

## Footnote to Fame

By JOHN LAWRENCE MONROE

THOSE who knew the record of achievement of Dr. William C. Gorgas [1845-1920], surgeon general of the United States during World War I, were gratified by his election to the Hall of Fame last November. They remembered how . . .

- in less than eight months, he eliminated yellow fever from Havana, where it had scourged the population for 150 years.
- in less than two years, against unreasonable and almost insurmountable opposition of bureaucratic authoritarianism, he transformed the Isthmus of Panama from a charnel house of disease and death, a condition which had existed for 400 years, to one of the healthiest spots on earth.
- in two years he organized the greatest medical corps to care for the largest army in the nation's history up to that time, developing it from a corps of a few hundred to an organization of 35,000 officers and 250,000 enlisted personnel.

The ultimate fame of this "physician to the world," however, is not likely to rest alone on these achievements, but equally on his perception of the economic causes of disease and on his approach to their removal.

Speaking at a dinner of the Business Men's Club in Cincinnati in 1914, Dr. Gorgas said:

At Panama, the Commission found that to attract labor, and keep it on the Zone, they had to increase and, within a very few months, double the wages of the manual laborer. It does not take more than a moment of thought to show to you how such a measure acts and reacts. Results take place in many directions, but particularly with regard to increasing the ability of the people to live well and get better food and better clothing. While dwelling upon thoughts such as these, I came across *Progress and Poverty*.

Dr. Gorgas was impressed at once by the proposal Henry George advanced to substitute the taxation of land values for taxes on production, and felt it would be the means of bringing about that improvement in social conditions he saw as essential to the health of the community.

"It is a health officer's duty," he wrote later in a Public Health Bulletin, "to urge forward in his community those measures which will control individual diseases, but my long experience has taught me that it is still more his duty to take that broader view of life which goes to the root of bad hygiene, and do what he can to elevate the general social conditions of his community."