

present rating system. The New Towns Act looks not to why old towns are congested and deteriorate but would gamble £25,000,000 more or less on each to-be-built town and then let the rating system do its worst in taxing houses and giving private interests scope to gather increased land values to themselves.

A whole series of other measures touching the land question tells the same story of public money or Marshall Aid, or what you will, entering the Treasury to be dispensed again on schemes which ultimately benefit those who hold the land: the support for hill farmers; the £20,000,000 spent to improve Scotland's water supplies (increasing the rates on houses); the Drainage, Special Roads, Coast Protection and other betterment schemes. Each measure has compelled harassed taxpayers and ratepayers to foot a bill which should be charged against the rents of the benefited lands.

The obliquity of the Labour Government has been its failure to re-enact the Finance Act of 1931 (which the Conservatives repealed); to secure the valuation and taxation of land values and at the same time reform local taxation.

We do not say that the Conservatives would have done any better if they had been in power, but they could hardly have done worse. As it is, Conservatives and Socialists have been closely associated in effecting mischievous land legislation, and the Liberals have not been unwilling companions. It was time all came out into the open to justify their claims to represent the people in the government of the country. Whatever the results may be, we shall not this time have the Government so ardently desired by lovers of liberty, whose practical politics embody the simple plan that the free market shall be restored, that government take its hand off industry and that private initiative be allowed free scope, free from all monopoly and privilege. It is the pathway to peace and prosperity, to the Rule of Law and the righteousness that exalteth a nation. Land Value Taxation, the abolition of taxation on the work of man's hands, the freedom of trade, are secular phrases, but they are contained in the social philosophy free men must live up to, and these are its instruments.

A BIOGRAPHY WITH FALSE EMPHASIS

In *The Last of the Radicals** Miss C. V. Wedgwood, the writer and broadcaster, has presented the life of her uncle in such an urbane manner that she wins the approbation of those who had, and presumably still have, no sympathy with his social philosophy. Maurice Ashley, reviewing this book in *The Listener*, says that although he formerly laughed at Lord Wedgwood's "panacea of making the world safe for democracy by simplifying—or complicating—the procedure of the Inland Revenue" such thoughts did not predominate after reading this narrative; the author "had not allowed herself to be bogged down in the causes for which Lord Wedgwood fought." Such famous books as Condorcet's *Turgot* and Morley's *Gladstone* evidently require drastic excision.

From Miss Wedgwood's account it is quite clear that her uncle at the outset of his political career accepted the doctrines of Henry George and remained firm in this conviction to the end of his life. But if the reader wishes to learn the basis and scope of this radical philosophy which inspired the bulk of the story he will find, apart from passing references, only three sentences (pp. 69-70) which attempt any formal explanation of what the author refers to earlier (p. 10) as "Georgian socialism, now submerged by the Marxian school." After such cursory or misleading information it is not surprising to find that Sir Desmond MacCarthy, writing on this book in *The Sunday Times*, supposes George's "remedy was to nationalise the land" by a method apparently applicable only to America at that time, and which had never occurred to any reformer before. A biography that can leave readers under such delusions regarding the subject's guiding principle cannot do him justice. The Single Tax is not Socialism, as generally understood, but the alternative; it was advocated in old and new communities before George wrote *Progress and Poverty* and is maintained by a vigorous body of adherents not in the slightest affected by the influence of Marx. Miss Wedgwood convinces us of her uncle's integrity, independence and courage, and the vigour with which he

strove for what he considered right. But the biography of a reformer of society cannot have real value if the author does not give readers ample opportunity to judge the value of the reform he advocated, setting forth the arguments on both sides and endeavouring to establish the truth. By dismissing the main principle of her uncle's public life so briefly—even with a trace of amusement, e.g., "the gospel according to Henry George"—readers are left with the impression of a man of outstanding character whose "failure" might be attributed to inexplicable obsession for an obscure and doubtful theory.

Josiah Clement Wedgwood (1872-1943), was a great-great-grandson of that Josiah Wedgwood who in 1759 established the pottery which still flourishes under his lineal descendants. Young Josiah had the advantages of a healthy Victorian home, a public school and foreign travel as preparation for the army career he desired. Failing in physical tests, however, he chose naval architecture and as an apprentice in a Newcastle shipyard developed an enduring fellow-feeling for labouring men which stimulated an already active hatred of any form of oppression. In those days Fabians were the minority, so to stand by the under-dogs Wedgwood turned Fabian. This determined the direction of his approach to social questions although, paradoxically, even in the beginning he set a high value on tradition and nourished a romantic ideal of patriotism which survived service as an artillery captain in the Boer War. Afterwards, as magistrate at Ermelo, in the Transvaal, he was so successful in the task of restoring the life of a war-stricken district and reconciling an enemy whom he admired that he decided to live in Africa. But, his wife's health failing after two years, he resigned and at thirty-two was back in Newcastle-under-Lyme with a family and no profession.

Fortunately, just before this impasse in his career, the bequest of an uncle had assured him an independent income. He interested himself in the public affairs of the locality—his name and family opening every door—and read *Progress and Poverty*, discussing it with a brother on whose advice he had at Ermelo levied a rate

* Jonathan Cape, London. 16s.

on land values only, exempting buildings. At the time he had seen only the common sense of the method, now he appreciated the profound social significance of the principle. After his election to Parliament in the "Free Trade, Free Land, Free Breakfast Table" Liberal triumph of 1906 "in season and out of season he advocated the Single Tax as the solution to all problems of unemployment and finance"—to the amusement of Winston Churchill who, although he had read Henry George and found his arguments irrefutable, evidently regarded this as no excuse for an M.P. being in earnest about them. Wedgwood, however, from his first days in Parliament showed more concern for radical reform and defence of minorities than the usual political ambitions. He was active in all the land value agitation and legislation of those hopeful years before 1914, taking a leading part in the report which led to the Northern Nigeria Land and Native Rights Proclamation, 1910, which *The Times* described as "the most far-seeing measure of constructive statesmanship West Africa has ever known." In 1909 he became President of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values; he wrote *The Road to Freedom* "to show that modern civilisation is built upon slave labour, and land monopoly is the cause of this slave labour"; and in 1914 he toured America, lecturing to enthusiastic Georgeist audiences.

On the outbreak of war, after a moment of hesitation, he joined again and served with distinction in Belgium and the Dardanelles, later visiting East Africa, the United States and Russia in turmoil. As a member of the Mesopotamia Commission he learned enough about the spirit of a bureaucracy, in India, to arouse his sympathies for Indian nationalism.

But he never lost sight of the fact that "the last and greatest of the liberation movements," as he called it, was the paramount need, even although the cynical post-war atmosphere, with its political confusion sinking into class divisions, made it impossible to appeal as before to reasonable consideration of men's true interests. The struggle could not be taken up from the point where it had been interrupted, but in 1928, 1929, 1932 and 1933 he kept the subject of taxation of land values before Parliament by attempts to introduce Bills, and in 1937 he supported Mr. MacLaren's Bill for the same purpose. The failure of these attempts frustrated his efforts at radical reform but he could not be prevented from carrying out the M.P.'s true duty, as he saw it, of using his opportunities for ruthless investigation of every particular case of injustice brought to his notice. He supported some nationalist movements with an optimism not quite justified by the event. He wrote books on India, Palestine, Staffordshire pottery, the Wedgwood family and his own autobiography. His last book, *Testament to Democracy*, is an impressive warning against paternal government in all its aspects, and a vindication of a "free Parliament, not as a machine for making laws, but a machine for preventing Government from making laws."

Such sentiments might be mistaken for those of an Individualist of the Right if he had not always made it abundantly clear that liberty without access to natural opportunity is a sham. "Of his three best-loved causes, the Single Tax, Zionism and India, the Single Tax always came first," says his biographer. Starting from the Left he lived long enough to see the falsehood of such distinctions. He remained always consistent, though popular opinion changed and party "leaders" drifted with it. He was by turns Liberal, Independent Radical, I.L.P., Labour

and finally Independent, all three political associations supporting his last candidature at Newcastle-under-Lyme which he represented continuously until raised to the peerage in 1942. His political allegiance was best described by himself in an imaginary interview with his ancestor, the founder of the pottery. "What are your politics?" asks the old Radical. "Yours, sir," answers the modern Josiah, "hatred of cruelty, injustice and snobbery, and an undying love of freedom."

Miss Wedgwood's book gives readers the family and personal background to this story, but we are left with the impression of Wedgwood as a land reformer in almost complete isolation. Apart from his brother and a very doubtful reference to Philip Snowden, the name of no other Single Taxer is mentioned. No reader would dream that Wedgwood was Secretary of a Land Values Group of some 180 M.P.'s, that in 1931 an Act for general taxation of land values—albeit with some blemishes—was passed through both Houses, or that, despite the betrayal of leaders, the principle of land value taxation has been endorsed again and again in resolutions of the Liberal and Labour Parties.

Perhaps these and other omissions of relevant fact originated in the author's desire to justify her description of Lord Wedgwood as *last* of the radicals, a title which he himself suggested on one occasion. He could not have desired that it should be used in such a way as to disparage the courage and sacrifices of so many others actuated by a love of freedom equal to his own and who stood by his side in the same fight for land reform; nor would he have desired to ignore the comrades who have since joined to carry on the struggle.

Lord Wedgwood had powerful family connections, a private income and other worldly advantages. None could have used these advantages more generously or usefully, but he would have acknowledged that independence of mind and spirit is much more difficult to attain and preserve without any of these advantages. Yet it has been done by folk in humbler circumstances, imbued with the same radical spirit as Lord Wedgwood. It is difficult for the present reviewer to refrain from mentioning persons who have no desire to be singled out. To do so, however, would be more useful to the cause of humanity than to suggest there ever *can* be the last radical, however undisturbed the heedless many may remain at such a prospect. In the past the evils which corrupt human life have always been sought and checked by a minority who, refusing the specious assurances of authority and dominant opinion, got down to the root of the evil. Why did these radicals persevere in a course which rendered them so tiresome to the vast majority content with protection, privilege, doles and mass opinion? We do not pretend to know the deepest springs of human nature, but it is as certain that radicals will continue to be born as that the majority will not spontaneously become radicals.

F. D. P.

The Condition of Labour. By Henry George. Open letter to Pope Leo XIII and treating of the rights of property and justice in the distribution of wealth. 4s.

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