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The Single Tax. [CHAPTER+ILLUSTRATION]

The Single Tax.

Written for The Call
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Already the City of San Francisco has a peculiar interest for earnest and faithful single-taxers all over the world. And this interest must continue to grow as the coming years roll by, until, by the adoption of the single tax, the reign of justice is ushered in and poverty, with its horrid train of vice and misery, shall disappear from the earth, leaving behind it only the monstrous memories of a night forever past. Then will hosts of happy pilgrims from earth's remotest bounds wend their way to the City by the Golden Gate to see the place where the single-tax cause had its origin, where "Progress and Poverty" was written and first published to the world, and where the "prophet of San Francisco", and his earliest disciples formed the first organization to spread the light which he had revealed to them.

On the 27th of July, 1871, Henry George published at San Francisco a pamphlet of forty-eight pages, entitled "Our Land and Land Policy, National and State." In this pamphlet Mr. George forcibly pointed out the criminal folly of our National and State governments in squandering the public lands, and clearly foretold the evils that have since followed the practical exhaustion of those lands. He also presented the germ of the idea which he has since worked out and more fully developed in his subsequent works. The same year, 1871, Mr. George established the *Evening Post* of San Francisco as a penny paper, and during the whole course of his connection with the paper actively promulgated his views on the land question in its columns. On the Fourth of July, 1877, Mr. George was the orator, and at the California Theater delivered a masterly oration on "The American Republic, Its Dangers and Its Possibilities," in which he clearly and eloquently presented his views upon the same subject. Toward the end of that year a few earnest men to whom Mr. George had, from time to time, explained his doctrines, and who had read his pamphlets, his

editorials in the Post, and his Fourth of July oration, and who had become convinced of the truth of his teachings, met in an office on Clay street, above Montgomery street, for., the purpose of forming an organization for the propagation of their views. They organized under the name of "The Land Reform League of California," of which Joseph Leggett was elected president and P.J. Murphy secretary. This was the first society ever organized on the basis of the single-tax principle. It numbered about a dozen members, among whom were Henry George, James G. Maguire, William M. Hinton, John M. Days, A. L. Mann, John Swett and a few others whose names I am now unable to recall. The league held meetings during the following two or three years, endeavored unsuccessfully to secure the nomination of Mr. George as a delegate to the constitutional convention by the Workingmen's party held several public meetings throughout the City, which were addressed by Mr. George and others, arranged for a lecture by him, which was r delivered in Metropolitan Temple on the 26th of March, 1878, on the subject, "Why is Work Scarce, Wages Low and Labor Restless?" and published and distributed several thousand copies of this lecture.

Prior to the election for delegates to the constitutional convention in June, 1878, the league printed a series of four questions, which it sent to each of the candidates at that election and decided to support those who returned satisfactory answers to the questions. Mr. George was a candidate for delegate on the Democratic ticket at that election and received 3183 votes, which was a little over 500 votes more than- the next highest candidate on that ticket received.

The year following, 1879, Mr. George completed his great work, "Progress and Poverty." He was unable to find a publisher in the East,' whereupon his old partner in the Post, William M. Hinton, undertook to print an edition of 500 copies. This edition, which was got out in a manner most creditable to the publisher, met with a ready sale and was widely reviewed both in this country and in England. This edition is known as the author's edition, and is , now highly prized by all who are fortunate enough to possess a copy and is eagerly sought after by those riot so fortunately. After this Mr. George experienced no

difficulty in finding a publisher. The next organization formed on singletax lines in this City was called the "California Tax Reform League," which was organized in Lower . Metropolitan ; Hall about the year 1885. Its board of directors were : . James ; G. Maguire, P. J. Heaiy, Herman , Roger, Kate Kennedy, George Cumming. K. M. Smith and E. W. Thurman. This league held I public meetings for discussion and reprinted " and distributed an edition of 20,000 copies of Mr. George's Metropolitan Temple lecture. It did a very valuable work of education on economic questions. . The next organization of single taxers in this City. was formed about the close of the year 1886. and held meetings every week in B'nai B'rith Hall under the name of the Land and Labor Club. This club reorganized as the San Francisco Anti-Poverty Society at Grand Central Hall, corner of Sixth and Market, streets, where it held meetings every Sunday night for something over: a year. The society next moved to 909 Market street and changed its name to the "Single Tax Society of San Francisco." Here the society remained several years, holding meetings every Sunday evening. It also maintained a reading-room in the old Jesuit building on Market street for several years. It now meets every Wednesday evening at Foresters' Hall, 102 O'Farrell street. I believe I am well within bounds in saying that during the many years the society has been in existence no other instrumentality has done more to instruct the people of San Francisco in sound economic principles. The man of ordinary natural capacity who has ' regularly attended its meetings and carefully read the literature it has distributed is able to hold his own in the discussion of economic questions with the best informed men of his time. The range of subjects discussed at" its meetings has always been and still is wide and varied, taking in everything pertaining to human well-being. ' Its members have actively and ' effectively championed every practical reform calculated to advance the public welfare, notably in the case of the Australian ballot reform. As a society it has done an educational work in economics in this community of * which it has just .reason to be proud. And from its meetings the members have derived an instruction and drawn an inspiration that have greatly aided them in their individual efforts to advance the cause to which they are so earnestly devoted. It may be of interest to know how believers in Mr. George's

land views came to be called single-taxers, and the doctrine of land value taxation the single tax. On the 12th of January, 1887, Thomas G. Shearman, the eminent lawyer, economist and statistician, read a paper before the Constitution Club of New York City. At the request of Mr. George, who was then publishing the Standard, he sent it in for publication. When the article was set up the foreman asked Mr. George what heading he should give it, and he told him to call it the "Single Tax." It went into the Standard of May 28, 1887, under that head, and was afterward published under the same title in the Land and Labor Library in the form of a tract. The movement was at the time looking for a name, and it adopted the title thus given to Mr. Shearman's article.

Great movements have sometimes had to go a long way from home to get their names. The followers of Christ were first called Christians not at Jerusalem but at Antioch, and single-taxers got their name not at San Francisco but at New York.

San Francisco ought to be the first to accept and adopt the gospel of the single tax, for it was first proclaimed to her people. But unless she speedily bestirs herself her sister city of New York will get the start of her in adopting, as she did in naming, the single tax. The manner in which she turned out to welcome and honor her prophet in 1890 when he passed through on his way to Australia inspired a hope that she might lead the way, but she is too far from the center of thought to justify that hope. Some one may here inquire, What is the single tax? I am not writing this article for the very few who now need an answer to that question. I refer them to the Century Dictionary for a definition of the term. It is the remedy for the ills that now oppress and threaten the existence of our civilization which the people are going to adopt. This conclusion is justified both by reason and observation. An eminent citizen of this State is reported to have lately stated, as the result of his observation, that the people are going to adopt the single tax, whether it is right or wrong. When he comes to investigate the subject more deeply he will discover that the people are going to adopt the single tax because they know it is right. Reason teaches us that a people occupying the vantage ground now held by the American

people cannot permit their civilization to perish from the earth. Those who imagine that this Republic is going the way of the Roman republic have not considered the differences between the two peoples. Reason also teaches us that such a people as the American people are reasonably sure to adopt for the preservation of what they cherish those means that involve the least cost and that will cause the least disturbance to or interference with the institutions they have established.

Kidd says that the end which the developmental forces at work in our civilization • are apparently destined to achieve in the social life of the people is, to complete the process of evolution in progress by eventually bringing all the people into the rivalry of life, not only on a footing of political equality, but on conditions of equal social opportunities. The single tax furnishes not merely the shortest, but the only road to that end. To those I who are able to see only the surface of things this fact is obscured by the jumble of "reforms" that now clouds the social atmosphere. But the fact is there, and it will soon be clearly perceived by all. The single tax is in harmony with American sentiment, thought and aspiration. It clears the way to that greater freedom and that fuller opportunity which it is the ambition of every true American to attain. It will restore and forever preserve that personal independence and - magnanimity which , freedom and boundless opportunity in the past stamped upon the American National character. What the single tax will do for us is thus eloquently set forth in the closing chapter of "Progress and Poverty": "If, while there is yet time, we turn to Justice -; and obey her, if we trust Liberty and follow her, the dangers that now threaten must disappear, the forces that now menace will turn to agencies of elevation.

With want destroyed, with greed changed to noble passions; with the fraternity that is born of equality taking the place of the jealousy and fear that now : array men against each other; with mental power loosed by conditions that give to the hum- ' blest comfort and leisure, and who shall measure the heights to which our civilization may soar? Words fail the thought! It is the. golden age of which poets have

sung ;, and high-raised seers ; have . told in .metaphor! It is the glorious vision which ' has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendor. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity— the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and ; its gates of pearl ! It is the reign - of the Prince of Peace!"