

The Soul of the World

A "Henry George Novel"

By Estella Bachman, 1909

Rediscovered by BENNETT CHALLIS

THIS is a remarkable little book. Aside from a minor theme that might be called super-theosophy, going back to *origins*, which gives the work its title, the theme lends itself to at least three different interpretations. The author is certainly not joking, but is inspired with a most serious desire to show up the single taxers of her day as a confused lot. Each *read into* the works of Henry George what pleased his own fancy, and seldom agreed with any of his fellows—of whom there were thousands in 1908—all similarly subjective. Mrs. Bachman has her own idea of a remedy for this confusion, and is confident that, once they understand it, the many distracted would-be followers of George will eagerly unite, under a new banner, as harmonious, uniformly understanding and fervent Crusaders for the Right.

The stage is set in Pasadena. Glen Harding, a former Pennsylvania school teacher who has studied Henry George to some extent, is a leading character. She declares in one instance, "I am positive of one thing . . . there can never be any surplus revenue when the land question is actually settled. There must be an exact balance between revenue and expenditure or the system cannot meet the requirements of a science. You know Patrick Edward Dove called politics 'the science of equity.' There cannot be a condition of equity where there is a surplus revenue. A surplus is itself evidence that someone has given something for nothing in the transaction, and the scales are unbalanced."

Plausible as this may seem at first sight, it is all wrong. There is certainly no lack of balance between revenue and expenditure where the Henry George plan is in operation. Society alone creates the value of land, which therefore *belongs* to society; individual users of society's property pay economic rent to society for the privilege of said use; society receives nothing but its own, value for value, and if there is a surplus above necessary public expenses, that in turn reverts to individual contributions, in the form of manifold public benefiets. Could anything be better "balanced" or more equitable?

The "Great Discovery?"

Another character refers to the lack of a unifying natural law, feels there must be such a law, and seeks to find it. He maintains the only way to establish a balanced land tenure is to levy a tax on the value of all public roads and highways, said tax to be paid by the property owners who enjoy the use of such highways, each in proportion to the benefit received. This proposal was welcomed as a "great discovery."

Not one word is said about collecting ground rent from the thus benefited properties, which in itself would furnish society with ample funds for the building and up-keep of all public passage or transportation facilities, from city streets to railways, out of surplus.

As the plot thickens and a romance develops, the following dialogue occurs: "The community creates land values and therefore land values should be taken by the community, and the single tax will do it."

"I long ago decided that phrase was obviously incorrect, and quit using it."

"Yet the community does create land values. The community—local or national—enacts and maintains the statutes which make legal prop-