

Was It Preventable? By DOROTHY WORRELL

"AN OUNCE of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is an old adage to which, surely, Georgists subscribe in common with others. And, understanding the Henry George system of economics, we Georgists wish and, when we contemplate the serious economic difficulties which face our whole country, wish desperately that the situation might have been prevented.

Seeing so clearly, as we do, a straight economic path which, if we as a people would follow it, could lead us through many problems and obstacles and out into the open of economic freedom and plenty, we cannot help feeling that the present state of affairs is unnecessary and could have been prevented.

Was it preventable?

The writer is inclined to the view that it was not preventable. There are certain conditions which can be prevented by the exercise of common sense. For example, one does not need to put his hand into a fire or on a hot stove in order to find out it would be burned. He does not need to insert his hand into a whirling wheel to find out it would be cut to pieces or severed from the arm. The harm that would result from such action is obvious to anyone beyond the stage of babyhood.

In a virgin country, however, and with a scarce population, why would anyone realize the eventual outcome of monopoly ownership of land and other natural resources? Past experience would give no warning sign. Why would it occur to anyone that land and other natural resources are not property and that their relationship with price and tax is different in effect from that of property. There was room enough for everyone, land in abundance, and no problem.

The problem develops when the land in a given area is all taken up and more potential owners are available than there is land to satisfy them. People crowd into centers, industry develops and concentrates, use of land becomes vertical as high buildings go up, and land values soar. Poverty and riches increase side by side, and no one understands what can be wrong. Trouble then comes in various forms with artificial remedies applied, until an acutely serious point is reached, and a genius like Henry George is needed who can think out the basic cause and remedy.

All sorts of surface remedies are tried, but the basic cause, to cure which would remove the offending trouble for all time, is not easily seen, because buried too deeply under generations of wrong economic practice.

Like Naaman in the Bible, for whom the prescribed remedy of dipping seven times in the River Jordan to cure his leprosy was too simple, until his faithful servant remonstrated with him, the economic facts are too simple to appeal to most thinkers. They do not see, or they refuse to see that the comparative few hold in monopoly ownership the land, which means that others not able to own are basically dependent on such owners for livelihood and all the functions of living that are included in the category of livelihood—wages, food, shelter,

surplus, leisure, choice of work and whether an employee or owner of own business.

Few, indeed, there are who see the situation for what it is, when it is mildly acute, and the acuteness progresses faster than the conversion of the people's economic thinking.

This is not necessarily a discouraging commentary, however.

Granted the remedy cannot be seen in time to prevent the cause and granted the cause grows and spreads to acute proportions, keeping forever ahead of the selection and application of the remedy, is the solution hopeless?

By no means. All that the Georgists have done and are doing in the education of the public is an act of casting anchors to windward, anchors which will hold when the confusion of forced economic change comes upon us and there must be those who understand the fundamental truth underlying the change and who can point the way and explain the transition to those who will be bewildered.

Our education into the Georgist philosophy and our attempts to spread a knowledge of it as widely as possible, therefore, are not lost motion. Rather, they represent a very definite step toward economic justice and righteousness because they put us in a strategic position of usefulness when the time comes that we are needed. For the writer believes that other forces and other conditions will bring about a Georgist economic regime. In our educational work, we are preparing ourselves and others. That educational work, however, will never bring about Georgist conditions. They will come in due time, for they are right, but they will come from other pressures, and we—we must be ready.

A general economic pressure so great as to constitute virtually a collapse will probably be the outcome of prevailing conditions, which, indeed, are but the natural climax of a long, long period of faulty economic functioning. In the event of a collapse, a fresh start would have to be made on all economic fronts. Land taxes and rentals; real property, that is, buildings and improvements; our money system, and all the processes of trade would need complete reorganizing, and such reorganizing would have to be done on a different basis, a just and equitable basis, for our present system would be wiped out.

A lesser condition than a general collapse may be the means that will implement a new system, but we have pictured above an extreme case which will serve for illustration. And it may well be the way the change actually will come about.

We know that a radical change must come, and it is inconceivable that society would reinstitute the economic system which, having been current for many centuries, has in the end brought us to disaster. Some circumstance may force us into the Henry George system, or those who understand it may have to come forward with its presentation.

In either case, Georgists do well to study, teach and labor to become proficient, to impart economic knowledge to others, and to lay plans for practical work. Above all, it behooves Georgists to be ready. In fact, it is essential that they be ready, for at the right moment, and that moment may come suddenly, we shall find our opportunity.