

THE POLITICAL ECONOMISTS AND JUSTICE

THAT period of about two hundred and fifty years—from the early days of the fourteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century—in which the great changes of the so-called Renaissance and the Reformation took place is of deep interest to us, but this is not the occasion for an extended examination of its history. All we need to do is suggest to our students where they may find the latest scholarly reviews of this period, and advise them to study them, keeping in mind the sequence George has followed in his works. In Volume VII of *The Cambridge Medieval History* I would recommend the essay of Dr. Tilley. Here is the clearest account we have of the epoch which embraces the so-called Renaissance.

For a much wider and a strictly analytical survey of the astonishing changes that came to Europe, there is nothing quite like Chapter IX of the second volume of *The Decline of the West*. Here Spengler lays under his microscopic glance all the awful consequences of the

liberation of what he calls the ego. This emancipation of the self, abandoning the rules and disciplines which gave to the Middle Ages its distinctive character for equity and orderliness, turned man amuck in nearly every activity of life and led to orgies of devil worship and witchcraft that made bedlam of every country in Europe for many generations. In another recent work, *A Cultural History of Modern Europe*, by Egon Friedell, will be found a complete restatement of the conditions of Europe after the thirteenth century, written in striking contrast to those of the beginning of the medieval period. A close study of Friedell will reveal the religious and economic processes at work which brought about the changes that caused bewildered man to cast off the spiritual chains of the church and shackle himself to the war-chariot of the State.

My reason for recommending these works to you is one we have been prone to overlook. How is it such earthshaking changes could take place in Europe when, as we were taught two generations ago, knowledge became diffuse, science graduated from the schoolmen, and the mind of man was liberated from the Gothic charge? Here is an inquiry that will take us down to the very fundamentals we have been studying. I think Oswald Spengler makes good his claim that the so-called Renaissance was a rebellion of the ego, the self. But I believe it was something else, too.

My researches lead me to the conclusion that, if it was not directly a part of the great conspiracy (which started in the thirteenth century in all the countries) to take the land from the peasantry and enslave it, it indirectly was connected with a desire of the ego to batten upon the labor of others. Some works today suggest this, but their authors, not conscious of the

significance and the pressure of economic factors, do not come to grips with the problem.

A few years ago I read a new work on Luther and the peasant revolts of his time, which impressed me with the notion that the author regarded the revolution of the sixteenth century as an economic disturbance. Of this we may be sure, however: that grave economic change had been proceeding steadily since the last years of the fourteenth century. This marked also the period when the political power realized it could entrench itself securely by exploiting the economic power. Side by side with the increase of wealth, poverty and vagrancy kept step. These two marched together. The stronger the State became under the last of the Tudors, the more widespread the economic woe for those who were the victims of the conspiracy. Farming sometimes prospered on cheap labor and, after the dissolution of the monasteries, the landed estates of the nobles increased mightily in area and gave to the landlords a power so great that kings envied their might. It would be well for those who follow the gospel of Henry George to turn once again, as he did, to this long period and apply their intelligence to the understanding of it, for the conditions under which the people of Europe have suffered are attributable directly to the lack of the disciplines of the Middle Ages. The supremacy of the ego was the aggrandizement of the landlord, and it is on landlordism in Europe that we must squarely place the blame for our present woe.

Towards the close of the reign of Elizabeth, Richard Hooker thought it was time to make a restatement of the principles upon which Englishmen enjoyed their liberty. In 1594 he published *Ecclesiastical Polity*. I do

not know whether Henry George ever looked into Hooker's great book, but undoubtedly he read a work which was inspired by it, and that was John Locke's treatises: *Of Civil Government*. Hooker's examination of the whole realm of economics, religion, and politics is the most thorough of which we know. We find traces of it in the work of nearly all the essayists who wrote upon economics and politics for the next three centuries. The stamp of his authoritative reasoning is seen in the chief writings of the philosophers down to the day of the publication of *Progress and Poverty*.

I cannot understand why this work has been neglected by the Georgists. There is enough economic meat in it to provide them with texts so long as there is a man left to ask why the present conditions exist. Hooker says:

. . . They saw that to live by one man's will became the cause of all men's misery. This constrained them to come unto laws wherein all men might see their duty beforehand, and know the penalties of transgressing them.

In another place he says:

The supreme power cannot take from any man any part of his property without his own consent. For the preservation of property (that property which men have in their persons as well as goods) being the end of government, and that for which men enter into society, it necessarily supposes and requires that the people should have property, without which they must be supposed to lose that by entering into society which was the end for which they entered into it; too gross an absurdity for any man to own.

So far we have followed the course mapped out by Henry George. We have adhered to it strictly because he was the first to realize, as he has stated, that justice is the object and taxation the means of restoring human rights to use all natural opportunities and forces from which mankind draws its sustenance.

We now come to another very interesting period in the history of this age-long problem. In the reign of Queen Anne the whole matter of taxation was raised. This has been overlooked by many of our people, but because of its importance we must devote some time to a review of what happened when Walpole, in 1732, desired to revive the salt duty so that he might reduce the land tax. The question became a burning one; it was discussed by all the landlords of the kingdom and was the cause of long controversies in the House of Commons. Sir William Wyndham, a large landowner and Chancellor of the Exchequer, said:

It is as demonstrable as any proposition in Euclid that, if we actually paid a land tax of 10s. in the pound, without paying any other excise or duties, our liberties would be much more secure, and every landed gentleman might live at least in as much plenty, and might make a better provision for his family than under the present mode of taxation.

Then in the House of Lords, Lord Bathurst led the attack upon Walpole's motion to revive the salt duties, and he said:

This tax upon salt is, my lords, so far from being a just and equal tax, that it is the most unjust and the most oppressive tax that ever was set on foot in this nation. *To the public expense every man ought to contribute according to the benefit he receives* [Italics mine].

Is it not astonishing that a landlord (and Bathurst was a great one) should lay down the very principle which is the root of the Georgian gospel? Mark it: "Every man ought to contribute according to the benefit he receives." How was it a Chancellor of the Exchequer and great landlords should have a better comprehension of this question than almost any of the legislators and landlords since that day? The reason is not far to seek, for they knew their John Locke who in his essay, *Considerations of the Lowering of Interest*, gave to them a clear understanding of the difference between levying taxes upon the value of land and upon wealth, or as he puts it, upon commodities. Locke said:

A tax laid upon land seems hard to the landholder, because it is so much money going visibly out of his pocket; and, therefore, as an ease to himself, the landholder is always forward to lay it upon commodities. But if he will thoroughly consider it, and examine the effects, he will find he buys this seeming ease at a very dear rate; and, though he pays not this tax immediately out of his own purse, yet his purse will find it by a greater want of money there at the end of the year than that comes to, with the lessening of his rents to boot, which is a settled and lasting evil, that will stick upon him beyond the present payment.

Without any academic economists or professors of sociology around to advise them, many of the statesmen and the majority of the landlords of England of Queen Anne's reign were convinced that Locke was right. Have you ever stopped to think what it would have meant to the world if there had been a Henry George to prompt the Chancellor of the Exchequer of that day and explain to him that a yearly valuation of

the land apart from improvements was essential if he wished to see the full benefit of the system of taxation he advocated? Is it too much to say that all things economic, political, and social would have been very different?

About thirty years after this great question was discussed in England, a bitter controversy arose in France over the condition of the finances of the State. Turgot, in 1767, offered a prize for the essay which would show most clearly the effect of indirect taxation on the income of land owners. He sent the subject of the essay to David Hume with an outline of his own views and invited the criticism of the Scottish philosopher, who responded frankly in a statement that is famous. The reply of Turgot to Hume completely silenced the Scotsman. This letter which Turgot wrote is worth a prominent place in our literature. True, none of this would completely satisfy our purists who delight in quarreling amongst themselves or converting saints when they find them. Yet, George in examining this period looked for tendencies of principle, and he found them in abundance. Turgot was to George one of the great champions of mankind, and you who have studied *The Science of Political Economy* know the tributes that he has paid to Quesnay and his fellow Physiocrats. In this letter Turgot sent to David Hume, he refers to the inconveniences "caused to the consumers by a tax the collection of which is a perpetual interference with the liberty of the citizens." He then adds:

. . . They must be searched in custom-houses, their homes must be entered for levies and excises, not to speak of the horrors of smuggling, and of the sacrifice of human life to the pecuniary interest of the treasury. A fine sermon legislation preaches to highwaymen!

We must now hark back for a moment or two and touch upon a matter which really serves as a signpost, a turning of the ways in this history of reducing the peasantry to slave conditions. I have shown that the great conspiracy of which we have undeniable evidence, which began with John of Gaunt in the reign of Richard II, was carried on intermittently—sometimes with greater, sometimes with less force—for the purpose of robbing the people of their lands. Yet our examination of this would not be complete without a reference to a generation or so in this history when England enjoyed a period of great prosperity. Sir John Fortescue, who was the Chancellor to Henry VI, states in his book, *De laudibus legum Angliae (In Praise of the Laws of England)*:

Neither doth the King there, either by himself or by his servants and officers, levy upon his subjects tollages, subsidies, or any other burdens, or alter their laws or make new laws without the express consent and agreement of his whole realm in his Parliament. Wherefore every inhabiter of that realm useth and enjoyeth at his pleasure all the profits and commodities which by his own travail, or by the labour of others, he gaineth by land or water. And hereby it cometh to pass that the men of that land are rich, having abundance of gold and silver, and other things necessary for the maintenance of man's life. They drink no water unless it be that some for devotion, and upon a zeal of penance, do abstain from other drink. They eat plentifully of all kinds of flesh and fish. They wear fine woollen cloth in their apparel. They have also abundance of bed coverings in their houses, and of all other woollen stuff. They have great store of all hustlements and implements of household. They are plentifully furnished with all other things

that are requisite to the accomplishment of a quiet and wealthy life.

This extraordinary picture of England describes the condition which existed before the Wars of the Roses came to an end at Bosworth. From this testimony we gather one important fact: the landlords of the conspiracy had by no means completed their work of reducing the peasantry to the lot of landless slaves.

Fortescue's work was not published until the reign of Henry VIII. The impression that it made for long afterwards was indeed deep, and it has been shown how it affected the thought of many of the philosophers of later periods. Now contrast Fortescue's statement of the condition of England in the reign of Henry VI with that which I have described of two reigns later, when England was overrun, as Sir Thomas More has told us, by vagrants, thieves, and cutthroats. One would think that the iniquities of landlordism had reached their zenith. No, far from that! There was much worse to come, and in the midst of this reign of terror, which extended from the beginnings of enclosure by act of Parliament soon after the eighteenth century dawned until the period that closed with Cobden, there was born Adam Smith, who gave us *The Wealth of Nations*. We must always remember this work because George made a profound study of it.

George was the first to emphasize the importance of Smith's first canon of taxation, which is: "The subjects of every state ought to contribute towards the support of the government as nearly as possible in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the

protection of the state." Smith's fame, however, does not rest only upon *The Wealth of Nations*. There are some who consider that in his work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he reached the highest plain of precision of any who had examined the excellence of natural jurisprudence and the necessity of philosophers and political economists beginning their investigations with the natural law of justice.

Within the same generation in which Adam Smith produced his work, Kant was busily employed upon his treatise, *The Science of Right*, which I consider to be an indispensable work for Georgists. I know that they would find Kant's recasting of the formulae of Ulpian, the great Roman jurist, a mine of good things for the promulgation of the doctrine. Take the first juridical duty: "Do not make thyself a mere Means for the use of others, but be to them likewise an End." Kant says that this is a duty arising out of the right of humanity in our own person.

The second is rendered as follows: "Do no Wrong to any one, even if thou shouldst be under the necessity, in observing this Duty, to cease from all connection with others and to avoid all Society." Ulpian's third formula is: "Assign to every one what is his own." But Kant puts it in a different form, which leaves no doubt as to its meaning. Thus: "Enter into a state in which every one can have what is his own secured against the action of every other."

In the section on the Principles of Public Right, Kant lays it down that "Whatever one has *made* substantially for himself, he holds as his incontestable property." There is so much of consequence to us and our movement in this amazing work that it would take a whole series of studies on this subject alone to give

you an adequate idea of the good things it contains. There is not time to do more than draw your attention to *The Science of Right*, which lay forgotten for almost a hundred years before it was translated into English. Then those connected with the historical school of jurisprudence, who desired a new philosophy of law (as suggested by Sir Henry Maine) took hold of it, and very soon it was found that the principles enunciated in it gave a new life to those who were interested in natural law.

Is it not remarkable that in the period covered by Hooker and Locke, Adam Smith and Kant, we find the greatest minds in Europe bent upon the same inquiries that had attracted the leading thinkers of classical times? To me this is one of the most glorious things among the many attractions which tempt the student to retrace the old tracks to the source of our thought. No one did this so perfectly as Henry George, and I can very well imagine the joy that spurred him on in his enormous task of making sure, step by step as he advanced, that he was placing his philosophical foot upon mother earth whose laws he urged all men to observe.

The continuity of essential thought of the philosophers of all peoples, in all ages, proves conclusively to me that man can be worthy of the faculties with which he is endowed and can use them in an ordered world to reach the highest plains of culture. George's appeal to mankind to rely upon the best that is in itself is perhaps one of the most potent of all he makes. To him there was no reason whatever for man to grovel in the stage of the beast, and surely we shall grant that George knew the men to whom he made his appeal. He knew their virtues and their defects. He saw them at

their best and at their worst, and it takes great confidence and courage when you do see men at their worst to have faith that in the worst there are still the elements of the best, if we only give the fellow a chance to discover himself. This hope of George was the one that stirred men to their very depths.

I could name hundreds of men who have paid tribute to him, but one of the most extraordinary examples was Tolstoy, for in *Progress and Poverty* he saw clearly that George really had discovered the key which would open the gates of the kingdom. One of his translators told me that Tolstoy admitted he had never been so thrilled by anything in secular literature as he was when he finished George's Glasgow sermon, "Thy Kingdom Come." I can understand this, for in my experience I have found that that little pamphlet brought more men to the understanding of Henry George than any other of his works. Indeed, men have told me that, after studying it, they have turned back to *Progress and Poverty* and read it with a new light upon its pages.

How many of us appreciate the fact that Henry George realized the fitness of the definition of religion as given by Lactantius: "that which binds man to an invisible Creator"? How many of us realize that Henry George's mind was always so wide open that nothing of value escaped entering it? Do we not in his works meet passage after passage which seems like a revelation of his high desire to know the truth of things? Take all those glowing passages in *Progress and Poverty* that refer to the church. He knew the difference between Christianity and Church-ianity; he knew the difference between a professing Christian and an acting Christian. The man who could appreciate the reason-

ing of Joseph Butler in *The Analogy of Religion* was prepared to examine any and every important problem that had formerly confused the minds of his predecessors. Always far above the petty bickerings of the small controversialists, he succeeded in resolving many doubts and re-creating the best of our hopes. No small triumph when one considers he came within that period when the quasi-rationalists and rampant Socialists had things all to themselves! They had the platforms and the attention of what were called the thinking people. Now George remains invincible, planted on the rock of natural law, the St. George of justice who triumphs over the dragon of doubt and skepticism.

This is the place where we pause for a while, before our conclusion, to deal with the work Henry George gave to us, in which he sums up in general terms the quest we set upon. I do not know why so many Georgists confess they have either not read *The Perplexed Philosopher* or that they have merely looked into it. How one of our fraternity can think for a moment that he has really done full honor to George by reading *Progress and Poverty* is something I cannot understand. I have heard it said by men who have been frankly opposed to George's doctrine of taking the value of land for the use of the community that creates it that *The Perplexed Philosopher* is the most astonishing analysis of fundamental principles that has been written.

In this work George deals with Herbert Spencer. The occasion for it was Spencer's chapter on Justice in the *Synthetic Philosophy*. Here he recanted the gospel he laid down in *Social Statics*. It was no small thing for George to enter the lists at that time against Herbert Spencer. Yet he did, fearlessly, and proved that he

was equal to the task of exposing the man who was heralded as the greatest philosopher of all time. The encomiums showered upon Spencer, a collection of which will be found in George's book, were the most extravagant. It is not often that even the keenest critical scholar who loves to search out the great controversies of the periods meets such a delectable one as George gives us in *The Perplexed Philosopher*.

He begins by presenting the Herbert Spencer of *Social Statics*, which was published first in 1850, and then he confronts Spencer with his chapter on Justice, the recantation of the principles enunciated in *Social Statics*. Then bit by bit he tears away the mask of the Spencer who turned his coat and humbled himself before the great landlords and powerful politicians. In contrast to the lame and discreditable circumlocutions of the chapter on Justice, George upholds the principle declared in *Social Statics*, the rule of right, the law of equal liberty. He then says of Spencer's early work:

It is its protest against materialism, its assertion of the supremacy of the moral law, its declaration of God-given rights that are above all human enactments, that despite whatever it may contain of crudity and inconsistency make *Social Statics* a noble book, and in the deepest sense a religiously minded book.

When he exposes the confusions Mr. Spencer sets down in his chapter on Justice, George asks:

But what is justice?

It is the rendering to each his due. It presupposes a moral law, and its corollaries, natural rights which are self-evident. But where in a philosophy that denies spirit, that ignores will, that derives all the qualities and attributes of man from the integration of matter

and the dissipation of motion, can we find any basis for the idea of justice?

Again George, sure of his ground, confronts the Spencer of the chapter on Justice in the *Synthetic Philosophy* with the Spencer who laid down the fundamental principles of it in *Social Statics*. This great achievement would have been impossible if George had not equipped himself with the knowledge that is stamped brilliantly on every page he wrote. Have you the faintest idea of what it must have cost him, placed as he was in the far, far West in the sixties and the seventies of the last century, to do the work of research that was necessary to make him a fit antagonist to meet the Herbert Spencer of the *Synthetic Philosophy*? How any man can delight in calling himself a Georgist who is satisfied only with what is given to him literally in *Progress and Poverty* is something I have never been able to understand. Curiosity, which is natural in us, should spur an interested reader to action to discover how this printer learned the metaphysics of natural law.

How did George hit upon the true definition of justice? What led Henry George to a thorough understanding of the three gospels? We know he must have been a deep student of the Bible because he reveals that in his style. I have heard the shrewdest literary critics say it is Biblical. English history and English law had to be explored, studied deeply, for George to point his references in clear-cut phrases. He knew his Bracton and he knew his Blackstone. Indeed, he quotes the latter:

The word "land" includes not only the face of the earth, but everything under it or over it. . . . By the name of land everything terrestrial will pass.

And it is hard to find a weak line in George's knowledge of, and reasoning about, English law. His interest in the feudal system is shown over and over again. He equals Thomas Carlyle as an iconoclast breaking the putty and tinsel images of the political and social world and, as for exposing the crafts and whims of the State, he had no equal. He says:

To be sure Mr. Spencer justifies the taking of property by taxation only for purposes of defensive war and the maintenance of order and safety. But such limitations are practically no limitations. Neither an English jingo nor an American protectionist would quarrel with them. No invading foot has trod English soil, no hostile fleet has fired a shot at an English town, since the English national debt began to form. Yet what one of all the wars for which the English masses have paid in blood and privation and of which this great debt is the reminder, has not been advocated at the time as a defensive war? Is not our monstrous American tariff declared by its advocates to be necessary to the maintenance of order and safety? What has been the assigned reason for the maintenance of every fat English sinecure but order and safety?

The chapter towards the close of *The Perplexed Philosopher* on compensation should be published as a special pamphlet, for it is conclusive reasoning carried to perfection. Then at the end George sums up the whole matter in two paragraphs which point directly at the true source of his inspiration:

Let us rather, as I said in the beginning, not too much underrate our own powers in what is concerned with common facts and general relations. While we may not be scientists or philosophers we too are men. And as to

things which the telescope cannot resolve, nor the microscope reveal, nor the spectrum analysis throw light on, nor the tests of the chemist discover, it is as irrational to accept blindly the dictum of those who say, "Thus saith science!" as it is in things that are the proper field of the natural sciences to bow before the dictum of those who say, "Thus saith religion!"

I care nothing for creeds. I am not concerned with any one's religious belief. But I would have men think for themselves. If we do not, we can only abandon one superstition to take up another, and it may be a worse one. It is as bad for a man to think that he can know nothing as to think he knows all. There are things which it is given to all possessing reason to know, if they will but use that reason. And some things it may be there are, that—as was said by One whom the learning of the time sneered at, and the high priests persecuted, and polite society, speaking through the voice of those who knew not what they did, crucified—are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes.

There is a unity of souls of the great men who desire the kingdom to come on earth. The unity embraces the wisest men of whom we have record, and I have tried in these lectures to show you how the thought of ancient days was preserved in spite of all the vicissitude and woe through which men have passed and that George in his volumes condensed the essentials of their great work.

Bunsen in *Christianity and Mankind* says:

The same view of the destinies of man which makes the great poets of Greece the prophets of humanity, for all ages . . . shines with heavenly light of religious faith in the galaxy of those heroes of faith, the prophets of the Hebrew people. They proclaimed, in an uninterrupted series during more than a thousand years of

national life, the fundamental truth of all philosophy of history, that the divine principle of truth and justice, which is visible in the social and political institutions of the nations, will prevail, will expand without limit, and will finally make this earth the kingdom of God. They do not undertake to prove this truth; they see it; they speak out of the fullness of their intuitive belief in it.

Is it any wonder that some of the most brilliant philosophers and historians of the last century declared that the ancient faiths were more religious than Christianity? Still we hope to show clearly that Christianity was divided into two distinct and separate parts, and that its critics have not always realized that for one thousand years, at least, Christianity held faith in a development of mankind towards a triumph of eternal love, identical with the moral order of the world.

Christianity will be judged, as other faiths have been judged, not alone according to the faith of its adherents, but according to works and faith by which it sought to bring the divine love of truth and justice into the lives of its people and by its efforts to make the kingdom come on earth. Religion without the eternal law of justice cannot hope to bind man to an invisible God.