speakers, not only as a model of manner and method—which they sadly need—but as defining with clearness some of the limitations on which Mr. George insists, and which they are in the habit of ignoring. Mr. George finds his text in the Pope's maintenance of the rights of private property in land, and he seeks to establish a distinction, which he regards as radical, between the right of private property in land and what he calls the right of possession in land. The former he desires. The latter he freely concedes, and in a manner to carry dismay to the hearts of some of his professed followers. His postulates are familiar. God has made man and laid on him the injunction to labor. He has given to man the material for labor, which is land; man is entitled to the fruits of his labor, and to the possession of land for the purposes of labor. But the fruits belong to him individually and absolutely; of the land he has only the right of use. The property in it, the final ownership of it, belongs to the race. These, says Mr. George, are "the primary perceptions of human reason, the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith." They are, therefore, God's laws, which "do not change." "As soon as any piece of land will yield to the possessor a larger return than is had by similar labor on other land, a value attaches to it which is shown when it is sold or rented. The value of the land, irrespective of the value of any improvements in or on it, always indicates the precise value of the benefit to which all are entitled, as distinguished from the value which, as producer or successor of a producer, belongs to the possessor in individual right. To combine the advantages of private possession with the justice of common ownership, it is only necessary, therefore, to take for common uses what value attaches to land irrespective of any labor on it."

The system of taxation to be based on this conception of the rights of "all" and of individuals Mr. George defines as follows: "We propose leaving land in the private possession of individuals, with full liberty on their part to give, sell, or bequeath it; simply to levy on it for public uses a tax that shall equal the annual value of the land itself, irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it." In other words, Mr. George proposes to take for public uses the ground rents of all the land in the State, and "this we propose," he says with great naïveté, "not as a cunning device of human ingenuity, but as a conforming of human regulations to the will of God." The supremely simple mode of argument adopted by Mr. George is, on its face, extremely convenient. If we have God's law, that is obviously conclusive. The inconvenience arises from the condition of the minds to whom the argument is addressed, which is not likely to be one of acquiescence in the authority of Mr. George as a final in-