

---

May 9, 1896 The Outlook, page 866

## The Single-Tax Theory

To the Editors of The Outlook:

Priscilla Leonard's article on the single-tax campaign in Delaware, published in The Outlook of April 11, is unfair in several particulars.

It is not true that the single-taxers propose to let railroads go free of all taxation. On the contrary, they have always claimed that the highly valuable land used by the railroads as road-beds, terminals, etc., should pay a larger proportion of the public expenses than it does now.

Neither is it true that the single-tax speakers in Delaware have promised that their pet reform will bring the millennium. This is a cheap witticism which has often been aimed at far-reaching reforms. It is beneath the dignity of a serious critic of the single tax.

What has the fact that the speakers who have been talking single tax in Delaware are from other States got to do with the merits of the system they propose? It seems to me that the attempt to create prejudice against the "foreigners" from Philadelphia, New York, or Boston is unworthy of any one who aims to be fair.

Single-taxers do not admit that in order to introduce their tax system "everything will have to be upset." The abolition of all taxes on personal property, improvements, etc., can be done gradually, without any radical change in existing systems.

The silly assertion that the Delaware campaigners are promising "an increase of wages every day," credited to a Wilmington paper, is of itself sufficient proof of the lack of real arguments against the single tax. It may be that there are serious objections to Henry George's doctrine of land taxation. Your correspondent certainly does not mention them.

Whidden Graham.

## The Single-Tax Campaign in Delaware

by Priscilla Leonard

April 11, 1896

The single-tax campaign in Delaware at the present time is certainly an aggressive one. What with tents and stereopticons, a weekly newspaper, a regiment of uniformed propagandists tramping unweariedly through the little State, and haranguing the gaping agriculturist whenever he can be induced to listen; what with money pouring in from the single-taxers of every State in the Union, from Maine to Texas; what with orations from Henry George, Father McGlynn, and "Jerry" Simpson, to say nothing of numberless lesser lights; what with cart-loads of tracts and over a score of single-tax "clubs" through the State, each a center of light to lighten the darkness of Delaware ignorance -- surely, with all these agencies of the new gospel at work, it will be the Diamond State's own fault if she is not converted and sitting at the feet of these modern apostles by the time the next Legislature meets, on the first day of 1897.

The single-tax doctrine has the merit of being exquisitely simple. Here is its main proposition, as expressed in its own newspaper, "Justice," published weekly in Wilmington: "In round numbers, about \$1,300,000 is raised in Delaware by the present system of taxation. The United States census gives the total valuation of Delaware real estate as \$129,182,087. As a rule, it has been found that land values are about equal to the value of improvements, and therefore Delaware land values amount to about \$65,000,000. A tax of 2% on the land values of Delaware would, therefore, raise \$1,300,000, which is almost exactly the amount raised under the present system."

The clear argument is, therefore: "Accept our plan, which wipes out all these different and cumbersome taxes. Let banks, railroads, and liquor men go free, and the owner of land alone be the tax-bearer of the community. The experiment has never been tried; but it is sure to succeed, and will certainly bring the millenium. You are a small State; we have no interest in this matter; we are sincere and disinterested apostles from outside, and so you can trust us to know your needs better than you do yourselves. Come now; at the election next November give us full control; that is all we ask for. You are going to elect a Governor, all the elective officers, half the Senators, and all the Representatives -- very well, give all these to us, and then we can show you our theory in practice, for the first time, at your sole expense. To be sure, we will have to upset everything in order to begin, but think of the beautiful object-lesson you will be to all the other States before we are through with you!

In response to this enticing invitation Delaware really says very little, and appears to be concealing her feelings, if we may trust one of the New Jersey leaders of the movement, who says: "The Society for the Suppression of Truth exists in Delaware, and has upon its roll of membership the leading newspapers, clergymen, and privileged classes, whose plan of operation is to maintain a dignified conspiracy of silence." The leading newspapers have said something, though, for one of them remarked lately that "the single-taxers promise too much -- continuous work, increase of wages every day or two, no taxes, no hard times, no idle moments," and that such a "wonderful and mysterious cure-all" is foreign to the previous experience of political economists. The politicians, big and little, are also most unkindly indifferent. They say that the class which accepts such theories is not a numerous one in Delaware, and that it is not worth while to take the movement seriously. There is, as the list of taxes shows, no State tax on land, and the farmers, their representatives say, do not want one. Yet the single-taxers are not discouraged; as long as the money comes in, they are willing to keep up the liberal education which Delaware needs all the more for being indifferent to it.

All winter long, in the Wilmington Opera-House, they have had Sunday evening meetings, each addressed by some noted speaker -- Henry George, Father McGlynn, Thomas Shearman, Bolton Hall, Ernest Crosby, "Jerry" Simpson, Congressman Maguire, of California, etc. At first there was a question as to whether such meetings might not be considered a desecration of the Sabbath, and the City Solicitor and the Chief of Police attended the first one, which gave it a tremendous advertisement. But as the single tax announced itself, in answer, as a great religious movement, the authorities concluded to leave it alone, and the meetings have been unmolested. The spring campaign promises to open well, with several new and interesting features. On April 2 -- Jefferson Day -- the Philadelphia single-taxers always give a large dinner in celebration of the occasion, and this year they will give their dinner in Delaware. As soon as mild weather comes 25 men will start on the southern boundary-line of the State, about a mile apart from each other, and march north, distributing literature and holding a meeting each night. They will travel thus in a line across the State, covering it all (this is the advantage of having a small commonwealth to work upon), and will walk about ten miles a day, thus exploring Delaware in every part in about two weeks. The party platform is being prepared, which abolishes all taxes save the one, retaining, however, a poll-tax of one cent!

Delaware was chosen as a field largely in view of the fact that she has nothing in her

State Constitution forbidding the adoption of any tax vagary that her Legislature chooses to indulge in. There seems to be no reason at all why she should not legislate the single tax into existence if she likes it; but then, on the other hand, there is no reason at all why she should do it, unless she wants to; and her indifference is disheartening. If the single-taxers could only rouse a determined opposition, all might yet be well, for we all know that in politics, as in love, "it is best to commence with a little aversion." At present, though they are making a gallant and most picturesque attack, and there is much beating of drums and proclamations of coming victories, the unprejudiced observer cannot see that the intrenchments of the enemy are in any real danger.