

WE are surfeited with statistics, talks of the incidence of taxation, usually quite superficially treated, the smartness of economic and political thinkers more anxious to "show off" than to get to the roots of truth, strutting, vain, pompous in littleness, scrappy, and ostentatious with mere surface thinking. Santayana says, "Never was the human mind master of so many facts and sure of so few principles." This admirably summarizes modern tendencies. Yet the pendulum must swing, as Dr. Little predicts. We shall go "tumbling back to fundamentals." And this will be our opportunity and this is our hope.

ALL the more reason then for Single Taxers to refrain from the temptation to restate the principles of Henry George in language to conform to the ephemeral dialect of a superficial decade. The old formulas in the word of Progress and Poverty do not need to be reconstructed, but only restated in the clear luminous language of its author. The primitive strength of our English tongue was his; the throbbing, exultant note of the prophet was sounded by this master of style. His style served him perfectly as the instrument for the inculcation of the great truth he sought to popularize; no one can hope to improve upon it. And we shall return to it; it will not seem foreign to us. It is the language that Bacon spoke, and Carlyle, and we are concerned, not with the trifling literary feats of superficially clever men, but with the great fundamental truths that are not for the age but for all time, and ring as solemnly down the ages as the language of King James' version of the Bible. And if these wonderful scholars who took the message of the Hebrew prophets and enshrined them into the English that still enchants, were inspired, so was Henry George.

LAWNDALE, CALIFORNIA, has hit upon a unique kind of taxation, if anything in the way of taxation can be called unique. It taxes funerals that pass through its streets, and the town expects to raise enough revenue from this source to meet all expenses. San Mateo county is also collecting one dollar for each funeral passing from San Francisco county. It is perhaps singularly appropriate that the citizen should be reminded as he makes his exit of the system that taxes him from the cradle to the grave.

MR. STEPHEN BELL, in *Commerce and Finance*, a paper which we have had many an occasion to commend, comments in a recent issue on the curious contradiction that we look upon ourselves as a singularly gifted and superior people and at the same time hold tenaciously to the belief in the need of a protective tariff. He calls this a "baseless superstition." There is surely something amusing in the spectacle of a people who think themselves smarter than any race on earth crouched

tremblingly behind tariff walls. But this is not all that is amusing in the tariff superstition. It is necessary, we are told, in order that labor may be "protected."

IT ought to be clear that it is not to protect labor, but to prevent labor from doing something that it would otherwise do. A thing is made, some form of wealth is produced. It exists as a concrete product of wealth, a chair, a table, a watch or a piano. The maker of this thing does not wish to possess it himself, but to exchange it for something else. How can he be protected or in any way benefited by denying him the opportunity to exchange it at the best possible advantage to himself? What are national boundaries any more than state boundaries to him, if somewhere other laborers offer in exchange something he wants more than the thing he has made? It is clear that to interfere with him is to place him at a grave disadvantage.

ALL this has been said before many, many times. It ought to be obvious to a child. Yet around the denial to labor of this inherent right to dispose of what he has made to the best advantage to himself has grown up a wonderful philosophy, a host of self-contradictory propositions embodied in big books, and taught indeed in some of the universities. Bedlam will be searched in vain for anything to match it. Differing wage rates in different countries, standards of living, diversification of industries, "the foreigner pays the tax"—all serve to bewilder the poor simpleton who takes his economic philosophy from the political party to which he pins his faith. But not a single one of these arguments is relevant. The right of man to exchange the product of his labor for the product of another, though that other resides at the "ends of the earth," is not only an inherent right, but it is the basis, along with other things, of all enduring prosperity.

NO work has been written in modern times so searching in its analysis, so piercingly destructive of this curious superstition, as Henry George's *Protection or Free Trade*. As one reads the scales drop from his eyes, the whole fabric of superstition known as "protection" crumbles away. Other useful works have been written on this subject, Bastiat, Sumner, Taussig, General Lieb—all have administered more or less telling blows to the fetich. But George did more—he demolished the whole structure. No greater work of its kind has ever come from the hand of man—it is *sui generis*.

IN another column we print the Memorandum addressed to the Economic Conference of the League of Nations convening at this writing in Geneva. The agenda of the Conference explicitly raises for discussion the whole question of protective tariffs, trade barriers and other restrictions upon the freedom of intercourse between peoples.