

Forward from the Left

Now a freelance journalist and script writer for radio and T.V., Mr. Middleton is on a three-year visit to England. At 22 he emigrated to New Zealand, first dairy farming, later practising accountancy. Fifteen years later (1939) he moved to Australia. After 5 years with the Australian Army (artillery and education) he divided ten years in Queensland between building and running a tourist resort and growing pineapples. Later, in Sydney, N.S.W., he managed property and wrote for press and radio. An executive member of the Henry George Union (N.S.W.) and vice-president of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, he attended the Union's 10th international conference at Hanover, in 1959.



I AM TOLD, by those who should know, that I was an unusually gentle and well-behaved baby.

I made up for this by displaying rebellious symptoms at an early age and developing these into a full-scale phobia during adolescence and young-manhood, during the course of which I ran the gamut of pretty well all the current "Movements" of a mystical, religious or political nature, "fringe" or otherwise; until, as I like to think, wisdom came at last with maturer years and through contact with the mature mind of one of the world's great — Henry George.

My first unsteady steps in rebellion were taken down the doorstep of suburbia, the while I thumbed my nose cockily at "convention". I loathed, with the monumental loathing of which only the very young are capable, the standards by which my respectable parents and their respectable friends and relatives lived. The "slavery of the job", the routine of Sunday, the routine of meals, customary clothes, habits of speech, ways of thinking (when this luxury was indulged in), subjects suitable for discussion in polite society, "loyalties" and correct attitudes. How loathsome I must have been myself I have had hints in latter-day nightmares, and in observing the performances of present-day adolescents.

From a "suitable" occupation in the City, I rebelled by getting the sack after a couple of weeks. From a second and similar form of preventive detention I escaped, with a fellow-in-crime, into the countryside of war-time England (World War I) to "go on the land"—which meant selling our souls and bodies for a pittance and the bribe of "learning farming" to various hard-bitten members of the agricultural fraternity in need of cheap labour with which to earn the fortunes they were making out of the war.

This proved my first real disillusionment—with the Romance of the Land. There were many more, much needed, disillusionments to follow. With tails between

legs, we (my mate and I) crept back to London — and home — to lick our wounds.

Life demanded a compromise; it took the form of another City job, this time on a salary inflated by staff shortages and responsibilities beyond my years, which dulled the rebellious spirit for a time.

The rebellion moved onto the mental and emotional planes; I became an ardent socialist, even for a time a pacifist. I joined the Labour Party and found a vent for my undisciplined emotions and unbalanced cerebrations in protest meetings, marches, national conferences, stump speaking and election fervour. I shudder to think how much of a hand I may have had in putting in the first Labour Government of England.

Perhaps it is as well that, at this point, I accepted an opportunity to emigrate to New Zealand. With the hope nurtured by an optimistic nature, I went to join an ex-bank clerk from Sheffield in a "working partnership" on his fifty-acre dairy farm in the (then) wilds of North Auckland. At least it got me out of England, where more than a few of my relatives, at least, heaved sighs of relief.

The dairy farm had been acquired by an inexperienced, innocent man in search of a "new life" (at age forty), from a cold-blooded real estate agent at the peak of the post-war boom when the price of butter-fat was 2s. 6d. lb. at the factory. Within months of my joining the enterprise, butter-fat was down to 1s. lb, and my partner, handicapped by an unwieldy mortgage, was soon floundering in a sea of trouble from which, since I could not hope to rescue him, I withdrew gracefully, to lighten the load, leaving him to the tender ministrations and extra pair of strong hands of a recently acquired wife. After a short but interesting sojourn in small town grocery, I graduated to accountancy, in which profession I engaged, in various capacities and different localities of New Zealand, for the next twelve years.

My political views were still uncompromisingly Left, and I continued to spend much of my leisure time in a variety of tasks, official and unofficial, within the framework of the New Zealand Labour Party, including that of branch secretary and delegate to the National Conference.

Like so many others, I had an uncomfortable time during the "Great Depression" as a result of which, and of observation of the needless, widespread suffering it brought, I was on the verge of becoming an active communist. I had lost faith in the Labour Movement and its "unimaginative, unadventurous" leaders; revolutionary socialism was the only answer.

It was then, thank God!, that I met a young Dane, a son of the famous physical-culturist, Müller, whose book, "My System", I had read years before in London.

In the Auckland Fabian Club I had listened to this young man, in debates and discussion meetings, at first with a kind of superior scepticism, then with puzzlement, finally with admiration and the desire to know more of the intriguing ideas he was propagating. He seemed so sure of himself, and there seemed so little convincing argument brought against him, from people from whom I had come to expect the ability to demolish him; I cultivated his acquaintance. Eventually, I told him of my despair and my suicidal intention of joining the Communist Party. He told me about Henry George, and lent me "Progress and Poverty".

It was, of course, the turning point of my (intellectual) life. It is difficult, looking back on it, not to speak of it in terms of almost a spiritual revelation. Like the thousand pieces of a kaleidoscope falling into a perfectly balanced pattern, like the solving of a jigsaw puzzle, like the opening of a door in a window-less room onto the prospect of an ordered world; it was an overwhelming experience.

With George's devastating analysis of Marx's Theory of Surplus Value, and his examination of the historical development of economics from the Physiocrats onwards, together with Max Hirsch's "Democracy versus Socialism", I saw clearly how illogical had been the development of socialist thinking.

I saw how men and women, their passions stirred by injustice and suffering, had been misled into a concept of human society based on utterly false premises, that ignored man's essential nature and assumed that it was possible to legislate the "New Jerusalem" into existence without first bringing about a fundamental, a revolutionary change in man's nature; that the political revolution would bring in its train the revolution in human behaviour which would make the political revolution stick. A complete inversion of truth and commonsense—proved to the hilt in the quasi-socialist state of present-day England.

Instead, I now saw how beautifully the natural law, once permitted free operation, would ensure the gradual development of a just society. That, once you understood man's true nature and allowed it to act in a condition of

freedom and equality of opportunity, in which the power of exploitation of one man by another was removed—not by political law, but by natural law—you could visualise the growth of the perfect society of which the anarchist dreamed, a society in which the political law was reduced to the essential minimum and government performed its true function of holding the scales of justice and preserving "the peace of the realm".

Looking around this over-governed world in which we live, this battlefield of warring minds, this marketplace in which the scales are falsified by corruption and the purchasers blinded by the science of unscrupulous hucksters, I realise that the astonishing simplicity of the principles of the Just Society, so brilliantly elucidated for us by Henry George, is the chief thing militating against their acceptance in this age in which to be complicated is to be wise. Our task is to convince that the truth lies not in "expertise", in the complicated jargon of economic theorists, but in a return to first principles.

That is why I place my faith in the educational project of the Henry George School of Social Science, for it is, I believe, in the classroom and the discussion circle, rather than on the political platform that success will be won. We have been misled by slogans and misplaced emotion into the present state of chaos. The light of reason alone will be our guide on the road back to sanity.

Previous articles in this series are available either as single sheet reprints or bound in sets under title "Essays On Liberty".

EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY

From the Secretary, Kimba Henry George League
To the Editor of Land & Liberty.

Sir,—Mr. Robert Tideman's letter (L&L September '60) was discussed at our November meeting and I was instructed to express our protest against education being provided by the state. Under a just system of Government it is a moral responsibility of parents to educate their children and the duty of the Government to extend complete freedom and equal opportunity to all, including children.

So-called "free education" in Australia is well out of hand so far as parents having any say over their children's education is concerned. State schools appear to be breeding grounds for Protection. Under a just system parents could employ a teacher whom they knew would teach their children well, otherwise he or she would lose the job in favour of a better teacher. In this way teaching standards would be raised, and there would be established that close relationship between parent and teacher which is so lacking today.

Yours faithfully,
(Mrs.) B. J. HARRIS.

Kimba, South Australia.

Pressure on space obliges us to hold until next month a letter from Mr. Tideman in reply to Mr. R. D. Benton.