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WHERE HENRY GEORGE STUMBLED.

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Progress and Poverty is an enchanting book. As a work on political economy it is the freshest and breeziest of its kind, and no more like a scientific treatise in style than the grandiloquent productions of " Ouida." It reads as if the author had written in the white heat of enthusiasm and indignation, sure of his logic, infallible in his deductions, careless of repetition, profuse in explanation, and proud of the study and investigation so visible in fact, argument, and illustration. Indeed, a scientist might read it with a grave suspicion of the author's fitness for a scientific task. The logical mind is impatient of wordiness and the charms of rhetoric, is careful to check oratorical expression and to conceal sentiment and feeling in a treatise. Here, hung upon statements of the most vital importance to the world, are the jewels of language. Fervor, scorn, hatred, pity, disgust, and indignation shed a rather lurid light upon the bald and venerable axioms of a modern science. Feeling marks every page. The partisan is always apparent. The even-minded judge, seeking delay that reason may escape the mist of feeling, is not evidenced in the book. A writer has given his opinion of it in this sentence: "A *melee* of ideas and feelings, and a riot of words!" This was too severe, but not altogether unjust. Impassioned feeling is out of place in a scientific work, and verbiage intolerable. Both tend to weaken the critical faculties.

Nevertheless the first six books of the volume show that Mr. George is versed in logic, can think clearly and acutely, and, with all his enthusiasm and fondness for mere words, can demonstrate a proposition like a philosopher. In our humble opinion nothing in the writings of Smith, Mill, or Spencer can surpass the intellectual feat of the first one hundred and sixty pages, in which, with rare skill and marvellous success, he overturns every theory of political economy concerning the relation of wages to capital, the source of capital and interest, the source of wages, and establishes the correlation of the laws of distribution. The simplest principles of nature and law, at the same time most evident, are often the most inaccessible to the common mind. Genius alone discovers them amid the rubbish of customs and false reasonings, and offers them to the world. Mr. George is unquestionably a genius. His refutation of Malthus is very complete. By faith alone Christian men already knew that God had made this world capable of sustaining human life as long as earthly life was necessary to the divine project,

but on the ground of human observation and reasoning Mr. George has proved Malthus wrong. He has deserved well of Christianity on this score. The Malthusian theory has perhaps done more to increase the ranks of atheistic thinkers than the philosophy of the eighteenth century. It will be harmless for the future. Mr. George has signed its death warrant and written its epitaph. All honor and praise to him for this good deed!

One peculiarity of genius is its candor, another its courage. Candor and courage are two shining qualities in Henry George. He hides nothing, glosses over nothing. All difficulties seem alike to him, and he not only invites objection but divines it in the first sentence, and can hardly restrain his eagerness to answer it. He seeks out every possible obstruction, as if with joy to demonstrate the more powerfully his strength in its successful removal. He is afraid of no earthly power. His chances of political success may be ruined, yet he is not restrained thereby from attacking the Catholic Church. The sentiment of the time and the history of the world are against him, but he does not shrink from proposing as a remedy for pauperism a scheme which shocks mankind and makes history a sad blunder from the beginning. In the first chapter of his seventh book he writes: "If private property in land be just, then is the remedy I propose a false one; if, on the contrary, private property in land be unjust, then is this remedy the true one." His success or failure he leaves to a single throw of the dice. This is the courage of a real truth-seeker and the candor of an honest genius. It is not the confidence of a conceited sage, who, in his doubt of retaining his repute, leaves open avenues of escape and faces no contingencies. Mr. George chooses his battleground, and proposes to conquer or die. With the same feeling we purpose to meet him on this spot, and modestly hope that we shall see him carried off the field.

The very capacity of genius for large doings implies its liability to large blunders. The teachers of error have never been intellectual fools. After reading the first half of *Progress and Poverty* one is prepared for great things. The logic is so good, the facts so unanswerable, the power of the writer so evidently great, that one is not surprised at the brilliant opening of the seventh book. The man has already accomplished so much that here would be an anti-climax if he did not accomplish more. He is about to attack the key of his enemy's position. He must now succeed or fail for ever. Whatever learning, logic, skill, observation he may have hitherto shown, here he must surpass himself in all. He is aware of this, and proudly notifies on-lookers that the supreme test is before him:

" That alone is wise which is just; that alone is enduring which is right. . . . If our inquiry . . . has led us to a correct conclusion, it will bear translation from terms of political economy into terms of ethics, and, as the source of social evils, show a wrong. If it will not do this it is disproved. If it will do this it is proved by the final decision."

He prepares himself cheerfully for the last task, unsuspecting that it is his day of Waterloo. For here Mr. George stumbled. Here his logic went astray. Here he displayed gaps in his learning which must shame a public teacher. It is a bitter

disappointment to the admiring reader, this seventh book of *Progress and Poverty*. The philosopher of the first six books appears as a blunderer. It is unaccountable except by the supposition which opens this paragraph.

Here is Mr. George's reasoning:

"What constitutes the rightful basis of property? What is it that enables a man to justly say of a thing. It is mine? From what springs the sentiment which acknowledges his exclusive right as against all the world? Is it not, primarily, the right of a man to himself, to the use of his own powers, to the enjoyment of the fruits of his own exertions? Is it not this individual right which springs from and is testified to by the natural facts of individual organization—the fact that each particular pair of hands obey a particular brain and are related to a particular stomach; the fact that each man is a definite, coherent, independent whole—which alone justifies individual ownership? As a man belongs to himself, so his labor, when put into concrete form, belongs to him."

In this paragraph Mr. George makes the first of a series of woful blunders. As it is the basis of all the others, and the basis of all his reasoning against the justice of private ownership of land, the blunder need only be shown to bring his theories tumbling about his ears.

He asks, What constitutes the rightful basis of property ? and answers, The rightful basis of property is the right of a man to himself, to the use of himself, and to the fruits of the use of himself. The answer is wrong, and if Mr. George had consulted the commonest moral philosophy before penning that paragraph he would have seen his error. The answer is wrong, because

1st. *The supposed basis, since it rests upon another basis of wider meaning, is not the true basis of property;* and

2d. *If the right to own anything rested upon and was limited by a man's right to himself, there would be exclusive ownership of nothing in this world.*

1. Let it be ever borne in mind that in the first chapter of book seventh Mr. George sets out to find and establish the general principle on which exclusive ownership of anything must finally rest. In this paragraph we shall prove that he did not find the said principle, and, proving this, we shall thereby demonstrate the weakness of his entire edifice of logic. Every man born into this world has certainly the right to the use of his faculties—a statement which one has only to make for all men to acknowledge. This right Mr. George makes the basis of all proprietorship. But here enters a question. *Why* has man a right to these faculties, and to all things pertaining to their free exercise? When it is asserted that every man is sole and exclusive proprietor of himself as concerns other men, the query that naturally presents itself to reason is, Upon what basis does this exclusive ownership rest? Why should a man be so entitled to the ownership of his mental and physical faculties that he can say of them at all times, These are mine? Therefore outside of

the possessions and properties which nature offers to man we find a possession and properties in which man rejoices, and of which Mr. George makes no mention except to make it the basis of other proprietorships. Back of the question, Why can man own what he produces? we find another question, demanding another principle to give it answer. Now, before any other questions can be asked this one must be answered. Before one may ask, Why can a man own anything? and be answered, Because he owns himself, one must ask, Upon what title does a man own himself? and must be answered. The principle upon which he holds exclusive possession of himself must first be discovered and proved just, before any other principles based upon that possession can be established. This is precisely what Mr. George has failed to do. His reasoning, stripped of verbiage, stands thus: Since a man owns himself he can own what that self produces. This is a sound principle, but it is not a bottom principle. Under it lies the question, Upon what principle does a man own himself? Whence springs the title to possession of himself? Ownership of one thing cannot *always* make the principle of ownership in another thing. Before Mr. George satisfies us of the truth of his axiom, because a man owns himself he can own what that self produces, he must establish the basis of man's proprietorship over himself; he must tell us by what right he claims exclusive possession of his human faculties. He has not done this. He has omitted any mention of the existence of such a basis. He has mistaken the second tier of stones in the foundation for the bottom tier, and missed a principle. He set out to answer the question, Why can a man own anything? and answered only Why can a man own some things? He intended to establish the basis of all human ownership. But he took no account of the ownership of mental and physical faculties. He excluded them. He found no basis for them. Therefore, instead of establishing a general principle upon which all human ownerships might rest, he established only the principle upon which *some* ownerships rest.

This is as evident as day. It is a sad blunder for a logician to make, but Mr. George has made it. It vitiates all his after reasoning, and leaves his famous theory like a gas-deserted balloon or a dismayed ship. One cannot conceive how such a mistake could have been made by a mind so keen and inquisitive. To take a principle of limited scope and give it a universal application is a fault common to the ignorant and untrained. Geniuses err in a contrary way. It must have been clear to Mr. George that men own some things on other and better titles than the fact that they produced them. The title of a child to the clothes and food of a common existence is as strong and binding on other men as if that child produced them. Yet for many years of life the child produces nothing. It can never say of anything, This is mine, on the ground that it has produced it. Still, its title to necessary shelter, clothing, and food is so good that once they are in its possession, whether received or stolen from others, no power on earth can rightfully, by taking them away, leave the child shelterless, naked, and unfed. What is the ground of the child's title? How did Mr. George happen to miss these possessions, properties, titles? It seems as if, in searching for the last analysis of all present social complexities, he had not quite divested himself of his desire to find principles which would suit his land theories. Is it possible that Mr. George, so courageous

and candid, deliberately shut his door upon an important but unwelcome principle?

The magnitude of his blunder becomes more striking when the true basis of property is established. As in the last paragraph but one we proved conclusively that he had not discovered the true basis, now in this we shall lay down that basis, the one principle upon which *all* rights of ownership rest. It is very simple, as a first principle must be—quite as simple and evident as Mr. George's starting-point: Since a man owns himself he can own what that self produces. Moreover, it explains and supports Mr. George's axiom, in so far forth as that axiom is true. We put it in this shape:

The basis of ownership is the right of a man to life. The right of a man to life is admitted and understood by all mankind, and that this right to life is the basis of ownership can easily be seen from this reasoning: Since a man has a right to live he has also a right to all things necessary to support existence. He who has a right to the end has a right to the means. Because of his right to life man owns his mental and physical faculties—an ownership whose title Mr. George did not, perhaps could not, account for. Man does not own his own life. That is a trust from the Creator. But it is his right and duty to support and defend his life, and that he might do it fitly God gave man his mental and bodily faculties; gave him a clear title to exclusive ownership of whatever was necessary to life; made it lawful for him to own as well as possess every natural object essential to life's continuance, *whether produced or not by his own hands*. The earth and all its capabilities are only a means to an end. The mechanism of the human body, so wonderful and intricate, is only a means to an end. The end is life. That must be sustained. Stealing becomes virtue and murder justice when the starving innocent plunges his hands into another's surplus, or takes a life in defending his own. Life must be sustained. Nature is indifferent to ownership. Man may seize land to own or merely to use, and nature treats him alike in both conditions; or land may not be used at all, and nature remains untroubled. If to-morrow it became a necessity of man's existence that the fruitfulness of the earth should be destroyed, his right to life would justify that destruction. Whatever conditions are necessary to support life, those conditions are lawful. Ownership of use alone and ownership of the thing alone are indifferent circumstances. Whatever life requires, that it must have and that it will own, all other secondary principles to the contrary notwithstanding. Nature was made to serve life, and serve it she must, whether as the bond-woman destitute of rights or as the free-woman rejoicing in a sort of independence; and either condition is indifferent to the object of proprietorship.

We may now throw into the form of syllogisms the reasoning of the past few pages, and in brief space may better comprehend the effects of Mr. George's stumble.

Mr. George essayed to find the principle of *all* ownerships;

But the principle discovered by him does not include the ownership of the mental and physical faculties of man;

Therefore Mr. George did not find the principle of *all* ownerships. And therefore his basis of property is a false basis, and all the reasoning of the seventh book is thrown away—that is, all his reasoning against the justice of private ownership of land is simply no reasoning at all. The seventh book must be rewritten.

Besides, our reasoning may take this shape:

That is the true principle of ownership which accounts for all ownerships;

A man's right to life is a principle which accounts for them all;

Therefore man's right to life is the true principle of ownership.

Deduced from Mr. George's reasoning is the axiom, A man can own exclusively only what he produces.

Deduced from our reasoning is the axiom, A man can own exclusively all things necessary to life.

The lights which reason and history shed upon these principles and axioms show with admirable clearness the truth and beauty of those we advocate, the miserable insufficiency or deformity of those advocated by Mr. George. These have been reprobated again and again by the brilliant and impartial minds of Christianity. It is, we believe, Mr. George's contention that Christianity does not condemn him. Evidently he read Christian moralists with the eyes of his mind shut.

Mr. George may have been an extensive reader, but if so his reading was one-sided. We find no mention of any Christian philosopher in his work with whose writings he may have been familiar, and thus we are the better able to account for the astonishing lapses of logic and learning which occur in the seventh book. An instance of these is contained in our second objection to accepting his basis of property as the true basis. Mr. George had the hardihood to declare that "*as* a man belongs to himself, *so* his labor, when put in concrete form, belongs to him"; to which we replied that, "if the right to own anything rested upon and was limited by a man's right to himself, there would be exclusive ownership of nothing in this world." Over himself and his faculties man has no such power as he enjoys over the product of his own labor. He may do as he will with his corn, his sword, and his book, use, sell, or destroy them, but himself and his powers he can only use. He cannot take his own life, cannot dispose of it to any other, cannot make any other accountable for it, except by permission of its Creator — God. He cannot maim or injure himself, or destroy any of his senses, or paralyze his limbs, except by permission of their Creator — God. He can only use these things as he uses borrowed articles. Mr. George's comparison is therefore very unfortunate, and

resembles his basis of property in this respect, that it is not a comparison at all worth penning.

He would not have fallen into this simple error had he read the common text-books of moral philosophy. But Mr. George's first stumble sent him stumbling through the whole chapter, whose every page is disfigured by similar mistakes—the mistakes of a man whose mind had been seized and overpowered by one idea before his studies had been completed. "If a man be rightfully entitled to the produce of his labors," says Mr. George, "then no one can be rightfully entitled to the ownership of anything which is not the produce of his labor." And again: "The equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air." These assertions may be very clear to Mr. George, but to practised ears they have an indifferent sound. We have upset the first, and good common sense determines how poor an illustration is the other. We have a clear right to the use of land and to the use of air, because both are necessary for that life which God has given us; but whereas the land makes no resistance to private and exclusive ownership, the air of its very nature refuses to be owned by any one.

These and other blunders of the seventh book Mr. George had no right to make. When a man proposes to revolutionize the main feature of human society he is bound to prepare himself for his work by the most extensive study and the most profound research. To make such blunders as those we have exposed is unworthy of a philosopher. The author of *Progress and Poverty* had but to consult any of the common Latin text-books on moral philosophy to learn many things pertaining to his subject which he does not seem to know. It might have been excusable to blunder grandly, but to trip like a sophomore is ridiculous in a great theorist. He has been understood the better by the untrained and the ignorant, but he has exposed himself the sooner to the scorn of thinking men.