

Timber taxation as an annual charge ought to be imposed not upon the value of the growing timber and the land, but upon the value of the land alone regardless of the value of its growing timber. This would encourage the use of timber land for timber raising purposes, and it would be fair. It would be fair because the tax would fall in proportion to the desirability of the land for timber crops; and it would foster intelligent timber culture by giving to the grower the full value of his crop. It is gratifying to be able to number Mr. Pinchot among those who believe in lifting the burden of taxation from legitimate enterprise and industry.

* * *

INCIDENTAL SOCIAL QUESTIONS.

Even to the extent of total abstinence, or of prohibition, it is probable that temperance ideas wield today a far greater influence than in the time of the old temperance crusades. This may be the reason why there are no John B. Goughs in our day, and so little popular response to total abstinence agitation. Total abstainers from choice do not readily respond to appeals to be total abstainers as a form of self-restraint. Imagine the discouragements of an anti-snuff crusade, for instance, as an extreme illustration. The illustration does not apply completely to anti-liquor crusades, but it does apply in principle. Although drinking is still an enormous indulgence, it has lost its popularity. No one any longer apologizes for not drinking. Apologies run in the other direction. And in periodical literature, to the limited extent to which it discusses the temperance subject at all, which is not very much, it discusses it far more judiciously and effectively than in the days when professional writers regarded it as good form to pour out sentimental stuff in glorification of temperance, and bad form to abstain from pouring in liquid stuff in promotion of intemperance.

+

We have never felt it necessary to discuss the temperance subject in *The Public*, although often importuned to do so. Sometimes the call comes to us from prohibitionists, who apparently suppose that if we did discuss the subject we should stand for prohibition. Sometimes it comes from liberty folks, who assume that we would stand as firmly for free trade in whiskey as for free trade in any other article of commerce. As a rule the call has never come from drinking men, although an occasional letter forces upon us the thought that prohibition, however wrong it may be in general prin-

ciple, would not come amiss in that particular case as a personal benefit.

None of those general importunities, however, have influenced us to write upon the subject. But Mr. Bryan's recent editorial evokes demands in both directions which seem to be emphatic enough for a response, and now we offer one.

What we offer, however, is simply our own opinion, and we offer this to stimulate thought and not to convert—which is the spirit, let us say, in which everything in *The Public* is offered. In so far as we are regarded as “thinking for” our readers, we recoil with a little touch of shame; but in so far as we are regarded as stimulating them to think for themselves, we feel that *The Public* has a mission.

On the question of temperance, then, we may summarize our opinions as follows:

In the abstract, we regard total abstinence as a personal question—not open and disturbing drunkenness, but abstinence; yes, and moderation too. If a man chooses to drink or not to drink, to get drunk or to keep sober, it is—as an abstract question—his own individual affair. For the consequences he should be answerable to society, as if he becomes a nuisance or dangerous or neglectful of duties.

Likewise—in the abstract—of commerce in liquor. We believe that, other conditions being right, this would regulate itself better than organized society could regulate it.

Consequently, if it were not for the conditions of degrading luxury at one extreme of society and degrading poverty at the other, with their degrading influences mingling throughout the whole—all caused by economic conditions which do not originate either in destructive rum-drinking nor in destructive rum-selling, but are promotive of both—we should consider the question of temperance at a matter of individual conduct with which the law could not meddle to any advantage.

So, also, if there were reasonable prospects of an early adjustment of economic conditions on the basis of a square deal. We should in that case still consider the temperance question as outside the sphere of justifiable legislation.

But under the existing circumstances of economic maladjustment, which will persist while a large majority of the good people are socially blind enough to prefer sumptuary legislation to square deal legislation, we are obliged to recognize the temporary usefulness of liquor traffic regulations, even to the extent of prohibition. Although not disposed to agitate for this, except under special

circumstances—nor at all except as a secondary reform which thrusts itself in front of a primary one,—neither are we willing to oppose it.

+

In prohibitory legislation under prevailing economic conditions, we see three elements of usefulness.

For one thing, it might save some of the over-rich and many of the over-poor from degradation, while more fundamental but slower and more legitimate social efforts are in progress.

For another thing, we believe that in our efforts for social progress, our natural friends and allies of the future are those who now hope to do good by repressive legislation, rather than those whose conceptions of liberty begin in a distillery or a brewery and end in a barrel house or a civic-corrupting saloon.

Our third consideration is that in full operation, prohibition would demonstrate the fallacy of the now absorbing popular thought that intemperance is the cause of poverty, and thereby clear the path to social reforms under which prohibitory laws would become obsolete because unnecessary.

+

We relate these views not to the temperance question alone, but similarly to those other great agitations of our time which honestly, even if mistakenly, aim at social progress.

If they are in the right general direction, we must assist them or be useless chatterers; for no worthy goal can be reached at a bound, and head winds are not to be met head on.

If they go backward from ignorance as to method and not from wickedness as to purpose, we may sometimes find our account, and a good one, in going with them far enough to get a hearing on methods.

Meanwhile they may serve for ameliorations of individual suffering, which is no small thing incidentally in a program of progress that may require many generations for development.

Shall we have no child labor laws until privilege is so far extinct that parents will no longer sacrifice their babies to industrial exploitation? Shall there be no laws limiting the destructive exploitation of women in factories and stores for long hours until we have modified privilege so far as to enable women to contract in real freedom and not under jug-handled competition? Shall there be no food-inspection laws until we are all so free, and so enlightened in our freedom, that we will patronize only honest and competent purveyors in buying our food? Shall there be no mining nor

factory laws until privilege has been so far abolished that workmen in mine and factory will be independent enough to refuse employment unless every safeguard is provided? Shall we ignore the manifest evils of intoxicants—whether liquors or drugs,—and bear with the saloon and its deadly and deadening civic influences until we have extended freedom far enough to enable men to discriminate between what good there may be in them and the bad? Shall we have no tenement house regulation until land monopoly has been so far eliminated as to loosen up economic conditions sufficiently to enable the exploited masses to bargain in full freedom for their homes as well as for their work and their food?

To do so would, in our opinion, be neither wise nor serviceable, nor yet consistent with sound principle in any other than that literal way which lifts the letter above the spirit. We do not thereby lose sight of our idea of the right goal or the true method. On the contrary, we keep both in constant view. But we keep also in view those changing circumstances of everyday life under which that idea must be promoted if promoted at all.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

HOW THE VETO OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS MAY BE ABROGATED.

Liverpool, England, Jan. 6, 1910.

"Another story" about the peculiarities of British politics* remains to tell. It is the story, imbedded in English history, of how the abrogation of the legislative power of the House of Lords may be accomplished against their will, if the Liberals win at the election now pending over here.

+

This story has its large beginnings in the English Revolution of 1668, when the doctrine of "divine right" in England was put into the scrap heap of politics, and William and Mary were placed upon the throne by Parliament as constitutional monarchs. With that revolution the actual powers of government began to pass from the throne to the House of Commons.

Although William and Mary were nominally invested with the attributes of sovereignty, there was a clause in the Bill of Rights, under which their title to the crown was established by Parliament, which operated automatically to place the leverage of power in the possession of the Commons instead of the Monarch. This was the clause that gave to the Commons the sole right to levy taxes. It became what in modern slang would be called "a cinch" when the Commons established the practice of granting supplies to the King for only a year at a time.

The annual grant is the financial bill. In practice

*See "British Democracy" in the Public of December 24, pp. 1228-1230.