

Luke North

JAMES H. GRIFFES (Luke North) spent his early life in Schenectady, N. Y. He was a newspaper reporter in Chicago when that city had a flourishing Single Tax club of over one thousand members. Here his health broke down, and tuberculosis, which disease was the ultimate cause of his death, developed. He went to Arizona and started a newspaper.

His next appearance was in San Francisco where he became editor of a Sunday newspaper. In that city his wife was killed by a moral pervert, and Luke North, always a consistent opponent of capital punishment, appeared in court and passionately urged a commutation of sentence for the convicted.

He was in Los Angeles when the Macnamara trial was in progress, and worked for Clarence Darrow in unearthing testimony and in creating favorable public sentiment for the accused. His first publication in that city was *The Golden Elk*, an organization paper of the Elks of that city. This most informal of fraternal orders probably attracted North by reason of its singularly loose organization and its teachings of brotherhood. This publication was short-lived. Luke North then published *Everyman*, which began as a journal of philosophic anarchism and later developed into an organ of the Great Adventure, with which nearly all readers of the REVIEW are familiar.

The dead leader was a student of the occult. His eager intellectuality strove to pierce the curtain shrouding the seen from the unseen. A freethinker he, nevertheless, or perhaps in consequence, possessed much natural religion and a fine passion for humanity, which the vision of a free earth roused to an intensity which swept all before it.

He had an intellectual honesty which permitted him to disavow a mistaken conviction. His noble recantation of previously expressed views on the war was actuated by no motive of caution, for he had courage of a high order. "Radicalism, too, has its conventions," he said in a fine, illuminating phrase in the article analyzing the mental change through which he had passed.

He grew bigger intellectually as he grew older. He was, we believe, between forty-five and fifty, and had not yet arrived at the summit of all of which he was capable. Many of his earlier views he had discarded. He grew to embrace the larger philosophy of life and learned more of Henry George in the fierce stress of the two political campaigns in which he was the recognized leader.

Death brings an end to all of life's asperities. The curious antagonisms which are based upon unreasoning refinements, upon differences of individuality, and which develop into fierce hostility utterly incomprehensible to one who surveys these manifestations from a distance, are swept into forgetfulness when death shows their utter futility and triviality.

This is true in the presence of Luke North, dead, about whom there raged a storm from his first appearance as a

leader in the Single Tax movement. This is all the more curious in that Single Taxers have shown an accommodating readiness to accept unquestioningly all kinds of leaders and leaderships.

How comes it, then, that an active minority of Single Taxers in California refused to follow the banner that for the first time in three decades was lifted high for uncompromising, straight Single Tax? The fact is, it was not so much Luke North's personality as it was that the entire movement was startled out of its complacency. North's appeal was to the soul of the Single Tax movement that makes the Single Tax really worth while. He asked for the Single Tax to force the land of California into use. He impatiently brushed aside questions of the niceties of taxation, local option in taxation, questions of exemptions. The whole Single Tax movement had grown timid, respectable, and was almost moribund. Luke North uttered a cry that seemed to come out of the wilderness and from his very soul, an appeal that was piercing, vehement—and it rang from one end of the State to the other. No one since Henry George had spoken in language half so thrilling. The response his appeal elicited is proof of its potency.

It is no disloyalty to Luke North's memory to question whether this man was a great political leader, a great political organizer. He was, at least, a wonderful agitator. His speeches were not always remarkable for their historical or philosophical insight, but they were stirring, appealing. His writings had their obvious deficiencies—being a poet he was quite as often mastered by his moods as master of them—but there were many flashes of illumination, and he was often positively brilliant.

Turning to the "Songs of the Great Adventure," we can find much to commend. Little of it is conventional in form, save one extraordinary sonnet, "The Nativity," which Luke North called an "adaptation" from one of Alys Thompson's sonnet sequences in the "Year's Rosary." But how many arresting things there are! Where we and the Socialists are prone to predicate our class divisions, Luke North would have none of them. There was only one division, he reminds us, in words of profoundest import and truest sanity. Listen to him, under the heading, "The Line of Cleavage."

"Those who care and those who don't—this is the line of cleavage in human society. It does not run between exploiter and exploited, the robber and the robbed; those are later accidents of environment and opportunity and circumstances. The still earlier accident—~~it~~ must appear to our comprehension—that we have to deal with, is the 'accident' of birth which gave this man a quickened heart and this man a dull one—this man a heart responsive and this man a heart obtuse.

"Some men care and some men don't—this is the line of cleavage. It does not parallel any of the artificial lines that superficially separate society into classes. It is not between the masses and the classes, not between labor and capital, nor between worker and parasite; it is not between proletariat, bourgeois, and tinsel aristocrat, nor between the educated and ignorant.

"The true line of cleavage runs perpendicular through all classes of society—even through radicalism itself—and divides the world into those who care and those who don't."

The man who wrote these words lies now where the storm of controversy that raged about him is forever stilled. When he became ill he was induced to go to a hospital. Examination proved that he suffered from the last stages of tuberculosis. His death was followed by a quiet funeral in Forest Lawn Cemetery, in Glendale, near Los Angeles, and the only services consisted of the reading of selections from the "Songs of the Great Adventure."

"Died of tuberculosis"—so will read the medical records of the institution where he passed away. But it is not a pleasant thought that his end was hastened by undernourishment and the lack of full sympathy he must have craved. Yet this thought, which we hesitate to voice, he might have put aside with the same noble retort which we find on page 145 of the "Songs of the Great Adventure."

AT THE ROSLYN HOTEL

One arose and said
He had sacrificed more
For the Single Tax than I had.

He was right.
I haven't sacrificed anything
For Single Tax.

The vision of Henry George
Owes me nothing.
I am its debtor
For the greatest hours of my life.