A MOTTO FOR GEOGISTS

(An address of Dr. Robert V. Andelson, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the St. Louis Extension of the Henry George School, November 30, 1964)

On an occasion such as this, a speaker is tempted to offer cheap congratulations and to evoke heady but ephemeral enthusiasm. Yet I should be remiss were I content to send you away merely feeling good. At the risk of introducing an unwelcome element into the mellow atmosphere of this convivial event, I should like to make use of this opportunity to caution fledgling Georgists against superficial expectations. You old hands who have been through this yourselves should know from personal experience that what I have to say, harsh though it may sound, is really kinder than the sort of cheerful pep talk which after-dinner speakers often feel obliged to give. For our ranks include no place for summer soldiers or for sunshine patriots, and the sooner this is clearly understood, the better for all concerned. But please believe me, I didn't come here just to be a "party-pooper". The sober tone of my remarks is meant to challenge you to an enthusiasm based not upon grandiose anticipations but simply upon unflinching commitment to that which is right and true and just.

For the fact is that if we live, the Great Society we live to see may be a counterfeit; that the millenium which Henry George foresaw may not be just around the corner; that it may not be given to us but to some other generation to witness that culmination of which he so eloquently wrote -- "the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl; the reign of the Prince of Peace!"

I remember when I first read PROGRESS AND POVERTY. All that had puzzled me about the relationship between the individual and society, economic freedom and security, God and
Mammon, Caesar and Christ, suddenly fell into place. The answer was so simple! As George stated it in Glasgow in 1889:

"As civilization goes on, as a division of labor takes place, as men come into centers, so do the common wants increase and so does the necessity for public revenue arise. And so in that value which attaches to land, not by reason of anything the individual does, but by reason of the growth of the community, is a provision intended — we may safely say intended — to meet that social want. Just as society grows, so do the common needs grow, and so grows the value attaching to land — the provided fund from which they can be supplied."

This, I thought, was the golden key to the enigma of how to build a better world. Take for the community that value which is the creation of the community, and leave to private individuals the values which they, as private individuals create. I still think this is the key; otherwise I wouldn't be with you here this evening. But when it came to the matter of turning the key in the lock, I found that I was in for a rude awakening.

Fired with a consuming sense of mission, I figuratively rolled up my sleeves, girded myself with the breastplate of Truth, and sallied forth to enlist in that mighty army which would vanquish the forces of land monopoly, and in so doing, exorcise the looming specters of Communism and Socialism. Well, to begin with, I had a hard time finding the army. In fact, I didn't meet another Georgist until fully five years after I had read PROGRESS AND POVERTY. And when I finally found the army, it didn't impress me as being exactly mighty.

A score of somewhat seedy-looking folk, drinking vile Hawaiian punch from paper cups in a drab and barren hall, my fellow crusaders seemed for the most part considerably past the age for military service. But I consoled myself by recalling that Chiang Kai-shek's army is superannuated too, and that numbers count for little when the cause is just. So, undaunted, I placed myself at their disposal, inquiring what grand exploit was to be my first
assignment. Their reply was to put me to work stuffing envelopes! I was disconcerted only momentarily. Drawing upon my deepest reserves of optimism, I said to myself: "The pen is mightier than the sword. No doubt they're sending out some stirring manifesto which will galvanize a world-wide march toward social justice." Eagerly I perused the deathless document. This was my final disillusionment. The manifesto turned out to be the announcement of a debate on whether or not to raise the local parking meter fees. Ah, cruel awakening! The world tottering on the brink of Communism, and the only people with a solution debating about parking meters!

Where were the mass rallies demanding the return of man's God-given heritage, the earth? Where were the starry-eyed legions, exultantly waving green banners to the swelling chorus of "The Land Song"? I looked around the shabby room at the nondescript countenances of those to whom the revelation had been given and saw no reflection of the Grail within their eyes. Were these indeed the flame-crowned heroes who had been elected to slay the dragon of privilege and liberate mankind? I gazed down on the insipid liquid in the paper cup someone had pressed into my hand. My head swam with vertigo. It seemed as if the celestial city were dissolving in Hawaiian punch. "Let this cup pass from me," I murmured, "I want no part in it."

You see, my friends, I knew little then about the nature of real vision or of genuine dedication. In the months and years that lay ahead, I was to learn that real vision walks arm in arm with patience. I was to learn that genuine dedication bends to the task at hand, however humble, inspired, to be sure, by an ultimate goal, but never influenced by the imminence or distance of its culmination.

The history of the Georgist movement has been more characterized, I fear, by poverty than progress. Gains have been made, unquestionably, but they have been extremely tentative. An "enclave" here, an irrigation district there; a second-class city here, a road district there; a measure of local option on the
state level here, a feeble application on the national level there; of such stuff as these are our victories compounded. And even our rather pathetic relish in these modest triumphs is cankered by the knowledge of reverses. We point with satisfaction to certain showcases where our theory has proved itself over many years of application. Yet how many of its beneficiaries understand it? In Denmark the Justice Party lost its handful of seats in parliament. In New Zealand landed interests defeated the adoption of a site-value tax in Auckland. In Australia the more our system is extended on the municipal and state levels, the more it is abandoned on the federal level. In short, while Georgism may be the wave of the future (and I believe it is), there has been as yet no overwhelming tide in its direction.

Nonetheless, I would not speak to you the words of Tallyrand, "Pas de zèle" -- less zeal. What is needed is not less zeal but more zeal. What is needed is a zeal that does not ask to be fed upon success, a zeal that takes its impetus solely from the rightness of its goal. Henry George perceived this well. That is why he wrote:

"Let us not disguise it. Over and over again has the standard of Truth and Justice been raised in this world. Over and over again has it been trampled down -- often in blood. If they are weak forces that are opposed to Truth, how should Error so long prevail? If Justice has but to raise her head to have Injustice flee before her, how should the wail of the oppressed so long go up?

But for those who see Truth and would follow her; for those who recognize Justice and would stand for her, success is not the only thing. Success? Why, Falsehood has often that to give, and Injustice often has that to give. Must not Truth and Justice have something to give that is their own by proper right -- theirs in essence, and not by accident?

They have, and that here and now, everyone who has felt their exultation knows."
I trust you will forgive me a personal reference. Like many good Georgists, I dabble a bit in real estate (as a developer, of course), and recently I had occasion to choose a name for a street. I decided to call it after my wife's family, since it was her money which enabled me to do the dabbling. Now, when I married Bonny, I not only took unto myself the most delightful, the most exquisite, the most devoted spouse in all the world, but, as a kind of extra bonus, I found myself united to a collateral offshoot of the lofty and illustrious House of Orange, my bride being a sort of Tennessee kissing cousin to Queen Juliana. So I named the street von Orange Lane. My colleagues like to kid about my assuming aristocratic airs -- using the street as a means of boasting my wife's royal ancestry. But as far as I'm concerned, blue blood in itself is nothing to brag about. I realize that people of true stature prefer to stand on their own merits and do not seek to fashion crutches from the branches of a family tree. Yet is there a man here who would not be just a trifle proud to count himself, even if by virtue of espousal, among the scions of Jefferson or Lincoln or Robert E. Lee -- or of Henry George? Had Bonny been a Hapsburg or a Bourbon or a Romanoff, her lineage would not be a source of pride to me. It is a source of pride because the name of Orange occupies an immortal place in the chronicles of Western freedom. Our Pilgrim Fathers could never have set sail from Leydon had not the Netherlands been made a haven of religious liberty by William the Silent, martyred founder of the dynasty and father of Dutch independence.

The object of this rather elaborate buildup is to give you his motto, "I will persevere," which I have adopted for myself and which I commend to your adoption, and to share with you the profound epigram with which he elucidated what it meant to him: "We need not hope in order to act; nor need we succeed in order to persevere." Like Luther before the Diet of Worms, or Washington at Valley Forge, or Patrick Henry in the House of Burgesses, or Churchill in the face of the Nazi blitz, he defied the seemingly invincible armies of the Duke of Alba, persisting for the right regardless of the odds, undeterred by the apparent futility of his situation, and proclaiming in effect with Luther,
"Here I stand. God help me, I cannot do otherwise." And be- cause Truth and Justice were more precious to him than success, God did help. The dogged determination of William of Orange broke the oppressive world power of Spain and delivered Holland from the Inquisition. "We need not hope in order to act; nor need we succeed in order to persevere."

We must have long-range goals in order to keep us from being frustrated by short-range failures. Or, as Fletcher Knebel puts it: "Never give up. For fifty years they said the horse was through. Now look at him -- a status symbol!"

Speaking of status symbols, it is no longer quite so fashion- able in academic circles to speak slightingly of Henry George. From Colin Clark of Oxford to Robert Hutchins of the Fund for the Republic, the eggheads are beginning to utter qualified but friendly words about land value taxation. Even Professor Galbraith, the Grand Official Egghead of the New Frontier, seems to have experienced a change of heart. In THE AFFLU- ENT SOCIETY, he sneered at George as a visionary who had Prophesied doom as the alternative to a system which had no chance of ever being implemented. Yet not too long ago, in a private conversation with a friend of mine, he had kind things to say about land value tax. Builders and industrialists are eviden- cing a new awareness that this tax alone does not discourage enterprise or act as a brake upon production, and this awareness has been voiced in leading publications such as FORTUNE and the READER'S DIGEST. And Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon has pointed out that only an equitable land tax can save Latin America from going the way of Red China.

Perhaps the millenium may take place in our time, after all. But I wouldn't bet on it. Remember, the Fabians, too, spoke appreciatively of George. And Karl Marx, too, advocated a land tax. There is a certain collectivist mentality which seems to dote on taxes -- it loves them all without discrimination. Secretary Dillon may issue stern warnings against land monopoly abroad, but he has yet to mention it as the major source of
economic troubles here at home. Builders and industrialists may call for a shift to land in local ad valorem taxes, but we have yet to hear them call for a national land value tax to replace the income tax which Henry George condemned so strongly. I venture to say that it will be a long time before we read the full, unadulterated Georgist gospel in FORTUNE or the READER'S DIGEST. As for Prof. Galbraith, when he comes out against deficit spending, then I'll be ready to believe that the millenium is actually at hand.

What then are we to do? Why, simply whatever we can do, however modest and however humble. Sometime during the Twenties, an army officer stationed in the Philippines, finding himself with time on his hands, decided to improve his leisure in the base library. There he discovered a ten volume set of the works of Henry George. Today that officer, Col. E. C. Harwood, is director of the American Institute for Economic Research, which publishes a newsletter with a half a million paid subscribers. And because years ago some forgotten Georgist donated the set of books to the base library, ECONOMIC NEWS is a powerful and consistent advocate of land value taxation.

Mayor Jim Clarkson of Southfield, Michigan, may not revolutionize the field of municipal taxation by his efforts to get fairer assessment in Southfield. But then again, he might. Wylie Young and his Erie Land Tax Association may not set a national trend in motion by their efforts to shift the property tax in Erie, Pennsylvania. But then again, they might. John Nagy and his Statewide Homeowners' Association may not pave the way for a universal realm of social justice by their efforts to initiate land value taxation through local option in California. But then again, they might. Noah Alper and his Public Revenue Education Council may not sound a trumpet that will rouse this planet from its bed of mental sloth and stir the slumbering multitudes to a new awakening of freedom by their efforts to promote an understanding of basic economic principles. But then again, they might. My Tax Reform Association of Louisiana may not kindle a flame which will devour the menace of World Communism by its efforts
to rescue the Pelican State from the unholy alliance of feudalism and welfareism which is bleeding it white and stifling its development. But then again, it just might.

Truly has it been said that there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time is come. But also truly was it said that "of that day and of that hour knoweth no man." So we bend to the task before us, doing what we can.

In an old Hindu story, Ami says to his son, "Bring me a fruit off that tree and break it open. What is there?"

The son replies, "Some small seeds."

"Break one, and then what do you see?"

"Nothing, my lord."

"My child," said the wise man, "Where you see nothing, there dwells a mighty tree."

A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is but drudgery. A vision and a task is the hope of the world. May we never disdain the meanness of the task because of the greatness of the vision. May we never lose sight of the greatness of the vision because of the meanness of the task. Building patiently upon the sacrificial labors of countless unsung saints who saw Truth and followed her, who recognized Justice and stood for her, may we hallow their endeavors by indelibly inscribing upon our hearts and souls the solemn promise: "I will persevere."

The pastor prepared a beautiful sermon describing the plight of the poor and how it was the charitable duty of the rich to share their wealth with the poor. After the service a friend asked how it went.

"Well, it was partially successful," said the pastor reflectively, "I convinced the poor."