

THOMAS JEFFERSON

The bicentenary of Thomas Jefferson occurred on 13th April. We give here an extract from the tribute Mr Herbert Agar paid to his memory in the article appearing in the London Observer, 11th April.

IN 1784 Thomas Jefferson almost solved the problem of slavery in the United States. He was chairman of a congressional committee charged with making a plan of government for the Western Territories. This was before the present American Constitution was adopted; it was a year after the treaty which had set the colonies free from the British Empire.

The report of Jefferson's committee, which was drafted by Jefferson himself, provided that "after the year 1800 of the Christian Era there should be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any of the United States." The report failed of adoption by a single vote.

The greatness of the aim, the narrowness of the failure, the eventual triumph of the idea, all are characteristic of the life of Jefferson. If he had succeeded he would have saved the lives of millions and prevented the misery of tens of millions. He was beaten by the narrowest of margins. He foresaw the horrible results of his defeat. Yet he did not give way to rancour, and he did not lose his faith in man's reason or man's destiny.

In the last days of his life Jefferson was still seeking a method to abolish slavery. He was still defeated by his neighbours, yet he died believing in those neighbours. Those of us who share his faith to-day might celebrate his bicentenary by trying to make ourselves good enough to share his hope and his charity as well.

Seventeen years after his defeat on the issue of slavery, Jefferson became President of the United States. His purpose was to help to build a country which would confer equal rights and privileges upon all. He believed that man is reasonable and that men are brothers, and he thought that at last he would have a chance to prove it. Unhappily, he became President in the midst of the Napoleonic era. . . . He wanted his eight years in office to prove that he was right about the nature of man and the destiny of America; all that he was allowed to prove was the impossibility of keeping the United States out of a world war. The war did not come until Jefferson had retired from the Presidency; but his precious eight years had been wasted in the effort to have peace when there was no peace.

The moral of the story is not discouraging. Jefferson never lost faith in man's reason or man's brotherhood. He always knew it was his country's destiny, some day, to help make a world of equal rights and privileges. Therefore he lives in the American mind as the most powerful influence for good.

The historians have written wittily about Jefferson's failure to accomplish what he promised. He did not pass the laws, produce the economic conditions, maintain the peace, which he predicted. All he did was to live his life in such a way that four generations after his death his name still reminds Americans that it is their duty to defend a great tradition, to live in such a way as to promote human dignity, reason, equality.

ELLESMERE PORT AND OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

THE *Cheshire Observer*, 10th April, reports that representations to the Government in favour of a general valuation of land values in the country are being urged by the Ellesmere Port Council through the Urban District Councils' Association. It is further recommended that it be made obligatory for at least a portion of local rates to be levied on the basis of such a valuation, "or alternatively for a national tax to be levied thereon, the levying of such rates or national tax to be made applicable to all land according to its site value." The purpose of this, it is stated is "in order that a uniform benefit may be derived from it and an equal pressure exerted to reduce land values to a non-speculative level and prevent land from being uneconomically withheld from use." The Ellesmere Port Council are of the opinion that unless such action as this is taken, the State or the Planning Authorities may easily be committed to a large and wasteful expenditure for which no adequate return will be secured, and which will have the ultimate result of retarding the provision of houses and the extension of useful productive enterprises on which the economic life of the country depends.

OLDHAM TOWN COUNCIL

At the meeting of the Oldham Town Council (*Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 8th April) in discussion on the report of the Finance Committee, Councillor Tweedale remarked that greater demands would be made on local authorities after the war which would cost them money. He advocated the rating of land values as one way of securing a new source of revenue. Councillor Middleton said that a reform of the rating system was long overdue and that where land had been increased in value by public activities a fair proportion of that increase should go to public funds. The figures presented by the Finance Committee are typical of most towns showing how public debt has burdened the revenue and what proportion has to be spent on the amelioration of poverty (largely caused as it is by present laws of land tenure and taxation). Total expenditure was £686,695. Of this £145,118 went in loan charges and redemption of debt; £15,689 in housing subsidies; £77,068 in maternity and child welfare; and £126,596 in public assistance.

SOUTHGATE BOROUGH COUNCIL

In the discussion on a proposed municipal land purchase—two acres for £2,000—at the Southgate Borough Council, reported in the *Palmer's Green Gazette*, 9th April, Councillor A. E. Lauder said that to the many important things rationed at this time there was one important exception—the land—from which we all came and to which we all had to return. The land had gone up in value; the people had increased it. When the houses were built the Council would have to say that owing to the price of the land the rent would be so much more than the rent the Council charged for the houses they erected after the last war.

DROITWICH BRINE BATHS

The *Times*, 3rd April, reported that the St. Andrew's Brine Baths, Winter Garden and other property have been offered to

the Droitwich Borough Council for £200,000. The property includes two brine pits at Gurney's Lane and Tower Hill and the brine rights. The Council considered in private the report from the mayor, who with the town clerk had discussed the proposal with the directors of Droitwich Spa, Ltd., and resolved as follows: "Having heard this report, the council unanimously agreed that they could not see their way to enter into any further negotiations with the directors, having regard to the price asked."

It is obvious that a price for a monopoly was in question and the Council was deterred by the ransom demanded. Brine pits and brine rights should be the property of all the people and not the private perquisite of any individual. In passing, it would be of interest to know at what value this property, for which £200,000 is wanted, is assessed for taxation and what is the annual amount of local rates paid upon it.

WORLD CRISIS AND HIGH TARIFFS

SPEAKING at a Pan-American celebration in New York, 15th April (*Manchester Guardian* report) Mr Sumner Welles, U.S.A. Under-Secretary of State said: "It would be a distortion to say that the economic crisis of the early thirties was caused solely by the tariff policy of the U.S.A. It is not distortion, however, to say that the American policy of tariff increases had an important bearing in bringing about the adoption by other countries of similar policies. This slow strangulation of international trade was one of the chief causes of the world crisis. It devolved upon the country of the western hemisphere most responsible for this short-sighted foreign trade policy to take the initiative in reopening the channels of international trade. This was done by the United States through the Trade Agreements Act of 1934, extended in 1937 and again in 1940. These two policies, non-intervention and reciprocal trade concessions, laid the groundwork for undertaking inter-American co-operative action in many broad fields."

Mr Raymond Mortimer reviewing (*Manchester Guardian*, 17th April) Count Sforza's book *The Real Italians*, published by the Columbia University Press and Oxford University Press says: "It contains many penetrating comments, but the case might be better put, for Count Sforza glosses over the faults of the pre-Fascist regime, in which he was at one time Foreign Minister, a regime that was Machiavellian in its foreign policy as well as ineffective in home affairs. The Parliamentary regime failed because it curbed the rapacity neither of the industrialists in the North nor of the great landowners in the South. The Left finally resorted to direct action; the bourgeoisie followed their example, and proved stronger. The Fascist claim to have improved conditions is untrue, but that does not acquit the previous regime of gross negligence."

15s. THE PHILOSOPHY OF HENRY GEORGE, by Prof George Geiger. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.