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Death of a Teacher

By WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

(Author's Note: This article—especially submitted for the FRAGMENTS memorial issue—is an abstract of a eulogy which I delivered at Frank Chodorov's funeral, December 31, 1966.)

HE WAS born in New York, poor, the son of Russian immigrants, and he lived in the lower West Side. He enrolled at Columbia University, where he made the varsity football squad. He graduated, married, and went out to make his way in commerce, "having," as he wrote, "given up as hopeless for a Jew the ambition of becoming a professor of English." And then, in the Thirties, his two children grown, he began the career of teaching, quietly, studiously, passionately, which made him friends among so many people who never laid eyes on him.

Early in his post-graduate career, he had been drawn to Henry George, at first because of the literary style. "Here," he once recalled, "was something of the cameo clarity of Matthew Arnold, a little of the parallel structure of Macaulay, the periods of Edmund Burke." Having, for many years thereafter, cultivated what he grew to believe was the unique social vision of George, he became the director of the Henry George School. But in due course, there was a falling out, and he resigned. One cannot truly understand Henry George, he once remarked, without understanding his antipathy to socialism. But George's most modern exegetes, he feared, were disposed to traduce George, to put his social philosophy at the service of the state. And it was the centralized state that Frank Chodorov was born, and lived, to oppose.

He had a go at journalism. During those years, he had met Albert Jay Nock. Once again, in his admiration for Nock, he could unite his passion for prose and for a philosopher of the individual. The two of them had a go—unsuccessful—at reviving the ancient *Freeman*. He then founded a personal monthly four-page journal, *analysis*. I met him there.

analysis was, for those who saw it, the testimony of a single man

against the spirit of an age which had become infatuated with the possibilities of the central solution for the problems of society. In *analysis*, the old fires burned, or rather, were kept flickering.

The sparks were struck. He accepted a post with *Human Events*. From there, he went once again to the resurrected *Freeman*, which he served as editor, in association with Leonard Read. He left it to free lance, joining the staff of *National Review*.

And then, at the Freedom School in Colorado, he was struck down. His daughter Grace went to him, and he was barely able, after the stroke, to talk. But he did, in near-delirium, mention that his faith in Henry George was whole; that Henry George, above all others, understood. She brought him back to New York, and he recovered his powers of speech. But he could not write again; and, as he grew worse, he could not read—and not to write, not to read, were consignments to an insanity from which he was saved only by his devotion to Grace and her husband Herbert, and to his grandchildren Lisa, and Eric, and Francine. After a while, he needed professional nursing care in the country. I saw him there, and, puffing his fugitive pipe, he leaned over to me and said grumpily: "You know what this place is? It's a die-in." His eyes twinkled; but he was not amused. Forbidden cigarette-lighters were sneaked in to him: defiance of authority; individualism to the end! Finally, a crisis—and a merciful death.

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He came to Yale to speak while I was an undergraduate. His manner was diffident, didactic, firm, gentle. Ed Opitz, in reviewing one of his books, remarked that he united a polemical passion with an apparent incapacity to utter any meanness towards any one, dead or alive. He spoke from a heart full of belief, enlightened by a mind keen and observant and understanding. He spoke in a style resolutely undemagogic. He thought it somehow profane, by the force of oratory, to seduce any listener towards positions with which he wasn't,

somehow, organically oriented. "The purpose of teaching individualism, he wrote, "is not to make individualists but to find them. Rather, to help them find themselves."

And so, at a relatively late age, he started the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, whose goal it was to undo the damage done a half century ago by the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. I was the ISI's first president, but I was purely a figurehead, as I was soon reminded. In short order, I had a letter from him: "Am removing you as president. Making myself pres. Easier to raise money if a Jew is president. You can be V-P. Love, Frank."

And then, he started to write his wonderful books of essays, innocent—and that was their strength—of the entangling complexities of modern life. He dealt in personal and social truisms; he did not ever entertain the question that the world would conceivably presume to justify the subordination of the individual.

At first infatuated with atheism, he abandoned his faith in non-faith upon reading and re-reading Henry George. He came to believe in "transcendence." "Even the ultra-materialistic socialists," he wrote, "in their doctrine of historical inevitability, are guilty of transcendentalism. Admittedly, this is a flight of the finite mind from its own limitations; it is a search for security in an invariable; it is mining for bedrock in the infinite." John Chamberlain called him a mystic, and said: "His mystical assumption is that men are born as individuals possessing inalienable rights."

"These rights of man," his daughter Grace wrote me, "stem from a source higher than man, and must not be violated. To him, this was religion."

As a Christian, I postulate that today he is happy and serene in the company of the angels and the saints and his Celia. We who have time left to serve on earth, rejoice in the memory of our friend and teacher, a benefactor to us all, living and unborn. May he rest eternally in peace.