

THE late F. P. Dunne, speaking in the character of Mr. Dooley, remarked that "th' enthusiasm iv this counthry, Hinnissy, always makes me think iv a bonfire on an ice-floe. It burns bright so long as ye feed it, an' it looks good, but it don't take hold, somehow, on th' ice." The tremendous pother about "social reform" ran its customary short course and petered out, notwithstanding great effort by its energumens to keep it up. With this general decline of enthusiasm, interest in George's writings declined. His attack on Herbert Spencer, written in 1892, was comparatively little heeded. His weekly paper, the *Standard*, lost circulation steadily after the furore over the McGlynn case had subsided, and expired in 1892. George's unjustifiable utterances in defence of Dr. McGlynn put the *Standard* in the position of attacking the Church, and thereby greatly lessened its influence. While Dr. McGlynn was no doubt quite within his rights, and while the local authorities manifestly dis-

regarded his rights in their treatment of him, there still seems something to be said on the local hierarchy's side. The case was mismanaged all round; it should have been managed not only with justice, but with the appearance of justice, for it was one of those matters where the appearance of justice is quite as important as justice itself. This necessary provision was overlooked by everyone concerned, and by none more consistently than by the editor of the *Standard*.

The archbishop of New York and his vicar-general were unfortunately not the kind of men to have such a matter in hand. Both exceeded their authority by misrepresenting the Church's doctrinal position. It would have been one thing to discipline Dr. McGlynn for public conduct unbecoming his profession; but it was quite another thing to discipline him for infidelity to doctrine. The one could have been done with justice, whether or not it was advisable to do it under the circumstances. The other could not have been done with justice under any circumstances. Both the archbishop and the vicar-general maintained that Dr. McGlynn was advocating principles and theories which were contrary to the teachings of the

Church, and this was simply not true. Five years later the Georgian scheme of land-value taxation which Dr. McGlynn advocated was overhauled by a committee of Roman theologians who found nothing in it contrary to the Church's teachings, and Dr. McGlynn was reinstated.

The unfortunate thing about George's part in the affair was that he acted as he did again in his attack on Herbert Spencer. He went behind the returns; he imputed motives without any evidence sufficient to sustain him. Surely it would be a serious thing—a very serious thing—to assume that Archbishop Corrigan and his vicar-general were not acting in good faith. A charge of ignorance was competent in the premises, as the outcome proved; a charge of hastiness, irritability, bad statesmanship, martinetism, culpable failure to examine the ground of action—this also was perfectly competent and could in all justice be made to stick. But a charge of deliberate bad faith was another matter; yet George wrote:

What Dr. McGlynn is punished for is for taking the side of the workingmen against the system of injustice and spoliation and the rotten rings which

have made the government in New York a byword of corruption. . . . His sin is in taking a side in politics which was opposed to the rings that had the support of the Catholic hierarchy.

This was going behind the returns at a great rate; not only was it a charge of bad faith, but it was also an imputation of the next thing to criminal connivance. No wonder that George's hold on the public was weakening, or that on all sides he was accused of "attacking the Catholic Church"; no wonder that the more judicious among his intimates shook their heads sadly as they saw public sentiment, which seldom errs on the side of charity in matters of this kind, turning more and more to his disadvantage.

In May, 1891, after the local furore over Dr. McGlynn had died out, His Holiness Leo XIII issued the notable encyclical *Rerum novarum*, on the condition of labour. George, with his mind at once forced back on his brush with the diocesan authorities in New York, took the encyclical as aimed directly at his economic doctrines. Under ordinary circumstances it would seem to need a deal of self-consciousness to entertain this notion, for on the face of it the letter certainly suggests no such interpretation.

On a fair reading today, one would certainly say it was unlimbered against nothing but the collectivism which George detested quite as cordially as the Holy Father did. Whatever other intention could be strained out of it must be got at through those familiar methods of "judicial interpretation" whereby, as a contemporary of Bishop Butler said, anything can be made to mean anything.

Nor is it at all likely *a priori* that His Holiness would have any erroneous doctrine in mind but the socialism which he repeatedly arraigns by name. Still less likely is it that with his sources of information what they were, he would have fallen into the vulgar error of using socialism as a generic term to cover anything to which it was inapplicable, let alone something diametrically its opposite. Papa Pecci, servant of the servants of God, was a very great man; great as a saint, great as a scholar, theologian, philosopher, man of letters. In statesmanship, he was far and away the greatest of the century's four great creative minds. To find his equal, one must scan very closely the whole long list of those who have occupied the chair of St. Peter, and then one is not sure. Hence when he spoke, it is highly probable that he

quite knew what he was talking about and quite meant what he said, no more, no less.

Moreover, it hardly appears that the case of Dr. McGlynn excited anywhere near as much commotion and searching of heart in Rome as it did in New York. When Cardinal Gibbons brought the matter up at Rome in 1887, both the Holy Father and the cardinal-prefect of the Propaganda told him that so far from condemning Dr. McGlynn or his teachings, they had passed no judgment whatever on the case. In the view of the Vatican it was apparently a local issue. Five years later, when Dr. McGlynn went to Rome immediately after his reinstatement, the Holy Father asked him whether he taught against private property. Dr. McGlynn said no, he never had; he had always been staunch for private property. "I thought so," said Papa Pecci, and gave him his blessing; and that seemed to be all there was to that.

Curiously, however, George wrote a correspondent that "for my part, I regard the encyclical letter as aimed at us, and at us alone, almost." He thought he "ought to write something about it," with the old inveterate propagandist purpose; such a reply "might give an opportunity of explaining our principles to

many people who know little or nothing about them." Accordingly he devoted the whole summer of 1891 to this project, publishing the result in the form of an open letter to His Holiness, four months after the publication of the encyclical. It was brought out in New York and London, and at Rome in an Italian version. A handsome copy was put in the Pope's hands, and George thought the circumstances of Dr. McGlynn's reinstatement a year afterward indicated that the Pope had read it, which seems unlikely. Probably it was looked over by someone in authority who no doubt thought it was very fine, very good, but since it did not bear particularly on anything His Holiness had said, there was no use in its going further. At any rate, whether or not anybody in the Vatican ever read it, Leo XIII made no acknowledgment of the gift at any time.

He could hardly have done so. The only acknowledgment he could have made was in the way of a fatherly hint that George should not cry before he was hurt; and that obviously would be impracticable. It is clear that the Vatican never regarded George's views as anything but "free doctrine." The encyclical bore down heavily on land-nationalization, but it

was the socialists, not George, who advocated that; George was against it, all along—he was for nationalizing the economic rent of land, which is another matter entirely, and collides with nothing that the Pope had to say. Private monopoly of land is one thing; the Pope was for it, and so was George. Private monopoly of the economic rent of land is quite another thing; George was against it, and the Pope said nothing about it. Of course one may always assign any amount of importance to whatever implications one chooses to construe out of silence; but in doing that one should be sure that circumstances make one's constructions at least plausible.

When George wrote His Holiness that “your encyclical will be seen by those who carefully analyze it to be directed, not against socialism, which in moderate form you favour, but against what we in the United States call the single tax”—he was going behind the returns most unwarrantably. He was proceeding by pure arbitrary inference, with no ground of demonstrable fact to go on. Moreover, the gravamen of the statement was distinctly offensive, as will be perceived at once; it amounted to saying that the Holy Father either ignorantly or deliber-

ately misdirected the incidence of his censure; and this, to say the least of it, was an extremely serious assumption.

The letter to the Pope, like the attack on Herbert Spencer, which George published in the following year, 1892, under the title, *A Perplexed Philosopher*, produced little effect. Neither work provoked anything like the discussion which George expected; few were interested in them, fewer were enlightened by them. The country was tapering off from its delirious debauch on nostrums of one kind and another, and was getting into the mood of Col. Asa Bird Gardiner's famous saying, "To hell with reform!" It was preparing the path for Hanna and the full dinner-pail in 1896, for McKinley and imperialism in 1897, for Roosevelt and the policies of "practical men," for dollar-diplomacy and a long run of diligent imperialist buccaneering. George and his remaining friends were fish out of water, washed up on the bank and left there, high and dry.

George had misgivings about his last two productions, the letter to the Pope, and the broadside against Spencer. He was doubtful about their being worth the time taken away from his work on political economy. After they

were written, he thought more than once that his labour on them was largely wasted and that the time spent on them was misspent. It is interesting to observe here the persistence of vitality in a true instinct so long repressed and suffocated. In 1891, speaking of his projected work on the science of political economy, he wrote a friend that he had long thought "perhaps it would be useful if I could put the ideas embodied in *Progress and Poverty* in the setting of a complete economic treatise, and without controversy." *Without controversy*—there spoke the sound philosophical instinct, with what was virtually its dying breath, and its last words were those which prompted doubt about the worthwhileness of his two controversial essays.

Seven years were none too many for such a task as his proposed work on political economy, and in all probability George might have had more than seven. If he had devoted even seven years to that work, assuming that he was to have but seven, what a work it might, nay, certainly would, have been! For the first time in his life, moreover, he could have carried on a piece of sustained work undisturbed by the fear of want. He had been ill and broken by his incessant labours, and two rich friends now took him in

hand, insisting that he drop the *Standard* and enjoy an independent existence in reasonable comfort. George might well have taken this occurrence as an "intimation of the dæmon" that the work he contemplated was the one which he was called upon to do. But the Pope's encyclical intervened, Spencer's recantation intervened, a free-trade campaign in Congress intervened, forlorn local single-tax campaigns here and there intervened, all devouring his time and addling his attention—the habit of years was too strong to be broken, however much he might have wished to break it—and then came the hopeless and preposterous campaign for the mayoralty of New York in 1897, which led directly to his death.

II

A small compact host of disciples carried on the "single-tax movement" after George's death, with singular energy and devotion. Their efforts emphasized the fiscal features of his system, laying relatively little stress on the system's ethical aim. Since their policy was one of mass-conversion, this was reasonable, perhaps necessary; the masses could be best caught by an exposition of

effect on the pocket-book, and once caught by that, they would be better disposed to consider the system's ethical features. Yet inevitably this tended to push those features more and more out of the popular view, and more and more to cause the system to be popularly regarded as of a purely economic character. George the philosopher of freedom, George the exponent of individualism as against Statism, George the very best friend the capitalist ever had, George the architect of a society based on voluntary co-operation rather than on enforced coöperation—this George, the truly great, the incomparable George, sank out of sight, leaving only George the economic innovator, the author of a new and untried method of laying taxes.

George's course of public conduct, ill-advised as one may think it was, unsound as its fundamental postulate may appear to be, was directed towards the ethical end contemplated by his philosophy, and that end alone. It never varied; in all his preoccupations with the means to that end there was never in his own mind an instant of confusion of them with the end. When a silly person told him that the single-tax is not a panacea, he replied that he was well aware it is not, "but freedom is; and the single-tax is the

way to freedom." All his battles were fought to vindicate the natural rights of man as against those who would deny or over-ride them. In its eloquent attestation of this purpose, and of the ethical sanction which he invoked upon this purpose, his letter to the Pope has great permanent value. As an *apologia pro vita sua* its value even exceeds that of the section which ends *Progress and Poverty*. Probably no one can quite complete his understanding of George, or quite round out an appreciation of him, without a sympathetic reading and re-reading of this letter.

III

In their efforts to further the "single-tax movement," George's disciples have followed his methods; the methods of evangelizing, of organizing, of seeking political action. Judged in relation to the amount of time, energy and money spent on these methods, their success is not impressive; so little impressive, in fact, as to suggest their utter incompetence. A reading of Mr. Geiger's excellent book shows how hard one is put to it to discern the survival of any substantial influence which the continuators of George's teachings may have exerted; and a re-

view of George's career, such as has been attempted in this present essay, seems appropriate in order to show, among other things, why this influence is so slight.

The methods of George's disciples were based on the same postulate which he accepted concerning the moral and intellectual capacities of mankind. If that postulate be sound, then obviously George was right in his choice of methods, and the results might be expected to show, at least measurably, that he was right. Similarly, to take the most conspicuous example by way of comparison, if this eighteenth-century postulate of Condorcet and Rousseau be sound, the practice of even the pseudo-republicanism in vogue for a century and a half should be measurably attesting its soundness; it should at least be demonstrating that a closer approach to true republicanism is expedient and desirable. So should the practice of free public education; so should all the collective practices whose institution is referable to that postulate. On the other hand, if no such attestation appears in any instance, if results are negative or positively unfavourable, the postulate is in doubt. There is no way of judging save by the results of practical experimentation, because the postulate is

purely conjectural. One can not keep too constantly in mind the fact that this was a sheer speculation on the part of its projectors in the eighteenth century; an interesting speculation, highly flattering to the masses of mankind and therefore most acceptable, but nevertheless a sheer speculation.

It met no serious challenge in the nineteenth century, and up to very lately it has met none in the twentieth. Man's incapacities were generally ascribed to conditions, as George ascribed them; they were environmental in origin, not constitutional. A larval capacity was there, and one-or-another shift of external stimulus would bring it into play—more experience, more education, more responsibility, more-this, more-that. As the masses of mankind increasingly assumed control of civilization's immediate destinies, however, doubts began to be expressed about the correctness of this view, and it became apparent that the fundamental postulate supporting this view would stand re-examination.

Naturally so, because there can now be no question that the masses' assumption of control has issued in a prompt and swift degeneration throughout the world's whole social order. In the United States, for example, the progressive

mass-control of public affairs has brought to pass precisely the state of things which George forecast in *Progress and Poverty*, in the chapter entitled, "How Modern Civilization May Decline"—a chapter which will interest anyone as a model of accurate prediction, whatever may be thought about the premises on which the prediction is based.) The degree to which distinctively human qualities have degenerated under the sanction of a completely universal suffrage—under the consent that number should count for everything, and all other qualifications, or their absence, should count for nothing—is in itself sufficiently remarkable and startling to suggest a revision of eighteenth-century theory concerning the nature of man. A clear consciousness of this pervades modern critical thought as expressed in the admirable work of Dr. Carrel, of Spengler, Ortega y Gasset and others; and the undercurrent of uneasy doubt and questioning is perceptible almost wherever one may choose to feel for it.

It seems then that henceforth any review of George's career must take into account the question whether the general incapacity for acceptance of his philosophy, or of any philosophy, is circumstantial and temporary, or constitutional

and permanent. Were the eighteenth-century philosophers right or wrong? The ethical scheme of Philadelphian society in the 'thirties—was its fundamental postulate of human perfectibility sound or unsound? Were the Rev. Josiah Jupp and Mr. Creakle, whatever their divagations, proceeding on the strength of a sound fundamental principle, or on the weakness of an unsound one? Was Herbert Spencer's optimism, based on the assumption of indefinite time, actually any more tenable than George's optimism which disallowed and disregarded that assumption?

Such questions as these, then, would appear to be henceforth most appropriate for our revisions of history and biography to entertain. Some vague instinctive sense of this may perhaps even now be evident in the attitude of George's disciples of the second generation who have abandoned the idea of proselytizing-at-large. Perhaps, on the other hand, they have merely made the salutary observation that the world's great philosophers never contemplated a mass-acceptance of themselves or their doctrines, but only their acceptance by an élite. At all events, they are apparently bringing their efforts in behalf of George's philosophy into

line with this expectation, and therein they act wisely. "He that hath ears *to hear*," said the *Santissimo Salvatore*, "let him hear." Everyone has ears; Murdstone, Quinion, the Akka, the bushman, the African pigmy, all have ears, mostly very acute ears; but relatively few have ears *to hear*.

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out, however, that the entertainment of these questions has, and can have, no bearing whatever on the validity of George's philosophy, but only on the conditions of its acceptance. After surviving twenty years of controversy unharmed, untouched, it seems improbable that his philosophy will ever need review, reappraisal or even restatement. As it now stands it will apparently forever continue to fulfil perfectly the functions of a social philosophy as they are described by Spencer. It will continue to locate and identify the ideal which is needful for right guidance, however far in advance of practicability; considerations of practicability simply do not appear, they are not in its purview. It will continue to establish true conceptions of better and worse in social organizations; to look steadily beyond the exigencies of the moment; to differentiate sharply between the proximately-best

and the ultimately-best; and to reprehend those who habitually identify the proximately-best with the ultimately-best, thus "insuring the future ill-being of men while eagerly pursuing their present well-being."

Nor is it at all implied that if the average of mankind is permanently incapable of accepting a philosophy, it is incapable of accepting the fruits of a philosophy, for even the dullest and most self-willed of domesticated animals are capable of that. Hence whether the foregoing questions be settled in one way or another, the settlement offers no insurmountable bar to a practical realization of George's philosophy; it merely helps towards an intelligent determination of the conditions necessary for realizing it. It is clear now, for example, that this realization is to all appearances impracticable under a quasi-republican organization of society, and the closer the approach to true republicanism, the worse the outlook. This, however, does not make against its practicability under some other scheme of social organization; indeed, it makes some useful suggestions about the form or mode which a scheme most favourable to an implantation of George's philosophy might assume. Therefore in this as in all other respects, the

consideration of these questions is quite as encouraging as it is profitable.

IV

Finally we may remind ourselves that any reappraisal of George, whenever made, must end as it must begin, in reverent regard for the one quality which most conspicuously sets him off against the background of the society he lived in—the quality of simple human goodness. He was one of the greatest of philosophers, and the spontaneous concurring voice of all his contemporaries acclaimed him as one of the best of men. Erasmus made it a mark of true Christians that they should be so blameless as to force infidels to speak well of them, and this George was. In the midst of an evil and perverse generation he walked worthily; in a welter of the worst passions and the meanest prejudices he remained innocent, sincere, steadfast. He is with Marcus Aurelius as “one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks which stand forever to remind our weak and easily-discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried, and may be carried again.” In time to come, the élite of mankind

shall say, "It was a society which did only what was right in its own eyes. Its works and ways bore only the mark of Rimmon upon them; the people took up the tabernacle of Moloch and Chiun, their images; they followed the star of their god Remphan. Yet there were some who were incorruptible, who walked not after strange gods; their eye was single; and one of them was called Henry George."