

The Need for Maturity

by MILDRED J. LOOMIS

ARE other Georgists troubled by what seems to me a kind of inconsistency in George's philosophy?

He holds that "human beings tend to satisfy their desires with the least expenditure of energy." The least expenditure of energy is none. Logically then, I should try to get "something" for "nothing." One of the easiest ways to get something for nothing is to hold land and wait for, and cash in on, its rising values.

Yet George advocated just the opposite. Was he advocating a proposal that is impossible from his view of human nature?

How about reducing our abstraction level? Instead of broad generalizations like "human beings" tend to this or that, why not use more specific terms to convey more accurate realities? My observation is that *children*, and adults who continue childlike, want to get something for nothing, or without adequate exchange of energy. More experience, more understanding of long-range consequences, more maturity leads to more responsible behavior.

Mature human beings prefer a fair exchange—making contracts and giving value for value. Hence why wouldn't it be better to say, "immature people try to get something for nothing—mature people prefer reciprocity."

This would help us be aware of the need for maturity. And since we now know useful techniques for increasing and hastening maturity in adults—disciplines of general semantics, group dynamics and emotional insight—let's include these in our training. Let's help to do away with emotional, irrational, compulsive behavior — let's advance aware, responsible behavior.

From this angle, how would one answer a reader's recent proposal that Georgists profit from speculation in



land and turn 25 percent into the George school? Knotty question!

The "knotty question" from Mrs. Loomis of the School of Living was referred to a panel of experts.

William B. Truehart, Director of College Activities for the Los Angeles extension was the first to reply:

"The points raised in Mrs. Loomis's letter are thought-provoking indeed. I respect her mature reasoning and concede there is some truth in what she says. She sees George's principle, carried to its logical conclusion, as seeking to obtain something for nothing, and says children do this.

But it is also true that even mature people, given a choice of working 16 hours or 8 hours a day for the same wage, would choose the shorter work day. On the other hand I agree completely with Mrs. Loomis regarding the need for maturity, and am altogether for doing away with emotional, irrational, compulsive behavior.

"As for a Georgist speculating in

land, and possibly using some of the proceeds to help educate people to the injustice of this practice, this is a social problem, not an individual one. As far as land ownership is concerned, the ground rent is paid by the user in any case. It does not matter if the title holder happens to be a non-Georgist, a Georgist, or even the Henry George School itself. The market governs what a certain location is worth, and community growth and activity increase land's value. The system is not going to be changed just because Georgists refuse to be beneficiaries of LVT.

"I have a friend who says that as long as the rules of the game are as they are, he would rather be on the winning than the losing side, but he will work to change the rules, that is, he will educate for society's changing the rules that now make it possible to profit privately from community development. And since it would not be profitable to hold land out of use or use it improperly under a system of full land value taxation, the same incentive to satisfy our desires with the least effort would operate to encourage people to improve land adequately and to produce on it, since improvements and production would not be taxed, as would the privilege of holding land."

Ralph S. Huntington of San Francisco said "the least effort is 'none,' therefore if his desires are none he expends no effort, therefore he gets his desires . . . Mildred J. Loomis, being a 'Buckeye' should know the story of Tom Johnson, the rich man who bought a copy of *Progress and Poverty* to read on the train. On arriving home he instructed his secretary, Newton D. Baker, to read it saying it could not be true, 'there must be an answer to it, but I cannot see it and I want you to tell me what it is.'"

As this book turned all his previous training and opinions upside down, he sought out Henry George and became a fast friend and supporter. "When he

was in Congress and his colleagues in the House accused him of insincerity for advocating the single tax while he was making money on land speculation, Mr. Johnson replied, 'I am spending my money to try to change the law so as to make it impossible for me to make money, but as long as the people allow the law to stay as it is I have the same right to use it as anyone else.'"

Robert Benton, Detroit HGS director agreed, "of course there may be immature methods of attempting to satisfy human desires for many things—food, sex, riches. Land speculation may be an immature method for acquiring riches, but that fails to prove that all methods of acquiring wealth with little effort are also immature. Would one say that inventiveness is immature, that discovery and material progress in general are immature? These are ways of acquiring more wealth with less effort. Trying to acquire too much wealth to the exclusion of other values in life may also be a sign of immaturity. Such immaturity may come as a result of insecurity in making a living. In other words, much of our immaturity may come as a result of land speculation, not the other way round."

George M. Menninger, Jr., the new director in Ripon, Wisconsin, replied: "one must have faith in the basic nobility (maturity) of man. I do not believe that a single sane man could support private property in land if he truly understood the misery it causes. The fault does not lie in those who do not understand, and if it did we would be lost. The fault lies in our inability to transmit a clear picture. Henry George did not condemn landlords. In fact he said emphatically that it was not the landlord who denied so many their rightful inheritance. But rather that they were 'denied by society! denied by us! We disinherit them. We take away their birthright. And the curse for such injustice must fall upon us.'"

Carl Shaw, formerly of Detroit, now a musician with the band at West Point, offered these comments:

"Least doesn't mean *nothing*. Henry George advocated the single tax and this lies in the area of social philosophy, assessments, economics—not especially in psychology and human nature. Humans have to be educated to want to keep their product and to let the community have its product—land rent. . . . Laws have to be written to cover this situation, and must be enforced.

"*Mature* is a relative term. Most mature and enlightened intelligent adult people have never heard of the single tax nor have they ever considered its efficacy. How do we know when a person is mature? At what age? After how much education? Who is to say what is 'responsible behavior?' I'm not sure that emotion is undesirable or that it can be controlled by training. If a Georgist profits from land speculation he does so due to a *social* wrong—not an individual wrong. Perhaps a mature Georgist in the above situation should contribute 100 percent of his gains to the Henry George School.

"I have never found any inconsistencies in George's philosophy. In fact as I was reading *The New York Times* this morning I had the feeling that the older I get the more I see of the world's political and economic errors and some of the proposed solutions put forth by people who are supposed to be knowledgeable, the more convinced I am that George stands head and shoulders above our politicians, social reformers and protestors of today."

Heman Chase of Alstead, New Hampshire, author of *American Ideals*, wanted to make it clear "that Mrs. Loomis is a very devoted and life-long worker for better ways of human living, and worthy of the respect of all Georgists. Her goals are ultimately the same as ours, in a very real sense." He says his faith is invariably renewed whenever he reads Chapter IV in Book

IX of *Progress and Poverty*, taking it as a whole.

In the following comments on Mrs. Loomis' "knotty question" he gave credit to his wife Edith for "cutting it down to size."

He sees no inconsistency in George's philosophy or in his first law, since he stated a universal tendency. But "this is not to say that people wish to do no work at all. Given opportunity and incentive people will normally work very hard to satisfy their desires, but in doing so they will naturally try to attain efficiency by following easiest, most direct ways. They are so guided, not just to avoid all exertion, but in order to conserve time and energy to be able to go on and satisfy the ever-new desires always occurring to man.

"By failing to collect the rent of land society has had to take much of the earnings of peoples' labor for public revenue. This in turn has reduced peoples' incentive to work, and has also created, for those with an initial foothold, an incentive to live by land speculation, while it has induced in others, with no such initial advantage, an incentive to live by far less respectable activities. The fault lies in public policies which Georgists would change.

"Regarding the suggestion that Georgists might speculate in land and turn 25 percent of the profits in to the Henry George School—I think that is preposterous. What explanation, moral from our standpoint, could be made of the implied disposition of the 75 percent? Even if 100 percent were given to the school some slip in internal management or external public relations might, in unexpected ways, call to our attention that "actions speak louder than words" in the public eye. I am reminded of the report given by a university student on the outcome of a controversial basketball game in 1927, "Wisconsin won a moral victory, but of course nobody will remember anything but the score."

Professor Stephen B. Cord, author of *Henry George—Realist or Dreamer?* agrees that Mrs. Loomis's statement, "immature people try to get something for nothing and mature people prefer reciprocity," has truth and appeal; and as for giving 25 percent of profits to the Henry George School, it seems to him "more praiseworthy to give 25 percent of legitimate business profits instead."

He agrees with George's axiom but believes this does not justify private rent ownership. "People should desire what is ethical and not necessarily what involves the least expenditure of energy. What people do and what they should do are two different matters."

"Is man immature when he seeks to gratify his desires with the least exertion? To my understanding," says **Mrs. Josephine Hansen** of New York, "this axiom indicates man is an intelligent creature. His maturity of mind—his power for progress—has invented everything from the club to the computer. Isn't society enriched rather than robbed by labor saving tools (true capital)? With reasoning ability, cooperation and transmission of knowledge, man has gradually escalated production of wealth while diminishing necessary physical exertion, until we are approaching a period where all may hope for abundance.

"True, some hold land in hope of 'something for nothing.' They will continue collecting the unearned increment only so long as communities (all men) are unaware that ground rent is the communities' creation and source of revenue. This awareness, we know, will be through the process of education in which we are all engaged.

"As for Georgists speculating in land for the school's benefit, there are two views—they could lose their shirts or grow rich. Should they all prosper it would be concrete evidence of George's theory. Could reform be far behind?"

Oscar Johannsen of New Jersey and New York, sees this as a polar issue calling for balance, a specialty high on the list at the School for Living:

"That man seeks to satisfy his desires with the least effort and that desires are unlimited, are manifestations of the dichotomies existing in nature. Electricity has its positive and negative elements, one holding the other in check—so also the pole of least effort is balanced by its opposite of unlimited desires.

"It is not a question of whether men should or should not satisfy desires with the least expenditure of energy. They cannot act in any other way. They can only attempt to understand this principle as one endeavors to comprehend the law of gravity—to make better use of it.

"Since the least amount of energy is none, it follows that some want to gratify their desires by doing nothing. To the extent that they expect to attain this chimera they are immature, for experience teaches that this is impossible. Unlimited desires well up within men which cry out for gratification, so they are forced into action.

"The desires which man wishes gratified impel him in one direction, while his distaste for work impels him in the opposite one. The resultant determines what is actually accomplished and this will vary as circumstances change. Men at times have desires so overpowering that the tremendous energy required to obtain them seems insignificant — at other times they may be too exhausted or lethargic to expend even enough energy to feed themselves.

"An angel and a devil lurk in this least-effort law. It has caused men to produce brilliant and complicated devices for the gratification of desires, but it is satanic in its implication that one can steal what another has produced.

"While the strongest desires are preservation and procreation of life, men also wish to be kind, honorable

and responsible. As these desires for attainment of virtue are not the basic instinctive ones, education, the arts, and the major religions presumably will strengthen them where there is a temptation to ignore them. So while men may wish something for nothing—once experience dispels the weakness of this, the inclination to act responsibly suggests that they expend their energies in the direction of justice — unless the mores are degenerating as they are in many countries, including our own. In this case the price paid is loss of self-esteem.

In all systems injustices creep in and become a part of the code. A conflict arises when an individual objects to such accepted injustices but considers it necessary to accept them in order to live. For example the purchase and sale of land is immoral, for land is the only means by which men can live, but a Georgist cannot escape this immoral procedure. As long as he is willing to assist in amending the procedure he can hardly be denounced for following it, since like the others he needs land to live on. There may be some who would refuse to take advantage of any gains which normally accrue when dealing in land. All honor to such persons, for they set the finest examples. Most of us would find such a course too idealistic, and though we deplore the necessity to do so, we become involved in land speculation, for the purchase and sale of anything is a speculation.

Men may rationalize this practice just as in an earlier era they excused the purchase and sale of slaves, and they may donate part of their profits to such worthy causes as the educational program of the Henry George School, possibly to ease their conscience. This is indeed a "knotty question" and a highly subjective one. Each person's decision will reflect his strong convictions and his sense of values.

The most powerful forces in the world today are clear ideas in the minds of energetic men and women of good will.

"But in any case man remains continually under the influence of the powerful desires which he seeks to gratify, and this makes life sometimes exhilarating and rewarding, sometimes frustrating and disappointing, but always unpredictable and unique."

Go Ahead and Live!

The School of Living had its inception in the 1920's when Ralph Borsodi and his family built a large home with gardens, orchards, animals—and called their experiment "modern homesteading." From the interest engendered there and through his writings, a research school was started at Suffern, New York where they developed a homestead community.

By 1940 John Loomis and his wife Mildred Jenson Loomis had joined the movement and went to Brookville, Ohio to Lane's End Homestead, where they lived a model life on a model farm. So significant was their influence and example that the farm grew into a community as others joined the School of Living. Its reputation and curriculum have now reached a level where it enjoys a tax exemption for donations, which though not lavish have enabled a steady expansion in building and publishing.

Mrs. Loomis, author of *Go Ahead and Live!* and her husband, would like to be relieved of some of the heavy load of these past 20 years, and the present plans are to build a headquarters community at Freeland, Maryland, in a 150-year old stone mill on a 77-acre farm, made available through the generosity of W. B. Anacker. Once again, much time, effort and money will be needed to breathe life into the old mill—but the spirit is there, *Go ahead and live!*

After winning a B.Sc. degree in economics, Mrs. Loomis studied and taught Henry George classes. She holds an M.A. from Columbia University.