

"HOW TO ABOLISH POVERTY"

This is a remarkable book* by a remarkable man. George L. Record died in 1933, and this book was written during illness and put aside by the author in the hope that he would be able to improve it. This fact will explain a certain sketchiness in the treatment of some of the subjects handled, but his friends have done well to print it with an introduction by Amos Pinchot and a foreword by James G. Blauvelt who tell us something of the man as well as of his work.

Mr Pinchot says: "George L. Record was one of the most extraordinary men this country has known. . . He was an idealist. But what made Record's idealism so unusual, and what put him in a place where, to my mind at least, he stood alone, was that, while he thought constantly and loftily in terms of a greater and happier society, he brought to his thinking an intensely shrewd, and to me, thrilling realism." Speaking of his campaigns for senatorship, Mr Pinchot says: "His speeches were the ablest, most brilliantly argued political addresses I have listened to. I have heard many of the foremost politicians of our time—Wilson, Brandeis, Borah, La Follette and lesser men. Not one of them, I think, could match Record in clear, forceful exposition of a subject. His native common sense, his honesty and utter fearlessness, his picturesque idiomatic expression and command of facts, placed him, so far as my knowledge of political arguments extends, in a class by himself."

Another tribute to Record is quoted from a letter written by Lincoln Steffens, now, too, no longer with us, to James Kerney, after reading the latter's book, *The Political Education of Woodrow Wilson*: "The idea you left me biggest with is 'The Record of George L. Record.' As I learned from you the part this amazing man played in the education of Mr Wilson, I recalled his efforts to show me and Mark Fagan and Everett Colby, and all that crowd and others, many others, what they were up against really and what to do about it. He must have played a part in the lives and education of more men than anybody except perhaps his opposite, Alexander Hamilton. He has been the Thomas Jefferson of our day."

A man who could evoke such praise from men so competent to judge must indeed have been a remarkable man. This book indicates, though imperfectly, how much it is deserved. It goes straight to the point, without ambiguity and without hesitation. Its very title is a challenge—not how to tinker with abuses, not how to palliate the results of injustice, but how to abolish poverty. There is a lesson in that. There is a lesson also in the fact that he keeps clearly before him that poverty is due to privilege, that what is needed is not charity but justice. Yet keeping that ideal in front of him the immediate policy which he outlines as applicable to the United States though radical is not extreme. The great thing is that it moves in the right direction. There is nothing in it that blocks further progress or does not facilitate the attainment of the ultimate goal. However, it is for Americans to say how far they think it suited to the needs and circumstances of their country, for it is American in its outlook although based upon principles which are applicable anywhere.

As an example of how sure and direct was Record's analysis of any problem we may quote some passages from his chapter dealing with proposals for the relief of the farmer. He says:—

"It is suggested that public money be loaned to farmers on mortgages bearing a rate of interest lower than the

market rate. The resulting favouritism, not to say corruption, is obvious. This money must be raised by taxation, which is sure to diminish the purchasing power of the masses. It is suggested that they should be induced to curtail their crops. The absurdity of trying to abolish poverty and increase jobs by diminishing the production of wealth ought to be plain. Such suggestions are subject to the defect shown by the experience of the Farm Loan Board. The theory there was that the government should purchase what was estimated to be the surplus products by our farmers over and above domestic needs; the price could be held up, and the Farm Board could gradually feed out the supplies thus purchased by the Board perhaps at a higher price, or at least without loss, and the price of the farmers product thereby permanently enhanced. This is a typical instance of what is called 'social planning.' It looks well on paper but ignores the result of human experience everywhere. The result was the expenditure of several hundred millions of dollars, accumulation of enormous quantities of farm products in storehouses, which are carried at large expense and which overhang the market, and which must finally be destroyed, or given away in charity to our people or foreigners."

One is tempted to quote much more if space permitted. The book passes under review the main economic problems of the day—tariffs, unemployment, sales tax, the new deal, the money question, monopolies, and most important of all the land question. Some readers may think Record went wrong in his immediate programme in defending the income tax and inheritance taxes, and in not advocating a drastic attack upon the tariff although he recognizes free trade as the ideal to be aimed at. At these points we enter the difficult field of political expediency. The propagandist is free from the necessity of considering how he can secure sufficient votes to carry even an instalment of what he aims at. It is easy to denounce his political colleagues' lack of principle, whereas experience might make him more sympathetic. But whatever small criticism this book may receive in so far as its statement of a political programme is concerned, its merits are so great that it deserves to be read.

It should be mentioned that it contains as an appendix the review of *Land Value Taxation in Practice*, written by Mr Madsen as an appendix to Mr Verinder's *Land and Freedom*. The editors considered that this exposition of the practical achievement of land value taxation throughout the world was a fitting complement to Mr Record's argument as to the basic importance of the land question.

A COMMENDATION

Writing in the *Daily Herald* (10th August), Mr Francis Williams, the City Editor, said:

Very few people, I am afraid, bother to interest themselves overmuch in the deficiencies of an existing system of local rating. Certainly not one ratepayer in a hundred appreciates the fact that his annual liability might be put on a more equitable basis if rates were assessed on land values and not the buildings and improvements erected thereon.

A comprehensive survey of the anomalies of the present system and a sound outline of proposals for remedying the situation are to be found in a new book, *Land-Value Rating*, which has been written by Mr F. C. R. Douglas, a member of the London County Council and Chairman of the Finance Committee of Battersea Borough Council. The book, which is published by the Hogarth Press (2s. 6d.) is worthy of the closest study by all concerned in local administration.

* *How to Abolish Poverty*. By George L. Record. Published by the George L. Record Memorial Association, Jersey City. Price \$1.