

1890-1897

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Between 1870 and 1897, Henry George wrote eight books. We are acquainted with five, already; three remain to be fitted into the story of his life. From first to last, George's books can be remembered conveniently by decades, and in that way be classified as to type and purpose.

During the '70s he found himself as a writer. In *Our Land and Land Policy* he rough-hewed his ideas; and in *Progress and Poverty* he polished them and gave them richness of context. During the first five years of the '80s he directed those theories toward practice. In *The Irish Land Problem* he made his *argumentum ad nationem*; and in *Social Problems and Protection or Free Trade* he developed, first, the practical collectivist side, and then the free-enterprise side, of his larger economic philosophy. Finally, during the '90s, he undertook the two tasks he had most wanted to do from the moment of completing *Progress and Poverty*. That is, he wrote answers to the philosophical materialism of his age, and he did a book which restated the principles of general economics in conformity with the ideas of his masterwork.

To be sure nothing turned out quite according to original plan. The 'primer' of economics, as he had first conceived it, ultimately became a two-volume treatise — though he never finished parts of it—*The Science of Political Economy*, which was published posthumously in 1898. The reply to materialism, though George

had said that he held back much of his thought on that subject when he wrote *Progress and Poverty*, turned out to be not a general affirmation of idealism but a critique of Herbert Spencer: *A Perplexed Philosopher*, 1892. And before the busy author produced either of these works he took time, first, to do a short book, *The Condition of Labor*. This was his famous open

letter to Pope Leo XIII, which set out to reconcile the social ideas of *Progress and Poverty* with those of Catholic Christianity.

George's entire writing effort of the final decade of his life reminds one of an engineering event of some years ago in Washington. When the huge Lincoln Memorial on the Mall, the marble temple which encloses the statue by John Chester French, threatened to go down because the ground around it was marshy, tons of fresh concrete were poured, to establish a sufficient foundation. Henry George had built *his* monument, and for a decade after 1879 it had held up beautifully, unthreatened. But experience was now persuading him that neighboring areas were unstable; and, much like the pourers of concrete into Potomac swamplands, he turned next to writing books intended to reinforce not so much *Progress and Poverty* itself as the terrain upon which it rested. Of the three new works of the '90s, two extended the reach of the moral sequence of thought set forth in *Progress and Poverty*. Only one book attempted to reinforce the inner logic of his economic proposals, and that book he left unfinished.

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Readers who have sensed the degree of reorientation which occurred in George's activities when he abandoned labor politics will understand the better his wish to return to first principles, and to make those principles as clear and as practicable as he was able. Yet, to comprehend more completely his compulsion to fresh thought, a backward glance is required, a little to one side of the main road of reform affairs which the last few chapters have followed. We must now consider what did not concern him very much before 1890, namely, the meaning of the less partisan and more intellectual criticisms and estimations which had cumulated along the way. Thinkers who misapprehended or seemed to misapprehend him, and people who were lukewarm toward him or else coolly indifferent, any and all who might possibly be transformed into

followers or sympathizers, or whose opposition might be neutralized — such persons naturally challenged Henry George to restate the fundamentals of his argument.

The time to look back to is the middle '80s. Though, as readers of Chapter xiv will remember, the country's awareness of the man derived in part from earlier causes than the political campaigns in New York city and

state, the excitements of 1886 and 1887 must be understood as having heightened that awareness tremendously. The United Labor party created an American atmosphere in favor of recognizing him that compares with the effect of the Irish crisis on Britain's recognition, four or five years earlier.

As in England in 1883 and 1884, so in the United States a little later, criticisms and replies to Henry George increased to very large numbers. Individual items came out as pamphlet and book-size publications. The first such effort appeared in 1884, William Hanson's *The Fallacies of 'Progress and Poverty': in Henry Dunning Macleod's Economics, and in 'Social Problems.'* Though written by one who spoke rather against the compulsion of land-value taxation than against the merits of the case in economics, the little book seems to have disturbed George not at all. Perhaps it was too mild and glancing a blow to be concerned about, after Toynebee, Argyll, and the major British journals had struck their hardest.

By three years later, however, in the wake of the mayoralty campaign and during the year of the state campaign and of Father McGlynn's excommunication, two more books indicated an increase in both quantity and quality of counter argument. In the instance of J. Bleecker Miller's 200 pages, *Trade Organizations in Politics, also, Progress and Robbery: an Answer to Henry George*, there is little, indeed, to be said about quality. The book simply incorporated two anti-George campaign addresses of 1886, and it carried forward the name-calling of that year. But Reuben C. Rutherford's *Henry George versus Henry George, a Review*, brought out by Appleton, George's own first New York publisher, was half again as long, and in its own way made telling points of objection. Beginning with a premise, opposite to George's own belief, that 'Equality is a dream that can never be realized ... as undesirable as it is impossible,' and ending with a contention that George assumed too completely the perfectibility of the social order and considered too little the evil inherent in man, Rutherford's book illustrates the anti-egalitarian and anti-rationalistic assumptions which penetrated American criticism almost as frequently as they did British.

As might be anticipated, the year 1887 produced a good deal of Catholic commentary. Some of it cropped up far from the archdiocese of New York. For instance, Father Edward A. Higgins was requested to lecture by students at Xavier University, in Cincinnati; and his ideas about the mentor of Father McGlynn were published in a pamphlet, *The Fallacies of*

Henry George. At a more scholarly level, the *Catholic World* carried an article by Father Henry A. Brann, who noticed, as Archbishop Corrigan did not, George's distinction between private property in land and private property in things, but who condemned Henry George roundly, partly because he found him 'essentially anti-American,' preaching 'a crusade against our republican rights of property.' A third Catholic writer considered George to belong, or almost belong, in the tradition of the best utopianism. But he reserved the thought that the monastic orders of the Catholic Church were the only organizations capable of a 'true and practical' realization of utopia, and so in the end he dismissed George as a misleader. Still another writer, a parish priest of Pittsburgh, undertook in a pamphlet to make a kernel-sized reply to all of George's principal economic ideas.

Occasionally criticisms came from writers of such derivations in society as George liked to think would naturally be favorable to his ideas. Two of these were George Gunton and Robert Ellis Thompson. Gunton, though better remembered for the journal he edited under his own name, was at this time simply a labor spokesman for the eight-hour program. In a *Forum* article of 1887, and in a book published a decade later, this writer criticized Henry George's theory of wages (and criticized F. A. Walker's also), and he offered a theory of his own. And the *Irish World*, which had turned against George when Father McGlynn defied church authority, deepened the rift by pushing the tariff question to the limit. During the election year, Patrick Ford employed Professor Thompson, whose book George had selected as target for *Protection or Free Trade*, to speak for the protective tariff. Along the way, the Philadelphia professor declared just as strongly against the single tax as he did against free trade; and the *Irish World's* editorial page commented more savagely than did the special articles. From the point of view of the Henry George movement, the coincidence of opposition from priests, and from Irish and labor journalists, marked a real frustration. It set up a barrier beyond which George had a right to believe his ideas might carry. But the barrier held, apparently as unyielding in 1890 as three years earlier.

Among scholars, the most famous person to speak against him in this period was William Torrey Harris, the educator of St. Louis and a leader of the Concord School of Philosophy. In early September 1886, a date that

indicates his decision to criticize was made before George became a candidate for mayor, Mr. Harris delivered a paper at a Saratoga meeting of the Social Science Association. His very adverse address, 'The Right of Property and the Ownership of Land,' was printed in the journal of the association.

Crediting Henry George with a true eloquence and with having achieved an influence on thought about equal to that of Ricardo or Malthus, Harris believed that land-value taxation, if ever put into actual operation, would lead to confiscations even greater than the amount of economic rent it intended to appropriate. The philosopher-critic said that George's style of thinking should be classified with that of Herbert Spencer. Though once again there is no evidence that George himself took any special notice of a critic, this kind of article was just the sort to seem answerable. As much as five years later, when Harris renewed his criticism, E. Benjamin Andrews of Brown did come forward with a kind of defense. 'Many of the objections raised against the George philosophy are in a way recommendations instead,' wrote the college president in the *International Journal of Ethics*. While stating doubts of his own about George's utopia, President Andrews called George 'clear-headed' and his economic analyses often 'very brilliant'; and he suggested that 'a stiff tax might be laid upon land without entirely destroying private income from rent, and involving no whit more confiscation than the forms of taxation now prevalent; in fact much less.'

Though estimations are bound to be impressionistic and generalizations must be tentative, it does seem that the middle and late '80s were the time when Henry George was least rejected by academic economists. Representative of the new institutional and historical branch of American economic thought, Richard Ely, whose later antipathy toward George impressed his students, made respectful comments in his *Recent American Socialism*, a Johns Hopkins study published in 1885; and, in a textbook and elsewhere, he said appreciative things about George as a stimulator of public thought and discussion. General Walker himself clearly referred to his old opponent in his presidential address before the American Economic Association. Even while condemning the vagaries of economic protest, he advised his brothers of the guild to pay attention. 'We ought to rejoice, with all our hearts, that the people, the whole people, are coming,

for the first time, to take a deep, earnest, passionate interest in the subjects to which we have devoted our lives.’

Possibly the most revealing glimpse we can take in the academic direction is into the ideas of John Bates Clark, then of Smith College, bright rising star in neo-classical economics. The preface of his important book, *The Philosophy of Wealth*, was the place, 1886 the time, in which he stated the debt to George which we have already noted. In the fall of 1890, writing on ‘The Ethics of Land Tenure,’ however, Professor Clark rejected utterly the Georgist ideas that landholding is monopolistic and that the institution of private property in land operates to depress wages. That is to say, Professor Clark announced judgments different from those of George; the differences circumscribed but did not eradicate his old debt for insight into marginal theory.

Meanwhile Edward Bemis, Johns Hopkins-trained student of co-operation, made a fresh study of all of George’s books and of his writings in the early *Standard*. He published his findings in the conservative pages of the *Andover Review*. Reversing John Bates Clark’s criticism, Bemis admitted that he agreed ‘fully with George, as did Mill, and as do all economists,’ about the justice of land-value taxation, but he felt that the practical objections were overwhelming. He believed that such considerations, rather than those of theory, were what obliged conservative and radical schoolmen alike, the Sumners and Laughlins, and the Jameses and the Elys, to oppose with one voice the ideas of Henry George. The most that Bemis would concede in a practical way was that some form of land-value taxation might justly be applied in the big cities.

Replying to Clark’s article in the *International Journal of Ethics*, and using the dissenting title ‘Another View of the Ethics of Land Tenure,’ Simon Newcomb Patten of the Wharton School came up with a judgment close to that of Bemis. Patten rejected George’s program, yet spoke in a more friendly way than Clark did of his ethics; and he made the article mainly a plea for clearer thinking on everyone’s part, along the lines that join and separate economics and ethics.

Only the most general words are inclusive enough to cover the various intellectual, more or less non-partisan, attitudes of academicians and others toward Henry George from 1886 to 1890: recognition, interest, criticism, opposition, usually distrust, but sometimes deep sympathy. Though

George's own immediate reactions are hard to catch, it seems not too much to assume that he kept informed of current criticism; and the files of the *Standard* make it plain that his newspaper, at least, kept a sharp eye open for outside comment — especially for quotable items of approval. That paper reprinted in full, for example, the lawyer Samuel Clarke's review of criticisms, friendly to George, which appeared first in the *Harvard Law Review*. Likewise the *Standard* noticed when Arthur Twining Hadley, brilliant and philosophically minded economist at Yale, said something (apparently much like Bemis' position) that gave an opportunity for friendly comment. Even a conservative could go a considerable way with the idea of taxing urban land values and relieving capital improvements, said the *Standard*. The radical picture within a conservative frame was its judgment of Hadley's position.

With a world reputation, a newspaper, and the single-tax movement, Henry George in the United States about 1890 seems, on a magnified scale, very comparable to Henry George fifteen years earlier, after he had lost the *Post* in California. He had gone into retirement to write, at that time, even though there were many other possibilities open to him. This time his loss was the United Labor party, the vehicle of political expression most natural to him. Whatever other occupations might offer — whether in the single-tax movement at home, or in journalism abroad, for example — none was as important to him as a return to his desk once more.

This time he had the conviction of thought already tried, and he was more accustomed to advancing than to retreating in the international warfare of ideas.

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In the preceding section, occasional uncertainty has been necessary about the effect on Henry George himself of the accumulating

body of criticism. It is hard to be sure how much he knew or cared, while he was busy with politics or lecturing, about any except a few of the adverse articles and booklets. But there is no doubt about the fall months of 1890, immediately following the trip around the world. He then found himself under such pressure of controversy, outside politics, as never before or after; and the common-sense assumption is the only possible one, that

that pressure contributed directly to the exhaustion and illness which came at the beginning of winter.

Indeed certain things George did and said in late 1889 and early 1890, before he left New York, indicate earlier efforts to answer the rising criticism. During September, for instance, he reprinted in the *Standard*, from the *Forum*, a reply to opponents written by Thomas Shearman. The title of the article was 'Henry George's Mistakes.' The 'mistakes' were the ideas chosen for dispute by half a dozen opponents: and the Shearman article amounted to a counterattack on the Duke of Argyll, William Mallock, Abram Hewitt, Edward Atkinson, and William T. Harris. Two months later Shearman again contributed to the same magazine an article on 'The Owners of the United States,' an examination of the new concentration of wealth, from a Georgist point of view. Endorsing this endorsement of his own ideas, Henry George reprinted it in the *Standard*, as he had the preceding article.

Drawing on a different type of reinforcement, the *Standard* republished from *Harper's Weekly* Hamlin Garland's now famous story with a Henry George moral, 'Under the Lion's Paw.' The paper announced at the same time that Garland was doing a single-tax play, 'Under the Wheel,' and that the distinguished playwright, James A. Herne, predicted a great reception for it.

The month of January 1890, before taking a train for San Francisco, was probably the time when Henry George wrote his reply to the most considerable piece of writing Edward Atkinson ever did against him. This was the Boston capitalist's 'A Single Tax on Land,' which would be published in the *Century* for July, and which George must have examined in manuscript or early galleys. In this instance the argument against George was placed principally on a statistical level; and the proposition, much like Harris's, was offered that land taxation alone could not support all the costs of government in the United States. Besides this, the critic challenged the justice of George's remedy; and he hated the thought of the administrative procedures which he believed the practice of land-value taxation would require.

The *Century* gave George space for a full reply, and placed it in the same issue, alongside Atkinson's article. Although Henry George did make deft use of logic now familiar, building his argument on the automatism of

economic rent, and reassuring readers that his scheme would affect urban site-holders but disturb very little the property rights of farmers, he hardly tried to answer Mr. Atkinson in kind. He did little more with statistics than to incorporate some of Thomas Shearman's findings. Thus he practically refused to enter into the kind of realistic controversy invited by his businessman adversary. Not from this instance alone, the impression is given that, except for Shearman, spokesmen for land reform were not very ready with facts and figures at the present stage of controversy. In the October issue of the *Forum*, for instance, Bishop Frederic Dan Huntington, of upstate New York, pronounced in broad but not very practical terms, in defense of George and like-minded reformers.

But it would be untrue to imply that the rising criticism of George and Georgism represented, in a general way, fact-minded people *versus* the philosophically minded. On the contrary, about the time George was leaving the country, two writers carried criticism right to the ground of ideas where he was always ready to answer. In February Horace White, who now had worked with Godkin for years, elected to quarrel with the single tax, largely taking issue with its premises in natural-law and natural-rights philosophy. White's ideas were of course in current style, and the article, which was published in *Popular Science Monthly*, might well have led to something considerable in George's life of controversy if he had remained in the country. In his absence Louis Post answered in the *Standard*.

But then, almost simultaneously, Thomas Huxley raised the same issues of philosophy, in a series of articles in the *Nineteenth Century*. If George departed from home just too early to debate with Horace White, his midsummer visit brought him to England when the Huxley articles were several months old. Yet we know they excited him greatly. 'Have you seen Thomas Huxley's articles?' he demanded of Dr. Taylor about as soon as he returned to New York. 'What do you think of him as philosopher? I am itching to get at him and will as soon as I can.'

The mere titles, which the great explicator of evolution had selected, go far to explain George's impulse: 'On the Natural Inequality of Man,' 'Natural Rights and Political Rights,' and 'Capital — the Mother of Labour.' The first article criticized Rousseau; but the second, which was published in February, made Henry George the modern intellectual villain. Taking up the early pages of *Progress and Poverty*, Book VIII, Huxley

ridiculed the natural- rights underpinning of the argument. Then, in the final article he restated the wages-fund and Malthusian ideas, in opposition to George's eleven-year-old criticism. Compared with the early British reviews of *Progress and Poverty*, Huxley was temperate and respectful of George. But his economic presumptions were little different from, say, those of the critic in the *Edinburgh Review*, almost a decade earlier.

There is evidence which suggests that, within a month of mentioning the matter to Dr. Taylor, Henry George found time to rough-hew an answer to the articles. That he never finished may be explained in the short run by the pressure of demands on him in the fall of 1890, and in the long run by the fact that, after his illness and recovery, Herbert Spencer would offer a more obvious occasion for a reply to modern materialism. Yet, in Henry George's own behalf, there is reason to regret that he did not complete immediately, and publish, his reply to Thomas Huxley. Such an essay would have placed in the record an important document in the modern collision of ideas between evolution-minded elitism and conservatism, and the natural-rights philosophy in the Jeffersonian tradition. Two or three answers to Huxley did actually get into prominent British print, one of them by a working man and one by Michael Flurscheim. But of course George's authority was lacking; and Huxley's anti-democratic philosophy seems not to have been much challenged or answered.³³ Disturbed by the criticisms of the scientific-minded, George had hardly reached home when the attitudes of clergymen became, once more, a problem to him. In one of the sessions of the big single-tax conference, a minister-member of the new Single Tax Brotherhood of Religious Teachers rose to move that such organizations as his own be given special representation in the new committee. The motion had considerable support. But it drew fire which was dangerously sharp for the stability of a new organization. Were clergymen playing politics again, new McGlynn's and Pentecosts in the making? The question produced especially convincing denials from John Filmer, one of the numerous Swedenborgians in the movement. No man or woman of that persuasion, he announced, wanted any 'recognition here on any other ground than manhood or womanhood.'

Not George, but Croasdale, spoke the opposition of the nonclergymen members, and the attitude that prevailed at the meeting. 'We represent in this movement in America what is understood by the word "state"; they

represent what is understood by the word “church.” The sound American doctrine is to let the church stand on its own bottom and let the state stand on its own bottom, each doing the work for which it is appointed, without any danger of complication or other responsibility of one for the other.’ Though it must have been painful for George to receive, a little later, a sorrowful letter from a clergyman, who promised for the future that he and his kind would take a back seat, it is plain that George’s own feeling went with the majority.

By this time the Protestant social-gospel movement had more than begun in the United States; and excellent histories assure us that Henry George had had much to do with impelling it. But events of the fall prove that he personally felt no happier about clergymen without, than about those within, the single-tax movement. When a new People’s Municipal League of New York presently nominated a slate for a city election, and when socially conscious ministers assumed leading roles, George spoke out quite critically. He would vote with the League, he conceded. But, with reference to Heber Newton, he said that the reform platform had no vitality, and that he could find little heart in himself for such dilute reformism. Moderate reform had not changed San Francisco, he observed: ‘Where Casey and Cora were hanged Boss Buckley now rules.’

A sense that clergymen were soft toward doctrines he hated entered Henry George’s feeling about them. He voiced this anxiety to Father Dawson: ‘It is very sad to see the general tendency on the part of all clergymen — and it is quite as marked, perhaps even more so, among the Protestant sects even to the Unitarian — to avoid the simple principle of justice . . . This is leading [the clergymen] to the advocacy of socialism and all sorts of dangerous things, even to the acceptance and even advocacy of principles which will lead ultimately to atheism.’

George’s several-faceted concern about the role of Christian ministers in reform was matched, during this autumn of great pressures and anxieties, by yet a further concern about socialism. He sensed, correctly, that this movement was gaining in the United States. The situation had changed, not simply from the years of his collisions with Marxists of the SLP, but even from just a year-earlier. In 1889, when he had blown back at what he called

the cloud stuff of the Bellamy movement, he had also welcomed the cloud as a signal of America's social awareness. But now he felt uncomfortable, when the Bellamyites' journal, the *Nationalist*, discussed the possibilities of political co-operation with single-taxers. Thousands who do not go all the way with George, said one communication to that journal, do want 'the nationalization of land, railroads, telegraphs, etc., which is the rockbed of socialism,' and nationalists should recognize that George was the man who alerted the country to the need for those kinds of socialization.

To be enveloped in utopian socialism seemed to George a prospect hardly more attractive than to be identified with the Marxian variety of the movement. At home the difficulties he envisaged merged with his estimate of the clergy: a danger of false thinking, and a danger of reducing the zones of reformism. But the total problem seemed to him as international, not just American; and from England he learned of it in the most personal and affecting way.

Henry George and Thomas Walker had been discussing their disagreements about social theory for two years now; and by this time Walker's old argument, that interest on capital should be captured for the public as fully as the rent of land, had broadened, in his letters, into some vague general sympathy with socialism. The wealthy manufacturer contributed to a 'Labor Church,' supported the Fabian Society, and even showed some interest in Hyndman's Democratic Federation. He continued membership in the Land Nationalisation Society, though he confessed to George that the secretary of that organization knew no better than to be fuzzy-minded between nationalization and peasant proprietorships; and through all this he kept on with the Land Restoration League, and with affirmations of devotion, despite his disagreements, to Henry George. Writing to J. C. Durant, George explained what was worrying him about his friends in England. It was 'the wobbling, the compromising, the affiliating with socialists, and the admixture of our ideas with ideas that are directly opposed to them.'

In their correspondence of this autumn, Walker wrote long and troubled arguments of theory. In one letter he reached a conclusion very similar to that of William Torrey Harris, the Hegelian conservative. Urging

George to 'trace the result of wise expenditures of Rent by the nation,' he said that the result would be '*making all good things common*, which in my opinion will be seen to be the flavor of your teaching.' In an immediate reply George explained that the single tax embraced everything *Progress and Poverty* said in favor of capturing, for the community, the values created by the community. Do not be misled by socialism, he begged in a series of letters. 'As for Karl Marx he is the prince of muddleheads.' Other letters to England promised a full answer to socialism in future writings; and the next spring, after he had been ill, George told his son that he planned to use his coming 'Political Economy' to make that answer, as well as for other purposes.

Considering first certain differences of opinion within his own following, we have by-passed the most open sign of all that academic and general critical opinion in the United States bore heavily and personally on George, on the heels of the National Single-Tax Conference. On 5 September, as soon as he could get away from New York, he attended the annual meeting of the American Social Science Association in Saratoga. A 'Single Tax Debate' was the program; and speakers of opposite inclinations were scheduled, some of them old and some of them new to public discussion. Though scholars had by then organized, as at present, in national associations of economists, historians, and so on, the Social Science Association still brought together men of different kinds, nonprofessional students with professionals, and representatives of all the social studies with one another. The association combined in its learning a certain root flavor of idealism and reformism, as was appropriate to its origin and history.

The arrangements in this case indicate general fairness, if not fondness, for the single-tax movement. Besides George himself, two lawyers, Samuel B. Clarke and William Lloyd Garrison II, and a land-title expert of Boston, J. R. Carrett, were the invited speakers clearly on the single-tax side. Sure to take the negative side were Edward Atkinson, whom George had just debated in print, and William T. Harris, who was now United States commissioner of education.³⁴ Two college economists, John Bates Clark (whose paper we have already drawn on) and the young Edwin A. Seligman of Columbia, were perhaps as certain as any to speak on that side.

Others seem to have been less predictable, and plainly a few of them provided surprises. Thomas Davidson, whom we have met as a teasing friend of George, sent a paper which went entirely against the single tax. He spoke from somewhat state-solidarist, perhaps Hegelian, grounds. 'The true way to regard property,' he said, 'is as a gift of the state.' Professor Edmund J. James, of Pennsylvania, very recent founder of the American Academy of Social and Po-

litical Science and soon to be a university president, pleased George and distressed Seligman by announcing a mild degree of approval. (His paper was not printed.) President Andrews took the friendly, middling position we know. He connected George's analysis with the recent *Analysis of Property under the Capitalist Regime* by Achille Loria, and said that 'an increasing number of able English and American writers share this view.' The record of the meeting gives the impression that the single tax gained more than it lost from those who might be called the uncommitted, or not clearly committed, speakers.

The fight of the meeting, the combat which left the scars, occurred between George and the Columbia professor. Seligman was just thirty years old, with his future great standing as tax expert and economist still to be attained. The antagonism, which sprang up when he spoke, seems to have derived as much from his manner as his argument. He spoke of 'the general science of finance' as though it were little understood, and as though understanding were reserved to readers of scholarly literature in foreign languages. He proposed to test the single tax by what he called the standards of universality, equality, and justice, and he found it lacking. He assured the audience that professors of political economy as a group rejected it.

George was stung. 'Let me say a direct word to you professors of political economy, you men of light and leading, who are fighting the single tax with evasions and quibbles and hair-splitting ... You must choose the single tax, with its recognition of the rights of the individual, with its recognition of the province of government, with its recognition of the rights of property on the one hand, or socialism on the other.'

It was the anger of the reformer against the academician's assumption of the higher judgment. Yet Seligman's rejoinder won from George a half-

apology for having called professors bartered minds. Seligman insisted that George overdid the distinction between property in land and property in things; and he said that Bellamy's socialism had grown at George's expense because it recognized that other values than land gained unearned increments. He demanded that social reformers 'not offer us schemes which are repugnant to our moral sense and repellent to our logic'; and

he denounced *isms* and panaceas of all kinds. In later writings Seligman rounded off his case against the single tax — criticizing the singleness of it, and repudiating its natural-law foundation.

The battle of wits at Saratoga was George's third and last test by the measure of university men in America. Berkeley in 1877 was the first, and the magazine controversies with Sumner and Walker in 1883 the second. Ruefully he now wrote to Dr. Taylor that schoolmen rejected him. 'How persistent is the manner in which the professors and those who esteem themselves the learned class ignore and slur me; but I am not conscious of any other feeling about it than that of a certain curiosity.'

In the longer perspective we know that the total situation was not as unfriendly as he said. In the letter just quoted George added that he had 'been looking over some of the more recent politico-economic treatises. How clearly *Progress and Poverty* has influenced them, even though they ignore it.' This did not exaggerate. He may have been scanning some of Clark's writings, or Ely's. Even the writings of Edwin Seligman, Professor Dorfman now tells us, came to show some effect of Henry George. Though a reformer's bias must be discounted, it is worth anticipating that, a year later, when Bolton Hall as secretary of the New York Tax Reform Association was seeking support for that organization's mild Georgism he was able to say that he had received 143 answers to an inquiry addressed to 'leading political economists in our colleges. Of these 78 are highly favorable, including those of Bowdoin, Brown, Columbia, Harvard, New York University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Virginia, Union, Williams, and others.'

As of 1890, neither Henry George nor anyone else could count, before they became vocal, the sympathetic professors of the next generation, the young men whose minds were already being disturbed by *Progress and Poverty*. But the testimony of such future professional students of

economics and society as Edward A. Ross, John R. Commons, and Thorstein Veblen tells us that they and their kind were affected. In the final chapter of this biography we shall encounter second-generation consciences stirred by Henry George, quite apart from any single-tax commitment; and in that afterphase professional economists were to have a considerable role.

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The obligations of the controversies just discussed — the public appearances, the writing of letters, and apparently the planning and rough-sketching of articles — bore upon George in September and October principally. During November he went off to Texas on a two-week speaking trip. On the way out he stopped a couple of days in Memphis, where he made several addresses before women's organizations and Jewish groups which had invited him. Though he mentions one or two light audiences in Texas, there were single-tax clubs across the state — he went all the way to San Antonio — and he made \$1200 or more on the tour. He was received by the mayor and council of Dallas; and he was obliged to cancel an engagement in Galveston in order to accept an invitation, and a \$250 fee, to address the legislature in Austin. On the way home he stopped in Evansville, Indiana, for a speech arranged by the Central Labor Union — a kind of auspice not frequent on this journey. Altogether he had a hard trip, though doubtless also a good and reassuring one.

The chief incidental event of the fall of 1890 heightened the effect of pressures on the man, and of making high decisions. Since 1886 there had been snarled in the New Jersey courts the disposition of the so-called Hutchins legacy, \$10,000 designated for Henry George. A widow's need, and opposition in the family complicated the situation. At an early stage of the litigation a judge had ruled that the money could not be delivered, because George's ideas were contrary to law. This amounted to a state inquisition and an Index in New Jersey. But during his own campaigning and travel, George's lawyers had won a reversal of that decision, and at this point he was offered the remnant of his legacy left after charges had been deducted — a net amount of \$435. In this autumn of controversy, however, Henry George chose to fight his own lawyer rather than take the tiny amount, because the bases of settlement did not suit him. Meanwhile giving

financial assistance to the widow of his admirer, he refused the money — and would wait four years longer to win a final token of \$200.

The suggestion which the story of the Hutchins case conveys, that George was in an easy position as to money, at least, while life was otherwise so complicated, corresponds with other indications.

The house on Nineteenth Street, though his daughter remembers it as shabby, was costing \$1000 a year, he told Thomas Briggs, and it required two servants. It is hard to believe that his recent earnings from lectures, abroad and at home, sufficed to account for his capacity to handle such costs; but it is easy to assume, either that he was already receiving direct subsidies from his wealthy followers, or that he had been assured he could have support, whenever he needed it.

Perhaps until December 1890, any subsidy he had took the form of salary from the *Standard*. The contributions which Tom Johnson, August Lewis, and Thomas Shearman were making to the paper now amounted, it seems, to \$7000 or \$8000 a year. But George apparently did not feel that he had to depend on the weekly; and he made arrangements, during the fall, for the final surrender of his position. His nearly eight months out of the country had convinced him that the *Standard* could carry on without him. To the guarantors he now stated that for some time his services had been only nominal, and that he could not go back to the old weight and haul. Did they want the paper continued, he inquired, or should the *Standard* and its deficits be at last put to rest? He left the decision to others.

A committee was set up. Agreement was quickly reached that George should be relieved, but that the paper should be continued for the benefit of single-taxers. Accordingly a new publishing firm was formed, to take over from Henry George and Company at the end of the calendar year. Fresh capital was supplied by the sale of shares of stock; Croasdale took the editorship; and he, until his death, and then Louis Post, would carry on the paper for twenty months longer.

On 5 December, two days after announcing in the *Standard* the change of proprietorship and control, and just as his activities were lightening, Henry George was struck down temporarily. The trouble began with a horrible headache; and for three days he could speak hardly at all. When the

doctors came they called it aphasia: 'a slight hemorrhage in that part of the brain which presides over articulate speech.' As he himself came to recall the experience, though he lost all power to understand or express words, he felt perfectly clear of mind from first to last.

After the first few days he was a poor patient. Permitted to be up and around the house, he paid little attention to doctors' orders — four were consulted — to rest and not to try to write. Friends rallied round. John Russell Young called daily; Boston friends, Garrison and Louis Prang, wrote affectionate letters. From Birmingham, Thomas Walker, who had not yet replied to a long critique from George, wrote that his 'heart stood still' when he learned of the prostration. Very delicately he offered to take up any debt that might remain in George's name against the *Standard*, and offered any other assistance he could render. To Tom Johnson, whom he had never met, Walker wrote in anxiety, lest George return too soon to harness. 'Although I by no means accept slavishly all his conclusions, I recognize with deep gratitude that he has struck the keynote of the future universal harmony. For me, he has absolutely drawn aside the veil that hid the next stride in human progress, and has given to life a meaning and a brightness which previously it lacked.' Could Mr. Johnson persuade George, the Englishman inquired, to permit one or two of his followers to relieve him of financial worry? Walker implied a wish to make a sizable contribution.

Johnson and Lewis had already acted. Johnson wrote that George did not need help; and George, writing five weeks after the stroke, said that he felt entirely secure for the future. Recently he had had more invitations to lecture than he could accept, he said, at \$125 per engagement. The letters to Walker did not say that Tom Johnson had provided for Mrs. George, in case of her husband's death; and it is not clear whether or not recent disagreements about ideas had anything to do with their refusing Walker.

As sensibly as generously, his rich American disciples wanted George to have a complete change of situation, and absolute separation from his desk. They selected Bermuda for a vacation. The arrangement proved just about perfect; and, amusingly, perhaps the only incongruity of the excursion was provided by Mr. Lewis' selection of a gift. He presented George with three volumes of Schopenhauer. The voyager actually managed a volume or more — 'like a red flag to a bull,' he said.

Mr. and Mrs. George had as traveling companions the Simon Mendelsons, who were the parents of Mrs. Lewis and Dr. Walter Mendelson, who had attended him. Only it was about as hard to keep Henry George quiet in Bermuda as in Manhattan. One single-

taxer, on from New York with a bicycle, taught him to ride; and he loved the popular sport. Other single-taxers — an army chaplain and the editor of a Bermuda paper — kept him talking — more than seems likely to have been good for George. He went sailing several times with Horace White's daughter, who became devoted to him. Except that, as an expatriated Californian, Mrs. George thought the Bermuda climate overrated, she especially loved the sojourn, and delighted in the rest her husband was getting.

For Henry George, himself, however, five or six weeks were enough, and all he wanted. By that time he felt that he must get home and be doing something, or at least preparing for work.

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'I shall try to give a good account of the next few years if God spares me,' George had written Durant a week before the attack. Now he returned to duty in just that mood.

After taking time to visit Harry, in Washington, he plowed straight ahead. Within less than a month he had caught up with the preliminaries of major writing: getting settled at his desk, looking over old writings on subjects about to be undertaken, making plans. He sought Dr. Taylor's help in acquiring copies of his quarter-century-old pieces in the *Overland Monthly* — his memory was none too accurate about them. He considered a reprint edition of *Our Land and Land Policy*. Before April ended he had actually 'got to work' on the general treatise on political economy, which he had been contemplating for twenty years.

But on 15 May 1891, a world event in social thought and policy deflected his course. On that date appeared *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical 'On the Condition of Labour,' which has often been called the Magna Charta of the working man. It climaxed a series of ethical pronouncements. Leo's earlier letters had concerned *Political Power*, *Human Liberty*, and the *Christian Constitution of the State*. The series, and

Rerum Novarum especially, is accounted by friendly scholarship to indicate a decision by the Catholic Church, ‘in a democratic age to seek popular in place of princely support,’ and a wish to establish ‘a kind of truce of God in the industrial world, all towards a new organization of society based upon some conception of equality.’ The central thought of the new encyclical recognized that the very poor of the age were wretched and defenseless; it denied *laissez faire* economics of the Malthus-Spencer variety; it condemned ‘rapacious usury’; and it regretted the passing away of guilds, as the ancient stabilizers of the condition of labor. According to traditions of church thinking, Leo repudiated the strong state, and so, socialism, as a solution for labor; and equally he rejected social warfare, both the idea of class struggle and the practice of strikes by labor unions. Of course the encyclical has become established in the twentieth century as the fundamental document of Catholic policy toward capital and labor under the industrial system.

Though it offended him, so much of the encyclical conformed with Henry George’s ideas that it was possible, when he drew his thoughts together, for him to acknowledge a certain basis of agreement. He appreciated, he said, ‘the many wholesome truths’ contained in *Rerum Novarum*, and felt, ‘as all of us must feel, that [the pope was] animated by a desire to help the suffering and oppressed.’ This degree of confidence made his situation with Leo different from his old situation with Archbishop Corrigan and Catholics of that kind, in America and Ireland.

Unfortunately for George, the pope’s letter had altogether too little in common with Father McGlynn’s old position — or Father Dawson’s or the Bishop of Meath’s. It acknowledged class differences as unconquerable, a part of God’s plan. ‘Just as the symmetry of the human body is the result of the disposition of the members of the body, so in a state is it ordained by nature that these two classes should exist in harmony and agreement, and should, as it were, fit into one another, so as to maintain the equilibrium of the body politic.’ Leo recommended workmen’s associations, on condition that the members pay ‘special and principal attention to piety and morality’; and he encouraged a necessary minimum of state intervention in favor of fair wages, when economic need might require. Sufficient wages and adequate accumulation for all were the pope’s main answers to the problem of poverty. Obliquely but forcefully he resisted radical land reform. ‘Man

not only can possess the fruits of the earth, but also the earth itself ... And to say that God has given the earth to the use and the enjoyment of the universal human race is not to deny that there can be private property.'

Perhaps there is suspicion of megalomania in Henry George's

hot individual reaction to a document drawn up for universal reading and guidance. The 'most strikingly pronounced condemnations of *Rerum Novarum* were directed against the ideas of *Progress and Poverty*' he declared. Three days after the encyclical was released he wrote to Father Dawson how distressed he was: 'You know the result in Ireland of ignoring principle.' But very soon he had confirmation from Henry George, Jr., who was in London on a journalistic assignment, that his first fears had been correct. The young man had gone to call on Cardinal Manning. Did the encyclical contain anything against his father's views, he had inquired. 'His name is not mentioned,' the cardinal replied. Did the encyclical censure the idea of the common ownership of land? 'Smooth as satin,' according to the caller, Manning had said that he believed it did. 'This knocked me endways,' wrote the son; and he had departed with no further questions. Thus the Henry George evidence does seem to indicate that not Karl Marx the materialist but a disturbing American idealist had been the great enemy in ideas, at whom Pope Leo was striking.

Making almost no speeches at all this year, George concentrated more intensely than at any time since 1878. In five months he completed his reply, *The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*, a book a little over a hundred pages. It was published in October. Throughout the essay the author adopted such an editorial 'we' as few other Americans would have had either temerity or dignity to assume. He took advantage of the fact that he — unlike his more evolution-minded contemporaries — based his thinking, as much as anyone else, on religious assumptions.

In his own words: 'Our postulates are all stated or implied in your Encyclical. They are the primary perceptions of human reason, the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.' Consider, he invited, what Bishop Nulty of Meath, 'who sees all this as clearly as we do,' has to say about property in land. 'In this beautiful provision [of economic rent] made by natural law for the social needs of civilization we see that God has intended civilization . . . Property that in itself has no moral sanction does

not obtain moral sanction by passing from seller to buyer. If right reason does not make the slave the property of the slave hunter it does not make him the property of the slave buyer ... For the justice of God laughs at the efforts of men to circumvent it, and the subtle law that binds

humanity together poisons the rich in the sufferings of the poor ... Failing to see the order and symmetry of natural law, [socialism] fails to recognize God ... The whole tendency and spirit of [*Rerum Novarum's*] remedial suggestions lean unmistakably to socialism ... Did not Christ in all his utterances and parables show that the gross difference between rich and poor is opposed to God's law? ... Your encyclical gives the gospel to labourers and the earth to the landlords ... In your hands more than those of any living man lies the power to say the word and make the sign that shall end an unnatural divorce, and marry again to religion all that is pure and high in social aspiration.'

As he wrote, Henry George took every precaution, making an unusual form of argument, to reason as closely as possible. Father Huntington advised him, thanking God as he did so that the single tax was being presented as a law of nature; and Bishop Huntington commended the book in his diocesan paper and wished for 10,000 copies to be circulated as a tract. Proofs went out, with requests for suggestions, to Sister Teresa, Thomas Walker, John Russell Young, and William Lloyd Garrison. The son of the liberator, the most recent friend in the group, responded at once. 'If the Pope don't read it Christians will,' wrote Garrison, and he urged that clergymen be bombarded with copies. John Russell Young, now in Philadelphia, never a single-taxer, had equal enthusiasm. 'It is a masterpiece,' he wrote, 'and explains problems in your philosophy that never were clear in your book or your conversation. I envy you the vigor and truth and splendor of your style' — it surpassed all since Burke, this learned man added. None was more delighted than Thomas Walker, so recently dissatisfied with his friend. The book would be 'a crusher, a bombshell,' he wrote. On the Catholic side, friends in San Francisco were pleased; and Father Dawson, after some thought, praised George for the 'excellent use of a fine opportunity' and predicted that the book would do much good, whether or not the pope would come to understand it.

For Henry George himself, there was amusement and curiosity, not much importance, in the point discussed in New York newspapers: Did the

pope actually receive the letter? George learned that he did, more than once. Besides proof sent by the author in September, and a copy of the American edition, Leo received into

his own hands, from the prefect of the Vatican Library, a handsome copy of the Italian edition. There followed, within a couple of years, an edition in England, the first of three, and an edition in Germany. A Swedish, and apparently a Spanish one, followed much later.

Realizing that he could expect no reply from the pope himself or from a spokesman, George had hoped simply to put pressure on all socially minded Christians. 'What I have really aimed at,' he told Harry, 'is to make a clear brief explanation of our principles, to show their religious character, and to draw a line between us and the socialists. I have written really for such men as Cardinal Manning, General Booth, and religious-minded men of all creeds.' If as author he had been a bit disingenuous, and thought beforehand to stir up such cross-purposes within the Catholic Church as occurred in New York City in 1886, George did not announce any such intention, even to his closest correspondents.

Yet on a small scale that was the result. Some American Catholics of course sympathized with George's ethical argument, this time as earlier; and almost automatically these churchmen were obliged to raise questions of authority. Edward Osgood Brown, Catholic lawyer of Chicago, whom George had wanted to go over his manuscript before publication, said that no well-instructed Catholic supposed the encyclical to be such an utterance of the Holy See as is held infallible by Catholic doctrine. On the other side, as George reported to Father Dawson on 22 December, Archbishop Corrigan was openly proclaiming 'that all Catholics are bound by the Encyclical as well as by a well established doctrine of Holy Writ.' This led to as bitter a statement as George ever made, even in 1882 or in 1887, about the church. To the same friend and priest he continued: 'Catholic priests seem so thoroughly bulldozed that they are afraid to openly deny this teaching. I cannot but despise and hope for the downfall of a hierarchy that teaches so slavish a doctrine, and time will surely bring it ... [I] wish that the spirituality of the Church could in some way be separated from its political and corrupt machine, which turns into merchandise the efforts and sacrifices of men and women who are really God's servants.'

Accidents of chronology now help us tie together the events of five years. Four years, to a day, before this bitter letter, Henry

George had written the same priest the hopeful news that Cardinal Manning and Archbishop Walsh were trying to get the McGlynn case reopened. Since that expectation had proved false, little that was friendly or favorable had occurred between the reformer and the church. But just a year after *The Condition of Labor*, 23 December 1892, George reported to Father Dawson a change. ‘Something wonderful has happened on this side of the water. The Pope has quietly but effectively sat down on the ultramontane Toryism of prelates like Archbishop Corrigan. Their fighting the public school has stopped ... I have for some time believed Leo XIII to be a very great man, but this transcends my anticipations. Whether he ever read my letter I cannot tell, but he has been acting as though he had not only read it, but had recognized its force.’

The most startling and newsworthy event of all was that Father McGlynn was now actually restored to his offices. As the priest himself presently told George the confidential story, the restoration was managed by a churchman close to Pope Leo. This was Archbishop Satolli, who had just come to the United States as papal nuncio. He invited the rebel of St. Stephen’s to put into his own words the doctrines that had caused all the trouble. The resulting memorandum of beliefs, according to the man who wrote it, simply incorporated without quotation marks ‘passages largely from [George’s] own admirable letter to the Pope and partly from the Pope’s encyclical.’ The nuncio, who was himself a theologian, submitted McGlynn’s essay to four theologians at Catholic University. When on 23 December they attested that there was nothing contrary to doctrine, Archbishop Satolli removed the censures. No retractions of economic opinion were asked, and very little, if anything, was made of McGlynn’s refusals of 1886 and 1887 to obey orders.

On Christmas Day Father McGlynn said mass three times, and in the evening addressed the Anti-Poverty Society. To his old friend, Henry George wired congratulations — an overture toward their coming reconciliation. He and Father Dawson exchanged a pleasantry about a future Cardinal McGlynn. This was far enough from what would actually happen, as the two correspondents themselves must have known. Presently

Father McGlynn was assigned an inconspicuous parish up the Hudson at Newburgh.

Nevertheless the Satolli decision marked a victory for freedom within the Catholic Church, and for freedom in America. One would like to penetrate behind the scenes and understand more closely the change of ruling. Recent Catholic scholarship assumes that George's book did have an effect within the church, and did help restore McGlynn. This seems the only plausible assumption. Yet if this is true, the outsider's little book helped to establish a very puzzling church situation. For the Satolli decision appears to contradict utterly the secret condemnation of George's works, by the Inquisition, three years earlier.³⁵

Of the two policies, the Satolli decision is the one the church seems to have decided to live by. Since 1892 Catholic thinkers have contemplated as within reason George's distinction between property in land and other private property, and seem to have been positively affected. The writings of Father John A. Ryan of Catholic University, in this century American Catholicism's outstanding social thinker, are a case in point. This scholar rejected George's formulas, but agreed in part on taxation and on the social nature of rent. And for decades now, individual Catholics have acknowledged deep loyalty to George without being censured and have strongly advocated his proposals.

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The Condition of Labor, though climactic, is only one instance of Henry George's success at marshaling Christian ideas in behalf of social reform. This strength had its corresponding weakness. As he himself came close to saying to Henry George, Jr., there were whole areas of society he could not expect to reach by the use of religious and natural-rights arguments.

An illustration of this came from California. 'There are many brilliant and many true things in Mr. George's book,' wrote President David Starr Jordan of Stanford, and 'I am not objecting to the idea of the public use of *land* rentals.' But this scientist and great citizen, who was readier than most scholars to speak for social improvement, could not stomach *The Condition of Labor's* underlying argument. 'A land tax is no more God-given than a

beer tax!' he protested, and said that the reformer's metaphysics poisoned all the books he wrote.

There is no precise name for the boundary of thought that separated George from the secular-minded, who were offended by the drafts he made on Christian and natural-rights ideas. Practical men abounded on the side opposite George. Huxley had represented them. Andrew Carnegie represented them in a different way, in 1891, in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*. The writing ironmaster asserted that all economists disagreed with Henry George and said also that the emergence of millionaires in America signified the well-being, not the hardship, of working men. Carnegie's real belief was in social progress of an almost automatic sort; and Henry George's own word which comprehended that philosophy, 'materialism,' though not precise was not inaccurate either. The phrase 'Social Darwinism,' which, as we have seen, scholars have adopted, comes close. George had had one collision with this *ism* in 1883, in the person of its high spokesman, William Graham Sumner. By now it was suffocatingly strong, in business and educational circles especially.

Perhaps Henry George regarded his old determination, to write a positive statement of idealism, as having been fulfilled by the letter to Pope Leo. The scope of that book makes it seem natural, at any rate, that he returned in 1892 to the polemic type of effort which he had planned and set aside two years earlier: a refutation of popular philosophy. The Huxley articles were old by now, but Herbert Spencer, whom George chose to call the 'Pope of the Agnostics,' offered a wide-open opportunity for controversy.

It will be recalled that George's first fondness for Spencer, from California days, had been chilled at a London party in 1882 and had been dissolved altogether when Spencer repudiated any identification with radical land doctrine. George's fresh occasion to give challenge came when Spencer at last changed certain writings to bring them into accord with his actual beliefs. During the early '90s he was especially troubled by the advance of Georgist ideas into the actual practice of local taxation in Britain. In 1891 he published his little book, *Justice*; and the next year he

brought out a redoing of his first book as *Social Statics, Abridged and Revised*.

In *Justice* he specifically said that, though the 'equitable claim' of each citizen to the use of the earth resided in the discretion of legislatures, the operation of that claim was in fact 'traversed by established arrangement to so great an extent as to be practically suspended.' For the new *Social Statics* the author eliminated the objection he had made in 1850 to private property in land, and he filled space by inserting certain magazine articles of 1884, which were already well known under the general title, *Man versus the State*. This subtracting and adding of material gave the revised book consistency with the complete *laissez faire* of Spencer's later years. In George's opinion the changes so far overshot the philosopher's original individualism as to make 'a new departure' in his way of thought. Spencer was now assuming, George charged, that 'nothing at all is needed, in the nature either of palliative or remedy.'

George understood thoroughly how popular the doctrine was, and the figure, he was attacking. But, to him, Spencer's infidelity to his first judgment about property in land was part and parcel of the tardiness of the United States to accept *Progress and Poverty*. So once again the treatise on economics was left to wait, and a new book was given priority. Dr. Taylor urged caution. Henry George would be invincible against Herbert Spencer on the land question, the old friend counseled, but perhaps not so successful against the whole cosmogony of that philosopher. Yet George would not be persuaded. 'What I quarrel with is the essential materialism of Spencerian ideas, and this seems to me to inhere in them, in spite of all Spencer's denials.' He simply wanted to reassert the philosophy of *Progress and Poverty*, he explained, and not at all to deny 'the principle of evolution with which I do not quarrel.' He admired Darwin and Wallace, he said, because they wisely 'confined themselves so to speak to their muttons.' He most specifically did want to challenge the Spencerian extension of evolution into philosophy and into public policy.

In some degree George actually achieved his difficult goal. His chapter, 'The Synthetic Philosophy,' explains with uncommon force the materialism and fatalism so often implicit in evolutionary thinking. His footnote illustration from the case of E. L. Youmans, whom he described as wearing his Spencerian ideas 'like an ill-fitting coat he had accidentally

picked up and put on,' is especially telling. He had once heard Mr. Youmans denounce corruption in New York politics. 'What do you propose to do about it?' George had asked. 'Nothing! You and I can do nothing. It's all a matter of evolution. We can only wait for evolution. Perhaps in four or

five thousand years evolution may have carried men beyond this state of things. But we can do nothing.'

The writer achieved a kind of magnificence, too, in the field of his original quarrel with Spencer. In a chapter entitled 'Compensation,' he discussed again the question whether landlords should be paid by the state whenever land might be transformed from private into public property. He could hardly have changed his own mind on the subject. And yet, to state a firm no, at this time, was of course to imply great disagreement with his own followers of the 'single tax limited' persuasion. Their very existence challenged his doctrine. Notwithstanding the hazard, he wrote the most eloquent plea he had ever made, for confiscation. Followers at home and abroad were so struck by the chapter that they asked for separate publication.

For his own sake, it seems unfortunate that George did not act on that particular piece of advice. Though *A Perplexed Philosopher* contains two brilliant chapters, it is as a whole an unsatisfactory book, the only dull one the author ever wrote. The bulk of it traces interminably Spencer's various sayings about land, and attributes his recent conservatism to low motives. There can be little doubt that George proved Spencer to have contradicted himself, and to have displayed insincerity and even irresponsibility by keeping the old *Social Statics* in circulation for years after he had changed his opinions. Letters of approval from friends, notably Thomas Walker, Senator Carlisle, and Lloyd Garrison, can be understood to indicate an animus toward Spencer. But George's attack was too long and elaborate to be interesting, and so ill-spirited as to invite reply in the same tone.

Spencer himself made no response. But two years later, readers of the New York *Tribune* were treated to such a comment by a group which included Professor Youmans and John Fiske. *A Perplexed Philosopher* was translated only once, into Russian, and it was given very few reviews. From England, J. C. Durant wrote, even before publication, that the effort would prove 'somewhat of a waste of energy.' The real victory of the writer, he

added, was the return of a radical county council for London, several members 'out and out Henry George men.' From an opposite corner of the earth, Professor Joseph Le Conte assured George that what he had

said about evolution was sound enough, but that he had been too hard on Herbert Spencer.

A subtotaling of George's writings, since the trip to Australia, is in order. He had thus quickly gone as far as he was able in treating two subjects that had confronted him on his return to the country in September 1890. On the relation of Christianity to economic reconstruction, he had spoken against clericalism twice, once within his American reform movement, and once against the pope in Rome. Yet he had consistently maintained that faith is necessary for good works in society. On the dangers of evolutionary materialism to social thought, he had been equally definite. Though he challenged the mind of his age, he would remain to life's end an idealist.

Having been so definite with those who disagreed with him, Henry George logically returned once again to his treatise. He was now more than ever obliged to demonstrate, if he could, that the ideas he pronounced did actually belong to the science of political economy — and should be introduced into the policy of nations.

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After the false starts of 1891 and 1892, and the interruptions caused by the excursions against Leo XIII and Herbert Spencer, George at last felt free in late 1892 to give much attention to the big commitment. Even so, he withdrew from affairs less completely than he had while he was doing *Progress and Poverty*. As we shall see, he gave time and attention to national politics in the exciting years 1892, 1894, and 1896. In late 1893 for the first time since the stroke, and again in early 1894 and during the following winter, he did a good deal of traveling and lecturing.

But he did settle at his desk for long intervals. Apropos of current hard times, he wrote an article on depression theory which was published in the *North American* for February 1894. It chanced to be printed next to a famous article by William Dean Howells, 'Are We a Plutocracy?' George's interpretation of unemployment was no different from the ideas he had

discovered in California; but the article gave him the opportunity to say that New Zealand, which he called the most prosperous place in the world at the moment, owed its advantage to a partial policy of land-value taxation.

Writing articles and lectures may help with a book while an author's new ideas are germinating. But the restatement of old conceptions is useless; and one senses that, about the time of doing the depression article, George feared he would never complete the treatise. On the last day of 1894, writing to Thomas Walker who always sent him letters on Christmas and his birthday, he confessed recent discouragement. Though his courage returned, his expectations about finishing the work were several times put off. Nearly three years passed before he made up his mind he wanted 'The Science of Political Economy' as his title. He had waited to be sure, but he said at that time that he had made a science of the subject.

George's anxieties do him credit. He had changed, and the situation had changed, since he had last ventured to revise economics. In ways not again possible during the '90s, George as author of *Progress and Poverty* had conformed, not in ideas but by putting them on paper in the way economic ideas were usually written about. As he was a journalist then, so Malthus in his day had been a parson, Ricardo a businessman, and John Stuart Mill a civil servant; and, on the American side, Raymond had been a lawyer, and the Careys and Greeley had been editors and publishers. That is to say, big economic thinking and systematizing during the earlier nineteenth century had been non-academic, non-professional work, frequently, and had often had reformist or political purpose.

But by the time he got to work on *The Science of Political Economy*, the surrounding situation was different. Though we may have a good deal of sympathy for George's feeling, that the professors displayed considerable arrogance and animus against him, there could be no gainsaying that the new academic chairs and professional societies represented an enormous growth of economic literature which was strange to him. Importations and incorporations of ideas were taking place: from Jevons, from Marshall, from Schmoller and Wagner in Germany, and from Boehm-Bawerk and others of the Austrian school, for instance. Their influence, combining with native impulses, was making economic thought in the United States an

infinitely more complex thing than the classical British economics, which was the only kind George ever mastered.

The problem came up in midsummer, 1897. George's friend, Lawson Purdy, had gotten for him, from Professor Hiram Loomis of Northwestern University, a memorandum on the Austrian economists for quick study. Though Professor Loomis wrote that he advocated the Austrians and said that he believed that, except for interest theory, their ideas actually reinforced George's, the toiling author could find no benefit in them. In this final text, George said that if the Austrian school was based on 'any principles, I have been unable to find them.' At the same point he dismissed his old antagonist, Alfred Marshall, as 'incomprehensible.' To George the new economics was a 'pseudo-science,' and was 'indeed, admirably calculated to serve the purpose of those powerful interests dominant in the colleges under our organization, that must fear a simple and understandable political economy, and who vaguely wish to have the poor boys who are subjected to it by their professors rendered incapable of thought on economic subjects.'³⁶

Perhaps George's mood would have been better suited for writing an essay in irony than for composing a comprehensive treatise. But the treatise is what he persisted in trying to write. Before the final few months his correspondence supplies no more than occasional indications of his progress. Besides depression theory, he tackled money and banking. He looked over his old writings, as far back as the editorials on convertible bonds and greenbacks, in the San Francisco *Times* three decades earlier. But he did not attempt to write up such technical matter this time. When the treatise finally appeared, the tenor of its definitions of terms and the discussions of the functions of money were governed by the old anti-inflationist convictions of the author. The opposite of 'Coin' Harvey, and the large silver bloc now in Congress, George wanted no dependence on money reform as a means of economic stimulation.³⁷

While *The Science of Political Economy* was still in the middle stages of composition, George had separate chapters, as he wrote them, put into galley proof for distribution. Louis Post, who was now working for the Cleveland *Recorder*, was able to make the arrangements. This gave the author the advantage of safety (he wanted no such loss again as occurred to the first manuscript of Protection or Free Trade), and gave him unusual

freedom to invite friends to read and criticize. Louis Post was asked. His new wife, Alice Thacher, a religious person who was intensely interested in the single tax, helped also. The author called on Dr. Edward Taylor once more, and on Lloyd Garrison — who had had and approved George's last two manuscripts.

Any preliminary criticisms, which might have been rendered at the stage when an author feels somewhat malleable, are not of record. But early in 1897, when George was estimating that he would probably need somewhat more than a year to finish, his intimates made comments which indicate them to have been baffled. Dr. Taylor praised 'great thought' and elevation of tone, once more, but said also that much of the manuscript seemed irrelevant. Tactfully the old associate enclosed a sonnet, the best he had ever written he was sure, and added that he wished no more than to leave one song that his fellow men would not forget.

But Post wrote in brutal candor. The sentences were too long — one contained 275 words — and the whole treatment lacked sharpness. George must not let himself think that the work was anywhere near done. Mrs. Post, with her Swedenborgian sensibilities at work, submitted her own separate criticism. She liked a certain opening passage on evolution, in which George discussed the special powers of reason and morality which elevate man above the animals. To the harsher criticisms, George's simple answer was that he would stick to his guns. 'I put my own judgment against yours ... and my own judgment is that this will be equal to Progress and Poverty.'

But it is doubtful that his confidence ran deep. In the latter part of the month in which these criticisms came in, the curtain dropped briefly, all too much like the attack of seven years earlier. Dizziness and nausea overcame Henry George, and utter weariness. To Dr. Taylor he wrote that he had had to stop work for a while, 'from fear of the prostration I had in 1890.' He resisted a doctor's suggestion that he take a sea rest again. This meant that he was at home, not quite recovered, when the saddest possible family event occurred. His daughter Jennie came on from her home in Baltimore, with her husband and new baby, for a visit. Typhoid struck like lightning and she died in her parents' house. The father bore the loss bravely, but the family sensed that he believed he had not much longer to live.

All this occurred in the spring of 1897, and events and conditions left sharp memories. His children noticed that Henry George reverted, again and

again, to ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’ and the Scriptures.

One day, while Richard George was doing a bust of him, the father said mildly, ‘When I am dead you boys will have this bust to carry in my funeral procession as was the custom with the Romans.’

Yet George’s letters of the summer show him back at work. He carried his draft through a series of chapters on economic value, notwithstanding his incapacity to read the extensive new scholarship in that field. Presently the call came, as it had in 1886, that he run for mayor of New York. He consulted his doctors and was told that a campaign would probably kill him. But he did not refuse the nomination and meanwhile continued with his writing. Three weeks before the vote he was sending out chapters for criticism and suggestion.

By doing the two things at once he indicates that he had made a remarkable decision. He would complete his book if he could. But he would take a huge risk of never finishing, in order to be candidate. That is, at final choice he preferred to dramatize his career in an appeal to voters in the general terms of politics rather than to reargue the technical background of reform.

From all that he said and did, the present writer believes the decision represents a tacit acknowledgment by George that he was unable to weld a new system of economics. When he lay down his pen, the six chapters on money still lacked recommendations for positive national policy. Chapters on wages and rent were wanting. In many other ways the book was not complete. Perhaps George reasoned that, whether or not he ran for mayor, his life would be too short to complete the writing. Or, just possibly, he admitted to himself alone that he had made a mistake of planning — that he was not the man, after all, to venture a compendious survey.

Unquestionably *The Science of Political Economy*, as Henry George, Jr., had it published in 1898, does not satisfy his father’s first plan or the recent choice of title. Just as certainly, like the book against Herbert Spencer, it does contain passages of eloquence and of great logical power. The more interestingly because they had no great sympathy for Henry George otherwise, Charles and Mary Beard paid high tribute to this book’s eloquence about the nature of civilization and humanity, and George’s

perception of the relation of economics to politics. ‘The body economic, or Greater Leviathan,’ he said, ‘always precedes and underlies the body politic, or the Leviathan ...’ The author restated his religious and rationalist humanism: ‘Is it not in [the] power “of thinking things out,” of “seeing the way through” ... that we find the essence of what we call reason? ... Here is the true Promethean spark, the endowment to which the Hebrew Scriptures refer when they say that God created man in his own image; and the means by which we of all animals become the progressive animal. Here is the germ of civilization.’

If *A Perplexed Philosopher*, in 1892, was two books not one — short declarations of ideas and a long exposure of Herbert Spencer — the *Science of Political Economy* was several books. The parts that came intensely from the writer’s experience were good; and the parts that came from his deferred studies were neither good nor successful. In some sections the book is autobiography. One chapter, an afterthought which George slipped in late, is really a short history of *Progress and Poverty*³⁸; and other chapters in Book 11, though listed as a survey of economic thought since the Physiocrats, are better understood as a review of certain books as sources of Henry George’s ideas. The book is an arraignment in part. It completes Henry George’s charge that economists in rejecting *Progress and Poverty* had rejected their consciences’ best judgment. Though this passage is less self-righteous than the corresponding part of *A Perplexed Philosopher*, the signs of a reformer’s frustrations are neither pleasant nor persuasive.

As a treatise for students and reviewers, *The Science of Political Economy* received about what its frailties deserved, not much consideration in the journals. Yet, a little paradoxically in view of how Henry George had been treated by Yale economists during his lifetime, a year after the author’s death the book was reviewed, considerately and wisely if not favorably, by Arthur Twining Hadley. There are no contemporary words with which to take fairer leave of the latter-day Henry George, as writer, than Hadley’s. They deserve quotation: ‘Henry George was a great preacher ... But in proportion as George passes from the field of oratory into the field of science, his work becomes less good ... The book has little which is really new, unless it be a somewhat commonplace metaphysics within which the author tries to frame his economic system. Subtract this, and we have

simply a new edition of *Progress and Poverty*, less well written, *plus* a number of rather disconnected ut-

terances ... For this reason it is quite impossible to review the book *in extenso*. This is not the first time a good preacher has proved himself a poor controversialist. Those of us who have admired George for his brilliant earlier work and for his unblemished personal character can only regret that this last book was ever written and desire that it may be forgotten as soon as possible.'

Neither Professor Hadley nor any other critic could have understood that he was reviewing an effort which had been sacrificed, rather than a text which the author thought he had mastered. *The Science of Political Economy* is read with comprehension of Henry George only when it is considered as a book that had several times yielded to other and more pressing interests. I think George would have been wise had he asked that it never be published; and his heirs would have served him better had they felt free either to make that decision themselves or to print the book as what it might have been if portions had been dropped and wise selections made — a distinguished series of memorial essays.

This final possible choice would have saved the book for its present best purpose. It would have preserved a conception of large strategy drawn by an aged fighter — by one who had died willingly, a volunteer on a different field of battle.