

was a lovable character, to whom democracy was a religion and the teachings of Henry George one of its scriptures. Born in Killea Rectory, Ireland, in 1833, he was educated at Dublin University, married Margaret S. Thomson at Pittsfield, Illinois, in 1868, and, settling in Camden County, Missouri, in 1871, lived there until his death from old age in October of the present year. His name on The Public's list continuously all these years was one of its cherished landmarks and his occasional letters of encouragement among its cheering episodes.



THE INITIATIVE AND THE SINGLE-TAX.

There are few places so backward or persons so dull as not at this day to understand the essentials of the Initiative. It is a method of legislation by the people themselves, free from veto by Governor or legislature or any other representative power, and obstructed by no necessity for securing other permission for a popular vote than that of a percentage of the voters concerned. For this reason the Initiative stands out conspicuously as the climax of People's Power.

Not that legislative bodies or other forms of representation would be abolished by the Initiative. Legislation by representatives would be as necessary as ever, and more truly representative.

The effect of the Initiative upon representative bodies would be to take from them the tremendous power which they have usurped, and to restore to them the functions of representation from which they have fallen away. They would be people's *committees* in most things, instead of people's *bosses* in all things.



This restoration of power to the people has made friends for the Initiative among most advocates of radical changes in government.

Wisely so.

For whether or not such changes shall be made or be prevented, the people themselves ought to decide. They ought not on the one hand to be plunged by their representatives into changes they do not want, nor on the other to be obstructed by their representatives in securing changes they do want.

Wisely so for a further reason.

Under representative authority of the plenary sort, general stimulation of public opinion is extremely difficult if not wholly impossible. Legislators themselves may grow in civic intelligence

through the clash of opinion which centers at a capitol during sessions. Consequently, when radical proposals come before legislative bodies with virtually plenary powers, some stimulation of thought may be secured. But it is almost confined to legislators. Even they experience it under circumstances quite likely to prevent free consideration. "Influences" at the capitol, or fear of prejudice among the people at home, may give their thinking a "crooked" course. But however it be with legislators, the people as a whole get little or no political education on public questions that are decided by legislatures, and that is not good for popular government. If their intelligence is to reach its best or even its better possibilities, the people themselves must have direct responsibility for decisions on changes in public policy.

For a double reason, therefore, does the Initiative commend itself to advocates of radical changes in public policy. It makes, for one thing, a direct appeal to the people possible; and incidentally, for the other thing, it promotes public intelligence regarding public policies.



For those reasons, as well as its essential democracy, democratic Singletaxers have ceaselessly and in many places successfully promoted the Initiative and Referendum movement. Its story in any State cannot be fully written without disclosing Singletax persons and influences as the principal motive power. Though some Singletaxers have opposed it, they were few in number and of little influence outside of circles with anti-democratic or other reactionary tendencies.

Most persons who respond to Henry George's profoundly democratic message are advocates of the Initiative and Referendum as the highest known method of democratic government—the Referendum as a people's veto, the Initiative as a people's command. For these it is not easy to look upon a defeat of the Singletax by the Initiative, as in Missouri and Oregon, with complete satisfaction. Accustomed to recognizing the central truth of democracy which is at the core of their simple fiscal reform with its unattractive name, and prone as democrats to believe that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," many of them had no doubt wrought themselves up to expectations of victory for the Singletax immediately upon its submission to the people of those States. Their disappointment at the defeat must consequently be very keen.

But there is no substantial reason for disappointment. All may see this who will remember

that the Initiative, a democratic method of government, is not designed to secure the adoption of the Singletax, or any other particular policy, against public opinion. They may see it still more plainly if they remember that it is designed not only to secure democratic government but also to educate all the people in particular democratic policies, including the Singletax.

Practically, the educational function may be the most important of all the functions of the Initiative. Is not general training in the responsibilities of democracy one of the essentials of democratic government? Can any other be more vital? With general civic intelligence, democratic government is in all things assured; without that intelligence, no democracy can long survive. And popular intelligence in civic affairs is impossible without popular education and training such as only the Initiative affords.

In a popular clash of opinions over concrete questions of policy, to be decided directly by themselves, men learn to think right. Thinking right, they incline to vote right.



The defeat of the Singletax in Seattle last spring, and in Oregon and Missouri and virtually in California this fall, does not prove that the Singletax is wrong or the Initiative useless, nor that the voice of the people is not the voice of God. What it does prove is that the people, essentially conservative (as is becoming if their voice is to be the voice of God), will make no radical change in public policy until they understand it. They await enlightenment. And enlightenment is not one of God's free gifts. It must be labored for. If political in character, it must be labored for in struggles which can be evoked only by exciting public interest and thereby bringing on public discussion.

Those adverse votes were not all hostile. Many of them, perhaps by far the larger proportion, were expressive only of indifference or doubt. A majority of the voters open to conviction, had not been convinced. But a vast minority had been convinced, and that minority is a gigantic nucleus for future majorities.

The people of those States have been at a school where this large minority have learned more of the Singletax in a few months than they could learn in many years through non-responsible propaganda.



If the Singletax is false doctrine, it will be completely discredited and dissipated by further Initiative contests;

but if it is true doctrine, every fresh clash of public opinion over it will carry Singletax education farther and deeper.

The city of Everett, in Washington State, is an instructive example at this moment and in this country. By a close vote the people of Everett had ordered the placing of the Singletax in their proposed charter. The charter commission excluded it from the charter but submitted it at the charter election separately. The charter was adopted by the people, but the Singletax was defeated. Here the parallel with Oregon's adoption of county home rule in taxation in 1910 and its repeal in 1912, is almost perfect. In neither case was public intelligence correctly expressed in the first contest; and in both cases the earlier action was revoked. The people were not finally *deciding* under the Initiative; they were *thinking* with the aid of the Initiative.

To such good effect did the people of Everett think, that at the recent election, after another educational campaign and in a vote almost as large as that for President of the United States, they adopted the Singletax and under its name of "Singletax," by a majority in every ward and by a total vote of two for it to only one against it.

This result may not be accomplished in Oregon and Missouri so soon; the voting population is larger. It may never be accomplished there. But from the experience at Everett a lesson is certainly to be drawn. It is a lesson of prime importance for the enlightenment of the Singletax Advisory Conference which the Joseph Fels Fund Commission have invited to meet with it at Boston on the 29th and 30th of this month and the 1st of next.



So far from being discredited with Singletaxers, the Initiative in Oregon and Missouri and Washington and California has proved its value to the Singletax cause. Let that Singletaxer deride it who does not believe in democracy, and then defend his Singletax faith if he can. Let that Singletaxer repudiate it, who has lost his faith either in the truths of the Singletax or in the special efficacy of the Initiative for public education in Singletax truths. But let all Singletaxers who believe in democracy, who believe in the Singletax because it is the core of democracy (political and industrial), who believe that extensive and intensive popular education in the Singletax is a prerequisite to its firm establishment, who believe that the people are on the whole righteous-minded and yet slow to make uncertain changes, who be-

lieve that they can be enlightened in the mass most speedily and convincingly by that clash of opinion which the Initiative creates—let these consider whether the Initiative in Missouri, California, Oregon and Washington has not proved of great and incalculable value to their cause. Let them remember the past, not for its disappointments but for its lessons.



The great virtue of the Initiative to Singletaxers is this, that whenever the people really want the Singletax they can get it despite legislative hostility or trickery; and that meanwhile it affords the best means of popular education on the subject, an education which incidentally trains all voters in the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Under the American theory, government depends for its democracy and consequent stability upon the springing up of new policies *from the people themselves*. This is the modern theory everywhere. Experience teaches that policies handed down from above, unless they spring primarily out of popular feeling, are of little value.

That being so, Singletaxers cannot expect as good results from representatives intrenched in power and tied up to predatory interests, as from the people themselves. For though great masses of the people be indifferent to righteousness when their own individual interests are at stake, their interests as a whole are sufficiently conflicting to leave the balance of power at the last with the righteous remnant.

When the people are wrong, it is usually because they are fooled. Many will agree to this and sigh. Many will supplement their sighs with "what's-the-uses" in cargo-lots as to the Initiative. But regarding the people in that respect, let Lincoln's wise words admonish all Singletaxers of the importance of the Initiative to their cause: "You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of them some of the time; but you cannot fool all the people all the time."



THE NEW YORK TAX REFORM ASSOCIATION.

Upon the adoption by the people of Ohio of their Constitutional amendment providing for the Initiative and Referendum in that State, we spoke editorially of the event as a decisive defeat for Allen Ripley Foote,* the noted lobbyist for monopoly interests; and in that connection we

used this language regarding his intimacy with the New York Tax Reform Association: "Meanwhile he had got into close relations with the Tax Reform Association of New York—a body originated principally to secure home rule in taxation for cities and counties, *but which has drifted into opposition to that policy.*"

Two letters in criticism of the particular statement which for purposes of distinction we now italicize, were promptly received from George L. Rusby, of Nutley, N. J., whose desire it is that we publish them. Inasmuch as they cannot be published without editorial comment, lest a mistaken impression be created as to our present attitude toward the criticized statement and its context, and as there has been no denial of any of the more important parts of the editorial in question, we should have been disposed to let the matter rest where that editorial left it. But our critic's judgment and integrity of purpose deservedly command high respect, and we accede to his wishes.

I.

Mr. Rusby's first letter, bearing the date of September 18, 1912, is as follows:

I was surprised to read your statement in "The Public" of September 13, 1912, at page 867, that the New York Tax Reform Association has drifted into opposition to the policy of home rule in taxation for cities and counties. Without waiting to discuss your statement with Mr. Pleydell, who represents the above Association, I hasten to assure you of facts that would seem to show your statement to be without foundation.

Not only has Mr. Pleydell, in all of my discussions with him on this subject endorsed the principle involved, but in my work here in New Jersey, in trying to secure legislation that would permit home rule in taxation for municipalities, he has given me valuable encouragement and assistance. I think I am in very good position to know his attitude on the question, and believe that the only thing in his attitude that could be construed as a basis for your statement is that he has modified his views as to the most practical methods, both in securing the necessary legislation and in the application of the principle itself.

For instance, he has modified his views to this extent—in which modification I thoroughly agree with him—that the municipality should be given power to exempt from taxation any desired class of property that is now taxed, but that it should not be given the power to introduce the taxation of new classes of property.

Mr. Rusby's second letter, dated September 23, 1912, is as follows:

Since writing and dispatching my letter of the 18th inst. (which action was taken entirely on my own responsibility), wishing to make sure that I had not therein misrepresented Mr. Pleydell, I sent him a copy, requesting him to let me know whether

*See current volume, pages 866, 867.