

*This copy*

*7 pages*

*Justice for everyone all (p.6)*

5341

# The Moral Side of Single Tax

-1-

There is one point, however, on which I am inclined to differ from our Texas friends. They seem disposed to think that it is a mistake to present any other than the fiscal side of the reform. There are circumstances under which this may be true. But speaking generally it is not true that this is the strongest side, or that anything is to be gained by ignoring the question of the right to the use of land. To show men that the concentration of taxes on land values will reduce the taxes they have to pay and directly benefit them, is a good thing to do, especially among the farmers, who have been told that our object is to lay on them the whole burden of taxation. But to bring men to our side who will stay there through thick and thin, to arouse the enthusiasm that is alone capable of carrying a great reform against powerful vested interests, we must appeal to something stronger than any hope of individual gain. It is a mistake to suppose that men are altogether selfish, and view everything from the standpoint of how it will affect them. On the contrary, men are naturally sympathetic; they naturally love justice; they are naturally moved by questions of right and wrong, even when these do not affect them. And in large matters, and when large bodies of men are concerned, the power that can be aroused by the appeal to higher and nobler instincts, is always more potent and more enduring than that which can be aroused by appealing to the lower qualities. Therefore it is that I believe that while the fiscal side of the great reform we would bring about is important, the moral side is more important still. It may be well at times to put the fiscal side to the front, but it would be the greatest of mistakes to perma-

nently ignore the moral side. On that side we reach men whom we could not reach from the fiscal side, and from that side it is that we get the energy, the devotion, the activity that is carrying our movement forward. Take the men who are to-day subscribing to the campaign fund of THE STANDARD, and the men who from its start have sustained it; take the men who are distributing our literature and publicly or privately pushing our ideas; take the men on the other side of the Atlantic, and the men in Australia, who are working in the same cause - is it from the fiscal side or the moral side that they are moved? Take the men of Texas, who are doing such good work with their petition - if all that they saw in the reform they are trying to bring about was but a reform in taxation, I doubt if one of them would have stirred a hand. They certainly would not have done such work as Mr. Ring has done and is doing. And when these men propose to put the larger and higher aspects of the single tax in the background, and to present it only as a fiscal reform advantageous to the personal interests of those to whom it is presented, they are ignoring in others the very force that has set them to work and keeps them at it. Such a policy may be best at a certain time, in a certain place, and for a certain purpose, and it may be of great use in clearing away misapprehensions that are the result of misrepresentations. But the strength thus secured cannot be relied on long or far. As Mazzini pointed out, when men are appealed to by considerations of self-interest, they can be carried away whenever their self-interest is appealed to on the other side; and thus it is that reform movements based on appeals to class interest have constantly been shorn of their leaders. Therefore, as he contended,

every great and successful movement for social reform must be in essence a religious movement; must appeal to men, not to assert or promote individual or class rights or interests, but to secure to all that freedom their Creator intended them to have.

-----

Every once in a while some one, thinking only of the opposition, writes me that he deems it a mistake that in "Progress and Poverty" I should have said anything at all about the right of individual ownership of land; and that it would have proved far more effective if I had contented myself with pointing out the economic benefits of concentrating taxation on land values. I know that this is not so. I know that the feeling that induced me to write that book is the feeling to which it has appealed. The success it has had and the forces it has set in motion, are to me proofs of the truth of what I wrote in it when I said:

"If you would move men to action, to what shall you appeal? Not to their pockets, but to their patriotism; not to selfishness, but to sympathy. Self interest is, as it were, a mechanical force - potent, it is true; capable of large and wide results. But there is in human nature what may be likened to a chemical force; which melts and fuses and overwhelms; to which nothing seems impossible. \*All that a man hath will he give for his life' - that is self interest. But in loyalty to higher impulses men will give even life."

In the long list of men whom I know as having since then given money, time, influence, toil, to the spreading of the doctrines that book sets forth, I know of no single case in which the moving motive

was any individual benefit, or even the idea of great and beneficial fiscal reform. In every case of which I know, the moving motive was the idea of overthrowing a monstrous wrong, the idea of making life better, brighter and fuller for those worse off than themselves, and for those yet to be born. I have known many who have recognized the fiscal side of the reform alone; but I have never known of any efficient aid from them. The men who have worked, the men who will work, the men who can be counted on everywhere, and every time, till death closes their eyes, are those to whom this reform appeals from the moral, the religious, side; those who see in it not a mere improvement in taxation, but a conforming of our most important social adjustment to the law of justice, to the will of God; a restoration to the disinherited of the bounteous provision which the Intelligence that laid the foundations of the world and brought them upon it has provided for them.

-----

And so, while we point out the fiscal advantages of the single tax, while we show men how it will reduce their burdens and increase their incomes; let us never lay aside the appeal to the higher principles -never seek to gain recruits by presenting to others in the light of a trading expedition that shall bring back much gain to those who participate in it, what to us is really a crusade. The unenlightened selfishness which brings want amid all the elements of plenty, which forces us to stint where we might enjoy, which converts into barren wastes what might be gardens, and makes life a drudgery where it might be a development, cannot be cast out by enlightened

selfishness. Selfishness can only be overcome by what is higher than selfishness. This is the core of Christ's teaching - the fundamental truth that it is only by seeking the good of others that men can fully secure what is truly good for themselves. And it is to the quick and sure moral sense, rather than to the slower and duller intellectual perceptions, that we can most successfully appeal. We seek to substitute a rational for an irrational system of taxation; we seek to bring into full play all the factors in the production of wealth, by abolishing the system that imposes fines and restrictions and prohibitions upon them. But what we primarily seek, is to do justice and give freedom. The great end to which the single tax is but a means, is to secure to all men the natural rights of man - to give to each during his life the equal right to the use of those natural opportunities that the Creator has provided for the sustenance and enjoyment of life, and to secure to each the equal benefit of what has been won for the common advantage by the progress of the race and the development of civilization. There are many slow to understand our economic reasoning who will be quick to appreciate our moral purpose.

-----

And it is because they do not understand our moral purpose, because they only look on the fiscal side of what we propose, that there are so many who do appreciate its economic advantages of the single tax without seeing in it anything to stir this enthusiasm. "It will increase wealth," they say, "but how will it abolish poverty?" "It is a reform" they say, "but when so many <sup>n</sup> reforms are needed, how

can it be a cure-all?" And so to them our concentration upon it seems the concentration of cranks who have lost the sense of proportion; our ideas of what it would accomplish, like the idea that all physical diseases can be cured by one medicine. Possibly because we are obliged to devote to the economic side of our propositions so much attention, they take this for all, and do not see that the only cure-all in which we trust is justice; that what we build our expectations upon is, not a mere improvement in human laws, but such simplification of human laws as in the most important of all human relations will give free play to the natural law.

-----

Some months ago there was printed in THE STANDARD a letter from a Unitarian minister, H. Tambs Lyche of Warwick, Massachusetts, which told how one who had first viewed the single tax as a fiscal improvement, had come to see its higher side and larger meaning. Mr. Lyche told how the social problems had forced themselves on his attention, and how ( and this is as true consciously or unconsciously of the class of whom I speak) state socialism with all its crudeness and dangerousness seemed to him to offer the only practicable way for their solution. He told how he had followed our movement with interest and sympathy, as promotive of radical discussion; how he began to see in the single tax a decided step toward social reform, but could not see in it that one great reform that we see in it, and regarded us as given to extravagant rhetoric. And he told how the more he thought of the single tax the more he saw in it, until at last it burst upon him that what the single tax would really do would

be to give free play to natural laws. "At last," he went on:-

"I see in the divine order and in natural law a provision for all our social needs. I see a plain way out of all our social difficulties - merely to order things as nature and reason bid..... I now clearly see that this single tax is nature's law; that such nationization of land as you propose will mean the end of this social system - which every man who has seen how it grinds the under classes must regard as a veritable kingdom of hell upon earth; that it will mean a new social system, rising naturally into all the good the socialist aims at - a new and grander civilization, not only grand in its material advances, but grander, still in the moral advances it will make possible; that it will mean, in brief and in truth, the physical foundation for the kingdom of heaven on earth.

"I now clearly see that private property in land is contrary to nature, that is, to God's will. I now see that it is the fundamental wrong which causes all the misery and ugliness of our advancing civilizations; which has turned such things as machinery and all modern inventions into veritable curses to large classes of men, and which turns the greatest misfortunes like tornadoes and fires into much to be desired blessings for the same classes of men; which has separated society into classes having distinctly opposed interests, and withheld from the masses the good that modern progress ought to have given them. I see that the cause for which you struggle is the simple social economical truth - the answer to the sphinx-like social

question. I see that the single tax is the law of nature, or, in brief, the pure, clear will of God.

"No fanaticism is here needed to shout 'God wills it!'"

In the calmest mood conceivable we see that if we may ever use these words, we may use them here. Yes, surely 'God wills it!' It is no assumption; it is plain truth. We see the command written in the very fibers and textures of creation, of nature. Being natural, it is of course God's will. And in a natural mood, without fanaticism, but quiet and calm, we must gird up our loins and work for this cause the best we can 'while it is day.' It is a part of religion, a part of thinking men's service to God. So I see it, so for several months have I seen it."

The man who sees this is with us, not for so far only, but to the end. He is "enlisted for the war." Let us neglect nothing, and hide nothing, that will bring us such recruits.

-----

We who have seen what Mr. Lyche has seen, we who have enlisted, as he has enlisted, for the war, have in this national campaign a great opportunity before us, and a great work to do. Endeavoring, as it were, to cut a new road through a rough country, we have met a great and well appointed army, bent as they say, on traveling a little distance in the way we want to go. What it is our part to do, is to help them on and urge them on, and so to animate and inspire them that they will go further than they now dream of. We want to elect Cleveland and Thurman, not for their own sakes, but because their election will mark a milestone passed on our way.

-----  
(end)



The democrats have laid hands upon a power which they fear to use. They are "men afraid of their horses" - the very horses that must be relied on to bear them triumphantly through. Mr. Mills' speech in closing the tariff debate was, from the standpoint his party has assumed, a strong and effective one. He showed that the bill is not a free trade bill, but only a timid advance in the direction of free trade. Yet he supported it with arguments whose only logical conclusion is in free trade. All this is good as far as it goes, and it is the line on which the most advanced democrats will make the fight. But until they avow themselves for free trade - not "a tariff for revenue only," but real free trade, the democrats are hampered. They cannot make that appeal for themselves that is most effective with the masses. They cannot present free trade in its beauty and harmony as the "international law of God;" they cannot appeal to that moral sense which is quick and true in men who distrust "figures and facts." They can match "statistics" with men who are adepts in lying in figures; and facts with men who are ready to manufacture facts. But they cannot appeal to the deep sense of social injustice, to the wide-spread desire for social reform. Nor can they explain the social phenomena in which protection finds its real strength with the masses. They can promise the laborer that commodities shall be cheapened and production increased. But laborers are constantly told that the cheapness of commodities is the reason why thousands have to suffer for want of them; they are accustomed to look upon over-production as the cause of widespread distress. And when confronted with the failure of what is called free trade to eradicate pauperism and abolish starvation in Great Britain, the

"free trade" democrats have no answer that can satisfy the laborer. We who are really free traders in the full, true sense of the term, can in all these things do what the democratic "freer trader's" cannot. We can appeal to the moral sense. We can point out that restriction, which is the true name for what is called protection, is the cause, and the only cause, why, in a world so abounding in all the materials of wealth, and in countries where the productive arts have reached such high development, wages should be so low and want so general. We can show why wages are lower in Great Britain in spite of freer foreign trade, and higher in the United States in spite of restrictions on foreign trade. We can explain the paradoxes that have entangled so many men in the meshes of protectionist sophistry, and we are free to show that the way in which the democratic party is now timidly moving is the way that, if followed to the end, will really emancipate labor, open abundant opportunities of employment to all, and make wages what in natural justice they ought to be, the full earnings of labor.

This we must try to do in such ways as we can.

On another page William T. Croasdale discusses this question. It does not seem to me that a separate organization is absolutely necessary anywhere. We can do a good deal of work individually. And as for organized work, we can do that most effectively, in states where no objection exists on either side, by working with and through democratic organizations. In states like New York I am inclined to think that instead of a separate organization of single tax men, it would be best to start or join free trade clubs, and

quite a number of single tax men have recently been doing in this city and in Brooklyn, where the Revenue reform club, of which Thomas G. Shearman has long been an active <sup>member</sup> is in reality a free trade club, and something more. We shall thus work with men who are much further on our way than the democratic tariff reducers, and while uniting forces to push the discussion of the tariff question to more radical lines, do something to bring those who are already in favor of free trade to the further step of free production.

Signed: Henry George.

July 28, 1888.