

Bummer and Lazarus

By JOS. W. FOLEY

THOUGH this age has been rightly called "The Age of Discovery," it so very seldom happens that the man in the street enters the ranks of the discoverer that the finding of even a small "nugget" gives a pleasing sensation of triumph. When the discovery is associated with Henry George the pleasure is increased; and the increase is greater when it throws light on some statement of his.

In Chapter V of the First Book of "The Science of Political Economy," Henry George writes:

"'Bummer' and his client 'Lazarus' were as well known as any two-legged San Franciscan some thirty-five or forty years ago, and until their skins had been affectionately stuffed, they were 'deadheads' at free lunches, in public conveyances and at public functions."

I suppose many readers, like myself, have often wondered who these two animals were. Not that their identification would add one iota to the sum of human happiness, or assist in the study of Political Economy; but the passage quoted above becomes intensified by knowing something about the animals themselves. And behind the animals lies a moving story of kindness.

Some ten years before Henry George reached San Francisco, another wanderer had landed there. His name was Joshua Abraham Norton, and he was an English Jew. He was about thirty years old, and his dress and bearing marked him out as being somewhat eccentric. This did not prevent him from prospering, for within a few months he was the occupant of a large building on one of the main streets, and advertised himself as "J. A. Norton, Merchant."

In less than five years this original building had increased fourfold, and Norton had become the owner of several others. For him, there was no need to run around seeking odd jobs at typesetting; for him no expeditions to Oregon or the Frazer River, chasing elusive gold and coming back "dead broke"; for him no going out to borrow five dollars from the first man he met.

Norton was indeed a "forty-niner," and he had the "forty-niner's" luck. "His name was writ in the list of 'our substantial citizens'; he had the courtship of men and the flattery of women"; but I doubt if he had "the best pew in the church and the personal regard of the eloquent clergymen."

Then by one swift stroke of fortune came disaster. The fire of 1853 almost blotted out the city. All Norton's fortune went up in flames, and heaps of ashes marked the places where but yesterday stood his substantial shops.

Stunned by the blow, he wandered aimlessly around, making no attempt to retrieve his losses; and when his friends, fearing suicide, offered their help, he did not

even answer, but walked away dazed with grief.

For a time he disappeared; and we can only picture some kindly soul looking after his wants and nursing him back to something like sanity. But when he reappeared he had raised himself to royalty! He was "Emperor of the United States of America" with the title "Norton the First." He announced that this honor had been conferred upon him by the state legislature, and later on, he added "Protector of Mexico."

It was well for the "Emperor" that he lived in such a backward age; for had he issued his proclamation today, a jury of "scientists" would have sat on him and discovered that he had a "split" mind, or that his hormones were not behaving themselves, and his royal palace would have been a lunatic asylum. But in those days he was accepted as one of God's afflicted, and treated as such.

His next proclamation declared that his subjects must pay taxes for the royal upkeep; and this was followed by "demand notes," which he served himself, acting as his own collector, and giving receipts bearing the royal seal. Fortunately for the San Franciscans, there was no national debt, and his entourage consisted of two collie dogs "Bummer" and "Lazarus," who followed him everywhere.

His "demands" were never excessive, generally two or three dollars, and when they were not met, which was very seldom, he threatened to "levy attachment," which soon brought in the cash.

Soon he came to be regarded as a fixture, and for nearly thirty years his claims were seldom disputed. As Henry George says, he and his dogs "were deadheads at free lunches, in public conveyances and at public functions."

On one occasion, travelling by train, he entered the dining-car and demanded a meal appropriate for Royalty. The steward, not recognizing his royal visitor, whose shabby clothes did not suggest a royal exchequer, took no notice of him; whereupon the steward was royally berated, and the rail oad company was threatened with the loss o its franchise.

It was only after some of the passengers had told the steward to fill the order and present the bill to them, and the steward had tendered a profuse apology, that the royal indignation subsided. Shortly after this the railroad company sent the "Emperor" a pass available on any of its trains and dining-cars.

"We, Norton I, Dei Gratia Emperor of the United States of America and Protector of Mexico, do command that the steamship company for denying us a free passage to Sacramento be blocked on the river by the revenue cutter 'Shubric' till the rebels surrender."

This was a proclamation issued after a steamboat captain, unaware that he was carrying royalty, demanded payment of Norton's fare. Again his "Majesty" was acknowledged,

and he received a life-pass on all the company's boats.

The thought arises, was this revenue cutter, "Shubric," the same ship as that which brought George to California? It is very likely; for in one of his letters he says: "The Light-House steamer 'Shubric' will sail in a couple of weeks for California, where she is to be employed;" and there is a description of her in "The Life of Henry George" which makes it certain. "In addition to her regular duties of supplying lighthouses and maintaining the buoyage along the West coast, she was intended to give protection to government property along the seashore of Oregon and Washington from the depredations of Indian tribes, and was armed with six brass guns and a novel contrivance for squirting scalding water on the redskins when at close quarters."

Norton the First was "dear cousin" to Victoria of England and Francis Joseph of Austria, but scorned to hold converse with that upstart Napoleon III, and when the latter was rightly beaten by Norton's "dear cousin," the King of Prussia, San Francisco was placarded with a proclamation of rejoicing.

He did not disdain to take an interest in local politics, notwithstanding his connections with Europe's monarchs, and for twenty years seldom missed a session of the legislature, having his own special chair in the senate house. And when Grant was seeking nomination for president for the third time, the "Emperor" sent him a personal telegram commanding him to withdraw.

In 1868 Norton suffered his second great loss, for in that year died Bummer and Lazarus, and the Emperor was bereft of his court.

George refers to the dogs as "Bummer" and his *client* "Lazarus," and at first one is puzzled by the expression. But when one remembers the exactitude of George's language the difficulty disappears. For instance, many readers of "Progress and Poverty" are disturbed when they read "it is only necessary to *confiscate* rent," for there seems to be something unjust in the word "confiscate." But when its real meaning is shown to be "to put into the public treasury" the injustice vanishes. Again, in "The Science of Political Economy," he says "the confusions as to value which in the minds of the students of the scholastic economy have *perplexed the idea* of wealth." We are accustomed to thinking of the *mind* being perplexed; but when we discover that the word means "to make difficult to be understood," we realize George's grasp of the English language. And so with the word "client," which originally meant a dependent, or a follower; we can picture "Lazarus" following the lead of the more active or intelligent, or perhaps older, "Bummer".

But whichever it may have been, their funeral was attended by a "concourse of San Franciscans on foot and in carriage," and as George says "their skins were affectionately stuffed," and, it may be, preserved to this day in a public museum.

Their loss however, did not deter the "Emperor" from performing his duties, and he continued issuing proclamations till 1879 when at the close of that year his "subjects" were called upon to offer prayers of thanksgiving to Almighty God for the blessings of the year that was closing!

Did he know? Could he have numbered those blessings? Had he heard of a book which had been brought to birth only a few months before? We can picture Henry George reading the placard, and fervently responding to its call.

But the American Empire was nearing its close, for Norton died on the 8th of January, 1880, after an illness of only a week. His passing might have been that of an orthodox Emperor, for the newspapers published long accounts of his life, and "more than 10,000 people, from working men to millionaires, and including over 2,000 women and children, followed his corpse to the Masonic Cemetery." This was no mere theatrical spectacle, but their sorrow was sincere and genuine; and the Pacific Union Club bore the whole expense.

Food for reflection; and questions many. But only one will suffice. George has made the dogs immortal, but what of the man?

Here, one would think, is a character which he might have used to illustrate many of his points; but unless it is in some of George's earlier and less known writings, Norton is not mentioned.

It is quite possible that there are still living, "old-timers" who can remember both Norton and George, and may be able to say if George ever spoke of the "Emperor." But whether or no, linking the two together has been an interesting and delightful task.

On Masks

THE Brooklyn Museum has been exhibiting a remarkable collection of masks of all types and races. The exhibition was labelled, "Masks—Barbaric and Civilized." One might see the witch-doctor masks of the African Negro, theatrical masks of the Orient, ceremonial masks of the American Indian.

Interesting is the fact that one present-day mask of the "civilized" world is—a gas-mask.

That reminds us of Thomas Hardy's verse:

"Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison gas.

One of the reasons we have to don gas-masks today may be that our economists, and leaders in high places are wearing masks similar to the primitive witch-doctor masks.

One word in defense of the witch-doctor—there was no one to tell him better.