

THE HENRY GEORGE LECTURE ASSOCIATION.

THE WORK OF JOHN Z. WHITE.

The lectures under the auspices of the Henry George Lecture Association began in New York city on the 1st of April, and continued in New York and vicinity until the middle of June.

About eighty addresses were made to a great variety of audiences. Among these were trades unions, churches, literary clubs, men's clubs, women's clubs, professional and charitable associations, as well as political and social societies. A few debates were included with the lectures, and frequently a lecture would become more or less of a debate as a result of energetic questioning, which latter feature was always invited if thought appropriate to the occasion.

Questions from the audience give the best results of all educational methods if the audience is in humor for further consideration of the matter, and often leads to discussion after the meeting. At one meeting, after adjournment, a clergyman asked "If your plan were put in operation would not the land owners increase rents?" The reply was another question: "Suppose the owner was using his own land, how would he increase rent?" A bystander interjected: "He would raise the price of his products." "In that case," replied Mr. White, "tenants would raise prices of products if landlords increased rents. Is that your notion?"

"Certainly," said the bystander.

The clergyman was then asked, "did you not attend college and take the course in political economy?"

He replied in the affirmative, and was then asked, "did you not learn that rent is a monopoly price?"

He again answered "yes." Then speaking slowly, as if to himself, said, "I remember, now; a tax on rent cannot be shifted."

"And, of course, if the tax cannot be shifted, neither the tenant nor the working owner can raise prices of products?" asked the speaker.

"That's true," said the clergyman. "I see more clearly now. I must look more closely into this. Where can I get literature?"

He was referred to E. B. Swinny, 720 Carroll St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

A further illustration was offered him, though really for the benefit of the aforesaid bystander and others who were listening, as follows: "Suppose I were to rob you of twenty dollars (all you have) and some one had power to take one-half of the proceeds of the robbery from me, could I then increase the robbery, or tax, or price or revenue?"

"Of course not," all agreed.

"Then, if the landowner has taken all he can (and he does), the tenant is under no compulsion to pay him more because a third party (the public) has forced him to yield a part, or even all, of the rent?"

The clergyman unqualifiedly agreed to the conclusion. He remembered the opinion of the economists whom he had studied in college. Had he been appealed to wholly on ground of reason or as matter of argument, there is but little doubt the question would have been more difficult to determine. But authority from so dignified a source as his alma mater was not to be resisted. And those who were listening? That was the curious thing. They accepted the authority of the clergyman. Now, who will say that a college education is not of highest value? It depends, of course, how it is used, as Thos. G. Shearman said of figures.

The first matter noticed by a Western man in New York is the relative absence of middle class caterers. All sorts of very fine things are easily found—the difficult matter is to find the price; and all sorts of very poor or cheap things are within easy reach. Very good restaurants are numerous and offer pleasant welcome—but they are not for the common herd. Very cheap restaurants are numerous, but they are not for dyspeptics nor for epicures. The medium grade caterer is not easily discovered. These facts show their effects in the mental attitude manifested by New York society. Middle class people are few. It very naturally follows that the ideas of middle class people are rarely encountered.

The laboring element (technically so-called) of New York is not so independent and self-assertive as is the western class of like social importance, and the upper class of New York is more affected than in its western counterpart. Snobbishness is more apparent in the East, but at the same time there are among the rich of the eastern metropolis a greater number of genuinely public spirited men. One can almost believe that classes are in process of formation in the West, while in the East the forming of an aristocracy has so far progressed that the mere building of it is not of great interest. The enjoyment of its luxuries becomes the important matter to the lightweights, but a few among the favored sons and daughters of wealth are strong by nature, and their strength of necessity must find expression. The public welfare invites the sympathy of some, and so we have at least one multi-millionaire opposing a tax on street car companies because this would be taxing patrons of street cars, and, like a Single Tax man, he wants to know why riding on a street car should subject any one to a special tax levy by the State?

The millionaire referred to said, very truly, "If the street car company can afford to pay a tax, they can afford to reduce the rate of fare instead"—again like a Single

Tax man. It would be difficult to find one among Chicago multi-millionaires who would object to taxing street car companies for that reason. They object to the tax sturdily enough, but on quite different grounds.

Just as a greater liberality seems to indicate a more settled social stratification among the rich, so a somewhat less definite appreciation of personal liberty indicates the same condition among the poor. Indeed, in some parts of the East Side of Manhattan, the American idea of a free man is apparently unknown. The social upper class and the social lower class seem to be accepted as the natural order—as an inevitable result of “business.” Is it surprising that socialism finds such soil fruitful? And while nearly all existing educational forces teach that this resulting condition is right, is it to be doubted that socialist promises will find ready acceptance?

Burn's declaration that,

“The rank is but the guinea's stamp
The man's the gowd for a' that,”

is a meaningless jingle to these. They discover as a very definite and concrete fact that the rank is the “whole thing.”

Occasionally a rift is found in the general gloom, like that caused by the remark of a young lady at one meeting, who after many questions, said, “Why, this Single Tax idea seems to answer every inquiry. Maybe it is the central thought that all reformers have been looking for. There is one right way—maybe it is this for which we search.”

That girl was really looking for something, but the general run are still dense and unbelieving—as stupid and cowardly as a Democratic National Convention. Most of our people very eloquently profess a sturdy faith in splendid fundamental social truths, but with an unyielding stubbornness resist any and every attempt to put that faith to the test of practical demonstration.

And yet the situation is vastly better than it was a few years ago. A much greater number will readily admit that something is wrong, and since the two great political parties are so nearly agreed that they might swap platforms without injury or even inconvenience to either, we may hope that before many more presidential years have come and gone there will be substantial agreement as to the nature of that wrong.

The fact of the matter is that the wrong of existing conditions cannot be revealed without bringing into view the doctrines of Henry George. That is the stumbling block to many—and it is our strength. The unrest grows, and perhaps will be even more apparent late this Fall. More evident dissatisfaction offers greater inducement for the exercise of right reason. We may now perceive more clearly the truth of the assertion of George, “The future is ours.”

It was intensely interesting at many of

our meetings to observe the close interest of the women. Hand-to-hand talks frequently followed adjournment, and as often as not women, evidently accustomed to hard labor, made up a good portion of the group. The matter of rent interested these, and when it was shown that land owners as such did nothing of a useful nature, they gave ready assent. In fact women, compared with men, have clearer perceptions, though possibly not stronger reasoning powers.

The presentation most generally pursued was to the effect that the distinguishing fact of modern civilization, indeed its chief glory, is the degree to which it has carried individual liberty. In matters of religion personal liberty is well nigh complete. No longer do we fear the midnight torch or secret assassin because of our religious faith or profession. No longer are we taxed to support religious forms in which we have no belief. Personal liberty is here secure, though an awful price was paid for it by our heroic ancestors.

In the political world each American citizen stands practically the equal of his fellow (not *her* fellow, as yet, but that is coming). Equal freedom is the essential political condition of our people. They fail to use their power with the intelligence hoped for, but that is a question of knowledge, which will be gained in time. Here, as in religious matters, personal liberty is ours.

In the economic world the situation is not so bright. Land and labor are the two natural factors of all production—the two prime factors—and one of these is free. No longer is man a serf or slave in his body. He is free. To be sure it is only the freedom to starve and freeze, if he cannot find another man who will employ his services, but still it is a fact that the ancient aristocratic control of his actions is gone—let us hope never to return. We may fairly and truthfully claim that the modern world, in its best expression, has, in matters of religion, politics, and as to the person, established personal liberty. Further, that only because of this achievement have other blessings of modern civilization been possible.

But each man and woman must consume food in order that life may continue. Freedom in religion, in politics, in the body, will not supply food. Furnishing the material needs is the office of labor, and labor cannot be done save upon land. The body is free, but it is a useless boon without the natural opportunity for its exercise. That opportunity is the earth. And this still rests under the ancient aristocratic dominion. The path to complete freedom, on the physical plane, is still barred by the earth owner.

We hold, then, that to go forward and free the earth, on equal terms to each, is but to finish the work already so far advanced by our ancestors. We claim that in

making this proposal we occupy a distinctively conservative position; that it must be done in order to justify the liberties already gained; that it must be done or liberties now possessed must be surrendered; that every argument by which we defend the modern world makes this step imperative.

How can we say to any man, you have religious freedom, political freedom, personal freedom, but if you wish for food you must find another man who will "permit" you to work? What are the glories of liberty to him?

To avoid the surrender of the fruits of many dearly bought victories over the old order we urge this advance. "Freedom will accept no half-way worship." We are the true conservatives. We are not destroyers, not revolutionists; but progressives.

One of the best evidences of solid progress of Single Tax notions is the fact that men and women holding these views are to be found in almost every community and among all conditions. Professional men, commercial men, manufacturers, mechanics and unskilled laborers evidence the universality of the truth George labored to make plain. The one thing needed is modest self-reliance. A farm laborer recently met thought himself a socialist, but after a few questions said, "That plan is pretty good, and easier." This man thought for himself. He did not need the authority of some university in order to perceive the simple truth that each man is dependent on land for the means of life. Being a farm "hand" he did not give undue weight to the importance of machinery in production. He was asked: "Suppose each was given equal access to land, how would it affect the money question?" He replied: "Well, money would not be so important as it is now." What a pity it is that farm "hand" was not sent to St. Louis in place of some great statesman.

The recent rise in rent in New York, perhaps more severely felt on the East Side, where in truth the rise is least, has made the subject, "Rent and Wages," a popular one. A simple explanation of the nature of production, to the effect that the people as a whole are cultivating the ground—are, broadly speaking, farmers—followed by a statement of the obvious truth that the product of such cultivation is divided between those who do the work and those who own the ground is generally clearly apprehended. If, now, we label one of these divisions "Wages" and the other "Rent," it is self-evident that the larger one division is, the smaller the other must be; just as, if an apple be cut in two, the smaller one portion is, the larger must be the other. Therefore, the higher wages are, the lower rent must be, and *vice versa*.

While this reasoning will usually be accepted, it will not carry conviction without illustration; so we cite a farmer working as

a tenant. It is very clear that the less of the crop he gives to the owner of the farm as rent the more he will keep for himself as wages. Most audiences will agree to this, but will not perceive that what is true of the farming occupation is also true of all other employments. It must then be emphatically urged that all products come from the ground as surely as do vegetables and grain. Further, that they are brought from the ground just as are vegetables and grain, that is, by human toil. An invitation to cite one single exception in all of the millions of articles exposed for sale in all the markets of the world, will be answered by silence. And finally, we point out that the modern woolen mill is doing the same work our grandmothers did—that is, reducing a fleece to yarn, to thread, to cloth. It is merely a wiser, because more economical, method of applying labor.

What is true of the woolen industry is true of every occupation that is productive in its nature. Always labor applied to land, with the results that by this wiser method much more wealth is produced by the same amount of labor, and with this increasing product an ever increasing share goes to the owners of land as rent, while relatively a less share goes to laborers as wages. Illustrations of this character generally force conviction, and open the way to a consideration of remedies. The Single Tax as a remedy meets all objections that arise among clear headed men who really seek the truth. It will never be accepted by a stupid people. That is one reason it formerly excited more opposition than now. The society saviors did not know how very innocent the good public is—to fully reveal this verdancy there were required Dowie and the St. Louis gathering.

The people in New York and vicinity, in common with those of the rest of the country, have been led by the public prints to believe that Henry George taught a doctrine of confiscation and revolution dangerous to peace and good order. This idea is slowly giving way to a truer conception of the noble sentiment and wise statesmanship his teachings evidence. No better service can be rendered the cause of human freedom than to tell, and tell again, the truth that Henry George came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law; not to inaugurate, but to stop confiscation; not to incite, but to avoid revolution; not to prevent, but to restore peace; not to overthrow, but to establish order.

To secure these ends, he urged a simple, honest recognition of fundamental relations, so obvious that children perceive them, and the application of a remedy so simple yet so effective as to excite wonder that it was not noted centuries since. A plan so completely meeting the require-