

for learning; for playing; for attending the theatre; for tilling the ground; for water to wash in and for the soap to launder a shirt.

"Not to be able to win his bread without fear of punishment; not to import commodities, or to manufacture, or to sell them; nor to eat; to print; to contract; to defend himself in court; to heal himself; to travel; to protest; to learn; to be married; to die, without paying any money — what is this but the permanent violation of all natural rights? What is it but a despotism more ignominious than ancient slavery? What liberty is there possible for him who has no money?

"Nothing essential has changed in the moral life of man. Not so much as one reparation to justice has been attained in two thousand years. The slave who became bondsman is now a hand-to-mouth wage earner. The problems which frighten contemporary society are the same as those which destroyed ancient Rome: irresponsible tyranny at the top and incorrigible oppression at the bottom; bare subsistence



E. P. MIDDLETON WRITES

## Letter from America

THE pressure of land values is everywhere visible, from New York to San Francisco. All the words and phrases with which you are familiar in Britain are banded about in the U.S. press and at public meetings, local government sessions, et al., "Urban Renewal" and "Slum Clearance" being prominent among those in common use. In New York — population 8 million, assessed value of real estate \$22 billion — where a measure (far too small of course) of land values is taken in municipal taxes, there are still great areas of vice-infested slums and "blighted areas," and others developing with the influx of Puerto Rican and other communities. Despite a police force (all armed) of 40,000, it is still possible to read a letter to the *New York Times*, as I did while there, from a near-demented mother afraid to send her child to school in the West Side district. Manhattan Island itself — population 2 million, assessed value \$8 billion is fast becoming a city of troglodytes. Already there can be scarcely a soul left there who knows anything about cultivating a garden, except the experts in the Parks Department. Those who still cling to the dream of a house and garden spend half their days commuting from miles outside the city.

In every city we visited the pressure had operated to cut the size of home allotments to the barest minimum — no minimum standards appear to be laid down by the local authorities — so that it is rare (except in such salubrious suburbs as Beverley Hills in Hollywood, or the outer areas of Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago,

and lack of housing; political and social influence of the rich; demoralisation and subordination of the electoral body; oscillation of nations between republic and monarchy without the rooting of either one of them in the popular conscience.

"Tributary confiscation of the products of labour brings about general uneasiness, disgust, sadness. There is insurrection of the oppressed; requisition of produce; prohibition of exports; the fixing of prices; persecution of the producer of food, but not of the appropriators of land where food is produced. There must be distribution of State help because labour is denied access to land; frauds at the expense of general penury; the paralysing of useful activities for fear of fines, and depreciation of wages and of the currency by falsification of coinage.

"There is as much misery in industrial circles as in rural areas and this situation will remain as long as the ownership of natural resources by a minority condemns the remainder to utter dependence and persistent poverty."

for example), to see a house with more than a few feet between it and its neighbours, plus a few feet of lawn in front and enough room at the back to park the inevitable car. I have a clipping before me from the *Los Angeles Times*, of September 3, on the subject of "Resistance to Urban Renewal" in Los Angeles which begins with these words: "It may take years and millions of words before the first trace of blight vanishes from an urban renewal project area" and goes on to discuss the plight of those owners and tenants who object to the term "blighted" being applied to their district and who fight any redevelopment scheme. No one raises the query "Why?" "What causes this blight?" The weight of opinion is on the side of the developers. "Tear down" is the most active phrase in American building and planning circles, and the evidence is everywhere of the besetting interest in keeping profit ratios in line with the ever-rising land values. "I see the centre of the city dying" says one of the people interviewed by the writer, "and I realise that this redevelopment project is the only way to keep it from going completely under." On the other hand, California is the "boom state" of the U.S. with population streaming in from all over the continent at a five-figure rate every month. There's no danger to Californian land values or to the fortunes being made from them.

Two things of importance and encouragement to Georgeists occurred during my visit; one was the publicity given to the Henry George School's conference in Pittsburgh on that city's "Graded Tax Plan" by the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* — streamer headlines and a four-column picture of delegates. The other was the publication of the main argument of the *House & Home* supplement on land prices, etc., in *Reader's Digest* for July 1962 — and reprinted as a leaflet by them.