

## "BACK TO THE LAND"

By Louis F. Post

(From an unpublished manuscript)

"Back to the land" means more than "back to the soil," more than away from the cities and towns and back to the farms.

It might have meant only that to Horace Greeley, had the phrase been current in his time; for free soil at the American frontier was what he alluded to in his once famous but now obsolete advice to young men to "Go West!"

Such, too, may be its meaning to popular speakers and writers and their thoughtless auditors or readers.

But those words have a broader meaning, a meaning more comprehensive and modern and better suited to the fact that land is the one thing necessary for all industry—not alone the primitive in woodcraft or agriculture, but also the highly specialized and organized in manufactures and commerce.

Business men recognize this comprehensive meaning of "back to the land." Though they know not the phrase itself in any other sense than as an allusion to agricultural land alone, they understand and profit by what is involved in its broader meaning.

And all that ordinary business men mean when they search for "good locations," all that land speculators mean when they boast of their "confidence in the growth of localities," all that great capitalists mean when they scheme with governments for grants of "undeveloped" natural resources, is comprehended in the phrase, "back to the land." This is what Henry George meant when in the '80's he republished the memorable pastoral address by Bishop Nulty of Meath in which the phrase was uttered first. That it meant this to the venerable Irish Bishop himself is plain enough from the text of his address.

"Back to the land" means what Henry George meant when he wrote *Progress and Poverty*. It means not only to the soil, not only to natural resources, not alone from towns and cities to farms, nor by a moderately fortunate few; it means, as well, back from the custom of land monopolization, back from the grinding capitalism that land monopoly breeds and nurtures, back from the consequent exploitation of labour, back from poverty in the midst of plenty—from all this, "back to the land" in order to open fair opportunities for the full enjoyment by all the people of all the benefits of advancing industrial processes. Not "back to the land" for a primitive life for any; but forward, through restoration of the land, to civilized and civilizing lives for all.

In associating this comprehensive meaning of "back to the land" with Henry George, there is no thought of chaining so great a gospel to any man's altar. No appeal should be made to him as to one in authority, or as an original inventor or discoverer, or the founder of a cult. With few experiences was he himself ever so impatient as with contentions for his priority in the invention or discovery of the substance of the civilizing

message his name is identified with. He never claimed that message as his own, and never so regarded it. He had no other solicitude about it than that the people should see it, understand it, and adopt it as theirs. Whether this were with credit to him or no, was not alone his least concern; it concerned him not at all. The relationship which Henry George regarded himself as holding to the message he proclaimed, was simply that of an expositor, a teacher, an apostle.

With his first words in *Progress and Poverty* Henry George discloses the economic object of all that follows. Not a mere system of taxation, is this object; nor a

mere form of land tenure; nor a programme of social reconstruction. All are considered as methods for realizing the object, but quite another thing is the object itself. What that object is may be inferred from the riddle that *Progress and Poverty* attributes to the Sphinx of Fate. It may take this form: "Why does poverty persist with progress?"

That is the economic problem, the industrial problem, the labour problem, the business problem, the political problem, the social problem.

Not why poverty persists, be it observed; but why it persists with progress.

In other words—and this we all know from observation or experience to be the fact,—Why does poverty persist in the midst of abundant and constantly increasing wealth and wealth-producing power?

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Louis F. Post writes to *Land & Liberty* on behalf of himself and Mrs (Alice Thatcher) Post: "I have heard about Mr Hennessy's trip to your side this summer, and assurances come of the success and high promise of the Henry George Foundation Convention at New York last month. We had a delightful brief visit from our Danish friends, Mr and Mrs Jakob E. Lange, who were in attendance at the Convention.

"My *Basic Facts of Economics* is already out, and on the shelves of more than 1,000 public libraries. By October it will be in the hands of a thousand or more Universities. I hope it will serve a useful purpose. *The Prophet of San Francisco*, my last job, condensed by about 50 per cent, is in the hands of a publisher with a fair prospect of his putting it into print and upon the market. In all this work Alice has been my indispensable helpmate. The first edition of *Basic Facts* is nearly exhausted, and we are expecting to get out a second early in the year. Tom L. Johnson's *My Story* is likely to have a second edition (the first being exhausted) in the early future, of which the serial publication right has been purchased by a Cleveland publisher." The letter concluded with a message of warm greeting to all friends on this side.