

A Word With You

THE history of man is a many-sided and complex thing. Who can tell all that happens? The best we can do is to stake out key points in the undivided total of reality—vantage points from which we can understand a little of what goes on.

And so we have "interpretations." Older history books concentrated almost exclusively on wars and political figures. Newer books are somewhat broader in scope, taking in more of the social milieu.

The "economic interpretation of history" was Karl Marx's outlook. He contended that the economic system of a society determined everything else about it—its politics, its religion, its culture—an extreme notion, and one with which Henry George would not agree.

George was fully aware of the prime importance of economics in society and in history; yet he was not an economic determinist. See his "master motive of human action," his "ode to Liberty," and his "difference between the animal and the man" in *Progress and Poverty*.

Human beings are not puppets pulled along by impersonal forces. They are living, thinking (sometimes), many-sided creatures, conditioned, to be sure, by their environment (which is also many-sided), but with at least a modicum of free will. Any "interpretation" that dwells upon one factor needs to be balanced by other considerations.

What about an "emotional interpretation of history"? How many events in history took place or did not take place because of emotions—fear, superstition, premonitions, visions, love, hate, jealousy, hurt feelings, patriotic and religious fervor? One could even write an "accidental interpretation of history." "For want of a shoe the horse was lost"—"If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the face of the world would have been different"—that sort of thing.

And something that deserves more probing is man's *pre-history*. We still know all too little about that vast formative period from man's early beginnings to the dawn of history. It would be worth while to follow the steps by which each lesson was learned—which we take for granted but which really are stupendous when you consider them—speech, for instance; or the use of tools; or the formation of society.

At the beginning of recorded history we find that man, everywhere on the globe, has reached about the same level of development at the same time. How did this happen? Can there have been a continuous network of civilization?

But the most needed interpretation is the "land question interpretation of history." A history of the world from the point of view of land tenure systems, abuses, problems, struggles, reforms—would shed new and unsuspected light on world events.

—Robert Clancy

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The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y., supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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