

The Fame of Emperor Norton

IN the last issue of *LAND AND FREEDOM*, Jos. W. Foley contributed an interesting bit of research in his article "Bummer and Lazarus". In it Mr. Foley expressed regret that the hero of the story, Joshua Abraham Norton (who thought he was Emperor of America), was not mentioned in the works of Henry George. An additional bit of research reveals that George did mention him.

In one of his newspaper features, "Strange as it Seems", John Hix mentions an eccentric San Francisco character known as Abraham "Money" King. Accused by one John Cook, a tax collector, of being a miser, "King challenged the tax collector to a 'money duel' to prove that money meant nothing to him. He proposed to toss \$5 into San Francisco Bay for every dollar John Cook would toss in. By the time King had flipped 80 'cartwheels' into the water, Cook reluctantly admitted defeat." This incident, readers will recall, is mentioned in Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" in the discussion on labor unions in Book VI.

Upon our inquiry, Mr. Hix has assured us that "Money" King was the same character as "Emperor" Norton.

Another interesting article on Norton appeared in the *American Magazine* of February 25. In this article, the story of how Norton lost his fortune is different from Mr. Foley's version. "In 1853," the *American* story goes, "he became eagerly speculative and tried to gain control of the rice market. He bought heavily to effect a corner and capitalists applauded him for his daring. He seemed on the verge of an immense fortune in profits and he built extravagant dreams. Almost the last pound of rice in port had been purchased. Then came the blow. Two unexpected shiploads of rice arrived from China. Norton and his newly-formed company could not take them up and were almost ruined. The shock of disappointment was a blow to his sanity."

If this is the true story of how Norton lost his fortune, it might well have been used by Henry George "to illustrate many of his points," as Mr. Foley suggests. It is a good example of the impermanency of monopoly in the products of labor. Wealth, not being limited in quantity, does not permit of being cornered. Had Norton the foresight to seize control of the limited source of wealth, land, the story might have been a different one. Instead of losing his sanity, and imagining he was Emperor of America, he might have in fact become a real one.

But nevertheless, Norton's fame is on the increase. There is a plan afoot to erect a statue to his memory in San Francisco. Would that that city were equally ready to pay tribute to the sanity of its prophet, Henry George!

BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN DEWEY'S SOCIAL APPROACH

"The Philosophy of John Dewey", Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp. Northwestern University, Evanston and Chicago. 1939. 708 pp. \$4.00.

This imposing tome is Volume I. of an ambitious project, to be known as "The Library of Living Philosophies". The purpose is to present an adequate survey of the thought of leading contemporary philosophers. John Dewey has been honored first, as America's foremost philosopher.

The work follows a certain plan of presentation (as will the others to come): A biography of the philosopher; a series of expositions and criticisms of the philosopher by leading thinkers; a rejoinder by the philosopher himself; and a bibliography of his writings. Among the contributors to this volume are Bertrand Russell, George Santayana, Alfred N. Whitehead, Joseph Ratner, and George Raymond Geiger, each one writing on some particular phase of Dewey's philosophy.

Dr. Geiger's subject is "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy". While some of the other contributors have criticized Dewey adversely, Geiger has offered an appreciative exposition of Dewey's stand on social affairs. In his introductory remarks, Geiger reiterates the challenge to philosophy that has appeared in his earlier works, notably "The Philosophy of Henry George". The modern philosopher, he says, must become part of the life about him and tackle its problems, if he is to serve a useful purpose in society.

Geiger further points out that Dewey's philosophy is chiefly one of social approach. This he explains as a function of his experimentalism and instrumentalism. Dewey is one who would apply the scientific method to social affairs. The true scientific spirit "stands for provisionalism and reconstruction, reliance upon working hypotheses."

Another of Dewey's chief tenets in his entire philosophy is the stressing of "interaction" or "association". Though he would steer away from the concept of immutable natural law, he is compelled to state that "association in the sense of combination is a 'law' of everything known to exist." The apostrophic treatment of the word "law" is an expression of the aversion on the part of most modern philosophers to the concept of natural law. This attitude is almost as dogmatic as the one-time arrogant attitude of "assertion without analysis". It would seem that when a universal condition has been observed and tested, there should be no objection to calling it a natural law.

But this avoidance of absolute concepts serves a healthy purpose in some things. For instance, grand abstractions like the State have no meaning for Dewey. "Public acts require officials and administration. This is the locus of the state." It is merely "a functioning arm of public activity instead of a mystical power worthy of worship."

In Dewey's analyses, new and fresh meanings are given to "democracy" and "liberalism"—words that are so carelessly rolled about these days. In his own sense, he is a democrat and a liberal. He demands a free and democratic society, in which philosophic inquiry into social affairs can function—a society in which "free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication." He has no use for totalitarian concepts, nor for Marxian dialectic, because of their deadening effects on the inquiring spirit, because of their metaphysical and absolute approach to social affairs.

In Dewey's own rejoinder, in this book, he gives an appreciation of Dr. Geiger's paper. In his remarks he says: "It cannot be denied that in our social life a great unbalance has resulted because the method of intelligent action has been used in determining the physical conditions that are causes of social effects, whereas it has hardly been tried in determination of social ends and values."