

SKETCH OF TWO CHICAGO SINGLE TAXERS RECENTLY PASSED AWAY.

(For the Review).

Within the past six months two prominent citizens of Chicago have passed away who are entitled to a place in the Single Tax necrology, viz.: John Black, who died June 13, 1909, and Robert Atchison, who died October 7, 1909.

Both were natives of Scotland, and both located in Chicago previous to the great fire of 1871, and were therefore, among our older citizens.

Mr. Black was among the very first of the citizens of the West to espouse the Single Tax cause and none was more zealous in propagating its doctrines.

Early in the labor movement he was perhaps the most forceful and active worker in the Knights of Labor, serving as master workman in the South Chicago district.

John Black was born in Glasgow, Scotland, December 17, 1844. In 1866 he emigrated to the United States, first locating in Boston, three years later moving to Chicago. Before coming to this country he had served a thorough apprenticeship at the tinsmith trade in his native city, and when he came to Chicago he established the tinsmith business in co-partnership with an uncle.

Two years later all of his worldly possessions were swept away in the great fire.

He then went to work as a Journeyman at his trade, moving to South Chicago in 1882 where he became the leading spirit in the Knights of Labor.

Brought up as a Covenanter, the bible was his chief study book in his youth.

Having a retentive memory, no one could quote Scripture more fluently and aptly. The strictness of his early training had a tendency to prejudice him against the church. He never became a member, although he never antagonized it.

During his early manhood he was a regular attendant, and throughout his later years, although Unitarian in belief, would attend services of any denomination where the clergyman gave evidence of trying to reach the truth. Being active in the labor movement his attention was called to Progress and Poverty shortly after its first

appearance. He read it with an open mind, and being logical and fearless, he not only accepted its philosophy, but immediately became an active propagandist, continuing so until his death.

Mr. Black worked as a Journeyman until March 1893, when he established the tinsmith business in conjunction with a hardware store.

The country was soon in the midst of a great industrial depression, affecting the district of South Chicago more than at any other point, because its prosperity was dependent mainly on the operation of one great steel plant, the Illinois Steel Company's, now merged into the U. S. Steel Corporation. Mr. Black struggled through this depression and finally succeeded in placing his business on a solid foundation.

His was the leading hardware and tinsmith establishment in this part of Chicago.

He was always outspoken in his economic views, and being a practical man he was practical in his politics, and took an active part in espousing the course of Bryan and Altgeld. His activity in politics was detrimental to his business and for a time he suffered from a boycott by his political opponents.

In 1894 the Rev. Louis H. Mitchell became pastor of the South Chicago Presbyterian Church. Being an earnest seeker as well as preacher of the truth, Mr. Mitchell became attracted towards Mr. Black, and after repeated discussions over the philosophy of Progress and Poverty, he became an avowed apostle of its doctrines. Occupying the pulpit of one of the foremost Protestant churches in South Chicago, Mr. Mitchell was invited to preach the memorial services held the Sunday preceding Memorial Day, on which day the local post of the G. A. R. occupied the seats of honor. Mr. Mitchell devoted little time to bestowing praise on the comrades for their part in preserving the integrity of the Union, and then drew a parallel between Chattel Slavery as it existed in ante-bellum days and industrial Slavery as it exists to day. This service, as conducted in South Chicago, is a Union service, all the Protestant denominations uniting. As it is a patriotic service, the "patriots," of the great party who *saved* the Union

were out in force. Many of these showed their displeasure at the remarks of the speaker by defiantly leaving the church in the midst of the service. Among them were a number of the members of the G. A. R., in whose honor the services were held. This mark of disapprobation caused such a sensation that it culminated in severing the pastoral relations of Mr. Mitchell with the church. With the foregoing church incidents Mr. Black and Mr. Aitchison were both closely related, as they were the spirits that prompted Mr. Mitchell to the bold stand he took in proclaiming the truth.

Mr. Aitchison was an elder and treasurer of the church, and although not so aggressive as Mr. Black, was the most dominant member of the church session, which means also that he was the most influential single member of the congregation. Mr. Mitchell's successor was Rev. Samuel Charles Black, who took hold of the pastorate with a great deal of enthusiasm, as most protestant pastors do in a field which offers such illimitable opportunities as does this part of Chicago. However, before proceeding further with this story, a sketch of Mr. Aitchison is relevant.

Robert Aitchison was born in Berwickshire, Scotland, in 1830. He emigrated to the United States in 1856, and in partnership with his brother, Andrew Aitchison, established the Aitchison Perforating Company in Chicago, removing it to its present site in South Chicago, in 1874, it being the oldest established industry of South Chicago to day. Mr. Aitchison as well as his brother Andrew was a staunch believer in a high protective tariff, and showed his enthusiasm by carrying a torch and wearing uniform in Republican processions. Being natives of the same land, and members of St. Andrew's Society and identified with the industrial interests of South Chicago, an attachment soon sprung up between Black and Aitchison. They had frequent meetings, at all of which the tariff was the main subject of discussion. Aitchison was loth to give in to Black's flawless logic, but when he did, went the whole distance. He in turn became a Single Tax propagandist, but realizing how difficult it was for him to yield to his early

prejudices he was much more tolerant in manner and much more tactful than his teacher. However, whenever opportunity opened he made good use of it, and he was responsible in bringing Mr. Mitchell in contact with Mr. Black. He was not alone in his work as a propagandist among his employees, but had the co-operation of his brother, his business partner, in proclaiming the Single Tax doctrines.

Mr. Aitchison was also reared in the Covenanter faith and from childhood had been a regular attendant at church. However, he did not make an open profession of the faith and unite with the church until he had attained mature manhood. For more than twenty years before the main incident I am about to relate occurred he had been the leading member of the session. We all remember the abuse that was hurled at Gov. Altgeld by the press of the country when he granted amnesty to the imprisoned anarchists. The pulpits of the city of Chicago as a rule joined in the hue and cry, and in a sermon devoted to civic matters the Rev. Mr. Black regaled a large congregation by repeating some of the falsehoods published by the press about Gov. Altgeld. Mr. Aitchison having some difficulty in hearing occupied a front pew. When the pastor began his reference to Gov. Altgeld Mr. Aitchison leaned forward with his hand to his ear so that he could get the full utterance of his pastor. Finally under the tenseness of the situation he sprang to his feet, and in a defiant attitude blurted out in his Scotch dialect, "It's a damned lie!" picked up his hat, walked down the aisle and out of the church. After such a *denouement* the consternation that followed can readily be left to the readers' imagination. However, to get its full significance one must consider the age, character and the position in the community of the offender. Here was an elder, 70 years of age, who for more than twenty years had been one of the chief spiritual advisers of the ministers of the church, and who had charge of its financial interest at the same time; a man whose most intimate associates had never heard him use a profane or obscene word, who commanded the respect of the entire community on account of his uprightness of character

and consistent Christian life. Realizing this, and moved perhaps more by his mortification over the affair, Mr. Aitchison immediately expressed a desire to meet with the pastor and session and make contrition for his offence. His apology was accepted, but Mr. Black requested that he relinquish his official positions, a request in which he cheerfully acquiesced. This action of the pastor aroused the ire of the congregation, and his pastorate was short lived there after. Mr. Black was succeeded by the Rev. Donald K. Campbell, from whom I first learned of this episode. Mr. Campbell further informed me that shortly after he assumed the pastorate he called on Mr. Aitchison to urge him to accept the offices he had relinquished. He finally yielded to the appeals, and again assumed the position of elder, which he held until his death.

For several years Mr. Aitchison had been an invalid. During the last months of his illness, among his most frequent visitors was Alec Pernod, a liquor dealer of South Chicago, whose conversion to the Single Tax philosophy was chiefly due to the propaganda work of John Black and Robert Aitchison. Pernod has been actively engaged in the liquor business most of his life, but is now the most indefatigable Single Tax worker in South Chicago. Notwithstanding the taboo the church has put on those identified with the liquor business, at the earnest request of the family of Mr. Aitchison, Alec Pernod was a pall-bearer at Mr. Aitchison's funeral. It must have seemed passing strange to the large concourse of church people who attended Mr. Aitchison's funeral to witness a liquor dealer acting as pall bearer to an elder of the Presbyterian church. But the family of Robert Aitchison, knew that nothing they could have done in performing the last sad rites, would have given him more pleasure than to have his co-worker in establishing Justice among men, assist in consigning his body to mother earth. Comparatively few of the Single Taxers of Chicago were acquainted with Black and Aitchison, although both were active members of the South Chicago Single Tax Club.

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### THE FELS COMMISSION.

On another page it is stated that report of the progress of the Fels' Fund Commission appears in this issue. This report is postponed until Jan.-Feb. issue when matters of great interest may be detailed in full. The Literature Committee will also be able to furnish a full report by that time.

THE Brooklyn Single Tax Club is showing renewed life. This club of which W. B. Vernam is president, will hold lectures during the coming Winter and Spring at Lotus Hall, corner Clinton Ave. and Fulton. Mr. Henry George, Jr., was one of its speakers on Friday night, Nov. 26, his subject being "The Land Tax Fight in Great Britain."

### GARRISON MEMORIAL MEETING IN BOSTON.

A memorial meeting for William Lloyd Garrison was held at Park street church, Boston, on Oct. 12. Rev. Chas. F. Dole presided, and among the speakers were Prof. W. E. B. DuBois, of Atlanta, Ga. Louis F. Post, Rev. Anna B. Shaw and Frank Stephens. The speakers told of Mr. Garrison's work in the different lines of reform in which he was interested.

The meeting was largely attended, many of the friends of the late leader coming from distant cities.

THIS is a small world. Royden Powell is a Single Taxer all the way from Adelaide, Australia, and in November was in New York city. While riding in the subway he saw a gentleman opposite reading the Single Tax REVIEW. He inquired the publication office of the REVIEW, and exchanged cards with the gentleman. Mr. Powell is a quiet, forceful young man who brings gratifying news of the progress of our cause in Australia and England. In the latter country he attended a number of Budget and anti-Budget meetings. While he was in New York he spent much of his time with the local workers of the Manhattan Single Tax Club.