

Observations Regarding the SPES Research Document: “Principles Guiding the Purpose and Form of the School”

These observations are not comprehensive and relate only to the importance of “economic science” in the School’s work.

In the preface to the the document Mr Lambie provides the following information:

1. “The School began with an impulse received by Leon MacLaren to discover and teach truth and justice”.
2. *The best description of our purpose” is that provided by Mahārāja Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī when he described the “School’s immediate aim as the upliftment of society, and the ultimate aim of providing help on the way to liberation, the realisation of the Self”.*
3. The purpose of the document is to “set out the factors which have been found valuable in its (the School’s) work”.

Leon Maclaren told us about the impulse he received in a lecture when he said:

“I am coming to speak to you about the beginnings of the school.

I wish I could, because the school like anything else begins in the absolute, of that beginning only the self knows.

*In this, as in many other things we are forced to speak about what comes into manifestation, that appears and then develops. So, as a kind of historic beginning, it goes back to about 1926 so far as I am concerned. I had become 16 years old and I went and asked my mother what book it was that my father prized so highly and used in his speeches and she told me that it was *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George. It was the first time I had heard the title of the book. She went to the bookcase and got it out for me, for my father had quite a library.*

*I took it away and read it. A little later, sitting by a lake, having read from the book it became very clear to me that there was such a thing as **truth** and there was such a thing as **justice** and that they could be found and, being found, they could be taught. It seemed to me that that was the most valuable thing that one could pursue so I resolved to pursue this when I was twenty one.”*

Here it is clear that Leon MacLaren’s inspiration to learn and teach about “truth and justice” arose from reading and reflecting upon the contents of the book *Progress and Poverty*. As someone who has read, reread and reflected upon the contents of *Progress and Poverty* many times since being introduced to it by the School over sixty years ago I understand and share that feeling and believe research into the book’s content should be a priority for anyone seeking to set out the factors that have been found valuable in the School’s work,

I can confirm how that book, and the many other works that Henry George produced, have been of immense help in my efforts to support and promote the School’s immediate aim: *the upliftment of society*, and the School’s ultimate aim “*of providing help on the way to liberation, the realisation of the Self*”.

In connection with the “uplift of society” George’s practical remedy to the man-made problem’s of poverty amidst extravagant forms of wealth are too obvious too need restating. In connection with the ultimate aim “*of providing help on the way to liberation, the realisation of the Self*” a deeper appreciation of George’s work is called for. A clue to this link may be found in the penultimate chapter of *Progress and Poverty* where he says: “*Liberty means Justice and Justice is the natural law ... (that men) must have liberty to avail themselves of the opportunities and means of life; they must stand on equal terms with reference to the bounty of nature. Either this or Liberty withdraws her light! Either this or darkness comes on, and the very forces that progress has evolved turn to powers that work destruction. This is the universal law. This is the lesson of the centuries. Unless its foundations be laid in justice the social structure cannot stand.*” Here, I think we may see, how whilst the immediate aim of George’s work might have been the uplifting of society, the ultimate **effect** of adopting the remedy he proposed, would be to help individuals to more fully realise their potential and own true Self.

Some ten years after Leon MacLaren’s ‘awakening’, when, with his father and other followers of Henry George’s ideas, he formed “The Henry George School of Economics” the teaching material was based entirely on the body of knowledge contained in Henry George’s books. This ‘body of knowledge’ was thus then, a most valuable factor in the School’s work. This remained the case after 1942 when the school changed its name to “The School of Economic Science”. This change made clear that the School’s approach was not rooted in the views of a particular individual but that, as a ‘science’, it sought governing principles through evidence and a systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the world based on observation and reason. This was reflected in the School’s practice of urging students to neither accept nor reject what they heard in their classes, but to test them through direct observation and reason. This echoed what George himself says in the introduction of his final work, “The Science of Political Economy” where he writes: “*I shall try in this work to put in clear and systematic form the main principles of political economy.*

The place I would take is not that of a teacher who states what is to be believed, but rather that of a guide who points out what by looking is to be seen. So far from asking the reader blindly to follow me I would urge him to accept no statement that he himself can doubt and to adopt no conclusion, untested, by his own reason”.

The link between “*providing help on the way to liberation, the realisation of the Self*” and ‘Economic Science’ is reinforced in George’s final work where he identifies “*that which feels, perceives, thinks wills; (and) which to distinguish, (from matter and energy) we call mind, soul or spirit*” as the **primary factor in the world as we know it**. He says this is because; while in **thought** we are compelled to distinguish spirit, matter and energy as independent and separable elements “*it may be that at bottom (they) are one, for it is mind, soul or spirit which is first in our own consciousness, and it is only through this that we have consciousness of any other existence. In this, as our own consciousness testifies, is the initiative of all our own motions and movements so far as consciousness and memory shed light; in all cases in which we can trace the genesis of anything to its beginning we find that beginning in thought and will. So clear, so indisputable is the priority of this spiritual element that wherever and whenever men have sought to account for the origin of the world they have always been driven to assume a great spirit or God. For though there be atheistic theories, they always avoid the question of origin, and assume the world always to have been*”.

Henry George tells us directly that his return to faith, following a period of agnosticism, followed very deep consideration and was directly linked to his appreciation of the universal application of the laws of nature. He saw how it was only possible for a person to express their will and make a new thing that was 'good' for a purpose e.g. to meet a human want, when they used their powers consciously. Having made such a thing for the first time and describing the processes that need to be followed, further similar items could be made by 'following the process rules' and far less consciousness was called for. These rules (laws) could thus be said to express 'the will of the original maker'. Looking with all that any man is equipped to use, his own senses, mind, and spirit and aided by knowledge gleaned by past generations that satisfied his own critical faculty, it seems to me that George was able to reason that the 'all maker' must not just be conscious but must be consciousness itself – continuously manifesting through all creation and (as far as humans are concerned) especially through human kind. Thus in his final work he was able to say:- "Why is it that some things coexist with other things? and that some things always follow other things? The Mohammedan will answer: "it is the will of God." The man of our Western civilisation will answer: "it is a law of Nature." The phrase is different, but the answer one."

In the philosophy that we seek to study, practice and teach this link between recognising Natural Law and religious faith is clear when we consider the Sanskrit terms **Dharma** and **Sanatan Dharma** as indicated in the glossary of the book 'Good Company II' viz.

Dharma: *Natural Law. Recognition that the natural world of physical phenomena, human action and thought, are governed by universal law. All things and events are part of an indivisible whole. **Sanatan Dharma** (eternal 'religion') is behaviour that is in harmony with this unity.(See under 'Origin of religions').*

It seems to me that the link between Dharma and Sanatan Dharma means that the "School's immediate aim, the upliftment of society, and its ultimate aim of providing help on the way to liberation, the realisation of the Self" as described by Mahārāja Śrī Sāntānanda Sarasvatī's, are complementary.

As far as I am aware The School of Philosophy and Economic Science is the only educational institution where mistaken ideas of 'identity' and 'property', i.e. of "me" and "mine"; what "I am" and "what I may own", are recognised as barriers to the full realisation of both individuals and human civilisation. This is one reason why I think the Economic Science aspect of the School's work and the body of knowledge inherited from Henry George's works need to be more fully taken into account as its future is being considered.

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P.S. Quote from final chapter of P&P:

"My task is done. Yet the thought still mounts. The problems we have been considering lead into a problem higher and deeper still. Behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life. I have found it impossible to think of the one without thinking of the other, and so, I imagine, will it be with those who, reading this book, go with me in thought. For, as says Guizot, "when the history of civilization is completed, when there is nothing more to say as to our present existence, man inevitably asks himself whether all is exhausted, whether he has reached the end of all things?"

This problem I cannot now discuss. I speak of it only because the thought which, while writing this book, has come with inexpressible cheer to me, may also be of cheer to some who read it; for, whatever be its fate, it will be read by some who in their heart of hearts have taken the cross of a new crusade. This thought will come to them without my suggestion; but we are surer that we see a star when we know that others also see it.

The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth. Will it at length prevail? Ultimately, yes. But in our own times, or in times of which any memory of us remains, who shall say?"