

As we were and as we are

America has grown and developed and become the greatest industrial nation on earth. Our living conditions are the highest in the world. But the American people are mainly descendants of Europeans; they are in nowise superior to their ancestors. It is obvious that certain conditions and advantages that were not present in Europe or anywhere else must have contributed to this development.

A few of the more important of these conditions are easily apparent:

1. There was no aristocracy.
2. Religion had no part in government.
3. Free public schools were early established.

4. Taxation was negligible.
5. Free land was abundantly available.

A sixth factor—honest money—might be included, but the earlier financing was at times open to criticism, and prosperous times beget confidence, which is money's basic strength.

What might be thought to be a seventh factor—natural resources and raw materials—is part of, and included in, the land.

Concerned as we all must surely be with America's eminence, strength, and comfort, the questions naturally arise:

1. Are all these conditions essential to America's continued greatness?
2. Do all these conditions exist today?

You may be one of the millions of Americans who rejoice in our national strength, who are confident of our greatness, who are certain that the American Way (though you probably would have difficulty in describing it) is the only proven correct one and that we need only to continue as we are and all will be well.

Perhaps it has never occurred to you to weigh the difference between "as we are" and "as we were." But two things have happened in the last fifty years that sharply split "as we are" from "as we were," and those two things mean frustration and drag in our progress. They mean that the most we can look for is to coast on with the gradually declining impetus left to us by the freer days. They mean that we are no longer able to save and develop the safeguards for our future, that we are discouraged in every ef-

fort to be independent, and that we are more and more retreating into jobs that offer the most hope of "welfare" pensions in our old age.

This is our fate unless we properly deal with the two following evils:

1. The Sixteenth Amendment, written into our Constitution in 1913, permitting levying of the income tax
2. The disappearance of free land

You have grown to citizenship too late to enjoy the advantage that existed when a man could keep his private property, the fruit of his energy, management, service and labor, and his capital, which is his stored-up labor; and America grew because there was incentive to work and to risk capital.

You have grown up too late to enjoy the advantage that existed when a man dissatisfied with conditions in one place could "patent" a homestead without having to pay someone else to get out of his way; and America grew because land was free or because, other land being plentiful and population scarce, land could not be held at a high price.

You have grown up thinking that surely the men who adopted the income tax and inheritance tax policies and the men who wrote our tax laws of today had some degree of intelligent knowledge of economics. But there is no evidence or indication of intelligence in their actions.

All that can be said in defense of the legislators of 1913 is that they were too limited in vision to foresee the ra-

capacity of their successors and the ruinous evil of their creation.

And all that we can be saying soon to the tax authorities of today is, "Ye have sheared the wool from the goose that laid the golden egg until ye have pumped it dry."

The following study of the five factors listed (aristocracy, religion, schools, taxes, and land) may contribute to finding the answer to the two questions presented (Are these essential? Do they exist today?) and, if we find that they are truly vital, the answer to the additional question: Can we eradicate these two evils (destructive taxation and costly land) that beset us?