

SINGLE-TAX COURIER

Vol. IV #7.

GEORGE'S HOT TALK.

SURPRISED TENEMENT HOUSE REFORM MASS MEETING.

Cheered by the Audience - Why He Objected to the
Recommendations.

New York Herald.

What was intended to be a mass meeting of those interested in the tenement-house reform on the lines laid down in the report of the Tenement House Committee was held in Cooper Union under the auspices of the Social Reform Club last night.

Everything went along smoothly until Henry George took the platform, and he threw what proved to be a bomb into the camp of the reformers by ridiculing and denouncing their objects and the report of the committee in one of the strongest, most forcible addresses he has delivered in the city in years.

It was no less a surprise to the persons on the platform than it was to the audience, which packed the hall to the very doors; to the latter it was more welcome than it was to the former. The promoters of the meeting looked aghast as he continued to arraign their projects in the most scathing terms, and finally Ernest H. Crosby, who presided, leaned forward and asked Mr. George to close his speech as his time was limited. "All right," was Mr. George's answer, and in a few minutes he concluded.

The audience became wildly enthusiastic over Mr. George's address, and encouraged him by all manner of sympathetic remarks, prolonged applause and frequent cheers. His hearers were unwilling to let him go, and yells of "Go on!" "Go on!" greeted him as he moved to his chair between the Rev. Father Ducey and the Rev. Dr. W. S. Rainsford. After

he had seated himself the cheering continued for several minutes, the manifestations being so unanimous that the next speaker referred to the assemblage as a "single-tax audience." He and all the speakers who followed paid more attention to refuting Mr. George's statements than they did to the purpose for which the meeting had been called.

WELL-KNOWN PERSONS PRESENT.

When Chairman Crosby stepped forward to call the meeting to order there were seated around him on the platform half a hundred well-known men and a score of women, among the latter being Alice L. Woodbridge, the secretary of the Working Woman's Society. After he had explained why the meeting had been called, Mr. Crosby made way for Samuel Gompers, who read a long list of vice presidents, on^e/_A half of whom were wage-earners, the others being sympathizers in the movement.

Richard Watson Gilder was the first to speak. He told of the work of the Tenement House Committee, said that its recommendations had been well weighed, and that it would be a public calamity should they fail to result in legislation in Albany and prompt action in this city. In conclusion he said:

"Who is it among the people, or among the servants of the people, who will vote "no" to the main propositions of the committee's report? When the question is raised as to the destruction with moderate and well-guarded compensation, of old, dangerous and death-disseminating tenements, will the people and the legislature say no~~x~~ or aye?

"When it is remembered that the tenement houses of New York constitute 31 per cent of its buildings, and that in this 31 per cent 53 per cent of the city's fires, and when increased protection for life and property is demanded in behalf of those who live in these tenements,

will the people vote no or aye?

"When more air and sunlight and safety from fire are required in the double-deckers of the future, will you vote no or aye? When it is attempted to break the deadlock and open up Mulberry Bend and other small parks and playgrounds in the most crowded city on earth - who will vote no, and who will vote aye to that proposition? When greater bathing facilities are demanded for the people, more water in the houses, more smooth pavements, better schoolhouses, more kindergartens, more school playgrounds - there are hardly any now - and more rapid transit - when such things as these are demanded - many of which are the common-places of other great cities of the world - let us watch those who vote aye, and let us especially watch those who vote no."

ABOUT THE QUACKS.

A hearty welcome was extended to the Rev. Dr. Rainsford when he was announced. He said no one could provide a panacea for the tenement-house condition, and any man who said he could was only a quack.

"He may be a religious quack," he added, "and there are lots of us quacks religious, so I speak of my own household first so I can speak of others." He told how he had secured measurements of sets of rooms - one in a house over-looking Central Park, the other in a crowded court of Stanton street. He found, he said, that the tenants in the uptown houses paid only one-half as much for a cubic foot of air as did the others.

Referring to the danger to a community when its men and women

were driven to despair, he remarked that it also cost a great deal of money, as these persons became dangerous and had to be watched.

"By the Seventh regiment, I suppose!" yelled one of his hearers.

"Yes, exactly so," answered Dr. Rainsford: "those men only did their duty in preserving order," and when the mingled applause and hisses which greeted this statement had subsided he continued: "It costs as much to keep one tiger as to keep ten horses, and we've had too much of the tiger in this city. I say legislation isn't worth a continental cuss in this country unless it represents the sentiments of the people."

He provoked a round of applause by his reference to the Trinity Church corporation and its methods.

"We can't trust private corporations," he said. "A great church corporation in this city owns many tenement houses and there is a direct issue between that corporation and the Board of Health, I say there is no chance for the corporation, so far as public sentiment is concerned, and it will and should go to the wall."

MR. GEORGE'S APPEARANCE.

Then Henry George was announced, and as he walked to the front of the platform, buttoning his frock coat, he was enthusiastically cheered. He looked very serious as he began.

"I have just read your constitution for the first time, and it makes me wonder why you invited me here. But you asked me, and I am here, and I propose to speak the truth as I feel it. To me it seems you want social reform without a social theory."

Complimenting Mr. Gilder and his fellow-committeemen, Mr. George said he knew some good must come of their work. Then he added:

"But with this word of praise, I, for one, must hate my breath. Of the twenty-one recommendations in the report, some are good and some are bad. Of the latter is that which seeks to more severely punish the poor disorderly woman in the tenement house than you will her richer sister in a palatial residence. Public indecency, I say, ought to be punished, but it is no part of the duty of the state to punish sin.

"This spying out and arresting and punishing these women, like the spying and punishing of men for selling liquor and gambling, is all wrong, and leads to evil. It produces corruption and hypocrisy; it doesn't lessen sin; it increases it. Some of these recommendations, to me, are indifferent, but they are all alike, in that they go nowhere toward the settlement of the questions the committee has brought up.

"If these recommendations were put before me in a measure leading to the betterment of the people's condition I would vote no to every one of them. Take that calling for rapid transit. What good will the extension of transit facilities be to the people who are sweltering in the tenements? The island is narrow, you say. No, it is not the rivers that confine the city; New York has all America behind her. It is not more room we need. What makes it hard for a poor man is this speculation in land."

SAYS DOES NOT HELP THE POOR.

This statement provoked cheers and cries of "That's right!" "Now you've hit it!" and "Go on!"

"We have had rapid transit in this city for years. It has made colossal fortunes for the Tildens, the Goulds and the Sages, but it

has done nothing for the poor, for the masses. You can turn the east side and its tenements into the most beautiful part of the city, and the result will be that our millionaires will soon be living there.

"There are men in this city to-day who are hungry, there are men, women and children half clad. What do you think of a proposition to help the hungry by which no one will be allowed to eat unless he goes to Delmonico's, or to clothe the naked unless they have their garments made by first class tailors? The proposition of your committee means just that. You want to tear down those tenements and let no one live unless he has 600 cubic feet of air. Where are the people turned out from these houses to go? Into the streets, into the police stations, that this very night are already crowded, or into the almshouses?"

At this point Father Ducey turned to the audience and began to laugh boisterously, and some in the assemblage joined him. Mr. George stopped in surprise, saw the priest laughing, and, walking towards him, said: "What's that?" But Father Ducey shook his head, while he continued to laugh. Mr. George, after putting on his spectacles so that he might see the cause of any further interruption, continued:

"Wealth is power; it has a purchasing power in the church, among public officials, among legislators and in the courts. We pay to Superintendent Byrnes something like \$6,000 or \$8,000 a year. Gould paid him \$300,000. Put your faith in the Health Board, and how long before some Astor or Gould will buy the head of that board?"

MEASURES TOO TIMID.

"It seems to me that when we talk of quackery, the greatest quack of all is he who tells you to go slow; is the quack who would substitute charity for justice; is the quack who tells you that in instituting

reform no one need be hurt. In this I mean to be disrespectful to no one; but these timid little measures that are proposed by men of light and means who play at philanthropy. What is the distinction between the poor and the rich?"

"The Aster tramp!" yelled a hearer.

This caused a laugh, and Mr. George was dilating on his well-known single-tax ideas when Mr. Crosby requested him to be brief.

"Give the poor the right to the land," said Mr. George, "and your social ^oproblem is solved, and until you do that, anything else that you can do will be of no avail."

As Mr. George took his seat the audience rose at him and cheered him for some minutes. Then Prof. E.R.A. Seligman of Columbia College, who wore the only dress suit in the house, was introduced. His speech was a reply to Mr. George, but it did not please the audience, who interrupted him frequently, by pertinent questions. When he remarked that men all over the world who had started out on the single-tax theory had become socialists yells of "No, no!" came from all over the hall, and one man cried, "Don't dare to repeat such a statement, for it is false."

REPLIED TO MR. GEORGE.

Prof. Felix Adler replied to Mr. George in a very sarcastic manner, and then Edward King put the audience into a good humor again by a very witty speech, in which he evenly divided his favors.

Resolutions were then adopted approving of the recommendations of the committee and making this reference to the action of the Trinity Church corporation:

"Resolved, further, That we have read with surprise and distress

that Trinity Church has resisted the enforcement of the law which provides that there shall be adequate water supply for domestic purposes in each story of tenement houses on the ground that it was unconstitutional, and has succeeded in obtaining a ruling to that effect from the general term of the court of common pleas in the city and county of New York, in consequence of which the Board of Health has been unable to enforce this statute so far as it applied to tenement houses built or used for that purpose before the passage of that statute."

"Resolved, That we condemn the action of the corporation of Trinity Church, which has thereby become an obstructor to tenement-house reform, instead of a leader in it, as it was bound by every consideration of humanity and religion to be."

The meeting was then adjourned.

Feb. 16, 1895.