

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

THERE is no end of the explanations given by college professors and so-called economists for poverty and depressions. These range from overproduction to sun spots. But there is a school of economic atheists who have a blasphemy all their own. They reject all explanations and abandon the problem with the synthesis that poverty and depressions are due to the ordering of an Unwise Providence. Therefore nothing can be done about it. Providence is just plain stupid.

THIS nihilistic philosophy dispenses with any hard thinking. There is still room for speculation about business cycles in which we are to look for depressions as regularly occurring due to the blundering of a purblind God who has forgotten all about His creation and His creatures. It is true that other matters move in obedience to His laws, and one shudders to think what would happen if the movements of planets that are ordered so perfectly should get out of hand owing to a like forgetfulness or incompetence of a careless Creator.

IT never occurs to these economic atheists that there may be natural laws in the constitution of society which will bring about the same harmony we observe in the sidereal heavens, that poverty and depressions are man-created and are the results of human maladjustments. No wonder the world has lost faith. No wonder that it relapses into the hopelessness of Lessings despairing cry: "We are all orphans, you and I—we have no Father."

THE assumption that there are no natural laws in society to which legislation must conform is responsible for the "planning" which not only blinds us to the problem but actually makes matters worse. For to impose these cumbersome provisions in the free movement of society is to interrupt these natural laws of production and distribution which conserve the welfare of the individual.

HUMAN beings are a sort of divine automata. Though each individual works for himself all are under the

law of unconscious cooperation. There is nothing really valuable in society that is not the property of the unit. The purposes the individual pursues in gratifying his desires with the least exertion yield their result to the mass. Yet the hope of legislation lives eternal in the human breast, notwithstanding that the breaking down of manhood—of self-reliant selfhood—eventually comes to man in the process of having things done for him.

THINK of the individual. What is he? A mass of mingled feelings and perceptions, of wants and desires, of instincts and impulses, all serving in various ways his own gratification and that of others. His principle motives urging him to action are beneficently fruitful of results for the general good. When he competes he cooperates. When he fells a tree, or builds a house, or plants a seed, be he the veriest miser, the sum of human gratification is increased. And the leaving him free to do this—for man is a social animal and not "a creature red in tooth and claw"—is responsible for the nicety with which the complicated social machinery has been put together, and the smoothness with which, when let alone, its myriad appliances revolve.

NOW think of the State. What is it? A delegated function, without soul, feeling, thought—a mere apparatus. If the individual fail in intelligence, how shall he deputize intelligence in the state which is an artificial arm of society, and not society itself. How shall the state, soulless, emotional, passionless, succeed where the individual has failed?

THE want of adaptiveness in the state—its slow intelligence, the absence of prompt cognizance of improvements in production of labor saving devices, notoriously exhibited in every official department, mark the inferiority of its service. The influence of mechanical routine makes it passive, slow, over-cautious—in everything but resistance to change. The state is without self-interest, therefore the most important spring of action has been removed. "The insolence of office" is no more flagrant than its delays which spring from the confidence in the security of its existence. A private concern has no such security; it must serve well or die.



THE lover of freedom fleeing from tyranny may make his flight through the door of socialism, because it seems to offer escape. But the constructive statesman, conferring face to face with freedom, will cast no longing eye that way. A free people will not—if they know and love freedom—consent to blind themselves with even silken shackles. Men do love freedom—blunderingly, it is true and not with the clearest vision. Let it be shown to them and they will rally to her. Let her voice be clearly heard and the song of the socialistic siren will charm in vain.

IF our readers will permit a further digression in this somewhat rambling discussion, it should be said that political economy as taught has missed no absurdity tending to confuse the essential truths. A glance at the history of the so-called Wage Fund Theory may be of interest. The theory held that wages depend on the relative amount of capital set aside for payment of wages and that wages are high as the amount is high or the numbers to draw upon it are small. For a refutation of this theory our readers are referred to "Progress and Poverty."

THE Wages Fund Theory is attributed to James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill. The son embraced the theory but later abandoned it and exposed its fallacy. The most elaborate attack upon it was made by Francis Walker. Following John Stuart Mill's capitulation the theory ceased to influence economic thought. But nevertheless the notion that is inherent in the Wages Fund Theory pops up in different forms in current teaching.

HIS (*Jefferson's*) legacy is not his solution of the political problem, but his realization that the problem must be solved anew in each succeeding era. Our heritage is his faith that an informed and intelligent people can and will work out their own salvation.—

*The Jefferson Tradition in American Democracy,*

CHARLES M. WILTSE.

IN unexpected nooks and crannies one comes across a witness to one or another of our beliefs:

In the annual report of one of the finest libraries in the country, in describing one of the accessions to the collection the librarian writes of "An Association" entered into to raise money for the purchase of lands in the North Western-Territory; the work printed in 1786. Of this plan it says, "One of its distinctions was that it was not an organization for the exploitation of settlers by a group of speculative investors, but a democratic association in which the subscribers themselves, very largely, were the colonizers, and in which the benefits of the project were reaped by those who bore the heat and burden of the settlement."

## Puerto Rico, Sweet Land of Liberty

BY WILL LISSNER

DEMONSTRATION of the universal character of the land question, as it appears within a particular national economy, was one of Henry George's important contributions to economic theory. The question, George held, "is nothing less than that question of transcendent importance which is everywhere beginning to agitate and, if not settled, must soon convulse the civilized world," the question whether the masses of mankind will be content with poverty amidst actual and potential abundance.

Distress was acute in Ireland in George's time and the situation was dramatized by the agitation of Parnell Davitt and the Land Leaguers. George analyzed the situation in "The Irish Land Question," afterward published as "The Land Question." He found the cause of the distress in the system of land tenure which prevailed there, the system of absolute private ownership of land and noted that "essentially the same land system as that of Ireland exists elsewhere, and, wherever it exists distress of essentially the same kind is to be seen." He concluded that everywhere the connection between the system of tenure and the social problem of pauperism is "that of cause and effect."

This principle of George's has resulted in many studies of various types of economies by students of the social sciences. These studies have particular value for the science of economics. Not even in the United States where statistical research has made great advances in the past two decades, are data available for a complete analysis of the economic effects of privilege. Thus the student must turn from the monopolistic-imperialist economy to other types.

It is not true that the seemingly exact scientific method of laboratory analysis, experiment and proof, which is associated with the physical and biological sciences, cannot be approximated in the social sciences, and particularly economics. One cannot experiment with the happiness and well-being of 135,000,000 persons, of course, in the present delicate state of the economy.

But, as George pointed out, in the less advanced economies the relation between land and labor can be seen with such distinctness that it is seen "by those who cannot in other places perceive them." This is possible, he continues, because of certain special conditions peculiar to the particular economy. Definition of these special conditions is of no concern here; they are not always identical, from one country to another, and probably need not be.

These studies have been limited in the light they have thrown on the principle only by the limited character of the data available. Fortunately, the growth of interest