

THIRD PRIZE, TWENTY DOLLARS.

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A pilot in social reform, a leader of the people, and a man unafraid to face the truth: such was Henry George. High in the ranks of those who have sought after universal freedom stands this man who gave his all to the search for the God-given order of things, and the causes of civic decay. Much he accomplished himself toward the righting of human wrongs, and more he made clear for the accomplishment of others. Like One who died for the cause of humanity, Henry George could but point the way. It is for his followers to carry out the work.

The philosophy of Henry George came near to prophesy, as well as to the discovery of natural laws. So accurate was his logic that his works foretold the stupendous events of today. So surely did he trace effect to cause that he was able from cause to predict effect. But we can best appreciate his practical philosophy by following him through the course of his reasoning. Let us, therefore, proceed rapidly along the line of his convincing argument to its irresistible conclusion.

We need only touch upon the most striking points to understand what it is that has made the work of Henry George so important a factor in the treatment of social problems. A splendid example of his brilliant reasoning and clear thinking is the manner in which he shows the fallacies of many current politico-economic doctrines. Take the commonly accepted theory of wages and capital. The idea that wages are drawn from capital was formerly so universally taken for granted that it threw into error even famous thinkers like Smith, Ricardo and Mill. But George was not satisfied with taking his premises for granted: he proved them for himself in order to build his further reasoning on a solid foundation. Thus, he found that wages are not drawn from capital, but from the product of the labor for which they are paid. By establishing the "identity of wages in money with wages in kind," he upset the entire structure of current political economy and was forced to build a new one. For, contrary to the general belief, he had proved that "capital does not limit industry, the only limit to industry being the access to natural material." This fact opened up an immense tangle of possibilities, which he straightway began to examine with the most startling results.

Not for a moment did he hesitate over the apparent verity of the Malthusian doctrine: he would not believe that God intended that population should outrun the limits of subsistence. He refused to believe that poverty and its attendant horrors are the result of natural law, and that the "instinct of reproduction, in the natural development of society, tends to produce misery and vice." For, he argued, "the men who run steamers do not send them to sea without provisions enough for all they carry. Did He who made this whirling planet for our sojourn lack the forethought of man?" Convinced that such was not the case, he sought an explanation other than that of natural law; and he found it proven by inference, by analogy, and by fact. He showed that the enemy of man is not God, but man. He showed that it is not "dense population, but the causes which prevent social organization from taking its natural development and labor from securing its full return, that keep millions just on the verge of starvation, and every now and again force millions beyond it." He proved through the cases of India, China, and Ireland that "whatever be the trouble, it is clearly *not* in the want of ability to produce wealth."

This, then, materially narrowed the field of his search for the cause of the social erosion. He had conclusively refuted the current pseudo-explanations; and had thus ascertained that the fault lay somewhere in the ramifications of the distribution of wealth. With tireless assiduity, he delved to the very bottom of this new quicksand. In doing

so, he found it necessary to recast the entire system of accepted political economy, but his efforts carried their own reward. When the laws of rent, wages, and interest were placed in their proper contiguous relationship, the result showed that "where natural opportunities are all monopolized, wages may be forced by competition to the minimum at which laborers will consent to reproduce. Hence, the rate of wages and interest is everywhere fixed, not by the productiveness of labor, but by the value of land. Rent swallows up the whole gain, and pauperism accompanies progress."

Following out this idea, George reached the inevitable conclusion that "as land is necessary to the exertion of labor in the production of wealth, to command the land which is necessary to labor is to command all the fruits of labor save enough to enable labor to exist. The great cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth is inequality in the ownership of land."

From the labyrinthine maze of existing politico-economic arguments, George marshalled his facts with unbiased and unflinching care. He found conclusive evidence that private property in land and the consequent monopolization of land were everywhere accompanied by poverty and vice. The landowners lived luxuriously on the rent taken from labor, while labor writhed in futile misery because unable to have access to natural advantages. Private property in land was the cause of the enslavement of labor and the source of universal social disorder.

But George was not one to halt in dismay at the immensity of the social problem. He was not content to stop at merely finding the root of the evil: he sought a remedy. And no remedy short of an absolute cure would satisfy him. For, he argued, the tendency of half-way or succedaneous measures "is to prevent the adoption or even advocacy of thorough-going measures, and to strengthen the existing unjust system by interesting a larger number in its maintenance." He believed that the evil should be deracinated once and for all. He thought, like Rauschenbusch and the Wagners, that "the abolition of private property in land in the interest of society is a necessity." And he was firmly convinced through his knowledge of the true social condition that nothing short of the abolition of private property in land would suffice to equalize the distribution of wealth.

This, then, is the conclusion to which Henry George was led by the pellucid force of logic and fact. The laws of God and of nature gave all men an equal right to the land which is necessary to life: but man has manufactured a state of society in which the right of all becomes the property of some. Therefore, the solution of the problem is the extirpation of the wrong.

At once, however, arose a question of the justice of making land common property. The present landowners had received their land in good faith, and were indignant at the idea of George's "philosophy of spoliation." The Duke of Argyll, in a heated tirade against George, declared his solution of the social difficulty to be nothing short of robbery. But George was prepared to prove the efficacy and justice of his remedy. "Robbery," said he, "is the taking or withholding from another of that which rightfully belongs to him. That which *rightfully* belongs to him, be it observed, not that which legally belongs to him." That the landowners acquired their land in good faith does not alter the fact that private property in land is itself unjust. As George pointed out to the Duke, "right and wrong are not matters of precedent." He might well have cited the analogy of the man who receives stolen goods. The mere fact that he received them in good faith by no means establishes his right to their retention. So land, by all moral law, is essentially common property. And, "as nature gives only to labor, the exertion of labor in production is the only title to exclusive possession. Whatever may be said for the institution of private property in land, it is therefore plain that it cannot be defended on the score of justice."

Remained only the need of finding a satisfactory method by which to make land common property. That question also, George solved. He proposed "simply to levy on it for public uses a tax equal to the annual value of the land itself, irrespective of the use

made of it or the improvements on it." He proposed to repeal all other taxes of any kind as being no longer necessary, and as being unjust in addition. He proposed to let the present landowners remain in possession of the land, and to let them continue doing with it whatever pleased them. Thus, he maintained that "it is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent."

Here, then, we have the fully developed idea of the Single Tax. Not only is it the logical and natural remedy for social ills, but it would be easily exacted and wonderfully efficient in practice. The weight of such a tax would fall upon those best able to bear it; while the sufferings of the poverty-stricken would be alleviated. Expediency and justice are united in its support.

Thus far in our epitome of the argument of Henry George, we have observed his far-reaching knowledge of natural phenomena as explained by cause and effect. We have noted the depth of his erudite philosophy, and the force of his reasoning. We have admired his tenacity of purpose, and the whole-souled sympathy of his endeavors toward social harmony. Let us now briefly consider the practical wisdom of his ideas.

He has repeatedly been charged with holding pessimistic views on the social problem. Yet to anyone taking the trouble to look about him, it will be apparent that George told no more than the truth. Today, conditions are even worse than when he wrote. Vice and misery are spreading with the most appalling speed. Our large cities are choked with immigrants denied access to the land. The great laboring class is well-nigh crushed beneath the incubus of dire poverty. Speculation in land necessitates fatal crowding within cities. Children are conceived in a state of exhausted vitality. Large sections of our population are saved from inability to reproduce themselves only by the fecundity of the immigrants. Prostitution and debauchery are everywhere increasing instead of diminishing.

Such is the curse and menace of poverty and the unjust distribution of wealth. Such is the condition that made Henry George seem pessimistic. Too long have we suffered our "national optimism and conceit" to blind us to the facts. But they are *true*. True, and the remedy lies within our grasp. Some day the American people will rise up and demand social freedom, and they will not be denied! This it is that Henry George foresaw. It is of this that he warned us in what we are pleased to call his pessimistic vein. His words ring out a challenge to the future which we are to make our own: "What has destroyed all previous civilizations has been the conditions produced by the growth of civilization itself. The advance of inequality necessarily brings improvement to a halt,—and retrogression begins. The struggle that must either revivify, or convulse in ruin, is near at hand, if it be not already begun!"

How truly he prophesied, is evidenced by the prodigious upheaval now being enacted in Europe. To appreciate his wisdom, we have but to look about us. For the future, we can do no more than bend every effort toward the realization of perfect equality and freedom in all things. The day is not far distant when the plutocratic monopolist of land will be asked to "show a bill of sale signed by the Almighty."

Political economy has been called the dismal science, and as currently taught, is hopeless and despairing. But this, as we have seen, is solely because she has been degraded and shackled; her truths dislocated; her harmonies ignored; the word she would utter gagged in her mouth and her protest against wrong turned into an indorsement of injustice.—"Progress and Poverty."

Only in broken gleams and partial light has the sun of liberty yet beamed among men, yet all progress hath she called forth.—"Progress and Poverty."