



## The BOOK TRAIL

### A SHORT CUT TO "PROGRESS AND POVERTY"

"More Progress and Less Poverty," by Joseph S. Thompson. Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York. 1942. 150 pp. \$0.50.

This condensation of *Progress and Poverty* is just the book I thought I wanted. Every Georgist will recognize the need which Mr. Thompson explains in his preface, "For twenty-five years I have been advising my business friends to read *Progress and Poverty*. . . . But it is a large order for most busy men to undertake a five hundred and sixty-five page book on another man's say-so." Most Georgists, I believe, will heartily approve the method of abridgment which Mr. Thompson has adopted, "Without transposing a word or phrase of the original, and with only occasional use of a pronoun or a conjunction to save words I have telescoped the book into one hundred and sixty pages."

*More Progress and Less Poverty* uses the chapter headings of *Progress and Poverty*; the sequence of argument is thus retained, and the divisions of the abridgment are roughly proportional to the units of the original. The four chapters on the Malthusian theory are, however, omitted.

Why then does not the book, at least in this reader's opinion, do the job expected? Precisely, I believe, because it is a skeletonized version of George's masterpiece, and not a re-production. *Progress and Poverty* is not simply a statement and clarification of scientific laws, it is primarily an argument, and thus a work of art. As an artistic creation, *Progress and Poverty* is on the same level as Hamlet, or Titian's Paul III. Can a synopsis reveal Hamlet as a great drama, can a pen and ink sketch of the painting give you the Renaissance Pope, or can an X-ray of Ann Sheridan show you the reasons she is called the "Oomph Girl?"

*More Progress and Less Poverty* while not for economic illiterates is, nevertheless, an excellent and genuinely needed book, because it does provide a tool which Georgists, and especially Georgist teachers, need. The plan and the frame of the structure which only such a great mind as George's could have created are there; it remains only for us to clothe his naked laws with the bricks of current illustrations and cement his logic with the mortar of vernacular explanations. *Progress and Poverty* should be taken away from Georgist teachers after the fourth reading and Mr. Thompson's book placed in their hands. The teachers would then be forced to do their own thinking in 1942 language, instead of

leaning on George to point out for them with dated instances the applications and implications of his economic theorems.

Let me try to illustrate why I believe *More Progress and Less Poverty* is a tool for skilled hands, rather than what Mr. Thomas considers it, a beginner's primer. Chapter 4, Book 1, of both books is entitled, "The Maintenance of Laborers Not Drawn from Capital." The chapter, you remember, is one step in George's destruction of the Wage Fund theory, and is necessary in order to show that Capital is not the key to starting or stoppage of production. In *Progress and Poverty* it occupies nine pages. In Mr. Thompson's condensation the point is made in four sentences, which I take the liberty of quoting in full:

Consumption is supported by contemporaneous production. Mankind really lives from hand to mouth; it is the daily labor of the community that supplies it with its daily bread. Subsistence of the laborers engaged in production which does not directly yield subsistence comes from the production of subsistence in which others are simultaneously engaged. *The demand for consumption determines the direction in which labor will be expended in production.*

This does actually cover the ground of chapter 4, but do you feel that one of your business friends would be convinced upon reading the above, of the truth of the statements? Or, that they had any great significance in destroying an unsound explanation of depressions? Now let me paraphrase George to show how the original adds muscle to Mr. Thompson's skeleton of argument:

It is true that the plowman cannot eat his furrow, and economists and laymen therefore assume that labor must be subsisted from capital—which therefore, controls employment. But, when Robinson Crusoe built his canoe did he first have to accumulate a stock of food, or did he alternately work on the canoe and his garden? Does the idler living on inherited government bonds live on current or past production? The eggs on his table are new laid, the milk is fresh and the vegetables are dewy from the garden.

Subsistence of laborers working on the pyramids came from the production of laborers simultaneously working on the Nile Valley crop. So it is today, through the agency of exchanges. The laborer works to produce a locomotive because the man who has the power to give him bread, meat, etc., told him to do so. That man told the laborer to make the locomotive only after he was sure there was a demand on the part of those producing bread, meat, etc., for the locomotive. So, it is not Capital which controls employment, nor does it subsist labor.

The assurance of a future crop, given by the plowman opening a furrow, sets free from the stock constantly held his day's subsistence. Capital is not necessary where labor is looking for employment in production for which there is demand. Witness the sharecropper; since the farmer advances him no money, he will, on the strength of the work he is doing, obtain credit at the nearest store for his subsistence.

Comparison of this paraphrasing of Chapter 4 with Mr. Thompson's four sentence summary shows, I think, why *More Progress and Less Poverty* is not for neophytes, but strictly for those able and willing to supply their own illustrations and do their own thinking.

Mr. Thompson's style is lucid, easy, and talks neither up nor down to the business men for whom he writes. The omission of George's chapters on Malthus, the summarized treatment of the Wage Fund chapters and the small space devoted to definitions of terms are, I surmise, an adjustment by Mr. Thompson to his audience of business executives. It is true that Malthus has long been discredited, and that the Wage Fund theory is no longer taught, but they are, I believe, still acted on. Or have our immigration laws been repealed? I wish Mr. Thompson had dealt with these economic fallacies—in argument, as in military strategy, it is not enough to hold the central truth, the out-posts and bases are also vital.

Scattered through *More Progress and Less Poverty* are clippings from newspapers which give current illustrations of the practical working-out of Georgist principles. How Mr. Russ' San Francisco land rose in value from \$37.50 to \$10,000 a month makes a welcome variation from the wheeze about the twenty-four dollar purchase of Manhattan.

*More Progress and Less Poverty* is a book every militant, crusading Georgist should have, read and use and also lend.

For the book that will make Georgism a mere pill I am still waiting, but no longer hopefully.

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