

The Fame of Emperor Norton

IN the last issue of *LAND AND FREEDOM*, Jos. W. Foley contributed an interesting bit of research in his article "Bummer and Lazarus". In it Mr. Foley expressed regret that the hero of the story, Joshua Abraham Norton (who thought he was Emperor of America), was not mentioned in the works of Henry George. An additional bit of research reveals that George did mention him.

In one of his newspaper features, "Strange as it Seems", John Hix mentions an eccentric San Francisco character known as Abraham "Money" King. Accused by one John Cook, a tax collector, of being a miser, "King challenged the tax collector to a 'money duel' to prove that money meant nothing to him. He proposed to toss \$5 into San Francisco Bay for every dollar John Cook would toss in. By the time King had flipped 80 'cartwheels' into the water, Cook reluctantly admitted defeat." This incident, readers will recall, is mentioned in Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" in the discussion on labor unions in Book VI.

Upon our inquiry, Mr. Hix has assured us that "Money" King was the same character as "Emperor" Norton.

Another interesting article on Norton appeared in the *American Magazine* of February 25. In this article, the story of how Norton lost his fortune is different from Mr. Foley's version. "In 1853," the *American* story goes, "he became eagerly speculative and tried to gain control of the rice market. He bought heavily to effect a corner and capitalists applauded him for his daring. He seemed on the verge of an immense fortune in profits and he built extravagant dreams. Almost the last pound of rice in port had been purchased. Then came the blow. Two unexpected shiploads of rice arrived from China. Norton and his newly-formed company could not take them up and were almost ruined. The shock of disappointment was a blow to his sanity."

If this is the true story of how Norton lost his fortune, it might well have been used by Henry George "to illustrate many of his points," as Mr. Foley suggests. It is a good example of the impermanency of monopoly in the products of labor. Wealth, not being limited in quantity, does not permit of being cornered. Had Norton the foresight to seize control of the limited source of wealth, land, the story might have been a different one. Instead of losing his sanity, and imagining he was Emperor of America, he might have in fact become a real one.

But nevertheless, Norton's fame is on the increase. There is a plan afoot to erect a statue to his memory in San Francisco. Would that that city were equally ready to pay tribute to the sanity of its prophet, Henry George!

BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN DEWEY'S SOCIAL APPROACH

"The Philosophy of John Dewey", Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp. Northwestern University, Evanston and Chicago. 1939. 708 pp. \$4.00.

This imposing tome is Volume I. of an ambitious project, to be known as "The Library of Living Philosophies". The purpose is to present an adequate survey of the thought of leading contemporary philosophers. John Dewey has been honored first, as America's foremost philosopher.

The work follows a certain plan of presentation (as will the others to come): A biography of the philosopher; a series of expositions and criticisms of the philosopher by leading thinkers; a rejoinder by the philosopher himself; and a bibliography of his writings. Among the contributors to this volume are Bertrand Russell, George Santayana, Alfred N. Whitehead, Joseph Ratner, and George Raymond Geiger, each one writing on some particular phase of Dewey's philosophy.

Dr. Geiger's subject is "Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy". While some of the other contributors have criticized Dewey adversely, Geiger has offered an appreciative exposition of Dewey's stand on social affairs. In his introductory remarks, Geiger reiterates the challenge to philosophy that has appeared in his earlier works, notably "The Philosophy of Henry George". The modern philosopher, he says, must become part of the life about him and tackle its problems, if he is to serve a useful purpose in society.

Geiger further points out that Dewey's philosophy is chiefly one of social approach. This he explains as a function of his experimentalism and instrumentalism. Dewey is one who would apply the scientific method to social affairs. The true scientific spirit "stands for provisionalism and reconstruction, reliance upon working hypotheses."

Another of Dewey's chief tenets in his entire philosophy is the stressing of "interaction" or "association". Though he would steer away from the concept of immutable natural law, he is compelled to state that "association in the sense of combination is a 'law' of everything known to exist." The apostrophic treatment of the word "law" is an expression of the aversion on the part of most modern philosophers to the concept of natural law. This attitude is almost as dogmatic as the one-time arrogant attitude of "assertion without analysis". It would seem that when a universal condition has been observed and tested, there should be no objection to calling it a natural law.

But this avoidance of absolute concepts serves a healthy purpose in some things. For instance, grand abstractions like the State have no meaning for Dewey. "Public acts require officials and administration. This is the locus of the state." It is merely "a functioning arm of public activity instead of a mystical power worthy of worship."

In Dewey's analyses, new and fresh meanings are given to "democracy" and "liberalism"—words that are so carelessly rolled about these days. In his own sense, he is a democrat and a liberal. He demands a free and democratic society, in which philosophic inquiry into social affairs can function—a society in which "free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication." He has no use for totalitarian concepts, nor for Marxian dialectic, because of their deadening effects on the inquiring spirit, because of their metaphysical and absolute approach to social affairs.

In Dewey's own rejoinder, in this book, he gives an appreciation of Dr. Geiger's paper. In his remarks he says: "It cannot be denied that in our social life a great unbalance has resulted because the method of intelligent action has been used in determining the physical conditions that are causes of social effects, whereas it has hardly been tried in determination of social ends and values."

It may be added that here is the basis of Dewey's appreciation of, and favorable disposition toward, Henry George's philosophy. George has fused his keen analysis of social forces with a constructive concern for social ends and values. He tells us not only what is wrong, but what to do about it for our own good.

R. C.

THE BATTLE AGAINST HEREDITARY PRIVILEGE

"The Ending of Hereditary American Fortunes" by Gustavus Myers. Julian Messner, Inc., New York. 1939. 395 pp. \$3.50.

In this book, Gustavus Myers adds a valuable research contribution to his previous work. The value and importance of Myers' work rests mainly in the mass of documentary proof which he lists in support of his statements. Only a person accustomed to research can fully appreciate the tremendous labor involved in the study of original sources of information evidenced in the preparation of this book.

The theme is the history of the struggle in America, from era to era, against inequalities, particularly against inequality of power and position conferred in law by accident of birth.

Two laws of feudal origin, primogeniture and entail, brought to this country from Europe in connection with early Colonial land grants furnished the battlefield prior to the American Revolution for those fighting for liberty and equality. Primogeniture vested ownership of great landed properties in the eldest son to the exclusion of daughters and younger sons. Entail kept the estate intact from generation to generation and from century to century. The arguments of Thomas Jefferson and others to abolish these two bulwarks of landed aristocracy and the character of the opposition are well portrayed in the book. Pennsylvania (1776), North Carolina (1784), Georgia (1789), Massachusetts (1784), New Jersey (1780, 1784), New York (1786), South Carolina (1791) in turn abolished perpetuities in land holding. States later admitted to the Union were free from the perpetual grip of the dead hand. By about the year 1830 most of the great estates in America had vanished. With the abolition of hereditary title went also the hereditary prerogative of holding office, which, while not fixed in the statute law, had all the force of unbroken custom. Rotation in office under the pressure of democratic forces became the rule.

Common school education for the masses destroyed another age-old birth privilege which limited education to the well born.

The author points out that while this battle against hereditary privilege was being won as to land tenure, another form of perpetuity was coming in, that is, corporation charters for banks, land schemes and other enterprises.

The right to vote, formerly limited to men owning real estate of a prescribed value, became more universal after a long fight against the resistance of propertied opponents.

Assaults on the hereditary transmission of wealth came into the open in 1829 by a resolution adopted by the Workingmen's Party in New York City "that the first appropriation of the soil of the State to private and exclusive possession was eminently and barbarously unjust. That it was substantially feudal in character, inasmuch as those who received enormous and unequal possessions were *lords* and those who received little or nothing were *vassals*." Having made this timely and pertinent approach, understood then by everybody, the resolutions went on to press the main point: "That hereditary transmission of wealth, on the one hand, and poverty on the other, has brought down to the present generation all of the evils of the feudal system, and that, in our opinion, is the prime source of all our calamities."

The slavery question, another issue arising from accident of birth, occupied the mind of America during the generation preceding the Civil War. The movement for an income tax from 1861 to the present,

the growth of the power of the railroads, the economic dictatorship of the "Trusts", Populism, Labor Unions, each find their place in the swing of events up to the opening of the present century. Pen pictures of the contrasts between the extravagant follies of descendants who acquired control of great fortunes by "accident of birth" and the destitution of the children of the poor from whose labor those fortunes are extracted, appear throughout the volume.

The transition of the United States Senate from a "Millionaires' Club" to that of a popularly elected democratic body is dramatically told. The movement for inheritance taxes and gift taxes as a means of revenue and breaking up of great estates is traced with interesting results.

In conclusion the author points to the abolition of inheritances above moderate amounts as a remedy. As to great hereditary wealth he asks: "Why not definitely abolish it as a statutory right? And at the same time completely recast laws so as to prohibit trusts for heirs and all other devices allowing transmission of large fortunes?"

It is quite apparent that the author sees that the foundation of hereditary fortunes rests upon manipulation and control of the nation's natural resources and in monopolies and special privileges granted by law. The book also makes it plain that in spite of the passage of statute law tending to break up hereditary fortunes—primogeniture, entail, slavery, corporation trusts—the fact remains that great fortunes have increased and the lot of the average man has become more precarious as our Republic has advanced.

Students of Henry George will recognize that the remedy lies in preventing the wrongful appropriation of wealth in the processes of production and distribution rather than to wait as it were until the death of the robber and then attempt to recover some part of the proceeds of theft that he may perchance have left behind.

WALTER FAIRCHILD.

PAMPHLETS RECEIVED

"My Story—Englishman by Birth, American by Adoption", by Edward Barker. 1940. 25 pp.

The author relates his early admiration for American democracy while he was still in England, and his migration to America, the land of promise. Thrilled at first, then greatly disillusioned and saddened by the spectacle of unemployment and depressions, he emerges with his faith in democracy unshaken. He sees the solution to America's problems in an extension of democracy, in the adoption of the philosophy of Henry George.

"Business is Business", by Louis B. Ward. 1939. 18 pp.

This is an attack on the dogma of self-sufficiency and a plea for free trade. After a keen statistical analysis of our export trade, the author says:

"America is not self-sufficing. Three courses are open to her. First, she must become self-sufficing, which means a new imperialism if she is to continue to use such things as tin, rubber and silk. Second, she must find substitutes for these things. Third, she must learn to trade with the nations of the world."

"The Non-Producing Class", by William O'Neill. 14 pp. 1940.

The author seems to combine Veblenism with Georgeism, and there is also a touch of Marxian dialectic, although Henry George is the only authority quoted in the pamphlet. It is a brief survey of the rise of social consciousness, and the reactionism of non-producers. The author sees a new era approaching in which the common good will prevail over the unsocial lust for power still prevalent. He closes with an affirmation of faith in the power of education.