

June

5339

THE SINGLE-TAX COURIER.

Vol. IV #1.

GEORGE'S NIGHT.

HENRY GEORGE LECTURES FOR SINGLE-TAX CLUB.

In Chickering Hall, New York - Right to Life and the
Right to Land.

Sunday night, December 16, Henry George delivered the third of a series of twenty lectures, to be conducted at Chickering Hall this winter by the Manhattan Single-Tax Club.

Mr. George was received with great cheering, which lasted several minutes. The enthusiasm was so general and spontaneous that the great single taxer, who always appears in a good humor, laughed quickly till his sides shook.

THE SINGLE-TAX.

"The only complaint I have heard about these lectures," he began, "comes from single-tax men, and is that some of our speakers do not clearly tell the audience what single-tax means, and I have been asked, therefore, tonight, to speak about the single-tax and endeavor to give a clear idea of what it is. The name, like most names ^{that} ~~and~~ adhere to parties or movements, was not of our deliberate invention. By the single-tax we mean a proposition to collect all the public revenues from one source - that which the political economists know as rent, collected on the value of land, irrespective of improvements. This is the best and cheapest way of raising revenue. Every owner of a valuable estate has in his hands the power of raising revenue. He may charge according to the use that is made of the land. In feudal times charges were made even upon the births and the marriages and the deaths. A man who would attempt that now would be considered crazy. It has

been found for landlords that the largest amount of revenue can be raised by one single charge for the use of the land.

"Take the great buildings. The owner has it in his power to raise revenue, from those who use the structure. He might charge tolls on the elevators, or demand contributions from goods coming in or going out, or upon the business done. But he does not do that. The perpendicular railways run free. There is no charge upon incomes, upon what men have, or upon what they do. In some places heat, light, power and even service are furnished, the owner getting his income in the cheapest, best and most satisfactory way in the one charge of rent.

THE STATE AND THE LAND OWNER.

"The State gets its power of taxation the same way. It comes from the fact that the community or State is the superior land-owner, an 'over-lord' within a certain area, and no matter how it may levy its exactions for revenue it cannot by the multiplicity of these exactions get any more than it can by one form - for the use of the land. There is the ultimate limit to the revenue. The State can levy revenue only over the territory which it controls, and the amount it can raise is always governed by what men are willing to pay for the privilege of living within that area. The landlords of olden times had even the right of life and death, but it made no difference. If exactions pass a certain point people will cease to live within that area. Those who cannot get away will be impoverished and finally will die. History is full of examples of populous cities being converted into ruins and fertile districts changed into deserts by ill-judged taxation.

"Now, with the State as with the individual landlord, one single

rent tax will afford the largest revenue with the least trouble and expense. Take the manifold taxes we levy to-day through out various governments. They are literally as stupid and barbarous as it would be on the part of an individual owner of an estate to go back to petty feudal exactions. We tax business, occupations and wealth wherever we find them. We tax good things coming into the country, and levy burdens on all the sources - not of revenue, but of production. The single-tax would raise all the revenue at the lowest possible cost, and without checking at all the sources of production.

LAND CANNOT HIDE ITSELF.

"The single-tax would be the most certain tax. The land cannot be carried away. It cannot be hidden or disguised. You do not now even have to know the individual who owns it. A little placard on every lot, simply giving its dimensions, saying it was valued at so much for taxation, would bring public opinion and the public conscience to the aid of the assessor. How can you find out the income of a man? You can ascertain the value of the lots even under the most costly buildings, but how can you find the value of what is contained in those buildings or even the value of buildings themselves? Still less, how can you find out the amount of wealth a man has? The present system of taxation requires a horde of officials. They constantly provoke evasions, frauds and perjury. And even still worse, many of the taxes create a special interest in favor of the imposition and maintenance of the tax. Through it a profit is given to individuals besides that which goes to the State. All taxes upon imports and capital, upon buildings and improvements, are and must be ultimately by the user. They are shifted from hand to hand, increasing as they go, so that the ultimate payment

by the people is very much greater than that received by the State.

"All such taxes are stupid and barbarous. They check production. They create monopoly and strengthen it, and give to the man who has such an unnatural advantage over the man who has little. (Applause.) Every dictate of good policy and good morals calls for their abolition.

"The single-tax would be paid to a man sitting in his office and would be to the last cent of value of the land. So clear is this that if a man or syndicate owned the whole United States that plan would afford the largest possible revenue.

"It's the beauty of the single-tax that accounts for the energy and determination and the spirit something like religious enthusiasm that animates its adherents.

"To discuss the moral side of this question, let me ask what is the first of all moral principles? That all men have equal rights to life. That is a principle that no man, no religion and no philosopher will deny. From this question of the right to live springs first the question of the right to the use of land, which is necessary to the use of the products of labor. The system simply provides that those who are accorded possession and the use of the land shall pay into a common fund the equivalent of the special advantage which they get. That is all. That is the single-tax. (Applause.)

WHY LAND VALUES GROW.

"In that ideal state of society in which men were only hunters or fishermen, and each family was self-contained, there was no need whatever of public revenues. As civilization advanced, needs appeared, In that rude state there had been no roads to build, no streets to clean

or pave, no schools to be maintained, no law courts - none of the one thousand and one public requirements of the civilized condition. Above all, there were no land values. Economic rent had not arisen. Land has no value in the beginning, but whatever is produced by labor has value from the very first. Economic rent does not arise until the community is born and begins to grow. Now, just as that social growth goes on, what is the one thing that increases in value everywhere?

"It is the land. The progress of civilization tends constantly to reduce the value of things produced by labor, because its constant movement is toward cheapening the cost of production. We have only to look back a few years to see how true that is. Almost all the products of labor have declined in value - iron, steel, dress goods, etc. But land values have gone up with every increase in population and every social improvement - just as the necessity for public revenues has increased.

NEW YORK AN ILLUSTRATION.

"Consider the condition of this Manhattan Island at the time when Hendrik Hudson sailed up the North River. The few scattered families that then inhabited it were self-contained - they had no need of public revenues. Consider how enormous its needs of legitimate public revenues are to-day - needs that are not half supplied. There is need for light, sewers, schools, public officials of all kinds; for there are really a great many public officials who have a legitimate purpose, as well as a good many that we no more need than a dog needs two tails. Look at the enormous values that attach to land here. It has already been sold in a certain section of the city at the rate

of no less than \$12,000,000 an acre. A man who has inherited what one of the early Dutch settlers would not consider large enough for a decent cabbage garden, can now live in luxury from the annual income he gets from it, without doing one single thing to aid production.

"This need of public revenues and this enormous value that attaches to land through the growth of New York came from the very same sources. Is it not as clear as the mother's milk for the sustenance of the child, that this great unearned increment is for the satisfaction of the public wants that grew from the same things that caused that unearned increment?

"What does this land value come from? Clearly from the social growth, not from anything that the individual does or can do, except that he adds to the social growth. Every public improvement - new railroad, the opening of a street, park, etc., add to it, as do even those public improvements that are in their nature moral improvements.

"For instance, if Tammany Hall were down forever - some say it is, but I doubt it - and that, for the future, we were going to have an absolutely pure and honest government of this municipality, what would be the effect? Why, it would enormously increase land values, necessarily.

DOWN WITH CUSTOM HOUSES.

"And what an enormous improvement would be made by tearing down that custom-house in Wall street, and by selling, or giving away, if need be, all our revenue cutters, and allowing everyone who wanted to bring wealth into New York to bring it here, without let or hindrance! How enormous would be the improvement if we did away with

the stupidity of taxing a man who has capital! We should say to him, "Come here, and we won't tax you a penny!" Land values would go up enormously. Twelve millions an acre would be a small price for land, even on the outskirts.

"With private improvements it is the same. A man builds a beautiful house, or, if he lives in the country, he greatly improves his farm. It tends to the increase of land values all around. In Austin, Tex., a few years ago, a Yankee school teacher showed by experiment that that soil was well adapted to the growing of superior pears. He got his own reward in the shape of pears, to eat or sell, by the very fact that he had shown the capabilities of the soil had sent up the value of the land over a large area from \$5. an acre to \$50 and \$100.

"Even improvements in the moral qualities of the individual tend somewhat in the same direction. Whatever tends to make people good neighbors, to make a certain locality a pleasant or respectable neighborhood, adds to the value of the land.

A PLAN OF NATURE.

"Now, what means this vast unearned increment that is secreted, as it were, in the advance of civilization - a fund that does not belong to the individual and cannot be given to him? We may enact and enact, in our boards of supervisors, legislatures, or congress until we are black in the face; we cannot contravene the natural law. The law of rent is a natural law, a law of God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. We cannot contravene it if we try.

"The British Parliament cut down by law the rents payable to the landlords by the Irish tenants. What has been the effect? Simply to make those tenants little landlords. Everywhere that the rent has gone down, the bonus payable to a tenant who may transfer his tenancy to another has gone up. You cannot do away with rent by any possible device.

"This great fund means that, in the natural order of civilization, there ought to be an advance toward a greater and greater equality among men, for, by a natural law, the interest of each as a member of the whole becomes steadily greater and greater. There is a natural provision tending to do away with those irregularities that we see in the earlier stages - a provision that puts the weak nearer to a level with the strong, the stupid nearer on a level with the cunning. There is a deep law that we may see running through the universe. Nothing is good or evil in itself. All things are good or evil according to the use we make of them. If we reject this proposition that should make the advance of civilization toward a greater equality, we must turn toward a more and more monstrous inequality. Yet that is just what we see to-day all over the civilized world. That is the heart of this great problem that men foolishly refer to sometimes as the strife between labor and capital - that social problem that underlies all political problems and all religious problems as well.

"This present condition, in which one man must seek work of another, is an utterly unnatural one. No man has any moral right to ask any individual to give work, still less has any man, or number of men, to bind together in order to say, "We will compel you to give us work

at such and such prices." But every man has the natural right to go to work himself on the opportunity that God the Father gave for the employment of his labor."

EMMA GOLDMAN'S QUERY.

Mr. George then announced himself ready to answer any questions bearing on the single-tax issue. He got quite a number, and, although the audience could not take most of them seriously, the speaker treated all with equal courtesy.

More than the usual stir was created by the last questioner. She was Emma Goldman, the shouter for anarchy: "If God," she asked, "gave every man an equal right to the land, who has the right to tax man for the land?"

Mr. George replied that no one had the right; that the single-taxers did not propose to tax land, but its increased increment. He explained the point at some length.

Jan 3, 1895.