

The New Abolition

The Best Title For The "Single-Taxism of Henry George"—That Great Moral Reform With the Intensely Practical Name

By WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, son of the great emancipator

LABOR, too long insensible to the conditions which have crushed it, begins to ask the reason for its burdens and to perceive that they are possible only so long as passive ignorance prevails. For poverty comes not of the gods, but is self-imposed. And labor may in its desperation organize to revenge its wrongs by strikes and boycotts; but they are powerless while the usurpation of the owners of the earth extracts the product of their industry through¹ (the private appropriation of monopoly, economic and speculative) rent.²

We preach a new evangel of reason and of life, and repel as blasphemous the aspersion of divine goodness. The fault is in ourselves, not in our stars. Self-government is not intricate, and taxation is as simple as the daily trade of the citizen with his grocer, but as an instrument of spoliation and extraction it has to be disguised. Personal interests underlie the public weal, and individuals grow rich because the masses are defrauded.

The great truth that binds us together dawned on me gradually. The "Cat"³ revealed itself in a very fragmentary way. I had heard of Henry George, and having had some acquaintance with professional labor reformers of an uninspiring kind, I put him down in my mind as one of that fluent but work-shunning brotherhood. I date my new birth from the memorable evening when I picked up by chance the *Nineteenth Century* magazine with Mr. George's reply to the Duke of Argyle.⁴ I had a great respect for the duke. He had married a daughter of that truly noble Duchess of Sutherland who was a steadfast friend of the

American Abolitionists, and the duke himself had stood by the North in the Civil War, with John Bright and our other brave defenders in that dark hour. The idea of Henry George coping with him! But my curiosity to see what he could say at once gave way to the fascination of that inimitable style. While the eloquence of the appeal moved me, the reasoning touched my conscience and my heart.

The revelation came in *Progress and Poverty*, and in it its author met the rare qualities of the seer and statesman. The *Single-Tax*,⁵ that intensely practical name for a great moral reform, fails to suggest the uplifting power of the movement,⁶ but it makes plain our METHOD⁷ of procedure and saves endless explanations.

We are the *New Abolitionists*, because our object (the abolition of the undeserved poverty of the masses) is to be attained purely by the abolition of vicious taxes—taking them off one by one, until land-values (i.e. ground rent) alone supply the government with revenue. While working for the ideal society where JUSTICE shall make CHARITY obsolete, we strike at the obstacles which lie nearest our hand.

So, although we use the term *Single-Tax* to give a distinct idea of our method, it is in no sense a burden, does not partake of the nature of a tax, and cannot enter into the cost of production.⁸ This is an important point, because our claim for the justice of the *Single-Tax* rests upon the impossibility of shifting the tax upon labor; and the trouble with the present system is, that taxes are made to be shifted and eventually are unloaded upon the shoulders of the people least able to bear them. Hence we now have unequal conditions of living, low wages and undeserved poverty.

(Carefully selected portions of a speech delivered before the Chicago Single-Tax Club, September 3, 1891)

NOTES—(1) *Condition of Labor*, footnote, pp.13-14, Fels Fund Edition, and *Progress and Poverty*, Bk.9, Ch.2, pars.7 & 8. (2) *Ibid.*, Bk.5, Ch.2, and Bk.7, Ch.2. (3) *Prophet of San Francisco*, Louis F. Post, p.12. (4) *Property in Land*. (5) *Prog. & Pov.* Bk.8, Ch.4, Par.13. (6) *Ibid.* Bks. 9 & 10. (7) *Ibid.* Bk.8, Ch.2. (8) *Ibid.* Bk.8, Ch.3, Sec.2, par.4; & Ch.4, par.15.

Progress and Poverty (\$1.00 a copy, postpaid) and other books by Henry George may be obtained from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 11 Park Place, New York City