

Observations of a Pessimist

WHEN one converses with some of the educated and so-called intelligent people, or reads what some of them write in magazines and newspapers, he can not help wondering if sound clear thinking is not becoming a lost art. Whatever else education may do, it does not teach people to think. It is probable that most Single Taxers have frequently thought just what Thomas Carlyle says in one of his essays, "The Diamond Necklace":

"But so few are thinkers? Ay, Reader, so few think; there is the rub! Not one in the thousand has the smallest turn for thinking; only passive dreaming and hearsaying, and active babbling by rote. Of the eyes that men do glare withal so few can see. Thus is the world become such a fearful confused Treadmill; and each man's task has got entangled in his neighbor's, and pulls it awry; and the Spirit of Blindness, Falsehood and Distraction, justly named the Devil, continually maintains himself among us. . . ."

It has always been thus, but what seems like such an enigma in this day and age is that so many men who would seem to be qualified by education, training and experience to think along varied lines, broadly and intelligently, are able to think only in narrow grooves. On a few subjects their thoughts are of value. Away from these, their thoughts are queer, warped, grotesque. * * * * *

There is a certain scholarly gentleman whose syndicated essays on commonsense subjects appear in many of the leading daily papers, and whose editorials set in their eye-attracting and attention-holding lines of 10-point bold faced type are to be found in each of a number of daily papers and monthly magazines. On matters of theology, philosophy and kindred subjects he is an authority. But when he expresses his views on taxation, as in the following article, he dispenses with logic and consistency and gives a demonstration of some queer thinking and defective reasoning. The following is just a part of one of his commonsense(?) essays clipped from a metropolitan daily paper.

"The best method of taxation, the one that has the most reason behind it, is what is known as Single Tax. I do not think however, that it would be practical to attain Single Tax at present, as our property system is so complicated and the mass of prejudice against this form of tax is at present so great. No matter how sensible and logical a system is we have to take into account the material we have to work with, which is the public mind. And just now the public mind is both incapable and unwilling to consider the arguments of Single Tax.

"But while the Single Tax, which is taxation at the point of production, is impractical, there is a form of taxation at the other end or the point of consumption, which is entirely feasible. I mean the sales tax.

"The sales tax would levy the entire tax upon the ultimate consumer.....Such a tax would be simple, easily collected and entirely just.

"Under the present system of taxation the government, which should assist business, really impedes, obstructs and annoys business. Instead of helping the prosperity of the country it is injuring it."

The rest of the article is taken up with a criticism of the present income tax. In conclusion he says:

"Let the tax be at one end or the other, either at the point of consumption or at the point of production."

The author of the foregoing "solution to the tax-riddle" has made so many errors that it might be easier to point out where he is right than where he is wrong. How does he arrive at the conclusion that the Single Tax is a tax at the point of production? Since when did landlords produce anything by merely holding land and appropriating the rent therefrom? Two things the author should do: look up in the dictionary the meaning of the word production, and study more about what the Single Tax actually is.

The learned gentleman lacks the courage of his convictions. He admits that the Single Tax "is the best method of taxation," yet he fears that it is not practical on account of the public mind. One who is at all familiar with the Bible can recall that it was largely the public mind of that period, steeped in ignorance and prejudice, which caused Pontius Pilate not to release Jesus, but allowed him to be crucified. Pilate evidently thought it would not be practical to release Jesus.

... "Our property system is so complicated and the mass of prejudice against this form of tax is at present so great," he asserts. In this he is right. Our property system is complicated. Since it is so, because not enough effort has been expended to eliminate some of the complications, is that any reason why it should remain so? And the reason why there is so much prejudice against the Single Tax is because many people are ignorant and misinformed. There are men everywhere like the distinguished author; they believe in the Single Tax and they have the opportunity to influence others, but they will not advocate or work for that which they believe to be right. He speaks of the incapability and the unwillingness of the public mind, as if the public mind were utterly hopeless. Apparently he believes that since it is, it is better not to try to enlighten or improve it.

It is quite unnecessary to take the time or space here to point out the fallacies of his arguments in favor of a sales tax. The readers of this magazine are already familiar with the viciousness and the injustices of the sales tax.

His conclusion is perhaps one of the weakest parts of his dissertation. He insists that taxation should be either at the point of production or at the point of consumption. As if there were no other source left. If the government took the full rent of land neither production nor consumption would be taxed.

By the time this appears in print the widely heralded and much discussed Bok Peace Plan will have been smothered under a mass of later news, such as Washington governmental scandals, discoveries of oil in high political offices, rumors of another war; and forgotten by a large per cent of the people. It will not matter much however, as only a comparatively few gave any serious thought to the plan.

As a commonsense, workable plan to provide permanent world peace, the one which was awarded the \$100,000 and declared the best, is as practicable and has about as much value as the often discussed scheme for extracting gold from sea water. Both are possible, but not feasible.

In the January-February number of *LAND AND FREEDOM* on page 5, in the platform of the Commonwealth Land Party, one reads these words:

"War and strife, now and always due to economic maladjustment, would disappear with the elimination of private ownership of land, which has ever been the basis and the cause of all the world's economic troubles."

This paragraph contains the fundamentals, the foundation for a worth-while peace plan, whose only fault is its simplicity, and simplicity is something which would naturally eliminate it from the consideration of professional peace-plan juries. Unfortunately, there is much in our modern life which is unacceptable because of its simplicity.

L. R. WADE.

The Common Right to Air

THE Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce has reported favorably on the bill of Senator Howell, of Nebraska, relating to radio communication.

The Bill declares that ether is the inalienable possession of the people and the government. Privileges to enjoy the use of the ether may be granted for terms not to exceed two years. The Bill aims to prevent the monopoly of the air.

This is a revolutionary and radical assault upon private property. Daniel Webster declared that a legal title to land extended to the center of the earth and as high as the heavens, or words to that effect. The possession of the air is claimed by the Landlord as his legal right.

Senator Howell is treading on dangerous ground. If one natural element like the air is the inalienable possession of the people, what about the other natural element, land? If air is common property, wherefor not land?

The *New York Times* seems to scent the danger. It questions if the senators know what the mysterious element, ether, is anyhow, and calls physics to its support. "Ether," says the *Times*, "is a hypothetical medium of extreme tenacity and elasticity supposed to be diffused through all space (as well as among the molecules of which solid bodies are composed) and to be the medium of the transmission of light and heat."

That's the talk! Quote a lot of words at 'em. Try the same thing on the fellows who talk about land being the inalienable possession of the people. What is "land" anyway? Something only a little less tenuous than air.

Enemies of the Farmer

THIS publication has from time to time devoted considerable space to discussions of the present conditions in the great agricultural industry of the United States, which, firmly rooted as it is in the soil, is suffering from a nationwide depression causing great hardships to the working farmers. It is highly important that advocates of Land Reform should clearly understand the farmer's situation, since to the plea for free land to the user as a solution of social and economic problems the invariable rejoinder is: "Look at our farmers; they have land, yet the great majority of them are poor, deeply in debt, and hardly able to get a bare living" It is needless to say that this is not a refutation of the claim that with free land available to all who wished to work upon it involuntary poverty would disappear, but it does mislead the unthinking into believing that access to land would not effect any improvement in social conditions.

What the real causes of agricultural depression are we have frequently stated; the essential facts being that through our present system of privilege the farmers are robbed of so large a part of the products of their labor that they have been impoverished. How this robbery is affected is well known to all students of the problem, yet the farmers themselves seem to have no inkling of the truth, and expend their energies in vain attempts to secure relief through fantastic schemes for government loans, or Socialistic plans for controlling production and prices of farm crops. What is practically the only channel through which they can be released so as to put before them the plain truths that will free them from their intolerable bondage,—the farm journals of the country, are blind leaders of the blind. Circulating by the millions these farm papers are as a rule, mere advertising sheets, whose policy is controlled by the advertisers. There are not in the United States today, half-a-dozen farm journals that dare to tell the truth, even though they know it. Cowardly ignorant and foolish, they are in reality barriers against knowledge of the only way in which the farmers can become prosperous. The most urgent need of the American farmer is a fearless and intelligent farm press, that will tell its readers that the way to help the farmers is to take the burdens of taxation off their backs, and destroy the system of privilege that is slowly crushing them.

WHILE we prate of the rights of man there are already among us thousands and thousands who find it difficult to assert the first of natural rights—the right to earn an honest living; thousands who from time to time must accept of degrading charity or starve.—HENRY GEORGE.