

not the *sine qua non*. In comparison with the impulse of social esteem, it is mean.

GROUND RENT AND THE SINGLE TAX.

(*The Boston Beacon.*)

It is rare that one finds in this country a band of reformers so persistent and enthusiastic in their advocacy of an idea and yet so uniformly broad minded and good tempered in carrying on their agitation as the members of the Massachusetts Single Tax League. One rather fancies that this agreeable combination of earnestness and optimism arises very largely from the mental attitude of the president of the league, Mr. C. B. Fillebrown, who has been for years a pioneer in economic reform and who has won to his side a group of vigorous thinkers made up of men of quite varied callings. The methods of the Single Tax League are educational and not revolutionary. Its members are sincere believers in the mechanical power of the wedge as being in the long run superior to dynamite, and they believe in getting in the small end of the wedge first. Notwithstanding the tendency of college professors to lend their support to the single tax idea, it will not do to call the movement academic. As far as it appeals to thinking men at all it appeals on the basis of common sense. At the conference of last Monday night, in which eight professional economists took part, the discussion turned on the question of ground rent and much that was illuminating was said on the possible distinctions between land and other forms of capital, and between rent and interest. All this was interesting, instructive and suggestive, but in the end we come back to the basic fact that land is the one form of capital which may lie utterly idle and yet enhance in value to the benefit of the individual owner simply through the co-operative activities of the entire community. It is this unearned increment in the value of land that is the disturbing element in the theories of the economists, and although numerous efforts have been made to account for it and at the same time to class land as productive capital, the attempts have not on the whole been successful. Once grant the premise of the advocates of the single tax, that land, like air and sunshine, is the common inheritance of the human race, and that land has been made a monopoly simply because of its tangible quality and through the ability of the strongest to seize and hold it,—once grant this, and the logic of the single tax irresistibly follows. Upon this much at least every reasonable person is agreed, that our existing tax system is about as bad as it can be and that almost any kind of a change would be a change for the better. The suggestion made some time ago that the General Court grant to all towns and cities in the Commonwealth the privilege of local option in matters of taxation is still worth considering. It is barely possible that if this privilege were granted some community would experiment with the single tax as a relief from existing extortions and inequalities, and in that case we should get some very significant data for legislators as well as economists to consider.

In the past our great and all inclusive economic problems have been studied in the light of certain theories which have maintained their sway in part because very few practical people gave them any attention, and in part because those who have tried to cope with the complex and knotty questions involved failed to reach a surety of conviction which made them venture to break away from the thrall of well grounded opinions. To study conditions in the light of long accepted theories is not the most progressive and scientific way of getting at things, and this habit may have contributed to that confused and unsatisfying thought regarding this subject which has won for it the name of the Dismal Science. And yet this same subject is bound up with all our most important

everyday interests, and it is evident that until the counsels of the teachers and leaders of economic thought shall be clarified there will be little prospect of practical advance in securing a tangible basis for legislation and experiment. It is pleasant, therefore, to discover in the interesting papers read at last Monday's conference indications of a growing unity of thought respecting economic definitions and principles. This, as we understand it, has been the purpose of Mr. Fillebrown and his associates of the Single Tax League, to secure through friendly discussion such an elimination of unessential differences and such an emphasis of essential agreements as will bring something like harmony out of confusion and secure a generally conceded basis of thought and action. For this worthy endeavor, which seems to have been very successfully carried out, the league deserves the thanks and indorsement of all those who realize the importance of an early and scientific solution of our economic problems.

AFTER DINNER WITH THE ECONOMISTS.

(The Social Settler in the Boston Transcript.)

President Fillebrown of the Massachusetts Single Tax League played the host again Monday evening in his usual hospitable fashion, the lions of the occasion being certain "professional economists." The latter held the boards at the postprandial entertainment, and dealt out three hours' worth of cut-and-dried wisdom on the subject of "Ground Rent." The subject was not a juicy one, and the treatment that it received was appropriate. No speaker is to be blamed, however, for failing to extract after-dinner sunbeams from an economic cucumber. The Settler is proud to say that he was among the few indefatigables who were in at the finish. When President Fillebrown finally called upon one of the chief performers to wind up the discussion, the Settler thought of the Memorial Day orator who was introduced to the patriotic celebrants gathered in the cemetery, as follows: "We will now listen to some closing remarks by the orator of the day, after which a salute will be fired over the dead." Seriously, however, President Fillebrown is to be congratulated upon his success in getting representative economists to express substantial agreement concerning a number of important points and principles. This in itself is no mean achievement. Whether the agreements will directly help the single tax cause is another story. But, however this may be, the results thus far reached in the agreement business testify eloquently to the diplomatic strategy of the tactful propagandist who directs the policy of the Massachusetts single taxers.

THE SINGLE TAX.

(Congregationalist.)

The best way to promote any particular reform is to bring light from all quarters on the conditions to be remedied. Mr. C. B. Fillebrown, president of the Single Tax League, appears to be the kind of reformer who welcomes all available help in the work to which he devotes himself. At the annual dinner of the league, held at Copley Square Hotel last week, which was attended by a large number of educators and business men he secured addresses from half a dozen instructors and professors of economics from Harvard and other universities, bringing one as far as from the University of California. The program was carefully arranged and the papers read were prepared after opportunity to see the outlines of arguments of the other speakers. If those who listened to them did not learn something valuable concerning the nature of ground rent and the reasons for and against raising all public revenues from taxes on land, it is not for lack of a systematic effort for their enlightenment.