

legislature last winter by Senator Elsberg. We explained and commented upon it last summer at page 342. As now modified, only in some details and with Senator Elsberg's approval, and as unanimously endorsed by the chamber of commerce, this bill has two commanding features. **Primarily, its purpose is to remit the question of the taxability of property to local governing bodies—counties and cities.** That is the Australasian system recommended by the Colorado commission. **Secondarily, for the purpose of perfecting that system by depriving the state equalization board of all power of favoritism, it substitutes for that body a tax apportionment board having no discretion whatever.** This is done by basing the apportionment of taxation each year upon data furnished by the taxation of the previous year. The apportionment board is to ascertain the percentage of state tax which each county must pay in the given year, "by dividing the sum of the gross revenue, for the preceding calendar year, of each county, including all the tax districts within the county, by the sum of the gross revenue of all the tax districts of the state for the same year." This purely clerical process is to determine "the percentage of state tax which each county shall pay." In other words, the proportion of state tax to be paid by each county in the given year will be determined by the amount of its own revenues of the previous year. Counties, therefore, may regulate the amount of their share of state taxes by their own range of expenditure. Inasmuch as with this plan of apportionment—or, rather, as underlying it—would go the right to each county to raise its taxes, both state and local, from personal property, or land, or landed improvements, or from any two or all three, as to the taxed voters might seem most beneficial to them, the new Elsberg bill should prove to be a satisfactory measure.

Before endorsing this bill the New York chamber of commerce referred

it to a committee which carefully examined it with the aid of Lawson Purdy, of the New York Tax Reform association, and under the advice of such eminent lawyers as Samuel B. Clarke, George W. Wickersham and Wheeler H. Peckham. In their report this committee discussed the general property tax which prevails in New York, and which, though designed to be equal, has proved, as they declare, to be "in actual operation unequal." They look forward, of course, to reform in taxation itself as the result of an enactment of this bill; but they aim immediately only at securing a more elastic system, believing that a right principle of taxation "can only be secured by granting to the several political divisions a certain discretion"—in other phrase, by establishing local option.

It is surprising to learn from the report of this chamber of commerce committee how great a hold the local option idea has taken upon the minds of men actively interested in taxation problems. At a state commerce convention held at Syracuse last June, which consisted of forty presidents of villages, twenty-six mayors of cities and sixty-one delegates of boards of trade and other like associations, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved, That the best way to reform the system of local taxation is to grant local option in taxation to the cities and counties of the state.

To the same effect, the report proceeds, have numerous local bodies expressed themselves. Among these are the boards of supervisors of Oswego and Oneida counties, the Merchants' exchange of Buffalo, the chamber of commerce of Rochester, the Manufacturers' association of New York and the Workingmen's Federation of the state of New York. Such newspapers are cited in favor of the reform as the New York Tribune, Times, Post, Journal, Commercial Advertiser and Daily News; the Brooklyn Standard-Union, and Citizen; the Albany Argus and the Syra-

cuse Herald. Mention is also made of the actual operation of the reform in New Zealand since 1896, and of the fact that in Ohio, Michigan, California and Colorado one house has passed local option bills. To this record is added the statement that Glasgow, in Scotland, and over 266 municipalities in Great Britain, have petitioned parliament for local option in taxation.

It is no secret that the followers of Henry George regard this local option tax reform as the probable practical beginning of the great industrial and social reform which George expounded in "Progress and Poverty." Not that this tax measure would be an entering wedge in any unfair way or misleading sense, not that it would amount to stealing a march; but that local option privileges in taxation once given, localities would grow in intelligence regarding the principles of taxation and the economic laws of wealth production and distribution until, step by step, the people would come to accept George's proposal in its fullness. It was in that spirit that the late Thomas G. Shearman proposed, and George himself adopted this line of practical, as distinguished from agitating work, and that Mr. Shearman in 1888 prepared the first local option bill ever drawn. After twelve years of persistent effort, unrelieved by spectacular displays which are naturally dear to the reformer's heart because encouraging to his hopes, effort whose astonishing success has for that very reason been singularly underestimated, the practical beginning of George's fundamental and far-reaching reform seems to be now almost at hand.

One of the many signs that this day is near is the recent action of the London county council. At its last meeting before the Christmas recess that metropolitan body debated a proposed parliamentary bill for the local taxation of site values. The bill provides for the appointment of a site valuer in each parish, who is to make valuations every five years. The rate

of taxation proposed is two shillings of tax to the pound of site value—about 50 cents to five dollars, or ten per cent. It is to fall exclusively upon the value of sites, improvements being exempt; and unoccupied property is to be taxed for site value as if it were occupied. The burden is fastened upon the owner, tenants who pay it being allowed to deduct it from their rent. This precaution was necessary in order to reach the owners of land under lease. Economic conditions would, in new transactions, make the owner bear the burden better than legislative provisos could. Though ten per cent. of site value has a confiscatory sound on this side of the Atlantic, where site value means selling or capitalized land value, it is really a very light tax; for in London site value means annual site value. If the bill becomes a law it will yield about \$8,000,000, the estimated site value of London being about \$80,000,000 annually. And there is strong probability that it will become a law. At the conclusion of the debate upon it, mentioned above, a hostile motion to refer the bill back to committee was defeated by a vote of 63 to 27, and thereupon it was adopted without dissent. So the bill will be introduced in parliament at the next session with the backing of the county council.

Still other signs of a single tax ground swell are observable. One of these is a long and thoughtful editorial in the Detroit News-Tribune, perhaps the most influential paper of Michigan, under the initials of its proprietor, Mr. J. E. Scripps. Mr. Scripps strenuously urges the abolition in Michigan of all taxation save upon land values—the abolition, that is, of all taxes on personalty and improvements—doing so not as a follower of Henry George, a distinction which he is at pains to disclaim, but as a hard-headed business man speaking for and appealing to his class. The article, which appeared in the News-Tribune of December 23d, is calculated to command serious considera-

tion. There is, to be sure, no thought on Mr. Scripps's part of readjusting general economic conditions by this method. He is not an adventurer upon the billowy sea of social reform. For that reason some of us who want the world made over completely and immediately may be disposed to see nothing significant of radical economic progress in his business-basis advocacy of land value taxation. We may even wish to doubt its efficacy for social reform because a business man advocates it for business reasons. Such a disposition, however, is a pious temptation that should be sternly resisted.

There are but two ways of achieving social reform. One is by revolution; not violent revolution necessarily, but revolution. The other is by steady, patient, commonplace advances in the right direction. Now, revolution seldom finds its opportunity. It almost never finds it except in violent commotions. And when it does find it, whether in peace or war, conditions slip back after the climax almost or quite to where they were before. Somehow, the race seems incapable, when advancing by leaps and bounds, of holding to the advances it makes. Social progress, like vegetable growth, to be firm and enduring must be slow and persistent. The plant that grows up in a day withers in a night. The oak, hardening as it grows, endures. No small matter, then, are these uninspiring indications of deliberate progress along the lines that Henry George laid down, even though made by men who are out of sympathy with his ultimate purposes and for reasons that could never have appealed to his higher aspirations. It is from such men, moved by such reasons, that the popular support necessary for the first practical steps in any enduring economic reform will have to come.

There are disquieting rumors from Washington to the effect that our government contemplates forcible interference with the government

of Venezuela in behalf of a private American corporation. A concession of asphalt deposits had been made by the government of Venezuela to this company. Later the government revoked that concession and made a new one to another American company. The original concessionaire, arming its employes, defied the government; and in the expectation that the government of Venezuela would attempt to enforce its decrees of revocation, our government is preparing, according to the Washington rumors, to support the original concessionaire with the army and navy. Though this story rests upon rumors, there is nothing improbable about it. No one need be surprised, after our imperial experience of the past two years, if the Washington government assumes the function of forcing weak nations to keep improvident contracts with American monopolists. Yet nothing could be more reprehensible. When Americans obtain concessions from foreign powers they take them at their own peril, knowing full well that repudiation, be it immoral or not, is one of the inherent and necessary rights of national sovereignty. To enforce their repudiated claims by making war upon the repudiating country is to make war wantonly in defiance of one of the first principles of international law and of every principle of morality whereby war can at all be justified. Making public war to enforce private contracts or collect private debts is as infamous an excuse for getting glory by slaughtering people as could well be conceived.

Though ex-President Harrison's article on colonialism, which appears in the North American Review for January, is not open to the criticism of incoherency which he preferred against the "verbatim" newspaper report of his Ann Arbor speech of last month, being in point of literary workmanship fully up to its author's well deserved reputation, it is in sentiment neither weaker nor stronger than the speech. Like the speech, the