

# Truth Sets Men Free

Dear Mr. Chodorov: Your critique of Mr. Nock's book\* interests me deeply. First, let me congratulate you on the admirable way in which you deal with his work. It is rarely one comes across, nowadays, a bit of criticism which stimulates the reader because of the crisp, sure method of dealing with the book. You have succeeded, it seems to me, in arousing the reader's interest to the extent of making him wish to purchase a copy and read for himself what the author has to say. In my case, you have urged me to send to the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation for a copy of the volume.

The quotation and summary at the end of your article remind me strongly of the struggle that I had when I was persuaded to go into politics in England. I firmly believed at that time that nothing of an effective nature could be done by making the gospel of George a political issue. I was over-persuaded and devoted many years to promulgating the theory of the taxation of land values from the political platform and was not sure at any time that I was doing the best for the cause. Still it must be admitted that the political channel may be used to advantage for educative purposes as is done in England.

First, let me deal with the matter of Mr. Nock's "educable élite." The meaning is clear to me, although I think the word "élite" is not well-chosen. I also think that it was bound to raise a false notion in the mind of the reader. Surely Mr. Nock means, when he uses the word "élite," the few profound thinkers who may come from any class of society. It is not to be confounded with social distinction of any kind, but only in the case of quality of mind. The philosophy of George must make headway in spite of all political seductions. The cause must spread and prosper because it goes to the very heart of man's purpose. It must be accepted for its own treasures.

I am convinced that the masses can never be educated. In the first

place, there is no known way of educating the instructors, save in our own case, which is my ideal of a system of education. As for school, college and university education, the longer I am acquainted with the systems, and the more I see of the method and practice of faculties, the more certain I am that we shall never, under present conditions, reach a stage when the instructors will have the knowledge to impart that a student-graduate of the Henry George School gains from your system.

FRANCIS NEILSON.

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The editor, in acknowledging the generous comment of Francis Neilson, informed him of the following experience of the Henry George School of Social Science:

"About fifty per cent of those who enroll in the course based upon 'Progress and Poverty' complete the course. Of this fifty per cent about half want to know more, and enroll in the advanced courses. These advanced courses consist of 'Protection or Free Trade' and 'The Science of Political Economy.' There are other courses and this Fall we are adding one, based upon Max Hirsch's book.

"And so, we are finding that about twenty-five per cent of those who originally enrolled in the course have something in them that prompts them to keep on studying the philosophy of freedom."

This led Mr. Neilson to make the following analysis of the function of the Henry George School:

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When I was intimately connected with night schools of the various systems in England, such as crafts and design, university extension lectures and those to be found at such places as Toynbee Hall, the Samuel Memorial (after the pattern of the old Cooper Union in New York), I found that the number of persons (men and women) who had a desire to be instructed after they had left the

day schools and had started to work for themselves, amounted to so small a fraction of the mass of youths who left school and entered the labor market, that it was scarcely worth the cost and the trouble of turning out so few.

Moreover, in the various branches of trade and art, to say nothing of politics, in which I have served apprenticeships, I have found only a few in each branch of activity who have shown the desire to progress steadily to a goal. In music and in the theatre this was most noticeable. The masses of mediocre folk who, year in and year out, preferred a precarious existence, was noticeable to everybody concerned. Politics is the great field in which it can be shown that only the few can be educated. So far as trade itself is concerned, any manager of a large department, whether manufacturing or clerical, could tell the inquirer that the vast majority are incapable of progressing beyond a definite stage; and are satisfied to perform only routine work under supervision. Initiative and perseverance seem to be qualities which only the few possess.

Yet, when we look over the field that George has brought to our ken, small as the patch was when he began his work, we see something which puzzles us. And here it is that we find that Mr. Nock's term "élite" will not in any way fit in with our ideas; in my experience I have found, both here and in England, most extraordinary examples of poorly-educated men working hard for small pay, making an effort to understand George's philosophy and becoming master-instructors and crusaders. The reason for this is that George's gospel appeals to all that is finest in the nature of man.

If there be a dormant idealism in the neophyte's mind, and if he have the inclination and gumption (to use a good old folk-term), George's gospel will waken it up and give an entirely different color to life. Imbued, after a bit, with a sense of the pos-

sibility of another economic order, the student becomes a fervent disciple whose desire to take the good tidings to his fellows actuates his every thought and thrills his being.

Now school education has lost its savor. It is found on every hand, it requires little or no exertion and it is used, so far as the generality is concerned, for one purpose only, which is a material one, namely, acquiring the mere elements of reading, writing and arithmetic, so that they may qualify for a job. Two generations ago, when education was hard to get, the lads and lassies of England, Scotland and Wales had, in the vast majority of cases, to bear privation and sacrifice the hours now devoted to games and sport, so that they might fit themselves for what were then called "careers." Those who succeeded in winning scholarships carried on, and many reached the universities. Vast numbers, not successful in gaining the prizes, plodded on, attended night schools and rose from the ruck.

That phase of our system of education has been ignored very largely by the people who record the wonders of the past fifty years. But Henry George himself is the most extraordinary example that can be placed before the poor boy who desires to know something of the philosophy of life. Think of what he did; the sacrifices he cheerfully made; of how he went from one shelf of stored knowledge to another in his unremitting search for wisdom!

There is, therefore, in this gospel that subtle something, call it what you will, that hath the power to bring the best out of a student in whose mind fine notions of the potentialities of man lie sleeping.

There is, however, this important consideration to be marked in dealing with those students who fail to comprehend George's philosophy in full. I have found numbers, particularly in that great organization, the League of Young Liberals in England, which I had the honor of forming, who could not go beyond the point of grasping a clear understanding of the three factors in production and holding precise ideas of the definition of the terms: "rent,"

"wealth," and "property." In the discussions and debates at League meetings, I was deeply impressed, over and over again, with the way young men, who had no notion of what the order of society would be if reform could be carried out in full, argued their points and maintained their convictions. This was most noticeable when there would be a clash of ideas between a land values man and a Fabian or a Municipal Socialist. I do not remember an instance when a land values man did not beat his opponent hollow in the argument.

So we must recognize, I think, that the 50% you refer to, who do not go on, may prove to be very useful disseminators of certain fundamentals. They, too, can be sowers of the seed of truth. At any rate, I think we have divined the unique, innermost quality in the gospel of George, and that is the direct appeal it makes to the finest instincts in man. It brings out of him the best that is in him.

Whether it can be carried into practice and what order of society will be established are questions that may repose in the lap of the gods; but there is this wonderful gift which has been given to us, which is that we can endure the present system because we know that there is another world for man, a world in which he will have a chance to rise to the highest plane of culture and refinement.

In toto, George has given us the means whereby we shall move forward to what Isaiah, in the sixty-fifth chapter, verses seventeen to twenty-three, calls "the new Jerusalem."

One of the greatest satisfactions of my life is that I can, in these days of turmoil and grief all over the world, take repose in the belief that it is only necessary for the truth to be known to set men free. It is not governments or political parties which hold men in chains; it is their own benighted minds which enslave them.

I once heard a man say that you can teach the elements of political economy to a child of six or seven years. This statement surprised me much and interested me deeply. At the time I heard it, my children were in the teens and could then speak glibly about the taxation of land values. I made inquiries, as I went about the country, and I learned that many parents began to teach their children the meaning of the factors in production at the age of five.

Now this notion leads me to ponder what would happen if an elementary course could be introduced in the common schools. The Jesuit says, "Get them early!" True! It is a well-established fact that children who have French and German nurses are often able to speak three languages before they reach their teens. I have always held that the simpler the mind, the easier it is to grasp the fundamentals of political economy.

The greatest difficulties I have encountered have always been in the cases of men who have become immersed in the present system and whose minds are constantly perturbed about the conditions in which they struggle. They have no clear notion of what they have to encounter day by day, as consequences of their fogged notions of economics and politics.

In your school, I take it, for the most part, your young men's minds are not cluttered up with all the buncombe that you would find in the minds of fellows in a counting house or in a factory.

FRANCIS NEILSON.

\*"Henry George," by Albert Jay Nock—\$1.00—Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 32 E. 29 St., New York.