

# The Lustre of Argente

A Tribute by

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(Translated by R. D. Young)



ON 28 SEPTEMBER last there died in Madrid Don Baldomero Argente del Castillo. He was buried in Almudena Cemetery. This noted patrician was born in the village of Jerés del Marquesado, in the province of Grenada in 1877. He emigrated to the Philippines in 1894, where he practised journalism, and where he took a degree in law in 1897. He volunteered for the Spanish army, returning to Spain with the rank of captain at the end of the war with the Philippines. In 1904 he was the director of the Madrid paper *El Globo* and later of the *Diario Nacional*.

In politics he was of the Liberal Party, occupying the posts of deputy-mayor of the Madrid municipality, provincial deputy, and deputy in the Cortes (Parliament) on various occasions. He was the under-secretary of the Presidency in 1913, in the government of Count Romanones, and under-secretary also on various occasions of Justice and of Public Instruction. In 1918 he was Minister of Supply, and later a Councillor of State. At the time of Primo de Rivera's government he was a member of the Consultative Assembly. Outside politics he was a vice-president of the Madrid Athenaeum and an academician of the Academy of Jurisprudence and of that of the Moral and Political Sciences. He was the holder of numerous decorations, both national and foreign.

Up to now I have mentioned only published facts. With only slight variations these have appeared in the obituaries in the newspapers and are in part taken from the encyclopaedia dictionary. These form the kind of biographical sketch current in relation to distinguished Society people, who belong to little village-histories and who then slumber for years, even centuries, in diaries and encyclopaedias, thanks to the learned and the historians.

The true greatness of Argente is rooted, not in his having been a minister in the Government, a deputy in the Cortes, a councillor, an under-secretary, or a director of various newspapers, since these distinguished posts may be attained by those with knowledge and luck, two qualities which do not by themselves prove the capacity or ability of an individual in his work. The lustre of Argente is attainable by few men, and will not fade, because his ideas — noble humanitarian ideas which he upheld and spread with singular earnestness — will always endure.

Baldomero Argente was a great man, like all who climb the greasy pole of public life. He passed over the threshold of true wisdom and began to use his great understanding and culture to eliminate economic factors which make

material progress dangerous and render unstable all good understanding between man and man and nation and nation. It is at this point that the figure of Argente looms large and acquires world renown.

The employment of his scientific abilities and great literary and journalistic gifts began with the publication of his book *Henry George: his Life and Work*, which was published in Madrid in 1912. In 1913 he published *The Enslavement of the People* and in 1920 *Decline of a World*, which is a selection from pamphlets and newspaper articles. The preface of this book ends with this paragraph: "This book is intended to stimulate the curiosity and the attention of those who, saddened by the spectacle of the world at present, would learn the causes of its ills and apply the remedy . . . Georgeists need not preoccupy themselves with this, for it has been marvellously done for them in the works of Henry George, which every patriot, every Christian, every man of honour has a duty to study."

Argente published other instructive and interesting works: *Land Reform* in 1931, *Economic Crises and the Distribution of Wealth* in 1932, *Capitalism* in 1955, *The Common Good* in 1957, and *Common Justice and Social Justice* in 1962. In these last three works he introduces his own thoughts on economic philosophy. At his death numerous manuscripts remained unpublished. Many thousands of his articles were published in newspapers all over Spain and also abroad.

He was director of the Madrid review *La Reforma Social*, (which ceased publication in 1936) in which he consistently advocated reform of taxation with the ultimate goal of the single tax and free trade. He was proud of being president of the Asociación Georgista Española (Spanish Georgeist Association) and a vice-president of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade.

His was a full life, dedicated, with unusual ardour and disregard for his own interest, to pointing out the great economic fallacies which give rise to this monstrous economic structure of our society called Capitalism, the father of the no less monstrous Communism and of its younger brother State-Directionism, which is prevalent in conservative nations. Argente denounced the errors and showed the remedy; he did not confine himself to lamentations, nor to proposing palliatives.

Among those errors the greatest of all is the false concept of private property which confuses things produced by man's labour with the raw natural resources which we have received from God, and which, therefore, should belong equally to all His children.

May he rest in peace, this intelligent and generous man, who, instead of seeking the spectacular honours and the vanities offered by political life, followed the more obscure path taken by the few sages of the world. His spirit will rejoice and be happy in the contemplation of his friends, continuing undaunted in their work of education, in which he so unstintedly set us an example.