

HENRY GEORGE'S POLITICAL ECONOMY.

To be a teacher is one thing; to be a reformer is to be more and less. To possess but a single idea is often intolerable weakness; to be possessed of but a single idea is often intolerant strength. To propound an economic theory is an affair of intellect; to propagate an economic gospel is a matter of heart and soul and strength and mind. To those who are at all familiar with the writings of Henry George, the key to his influence is not far to seek. He was a reformer; heart and soul and mind and strength, he was possessed of one idea; he was the eloquent apostle of an economic gospel, — the “new philosophy of the natural order, best known as the Single Tax.” Here are his weakness and strength, his narrowness and breadth, his power for good and power for harm. In earlier and later writings, controversial or explanatory, the same merits and the same defects appear.

Obviously, a single set of criteria may not be applied to gospel and to science. For while the scientist is everlastingly seeking the truth, the apostle is proclaiming the everlasting truth. The one is calm, cool, and dispassionate; the other, enthusiastic, ardent, and intolerant.

Henry George's apostolic fervor, no less than the supplementary relation of this posthumous volume¹ to his earlier work, is sufficiently indicated by an extract from the preface, supposed to have been written in 1894, fifteen years after the first appearance of *Progress and Poverty*: “On the night on which I finished the first chapter of *Progress and Poverty* I felt that the talent entrusted to me had been accounted for, — felt more fully satisfied, more deeply grateful, than if all the kingdoms of the earth

¹ *The Science of Political Economy.* By HENRY GEORGE. New York: Doubleday & McClure Co. 1898.

had been laid at my feet; and though the years have justified, not diminished, my faith, there is still left for me something to do.” This “something” was no less than the attempted reconstruction of political economy, — begun in 1891, and presented to the public in its incomplete condition, “exactly as it was left by the author” at his sudden death in October, 1897.

Like all his later writings, this book is primarily a restatement of “the new philosophy of the natural order, best known as the Single Tax.” Incidentally, however, it gives a cosmic introduction to this philosophy; demonstrates the eminently respectable ancestry of the single-tax doctrines; insists that they embody all that is good in the economic thought of the past; and asserts vehemently that in departing from these principles as imperfectly enunciated by the physiocrats and Adam Smith, the science of political economy during the present century has first been betrayed into a mass of hopeless confusions, and then been entirely abandoned by its professed teachers in favor of an incoherent pseudo-science called “economics,” — the subservient tool of tremendous pecuniary, special, anti-social, class interests which have everywhere captured the educational machinery of thinking and teaching in higher institutions of learning. More in contempt than in sorrow, he admits that he once hoped for better things, and thought the constructive work to which he now addresses himself would be undertaken by at least some of the professed teachers of political economy. “Had these teachers frankly admitted the changes called for by *Progress and Poverty*,” he condescendingly suggests that “some of the structure on which they built might have been retained.” But that was not in human nature.