

## “It’s Never Too Late”

By ROBERT MILLER

Mr. P. R. Miller is married and has two grown-up children. He is an estate manager by profession, and his hobbies (when he gets time) are writing, chess and gardening. He is a tutor of the Henry George School and a Rating Reform Campaign Representative.



I WAS born in Aldershot fifty years ago. My father, a regular soldier, died in 1917, and left his widow the unenviable task of bringing up her two sons, and, through no fault of his own, precious little with which to carry it out.

There was no welfare state upon which my mother could shift the burden, so I need not dwell upon the sacrifices which she had to make. Sparing herself nothing in all the years of struggle which followed, I never once heard her complain of her lot, and I welcome this opportunity of recording the fact as a humble tribute to her devotion. She belonged to a generation, now almost passed away, which bore the unkind cuts of adversity with a spirit and pride which ought to put to shame the type, all too frequently met with today, which abuses an over-beneficent state.

During World War I, and being set by fate in a military environment, I was of such tender years that, seeing so much coming and going of soldiers and all the paraphernalia of military affairs, I regarded a state of war almost as I now regard life itself; in fact, the war had been over for quite a long time before I realised that playing “Germans and English” with my friends was out of date.

Even my schoolmasters wore uniform; all my school books, including the Bible, were stamped with the official Crown, and I was occasionally punished with a “cane, boys, junior, for the correction of, Mark I.” (Incidentally, the girls were also caned, and everyone concerned took it all for granted.) It would have been natural, I suppose, if I had followed many of my companions into the army on leaving school, and this proposition was carefully considered, but was finally abandoned in favour of a slightly more lucrative but far less adventurous career.

As a result of my early baptism into army life, I may perhaps be forgiven for a tint of what is sometimes referred to as “jingoism”; but I have always felt that

provided this attitude springs from a genuine love of liberty and respect for law and order, it is not to be too harshly condemned.

I first made the acquaintance of Henry George as recently as 1959, and it will be to my everlasting regret that I never did so before. Since reading *Progress and Poverty*, and taking part in the School’s activities, I have seen how, time after time in the past, my mind in more or less confused and hurried thinking, has touched upon the truths which that great book expounds, but which I had never taken sufficient trouble to pursue. I recall, for instance, when a very small boy spending a day by the sea with my mother, being told that we were sitting next to a private beach. This was explained to me, and I then wanted to know who owned the sea. My mother replied that God owned the sea, but that we were allowed to bathe in it, fish in it, and sail our ships on it. I then wanted to know if He owned the land as well, but I cannot remember my mother’s answer. Perhaps she found the question too difficult and changed the subject, and who can blame her? Many other people, much more important people, highly educated and responsible people whose trust is the liberty and welfare of nations, have likewise declined, but for other reasons, to commit themselves on that question. Is it not written that “out of the mouths of babes shall come forth wisdom”? Equally truly I submit that from the same source issues the occasional “snorter.”

In my early twenties, the unequal distribution of wealth intrigued me to a limited extent, and I tried my hand at thinking out my own remedies. I knew, of course, that something was wrong somewhere. I could not understand for the life of me why, for instance, machines capable of turning out vast quantities of necessities at the mere flick of a switch had to stop doing so just when the goods were needed most. The machines had not broken down, neither had the men working them, but something had.

That is about as far as I got, and as it is about as far as a great many economists get, I am not very ashamed of my effort. These enquiries, if they can be flattered with the name, led to many fatuous articles which I inflicted upon various long-suffering editors, who quite rightly bounced them back to their misguided author.

I next remember attending some political meetings, but decided that merely applauding the speeches with which I agreed and muttering rude remarks about those with which I did not was getting me nowhere at all. However, I went on loyally voting Conservative at every election, believing that in the end the "educated class" would pull us through and make all things right again.

After World War II, during which I served in the Police, in munitions, the Royal Artillery and Intelligence, I was faced once again with the responsibility of casting a vote in the General Election of 1945. For some time I was torn between a deep respect for Winston Churchill and an utter loathing for the "brass" who continued to push us around like so many numbered bits of machinery for weeks after the war had ended in Europe, as though we had lost it for them instead of having won it. I was by no means alone in my sentiments, and, as the final count showed, this failure to realise that they were dealing with people and not machines brought its own reward. In the end my true-blue background prevailed and once more I voted Conservative.

The failure of the Labour Government, during their period of office 1945 to 1951, to give us a land fit for heroes to live in strengthened my faith in the Conservatives, and there my allegiance lay until comparatively recently, when I realised at last that the policy of neither of these two parties could ever achieve real economic freedom for our people while each is tied by its own peculiar ideology to a particular interested section of the community. As for the Liberal Party, while I am not satisfied that it obtains sufficient consistency and cohesion in what I now know to be fundamentals, I nevertheless perceive in many of its members the essential attribute of a genuine desire to further the welfare of mankind in general.

My conception of liberalism, strengthened enormously as a result of my acquaintanceship with the writings of Henry George, and my close association with the ideals and work of our movement, transcends a mere political party which, after all, should be but a means to a desired end, not, as one might often assume, after contemplating some of the strange customs observed and activities which take place from time to time in Westminster, an end in itself.

As you well know, this liberalism has many enemies, who are often found fighting under banners which bear strange devices. It is widely maintained, for instance, that war, poverty, persecution and most diseases are caused simply by a deliberate disregard of the natural

law which insists that man shall love his neighbour as himself, and that until he learns to obey it, all 'isms' are in vain.

Unhappily, this sweeping condemnation of all political and economic theories would seem to include liberalism — mainly, I think, because it is associated with a popular interpretation of *laissez-faire*, which may be anything from "mind your own business" to "I'm all right, Jack." If this is the kind of philosophy upon which the liberal case rests, it is rightly condemned. But it is not, and for this reason: to love your neighbour as yourself, you must first love yourself, the essence of the command lying in the word "as." Thus it means, do only those things which merit self-respect; you cannot expect others to respect you if you do not respect yourself, and you can only achieve this desirable state of mind by loving your neighbour and insisting that he enjoy the liberty and justice that you desire for yourself. "To thine own self be true," says Polonius, ". . . thou canst not then be false to any man." A pure self-love involves and motivates this burning desire to love one's neighbour, and this is the cornerstone of my conception of liberalism.

I believe in a positive approach to life; love, kindness, tolerance, and so on are the attributes of positive living, the vital ingredients of happiness; whereas selfishness, greed, hate, cruelty, poverty, injustice, are all negative. They are unnatural, they represent the absence of something, as darkness represents the absence of light, and ignorance the absence of knowledge. To deny your neighbour love is to die spiritually.

Several times the author of *Progress and Poverty* uses the teaching of Jesus to support and endorse his arguments. These may be seen quite plainly by those who wish to see, or cleverly concealed from those who do not, for it must be admitted that to some people any mention of religion is an embarrassment — but they are there just the same. I would even say that Henry George not only supports but proves Christian teaching, by providing practical ways in which all men might be the happier for it. I am not referring, of course, to that narrow and fear-ridden misrepresentation which in the past committed, in the name of its Founder, so many crimes upon persons and property, but its original message of love, reconciliation, tolerance, and the individual's obligation to bow the knee to no one but his Creator. It is as well to bear in mind also that in explaining neighbourliness with the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus by no means condoned robbery, with or without violence.

In short, I am satisfied that the philosophy of Henry George is consistent in every way with Christian ethics; in fact, the one is no less than the practical and economic application of the other as regards the efficient maintenance of law, order, liberty and justice in a group of individuals with a like nature.

It has taken nearly half a century for me to see the light — I believe it takes some people even longer — but at last the dead wood of inaction, and the tangled undergrowth of confused thinking, have been cut away for ever. The path is now clear, and I hope I shall be granted many more years in which to play my humble part in this noble enterprise. Nor shall I be dismayed by

the odds. The final verse of the well-known hymn by Arthur Hugh Clough shall be my constant inspiration :  
 "If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars ;  
 It may be, in yon smoke concealed,  
 Your comrades chase, e'en now the fliers  
 And, but for you, possess the field."  
 That is sound enough logic for me.

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Needless Tragedy Of Ireland

By R. SMITH

*THE GREAT HUNGER* by Mrs. Cecil Woodham-Smith  
 (Hamish Hamilton, 30s.)

IN AUGUST, 1846, the potato fields of Ireland turned black almost overnight — attacked by an unknown fungus. Three days later there was "one wide waste of putrefying vegetation." The famine that followed was the most terrible in Irish history; it was estimated that out of a population of eight or nine million, one and a half million people perished of starvation and disease. The harrowing story of the famine years from 1845 to 1849 and the story of the failure of the British Government to effectively relieve the situation are vividly told by Mrs. Cecil Woodham-Smith in *The Great Hunger*.

Many years before this period, the population of Ireland had begun to increase at a rate unknown in Europe. Paid employment hardly existed, and the population gained their existence from the cultivation of their small holdings which produced barely enough to pay the rent. The Irish people did not regard wheat, oats and barley as food — they were grown to pay the rent which was of necessity the first priority. Land was precious; holdings were divided until six or seven persons were depending on a mere fragment. In normal times it was estimated that this system led to hunger for two and a half million people for most of the year, although according to Irish revolutionary John Mitchell, "during all the famine years Ireland was actually producing sufficient food, wool and flax, to feed and clothe not nine but eighteen millions of people."

In drawing up plans to relieve the victims of the famine, the British Government determined against direct interference and decided that food was to be brought in by private trade. In order to provide the Irish people for the first time with paid employment, so that they might be able to buy the imported food (maize), public works were to be started on a large scale all over the country.

The scheme was a failure. Expected imports of maize did not arrive, owing to bad harvests elsewhere, and what little was imported was sold at scarcity prices. The staff of the Dublin Board of Works was totally inadequate to deal with the deluge of proposals for public works schemes which came in from all over the country, while those that

were started could employ but a small proportion of the destitute. Also, the fact that liability for payment for these schemes fell upon the ratepayers, who were in no position to pay, contributed to the eventual collapse of the scheme.

In October, 1846, starvation began in earnest. Many children died, and the hungry masses became uncontrollable. At this point, a winter of abnormal severity set in. The public works schemes fell into hopeless confusion, for, since the test for employment was destitution, starving women, children and old people had been taken on, but these were so weakened by hunger that many could not hold a spade. All over Ireland people were dying, many in the streets. Although the Government decided to stop the public works schemes and to treat the victims of the famine as paupers, many local authorities refused to close their public works.

Owing to bad conditions elsewhere in Europe, the price of seed had risen, and everywhere labourers' patches lay uncultivated. The Government decided against distributing seed as "this would have interfered with private enterprise."

Conditions had never been so fatally favourable to the rapid spread of disease, and during the winter of 1846-47 fever on a gigantic scale began to ravage the country. Terrified and desperate, the people began to fly from the country, making their way to America and to Britain. Fever went with them.

Although Irish emigrants were allowed to settle in Canada, they were not welcomed in the United States, being regarded as "unprofitable," although many managed to cross the border; but thousands died on the voyage and thousands more soon after arrival.

In Ireland throughout the spring and summer of 1847 the state of the people became desperate. Rates could not be collected in distressed districts, and large scale evictions began. After the assassination of a number of landlords it was thought that a conspiracy was afoot to drive them from the country, but the murders were in fact individual acts of vengeance by tenants who had been evicted.

Although there was a good potato harvest in 1847, an

