

Luke North

JAMES H. GRIFFES (Luke North) spent his early life in Schenectady, N. Y. He was a newspaper reporter in Chicago when that city had a flourishing Single Tax club of over one thousand members. Here his health broke down, and tuberculosis, which disease was the ultimate cause of his death, developed. He went to Arizona and started a newspaper.

His next appearance was in San Francisco where he became editor of a Sunday newspaper. In that city his wife was killed by a moral pervert, and Luke North, always a consistent opponent of capital punishment, appeared in court and passionately urged a commutation of sentence for the convicted.

He was in Los Angeles when the Macnamara trial was in progress, and worked for Clarence Darrow in unearthing testimony and in creating favorable public sentiment for the accused. His first publication in that city was *The Golden Elk*, an organization paper of the Elks of that city. This most informal of fraternal orders probably attracted North by reason of its singularly loose organization and its teachings of brotherhood. This publication was short-lived. Luke North then published *Everyman*, which began as a journal of philosophic anarchism and later developed into an organ of the Great Adventure, with which nearly all readers of the REVIEW are familiar.

The dead leader was a student of the occult. His eager intellectuality strove to pierce the curtain shrouding the seen from the unseen. A freethinker he, nevertheless, or perhaps in consequence, possessed much natural religion and a fine passion for humanity, which the vision of a free earth roused to an intensity which swept all before it.

He had an intellectual honesty which permitted him to disavow a mistaken conviction. His noble recantation of previously expressed views on the war was actuated by no motive of caution, for he had courage of a high order. "Radicalism, too, has its conventions," he said in a fine, illuminating phrase in the article analyzing the mental change through which he had passed.

He grew bigger intellectually as he grew older. He was, we believe, between forty-five and fifty, and had not yet arrived at the summit of all of which he was capable. Many of his earlier views he had discarded. He grew to embrace the larger philosophy of life and learned more of Henry George in the fierce stress of the two political campaigns in which he was the recognized leader.

Death brings an end to all of life's asperities. The curious antagonisms which are based upon unreasoning refinements, upon differences of individuality, and which develop into fierce hostility utterly incomprehensible to one who surveys these manifestations from a distance, are swept into forgetfulness when death shows their utter futility and triviality.

This is true in the presence of Luke North, dead, about whom there raged a storm from his first appearance as a

leader in the Single Tax movement. This is all the more curious in that Single Taxers have shown an accommodating readiness to accept unquestioningly all kinds of leaders and leaderships.

How comes it, then, that an active minority of Single Taxers in California refused to follow the banner that for the first time in three decades was lifted high for uncompromising, straight Single Tax? The fact is, it was not so much Luke North's personality as it was that the entire movement was startled out of its complacency. North's appeal was to the soul of the Single Tax movement that makes the Single Tax really worth while. He asked for the Single Tax to force the land of California into use. He impatiently brushed aside questions of the niceties of taxation, local option in taxation, questions of exemptions. The whole Single Tax movement had grown timid, respectable, and was almost moribund. Luke North uttered a cry that seemed to come out of the wilderness and from his very soul, an appeal that was piercing, vehement—and it rang from one end of the State to the other. No one since Henry George had spoken in language half so thrilling. The response his appeal elicited is proof of its potency.

It is no disloyalty to Luke North's memory to question whether this man was a great political leader, a great political organizer. He was, at least, a wonderful agitator. His speeches were not always remarkable for their historical or philosophical insight, but they were stirring, appealing. His writings had their obvious deficiencies—being a poet he was quite as often mastered by his moods as master of them—but there were many flashes of illumination, and he was often positively brilliant.

Turning to the "Songs of the Great Adventure," we can find much to commend. Little of it is conventional in form, save one extraordinary sonnet, "The Nativity," which Luke North called an "adaptation" from one of Alys Thompson's sonnet sequences in the "Year's Rosary." But how many arresting things there are! Where we and the Socialists are prone to predicate our class divisions, Luke North would have none of them. There was only one division, he reminds us, in words of profoundest import and truest sanity. Listen to him, under the heading, "The Line of Cleavage."

"Those who care and those who don't—this is the line of cleavage in human society. It does not run between exploiter and exploited, the robber and the robbed; those are later accidents of environment and opportunity and circumstances. The still earlier accident—so it must appear to our comprehension—that we have to deal with, is the 'accident' of birth which gave this man a quickened heart and this man a dull one—this man a heart responsive and this man a heart obtuse.

"Some men care and some men don't—this is the line of cleavage. It does not parallel any of the artificial lines that superficially separate society into classes. It is not between the masses and the classes, not between labor and capital, nor between worker and parasite; it is not between proletariat, bourgeois, and tinsel aristocrat, nor between the educated and ignorant.

Principles long held to be the traditional inheritances of one or other of the parties are now shared on a "fifty-fifty" basis by both organizations. There is not a single issue on which each party is not pretty evenly divided. There is not one question of importance that has not its great protagonists in both parties, from the League of Nations down through to every minor issue.

There is perhaps one exception, and that is the tariff. As to this issue both parties are protectionist. There is not a single free trader in the national administration, if we judge correctly from their public utterances. We have not succeeded in teaching the Democratic Party the beauties of free trade, as we started out to do. We have failed in the role of preceptor, and we have seen even Mr. Bryan abandon his free trade activities for the preaching of all sorts of political nostrums, ending with national prohibition.

If it were not for Woodrow Wilson the Democratic Party could not carry a single electoral vote outside of the "Solid South." Never was there a party so thoroughly dead and buried. This is the more remarkable, in that the party might be imagined to have gained a certain prestige by carrying a great war to a successful conclusion. But even this is not enough, and will not suffice to save it from the overwhelming defeat that awaits it.

The Republican Party while possessing a greater cohesiveness, and incomparably greater intelligence, is, so far as great issues are concerned, a heterogeneous mob. Now that Theodore Roosevelt's political generalship and his hospitality to new ideas are gone, that party, too, is like a ship without a rudder.

Today is the auspicious time for the formation of a national Single Tax party organization with national committeemen in every State. This National Committee must supplant the proprietary organization turned over by Mr. Kiefer to Mr. Towne and now being used to exploit a preposterous scheme for the raising of half a million dollars to enable Mr. Towne to carry out some wonderful PLAN (which he refrains from indicating) for the establishment of a chain of papers. To such a pass have we come under the irresponsible government inherited from the Fels Commission!

Do some of our readers hesitate to accept the suggestion that the great doctrine for which we stand be now put to the supreme and final test? Yet it is the only way of welding together the now disrupted and dissatisfied elements of our movement. It is the only way that we may present a solid front to the world. May we not paraphrase the Earl of Montrose?

"We either fear our fate too much,
Or our deserts are small,
Who dare not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all."

Great God! We are the torch-bearers of an economic world-gospel! We bring balm for the healing of the nations, a message for the oppressed, a new Magna Charta of emancipation for mankind. If rejected, Leagues of Nations, covenants of peoples, are veritable "scraps of

paper." Again autocracy will challenge the political democracies that even now are shaken by internal revolutions. Again the Man on Horseback, a pinchbeck Hohenzollern or a real Napoleon, will over-ride the world. Again on dying democracies, by power of cannon and shot and shell a modern Tamerlane will seek to fatten, or "the sword will again be mightier than the pen, and in carnivals of destruction brute force and wild frenzy will alternate with the lethargy of a declining civilization."*

What to the disinherited, conscious of his disinheritance, is the knowledge that there exists a pact of international comity for the world? What to the laborer divorced from the land who surveys the swelling acres of Milord, does it matter that there is now a new *entente* between the rulers of Europe and America? His rulers are those who control the natural bounties of all lands. Will it assuage his anger and disappointment when fresh from the fields of Flanders on his return to his native Illinois he looks upon the country he has fought for? Is it *his* country or Lord Scully's?

We need not defer to the counsels of the timid. It is true we are numerically insignificant. We are without great leaders. We are oppressed by the traditions of democratic alignment. The mantle of Henry George has descended to none of us. We falter on the threshold of great achievement.

Yet the movement, in spite of thirty years on which we now look back with somewhat mingled emotions, is really in its formative state. The Land Movement of Henry George, as we have said elsewhere, "needs to be begun all over again." And it must not be begun in a timid, half-hearted way. Therefore it is needed that in 1920, or late in 1919, we hold a National Convention to perfect a national political organization; and inaugurate a new national party to carry the message straight to the Federal government.

* "Progress and Poverty," by Henry George.