

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

IT is a gratifying symptom that among the reading public of the country not all are immersed in tabloid newspapers and novels of a cheap and dubious character. We have in mind Will Durant's "Story of Philosophy," which, surprisingly enough, is now one of the "best sellers." And it is a book that deserves its popularity, clear, flashing, illuminative. We have little inclination to quarrel with it on the score that it leaves much to be desired, since it is an amazingly persuasive appeal for higher thinking, and for the kind of thought that makes for higher living, a better social world, and a saner outlook upon the problems of life.

Here is an extract from an article by Will Durant in *Harper's* which may serve a specimen of his style:

Are there any laws of growth and decay, marking and perhaps determining the rise and fall of nations, of races, and of civilizations? Here we shall come upon Montesquieu and Buckle discoursing of the influence of geography on the fate of peoples; here Condorcet, about to die, will console himself with the thought of progress, and the indefinite perfectibility of man; here Hegel will show us his dialectical sleight-o'-hand, and Carlyle will tell us of his heroes; here the great chauvinists will sing the strength of their races' seed, and will curse the coming of the barbarians; here Marx will frighten us with a mountain of figures and arguments for the economic determination of history; and here perhaps we shall find one or two seekers who will explain to these splendid monomaniacs that their truths are but facets of the fact, and that history and nature are more varied than they have dreamt of in the philosophies. And off in a corner we shall find the gloomy Nietzsche singing his song of Eternal Recurrence, and Spengler passionately proving the downfall of the western world.

DR. DURANT might have continued in this strain: And then we come upon Henry George and his explanation of the rise and fall of nations, of races and civilizations. Mr. George declared the law of progress to be "association in equality." And conversely the cause of the retrogression, decay and death of nations and of civilizations is association in inequality. Here is an inquiry that might well attract this fine mind, this piercing intelligence.

"The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome." And the dead civilizations of an older time. How comes it that they flowered for so brief a period, decayed inwardly, or fell a prey to barbarian inroads? What influences of caste and privilege acted upon these civiliza-

tions; what institutions making for inequality slowly sapped the spirit of resistance to foes inside and outside their borders? In many instances can we not divine the effect of those laws that grew up in contempt of human rights; the consequent loss of ethical and religious restraints; the denial to large numbers of the population of the full fruits of their labors, resulting in the disappearance of any cohesiveness, of any real identity of interests?

VARIOUS and complex may seem the causes that preceded the decay of nations and civilizations. But it is the incidents only that are various, differing merely in complexion. There must be a law of human progress and George has indicated it. Like all laws it seems absurdly simple. But it runs a thin thread, easily discernable, through all this warp and woof of our sad civilizations, where always, confronting each other, are master and slave, the privileged and the unprivileged, wealth and want.

LET not the reader misunderstand. There are those who set up a straw man of equality as if it meant equality of intellect or equality of possession. Nature recognizes no such equality. But the equality of nature, and of all real liberty, is one in which all have an equal chance. It is the equality in which all start fair and none are handicapped. It is the equality where no one is compelled to yield any part of his earnings to others who contribute nothing to production. It is an equality which gives to labor and labor only, and apportions the share of the wealth produced in accordance with the contribution made by each to the general fund. This is association in equality—the indispensable law of human progress.

BISHOP MANNING, urging prayer as a cure for social ills, exclaims, "What a difference it would make if all New Yorkers who call themselves Christians would kneel in prayer." It might—but then again it might not. Supposing the prayers were translated into action it might very well be believed that it would make a difference. But mere prayer, mere lip service, in itself means nothing. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is a prayer many centuries old. But what about its application? The very people who breathe that invocation do not trouble themselves to ask in what particulars the Kingdom of God differs from the kingdom that is the result of their own volition.