

# Teaching Community Civics in Cleveland

HERE are extracts from *Community Civics*, a text book by R. O. Hughes, in use in the 8th grade of Cleveland's Public Schools, and for which information we are indebted to Mrs. Charlotte Smith, the efficient secretary of the Ohio Single Tax League. Mrs. Smith's little daughter Lucile is a pupil in the 8th grade.

We do not believe that any comment is needed. Miss Lucile can probably tell her instructor that the only thing that increases in value by the presence of an efficient fire department (and all other public service), is land with a house on it and a vacant lot that cannot burn. Also, that land of value calls incessantly for improvements, else it would possess no value at all, and that more homes in Cleveland for the homeless of that city would probably (we may timidly hazard the suggestion) conduce to "the happiness and morality of a large number of people." But for the partial concessions grudgingly admitted by the text book writer we suppose we must be duly grateful.

"It is much easier to find fault than to correct the fault. With all the talk about the iniquities of the general property tax, no one has yet brought forward a substitute which does not have faults of its own, as well as some of those of the property tax.

Take, as an instance of the proposed reforms, the so-called Single Tax. The foremost advocate of the idea in the United States was Henry George, who wrote a book called 'Progress and Poverty,' in which he urged that his plan would almost bring about the millennium. He proposed that nothing whatever should be taxed except the value of land. Land, he said, is the gift of nature, and when individuals occupy this land for their own use, they should pay the State for it but should not be taxed for the buildings and other improvements which their own energy and labor brought into existence.

The gobbling up of land in cities by a few speculators, who intended to hold it until it became more valuable was in his opinion responsible for the crowding of people in the slums and the resulting disease, crime and poverty. If unoccupied land were taxed so that it would no longer be profitable to hold it idle, it would be built upon, the pressure on the crowded districts would be relieved, and everything would move on to happiness.

Several new Canadian towns have adopted the plan and have prospered during its operation, but whether the prosperity is due to their newness or to the Single Tax is not clear. Many converts have been made to Henry George's doctrine and there is a pretty general feeling that land values have to say the least, not contributed their share of taxes.

But the question rises whether it is fair that the owners of land which costs nothing to protect should bear much of the burden of taxation, while the buildings, which demand so many expenses for fire protection and other purposes should go wholly free. Moreover it is not proved to the satisfaction of all that the filling up of all unoccupied land with buildings would be a great improvement, or that the happiness and morality of any large number of people would be promoted by doing so."