

# Henry George and Emma Lazarus

"Henry George and Emma Lazarus: Comparative Views" by Jack Schwartzman. (Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1998, 27 p.) Review by Lindy Davies

**T**his important pamphlet contrasts the views of the great economist and the celebrated poet on "progress and poverty, on population and immigration, on sectarianism versus the universal [and] on liberty." That amounts to a list of the most profound themes that concern Georgists — so Dr. Schwartzman's choice of voices here is a way for him to enrich the perennial discussion of these themes and to remind us, so to speak, of our roots.

Emma Lazarus was deeply impressed with *Progress and Poverty* when she read it, after which she began a long and fond correspondence with Henry George. It inspired this poem, which appeared in the *New York Times* in 1881.

Emma Lazarus, the champion of free and open immigration, agreed fully with Henry George's refutation of the Malthusian theory — and Schwartzman goes to some length to demonstrate that

now, as then, there is absolutely no correlation between population density and poverty. He skillfully assembles relevant statistics on the subject in three pages that Georgist teachers could do well to reprint.

Schwartzman's argument is weakened, however, by the way he frames it in the traditional terms that focus on population density alone, without any link to other relevant areas of concern. There is a strain of "Neo-Malthusian" thought arising today that is not persuaded by such statistics, insisting that they fail to consider the (almost certainly unsustainable) demands that human societies make on the ecological balance of nature. The Neo-Malthusian

## **Progress and Poverty**

by Emma Lazarus

Oh splendid age when Science lights her lamp  
At the brief lightning's momentary flame,  
Fixing it steadfast as a star, man's name  
Upon the very brow of heaven to stamp!  
Launched on a ship whose iron-cuirassed sides  
Mock storm and wave, Humanity sails free,  
Gayly upon a vast, untrodden sea.  
O'er pathless wastes, to ports undreamed she rides,  
Richer than Cleopatra's barge of gold,  
This vessel, manned by demi-gods, with freight  
Of priceless marvels. But where yawns the hold  
In that deep, reeking hell, what slaves be they,  
Who feed the ravenous monster, pant and sweat,  
Nor know if overhead reign night or day?

argument, then, would be that increase of population will bring about either poverty or environmental destruction — that “Malthusian” poverty can only be staved off by robbing subsequent generations of their share of the earth’s bounty. This was not an idea that Henry George needed to consider in the 1880s. But if we avoid considering it now we risk being seen as either willfully or inadvertently out of touch. That is unfortunate, because I believe that the logic of Georgist analysis shows Neo-Malthusianism to be as baseless as the old version. (see page 52)

Emma Lazarus’s views on immigration are well-known — most famously as they are emblazoned on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...” Henry George, of course, agreed — except for one troublesome area, which Schwartzman bravely brings into light. Henry George made many statements at various points in his life against Chinese immigration, and said a number of unsavory things about the Chinese people, as well as Africans and Native Americans. It is unclear — and Schwartzman’s essay leaves unresolved — whether George indeed maintained these views throughout his life. The passage that Schwartzman quotes from *The Science of Political Economy* is ambiguous. In it, George cites his 1869 statement about Chinese immigration as an argument he based on J.S. Mill’s theory of wages — a theory he went on to refute in his own books. However, no less an authority than Henry George, Jr. maintained that “To the end of his life... George held the views against free entrance of the Chinese set forth in... 1869.” Schwartzman dares to ask, “Who would believe that Henry George, one of the great humanitarians of the world, would write so biased, so uncharacteristic, and so economically invalid a denunciation of the Chinese (and, possibly, black) minorities?”

This question remains open among scholars. Ronald Yanosky has suggested that George’s writings may demonstrate a profound change of heart concerning minorities and human equality, leading to the stirring humanitarian eloquence in the final book of *Progress and Poverty*. But, heroes can sometimes have feet of clay; the question, at least, deserves careful examination.

The remainder of the pamphlet contains interesting material on Emma Lazarus’s break with Henry George. In response to bloody pogroms in Russia, Lazarus became a “fanatic partisan” for Jewish causes. George urged the theme of universal human rights against sectarian battles, and their correspondence ended — sadly, for both deeply believed in the concept of “liberty”. George’s stirring excerpt, the “Ode to Liberty” is reproduced in full as the pamphlet’s final section. GJ