

Tithing: A Sermon

Reading the latest pamphlet* issued by the Henry George School of Social Science puts me in mind of a secret I have kept for about three years and decides me to tell all, for the first time in print, for your benefit, and the School's. Here are the confidential facts.

On Thanksgiving Day of 1936, at 11:30 in the morning to be exact, I determined upon a New Economic Policy. From that moment, I decided, I would devote ten per cent of all my takings to what professional social workers call "some deserving individual," or "some worthy cause." Although my children should lack bread or tuition and my home had to be located four flights up, I would insist on doing what every free man or woman ought to be able to do—make a positive financial gesture to prove my goodwill toward humanity.

At first the going for me was far from easy. In fact, about nine months after the initial resolution there was a complete moral breakdown, and for three months I didn't give away a cent. I thought I didn't have it to give. But although my finances did not improve, I got to feeling reckless, and in the fall I began tithing again and have kept it up ever since.

Though self-discipline was not my motive, still the tithing plan has been very good for me, as well as (presumably) for the individuals and institutions which have caught the crumbs. In the first place, I am overcoming an exaggerated sense of money, legitimately bequeathed me by a Scottish ancestry. In the second place, I get much satisfaction out of the idea of helping, even in a very modest way. And in the third place, oddly enough, it has not cost me anything; for after the first year, which was admittedly difficult, my income happily adjusted itself and even increased, until first I was able to take an apartment only three flights up instead of four.

Every human being ought to be able to show his friendly feelings toward humanity in hard cash as well as soft theorizing. If an idea is worth believing in, it is worth supporting. Giving money to advance ideas brings immense pleasure and satisfaction to the giver, and it tends to enhance the value of the idea in his own and everybody else's mind.

I believe that there are a great many Georgists who could profit as I have by some form of

tithing. To begin with, it would give them a glorious opportunity to do a little sacrificing for their convictions, and it just might be with them as with me, that it would turn out to be no sacrifice in the end. I believe that every Georgist should be permitted and even encouraged to help the School in maintaining and extending its activities, through the regular contribution of tithes. And so I am glad that the School is opening to its students this opportunity to "acquire merit" through generosity.

It seems plain that there is dubious wisdom in a financing plan by which a school or any other institution gives all and gets nothing, even if it is able to survive on those terms. A lack of financing seems to me imprudent, and not much more to be recommended is the financing through indirect and hidden methods—bazaars, socials, raffles, contests, and their numerous variants. Such expedients indicate a lack of confidence in the adherents by the management, or else they show a lack of solidarity and conviction on the part of the institution's friends.

The very prosperity of the School, its increasing numbers and influence, mean that it will be increasingly able to use bigger budgets. Its finances should be made sound now while its problems are comparatively small. Remember what John D. Rockefeller said in answer to a clergyman's pious, "The Lord will provide"? "Yes," agreed Mr. Rockefeller, "but I think we had better establish a fund."

Now I know that sentiment at the HGSSS is cold to organization of a political or other "pressure" sort, and still I would like to get to know other tithers and swap tithing experiences with them—learn who caught their crusts and what good they have done. Most givers have very little originality; they can see little but churches and hospitals, both certainly worthy causes, but not the only adventures in giving. I can even conceive of a "School of Giving," complete with classes, lectures, and testimony meetings. But in default of such a school I should like to join a Ten Per Cent Club whose members have decided to give regularly, not necessarily all to one object, but to purposes removed from duty and selfishness.

What do you think?

* Director's Report to the Board of Trustees.