

CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE

HENRY GEORGE was not a professional philosopher. Neither was he a professional economist. Perhaps it would have been with the journalists that he might have ranked himself had the question of his precise classification been presented to him. And perhaps it is as a visionary reformer that the world of academic economics and philosophy has regarded him (although that world has characteristically treated George with the devastating and unanswerable criticism of neglect), or as an interloping layman, unfitted by lack of scholastic training for his ambitious work of social reconstruction. But there really can be no quibble as to the exact nominal qualifications for admittance to the ranks of philosophy. Philosophy itself has been singularly disrespectful to all artificial distinctions when it has sought for recruits, and the slave and emperor, the dramatist, the priest and sculptor, as well as German professors and English gentlemen, have been equally welcome. All that is necessary is that spark of cold (or even hot) flame.

Philosophy, for George, was not "that dear delight." Nor was it literally a love of wisdom. If the ever-doubtful aid of etymology were solicited, "philanthropy," stripped of its popular, patronizing connotation, would perhaps better characterize his thought than "philosophy." The love of wisdom was never an end in itself for him; in all cases it was but a path leading to the love of man. Neither did his philosophy

concern itself at all with the traditional problems of epistemology, logic or psychology. George's attitude toward the fascinating difficulties that have made up the very fiber of the history of philosophy was casual rather than appreciative, and his acceptance of the metaphysical world of human sensation and reason was as complete as was his refusal to accept the social world of human institutions. The problems that stimulated him were not those of a theory of knowledge, but of a political and economic approach to morals.

It was this ethical interest that directed his economic speculations. Economics provided the methodology for reaching the summits proposed by ethical concepts, just as ethics was the directing agent of philosophy itself. The suggestion has been made repeatedly in this discussion of George's work that an instrumentalist interpretation of social ethics demands a knowledge and an appreciation of any completely articulated analysis of morals in social-economic terms. Philosophy, as represented in ethics, cannot refuse to accept the challenge that our present social system presents it. The problems and the proffered solutions that have sprung from the misery inherent in existing economic arrangements press for recognition from moral theory. It was the merit of George to confront philosophy and religion with this problem of social evil. Here was a question for those question-asking disciplines, one that had been given scant consideration by the great figures who directed their researches, but one which nevertheless menaced the structures that they were striving to raise.

And further, it may well be asked of philosophy whether it can afford to permit the social sciences to act as its surrogate in the handling of society's ills. If there is any problem that must stimulate the searcher for an integrated "world vision," it is this of remediable human misery. If there is any paradox that must startle the ethical theorist in his quest for the

realization of moral values, it is this starving of human power that takes place in front of the greatest expression of human power. Is not the solving of that paradox a vital task for social philosophy? If philosophy lays claim to one characteristic, it is that of catholicity. Surely, then, within its synthesis must be located not merely the vague awareness of the problem of social and economic disease, but also a sincere attempt to contribute to the remedy. This was George's interpretation of philosophy, a frank, urgent, perhaps unsophisticated demand that the love of wisdom be devoted to the love of man.

Indeed, in these concluding remarks it may well be that the challenge George offers to economics is not as crucial as that he offers to ethics. It is true, of course, that his criticism of economics¹ was unequivocal and pertinent. (Indeed, because the existing economic structure seems so unbalanced, so productive of wrong emphases, so tragically indifferent to

¹ "Political economy has been called the dismal science, and, as currently taught, is hopeless and despairing. But this, as we have seen, is solely because she has been degraded and shackled; her truths dislocated; her harmonies ignored; the word she would utter gagged in her mouth, and her protest against wrong turned into an indorsement of injustice. Freed, as I have tried to free her—in her own proper symmetry, Political Economy is radiant with hope.

"For, properly understood, the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth show that the want and injustice of the present social state are not necessary; but that, on the contrary, a social state is possible in which poverty would be unknown, and all the better qualities and higher powers of human nature would have opportunity for full development." (*Progress and Poverty*, p. 557.)

George was puzzled by the neglect of the economists. He wrote, in a letter to his friend Dr. Taylor: "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." (April 28, 1892.) Two years before that, however, at the conference of the American Social Science Association (Saratoga, New York, September, 1890), Professor Seligman thus spoke to George: "It is grossly unfair to ascribe to the professors of political economy a truckling or even an unconscious subservience to the powers that be. All history disproves this. . . . No one is more desirous of attaining social peace, no one has to-day a deeper sympathy with the unhappy lot of the toilers, no one is more anxious to seek out the true harmony of social interests, than the student of political economy. If we thought you had solved the problem, we would enthrone you high on our council seats, we would reverently bend

human values, it would seem that any unorthodox approach would start with the initial advantage of pertinency. And the onus of academic disapproval that has been placed upon all such economic heresies perhaps may not be taken too seriously until that academic world discloses what solutions it has offered for the problem of poverty.) But that criticism of economics, while more spectacular, was possibly less fundamental than George's implicit examination of ethics, and also, it seems, more subject to possible attack. Although these two enterprises—economics and ethics—cannot legitimately be completely separated, still there is a clear distinction between the demands that he presents to each of them. One is a technical and highly controversial demand; the other is simpler and more compelling. It is the plea that George makes for a hand-to-hand attack upon social evil. That attack, it is true, must take place within the enclosure of economics and politics, but the authority and the strategy for the struggle rest upon social ethics. Moral theory must provide the vision, and it must understand the consequences; the technique of economics must be shot through with the motivation of ethics.

To put it more bluntly: There is an urgent, menacing need for human intelligence to become sensitive to the malformations within the social structure. Economics, in some quarters, appears to be turning away from that type of sensitivity to one more appreciative of the statistical analysis of that structure. Sociology, in part at least, seems to be confining itself rigidly to the collection of data and cases, considering, apparently, that judgments are now taboo. But, on the other hand, there is an indication that ethics itself is becoming more aware of this precise type of problem, more aware of a

the knee and acknowledge in you a master, a prophet." (Quoted by C. B. Fillebrown in a pamphlet, *Henry George and the Economists*, Boston, 1914.) Such an expression of a "welfare" interest is a frank, helpful attitude that might well motivate contemporary economics.

particular form of evil than of the category of evil—which is nothing short of a revolution in ethical theory. Of course, that sensitivity is one which must rely upon the material provided by the laborious researches of the social sciences, but ethics will add that vital, directive factor of values. It will make judgments, a procedure that some of the social sciences seem mortally afraid of. And that is why this problem of poverty, of economic insecurity, may perhaps be most suggestively laid at the door of ethics.

Some day there will be a story-teller who will write of this life of Henry George. He will not be wistfully sympathetic nor will he wear a little patronizing smile. He will be one who can recognize and estimate the fierce strength of an unsullied sincerity. He will understand the use of those vague shadows of background and setting that play so revealing a part in any portrait. Unlike the son-biographer who labored under the disadvantage of having completed his work just three short years after his father's untimely death, he will be more able to judge of George's historical position. Perhaps the present vogue, unsurpassed in the history of publishing, for biography and autobiography, for memoirs and letters, will find in George a fitting subject—although he might not lend himself so easily to modern biographical method, to that technique of disenchantment. Such a story will try to make clear why George was confident that his work had led him to Truth, and why he was confident that ultimately it must be verified. And it will grasp the great power that lies in George's statement that with an economic program "has come to me something I did not think to find, and a faith that was dead revives." It will illuminate that vision which he kept always before him, and which led him on like the "Cross of a New Crusade." And it will elaborate those words of Henry George's great book, almost his very concluding words, in

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which he throws down his challenge. *Is it a challenge that can be ignored?*

He who will hear, to him the clarions of the battle call. How they call, and call, and call, till the heart swells that hears them! Strong soul and high endeavor, the world needs them now. Beauty still lies imprisoned, and iron wheels go over the good and true and beautiful that might spring from human lives.