*WHAT IS THIS SINGLE TAX?

By BOLTON HALL.

It seems self-evident that any improvement in the condition of the earth must go eventually and mainly to the owners of the earth.

Any improvement, mechanical, agricultural, educational, intellectual, financial, political, social, even moral, anywhere, will make that part of the earth a more desirable place to live and work in, and will consequently raise the rent. The people then must regain their "Right to the Use of the Earth," as Herbert Spencer called it in *Social Statics;* the most gradual and the easiest method is to take the rent of the land instead of taxes, for public use.

Whatever changes we advocate, we must begin with allowing the people to get to the land; we must begin at the beginning; and, indeed, the first principles are laid down in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as anywhere: "In the beginning," they say, God commanded the earth that it should bring forth abundantly to satisfy the desires of every living thing, and then commanded man that he should till the land; and God saw that it was all very good.

Now, when we speak of the land's bringing forth, we do not mean bringing forth merely corn, potatoes, and cattle; nor, when we speak of tilling, do we mean simply ploughing and digging. We mean using factory sites, and clay-banks, and mines, and coal-pits, and the trees on the hills—all those things used by men that were here before men came, and that will be here after men have gone, and that economists call land.

If anyone had told the Pilgrim Fathers that he was out of work, those staid Puritans would have laughed at him.

They would have said, "Why, clear that field of stones, or plow, or cut fire wood, or dig sand, or mine coal, or burn limestone, or do anything on the land and we will give you not only ample board and clothes but big wages." Those same lands are here, mostly still unworked; and, whereas, the fathers were hemmed into a little strip between the Indians and the sea, we have gridironed the whole continent with rail lines and opened up the world with steamship lines. Yet we do not laugh when even a skillful man says he is out of work and in need of all things—because the opportunities for raising food and getting clothing by work are owned and held unused for a further rise in value.

From that land, by labor, by the work of people, comes everything that we want.

Take any ordinary thing. This paper, for instance, came from wood-pulp, made out of the trees, which grew wild on the hills and were cut down by the labor of men; they were floated down-stream by labor; they were ground

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up and rolled and bleached by the labor of men. There is nothing whatever in this piece of paper except land and labor, labor of hand or brain.

Even the part of the paper that we know as "the capital employed in making it," the tools, in their turn, came out of the earth; for the iron was taken out of the mine by the labor of men, and was shaped into paper-making machines by the labor of men.

When we realize that everything that we eat, everything that we wear, everything that shelters us, comes out of the land by labor, and out of nothing else, and that man is a land animal, we have the answer to the whole social problem.

For in order that the earth may "satisfy the desire of every living thing," it is necessary that men should get *at* the earth; and when with our system of private ownership we have prevented people from getting at the earth, when we have fenced off the sheep from the pastures, then we have "a social problem."

Man really is "entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and, if he is entitled to life, then he is entitled to live somewhere. It can not be right, it can not be the divine will that any child should be born into the world to-day with no right to stay in the world at all unless some one will pay a price for the purchase or hire of a place to put its cradle—even to put its little grave. We have taken away the birthright of the child, for the earth was given to *all* the children of men. We have said, "No; it belongs to a few of the children, who may keep it vacant, or charge the rest a fee for its use."

It is necessary, then, not merely "to get the people back to the land," but to get the land back to the people, to restore the birthright, the earth; that it may "bring forth abundantly to satisfy the desire of every living thing."

On the one side we have idle lands; on the other side idle hands; how could it be otherwise? It necessarily puts somebody out of a job when land which is needed, and should be used, is held unused for the sake of profit. Practically, all land has some speculative value, and consequently there is hardly such a thing as cheap lands; there are low-priced lands, but they all have some speculative value; that is the "land question."

This land question touches everyone. The manner in which we shall get all the land into use is hardly worth disputing about. When men desire equal opportunity for all they will find out how to get it. Here is one way: Suppose that the coal miners are dissatisfied with their wages and should say, "We are sappers, smiths, drivers, pickers, powder-men, engineers, machinists, carpenters and all the other workers needed to operate the mine, we will leave your pit and go down the road a mile and open up another mine." The "Coal Baron" might ask, "Where will you get the necessary capital?" They would answer, "Those who need the coal at $6.00 a ton, which costs delivered in the town less than $2.00 a ton, will give us credit for what little machinery we cannot make ourselves—they will even take their pay in coal."

Then the coal Baron would answer, "You forget that even so, you can not open up that other mine, for it belongs to us." If now, the miners could

answer, "True, but you forget that we have got that coal land, which Mr. Schwab valued at over thirty thousand dollars per acre, assessed at its true value and we will tax it, used or unused on that basis instead of on the basis of farming land."

Then the Coal Baron would say, "Oh, then, we must hire men to use it, or else we must abandon it, for it does not pay to hold land idle and to pay taxes on its real worth."

There would be an end of the misery of strikes and an end of unemployment.

In every great city there are two large sections which are run, and have always been run, under the sanction of law, on the principle that is called in England "the assessment of ground rent"; and so successfully are they run that those who are working under that plan will laugh at you if you talk of changing it. Those two sections are the theatres and the hotels.

If a man goes to the theatre and asks for the best seat, you know that he will pay perhaps a dollar, and he will get a place in the front row. He may go there and laugh, and roar, and enjoy the play so that it is as much fun to see him as to see the performance; but the price is only a dollar. Or, he may go there, and go to sleep, and even snore, and the price is still a dollar. Or, he may stay away entirely; the price is still a dollar.

Now, for that *seat* the theatre-manager charges the full value. What does he do with the proceeds? He provides free light, free heat, free water, free police protection, free protection from fire, and all those things that a theatre-goer needs. It isn't according to one's ability to pay that one pays for the support of the theatre; it is what the seat one occupies is worth.

You may go to a hotel, and ask for the cheapest room; and you will get a small one in the rear, at the top of the house, say for fifty cents a day. You go up and look at it, and take the key and go away. The price is still fifty cents a day, or, you may open an office there, and make ten thousand dollars a year in that office; still, it is only fifty cents a day. You may put in magnificent furniture, and go there dressed in silk and diamonds; still, it is only fifty cents a day.

What does the hotel proprietor do with the money he gets for that *situation*. He provides free light, free heat, free water, free police protection, free protection from fire, and all things that as a hotel-occupant you need.

"Seat," "situation," and "site" are the same things. A high price for the best site, a low price for the poor site, and no price for the poorest site, because there is no competition for it. Good use or poor use, full use or no use, year after year the theatre-manager and the hotel man each charge the full value of the mere bare situation.

That is the plan of the taxation of land-values: to tax every land-user what his situation is worth.

What has been the effect of that plan upon the theatre-seat business? Why, you know there are some speculators in the theatre seats, but you never heard of any one's buying up theatre seats to keep them unused; one buys

them to have them used, and to make a profit out of their being used. You know that, with the growth of the city of New York, within ten years the rents of the hotel rooms in town will probably be double what they are to-day; but nobody but a lunatic would rent a hotel room for the purpose of keeping it vacant, because the hotel man insists on charging day by day, or month by month, the full value of the place, and so makes it impossible, because unprofitable, to speculate in hotel rooms. Henry George would do the same with land. He proposed to make it unprofitable and therefore, impossible, to hold land vacant for speculation, because the community would charge as a tax each year the entire rental value of the mere bare land.

If a man gets a piece of land, and puts up any kind of building on it, the present plan is promptly to raise his taxes, so that it is said sometimes that "if a man robs a chicken-coop, we fine him once, and we call it punishment; but, if he builds a chicken-coop, we fine him every year, and we call it taxes." That is stupid and wrong.

But there is a more fundamental reason for taking land value for public needs than that. The first of rights is the right of a man or a women to himself or herself (and, when women learn that, we shall have gone a long way toward solving what we call the sex problem.)

So that if you take from me so much as the value of a cherry-stone, which I may have carved perhaps into a little basket, I am robbed; if the township or the State takes from me the value of a cherry-stone, I am robbed. That which I have produced belongs to me against the world. All unjust taxation takes from me what I have produced.

"But," you say, "the government must be supported."

Yes.

"And it costs money to support the government; we must pay our taxes."

Yes.

But did not the Almighty foresee that? Were we put into a community in order that we should steal, under the protection of law, from one another by unjust and unequal taxation?

No. The all-seeing Providence has provided even for that contingency. In this way:

The pioneer goes out on the prairie, and he looks about him and says: "Well, it seems to be all about the same. Why not stop right here? The next one that approaches from the opposite side has no difficulty whatever in deciding where to go. He sees in the distance the curl of smoke, and he says, "I will get as close to that man as I can." After a time the village grows up there, then the town, and then the city.

The first settler had to shoe his own horse, cut his own lumber, build his own house, dig his own well, and make his own clothes; but now we have a blacksmith, a carpenter, a horse-shoer, a man that sinks the driven well, and a tailor; and all they make becomes cheaper, because of their proximity and their mutual help. Now, with as much labor as the pioneer used to spend to haul a load of lumber, he can build a whole house, because we have divided

up the labor, and everything that men have made has become cheaper; every thing has gone down in price—except one thing. One thing has been growing dearer—the land; one man has grown rich at the expense of the rest—the landowner.

The original settler needed no public improvements. His water supply was the pond near the house; his fire department consisted of a bucket on the front porch; his police protection was the bull-dog in his yard or his old gun; his street-lighting was the lantern he took out in his hand at night. But, as neighbors came, he needs public water, public roads, public lights, public protection against fire and by police, and just as fast as those things become necessary the land value supplies the funds to pay for them. The coming of new settlers to that site has increased the value of the land. With every such increase in value should come an increase in taxes upon the land so benefited.

Of one thing no man can say: "I made it. It is mine, and if you take it away, you rob me." That thing is *land*. In *land* the order of nature has provided enough for man's social wants, just the same as for his physical wants.

When the little baby is coming, the mother's breast begins to expand; and, when the child comes, there is the milk provided by mother nature and, when the necessity of that has passed away—when the child has become old enough to take care of itself—behold, the supply disappears.

So it is with the value of the land: as settlers come in, land increases in value, and should yield higher taxes to the community. If people move away, the value of land diminishes, and the taxes should be diminished.

Now, if the mother refuses to supply the baby with that food, what will happen? Not only the child will suffer, but the mother herself will suffer. And, if she conceals what she has done, the doctor comes, and scratches his head, and says: "There is high fever; there is inflamation, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, falling of the hair, and all sorts of symptoms. What have you been doing?"

Well, in the same way, we have not used the food for the social body that has been supplied, and so we have all kinds of symptoms of disease. If that doctor were like our social doctors, he would begin to prescribe; for bad appetite, a food commission; for the burning thirst, some restriction upon the kind and quality of drink sold (as we prescribe high license); for the minor ills, like the falling of the hair, some kind of massage, perhaps like our police; and for every little separate evil he would find some remedy, instead of going to the root of things.

But, if he knew what was the matter, he would say, "You have violated the law of nature; and you justly suffer for it."

An old servant of mine said once, "If the rich were happy, we should know there is no God." We too might say, if social evils did not exist, we should know that there was no God; we should know that we could unpunished break the laws of nature. We should know there was an end of order in the universe, that effect did not follow cause, that evil acts did not produce bad consequences.

We may thank ourselves for all the misery; or thank whatever gods there be for all the wretchedness and disease, even when it lights upon you and me, and takes away your children and mine by death. It is only these tragedies that will make us feel; that will wake up people like us to see that our poor are really our brethren; that it is no more possible to be good alone than it to be born alone; that it is not given to mankind to have the Kingdom on earth alone; that, if we get it at all, we must get it with those who are really bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. We must get it by preparing the way for true democracy and brotherhood.

Truly, we have but to open our eyes to see and to understand that the Law is equally applicable to social things and to mechanical things and religious things, and that by obeying it we can get rid of pauperism and the fear of it, and of the ulcer of unearned wealth, and of the crimes and diseases that follow in their train. After all, in social things as well as in personal things, it is the wicked man who is the fool, to whom the Spirit says, "Why will ye yet rebel? why will ye be smitten any more?" and in social things as well as personal things the ways of Righteousness are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.

FABLES OF NOMANSLAND AND ITS SOCIAL PROBLEM.

By AN INTELLIGENT CHIMPANZEE.

Translated from the Original Monkey Language by the Garner Method.

(*For the Review.*)

By J. W. BENGOUGH.

Concluded.

Fable XXIX.

THE PARROT AND THE SHEEP.

A Cockatoo, observing a Parrot of the perverted flesh eating species* clutching the wool of a distressed sheep and tearing away at the poor animal's vitals, upraided him for his atrocious and unnatural conduct. "You are a shame to the Parrot race." cried the indignant cockatoo, "for we are not by nature carnivorous. You put yourself on the level of the carrion crow or the disgusting Buzzard. Nature designed Parrots to get their living in an honest way by labor in the vegetable Kingdom." "Yes, but it so happens that Parrots of our particular feather have developed a passionate fondness for sheep's liver, and it is not our fault if the owner of the liver happens to be alive instead of dead," insolently replied the aggressor. "It is a much easier and more luxurious way of living I assure you, Mr. Cockatoo, yet you mustn't imagine we

*A species of Parrot in Australia has become destructive to the sheep of that country in the manner here indicated.