

Trying to Draw Out a Professor

A NEW JERSEY editor, recently, having undertaken to publish a series of articles on "a greater city," found towards the end of his survey that he was compelled to advance some reason why two facts confronted those who, by bringing about civic improvements, increase of population and considerable enlargement of building operations, endeavored to create larger individual opportunities for making a living, as to be distinguished from aggregate possessions or mere increase of taxable property. The first fact to which he had called attention was that in a large city, grown in a few years from a small one, ordinary people, dependent upon their labor or fixed incomes, did not appear to be any better off than before. The second was that there appeared to be no advantage for such people at any time to move from a small place to a large city. Here, he said, in his editorial remarks, was a phenomenon that required explanation. Apparently there was no advantage to be gained by booming the growth of a city, so far as the ordinary family is concerned. This editor closed the next to his last article by saying that he would ask a real, live professor of political economy to help solve the problem if he could—or would.

Thereupon a letter was addressed to one of the great national colleges, "to the professor of political economy," asking for an explanation of the phenomenon referred to.

After a while a courteous reply was received. The name of the professor need not be mentioned, but it may be said that he is one who is supposed to know about everything there is to know as to the Single Tax idea.

Here is substantially what the gentleman says: "Your questions are not easy to answer in a brief letter. The chief reason why with the growth of cities no very important benefits accrue to the mass of the people seems to be the working of competition. As better opportunities appear in any locality, they are taken up by men eager to improve their economic condition. Hence with freedom of movement we would not find very different levels in any two localities readily accessible one to the other. I believe the Single Taxers are about right in their contention that growth of cities benefits land owners, and profits non-landholders but little. There are, of course, many exceptions to this statement, but many landholders gain conspicuously. On the other hand many landholders lose heavily, due to the shifts in population accompanying city growth. It is in general rather foolish for merchants and business men to contribute money to funds for 'booming' a town. They pay much of the costs, and the landowners get most of any gain that may come. With the growth of a town, business men find their business cannot expand since new competitors come in. Back of this whole question is the question of population—the problem of what the best proportion between numbers and resources may be in a country at a given time. Population may grow so rapidly in a country that the owners of lands, mines and other things that cannot be increased in quantity indefinitely will gain, while increased competition is the lot of many other classes in the

community. Many careful thinkers believe that the fact that real wages did not change very materially in the twenty years prior to 1914 was due to the very heavy immigration during that period."

The letter of this professor is quite an interesting one, but it is just a little on the "good Lord, good devil" order. In the last three sentences the writer consciously or unconsciously tries to minimize the conclusions referred to in the first part of his letter. He does not anywhere point out clearly that the competition caused by men "eager to improve their economic condition" is a competition for locations, showing itself in increased land values, these values tending to equalize advantages between one location and another, and actually preventing the receipt of any better opportunity by those seeking it. The competition for location and the absorption of advantage by increase of land value is not clearly distinguished from competition in business lines. The professor appears to be a little confused here.

Again, reference to "exceptions," where some landholders lose and some gain as land values change, seems to indicate that the professor wants to hedge a little, or really believes that when a general condition is under examination where the absorption of advantage by land values generally is brought into view as the cause of failure of the mass of the people to gain by growth and civic improvement—it is of consequence whether there are or are not individual exceptions.

Perhaps some of our readers will feel inclined further to comment on this letter from a modern professor of political economy, so ingeniously obtained by a New Jersey editor.

Single Tax Party Activity

THE Single Tax Party of New York City at the late municipal election had a full ticket in the field and for the first time in the history of the movement the Single Tax appeared on the ballot. The workers were few and financial contributions insignificant. About a half dozen workers were all that were drafted as the campaign begun, though this number was added to as the days succeeded. A vote of nearly 1500 was cast for one candidate on the ticket, but that was many more than were looked for. But what is more important converts were enrolled, and the little knot of party workers nearly quadrupled for future contests.

During the campaign two trucks with Single Tax inscriptions were drawn up and down the thoroughfares, and in the night time at Broadway and 42nd Street an electric flashlight conveyed its message to a million passers-by.

Beginning this week two lecturers will tour the State in the interests of party organization and will visit every county. A full State ticket is in contemplation and the work of obtaining signatures for nominations will be begun at once. Fuller details will appear in our next issue.

This year in four States, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, Single Taxers will have full State tickets in the field.