

tributing their publications through book-cavassers. It is not, indeed, necessarily implied in the terms of the circular that the agents of the publishers intend either themselves to act as cavassers, or to employ other persons to canvass from house to house. Possibly the intention is merely to leave buyers to go of their own accord to the offices of the agents instead of the regular bookstores. But I believe it is an almost universal feeling of bookbuyers that the pertinacity of cavassers is a sufficiently frequent annoyance already; and there are not a few who make it a conscientious rule to refuse absolutely to purchase books obtruded upon them in this way.

There is, however, another aspect in which this innovation affects the interests of booksellers as well as book-buyers, and, therefore, indirectly of the publishing trade itself. The demand for books, which must grow with the advance of civilization, can be satisfactorily met only by a regular book trade; and it is therefore of immense importance to every community to maintain bookstores of a high class. I need not dwell upon what must be evident to every thoughtful mind, that a good bookstore is one of the most valuable influences in the intellectual and spiritual culture of a community; and, therefore, any movement is surely to be deprecated that imperils the maintenance of these educative agencies in our midst. But of course the booktrade is subject to the economical laws by which all other branches of commerce are governed; and it cannot remain possible for booksellers to carry on a business of a high order if works, which may be expected to yield a large profit, are taken out of the hands of the regular trade, and distributed through temporary agencies. The booktrade of Canada, which has been carried on under many disadvantages in our colonial position, requires all the encouragement it can receive from both publishers and readers, which it brings into communication; and it is pleasing to know that, with all its limitations, it has had some men, like Mr. G. Mercer Adam and Mr. Samuel Dawson, who have maintained the finest traditions of the booktrade of the Old World—men who could represent in their social surroundings, and enrich at times by their own contributions, the literature which it was their special occupation to promote in the commerce of the world.

Montreal, May 10th, 1890. J. CLARK MURRAY.

THE SINGLE-TAX QUESTION.

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—In the midst of a distressing array of misconceptions regarding the aims and objects of the Anti-Poverty Society or Single-Tax Association, the fair and clear criticism, in your issue of the 2nd inst., comes with a freshness for which I am heartily thankful. I beg to trespass on your space for a brief reply.

For my own part, I prefer to discuss the economic aspect of the question; but the critics and opponents of Henry George invariably force discussions into abstract questions of ethics, and these must be settled before practical issues will be considered.

If you admit for argument's sake "that there should be no absolute private property in land, that it belongs like air and ocean to the whole people," you virtually admit the whole contention. For it follows that the wrong consists in allowing the present holders to collect, as they do, the rental value of land, and not in collecting it by taxation.

He who invests capital in land suffers injustice when he gives that which is rightfully his own, in exchange for the privilege of doing the injustice of collecting ground rent, and not when that privilege is taken from him. As an analogy; a man is defrauded when he receives a counterfeit note and not when the same is dishonoured by a bank. And the principle holds good, irrespective of the number of hands through which the note may have passed. I could enlarge on this with advantage but space forbids.

As to the practical issue, the lessons of history teach us that this reform will be effected gradually. The general public prefer to take a moderate position—however illogical it may be—on all questions. But there is a natural conclusion to which all moderate reforms lead. It was impossible for our Southern neighbours to oppose the extension of slavery without favouring abolition. Those who contend that women should be allowed to hold property, and vote at the elections of school trustees, are—though often unconsciously—arguing in favour of the complete legal and political equality of the sexes. The advocates of every small extension of the franchise are moving toward universal suffrage. And Henry George takes that position, on the complex question of taxation toward which many recent agitations and improvements certainly lead. His influence is already noticeable in the altered tone of the daily press and also in many amendments in methods of assessment.

A few years ago, the exemption of vacant land was thought to be sound public policy. To-day that idea has entirely disappeared. The Legislature of Ontario recently passed an Act exempting from assessment over seven million dollars worth of live stock. In the Province of Manitoba there is no taxation on the value that is given to land by cultivation. These, together with our frontage tax, and the present agitation for the exemption of dwelling houses, all lead toward the appropriation of the rental value of land in lieu of all other taxation. But neither the present nor succeeding generation can reasonably hope to reach that goal.

As to the disposal of the immense revenue; the people may in the first place buy back their self-respect, and

pay their honest debts. At present, if we want a college, a park or an hospital, we must pass the hat for charity; often to those who are collecting the ground rents that are rightfully ours. Other methods suggest themselves, but that is enough for the present.

The position assumed by the Single Tax Association may be summed up briefly as follows: As a question of ethics, there would be no injustice in taking from this day forward the rental value of land for public uses. As a question of practical politics, the change must be effected by degrees, with a speed proportionate to the general enlightenment of the people.

May 12th, 1890.

Pres. Single Tax Association.

THE SINGLE LAND TAX.

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—In THE WEEK of May 2nd you draw attention to the justness of a single tax on land values to raise revenue for state and municipal purposes, *if only it could once be fairly inaugurated*. This, seemingly, is the chief difficulty with most persons, that, in order to obtain a clear field on which to start, great expense must needs be incurred by the state in indemnifying land owners, or else that much loss and injustice would be entailed upon those who have invested their means in land values.

Let us look at this for a moment, simply by way of suggesting some lines of enquiry. Suppose that our whole system of state and municipal taxation was changed suddenly to a direct tax on land values, which, by the way, is supposing an impossibility, as it would take many years to get any considerable number of the electorate to understand the matter; but suppose for the sake of argument the system were put in force completely and at once. What would happen? Not one of those who have invested what they own in land values, for the purpose of using the land, would lose anything whatever; indeed all those who now hold land simply for their own use would be gainers thereby, be it in city, town or country, merchant, manufacturer or farmer. These land values (such values as are altogether apart from and independent of any improvements on the particular land) freely change hands now, and people give for them what they believe them to be worth with the view of using the land for this or that purpose. A tradesman pays to a former holder, say, ten or a hundred thousand dollars for a site on King Street, this is surely an admission on the part of the purchaser that the lot is worth that sum to him for the purpose he wants to use it. If it were not so he would not give that for it. He believes it will fully repay him for this outlay to occupy that lot with his plant or stock-in-trade for business. He feels certain of getting as large if not a larger return from the advantages of the site than the return at current rates of interest on the ten or hundred thousand dollars. He must be fully satisfied of this or he would not have paid that amount for it. Then, this being the case, he ought, if fairly assessed with others, be paying in taxes on building, stock, income, etc., an amount equal to if not in excess of the yearly value of his lot, so if all the present taxes were taken off his property and placed wholly on the land he could not possibly be a loser thereby. The former taxes would normally be in excess of the tax to be collected on the land value of his site, and he would be a gainer by the difference between the taxes he now pays, directly and indirectly, and the single land tax. The land value he had purchased would of course cease to be exchangeable for other values, but his buildings and other property would be increased in value by the amount of taxes removed therefrom.

Farmers, who use large areas of land, would be among the greatest gainers by the adoption of the single land tax, though probably they will be the last to recognize the fact. The value of all improvements whatsoever having to be deducted from the gross value of the farm to get at the economic or assessable value, the yearly rate on this remaining value would seem very high, but the actual amount of taxes thus paid by the farmer would be, without question, much less than what he now has to pay through a thousand channels utterly unknown to him.

It is frankly admitted that those who have parted with what they own in exchange for land values for the purpose of speculation or investment would lose all by an immediate sudden change to the single land tax, inasmuch as these values would cease to be exchangeable when taxed to the full extent of the unearned increment. But, as has been said, there is no possibility of an immediate or sudden change. Even were it possible to effect a complete change at once, it would not be done. Though all men came to be persuaded at the same time that this was the only just and right mode, as it is, of raising the public revenue, it does not follow that they would thereon become devoid of reason and judgment and proceed to force a *just* thing forward in an *unjust* manner. The change would necessarily be brought about gradually to avoid, as far as possible, disturbance and loss to individuals. The state and municipalities would remove by degrees taxes now imposed on the products of labour, and as these are removed place them on the land. What is coming would cast its shadow a very long way ahead, and thus opportunity and warning would be given to all who own land they are not using to exchange for values which they could retain. This would go on over a lengthened period, and as the speculative value of land kept falling the ownership would extend to an increasingly widening

number of persons, until at length when all taxes had been removed from the products of labour and concentrated on the land, all the land held in private possession would be in the hands of those who intend themselves to use it. No one would then hold land except for the purpose of using it, either for pleasure or profit, for they would no longer be able to charge others for the use of it.

The loss which would occur by the disappearance of land values as private property would be spread over many years, and over a much larger number of persons than now own the land; furthermore, this loss would be infinitesimal as compared with the loss, during the same length of time, that is now unjustly inflicted on all forms of productive labour by the private control of land values.

The subject cannot be discussed satisfactorily in a newspaper article; this much, however, may be said with all confidence, that the private control of land values is a monstrous wrong in our social system, for, besides the direct injury it causes, it is the source of incalculable evils in every direction. While that remains you cannot deal with these other evils to remove them. It is, as to society, as if a man were standing on his head and a physician were called in to treat him in that position for some functional disorder. He could not do it. Place the man in a natural position—then there may be some hope of treating his malady successfully. So with the private control of land values. Yours, etc.,

THOS. RITCHIE.

HIGHER COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—In your issue of last week, a correspondent, advocating the necessity of governmental schools for the advancement of commercial education, seems to have overreached himself in his endeavour to belittle the work done by the business colleges of the country. He assumes throughout his letter that young men cannot hope for success in business life unless they are provided with the means of securing an education superior to that obtainable in any of our existing institutions, whether it be high school, university, or business college. Schools of the last-mentioned class he says, "do not and never can supply the place in commerce that is taken in arts by our universities." The sentence is very ambiguous. Does the writer suppose that the arts course in a university makes a man a lawyer, a doctor, or a preacher? Surely not, for although such a course may be helpful to him in his chosen career, the special training for it must come afterwards. Now the special work of business colleges is to *prepare* young men and young women for commercial life, not to *make* them merchants, salesmen and bankers, and this preparation consists of a thorough course in writing, book-keeping, commercial arithmetic, correspondence, commercial law and kindred studies; and that this work is generally well done is acknowledged by many of the leading business men in our own city and throughout the Dominion, who attribute much of their success to the early training received at such schools.

Further on we are told that the graduates of his imaginative institution "would occupy the highest positions in the gift of commerce, whose present occupants, being men of extensive commercial information, have been forced to serve an apprenticeship to acquire the necessary training." Such a statement would kill any scheme for commercial education that even Bellamy could dream of. To think that henceforth the managers of our banks and loan companies, our leading manufacturers and merchants, are to reach the goal of their ambition by a "royal road" instead of by the old-fashioned path of practical experience! Absurd! You might as well try to make a ship-captain or a locomotive engineer in the school-room, as a merchant, a banker, or a manufacturer. It must also be borne in mind that our laws do not compel those entering business life to undergo long courses of special study or to pass certain examinations, as in law or medicine, before being allowed to stand behind a counter or at an office-desk; hence very few are to be found who would willingly spend in preparation for such a career more than the usual six months required to complete a short course in a good business college. Time is too precious, and the struggle for existence and supremacy in the world of commerce is too keen to tolerate the idea of spending two or three years in an institution, the aim of which would be to give to the holders of "advanced commercial positions a degree of culture and prestige which they now lack." This at least is the opinion of most young men who enter commercial schools. H.

CONSIDERABLE interest is excited among electrical circles in the railway system that will soon be vigorously pushed by the Westinghouse Company. It is understood that the alternating current motor is to be used, and this alone is enough of a novelty to force the system into public notice. Just how well the alternating current motor will perform under the very severe conditions of street car service it is difficult to say, but it is certain that the subject has been carefully considered, and it is understood that the preliminary experiments have been encouraging. The real merits of an electric railway system can, however, only be determined after exhaustive trial in real service, and the performance of the first alternating motor road installed will be watched with the greatest interest.—*Electrical World*.