

Miss Gertrude Colles, of the Manhattan Single Tax Club, contributes to a late number of the *Public* a sonnet of singular beauty.

### IS THE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT INFLUENCING LITERATURE?

To make progress in politics and legislation, to compel a partial submission to the dictates of a new economic truth in such places where laws are framed or political platforms written, is one thing; this the Single Tax is doing. But it is doing more; its philosophy is permeating literature, even fiction, and unconsciously the great philosophy of freedom so inadequately described under the name of "Single Tax" is being absorbed by those who are seeking to contribute something of value to the world of books.

It is only in our own generation that the literature of economic discontent has grown; novels dealing with social conditions have been written without number, all with a too apparent purpose. Most of them have been inartistic and crude, as were many of the books called forth by the evils of chattel slavery; the great industrial novel has yet to be written. With a clearer insight Charles Reed might have written it in "Put Yourself in His Place," or George Eliot in "Felix Holt." But the modern thought was lacking, and the radicalism of "Felix Holt" seems, in comparison to the Single Tax philosophy, to have been a very mild and inoffensive radicalism indeed.

We present in this issue a few evidences of the growth of the single tax philosophy in current literature. It is far too incomplete. The numbers of those (writers of fiction, poets, essayists) who are being brought under the new spirit is every day increasing. No one who hopes to interpret life and the thought of to-day can any longer ignore the spirit of social reform and the direction that is being given to it by the single tax philosophy. Unconsciously it is being absorbed, and it is not too much to say that as its broad basic individualism becomes more general it will be inspirational of much that is to come in American letters, as the spirit of freedom voiced by the abolition movement determined the direction taken by the muse of Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Longfellow. Out of a people's great heroic movements the literature that is to live is born; it may not concern itself directly with them, but it will be breath of their breath and bone of their bone. Out of no other age than that of Elizabeth could Shakspeare and his choir of lesser singers have come; later the Cromwellian revolution gave us the sombre genius of Milton; out of the struggle for liberty emerged those German masters of the lyric; France, in its repeated social upheavals, gave us now Beranger, now Rousseau, now Victor

Hugo. The number of geniuses in literature evolved by social revolutions is legion; ours of a newer type are yet to come.

Burns was a Democrat, a democratic Democrat, indeed, an uncompromising foe of tyranny, and a bold spokesman for the individual rights of man. The political economy of the poet was bound to be the true one.

"Preserve the dignity of man  
With soul erect,  
And trust the universal plan  
Will all protect."

It was not to political economy that Burns referred, indeed, though it has as much application to that domain as to any other. "The universal plan"—natural law—to which the poet referred, will, indeed, protect all men in the enjoyment of all that is rightfully theirs. Any artificial scheme intended as a substitute for the "universal plan" results in the enjoyment by a few men of what is rightfully somebody else's.

Prof. John Quincy Adams has a remedy for strikes. It is to line the walls of shops and factories with paintings of the old masters. This is not a joke. The Professor is quite serious. Listen to him:

"When the manufacturers of this country line the walls of their shops with the paintings of the old masters and the masterpieces of sculpture, when the workingmen shall have music to listen to during their working hours, the laboring man will be content and the days of strikes will be over."

The realm once occupied by the late lamented Gilbert and Sullivan seems now to be chiefly filled by those who boast the prefix of "Prof." to their names. Those who rejoice in that of "Rev.", with due respect to the cloth, figure a close second. Rev. Robert Collyer, whom we would like to consider as belonging to a type of creed which has something of the strenuous religion of Jesus, for he was once a blacksmith, and knows the common people by actual contact, permits himself to gush in this really unbecoming fashion:

"Our men of wealth give freely, gladly. There is no need to squeeze money out of them; just touch them, and like a full honeycomb they freely pour forth a golden stream. They do not even wait to be asked. \* \* \*

"The fact that our men of wealth are devoting themselves more to the art of giving than to the art of getting is due to the growth of our sense of social responsibility. There is a public sentiment which declares that the man who gets without giving has not realized the responsibilities of his position. He is condemned for having fallen short of his duty."