

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

JOSEPH DANA MILLER, founder and editor of LAND AND FREEDOM, is dead. His whole life and his life work were devoted to the principles laid down by Henry George. He was one of those rare spirits who, seeing the truth, followed it and lived to the full, his individual life.

The following has been found among his manuscripts. "His task is done. Yet the thought still mounts."

LOST—THE INDIVIDUAL

THOSE who accept the orthodox notions of progress lay great stress on efficiency of production and the multiplication of satisfactions. If progress consists in *more things*, they are right, but if we estimate progress by the finer idealities of life, if we weigh all that we have gained by the simpler civilization of the fathers, we may become less optimistic. We have exchanged for the homely existence, the plain gospel, the simple yet lofty maxims of older days, this era of achievement for the sake of achievement, this modern hurry, this speed without a goal, this madness for bulk, size, altitudes, speed records, tall buildings and automobiles. And under all this complexity lies buried the individual, his original impulses strangled, his passion for self-expression lost.

WHAT is the goal of all our material progress? Has it any intelligible end? When accomplished does it serve any other purpose than increased efficiency in production, more satisfactions that do not satisfy, and at the end a blank material *impasse*?

WE have been too much concerned with the advancement of the race; too little with the right of the individual to live his life. Doubtless, these are related, but any progress of the race that leaves the individual overwhelmed and forgotten is not real progress. We have progressed since the days of Marcus Aurelius, but the brothers of Marcus are scarce enough today. There was little chance for Thoreau in his time, but much less today. Yet then we felt the significance of the protest against the *zeit geist* of the day—the time spirit,

which though it differs at all times is significant of real meaning at no time.

No one asks himself what is the meaning of life. People are too absorbed in the business of "getting ahead," which usually means getting ahead of the other fellow. But surely life must have a meaning, and progress, however we define it, must mean progress toward something.

WE stress the advantages of education and then wonder why it means so little when attained. We complain of the superficiality of persons who have gone through the processes of school and college and university education. We do not realize how complete is the suffocation of every original impulse that makes for individual initiative, powers of independent judgment, ideality, and a spiritual outlook upon life.

MOST of our people live in the cities. They are hemmed in by brick and mortar. They are part of the machinery of industrial life—unthinking cogwheels in an endless round. "The world is too much with us"—this world of twenty and forty-story buildings, subways, department stores, newspapers of prodigious size, and automobiles speeding up and down and around, and everybody in a hurry to get somewhere. And amid it all is the individual, a tragic solitary thing without that companionship which in a simpler state of society our fathers knew.

GONE, for the most part, the animated conversations of old, the friendships founded on some simple unity of aim independent of material possessions, the old simplicity of family life. We might as well face it. The automobile, the radio, the "movies" have changed our lives. We are a different people. We are not individuals—we are the automata of an industrial state, part of the machinery, victims of a material domination. And under that domination have fallen the college and the university, and even the church in great degree. To this is due the loss of the old restraints, and as there are no new ones to take their place we are startled by the wave of criminality that differs from the old in this: The lawbreaker of an earlier period was conscious that he was breaking a moral law. Often he was the victim of an

economic pressure—urged to crime, as it seemed, by necessitous conditions. The criminal of today has a new ethical code by which he justifies his acts, borrowing from the lax morality of the time his plea of extenuation. We owe that to the loss of idealities, to the glorification of material achievement, to the teaching of the gospel of success in terms of dollars and cents. We have not stopped long enough in our mad rush to ask of the individual how it fares with him in the life that he must live to himself. We have not cared. If we had realized the dangers to the individual resulting from the installation almost over night of a civilization run by machinery we might have reaped the advantages of the new system in its achievements toward material progress, and retained something of the old freedom for the individual that now seems in danger of being completely lost.

TO this mad, unreasoning pursuit of "progress" may be traced the weakening of the moral fibre and the loss of those inspirations which were the guiding influences of the past. The plain people were brought up on literature, which, whatever its shortcomings, leaned to the religious and humane. That has been replaced by the literature of the physical senses, by innumerable magazines of the picture sort, and the enormous spread of the "movies".

IN this atmosphere the individual life is lost in the standardization of the whole. No man lives to his ideal. The appeal made by modern agencies is to the superficial, pleasure-loving instincts of mankind. It is because of this that civilization as we know it in this hour is so trivial and materialistic in its manifestations, so neglectful of the finer appeal to what are matters of mind and spirit.

THE influences of the classics of our literature upon the mind have been replaced by other and lesser mediums. We have ceased to respect the Past—indeed, we do not know it any more. The civilization that we know lives almost wholly in the Present, for the Future does not seem to matter either. All the glory and sunburst of tradition that might radiate our lives are lost in the tinsel glitter of the modern day. The great souls of the past who walked with unshod feet over hot ploughshares no longer appeal to our imagination. Our heroes are the captains of industry, the successful politician, the author of some "best sellers," not the strong soul that fashioned some spiritual truth in the furnace of suffering and amid the taunts of men.

IT is a high price we are paying for our progress, so-called. Is it worth while to have lost so much that more bricks may be laid one upon another? Is it well to have lost the divine passion for a few books that a million volumes

may be housed in some great marble edifice? Is it well that the quest after the individual life be hampered that great cities may grow to unheard of dimensions and shapeless piles of brick and mortar blot out the sky? Our civilization in its devotion to material progress tends to perpetuate a sameness which is deadening.

How shall we escape from civilization into life?

Joseph Dana Miller

JOSEPH DANA MILLER has departed from this troubled world. He died, peacefully, on May the eighth, nineteen hundred and thirty-nine.

For the past year or so his friends had observed the inroads of time upon the editor, but it was hoped that a good long rest would restore him to something of his old self. Then early in February of this year he sustained a fall while on his way to attend a meeting of the trustees of the Henry George School of Social Science in New York. It appeared to be only a minor mishap, despite the nervous shock which resulted, and there was much rejoicing when, in a few days, he was again up and about. Thereafter, however, he began to complain of feeling tired, and consented with some reluctance to his removal to the Fairmount Hospital in Jersey City. Again he brightened up, and though he did little conversing with visitors, he enjoyed his food, and often walked around the corridors, apparently chafing under the restraint of enforced idleness, up to then never having had a sick day. His mind remained clear and alert all the while. But the good signs were not rewarded with the hoped-for recovery. His vital force began to ebb, and at the age of seventy-seven years, our beloved editor passed on. His body now lies at rest in Arlington Cemetery in Kearny, N. J.

We have spoken of his passing, but of course for those who understand the Georgeist philosophy, there is comfort in the knowledge that Joseph Dana Miller will always be with us. Like Henry George, his ideas and principles will live on, for such souls never die. Only in looking back upon the past will we remember him as the "grand old man" of the movement. In the present and future he will be enshrined as one of those of whom Swinburn wrote, the dew of whose word will keep the seed of freedom growing among men. For to Joseph Dana Miller *freedom* meant the freedom envisaged by Mazzini and George.

It was the wish of the editor and founder of LAND AND FREEDOM, as expressed in his Last Will and Testament, that the publication should continue after his death. To his associates, this wish is a command, and they reverently assume the task. Altho such a work should be accepted for its own sake, in deference to the memory of Joseph Dana Miller, there is another, and even more