What Is Liberty?

By FRANCES GOODALE

[From banquet address at Boston, July 3.]

IT IS true that I was present at a meeting, similar to this, in 1912, and to be present now at this conference is to me a somewhat emotional experience. At that first meeting I was not only an outsider, but also a hostile and cynical young whippersnapper who thought he knew a lot about economics and thought these Georgists were very funny. I noticed then something that troubled me, and that was the way they snapped at each other. I'm happy to see that such conduct has disappeared entirely. [Laughter from everyone.]

There were two groups of Georgists in 1912. There was the group known as step-by-steppers—Louis F. Post and Professor Johnson of Harvard were the leaders of that group. And there were the "whole-hoggers," so called, led by Baldwin Hall and Frank Stevens. I thought the contest would be settled by physical combat before they got through, but it wasn't, and at the end of the three-day conference there was a dinner, something like this, and everybody sang The Land Song with great enthusiasm, because everybody thought that "single tax" would become a reality in the next year or two.

Campaigns were going on in Peublo; Houston, Texas; Oregon and California, which were very exciting and everybody's mind was centered on immediate political action. My curiosity led me ultimately to become a convinced Georgist and to take part to some extent in those campaigns which followed immediately after 1912, and which were nearly successful, even here in Massachusetts. Then the war came on and single tax and the Georgist ideas were a war casualty. There were still a few faithful souls—John Monroe's father and others kept pegging along—John Gray was one of them and a lot of others kept things lighted. The spark never went out. Fisk Warren kept the spark going with his enclave (Free Acres, New Jersey). Joe Richards called his method, not the step-by-steppers nor the whole-hoggers, but the piece-by-piecers, and finally Oscar Geiger invented what I may call the "class by classes." His method has survived the second World War as the old methods failed to survive the first World War. I think that indicates great hopes for the future.

The Spiritual Bond

Well, perhaps I have reminisced enough about this, but there is just one thing I would like to say and that is what moves me so deeply. There may be some here who, like me in 1912, have come out of curiosity and not because they are Georgists. But I have a feeling that, although you have come from all parts of the country and from other countries, I have something in common with you. There is a true fellowship of the spirit which creates a kind of social organism. We have something which binds us all together—a personality which you

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might call the "common denominator" of all of us. It creates something—a real human aggre-
gate entity, and you can carry that on to the community and to the nation.
I did a little research on the meaning of lib-
erty in a technical sense, and Webster's Inter-
national Dictionary gives ten definitions, two
of which are diametrically opposed to one
other. Here is the first one: "The state of free-
dom. Exemption from subjection to the will
of a person claiming ownership or services. Op-
posed to slavery, serfdom, bondage or subjec-
tion." I think that is good but it doesn't go far
enough. The second one is: "privilege, exemp-
tion, franchise, immunity enjoyed by prescrip-
tion or grant." Mr. Webster gives as a cita-
tion to make that clear—a quotation from Sir
John Davies: "His Majesty gave not an entire
county to any, much less did he grant any ex-
traordinary liberties."

That is enough to show that the dictionary
doesn't give you the complete answer, and so I
hunted a little more and came across a defin-
tion which I think satisfies me. It's an inscrip-
tion over one of the courthouses in Massachu-
setts, and it states: "Obedience to the law is li-
berty." Now that seems like an odd saying the
first time you see it—somebody telling you what
to do and what not to do—bossing you around.
Is that liberty? Well, then you have to think
over the question "What law?" Perhaps there
is something which causes you to obey the law
—the police are not so likely to restrict your
liberties if you obey the law. But that is cer-
tainly not an adequate answer. I puzzled over
it a long time and then I began to think about
the meaning of liberty, and it seemed to me
that liberty is a meaningless word unless it is
related to people.

How Do People Think?
The important thing is philosophy, the premi-
se from which one's thinking starts. Gilbert
Chesterton said, "If a landlord is considering a
possible lodger, it is important for her to know
his solvency, but it is more important for her
to know his philosophy."

So if we are thinking about people and are
going to reason about people, I think it is es-
cential that we should begin by trying to find
out our own philosophy about people. In my
opinion the all-important cleavage; on one side
to totalitarianism, communism, Fascism and so-
cialism; and on the other side to democracy
and freedom; turns on one question: Do you
or do you not believe in people? Have you or
have you not faith in human beings?
There are those, and perhaps they are the ma-
jority in the world, who believe that people are
naturally bad; and that unless restrained they
will get worse. Their only hope is to have a
government of the wise, the good and disan-
terested, who will teach our people from the
top down, who will control them from the top
down and present them from manifesting the
evil in their nature. The question is obvious if
you follow it to the logical conclusion. Over-
head controls are, in the last analysis, the to-

talitarian state.
On the other side you have those who say, I
have faith in human beings. True, they behave
badly at times. They are behaving very badly
at the present time; the world is in a terrible
mess. But by and large if the average human
being was given the free choice he would rath-
er be kind than unkind, he would rather be hon-
est than dishonest. He does not want to be
cruel. He wants to get along with his fellow
men. What he needs is a chance to learn and
he can learn better in freedom than he can un-
der control, under guardianship.

So if that is your feeling, give him all the
freedom you can. The more freedom, the bet-

The photo shows Robert Clancy (photo by Herb Liebow).