

Pioneers of Social Reform in Chicago

By ALEXANDER GREENE

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

No social movement of our time has had so many men and women of outstanding character and colorful personality in it as the Georgist movement. Truly may it be said that each soldier in the Georgist ranks carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack; equally truly it may be said that often he was called upon to wave it, which he did with noteworthy capacity.

We of the younger generation of Georgists cherish the memories of these men and women. Their achievements were more than day-by-day victories; they live on in our time as inspirations to us who have come after. To meet this avid interest of the newer recruits to our ranks, The Freeman is presenting a series of sketches of the pioneers of the Georgist movement.

Collaborating with me in the series are a group of distinguished Georgists, who, in long careers, have bridged the gap between the past and the present. The first of them is Mr. Alexander Greene, an old resident of Chicago, whose work at the side of those he writes about is recorded indelibly in the pages of Georgist history. May his recollections prompt others to join in this series, and share with all of us the memories that have spurred them on in spite of all obstacles, difficulties and disappointments!

V. G. PETERSON

In the period 1896 to 1914, we had in Chicago many splendid men and women who did effective work for social reform, yet who were not known outside this city. We also had some who ranked amongst the foremost Georgists of the country. To name a few, we had Louis F. Post, his wife, Alice Thatcher Post, John Z. White, Judge Edward Os-good Brown, Frederick S. Monroe and George A. Schilling.

Besides our weekly meetings, we had a lunch table at a restaurant centrally located, where some of us met daily. Mr. and Mrs. Post, Editors of The Public, were usually present and often brought an out-of-town guest. To impress a friend, we would invite him to luncheon and give him the privilege of meeting our "great." Mr. Post was always gentle and patient, no matter how stupid a visitor might be; but the same cannot be said of John Z. White. If the inquirer were a socialist, or showed a socialist turn of mind, Mr. White charged to the attack, his eyes blazing and his great voice booming around the table.

Chicago knows the Posts no more. Louis Post died in 1928. Mrs. Post is living quietly in Washington. John Z. White is still with us. Today, he is slightly deaf, but the advancing years have not impaired his powers of oratory. His powerful voice can still fill the largest hall without the aid of a microphone.

To Frederick S. Monroe is due inestimable praise for his work as President of the Henry George Association of Chicago, and, more especially, for taking John Z. White out of a printing office and putting him on the road as a lecturer. He held us up for pledges that would enable him to finance the plan. His son, John Lawrence Monroe, is manifesting the same zeal in his work with the now flourishing Henry George School of Chicago. He, too, has mastered the fine art of extracting money and work from people without causing them a sense of loss. For twenty years Mr. White traveled, filling lecture engagements procured for him by Mr. Monroe. He spoke to legislatures, Kiwanis clubs, to church groups and to many

other organizations. He had the distinction of being "egged" while speaking in Missouri; but the eggs were fresh and, next morning, he breakfasted on one which had fallen, unbroken, into his pocket.

One of our dearest associates was George A. Schilling. He liked to tell that he was formerly a cooper. He was self-educated and well educated, one of the gentlest of men, of a religious nature but not a member of any denomination. Many of our people were without religious ties, and when they died Schilling would officiate at the burial and "make a few remarks." For that reason we called him "Pastor George." The story goes that in his early days he was an anarchist. Once, walking along the street, he stepped upon a banana peel and fell. His days as an anarchist ended. As he picked himself up he decided there should be enough government, at least, to prevent people from throwing banana skins on the sidewalk. He took up socialism, but he was too much of an individualist to remain long in that camp and soon became a Georgist, and a great credit to the movement.

Schilling had friends in all kinds of society. The Labor Unions trusted him; he was welcome in the offices of bankers and other big business men. He was an intimate friend of John Peter Altgeld, Governor of Illinois, and had known the anarchists upon whom responsibility was fastened for the death of several policemen in the Haymarket riot; but nobody knows to this day who threw the bomb. Governor Altgeld was petitioned to pardon those who had escaped hanging and were in prison, many influential business men being in the long list of petitioners. Mr. Schilling used to relate how he pleaded with Altgeld to sign the pardon. The Governor listened, saying nothing, pacing the floor of the executive mansion.

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Then he stopped before a portrait of Lincoln. For a time he looked at it. "I'll do it," he said. He did, but, not satisfied with merely releasing the prisoners, he told why!

The story of Altgelt is best told in "Eagle Forgotten," by Harry Barnard. This book also pays tribute to Schilling, who furnished the author with much of his material. Altgelt never declared himself a Georgist, but there was a strong, friendly feeling between him and our crowd. In later years he ran for Mayor of Chicago, but was defeated by that "peanut politician," as he called Carter Harrison. The only good deed Harrison ever did was to appoint George Schilling President of the Board of Local Improvements. In that position he had the opportunity to become a rich man by using the knowledge his position gave him to speculate in land values; but he never took advantage of it, and died a poor but much loved man.

Another Chicago man who did good work for the movement was

Judge Edward Osgood Brown, one of the guarantors of The Public. On one occasion when he spoke for us he declared in his low, guttural voice, "Next to the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Single Tax is nearest my heart."

In our Sunday meetings, and at our banquets, we listened to Georgists from other cities. Many years ago we gave a banquet in honor of Francis Neilson, then a resident of England. The toastmaster on that occasion was Hamlin Garland, the novelist. William Marion Reedy of St. Louis, editor of that remarkable paper, Reedy's Mirror, was once our guest. So was Bishop Williams of Detroit. John W. Benough of Canada gave us a "chalk talk" on one of these occasions, illustrating as he went along, with sure, deft strokes on a blackboard. Benough's cartoons had a pungency of their own. Among others were John S. Crosby, a splendid orator, Joseph Fels, full of vigor and fire, and Jerry Simpson, that clever congressman whom his critics tried to discredit by dub-

bing him, "Sockless Jerry." Simpson was a wit. In closing a speech for us, once, he said: "Well, goodbye—I hope to see you again sometime, somewhere—up here or down there—I have friends in both places."

Then there was that magnificent man, Ernest Crosby, who several times came to Chicago. He was tall, handsome, bearded, of striking appearance. Mr. Crosby was the American representative at the International Court in Egypt, an appointment for life. But he read Tolstoy, became disgusted with his position and resigned it. Before returning to America, he went to Russia and met Tolstoy, who asked him what he intended doing after he returned home. Mr. Crosby said he had no plans. Then Tolstoy advised him to study and preach the doctrines of the greatest American, Henry George, and this he did until his death.

That remarkable woman, Margaret Haley, who fought the Chicago corporations in order to obtain funds for the teachers' salaries, said, in

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her late years, that if she had her life to live over, she would devote it to spreading the message of Henry George. She was converted by reading the "Life of Henry George."

I saw our counterparts in England, when I visited there and made the acquaintance of many of the active Georgists. John Paul reminded me of Louis Post—the same gentle but forceful character, and Andrew MacLaren, M.P., with his hatred of socialism, seemed the English John Z. White. Dear old Frederick Verinder was much like my American friend, George Schilling, but, unlike Pastor George, a staunch Anglo-Catholic.

Long ago, I learned that the most deserving people are not always the

widest known. There were many Georgists whom I was fortunate to know who were never known far from their own narrow circle. Yet I may say that, by and large, the followers of Henry George have added more to my enjoyment of life than any other group.

