

THE SINGLE TAX—WHY NOT FACE IT NOW?

(For the Review.)

By **REV. CHAS. HARDON.**

Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, says that more titles to land have been written with the sword than with the pen. There are no doubt hosts of men who, in the excitement of battle, would sooner walk up to the cannon's mouth than in the calmness and deliberation of every day life face some plain and obvious truth.

Such a truth is the fact that no titles to land have any validity in morals. They are precisely on a par in this respect with the alleged ownership of goods which are proved to have been obtained under false pretenses. The earth is a subject of common ownership to all men. No person can own the earth or any portion of it. You might as well talk of some private individual owning the sun or moon or one of the stars. Think of a clique of men forming a syndicate and charging the farmers so much an acre for the use of sunshine, or forbidding scientists taking photographs of the moon or making a map of one of the constellations on the ground that it would be an infringement on their private property

The absurdity of such a proceeding is not a whit less absurd when applied to the earth, which is itself one of the stars, only that we happen to live on it; and so of any natural resources on or in the earth. No greater iniquity or one more far reaching in its destructiveness of the rights, the welfare and the happiness of the human race was ever perpetuated than this assumption of private property in the earth. Chattel slavery was a light and venial offense compared with this. That was limited and local, but this, in our day at least is all but universal. It has divided society into two great classes, or rather, one great class and one very small one; the landless and the land owners, with a constant tendency to increase the number of the former and diminish the number of the latter. It is a small percentage of the 93 millions of people in the United States that own by far the greater part of its available territory, and a still smaller percentage that own the land of Great Britain.

The earth is opportunity; and the great percentage of the landless is the fundamental cause of strikes and labor wars, of involuntary poverty and the slums of cities and the main cause of intemperance, prostitution and every nameable crime.

The assumption of private property in land is a theft from every landless man. Great stretches of earth measured as you may say only by the hundreds of miles have been given away by Congress to syndicates and railroad corporations; millions and millions of acres of the best land of this country are now "owned" by foreigners and what is no better for the landless more millions still by our own great capitalists. The plain truth is today, however, that there is not an acre of this land that is held by these so-called owners that is

any more theirs by moral right, than the horse that was taken by a thief from my stable last night is his today when found in his possession in another city.

And yet these people are for the most part not to blame. They have been brought up to it. They think it right. They have never questioned it. They think it necessary to advanced civilization. They feel about as the judges, the ministers, the merchants, the school teachers and all the respectable and religious people of the Southern States felt about slavery in 1850. The only title to a slave was that the owner had bought him, bought him of some one that had bought him before and so on back to the man that **STOLE** him in Africa. Titles to land are the same in their nature. The first man that bought a piece of land bought it of some one who did not own it but simply had seized or grabbed it.

The only justification of a title to land is that it is legal, by which is meant that the original usurpation of that land has been legalized while the immoral quality of the action remains the same and its viciousness decends to every purchaser or so-called "owner" thereafter.

The people of the United States today own every acre of ground in the United States, every water power site, every unplanted forest, every hill in which is a quarry, every tract underlaid with coal, every mountain and river-bed containing gold or silver or copper, every acre containing gas wells or oil or capable of yielding these products, the land occupied by every railroad, every right-of-way used for cars or trolleys or oil or gas pipes, every street and every city lot, every farm apart from its improvements and every spot where a telegraph pole can be set up—and even every tramp is one of these "people."

And this is the simple, absolute truth, though title deeds covered every inch of ground and all the deeds were as legal as law could make them. This is true, though every year 350,000 grown-up men and women die annually in England not legally owning a foot of land while 70,000 own it all. In the United States the proportion of landless may be less but their relative number is every year increasing.

Now some time the people are going to find this out; and some time they are going to claim their own. They are poor not because they are lazy or vicious or intemperate, but because they are robbed; they steal not because they want to steal but because they are stolen from; they sell liquor not because they want to injure anybody, but because they want to make a living; they are vicious not because they want to be vicious but because they are deprived of legitimate pleasures by their enforced poverty. They, to be sure, do not realize these things now but they are going to. Neither do the beneficiaries of this iniquity know or realize the real nature of what they are innocently doing, but they are going to. They must. This rotten foundation in our social system is going to give way, to be removed, peaceably, we hope, but to be removed.

Why not face it now?

Vested interests must suffer, but the relative number of persons to suffer will be small; the losses will be limited and temporary: the gain will be universal and lasting. The legal owners cannot be compensated; they are not the ones to be compensated. As Emerson said:

“Pay ransom to the owner
And fill the bag to the brim.
But who is the owner? The slave,
And ever was—pay him.”

The mass of the people will not ask compensation perhaps for what they have been deprived of, but will ask for present justice. Let the values of land go into the public treasury and take the taxes off all labor products: in other words increase the tax on land ownership till its value is absorbed, but diminish the tax on improvements and every product of industry till they are wholly free. Monopoly and privilege will thus be destroyed and even the rich will get their own.

HENRY GEORGE.

The truth which Henry George has taught:
“That God in all things may be sought—
That in the economic sphere
His moral law shines plain and clear.”
Is making way.
The seed which George with pains did sow,
Strong in the faith that some must grow,
Casting it on the barren soil
‘Midst weeds that choke—where fowls despoil,
Bears fruit today.

Though George is gone, (men call him dead)
His name through every land has spread,
And every land has those who teach:
“What each one earns belongs to each,
As each has won,
But of all rent that land will bear,
Each one must claim his equal share,
Then cast it in the public till,
To liquidate the public bill,
Or wrong is done.”

To his dear memory we raise
No rock inscribed with fulsome praise,
But show our sense of his great worth