

BOOK REVIEWS

A GREAT SINGLE TAX NOVEL*

Some years ago in the columns of this paper Lewis H. Berens, joint author with Mr. Singer of the "Story of My Dictatorship," reviewed appreciatively, even enthusiastically, the novels of M. P. Shiel. Alfred A. Knopf, of this city, now republishes one of these, the *Lord of the Sea*, and in a letter introducing it to the reviewers of the country, says:

"The startling simplicity and effectiveness of the Single Tax program, when allowed to function without hindrance, was never more remarkably demonstrated than in a recently published novel. Most sensible people have known all along that novelists and poets were far better economists than the gentlemen in colleges who practise the profession. M. P. Shiel's work in *THE LORD OF THE SEA* is a case in point."

There is an introduction by Carl VanVechten, and he tells us that in the copy sent him by Mr. Shiel the latter has written: "To my mind there are three supreme wits, all scientists—Galileo, Spencer and Henry George, George lacking the exact training of the others, but probably born the most penetrating of men: seeing which I have always felt it my business to discover some new demonstration of his demonstrated theorem: this being one such attempt." And Mr. VanVechten adds: "Progress and Poverty then is the father of the Lord of the Sea."

Mr. Shiel, after being long neglected, is now coming into his own. Such critics as Hugh Walpole and Arthur Machen have written his praises. H. G. Wells has dubbed one of his novels, not this one, "a colossal achievement." And the present reviewer believes that he will widen his circle of readers very rapidly now that he is introduced to the American public.

It is by far and away the most powerful novel called forth by the inspiration derived from the movement set in motion by Henry George. It is full of thrills. I shall let the publisher describe it in the circular letter previously quoted from:

"Young Richard Hogarth, through a series of strange but not outlandish adventures becomes the Lord of the Sea. This he accomplishes by building great steel "islands," or floating fortresses powerfully armed, and placing them at strategic points on the world's trade routes. He is thus in a position to levy a "sea tax" on all passing ships. A naval struggle follows in which the great forts turn back the fleets of the world. Once he has been able to dominate the nations, he sends out a manifesto pointing out the folly of men in taxing one another so wildly and haphazardly and stating that "Nature cannot be owned, only wealth. The taking of anything from Nature makes that thing wealth; and planets are presented to their inhabitants, who, by taking things from them, i.e., by moving something, change Nature into wealth, and own things."

It may be worth while to call this novel to the attention of William C. deMille. It would make a great "movie", similar to *The Sea Hawk*, one of the latest successes. Besides it could be made to teach our doctrine and thus to reach multitudes with our message.—J. D. M.

**The Lord of the Sea*, by M. P. Shiel 12 mo., clo., 229 pp. Price \$2.50 net. Alfred A. Knopf, New York City.

"THE ECONOMICS OF FREEDOM"

Once more there has come out of San Francisco a work on economics which is likely to be the cause of much cogitation, though of an entirely different kind from that which was provoked by "Progress and Poverty." Here we have the scientist, rather than the humanitarian. The author sets himself to offer a remedy for social evils by proffering a solution of the land problem and the currency problem, and out of much verbiage we extract the fact that he desires to regulate land holding by just taxation, and establish a currency which would make "land-area, gaged in terms of population-density, the basis of certified value or currency."

The author evidently dreads identification with the "Single Tax;" so much so that he deems it incumbent on himself to break a lance with some of Henry George's fundamental propositions. At this point it might be well to quote a paragraph from his chapter, entitled, "Single Tax and Other Epithets."

"It was undoubtedly with a perception of our desire for simplification, and moved by the aggregate miseries of mankind, that Henry George stepped boldly into the field and endeavored to reduce to final simplicity all our difficulties and all our remedies. The response to his teaching has been so eager that it seems almost ungrateful to question whether the cost, in terms of ultimate advantage, is not too great to pay for sheer simplicity. It would be callous indeed to ignore the earnestness of his effort. "Progress and Poverty" should be read, with the utmost sympathy, by every student of the economic situation."

Strangely enough the principle which he attacks is the statement "that men seek to gratify their desires with the least exertion." He seems to find this in conflict with another passage from "Progress and Poverty," which reads "Short-sighted is the philosophy which counts on selfishness as the master motive of human action." Here we see the strict application of a principle, early set down, wherein Mr. Atkins criticizes a passage in Professor Ely's book, "Outlines of Economics," by saying "it may seem a little unkind to mention it, but there can be nothing either ethical or politic about a science."

To him the "Single Taxers" are romantic economists. He finds fault with their terminology; but shows a certain charity towards them because of the fact that usually they had not the advantage of an engineering training.

There is a measure of truth in the implication which runs through the book that most of the writers on economics have not been scientific in the meaning which Mr. Atkins attaches to the word.

Whether we agree with it or not, the book will well repay a most careful reading. That the author is a man with a sense of humour and a faculty for satire and irony crops out continuously throughout the book. It is rare that a work holding out to be strictly scientific creates the impression of the reader that the author might be a desirable person to know, but that is the outcome of such a cursory reading as this reviewer has been able to give it.

In spite of the fact that he disagrees with Henry George upon important points, if "Progress and Poverty" had not been written "The Economics of Freedom" would hardly have appeared. When he says in his conclusion.

"Our vaunted democracy is no more than the raising of the standard of Freedom over a region of economic disorder. The exterior manipulation and the gross interior maladjustment from which we suffer are both largely unrealized, and consequently all the more difficult to deal with."

and when he says,

"Leaving detail for the sake of a larger view, the change in our basis of measurement, from gold to census-area, would eliminate a very dangerously contracted passageway in our arteries of flow. This passageway is permitted to remain contracted because we blindly support a chaotic device for arbitrary measurement which has no better justification than a tradition of autocratic bad faith. Our economic logic is distorted by an ancient injury."

he states what many of us believe.

There is the material for a great book in "The Economics of Freedom." Perhaps Mr. Atkins is too scientific to write it, because the public is too lazy to make the continuous effort necessary to digest his theories or understand the argument which he makes. Nevertheless, we hail the book with pleasure as a substantial contribution to the discussion of the most important problem that confronts humanity.—J. J. M.

Duffield & Company, New York City.!