

reason why capital is so limited in amount and concentrated into the hands of a few at present is that the system of land holding has determined both the production and distribution of capital.

In the meantime, however, though in the country most of the Labor members profess themselves land nationalizers, talk of compensation—an illogical position for men who profess a belief in the injustice of private property in land—they co-operate in Parliament in helping forward the policy of the "Land and Taxation Reform Memorial." It may be that some day the Single Taxers will entirely part company with them; in the meantime we work together, but before that time comes it is likely that there will be a great revolution in the ranks of the Labor party itself when many that hold our view of the functions of government will come back to us.

Mr. Douglass has recently been appointed a member of the V. C. staff and will assist Mr. Paul in the editorship of *Land Values*, organ of the Single Taxers of Great Britain.

THE PARABLE OF THE BRIDGE.

(For the Review.)

By CHARLES T. ROOT.

There was once in a distant country a town through which a river ran. To get across this river the townspeople built a bridge. A shrewd chap whose name history does not accurately record—it was Craft or Graft, or something like that—thought he saw a chance for a good stroke of business. So he took his stand in the middle of the bridge and demanded a small payment from each pedestrian and each vehicle that crossed. The passengers, supposing that the enterprising toll-gatherer had been placed there by the proper authorities, gave up their coppers without demur. As the intelligent reader will readily perceive, the "business" paid well from the start. The town grew and the receipts of the toll-taker grew with it. The increasing traffic soon necessitated repairs to the structure and the town had to make them or run the risk of damage suits. Having no surplus funds for the purpose, the authorities had to levy a tax on all the citizens, whether users of the bridge or not, to raise the money. For some reason, which is now lost in the mists of antiquity, nobody seemed to be "onto" the toll gatherer's little enterprise, so he just paid his individual share of the bridge maintenance tax and kept right on sawing wood.

At length, having gathered a modest competence through his honest toil, and desiring to travel and enjoy himself, Mr. Graft decided to sell out, and having found a purchaser who, impressed by the exhibit made to him

of the returns from so easily conducted an enterprise, took over the stand in consideration of a bag containing 10,000 piastres or roubles, or whatever the local mazuma was called. Having received this modest addition to the gains of his incumbency, Mr. Graft vanished from the bridge and from the chronicles of the time.

The new "owner," whose name has also escaped preservation but whom for purposes of identification may be called Brownsky, repeated the history of his predecessor. Traffic grew and the growing cost of maintenance and enlargement of the bridge continued to be defrayed by an increasing bridge tax of which Brownsky, as a good citizen, paid his little individual share without a murmur. So things went along until he had accumulated his pile when he, in turn, desiring relief from the confinement of his occupation, sought and found a purchaser of his "rights" in one Jonesovitch, who felt justified, on the showing made, in paying for these "rights" 25,000 of the same kind of simoleons that Brownsky had delivered when he took hold.

Now everything went swimmingly with Jonesovitch, insomuch that each night when he counted the gate receipts he threw large fragrant bouquets at himself for having made such a splendid bargain. But unfortunately it chanced that one morning a thoughtful citizen started across the bridge just after he had sent his check for the bridge maintenance tax. When he reached the booth and was held up for the customar kopecks, it sort of came over him to wonder what became of those coins after he passed them in through the window. He thought he would pause for a few moments and find out from Jonesovitch. But the latter only bid him get to the domain of Pluto out of there and not cause congestion in the stream of toll-payers. The citizen moved on as he was requested but he could not dismiss the subject from his mind. He had of course never heard of Missouri, which was not admitted into the Union for several centuries after the time of these events; but he had feelings which in the present day would have rendered him eligible to citizenship in that great State. Instead of going to his store he hiked directly to the Mayor's office and having salaamed to that functionary craved information as to the status of the financier on the bridge, and as to why he and all other citizens had to pay every time they crossed that structure, and also had to pay the town every year for keeping it in crossing order. His Honor looked blank for a few moments and then replied "H'm—Bless my soul, I never thought anything about it. Looks odd, doesn't it? I think I'll step down to the bridge and inquire into the matter." So the Mayor went down to where Jonesovitch was raking it in with both hands, and arresting traffic by a wave of his staff of office asked Mr. J. why and wherefore he was collecting all this money? "I am doing it in the exercise of my rights," says Mr. J., as bold as you please. "How so?" inquired the Mayor. "Do you own the bridge?" "Well, not exactly," admitted Mr. J. "Do you pay for its upkeep?" "Not wholly, of course, but I pay one yen tax every year the same as everybody else." "How much do you take in in a day?"

"That's my private business." "Better answer," said his Worship, "I brought a couple of gendarmes with me." "Oh, well, from five to twenty yens a day." "H'm, you didn't build the bridge and you don't maintain it. How came you by the right to collect the tolls?" "I bought it from Brownsky and paid a big price for it." "And where did he get the right?" "Why, he bought it from another fellow, Graft, I think his name was." "Did Graft own the bridge?" "I never heard that he did. But what's the use of talking? This taking of tolls has gone on so long unquestioned that it has become a vested right. So, will your Excellency please leave me, and allow the crowd that has gathered to pay me and go on its way?" Jonesovitch was clearly becoming impatient. "Not just yet," said the Mayor, "I have been a chump like my immediate predecessors; but I propose to have engraved on my tombstone 'He seen his duty and he done it.' You and those through whom you got into your present position have been robbing this community for a generation, but now the jig is up." "But, a vested right, your Highness," pleaded Jonesovitch, anxiously. "This may be a vested right," replied the Mayor with some heat, "but if so, I'm going to take its vest off right now. From this hour every bit of wampum that comes through that window goes into the public treasury and I'm going to put in a cash register to make sure of it. If you want to stay here you can do so on fair wages. If not, git!"

Hereupon Jonesovitch rent his toga and tore out a few hairs by way of indicating his hearty dissent from the decision of the Chief Magistrate. "Robbery and confiscation," he cried, and appealed loudly to the people outside who at once crowded around to find out what was up. When the Mayor had explained briefly the state of things, surprise and indignation seized the assemblage and looks were focussed on the hapless toll-man which indicated that the populace were liable to start something any minute. Jonesy perceived that he was a minority of one on the question before the house and that unless he made the vote unanimous on the next ballot, the freely offered suggestions of the bastinado and worse were likely to be adopted. "Kismet!" he said, "I yield to force majeure. Bring on your cash register." The Executive waved his staff, the interrupted inflow of coin was resumed and traffic went on its way.

The bridge tax, being no longer needed, was abolished forthwith. Inside of a year the bridge had been repaved, repainted and adorned with two lines of ornamental lamp-posts, all paid for out of the tolls, and there was money in the bank. Everybody was happy, with possibly one exception. Jonesovitch occasionally shook his fist secretly at the cash register, though he stuck to his collectorship like glue.

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Any citizen of full age and sound and disposing mind, whether Single Taxer or not, and irrespective of sex, color or previous condition of servitude, is free to distil from this parable any moral which it may conceal.