

JEREMY BENTHAM AND HENRY GEORGE

By D. J. J. Owen

PARALLEL LINES are said never to meet. Between ethics and economics, however, a certain parallelism leads us to an ultimate close connection and common ground. That school of political economy, in particular, of which Henry George is the classic exponent and titular leader, takes for its starting point the basic economic principle that all men seek to satisfy their desires with the least possible amount of exertion; this being the primary motive which explains all economic happenings.

Compare with this that school of ethics of which Jeremy Bentham, the Utilitarian, was the architect, whose starting point is the principle of utility, or in other words that the ethical criterion is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as measured by their relative pains and pleasures.

Both these schools of thought in their different fields have been subject to the same criticism. They both appear to be based on the selfishness, or at the best, the self-regarding interests of mankind. The Georgian axiom, indeed, seems the justification of laziness; it is, at any rate, out of favour nowadays with many as being too individualistic for this socialist age. The search for the satisfaction of desires, and that by the easiest path, appears to point away from any idealist view of human society, or mutuality of interests.

In a similar way, Benthamism measures right and wrong on a pain and pleasure scale, and this is said to rule out all altruism and acceptance of suffering for higher ends; pain or pleasure of the individual being the test of the well-being of the community.

These are obviously superficial misunderstandings offering exemption from more laboured reflection and search into the deeper issues. The economic principle, in the first place, is precisely an economic one, stating the economy with which men will strive to accomplish their aims whatever the ethical import of those aims may be. It cannot be denied that an intelligent being by reason of his intelligence will try to achieve his ends without waste of effort. The missionary setting out for the South Seas will, like his fellow-passengers, be they capitalists or would-be exploiters, look out the shortest and least expensive route. It is his duty as well as to his interest to be economical. And this applies to his companions on board.

The political economist follows up his basic principle and studies how men, alone and in the mass, may economise their efforts; make the best use of their powers; avoid waste of labour and wealth; get out of each other's way and by co-operation make their common life more easy. Political Economy is the systematizing of the knowledge of institutions, laws and customs gained by such study on this foundation. And Henry George is a guide in this task who cannot, without peril, be ignored.

Benthamism, or Utilitarianism, has been dismissed in the same facile way as Georgism as being mere Hedonism, or systematized pleasure-seeking. The pains and pleasures which make the ethical standard are hastily regarded as those of the lowest region of man's nature, and it is assumed that Bentham and his followers reckon nothing of the more æsthetic and psychical side of life, with its pain and pleasure, which of course cannot be omitted from any truly ethical appraisal. Yet Bentham writes at large on Sympathetic Sensibility, "the propensity," as he says "to derive pleasure from the happiness of others." Again, "Goodwill is the motive coinciding most with the principle of Utility. For the dictates of Utility are neither more nor less than the dictates of the most extensive and enlightened benevolence." "To the pleasures of sympathy corresponds the motive of Goodwill." "An act is good or bad as it proceeds from goodwill, that is, the desire to feel pleasure at the happiness of the greatest number."

Recent researches by Prof David Baumgardt, of Pendle Hill, Pa., U.S.A., into unpublished Bentham MSS at the British Museum, shortly to be published, confirm these aspects of Bentham's philosophy.

Bentham insisted that in estimating the interests of the community we are bound to calculate the interests of the greatest number of individuals and measure their happiness by the maximum of pleasure and the minimum of pain, and that this alone is the criterion of the interests or the utility of any community. And further, that the pains and pleasures to be taken note of, must inescapably be those of the physical nature of man in the first place, upon which the higher æsthetic and cultural life of men must necessarily be built.

When Bentham speaks of "enlightened" benevolence, he refers to a goodwill which pretends to no superior detachment from the physical bases of life, and turns no blind eye to the importance of the commonest pleasures of the masses of mankind as a legitimate objective of ethical aims. The Salvation Army has taught us that it is of no use to preach spiritual salvation to a man with an empty stomach.

To seek the fullest satisfaction of the physical needs of men should be the first ethical aim; that the greatest number should be well-fed, well-housed with full family joys is the lofty ideal, consistent with Utilitarianism. But, as Bentham insists, the individual man is the best judge of his own interests, because he alone can feel his pain or his pleasure. Each individual should therefore be left to seek his own interests, with the least hindrance compatible with the non-hindrance of others. That community has the highest well-being where this is the rule, and the chief utility of States is to give it effect.

We can see at once where Bentham's ethics and Henry George's economics meet. Wasted effort, the sin of economics, is physical toil exerted for nothing. This unrewarded labour is the commonest, the most widely felt of all physical ills. It is a "pain," literally, as well as in the Benthamite sense, to spend our toil for naught. Our language confirms this. We speak of "taking pains," of "sparing no pains," and our reward is what we "get for our pains." If we get nothing for our "pains," then it is pain indeed. This is a wrong, a bad thing, in ethics as well as economics.

Unrequited toil; forced labour; these are the great social ills, the sources of the greatest unhappiness to the greatest number of mankind in any generation. Toothache itself is not more common, and certainly, not more painful. The evil of slavery is the sense of injustice, that is, the sense that the slave's conditions are not what he would choose if he were free to choose. If he were free and unhindered he would exert his labour where the reward would be greatest, that is where he would secure the least pains and the greatest amount of pleasurable satisfactions. We find ourselves here interweaving the terminologies of Bentham and George.

Henry George saw in the system of private land-ownership the source of the evils that afflict our present capitalistic forms of production, as it has afflicted all earlier social systems. He looked on human society with a realistic vision akin to that of the Utilitarians. He saw the great masses of men everywhere condemned by the withholding of land from use to the hard grind of painful toil; with little reward save the maximum of discomfort and the minimum of ease. He believed that the greatest happiness of the greatest number could be secured by the reversal of this condition of things, through the abolition of land monopoly by his system of the taxation of land values.

To estimate the validity of George's conclusions requires an understanding, not beyond the average capacity, of the Economic Law of Rent, which shows how, by bringing higher capacities of land into freer use, human energy can be saved

and wasted effort be avoided. And as the saving of energy and the avoidance of waste is one of the most humane and civilised of pleasures, which we can seek for ourselves and desire for others, it may be agreed that Henry George and Jeremy Bentham are alike men of goodwill—examples of that Sympathetic Sensibility which derives feelings of pleasure at the happiness of the greatest number.

WAR CAUSED BY POVERTY

MR F. A. W. LUCAS, K.C., writing in *The Free People*, Johannesburg, June issue, says:—

"Although neither we nor any other people have ever tried real democracy we must defend with all our power the little we have of it and hope that, when the war is over and the challenge from the dictatorship of Nazism is defeated, we may be able to extend that little until we can enjoy real freedom, economic as well as political.

"The present struggle, grave and awful as it is, is only a temporary phase. We have to endure it because we made no attempt to destroy the cause of Nazism and other forms of tyranny. That struggle must and can end in only one way. Sooner or later the military might of the Nazis must be destroyed and each one of us must to the best of his ability help to that end.

"But when we have destroyed the Nazi armies we shall not have finished our job. Nazism is not a cause. It is an effect. It and its fellow tyrannies were conceived and born in poverty and unemployment and they derive their vigour from them. An English writer truly said recently: 'As the numbers of the unemployed (in Germany) soared so did the Nazi vote; so did the numbers of Roehm's storm troops.' The fear of want and insecurity gave Hitler his chance to organise his people for the course which led to the present war.

"This war will not destroy poverty. It will greatly aggravate it. When the war is over we shall, therefore, still have with us the great factor which has produced Nazism, Fascism, Communism, and other forms of tyranny, and which has led us into two great wars in one generation.

"It follows then that, if we really wish to end tyranny and prevent any more wars in the future, we shall have to end poverty. There is no other way. Peace and poverty cannot long live together.

"While we must help to bring this war to a successful conclusion in the interest of democracy we have to try to think clearly about the issues involved and how we can purge our country of poverty and tyranny and in so doing set an example to the world of what other peoples also will have to do."

The article points out that the reason why "Fifth Columns" have been so readily raised up in every country invaded by Hitler's armies, is that people must have food, clothing, shelter, and an opportunity to use their natural abilities; they have not got them to-day and as things are they do not see how to get them.

"That is why a Hitler makes such a strong appeal to millions of people. Among a prosperous people a Hitler's proposals would make no headway. That is why we urge our people to think over these things and, even in the midst of the dreadful events now happening in the world, to try to think clearly about the cause of poverty and tyranny and help us to be ready as soon as possible to establish justice and freedom, peace and plenty, in our land."

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The Free People is issued in both English and Afrikaans. At least half of the Afrikaans copies are distributed each month to relief workers and so its ideas are spread through a large part of the Union with good results in countering racialism. Continued publication depends upon adequate financial support. Contributions to Mather Smith, Box 4680, Johannesburg.

PETER WILSON RAFFAN

In the death of Peter Wilson Raffan, which is announced in our English and Welsh League notes, the cause of freedom and democracy has lost one who has given most noble service. Serious illness during recent years, aggravated by the death of his wife in May, 1937, had obliged him to rest from all activity. A native of Aberdeen, he was already as a young man taking an eager part in radical politics and in reforms closest to the heart of a radical; and we find him, after having read the *6d. Progress and Poverty* published by the late J. C. Durant, helping to organise the meeting Henry George addressed in Forfar when he first visited Scotland; and often Mr Raffan spoke of the inspiration he derived from that personal acquaintanceship. Faithful he was to the vow he then made to promote the teaching he had so well learned. In Dumfries where he met his wife and had his home for a time, he was an active member of the Scottish Land Restoration League. His journalistic career took him to Monmouthshire, where he settled for twenty years. He became editor of the *South Wales Gazette* and proprietor of the printing business connected with it. There he was prominent in the municipal and county life as member and chairman not only of the Abercarn Urban District Council but also of the Monmouthshire County Council. He and his wife were espousing the best and highest in Liberalism and the temperance movement also is indebted to them for the life-long, consistent and courageous service they rendered. Mr Raffan's public offices included membership of the Court of Governors of the South Wales University and of the Council of the Cardiff University College; so also educational interests absorbed much of his time. He came to London on his election to Parliament in 1910, sitting as Member for Leigh until 1922. At the General Election in 1922 he stood for Ayr Burghs but was unsuccessful. At the following General Election in 1923 he was returned for North Edinburgh, losing that seat when in 1924 the Conservatives were carried back to power on the "Zinovieff Letter" episode. By this time Mr Raffan had given up his business in South Wales, and on leaving Parliament he took up the office of secretary to the Band of Hope Union which he retained until his health broke down.

To make any adequate statement of Mr Raffan's work in the Henry George movement would require much space—his work in the House of Commons, the part he took in the debates, his leadership as secretary of the Joint Land Values Group of Liberal and Labour Members, his attendance at so many conferences and meetings in every part of the country, and his sound and steady counsel at all times when he was called upon to give advice. He was for a time President of the Welsh League and later was President of the English League and was member of the United Committee since 1910. Warm-hearted, genuine, sincere, he had a gift of oratory, sometimes even impassioned, which never failed to stir the deeper moral sentiments of his audiences. We recall his words at the meeting to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the United Committee when he spoke of the "men and women who hate to think of oppression and involuntary poverty, who believe that the way out is to see that the bounties of Providence shall not be monopolised by a few but shall be enjoyed equally by all; in the span that comes to each of us between birth and death, we can feel that we have not lived in vain if we can say we have kept the light burning and handed the torch down." These words write his epitaph. To his friends everywhere and to his relatives we convey our sympathy in their bereavement.

A. W. MADSEN.

Our relations were more than usually cordial because we were actively interested in the land and temperance movements both in Parliament (1910 to 1918) and outside before and since. Raffan's gifts of eloquence were always at the disposal of land reformers, and when speaking on the same platform I often envied his hold on popular audiences. Those who worked with him will cherish his memory as that of a sincere and stalwart colleague.

H. G. CHANCELLOR.

Tributes to Mr Raffan's memory have been received from numerous other friends.