

The Quintessence of Individualism

by OSCAR B. JOHANNSEN

HENRY GEORGE, in his lecture "Moses," emphasized that after tracing movements to their sources "we at last reach the individual." Georgism has been called the philosophy of freedom, but, possibly, it might be more accurately described as the philosophy of the individual, for it stands for more than stripping away all of the hindrances by which the State binds men. True, it staunchly defends the negative concept of laissez-faire—a fair field to all with favors to none—but at the same time it opens up the vista of a philosophy of life for the individual.

Each person has a life to live, in which he must prove himself to himself and to God. He has within himself a spark of the Divine—the knowledge and ability to do right and wrong. How he controls that spark will largely determine whether his life is a wonderful or a terrible experience.

Henry George seems to have captured the essence of that concept when he pointed out that "I AM was the truth that dawned upon Moses". I AM. I am a living, breathing, sentient being with a soul. I am a man with hopes, abilities, dreams which I must try to realize in order to live, here and now. But how will I make the most of my life? Henry George urged all to live in full awareness of the fact that their actions would "bear fruit in this world."

But to develop the finest fruit you must be in a position to utilize to

the highest degree the capabilities within you. This means you must not only have the freest use of your faculties, but at the same time have placed at your disposal the maximum amount of opportunities. The only conditioning factor is that the same opportunities must be available to your fellowman. Society must, therefore, take the economic rent of land not only because it is wise and just, but because that is the only way to give the individual the maximum freedom and opportunity he requires to develop.

Whether he makes good or poor use of his freedom and opportunities he, alone, can decide, but with these rights at a maximum, the possibilities exist that the choices he makes will be of the highest order. Implicit in the Georgist philosophy is the faith that men will tend to make the finer choices when conditions are optimum. That this appears to be a rational belief is borne out by the experience of our own country. With the much greater opportunities in America, due to the relatively free land available, the emigres from Europe became, in many instances, great writers, businessmen, statesmen and philosophers. Tom Paine, stifled in England, became, in the freer atmosphere of our country, the soul of the American Revolution.

How many of us have within ourselves the latent talents for creating a work of deathless beauty or compelling truth no one can say. But to the extent that opportunities have been

restricted by the private appropriation of economic rent many of our possibilities to develop have been infringed upon. Some like Henry George, despite growing restrictions rose above them and bequeathed to us great works. But, might not they have done even finer work had better conditions existed?

The simple fact is that we are not

advocating just another reform for improvement of the economic situation of the people. We are fighting for the individual's right to develop himself to the fullest and to understand the deep significance of the truth "I AM" which dawned upon Moses. In short, we are fighting for each man's maximum opportunity to be a man.

