A Motto for Georgists

by ROBERT V. ANDELSON

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We Georgists need to be challenged to an enthusiasm based not upon grandiose expectations but simply upon unflinching commitment to that which is right and true and just. Our ranks include no place for summer soldiers or for sunshine patriots, and the sooner this is clearly understood the better for all concerned. For the fact is that the millenium which Henry George foresaw may not be just around the corner, and 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. 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. This, I thought, was the golden key to the enigma of how to build a better world. I still think it is the key. 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 pulled 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, cut the ground from under the looming threats 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 first read Progress and Poverty. And when I finally found the army it didn’t impress me as being exactly mighty.

A score of neat but somewhat less than prosperous looking folk, drinking weak 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, 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 on 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 worldwide march toward social justice. Eagerly I perused the deathless document. This was my final disillusionment. The manifesto turned out to be a call for volunteers to help redecorate the local headquarters office! 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 lib-
erate mankind? I gazed down on the
insipid liquid in the paper cup some-
one had pressed into my hand. My
head swam with vertigo. It seemed as
if the holy city were dissolving in
Hawaiian punch. "Let this cup pass
from me," I murmured.

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 influ-
enced by the imminence or distance of
its culmination.

The history of the Georgist move-
ment has been one 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 op-
tion on the state level here, a faltering
application on some wider level there
—of such stuff as these are our victories
compounded. And even our rather pa-
thetic relish in these modest triumphs
is cankered by the knowledge of re-
verses. In short, while Georgism may
be the wave of the future (and I be-
lieve it is), there has been as yet no
overwhelming tide in its direction.

Nonetheless, I would not speak to
you the words of Talleyrand: "Pas de
zèle." What is needed is not less zeal
but more zeal. What is needed is a zeal
that does not ask to be fed upon suc-
cess, 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 tram-
pelled down—oftentimes 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 rec-
ognize 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 some-
thing to give that is their own by
proper right—theirs in essence, and
not by accident?

"That they have, and that here and
now, everyone who has felt their exul-
tation knows."

In place of the pusillanimous advice
of Talleyrand, I commend to your
adoption the motto, "I will persevere,"
under which William of Orange led
his countrymen to independence. And
I ask that you consider deeply the pro-
found epigram with which he eluci-
dated what it meant to him: "We need
not hope in order to act; nor need we
succeed in order to persevere."

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," replies 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

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hope of the world. May we never dis
drain 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 sacri-
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ficial labors of countless unsung saints
who saw Truth and followed her, who
recognized Justice and stood for her,
may we hallow, each of us, their sturdy
efforts by inscribing indelibly upon
our hearts and souls the solemn promi
se: "I will persevere."

Typical Comments from Students

MRS. MINA OLSON of Chicago
was proud of her students and
collected a few of their class talks for
us to share.

Faith Hoffman said she learned some
startling new ideas on the cause of
poverty, enjoyed the method of study-
ing the lessons, joined in some exhilar-
ating discussions, and hopes that be-
cause of this she can do something con-
structive about "our ancient, out-of-
date social system."

Andy Rausch said for him the most
important point in Progress and Pov-
erty was the part that rent plays, and
how, going back into history, it has
been the major cause of poverty and
the ruination of empires. "In order to
have equal distribution of wealth," he
wrote, "we must make it worthwhile
for capital to invest and for labor to
be fully paid for what it produces.
This may not eliminate poverty en-
tirely, but it could bring it down to a
bare minimum."

Gloria Handzik said she was grate-
ful for the opportunity to take this
course as it had made her aware of
some of the biggest causes of economic
problems, such as unfair taxation and
land speculation. The first kills incen-
tive and reduces purchasing power —
the second, land speculation, is the
parent of inflation, and throws the
economy out of balance. "Wouldn't it
be nice," she asks, "if some of our so-
called men of influence could believe
that we should leave this world in a
condition somewhat better than we
found it in?"

H. Handzik seemed surprised by
the simplicity of this idea and said man
has always wound up in the same dark
alley of taxation. Since Henry George's
views seemed the soundest and fairest,
three questions came to mind: 1) Why
is the land value taxation so difficult
for our political statesmen to absorb
and put to effect? 2) Is this idea, after
it's put into effect, as good as it
sounds? 3) What seems to be the big
obstacle standing in the way of putting
this totally to work?

Many interesting talks were also
given at the commencement in New
York last term. Here is a sampling
from one which happened to reach
HGN. It was by Essie Harris in Fran-
cis Nicosia's class.

"In every age and civilization there
has been the haves and have-nots.
There has always been plenty, and yet
for some there is so little. These situa-
tions are found throughout the world.
We know that aid in the form of food
and clothes is being sent to the so-
called poverty areas abroad as well as
to our large cities.

"Henry George, who was one of
America's great economists, referred
to this as a social evil, and in order to
get rid of it he said the causes would
have to be eliminated. He denied that
the evil resulted from insufficient cap-
ital or low production or too many
people. But he did claim it was caused
by unjust and unequal distribution of
wealth.

"Some things he said would help
eliminate poverty were association in
equality and chances to increase knowl-
dge and skill through education. Un-
less we have cooperation there cannot
be a healthy and flourishing society."

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