

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HENRY GEORGE

By George Raymond Geiger

This is a thesis "submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy, Columbia University."

The style is therefore not exactly popular, and it demands more than ordinary concentration from the reader. But if read with close attention, interest deepens and continues to the end.

Mr Geiger has read widely not only all George's writings, but the criticisms of friend and foe. And he attempts to put these fairly, so that the reader may judge the weight of argument on both sides.

He points out that George's aim was to show that there is no conflict between economic and ethical truth. "In George ethical visions and schemes of economics functioned together."

"Man must live before he can live well or nobly; wants must be satisfied before ideals can be reached. Therefore George directed his overt attention to economics, to means, but there was always before him that vision, now dim, now radiant, of ultimate moral ends."

After an introductory chapter the author tells the story of George's life. Born on 2nd September, 1839, in a pious home, going west into California as a youth, struggling with poverty as a miner, printer, journalist, editor, visiting New York, where he was struck with the contrast of wealth and poverty, "in daylight, in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—and there and then I made a vow—through evil and through good, whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true."

Returning to California, a casual talk with a teamster reveals to him in a flash—"With the growth of population land grows in value and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege." Here was the key to the mystery on which he had brooded, why growth in productive power and in wealth crystallized in Land Value, and drained into the landowner's hands the surplus of the joint product of labour and capital beyond that necessary for a bare maintenance for labour, and such return as would induce savings for capital.

In 1871 this idea was published in *Our Land and Land Policy*, expounded in his paper *The Post*, and in speeches all over the west. Eight years later it was expounded fully in the book that made his name famous all over the world, *Progress and Poverty*. The chapter continues and completes the story of his life, explains the occasions and effects of his subsequent books, his reactions to Socialism, the Church, Herbert Spencer, the Duke of Argyll, etc., his career as a missionary of the new gospel in Ireland, Great Britain, Australia and America, leading up to the great apostle's laying down his life for the cause by fighting the New York Mayoral election in 1897, against the solemn warning of his medical advisers.

Of these reactions the case of Dr McGlynn furnishes the most striking instance. Father McGlynn was a famous Roman Catholic priest who, in 1882, adopted George's doctrines and threw the whole weight of his influence and the power of his oratory into their propagation.

This was forbidden by his Archbishop, and on his refusal to be silenced he was suspended for a year, deprived of his living, then on 3rd July, 1887, excommunicated. Five years later, on 23rd December, 1892, he was restored to his full status as a priest, without one word of recantation of the views that had led to his

expulsion, a thing almost unprecedented in the Church, whose boast is *semper idem*.

In 1891, Leo XIII issued his famous Encyclical on social and industrial problems, which George considered an attack on his teaching. He wrote a courteous, tactful and reasoned reply and criticism of the Encyclical, which was presented to the Pope on 11th September, 1891. The ban on Dr McGlynn was removed unconditionally in the year following.

Mr Geiger gives a full and most interesting account of the episode and suggests that the two were not unconnected. The reply was published as *The Condition of Labour*, the most persuasive and easily mastered of all George's works. In immediate effect it was surpassed only by *Progress and Poverty*.

The rest of the book consists of a careful examination of George's writings, of his originality, of the extent of his indebtedness to earlier economists, and ends with a chapter on George and religion.

He early lost his faith, for a time abandoned religion, but "out of the inquiry why want goes with plenty, religion had come to have a new meaning. In the conviction that he had discovered that it was not by God's will, but because of violation of God's ordinance that man suffered involuntary poverty in the heart of civilization, a faith that was dead, revived." His faith in God, immortality and truth inspired his philosophy and gave wings to his words that set his disciples aflame with his own passion for justice and brotherhood, and started a crusade that can only end when economic freedom shall have established both. H. G. C.

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Professor Geiger's thesis, to which we have pleasure in giving this notice, will shortly be published in full as a book for sale and circulation, with foreword by Professor John Dewey. The relation between economics and ethics will be elaborated. The chapters on George's Economic Solution and George and Religion will be extended. Finally, a chapter will be added on the effect of George's works on later thinkers and on legislative proposals and enactments. We look forward to the announcement of this very important publication.

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