

HOLDING AND WITHHOLDING.

By FREDK. VERINDER.

"Land is the mother, and Labour is the father of all wealth."

—Sir William Petty.

"You take my life when you take the means whereby I live."

—Shakespeare.

Said an ancient writer, long before the times of Petty and Shakespeare:—

"There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to Poverty. . . ."

"He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him."

—Proverbs xi. 24, 26.

What, then, of him that withholdeth the land from which alone the corn can be produced?

The landholder who allows the worker to use "his" land, and charges him rent for it, is at any rate giving him a chance to live. It may be only a poor chance; he may have to work hard and fare harder, for he must share what he produces with the landlord. But it is a "sort of a chance."

But the land withholder denies him the right to produce by stopping the very source from which all production flows; by withholding from the willing workers the opportunity of growing or earning the corn and other means by which they live.

He is driving into the ranks of the Unemployed the men who might be growing the corn, and milling it, and baking it into bread; the men who might be hewing the coal, and winning the ironstone, and burning the one to smelt the other, and fashioning the pig-iron into steel, and the steel into machines; the men who might be digging the china-clay and the tin out of the land, and making them into pots and pans; the men who might be shaping the clay into bricks; the men who might be building the houses which the people need, on the valuable but vacant plots that surround our towns.

"He that withholdeth" building land is responsible for the high rents of the houses we have, and for the often overcrowded condition of those who live in them. He is responsible, not only for the starvation of those whom he shuts out from his own land, but for the low wages of those who are in work. His withholding "tendeth to poverty." Nothing keeps down wages so effectively as the presence of a mass of unemployed men who must work for some wages, however pitiful, or starve. And nothing makes unemployment so constantly or effectively as the withholding of land from uses of productive labour.

What we are asking the Government to do is to tax all land on its true value: to tax the holder of land who is using it well no more than the withholder of land who is keeping it idle: to tax the withholder of his unused land no less than the improving landlord is taxed.

The landlord who is already putting his land to the best use, or is allowing others to do so, has least to fear from the taxation of Land Values. The man who will be "hit" first and hardest by the taxation of land according to its value for the best use to which it might be put is the man who is not putting the land to any use at all. He is injuring the community, denying the workers access to the land, without which they cannot produce the good things they need. The "injury" to himself, of which the withholder of land complains, amounts chiefly to this: that the pressure of the tax will compel him either to use the land himself for productive purposes, or to allow someone else to do so; that is, to afford new opportunities for the employment of labour and give new impetus to the production of wealth.

He that withholdeth land, the people shall—tax him.

THE PARAMOUNT ISSUE.

[FROM THE OUTLOOK (New York), June, 1910.]

The paramount issue in the United States is represented by the legal phrase Special Interests vs. Public Welfare.

We do not agree with those who condemn all representatives of Special Interests as corrupt politicians and commend all pleaders for public welfare as pure patriots. Some high-minded men represent Special Interests; some demagogues represent Public Welfare. But the trial of a cause is not a prize contest in which the verdict is awarded to the best lawyer. The case of Special Interests vs. Public Welfare is not to be determined by the merits of the men who represent their clients. It is to be determined by the character of the issues involved and the

probable effects of the public decision on the Nation. All the issues now before the country are different forms of this fundamental issue.

Protection: Shall we organize our tariff to protect Special Interests, or to promote Public Wealth and Public Welfare? Shall we determine our tariff by balanced agreements between the Special Interests, so as to give something to each one? or by a disinterested and non-partisan estimate of the effect on the general public—the consumer no less than the manufacturer?

Conservation: Shall we invite Special Interests to take possession of our mines and our water powers, in the faith that private enterprise will develop public wealth? or shall we keep them under public control in order to insure the participation in their benefits of all the people?

Forestry: Shall we deliver over our forests to the lumbermen to transform them as rapidly as possible into building lumber and wood pulp? or shall we so control them that our trees shall be a perpetual crop—always drawn upon, never exhausted?

Reclamation: Shall we leave private enterprise to pick out such lands as it thinks profitable for the private person to reclaim, and leave the reclaimed lands to be the perpetual property of the corporations which have reclaimed them? or shall we reclaim them by the public and for the public?

Railway Rate Regulation: Shall we leave our National highways to be owned and operated by private parties for private profit? or shall we bring them so under public control that all the public—the big shipper and the little shipper, the big town and the little town—shall profit on equal terms by the service which the highways render?

The peril of allowing the Nation's wealth to fall into a few hands is emphasised by modern writers on government. For example:

W. E. H. Lecky: "The evils that spring from mere plutocracy are great and increasing. One of the most evident is the enormous growth of luxurious living. The evil does not, in my opinion, lie in the multiplication of pleasures. . . . What is really to be deplored is the inordinate and ever-increasing expenditure on things which add nothing, or almost nothing, to human enjoyment. It is the race of luxury, the mere ostentation of wealth, which values all things by their cost. . . . But the worst aspect of plutocracy is the social and political influence of dishonestly acquired wealth. . . . No one who is acquainted with society in England, France, and America can be blind to the disquieting signs of the increasing prominence of this evil. With the decline of rank and the breaking down of old customs, conventionalities, and beliefs, the power of wealth in the world seems to grow."

And again: "It is not the existence of inherited wealth, even on a very large scale, that is likely to shake seriously the respect for property; it is the many examples which the conditions of modern society present of vast wealth acquired by shameful means, employed for shameful purposes, and exercising an altogether undue influence in society and in the State. When triumphant robbery is found among the rich, subversive doctrines will grow among the poor."

More explicit in its bearing on American life is the warning of James Bryce: "Plutocracy used to be regarded as a form of oligarchy, and opposed to democracy. But there is a strong plutocratic element infused into American democracy; and the fact that it is entirely unrecognised in constitutions makes it not less potent, and possibly more mischievous. The influence of money is one of the dangers which the people have always to guard against, for it assails not merely the legislatures, but the party machinery, and its methods are as numerous as they are insidious."

History illustrates and enforces these warnings.

The concentration of wealth in the control of a few, the consequent growth of luxury on the one side and of discontent on the other, the simultaneous development of a privileged class and of a proletariat, the contempt of the privileged class for the proletariat and the hatred of the proletariat for the privileged class, made Greece an easy prey to Rome. The same conditions in Rome brought her to a similar downfall.

In reading the first volume of Guglielmo Ferrero's "The Greatness and Decline of Rome" one might imagine that he was listening to a modern journalist's description of modern conditions in parts of America. There is the tenement-house—"wooden lodging-houses, many stories high, managed and sub-let by a freedman or a lessee;" high rents for the poorer classes—"the laborers and small tradesmen of Rome would pay heavy rents for a single room;" extravagant rise in land values—"if a man inherited land in Rome or had been early enough in buying