

independent of our national government or other intimate association with the United States, what land value would it possess? Cut off from its relatively untrameled business intercourse with the rest of the United States, perhaps with a tariff levelled against her, with customs and other barriers at her frontiers, with any permanent immigrant compelled to forsake his country and leave his flag behind him, land values would sink, who can say how low? Certainly fifty per cent. would be gone. Thus we may reasonably believe that the existence of California under the National Union accounts for not less than one half of her land values.

The Great Adventure proposition thus resolves itself into this: Not alone shall California take for the use of the State the land values the State has created, but it shall take the other and perhaps the larger part created by the United States. Poverty is not properly to be abolished by taking that to which you have no title.

It may be said that the California landowner has no right to the part which properly belongs to the United States and that the State can well take it. The answer is not so simple. As between a landowner who has not created a value and a State which has not created but takes it from the National Government, there are no contrasting moralities. Both are wrong. Both are immoral.

But you say: Even so, less harm is done by the taking of this land value by the State than by leaving it in the hands of the landowner. There is a legal doctrine that there can be no contribution between tort-feasors,—in effect that the court when all are wrong will not and cannot admeasure between them. So it is between the landlord and the State in the supposed instance. There is no court of ethics to admeasure their respective degrees of guilt for taking what neither owns.

It cannot be argued that no harm will result if the State does take that to which it has no title, for the landowner was in essence doing no more. Suppose the State to receive, as it would under the Great Adventure plan, twice the revenue to which it has a clear title. Will it divide the surplus between the people, and if so on what principle? When the time comes, as it must, when this distribution ceases, will it have no accounting to make either in one sense to its citizens or in another sense to the remaining citizens of the United States, whose wealth it has disposed of? Will its wrong doing have no retroactive effect?

Or suppose the State expends in public works or public enterprises the surplus moneys to which it has no right, are its difficulties to be any less or materially changed in character?

But what has California a right to take from its landlords? There is one certain minimum. This is, enough economically to carry on the operations of its necessary agencies. The maximum California should take we simply do not know and cannot answer today. It may be no more

than the minimum. Only practical experience after we have taken the minimum will determine. Really in a practical sense we do not know the meaning of taking "all rental value." This represents a vague idea which will grow in clearness doubtless as we approach it. At present it is a mental abstraction perhaps never capable of absolute determination, and only offering a working hypothesis argumentatively.

Perhaps all the past eight years the voters of California have in their souls felt that the taking of all land value by the State for itself was ethically and morally as sound as the thing it was designed to supplant. May not this account for the growing unpopularity of the Great Adventure scheme?

—JACKSON H. RALSTON.

REPLY

We publish this letter partly in justification. Not in justification of Mr. Ralston, but of ourselves and the REVIEW. When our readers wonder at the sharp criticism of former "leaders" that appear in these columns we want them to have before them such self-revelations as this communication from Mr. Ralston. We want them to feel the same indignation we feel, and where they are inclined to condemn us for too great a severity of criticism to wonder rather at the veil of charity with which we sometimes seek to cover, because of old associations and old friendships, those who are betraying a great principle.

Mr. Ralston has long been identified with the Henry George movement. He was a member of the Fels Fund Commission. Poor Joe Fels! This Commission Mr. Fels organized and financed with the declared intention of "getting the Single Tax in some one state in five years." It would have been a shock to him to know that one of the influential members of his Commission was opposed to getting the Single Tax in any one state in any number of years!

We have listened to a variety of arguments against permitting the voters of California to express their opinion on the Single Tax at the polls. First, a campaign of education was necessary before submitting it—just how long a period of education was left delightfully indefinite. Next, that the affirmative vote had declined; next, that a measure for local option had received many more votes; next, that the voters were frightened about Russia, and that therefore it was impolitic at this time to tell them that the land was the gift of God to all mankind; again, that Luke North (lonely and heroic figure!) was not immaculate in his personal habits and attire. The last argument was profoundly effective with the ladies of both sexes in Los Angeles and New York. As an argument against the taking of the full land rent in Oregon it will apply quite as well, for the equally heroic and self-sacrificing leader of the Oregon forces, J. R. Hermann, is no Beau Brummell either.

But while these singularly forcible arguments against the resumption of Man's birthright in the State of California followed one another in rapid succession, it was

reserved for Mr. Jackson Ralston, eminent lawyer and writer on international law, to discover a new and real obstacle against doing anything of any importance in California.

It is the "tort-feasor." At first we thought this might be a kind of noxious insect. At least it is quite as dangerous. Just as in Rome the warning was conveyed in whispers, "Remember the ides of March," or in London, "Remember Guy Fawkes," so now to any Single Taxer in the state of California, the awful words, "Remember the tort-feasor," will sound its menace in afrighted ears. The voters of that state are all little "Orphan Annies" and the tort feasor will get them "if they don't watch out."

We say the objection raised by Mr. Ralston is a new one. We mean it that it is new as coming from a Single Taxer. It is by no means new in the mouths and from the writings of opponents of the Henry George principle. Mr. Ralston is only echoing their arguments which as a Single Taxer we should have expected to find him opposing.

Away back in 1897 Mr. J. A. Hodson, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* said, in an article entitled "The Influence of Henry George in England," (and we ask the reader to note the "residual claimant" as a half sister or some sort of near-relative to the "tort feasor:)

"Those who regard the nationalization of the land of England as a cure for all the ills that states are heir to, ignore the leading feature of our modern commercial policy, its internationalism. Grant their major premise that common ownership and control of land will procure equality of economic opportunities for all citizens and cut away the natural support of all industrial monopolies, can such a consummation be obtained by nationalizing the land of England? Is not the land of America, China, Egypt, Russia and all other countries, which by trade intercourse supply us with food and materials of manufacture, as integral a part of England for economic purposes as the land of Kent and Devon? No ultimate solution of the land question or any other social problem is even theoretically possible upon a strictly national basis. Neither the policy which posits "land" as the residual claimant in distribution, nor the policy which assumes that political limits are co-terminous with economic limits, can gain any wide and permanent acceptance among thoughtful people."

It now appears that California cannot or should not take the entire rent of land because longshoremen in New York contribute to its value, and that while working in the thirteenth floor of this building the humble editor of the REVIEW should have what he contributes to the value of California before the claims of justice in California can be satisfied. Rhode Island is busily engaged in adding to the values of California fruitlands—so members of the Great Adventure, beware, for what you propose is wholly unjust until Rhode Island gets its share of California land rent. Extending the argument somewhat—let us ask Mr. Ralston what proportion of the land values of the United States is due to the activities of Zanzibar? Who shall say it is wholly nil? So let not the United States contemplate taking the entire land values until the claims of the natives of Zanzibar are satisfied. So the tort feasor follows us even here—drat him!

Is Mr. Ralston serious? Perfectly so. This tort feasor stuff is quite as good an argument as any other for doing nothing. That is all it is put forward for, with a kind of

solemnity that is almost comically oracular. "Doing nothing" may sound unjust. What Mr. Ralston proposes is to take some of the land rent of California to pay some of the cost of the government. But that will accomplish nothing to free natural opportunities. Computed in increased site values nearly all economic advantages resulting from exempting improvements flow to landowners, making them richer than they are, and lightening only in very slight degree, or perhaps not at all, the burdens of the oppressed masses.

EDITOR SINGLE TAX REVIEW

The Old Man on the Pavement

THERE is an alarm of fire. Somewhere a house is burning and the inmates are in danger. The fire engine is leaving the fire house, and those who man the engine, the hook and ladder and the hose carriage are on their way to the burning building with the necessary apparatus. The Chief is issuing orders to hurry forward every man and every instrumentality to extinguish the blazing edifice and save the lives of the inmates.

Who is the old gentleman standing calmly on the pavement? He was once a member of the fire company. But he is getting old—some even call him senile—and the present excitement is not at all to his liking. It disturbs the serenity of his reflections. He thinks himself a "scientific" fireman. He is a "step-by-stepper." He does not believe in this extraordinary haste. He stops the Chief.

"Chief," he says, "don't you think you could make more haste with less speed? This reckless driving is liable to endanger lives of passers-by. The building may not burn down after all; no lives may be lost. And then too, the alarm may be a false alarm. A conservative method of approach may get you to the fire in good time." And then he mutters something about progress being slow, and that "evolution can proceed only step-by-step." (See letter of Arthur Henderson to the Oxford Conference.)

And what does the fire captain say? He says—for he is not a polite man—"Out of my way—damn you! The building is burning and little children are in danger."

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We who are impatient, we who know that a conflagration is impending which will destroy civilization, are rushing to the fire that threatens. We feel impelled to get there in a hurry. Our "leaders"—God save the mark!—have pointed out the danger in the past. They know it as well as we. In the past, they, too, were in a hurry to get to the fire. They were apparently as eager as we to extinguish it. But now they whisper words of caution. They talk about "the processes of evolution." What about the processes of God that come with a suddenness that overthrows empires and institutions and civilizations almost in a night?

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Poverty grew in France through the centuries. The people were crushed in misery. The monarchy rode in