

A Word With You

IN the life of Henry George one may read how a follower left him some money in a will to propagate his ideas. The relatives of the deceased, however, contested the will and claimed that the old fellow must have been out of his mind. George fought back and won—but then, on his own initiative, he returned the money to the relatives.

The point I wish to make here is that, when reading of George and the ebullient characters around him I had the impression that this was life, colorful and stimulating. When I came across the dingy episode of the grasping relatives, they seemed like shadows flitting across the scene.

Why should I gain an impression of something less than human from the very human impulse to seek monetary gain? The answer, I think, is that their behavior *was* less than human—*notwithstanding* that it represents very widespread behavior.

Man is an animal, plus. That plus is very important in the fulfilling of his humanity. The plus includes concern for the common good, the quest for justice, a caring for other human beings. When we are in the immediate vicinity of deeds done, the distinction is not always very clear. But as we move further away, the grasping and the greed, the ghoulish squabbles for gain, the self-indulgence, all seem to sink into an indistinguishable morass—and the only bright things

that stand out are the gracious, magnanimous and dedicated efforts.

One look at the stiff awkward portraits of kings in the early Middle Ages and gains the impression of a cramped and narrow life. But those monarchs lived a life of self-indulgence to the limit! From our distance we see the things that really count, and we call that period the "Dark Ages."

Even in reform movements selfishness can triumph. The "thirst for martyrdom" can be a form of self-indulgence, especially when there is an audience. And there is even crasser selfishness. In *Social Problems*, Henry George tells of a certain Florentine agitator—"when he had received a new pair of boots, he concluded that all popular grievances were satisfied." George muses that this happens to many reform movements.

I myself have seen quite a few impetuous crusaders sink into a peace with the world once they got themselves nice fat jobs. Suffering humanity? "To heck with you—I'm all right, Jack!"

"It is around the standard of duty," wrote George in concluding *Social Problems*, "rather than around the standard of self-interest that men must rally to win the rights of man. . . . In that spirit, and in no other, is the power to solve social problems and carry civilization onward."

—Robert Clancy

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The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y., supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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