

At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

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THERE is an interesting chapter in Progress and Poverty showing that historically considered private ownership of land has everywhere been super-imposed upon an earlier underlying condition of primitive common rights in the soil. Even today instances are often cropping up of systems of land tenure which to the unprejudiced mind appear to be juster than the elaborated codes of civilization. The late Lord Leverhulme returned to England from a visit to Africa filled with alarm at the freedom of the natives of Kenya and of Nigeria, who, having access to their own communal lands, can not be forced by white employers to be industrial slaves. Free land everywhere makes free men.

If our readers care to see how a modern instance of "the reduction to iniquity" may be brought home to the people of this country, our possession of the Philippines furnishes the means. A book to make one's blood boil with indignation is "The Isles of Fear," by Katherine Mayo, published by Harcourt, Brace and Co. The original stock of the Philippine Islands was Malay. Doubtless up to the time of the appearance of the Spaniards a primitive communal system of land tenure prevailed. With the Spaniards came their lawyers and their formulations of the Roman Law. Private property in land was rigorously established and great estates were parcelled out among the conquistadors, the Friars, and the courtiers of the King in Spain. The Philippines became christianized.

When the Americans took over the Islands and started in to govern them, they bought out the Friars Lands and set up a Homestead Act, so as to give the landless natives a chance to acquire homes. Miss Mayo's book is largely an account of the failure of this well-intentioned proceeding.

The first Land Act was instituted in 1904, the present Act in 1919. In the 15 years of the first Act 19,000 families found homesteads, out of a population of some 10 millions. Under the present Act there is no great rush to the land. From Miss Mayo we learn that there are two outstanding social classes among the Filipinos, the Cacique class and the Tao class. In the Glossary appended to the book we find the following definition for Cacique: "Christian Filipino boss, exploiter of the people." And Tao: "Christian Filipino, the lower of the two classes, variously estimated as from 94% to 99% of the Christian Filipino population."

Before one gets very far in the book one learns that the Cacique is the landlord class and the Tao the peasant or tenant or peon class. Is this sharp division a thing of yesterday? No, it developed and became part of the "mores" of the country during the 300 years of Spanish

rule. If the American Congress or the American administrators in the Islands have ever realized that this condition ought to be remedied they have not moved appreciably in the matter. The Homestead Acts above referred to have proved piffingly inadequate.

Miss Mayo calls the Cacique mestizo class "vultures in the sky"—or else "land hogs." Once a tenant contracts a debt to a landlord he never can escape. A man who owes 800 pesetas now will in five or six years owe 30,000. Under the so-called Enslavement Act or the Peonage law whole families fall into peonage. It provides that peace officers must arrest and bring back for trial tenants who have accepted advances of money or supplies on labor contracts and before the debt is worked out leave the service of the man to whom they have bound themselves. It is common practice in the rice provinces to keep the tenants constantly in debt, so that there is never a time when they cannot be jailed if they quit work or shift to another master—unless the new master, as is often the case, pays their debt and charges it against their account with him.

Truly a lovely state of affairs! This country appears to have accepted a "mandate" for the Philippines—Unhappy day! Our American sense of what progress and civilization consist was put to the acid test when we started out on the primrose path of imperialism and hitched up at the Philippines. The Filipinos want us to get out. After reading Miss Mayo's book it looks as if we might be damned if we do and damned if we don't.

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For over a hundred years the so-called "mystery" of Aaron Burr has remained unsolved. What did his expedition down the Ohio River signify? Was he, after his indictment in New York following the duel with Hamilton, merely a fugitive, attempting to escape the danger of a trial? Was he so embittered against his country as to harbor traitorous intentions and to seek to put them into execution? Did he purpose making war upon the United States? Was the story of Nolan, the "Man without a Country," as related in the well known tale of Edward Everett Hale, indeed founded on fact? Whence the fantastic dream of an Empire in Mexico, with Burr as Emperor and Theodosia, his beloved daughter, as heiress to the throne? What weight should we give to the outcome of the trial in Richmond? Should we cast aside Burr's admission that he did indeed wish to proceed against the Spanish in Mexico and set up an autonomous district with himself as ruler, but without taking the Southwest with him? Should we belittle the summing up of Chief Justice Marshall to the jury, that "weighing the whole of this testimony, it appears to me to preponderate in favor of

the opinion that the enterprise was really designed against Mexico?" Yes, the whole story is mysterious, elusory, romantic, shot through and through with hatred of Burr's enemies and colored with the adornments of hearsay and legend. No novelist nor dramatist has as yet done it any justice.

The recent appearance of a very able biography of Burr by Samuel H. Wendell and Mead Minnigerode (Putnam's) and the attention the work has attracted in the press, brought the matter up for discussion one night a short time ago at the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle, and Horace Wenzel, who was present, said that just as when you scratch a Russian you get a Tartar so when you scratch the surface of most historical and sociological puzzles you soon arrive at the land question. "*Cherchez le sol: la question du sol c'est la question fondamentale*" And he went on to analyze the problem of Aaron Burr, the main features of which we give to our readers briefly as follows:

"Burr's whole plan was the acme of amateurism and ineptitude. What I think he was driving at was a chance to recoup his fortunes through land speculation. In those days as now land speculation was the easy way to get rich quick. I wouldn't wonder if he expressed his views on this subject to his powerful client John Jacob Astor, and my guess is that Mr. Astor listened with interest to Burr's fairy tales and was perhaps influenced by their possibilities some years later when his own scheme of "Astoria" was undertaken. I am inclined to think that Astor may at first have thought so well of a big land deal as to have made Burr cautious promises of financial aid—but this is not very probable, for Astor was well satisfied with the lessons he had picked up in London, to lay field to field in the heart or outskirts of New York, never to sell but only to make ground leases and await the inevitable rise in values. As for "Astoria," that was about the only mistake Astor ever made. Well, land speculation was in the air. As a lawyer Burr was familiar with the cases that had come before the courts compounded of huge scandals and swindles in which enormous tracts had been stolen from the public lands and fortunes made by trickery and sharp dealing. Besides this he had a feeling for the sensuous delights of the landowner in the mastery the latter has over others. He had experienced something of the sort in his possession of Richmond Hill, his estate in what we now call Greenwich Village, where he and Theodosia kept open house for the distinguished of the land. And with envy and some bitterness he looked upon the landed aristocrats of the Hudson Valley, the patroon families and the lords of the manor the Schuylers and the Van Rensselaers, the Phillipses and the rest, who held their heads so high. Indeed he and Theodosia would show them all some day that the Burrs were their equals in the very realms of landlordism!

"Well, all went pretty well with Burr, in spite of his debts, until the duel with Hamilton and the death of the

latter roused the entire country to its emotional depths and made of Burr an outlaw from his home, with an indictment over his head for murder. It is true that he finished his term as Vice-President with dignity. But immediately thereafter it became apparent to him that something had to be done. And then began his visits to Blennerhassett Island, and the arrangements and engagements, financial and material, for the expedition to Utopia. Blennerhassett, as one to the manor born, so far as the advantages of landlordism were concerned, met Burr's expansive promises and rosy dreams with enthusiasm—which was altered to entire disgust when later on he sued Burr for money advanced. When at length the half dozen Argonauts on their flat-bottomed scow drifted down the Ohio towards the glittering Southwest, did they know where the golden fleece was to be found? Apparently not. The whole story reads like a child's tale. But the beautiful princess in the guise of the old witch or otherwise never showed up to guide and speed the hero on his way. On the contrary, he was everywhere beset with giants and dragons and traitors and enemies, until at length he escaped capture by a fluke and had to wander through the woods, alone and miserable, quite away from the direction of his pictured Empire. This it seems to me," remarked Horace in conclusion, "is about all there was in Burr's great Expedition."

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Mr. William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, by reason of an important pronouncement he made at the recent Annual Convention of the Federation on the subject of a wage policy has been very much praised and applauded by the conservative press. It is true that Mr. Green in getting away from the earlier demands for a "minimum wage" and going beyond Mr. Gompers' large utterance of "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work," as the Ultima Thule of labor's aspirations, gave the editors a bad quarter of an hour until they realized that the orator was safe and sane in his new proposals. Now the *entente cordial* between labor and capital is likely to be closer than ever before.

Mr. Green points out the fact that the productive forces of industry are vastly greater now than formerly and that they are bound to increase. What is known as "super-power" is at the call of the industrialist and the wonders of invention are aiding him on every hand. Must the wage earner be content to remain supinely satisfied with his present wages while he sees production, (in which he takes a part) forging ahead to the advantage of the "capitalist" manufacturer, the mine "operator" or other large employers of labor? Certainly not, says Mr. Green. The time has come to speak out boldly on this subject: "Social inequality, industrial instability and injustice must increase unless the workers' real wages, the purchasing power of their wages, coupled with a continuing reduction in the number of hours making up the working day, are

progressed in proportion to man's increasing power of production." * * Therefore "we urge upon management the elimination of wastes in production in order that selling prices may be lower and wages higher."

Pretty safe and sane, isn't it? How much it resembles those cheesy old pronouncements on the protective tariff: "we favor it in order that manufacturers may be thereby enabled to pay their employees higher wages than in the unprotected industries."

Well, let us be fair. Mr. Green means well. He wants to see prosperity for all. He has a heart. Though, like thousands of others, he shies at the name of Socialist, he is yet a Socialist at heart, which means that his emotions get the better of his thinking apparatus. He loves and he hates but he doesn't ratiocinate. He is a Friend to Humanity. "Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids, ready to fall." "But for my part I never love to meddle with politics, sir." "Lookest for Justice? I will see thee damned first!—

Bolshevist traitor, ready for the gallows

Communist outlaw, or thou, Single Taxer,

Last word of horrors!"

Of course Mr. Green, being a busy man, might and should take a course in "correspondence" economics and learn that be the production of wealth never so greatly multiplied by the advance of machinery and invention and the introduction of "super power," yet the advantages will be reaped by the "owners" of the natural resources of energy at their fountain head, and landowners will wax rich while laborers must struggle to maintain a precarious foothold. Mr. Green should ponder over the propositions advanced by the Commonwealth Land Party, that the earth is the birthright of all mankind, that the rent of land belongs to the people and that the first duty of government is to collect it.

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When Polonius appears in evening dress of the twentieth century and proceeds to get off that ancient stuff, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," we in the audience feel like mumbling, "Old man, that might have done as a wise saw for antique Romans or for Danes, but it is no good for us sophisticated moderns!" Neither a borrower nor a lender be—that rule would provoke a pretty state of affairs at the present time, wouldn't it, if it were generally carried out? For how true is it that, as things go, we *must* borrow to pay Paul. If one were asked to describe as tersely as possible the world as it is in essence and in fact one would make no mistake by calling it a world in debt. From the exchequers and treasuries of the greatest nations down to the slim resources of the average man of family, all are head and shoulders over in debt. Budgets fail to balance. Resort must be had to the floating of loans—and whether it is a promise to pay a billion at a whack or ten dollars on the installment plan, the princi-

ple involved is the same. The borrower must have the money. The lender stands ready to accomodate at a price.

Debit and credit, the debtor and the creditor. Have we here an equally balanced twain, a double star which might have swum into the ken of Emerson while writing his essay on Compensation? Not so, unless in the equilibrium of eternal forces we are to justify master and slave, rent lord and serf, conqueror and conquered, executioner and victim. For the debtor is ever the product and the sign of poverty—for him prisons have been built, on him opprobrium has been showered. He is the outcast, he is the broken man, the bankrupt. Our debts are not forgiven, because we never forgive our debtors. The Lord's Prayer is not for our practical, business age.

What a fool's paradise! On the one hand are the lenders of credit compounding their interest until it seems that a far more monstrous accumulation may gather in their hands than was conceived by Eugene Sue in his tale of *The Wandering Jew*. On the other hand are the borrowers of money, sweating under the load of whatever per cent the market compels and looking to the ultimate consumer to keep their overloaded ship afloat and themselves out of the galleys. On the one hand the bond-lords reinvesting their interest in rent-producing land, and collecting increasing tribute from the public. On the other, the little shop keeper selling his fifty dollar Liberty bond to help him pay his rent and his taxes.

In the arrangement of our debts we indeed go so far as to have a bankruptcy act; we admit the moratorium when we are forced to do so; we heed the pleadings of our war allies and remit a portion from their bond. But where is the Year of Jubilee? Who calls for a clean slate, a fresh start? Who wants the brotherhood of man? A world in debt is a world of inequality—and so aggravated is the situation that everywhere it appears to be getting out of hand.

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A nation's reaction to revolution has usually been a temporary surprised awakening from long accustomed lethargy, followed by the thrill of a punitive expedition. For, as a rule, revolutions have been unsuccessful, their net result a curt *vae victis!* That row of round heads rotting on London Bridge and the bloody assizes of Judge Jeffreys were the entirely logical outcome of the crimes of the Regicides and of the Duke of Monmouth—just as today the rebels at Damascus have had to take the consequences of their folly in the Street called Straight.

But what is noticeable in history has been the high light that beats about the heads of revolutionaries and the slowness with which the hatred harbored by their opponents fades away. Perhaps it never entirely fades away. Many who are ignorant of the Rights of Man and of what the French Revolution accomplished delight to make children's flesh creep with stories of Robespierre and of the guillotine.

We in this country are apt to magnify the glamor of the American Revolution. It was indeed the first revolution on a large scale that history points to as a success. But its general acceptance in Europe was slow and grudgingly given. With the exception of its effect upon the French it was the source of smouldering embers of hatred for more than three generations. The peculiarities of the Yankee nation afforded the humorists of Europe a choice field and they worked the ground over to the King's taste. Read the travels of Basil Hall and of Mrs. Trollope in these United States in the early nineteenth century or even later and read Dickens' American Notes and see how the uncouth lack of culture in our free and easy life of those days reacted on the critical sense of the visitors. It is sad sport even now to look back and see how Uncle Sam was maligned by the smug caricaturists of Europe.

One of our friends of the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle tells a story of how he proved to the servants of a house he rented in France that we Americans to this day are nothing but wild Indians; and the French servants believed it. On a certain Thanksgiving night, after a dinner as thoroughly American as it was possible to make it, the master of the house, giving the wink to those present, proposed an Indian dance round the table. All rose to the occasion and presently the attention of the servants was attracted by certain moderate whoops, which when their faces appeared at the door, rapidly increased in savage intensity. In Indian file all swung round and round the table, the squaws covering their heads and shoulders with shawls and the braves brandishing knives and spoons, banging on the table and indulging in war-cries alarming to hear. The servants were terrified. They had harbored no idea that we were like those others in America, of whom they had heard from their infancy. For weeks afterwards our friend's family was the talk of the place and referred to with a shrug of the shoulders as those *folles Americains*.

The revolutionists of Russia have been the latest illustration of the principle referred to above, by first undergoing the furious opposition of a whole world in arms against them, and ultimately upon the physical success of the revolution, by being subjected to the most sustained, the most embittered, the most vindictive and the most grotesque series of misrepresentations that the ingenuity of man and the malignity of the devil ever put together with malice aforethought. The Ogre of Corsica was a lamb compared with the unspeakable thing they made of Lenin.

But of course, the whirligig of time brings in its revenges, and sooner perhaps than in any previous revolution the successful leaders of the Russian uprising are taking their places as heroes and saints. Nevertheless for many a day to come humorists and caricaturists will continue to be busy at their expense.

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The library at the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle has recently been enriched by the addition of the new trans-

lation into French of Henry George's masterwork, *Progress and Poverty*. This translation is by P. L. Le Monnier, published by The League for Land Reform, located in Brussels. The League has been established only a couple of years, its organizer and first Secretary having been the late deeply lamented M. Cauwell, a devoted servant to our cause. The propaganda work inaugurated by M. Cauwell continues in the hands of a small group in Brussels, and the appearance of this translation at this time is a monument to their acumen and ability to press forward. The work is a beautiful example of book making, the paper of excellent quality and the printing a delight. It is sold for less than a dollar.

This translation into French appears at an opportune moment. So complete is the mess in which France finds herself today, so problematical the future, that one must think intelligent Frenchmen will welcome the clear call and the straight road proposed by Henry George for the solution of national troubles. The French have been known as a logical, intellectual people. Surely it is time that they gave over their frenzied emotionalism in national affairs and got down to common sense. The financial insanity inherent in the present scheme of their shifty politicians, to tax everybody and everything in order to pull through, is the last word in mental decadence, ineptitude and despair. Welcome then the steady light, the revivifying freshness, the hope and heartening of Henry George's message to the age. Listen to his message, you Frenchmen, who have forgotten in your delirium of revenge, war and imperialism, your own great teachers and philosophers, Rousseau and Voltaire, Quesnay and Turgot, Bastiat and Say.

Tax date trees and they disappear. Tax money and evidences of debt and both mysteriously flee the country. Tax the process of industry and you interfere with trade, raise prices and increase the cost of living. Tax a man's house and his goods and you are guilty of robbery. Learn from Henry George, O Frenchmen, that justice must prevail lest the heavens fall, that the difference between the rent of land and the products of industry must be acknowledged, and that even if the road to freedom is no easy road to travel, yet by every criterion it is safer and saner to lose that half of our present possessions to which we have no moral right than to hang on in our stubbornness till we lose the whole in a cataclysm of destruction.

TURN from principles to facts. Whether as to national strength or national character, whether as to the number of people, or as to their physical or moral health, whether as to the production of wealth, or as to its equitable distribution, the fruits of the primary injustice involved in making the land, on which and from which a whole people must live, the property of but a portion of their number, are everywhere evil and nothing but evil.

—Henry George.