

AN APPRECIATION OF HENRY GEORGE

By the Eminent Educationist, Professor John Dewey

[The new abridgment of *Progress and Poverty** containing significant paragraphs selected and compiled by Harry Gunnison Brown, Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri, has a remarkable tribute to Henry George from the pen of John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy at the Columbia University. Here is a statement that must impress every teacher and student into whose hands the book is placed, Professor John Dewey being one of the foremost scholars and thinkers in the English-speaking world. A further notice of the *Significant Paragraphs from "Progress and Poverty"* appears in another column.—EDITOR, *Land & Liberty*.]

It was a happy thought of Professor Brown to select and arrange passages from Henry George's immortal work that give the gist of his contribution to political economy and social philosophy, while the pages which follow show that the task has been executed with a skill equal to the idea. The fact that Henry George has an ardent group of disciples who have a practical programme for reform of taxation has tended to obscure from the recognition of students of social theory that his is one of the great names among the world's social philosophers. It would require less than the fingers of the two hands to enumerate those who from Plato down rank with him. Were he a native of some European country, it is safe to assert that he would long ago have taken the place upon the roll of the world's thinkers which belongs to him, irrespective, moreover, of adherence to his practical plan. But for some reason we Americans are slow to perceive and celebrate intellectual claims in comparison with the merits of inventors, political leaders and great industrialists. In the case of the author of *Progress and Poverty* the failure has doubtless been accentuated in academic circles by the fact that Henry George thought, wrote and worked outside of them. And in the world at large, in spite of the fact that no works on political economy have had the circulation and reading obtained by his writings, discussion of the practical merits of his plan of reform of taxation has actually tended to blur his outstanding position as a thinker. This has been the case because the enormous inertia of social habit and the force of tremendous vested interests have depreciated his intellectual claims in order to strengthen opposition to his practical measures.

I do not say these things in order to vaunt his place as a thinker in contrast with the merits of his proposals for a change in methods of distributing the burden of taxation. To my mind the two things go together. His clear, intellectual insight into social conditions, his passion of feeling for the remediable ills from which humanity suffers, find their logical conclusion in his plan for liberating labour and capital from the shackles which now bind them. But I am especially concerned in connection with Professor Brown's clear and well-ordered summary, to point out the claims which his social theory has upon the attention of students. No man, no graduate of a higher educational institution, has a right to regard himself as an educated man in social thought unless he has some first-hand acquaintance

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with the theoretical contribution of this great American thinker.

This is not the time and place, nor is there need, to dwell upon the nature of this contribution. Henry George is as clear as he is eloquent. But I cannot refrain from pointing out one feature of his thought which is too often ignored—his emphasis upon ideal factors of life upon what are sometimes called the imponderables. It is a poor version of his ideas which insists only upon the material effect of increase of population in producing the material or monetary increment in the value of land. One has only to read the third section of these extracts to note that Henry George puts even greater stress upon the fact that community life increases land values because it opens "a wider, fuller and more varied life," so that the desire to share in the higher values which the community brings with it is a decisive factor in raising the rental value of land. And it is because the present system not only depresses the material status of the mass of the population, but especially because it renders one-sided and inequitable the people's share in these higher values that we find in *Progress and Poverty* the analysis of the scientist combined with the sympathies and aspirations of a great lover of mankind. There have been economists of great repute who in their pretension to be scientific have ignored the most significant elements in human nature. There have been others who were emotionally stirred by social ills and who proposed glowing schemes of betterment, but who passed lightly over facts. It is the thorough fusion of insight into actual facts and forces, with recognition of their bearing upon what makes human life worth living, that constitutes Henry George one of the world's great social philosophers.

FOR THE SUSTENTION FUND

Miss Mildred E. Tideman, Wilmette, Illinois, whose father and mother we were delighted to meet in London last summer, writes: "Although I have only lately come to know the journal (*Land & Liberty*), I have a deep sense of its importance to the movement, particularly in a country which is in such dire need of its teachings. Therefore, I have been prompted to send you the small sum of two five-dollar gold pieces, prizes awarded me upon my graduation from high school, for an essay on taxation, realizing that the action is more a gesture of sentiment and goodwill rather than an actual aid."

This token of goodwill from the heart and understanding is a real compliment to the journal and tells also for the advent of a "Croasdale Single Taxer." Miss Tideman is working hard for her Bachelor of Arts degree. Her studies are principally given to History and Political Science and she has in preparation a paper on the history of land tenure in Spanish America.

Mr P. R. Williams, Secretary of the Henry George Foundation, Pittsburgh, writes: "I wish particularly to thank you for sending me a copy of your latest publication, *What is the Single Tax?* This is a splendid presentation which I have read with special interest." With his letter Mr Williams sent a further supply of the pamphlet, *Pittsburgh's Graded Tax in Full Operation*, which explains the effects of land value taxation in that city and is an excellent lesson. Copy will be sent to any of our readers on request.

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G. A. G., of North Wales, writes: "Please send me two dozen of Mr Lester's most admirable leaflet, *What is the Single Tax?*"