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A REMEMBRANCE OF HENRY GEORGE

By Thomas G. Shearman

To the Editor of the Journal.

I have known Mr. George for sixteen years. I was one of his closest and dearest friends. It was through the invitation of myself and two other of his friends and admirers that Mr. George came to Brooklyn to make his first speech in that city. At that time I was not familiar with his theories, but since then I have become convinced that he knew more of economics than any other man in the country. On all questions on which he and students of statistics and books differed, the results showed that they were wrong and Henry George right.

Not only was Mr. George one of the most disinterested and unselfish men I ever knew, but one of the most pure-minded. He was a man of generous impulses and a fixed nature. He was always absorbed in considering the welfare of his fellow men, especially among the poorer classes, the world over. He never grew morbid in pondering over these things. To him it was a matter of no concern what he had to eat or what he had to wear, and he craved not for luxury where he himself was concerned.

Henry George thoroughly believed in government by the people, and he hated every form of aristocracy in government, whether founded on birth or on money. But he was entirely free from that small jealousy which leads so many to dislike those who have had superior advantages. He never begrudged any man his wealth if honestly gained, and he believed that men could gain great wealth honestly; but his own personal sympathies were, nevertheless, with the poor. He was a man of real genius, having wonderful intuition on many economic questions. On points where there were no statistics which he knew of, he would reach wonderfully correct conclusions, which statistics afterwards proved correct. He took pleasure in having his work praised, not because the praise was given to him, but because it showed that his work had done good.

The hold which Henry George was gradually acquiring upon the people was far deeper than the world in general, especially the intellectual world, imagined. No philosopher since the days of Robert Jefferson ever gained such a hold upon the people as did Henry George, and if he only had the health and vigour to carry on his work, his influence would have rivalled that of Jefferson: but his health had been poor for a number of years, and I doubt if it had ever been strong. He was entirely unfit to stand this campaign, and I told him in advance that I would not support him as I did not want to have even that part of the share in causing his death. I had a strong impression that the campaign would be fatal to him, although I expected that the excitement would tide him over till after election day.

His death, however, seems an ideal one. He had done his work, and by this campaign had renewed and expanded his hold on the masses, and he died at just the moment when his death was likely to make the profoundest impression and do the most good for the cause he had so much at heart. So far from Henry George being a Socialist, he was the ablest and most effective opponent Socialism has ever met. No answer to Socialism can ever be made which does not offer a full remedy for the monster wrongs under which the people suffer, and Henry George was the first man to offer any suggestion to show a way which will at once, give relief to poverty and preserve sacredly every honest right to property. Whether his solution is right or not is not now important to consider, but I will say that it is the only solution to the dark social problem now threatening us which has ever been made outside of socialism.