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LAND VALUES WITHOUT LABOR.

By John Ffimer.

In the year 1626 the West India Company acquired from the Indians, through Peter Minuit, the right of possession of Manhattan Island, which contained about twenty-four thousand acres of land, for the sum of twenty-four dollars, about one tenth of a cent per acre. The company did not sell the land thus acquired, but per-



mitted any one to select such as he wanted to use. The original members of this community were mostly traders, requiring for residence or store but small lots of land, which they selected without regard to uniformity other than that suggested by the formation of the land itself. It was not till 1656 that there were any streets or other public improvements; yet as early as 1643 a lot

thirty by one hundred and ten feet on what now is Bridge street was sold by Abram Jacobson Van Steenwyck to Anthony Jansen Van Fees for twenty-four guilders, equal to nine dollars and a half.

In 1656 a survey of the city of New Amsterdam was made, and the city laid down on a map which was confirmed by law "to remain from this time forward without alteration." After this time grants of land were made only to actual settlers on condition that they should be improved at once; and several persons who

were disposed to keep the lots which had been previously granted them in their original condition for speculative purposes, were ordered either to build on them or sell, and if they refused to do so, their lots were taxed.

Larger tracts of land in the outskirts of the town and beyond were granted to settlers for farming purposes, while other tracts were retained by the company for its own use as farms, one of which, bounded by what is now Fulton and Chambers streets, and Broadway and the North River, has since become the property of Trinity Church.

At a very early date a piece of land was set aside as a burial ground for the English, situated north of Bowling Green and west of Broadway, which in 1656 had become so full of dead men's bones as to make it desirable to close it up and select a site for a new one: but it was not till ten years later that this was done, when the old graveyard was divided into four lots, each twenty-five by one hundred feet, and sold at auction, fetching a price, although no labor had been exerted upon them. The new site chosen for the English Church was nearly opposite the head of Wall street, running from Broadway to the Hudson River, a part of which was set aside for a graveyard. It is on this land that the present Trinity Church and graveyard are located, which together with other large tracts of land that have from time to time come into possession of the English Church, or practically the same organized body, that now forms the basis of the great wealth and power of the Trinity Church Corporation. The land between the old and new graveyards was at that time occupied by the gardens and dwellings of Mr. Vandegrist and Mr. Van Dyck, which, as well as the old graveyard site, have since undoubtedly changed hands many times. But all the land described, whether it has changed hands or not, whether it has had labor expended upon it or remained a graveyard, has acquired an enormous value. The first Trinity Church was built in 1696, and destroyed by fire during the Revolutionary War, but the value of the land was not destroyed with it. Could this undestroyed value owe its existence to the destruction of the labor value of the church? If the present Trinity Church and all the receptacles of the dead attached to it, and the accumulated remains of the dead that have been buried in them during the past two hundred years were to be removed from the land, the value of the land would not move with them, but would be enhanced; and if this land were to be sold at auction to-day, it would realize many millions of dollars; and it will hardly be claimed that these millions represent the result of the labor that has been expended upon it. There are at the present time parts of the island from which all evidence of individual labor has disappeared, and upon which little, if any, communal labor has been exerted, that when sold command enormous prices. One illustration will suffice. In 1884 Vice President Morton bought a piece of land in the upper part of Manhattan Island, containing

four hundred city lots, for which he paid \$400,000. In 1890 he sold these lots for \$1,000,000, and during the time they were in his possession no labor, either individual or communal, has been exerted upon them. The only labor Mr. Morton performed in connection with them has been the payment of the taxes, which cannot have exceeded \$30,000. It will hardly be claimed that the payment of such taxes has caused the land to more than double in value in six years. Three weeks or so later the syndicate that had bought these lots from Mr. Morton again sold them for \$1,500,000, at no cost to it over and above what it had paid to Mr. Morton except the expenses of the sale.

What has brought this immense value into existence? It has been shown that shortly after the West India Company located on the southern extremity of Manhattan Island, and before any public improvements had been made, a certain lot of land upon which no labor had been exerted, had acquired a value and was sold for a price. In common parlance we say the land was sold, but this is only apparently true, for man cannot produce land, therefore he cannot rightfully sell it, and as no labor had been exerted on this land it could not have been the results of labor that was sold. What was sold? The privilege of using the land. What gave value to this privilege? The presence of population and the existence of communal life. What caused the existence of the community? Manhattan Island being favorably located for trade and commerce, it was a natural opportunity which men could use to great advantage. Did man create Manhattan Island? No. How then can he rightfully sell it? Men produce wealth which is their property, communities create land values which is their property; respect on the part of each for the other's rights will secure the rights of both in the land.

I think it will be conceded that the value of the lot which was sold in 1642 was the value of the privilege of using it, the value of the good will given to it by the community, so to speak; and if it was true of this lot, it must have been of the old graveyard, and of the present graveyard attached to Trinity Church, and it must also be true of all land that has any value; for no matter how costly the improvements may be that are attached to the land, their value is always additional to the value of the privilege of using it. The selling price of bare land alone, without improvements, represents the capitalization of the untaxed value of the privilege of using it, which were it wholly taxed would totally destroy the selling price of the land.

The single tax is the means by which the rights in the land of both the community and the individuals who compose it can be equitably adjusted, as it will discriminate between what is rightfully the property of the landholder and the property of the community. The individual will retain as secure possession of the land he uses as he does at present; nay, more so, because he will hold it honestly, and also of his property, because the community

will then support itself out of its ground rents, and not out of the property of its members, as it now does.

John Filmer was born January 12th, 1827, in London, England, within sound of the Bow Bells. His father, William Filmer, had shortly before this moved from the farm on which he had been born at Luton, in the county of Kent, in order to establish himself in a business in the city. The family is usually descended from one Robert Filmer, who published a work which he called "Patriarchia," in which he advocated the doctrine of the divine right of kings, and who for his loyalty received the gratitude of his sovereign and a baronetcy.

John Filmer remained with his parents in London till the latter part of 1847, at which date he was sent to a school at Birkenhead, opposite Liverpool, conducted by his uncle, Rev. Richard Wall, a clergyman of the Church of England. In 1852, in company with an elder brother, he left England, landing at Philadelphia and proceeding thence to Boston, where, almost on the day of his arrival, as apprentice on a engraver on wood, he entered upon the business he now follows.

The families among whom he was thrown and the acquaintances he formed in Boston were strongly abolitionist in sentiment and most of them were actively engaged in anti-slavery agitation. Nor were the subjects discussed confined to the abolition of negro slavery. They included the question of absolute free trade, and a tax on land in lieu of a revenue raised by taxing trade.

In 1857, after a study of the theological writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Mr. Filmer became convinced of their truth, and united himself with the Boston Society of the New Church. He is now secretary of the New York association, a body which comprises the societies in New York State and Northern New Jersey. He was elected to this office in 1876 and has been annually re-elected.

In August, 1859, he was married to Sarah Alice Lockett, formerly of Manchester, England, and now has two sons and one daughter.

Early in 1860 Mr. Filmer removed from Boston to New York and resided in that city until May, 1861, when he became a resident of Brooklyn, his place of business being still in New York.

In 1881 he received a copy of "Progress and Poverty," from L. E. Wilmarth with the request that he carefully read it. This he did with the usual result in cases of minds open to receive such truths as were therein unfolded. How to promulgate a knowledge of these truths, how to bring them before the public, was the question that presented itself to his mind. The riddle was to a great extent solved by the nomination of Henry George for Mayor of New York City in 1888.

Mr. Filmer has been a member of the Anti-Poverty Society and also of the "Kings County Henry George Land Club." He is now a member of the order of the Knights of Labor, and in full sympathy with the main object of the order, and also of the "Economic Reading Circle," of which Miss Bachman is the promoter. In all efforts to "spread the light" of the new economy Mr. Filmer has been an active worker wherever and whenever it has been possible.

Between three and four years ago, in connection with some of his co-religionists, he took part in the formation of the New Churchmen's Single Tax League.

In order better to carry out the purposes of this League, as well as to aid in other ways in the diffusion of the principles which underly the single tax, the New Earth was established, the first number appearing November, 1889. This little paper has subscribers in almost every part of the civilized world, and is doing a work peculiarly its own. Mr. Filmer has been from the first the secretary of the League, as well as the business manager and one of the editors of the paper.

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