

STRENGTH, FAITH AND WISDOM

By JULIA BASTIAN

THE point about economic and social ideals — if they are ideals — is that they are bound to resemble all other ideals; the truth is the truth. Thus, in *American Ideals** as set out by Heman Chase, one is faced with a remarkable resemblance to the ideals of Henry George; yet this version has the marks of individuality.

Mr. Chase is a professional surveyor, teacher, engineer and economist, and is thus well placed to present afresh—this year of grace 1965 — the economic and social basis of an ideal society, but it is a pity, perhaps, that throughout this long essay no reference is made to the fact that the principles proclaimed would apply with equal force and benefit to every quarter of the globe, not just to the U.S.A.

The opening chapters trace the history of America from the time of the earliest settlers on free land and describe the effects of free trade over the country as a whole. Then comes the rise of mass production as the country matures in every economic and scientific way, a high degree of productivity and interdependence, greatly aided by the growth of communications and transport. These factors, combined with the absence of tariff barriers between States, provided the greatest free trade area anywhere in the world.

Around 1900, however, came a turning point and the beginnings of decline — especially the decline of the individual's self-reliance. America today, writes Mr. Chase (as if she were the only country), "is cursed by the accumulation of unsolved problems and by the growing burden of the costs of government palliatives, Robin Hood-ism, and of official tampering with economic affairs."

"Alongside the eruption of racial strife, the land and all its natural resources have been allowed to fall into private ownership. Thus it is that the country reaps a harvest of crime, poverty, violence, hatred and disunity."

Mr. Chase describes in the most compelling and colourful way the conditions in the life of the people during the past one hundred years, comparing the rural life most people lived in the nineteenth century, their versatility and self sufficiency, their independence and flexibility, with the problems of the industrialised and urbanised society that followed.

"What has actually come to pass," he points out, "is that access to natural opportunity to produce is now so badly distributed that many have no chance to produce anything to put into the channels of exchange, and so can buy nothing — and are therefore poor."

Monopoly of natural resources and productive technological sophistication have simply relegated many to the sidelines. This is all familiar ground. So, too, is the author's excellent explanation of the cycle of business depressions, complete with a chart showing the striking picture of conditions between 1898 and 1961, the early ups and downs, followed by slumps and booms and the extraordinary abnormality of the business cycle.

On, on, "down through the valley of the shadow," as Mr. Chase calls it, the reader is given the farm problem, the over-growth of the government, the social effects of industrialism, and the effect on young people — and on the old — who are the victims of these conditions.

Finally, the problem of war — shared with all other nations — is tackled bravely. "He who taketh up the sword shall perish by the sword" quotes the author, and explains how, despite the overall logic of peace, war is consantly revived.

One of the best sections deals admirably with capitalists v. proletarians. In thinking that the ownership of *land and capital* is the basis for exploitation of the workers — or "proles" — little if any distinction is made by socialists between these two basic factors of production — land and capital — as to their origin, durability, their replaceability, or their susceptibility to monopoly.

The second part of this work, called hopefully "Up toward the Light of Reason," takes the reader to the heart of the matter; land, of course, is the indispensable basis of all human activity and life. Plainly there is plenty of land, suitable for all uses from agriculture to commerce and housing, widely distributed throughout America *but not in use*, and only available at speculative prices.

The prevailing system of land tenure, its rights and wrongs, is pulled apart and viewed against a sound assessment of the essentials of public rights and private rights — which are, indeed, the economic basis of our ideals.

Among the wisdom and the numerous pieces of good advice that come out of this work, one prayer sticks in the memory: It is this:—

Give us the strength to change what must be changed,

The faith to bear what cannot be changed,

And the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.

Mr. Chase does not wait for that elusive moment in the future when he may have greater influence or more time to be persuasive: he has made the distinction one from the other, and in his wisdom has written this book.

* *American Ideals* by Heman Chase. Published by the author. \$1.00.