

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

MAY we plead for a little seriousness on the part of book reviewers, editorial writers and essayists of the day? We are sick of their eternal cleverness, their addiction to phrase-making, their insufferable pose. We name no names, though these qualities are characteristic of ninety per cent. of those who are doing the writing of the day.

WE hearken back to the essayists who were funny with a difference, Charles Lamb and Tom Hood. They had heart and conviction; beneath their humor lay a profound current of seriousness; they had a background which impelled Hood, for example, at other moments to sing his immortal *Song of the Shirt*; their humor lay close to tears, hence the perennial and indestructible character of their work. The modern humorist is not a humorist but a farceur.

WHAT is the real difference between the more modern essayists and the early Victorians or later pre-Victorians? We think it is that these writers had a far finer social consciousness. Lacking this, too many of our present-day writers fall back on a certain superficial smartness, clever turns of phrase, and a careless impudence and flippancy with which they face the eternal verities.

IT is due of course to our methods of education in which the essential verities play a small part. Fundamental principles of art, or literature, or sociology do not exist. There are no natural laws; principles exist subjectively, not objectively; political laws of action and interaction are what the latest professorial dicta declare them to be. And current literature, speculation and philosophy, along with the lucubrations of our smart little essayists, reflect this attitude.

THERE are innumerable magazines devoted to business and business technique. There are also colleges devoted to business, and calling themselves business colleges. That these enterprises are laudable enough may be granted, though they give themselves a factitious importance. It is impressive to read of Bachelors of Science in Commerce, Masters of Business Administration, and other degrees which are dealt out to the more proficient

graduates of these institutions. A writer in a recent issue of the *American Mercury* has a lot of fun with them.

WE want to say that not a single one of these institutions or periodicals makes any attempt to teach the fundamental laws on which business rests. They may teach bookkeeping and accountancy, but these are not *business*; they may attempt to teach the pupils how to organize a department store, or hotel, but that is specialization which is better learned by experience. Certainly nothing learned of these particular businesses named would fit a man to take charge of a manufacturing plant. They may try to teach salesmanship, but salesmen like poets are born, not made. The same is true of your organizer, who proceeds by rules learned of experience and invention born of the imaginative faculty. These can no more be taught than youthful John Miltons and John Keats can be tutored into writing *Paradise Lost* or the Grecian Urn.

THERE are other objections to these educational business institutions. They give themselves entirely too many airs, they teach too many things under one head, and they make no attempt at all to teach the principles of business. For business is production, the making of wealth. It rests upon certain fundamental laws; its factors are land, labor and capital. Do these institutions ask why so large a percentage of business men fail; do they ask in what degree the three factors named divide the proceeds, and why? Oh, that is political economy, we may anticipate their telling us. But that is just the trouble. To teach business and leave out political economy and its laws is to ignore the most important lesson of all business. Will they teach us what causes panics and industrial depressions and how to avoid them? That is of keen interest to business and business men.

THE students of these institutions are for the most part sons of privilege. They cannot safely be told that their fathers if they are the beneficiaries of privilege are the enemies of business—we mean hardly with safety to the institution and the endowments. Yet it is necessary if the student is to know what business is. It is, too, of little advantage to learn the technique of business and go out into the world unequipped with the necessary

knowledge of what it is that makes good or bad business. Until they are prepared to do this these institutions of higher business learning are sadly pretentious and ninety per cent. inefficient.

IF business knew its opportunities it would establish real colleges to teach principles of business rather than theories of technique of business. And this would be something worth while, for there are fundamental laws of production and distribution. For of these the institutions named are in the profoundest ignorance. A college of commerce run by protectionists with protectionist teachers should make the angels laugh. A business college whose tenets call for the acceptance of the status quo, or at least refrain from questioning it, is not likely to get the world much further along in producing wealth for the multitude, or in advancing the business success of the individual. The secret of failure or success in business—which after all is service—is dependent upon principles which business colleges in their very nature are not likely to approach with an open mind.

HERE in our world is a system of society in which we have what Asquith called, though in another connection, "the apparatus of illusion." We have a so-called democracy in which nearly everything is undemocratic; a system of society in which we boast that everybody has a chance, sometimes we say an equal chance, yet in which most of the prizes are for those who come first—really the forestallers. We boast that business is founded upon confidence, yet every one distrusts his neighbor, and in making loans we are particular about the collateral. We talk boastfully about the "ethics of business," yet the ethics of the race track and the gambling fraternity is, generally speaking, far superior, and is the only business founded upon confidence. Here, it is true, some of those engaged get something for nothing, but at least they are quite frank about it. They do not boast, as your social philosopher does, that "nobody can get something for nothing"—how often we hear that phrase—yet that is just what goes on continually. In fact the whole basis of our economic system rests upon the practise of "getting something for nothing"—and much of it.

BUT "the apparatus of illusion" conceals the process. The great social land rent fund, increased and intensified by speculation, is so combined with actual earnings, or returns to capital, as to seem indivisible. Deeds of sale include house value as well as land value; in what is called "profits", earnings and returns to privilege are intermingled; and even in some of the so-called salaries paid by corporations to favored employees are included some of the dribblings of economic rent and monopoly profit. To separate these into their component parts is not possible to theoretical analysis. Yet by one stroke, or gradually, if you please, the land rent fund can

be diverted into the public treasury, and the whole "apparatus of illusion" disappear, wages—under what would then be free competition—would go to labor, and interest—or what would then remain of interest—to capital, the only division possible under the operation of natural unhindered economic law.

Tolstoy and Henry George

THE one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian humanitarian, was made the occasion of a special celebration by the Soviet government, which stressed the work of Tolstoy in arousing a consciousness of human brotherhood. Although Tolstoy was a Christian and a pacifist, and thus in opposition to policies of the present Russian government as in other ways he was arrayed against the Czarist regime, the Soviet government not only established a school in his memory, but has agreed, in deference to his teachings, that neither atheism nor war shall be inculcated in the school.

In connection with this anniversary, many articles on Tolstoy have appeared in America, but practically all glorify him as a novelist; his views on social questions are either ignored, or glossed over as amiable idiosyncracies of a literary genius. The younger generation would never guess that Tolstoy had towered like a giant among his contemporaries, challenging one social institution after another—divine right of kings, warfare, slavery, private property in land. Even such articles as mentioned Tolstoy's interest in social questions carefully omitted any reference to his scathing denunciations of what he termed "The Great Iniquity"—private ownership of the land which God had made for all.

One notable exception, however, was an article in the *New York Times* of September 9, 1928, by Count Ilya Tolstoy, a son of the philosopher, from which we quote the following:

Speaking of father's American friends I have also to mention the great economist, Henry George. His book on "Single Tax" was a revelation to my father.

It must be said here that the land question in Russia is far more acute than in this country. The population of Central Russia is very dense and land hunger is the normal condition of the peasantry. It was especially so before the Revolution, when the large estates were in the hands of the nobles and the peasantry had not enough land to live on even in a state of semi-starvation. My father believed that land ownership was the "slavery of our times" and together with the Russian peasantry he thought that land belongs to God and cannot be man's property.

He was feverishly seeking for a solution of the land question in Russia when he ran across Henry George's "Progress and Poverty." This was exactly what he was looking for. Here was a peaceful and righteous solution of the problem. Let the land belong to the nation as a whole and give the use of it to those who work on it with their own hands. My father believed in the practical possibility of such a reform in Russia so deeply that he