

THE SINGLE TAX. May, 1897

The Single Tax and the Freeholder.

An interesting discussion is now going on in the correspondence columns of the Hastings Times between Arthur Clayden, who maintains that Henry George's solution of the Land Question would be "unconstitutional," "sheer robbery," "anarchy of the worst description," and our friend James Macrae, who shows that it is only pure and simple justice. We give the following extract from the Single Tax side:—

But to come to the illustration which Mr. Clayden gives as an unanswerable argument against Henry George's method. Of course no reform has ever been stopped or can ever be stopped by a few isolated "hard cases," real or imaginary. But let that pass.

Mr. Clayden supposes I have inherited a snug homestead of 200 acres, and thinks I should probably have used club reasoning with Mr. George, had he looked me up at my paternal farm, and told me he proposed to "practically dispossess me of it by taxing me 20s. in the £ of its value." Mr. George would have put his meaning more clearly to a farmer, who is primarily a land user, and whom he by no means confounds with the mere land owner, or farmer of farmers.

What happened between us when he looked me up was this —He not only reminded me of the glaring consequences of land monopoly and the threatening revolution, but he pointed out that even great landlords themselves were more or less victims of the evil -- morally, if not financially—for injustice could not be practised with impunity, and in the long run really profited no one; that as slavery was bad even for the slave-owners, as England's injustice to Ireland did incalculable harm to England herself, so squalid poverty and degradation and drunkenness and crime reacted on those who seemed to be placed far above their reach. As for such landholders as small freeholders, yeoman farmers, and homestead owners, the slightest discussion showed that they had everything to gain by the proposed change.

And he proved to me, both from historical facts and by reference to contemporary everyday life—and this impressed me exceedingly—that the

general body of citizens are actually paying their rates and taxes twice over, once to the ground landlord in the shape of ground rent, and a second time to the tax and rate collectors. He showed me, too, very clearly, that the Single Tax of 20s. in the £ on land values, although a tax in name, was not a tax in reality; that it was a return to the community ; also that it was practically a revival, under a better form, of the old English system under which the landholders, for benefits received, supported the cost of government and the defence of the country.

"With regard to your own case," he said, "your 200 acres of average land with the improvements on it would bring a rental of £200 a year, of which, roughly speaking, one-third, or £60, would be for the bare land, and the balance for the improvements. This £66 is just the value of the advantages attaching to 200 acres of average agricultural land in well-governed, well-defended, populous, go-ahead England. If your homestead were in Russia, this value would be less for the same area and fertility, and in Turkey it would be less still.

This value you personally do not earn; it is the creation of the community, and it is, therefore, no injustice if the community collects it to pay for government, and defence and other common expenses. And more than that, if the community fails to use this apparently God-appointed fund for its common needs, but allows it wholly or partially to go into private pockets, there is more or less of mischief and injustice; for, on the one hand, the community must appropriate private earnings in order to pay its expenses, and on the other hand, some people are receiving more than they earn, while others are *pro tanto* failing to receive what they do earn.

"Well, this £66 of community-earned increment which comes into your hands, is what you would have to hand back to the community under full Single Tax. And you would remain in undisturbed possession so long as you handed it back. Do you think that just or unjust?"

"It is the very quintessence of justice," I replied. "I see quite distinctly that I never ought to have had that £66—still, one does not like giving it up."

"Well," replied Mr. George, "you would have the approval of your conscience, and of course the change would come gradually. Then you would have other consolations and compensations. You would have no other rates or taxes, however much you might improve your farm, or your house, or your stading.

That would save you £15 in rates, and £7 in indirect taxation, or £22 in all. Then you would save another £20 in having no further calls on you for the local voluntary schools, the soup kitchen, the village hospital, the coal and blanket club, the orphans' day at the seaside, and so on. Then as a business man you would share, at least to the extent of twice £20, in the vastly increased prosperity of the country that would follow the removal of all taxation from industry. And it would surely be well worth another £20 to live in a pleasant world from which much of the vice and degradation and all involuntary poverty and the haunting fear of poverty had been banished, and where the execrated workhouse no longer loomed repellent at the end of the worker's life. Then I leave it to you to say how much it would be worth to be free from anxiety about the future of your children, to know that your three boys, subject to their good behaviour, would always be sure of making their way in life, and would no longer risk being crushed out by the present one-sided competition; that your two girls would no doubt be sought in marriage by independent young freeholders; or, if they did not choose to marry, they would certainly be able, even with their own exertions, to enjoy something far better than genteel poverty; and then--"

"That will do," I exclaimed, as I grasped his hand. "I am with you, heart and soul; and God grant the good time may come speedily! " And so the cause goes on, winning converts by its own inherent justice and sweet reasonableness.