

At Last---A Great Book---John E. Grant's "The Problem of War and Its Solution"

SUPPOSE we were called upon to review "Progress and Poverty" as a work fresh from the press in 1923. We could not do so with an approach to adequacy even after several readings. We could only read and wonder with bated breath. We could but exclaim, "Here at last is a great book!"

Both because of the nature of its treatment, and because of the clear revelation of page after page of this work of John E. Grant's, we are similarly estopped from the perfunctory and hackneyed phrases of commendation which spring so easily to the mind of the reviewer. Such phrases seem all too tame in the presence of a work like this.

So we can but exclaim, Here at last is a great book! It is the biggest book since "Progress and Poverty." It completes this work, brings it down to date, and fits the newer world of 1923 as completely as Henry George could have done had he been alive to supplement "Progress and Poverty" in the light of those happenings that have rocked the world since 1914.

How mean seem the flood of works on economics and current problems in the light of this splendid achievement, how inadequate the thought and philosophy of so many pompous emendations heralded with profuse encomiums of press and publisher. Even the best of them, Wells and Van Loon, seem trivial beside it. For here we have true philosophy, real insight, clear economic knowledge, apt allusions that jump out at us from every page even as they do in Henry George, and an embracing knowledge of books, men and epochs.

There are two qualities in which "Progress and Poverty" ranks superior. These are the quality and degree of eloquence, though in Mr. Grant's work many passages have eloquence of a kind, and in the greater symmetry and completeness of Henry George's work, with which indeed there is hardly a modern work to compare.

But when this is said, what we have written in commendation must be allowed to stand. In his treatment of the doctrine of Malthus, for example, Mr. Grant makes complete the demonstration of its fallacy, advancing the argument to a total annihilation.

We cannot do justice to this work by the brief citations which our space affords, but we can at least give a taste of it. Here is his approach to the "Problem:"

"Our problem is not only to investigate the origin of civil and international hatreds and wars generally, but especially to scrutinize the underlying cause or causes of modern strife.

We shall clear away as far as we can the debris which strew the path over which we must tread, composed of the fragments and boulders shattered from the mountainous fallacies long ago exploded by giant pioneers. These have discouraged former research parties.

On our way toward the source we may examine certain tributary theories to see where they lead, but not every one. The time is short, our friends remaining behind are anxiously awaiting our news. Guided by the finger of Truth, our expedition must not halt, therefore, but press forward, sustained by the conviction that fatalism is opposed to common sense."

This promises well, and we proceed to page 42, where the author says:

"From our point of view there is no mystery why children of the slums should be so often defective mentally and physically, and it is not necessary to assume hereditary transmission from defective parents. The appalling conditions under which our slum barbarians are forced to live would be hell to the lowest savage. On the other hand, the startling contrast afforded by modern public school girls, developed in healthy and freer surroundings than the hot house feminine culture of forty years ago, equally finds its interpretation.

While it is impossible to indicate where the tendency in heredity ceases and merges into the stimulus of environment, enough is known of the dynamic factor of environment, especially for ourselves—that part we have called super-organic. It is clear that we must look for some maladjustment in social institutions to account for the unhealthy phenomena of warlords, millionaires, paupers and criminals."

This is from page 48:

"It is almost impossible to assess absolute values in race until all races have equality of opportunity."

On page 68, treating of the Principle of Population, Mr. Grant says:

"What has been said with regard to the animal kingdom applies in a special way to man. The apex order of the primates, he alone within the final limits of water, air and sunshine can modify and extend his environing "solution" beyond anything imagined in the most Utopian dreams.

So far as food alone is concerned, chemistry in agricultural practice demonstrates that the most unpromising inorganic matter, as for example, basic slag, lime, sulphate of ammonia and the nitrates, can be converted to food stuffs under suitable conditions, so that an almost limitless population could be fed. The whole population of the world is already fed, clothed and housed by the labor of a small percentage of mankind, and it could be very well continue being supplied with these requisites, if all the lengthy, twisted line which connects a man with his food were short-circuited. Not only is the present efficiency extremely low, the proportion of the unemployed at each end of the social scale being high, but the toiling masses are to an unrealized extent engaged in useless or harmful occupations.

The surface of the earth has only been touched in a few places, and it is in fact crowded with inexhaustable possibilities. The barren rivers of New Zealand were turned into an angler's paradise by the importation of a few boxes

of English trout spawn. Newfoundland fishermen were provided with an abundance of fresh food by the introduction of American hare. Following the example of Dr. Jackson in Alaska, Dr. Grenfell in 1908 took reindeer over from Finland to Labrador, which saved the Eskimos from rickets, scrofula and tubercle, because they were thus provided with milk, cream and butter. If famine can be exchanged into plenty in hard climates and in sparsely populated mountainous countries, it can be surely so in fertile lands possessing good climates and inhabited by plentiful industrious people, who have all the advantages of close intercourse and co-operation."

From page 81:

"If we allow our senses and intelligence to be dwarfed or obscured by superstition, if we shut our eyes and in blind vanity disregard the plentiful warnings—the danger signals against the retention of social institutions *which are not standing the test of time*—then in the fog engendered by the assumption that all is well, Nature may appear hostile as we persist in wrong directions, hurting ourselves in doing so."

On page 128, under "The Law of Rent:"

"Belief in the private ownership of land is a comparatively modern form of error. To the nomadic mind, no matter how degenerate in credulously imagining that man may own his fellows as he owns sheep, land was never regarded as the subject of more than temporary possession, as pasture for flocks and herds."

And again on the same page:

"To afford equal opportunity for every one to the land it is only necessary to collect the fund of economic rent and return it in equal portions to every member of the community."

On the question of "Compensation" on page 133:

"Not only is it morally wrong to propose that those who now suffer because the community has lapsed into superstition should pay 'compensation' to the persons profiting by injustice, so converting landlords into bondlords, but land cannot be bought back—cannot be 'nationalized' by purchase. The land is, and always has been, a national possession; therefore it is only necessary to assert the common right and proclaim that upon an Appointed Day the Crown should collect for the people the Economic Rent, which is the outward and visible measure of its communal value."

And on page 207, in words that remind us of George:

"The progress of civilization may be likened to the advancement of a yacht under sail, which speeds along in the breeze. The pilot on board, representing society, is an amateur. He steers the yacht too dangerously near the wind, and brings her to a standstill. In technical parlance, the little vessel is 'in irons.' If the pilot is slow to learn, he may be driven ashore upon the rocks of anarchy, and may have to refit.

The yachtsman does not retain freedom to progress by giving way to violent panic or by refusing to learn from experience. To preserve himself he must act in accordance with certain immutable laws or so-called laws of nature.

The freely running steam engine, quiet and efficient, provides little scope for unilluminated comment, but the en-

lightened mind finds a never-failing source of pleasurable interest in it.

If, however, the engine has been erected upon a defective foundation which has therefore subsided, was out of alignment and strained, so that owing to friction in the moving parts it was almost scotched, and steam leaked from every joint, no one but a crazy person would find satisfaction in the spectacle.

The scientific engineer would not try to remedy matters by pouring sand into the bearings, nor would he add weights to the safety valve of the boiler for the purpose of increasing steam pressure to overcome the abnormal resistance. He would instead lay a sound foundation, and make adjustments that would have the effect of liberating the mechanism."

On page 355:

"If the sluice gates are opened in time and the Rule of the Land is put into operation, the community will magnanimously look upon the past sins of individuals as the outcome of maladjustments for which, due to superstition, all are responsible.

Compensation to those who have been living rent free, or who have been receiving tribute from the industrious for the use of the earth, cannot be entertained. Indeed, the land has been redeemed in blood and labor many times over, and its restitution will bring compensation not only to those hitherto deprived of their birthright, but also to those now superstitiously believed to have some peculiar right to it."

But quotations furnish a very inadequate notion of the thought of this work. Especially do we desire to commend the chapter entitled, "The Secret of History."

What is chiefly notable is the courage with which it faces the consequences of making land common property. In this it is in startling contrast to the timidity of some of our brethren in the movement who, in this secondary stage of our progress, would emasculate the doctrine to make it palatable to the conservative. So great and beneficent will be the change from a chaotic civilization to the natural economic order that we can afford to take into account and provide if necessary for the incidental losses and business disturbances that will result as a temporary condition while entering the period when Justice will rule and Privilege will cease to reign. In this his faith is as sure as that of Henry George and every Single Taxer who has read understandingly the message of our great leader.

One reflection occurs to us. Our admiration for the work increases our reverence for "Progress and Poverty." For this work of John E. Grant's comes at a time when his conclusions are reinforced by all that has gone before, the conclusions arrived at by other thinkers, and the events of the World War. But "Progress and Poverty" was written in 1879 before the flood of books dealing with the Social Problem, and when predictions based upon the trend of civilization lay mostly in the realm of prophesy. This is not said in detraction of the merit of Mr. Grant's monumental achievement. But what a reflection it is on the intelligence of the army of writers who have tried their "prentice hand" at solutions of the economic and social

problem without the slightest reference to the profound and illuminating studies of Henry George!

The work is from the house of E. P. Dutton and Company, of this city, and is a volume of 400 pages. The price is five dollars, which keeps it out of the reach of the general reader. We hope that the sale of the work will be sufficient to encourage the publishers to try a cheaper edition. It deserves the widest reading by men and women of the English speaking race, for no work of such importance has appeared in the last three decades.

JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

Suggestions For Practical Work

IT having been said of me in a recent issue of the REVIEW that I am an enthusiastic adherent of the Single Tax Party and a convert to the party idea, I feel inclined to explain my position, more especially as there has been going on more or less discussion of the moral as comparable with the fiscal presentation of our Big Idea.

I was asked to be one of two candidates for the New Jersey Assembly at the last election, and I complied with the request. No great splurge was made in the local campaign, but the candidacy gave Gaston Haxo and myself an opportunity to meet some people and do some propaganda work that we would not otherwise have been able to accomplish. As a means of advertising both the moral and fiscal aims of Single Taxers the party plan has many advantages, beyond question.

But my view is that the party scheme has a more natural affiliation with the economic and fiscal than with the moral foundations of our proposal. There is to me an apparent absurdity in the attitude of men who claim to be "middle-of-the-rovers"—excited and obsessed by the cruelly unjust conditions brought about by our land system—refusing, like William Lloyd Garrison to compromise, minimize, extenuate or equivocate—and yet who are content to be active in such a trifling enterprise as the formation of a party or a party organization. There is, undoubtedly, ample justification for a crusade against the private appropriation of economic rent. One cannot deny that this appropriation is a great crime against humanity, but surely those who take the responsibility of protesting against the crime should not be content with what amounts to a negligible use of party opportunities. A great crime demands adequate protest—even the "howling dervish" state of frenzy or fervid conduct and utterance.

Again, it is evident to me that some of our most distinguished promoters of the purely fiscal presentation of the Single Tax quite unnecessarily refrain from pointing out that there are equal rights to the use of the land—that exclusive possession of land is a privilege or franchise for which an annual return should be made in some way. Since no one really denies this, it could always form part of an address on taxation before even a Chamber of Commerce, and thus disarm much of the criticism leveled at

the fiscal talkers by those who are sometimes called "all-at-oncers."

The fiscal lecturers also are by me offered this advice: Let them conclude their fiscal explanations, duly accompanied by an outspoken belief in the principle of equal rights to the use of the earth, with some practical suggestions as to how, in the State where the speech is delivered, legislative progress might be initiated. By doing this last they will absolve themselves from the charge of being more interested in perennial sowing of seed than in helping in a harvest. For one, after some thirty-five years of connection with the Single Tax movement, I am ready for something really worth while to be accomplished.

And why should not the fervent moral enthusiasts and the devoted fiscal improvement workers join in seeking some way in which legislatures can move in the right direction, even in a preparatory way only? Here is common ground, where antagonism can be forgotten in participation in joint effort.

Take New Jersey, for instance. The question of taxation or reduction or change has been raised by our new Governor. The principal member of the State Board of Taxes and Assessment has gone on record as claiming sound reasons for differentiation between taxation of land values and improvement values. The legislature is in session. Why should not all those in sympathy with the Single Tax find means of consulting together and submitting to the legislature one or more practical suggestions? We need some kind of a loose State organization to bring about this co-operation.

One suggestion I would like to make is that in New Jersey the tax law be so amended that assessors shall be specifically instructed as to how separately to list land values and improvement values, not only in cities and settled localities, but also in rural locations. Surely before we can get farmers to become interested in a shifting of taxation from improvement values to land values, we must be able to show a definite rule for separate listing. In one township near here the lands are assessed for \$750,000 and the buildings for \$350,000. It is probably true that the pure land value in the township should not be figured at over \$250,000, buildings and other improvements accounting for the other \$850,000. Such a radical revision of the taxable valuations would immensely help in getting farmers to join manufacturers, merchants and home-owners in demanding that at least annual taxes upon buildings and improvements should be strictly limited.

GEORGE WHITE.

As I am born to earth, so the earth is given to me, what I want of it to till and plant; or could I without pusillanimity omit to claim so much.

—EMERSON.

WE have seen that the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalistic mode of production.—KARL MARX, "Capital," chap. XXXIII, English Translation pp. 793-4.