

### CHAPTER III

## THE GROWTH OF MAN

The theory of the "Social Contract" had been invented, partly in order to explain what were the tasks of the central government, partly to reconcile its demand for authority with the individual's demand for liberty. It had to be abandoned, because it could not give any security that the State would not, when she had once been instituted, abuse her authority, nor explain how fulfilment of social tasks could be the inmost will of free individuals, when they were supposed to be so completely isolated and naturally hostile as they would be if the natural state were indeed the war of all against all.

In his system of metaphysical idealism Hegel attributed social solidarity to a cosmic process that produced the social individual as a link in the legal order, which was represented by the State. The only unsatisfactory point in his explanation was his inability to indicate the actual powers which started this process and carried it through, and consequently he could not set forth social science with any certainty like that with which natural science worked. In France it had been thought that a more natural explanation had been found by emphasizing that man is by nature a social being with a feeling of sympathy for his fellow-beings, which is only brought to fruition through common work for the common good. But this sympathy for one's fellow-beings, the existence of which had long since been acknowledged by English moral philosophy, was in England as well as in France looked upon as an element that could not be reconciled with the individual's egoistic life, as ruled by his instincts; an attempt might be made to establish a harmonious relation between those elements, but this resulted, either in an attempt at placing human sympathy on a higher level than the egoistic in-

instincts, as being more elevated and noble, or in an attempt to prove that both were determined by a valuation of the same nature, only one was a wider, the other a more short-sighted estimation of one's own interests. But these attempts were impossible, and experience proved that harmony of interests did not exist; neither economically nor morally could the external power of the State be dispensed with for the purpose of forcing contending interests into reconciliation, nor could the discipline of religion or conscience be abandoned, as it was necessary in order to keep the individual's egoism in check.

*Darwin, Spencer.*

Then came Darwin. His demonstration of the evolution of organisms from lower into higher forms, merely by means of simple natural processes, gave quite a new impetus and graphic illustration to the idea of a constantly increasing degree of perfection. Man was a product of Nature arisen in the course of immemorial time through a series of gradual changes which made him more and more fit to survive in the struggle for existence; these changes also comprehended the coming into existence of altruistic and moral feelings which were not antagonistic to egoistic self-assertion, but, on the contrary, a means of extending the struggle for existence into a wider field, as the survival of the race was promoted in this way. Nature takes no interest in individuals, but only in the race. Evolution is not promoted in the slightest degree because individuals become more capable and better able to assert themselves in the struggle for existence, unless these acquired qualities are inherited by their offspring. Only he who makes the survival of the race more certain becomes a link in the process of evolution that is going on in Nature. This is the reason why the social instincts grow stronger and stronger; even though they do not become as vigorous as the egoistic instincts, they become much more durable and cannot therefore be violated by the individual without causing him lasting pain, a pain which we call a guilty conscience when our range of ideas grows wide enough to keep the memory of our actions alive.

Already before Darwin, Spencer (1820—1903) had set forth similar ideas of a natural evolution which in the animal world under the struggle for existence and through the influence of heredity must

lead to a constantly better adaptation of individuals to their surroundings, and, in this way, to a more perfect morality. By this means individuals will be created whose nature it is to spread bliss and happiness about them and whom it is not necessary to prevent by force from injuring their fellow-beings.

But the necessary condition that this evolution may take place is the struggle for existence, that the fittest and their descendants may conquer and the unfitted die so that their offspring do not populate the world. Spencer therefore turns against the thought of State care, State aid, and State regulation, as this will only hamper the individual growth of the moral qualities. Already in 1842 he protested against the idea that the State should provide the means for improved education (Owen, Cobden), and all his life through he continued his exertions to counteract State care. The State has only one task, to protect the individuals against the aggression of other people, and if she exceeds the limit which is thus set to her activity, she makes herself guilty of aggression and becomes aggressor instead of protector. The more people believe in the omnipotence of the State, the more they will demand the impossible from her like children who cry for the moon.

In the excellent work of his youth "Social Statics" (1850) Spencer calls the belief that the State can do all that she has Parliament's sanction for doing a modern form of the old belief in the Divine Right of Kings. For it is nothing but the belief in the Divine Right of government.<sup>1)</sup> Rousseau, strange as it seems, made even intelligent men believe in this and in the fact that it may be reconciled with the individual's right to liberty and protection. If the State is to have any obligation it must be to confer a benefit. But the only benefit that can be conferred on a man is, in the last instance, to assist him to fulfil the law of his existence. The first condition of being able to do this is, however, to have liberty of action, and therefore the task of the government can only be the guarding of liberty, i. e. to uphold everybody's equal liberty.<sup>2)</sup>

It is a delusion to believe that moral power can be created in man from without. A moral government presupposes moral individuals;

---

<sup>1)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*. 1850. p. 222.

<sup>2)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 278.

no legal order is found where men are not just. The most perfect legal order would fall into ruins in a country whose citizens were without a sense of justice,<sup>1)</sup> and, under such conditions, the enforcers of law become enemies rather than friends, and the forms of law will be used merely as a cover for and means of oppression. If the State does anything more than safeguard the individual in his use of his moral power, she will in reality do the opposite and hinder him from using and developing it, and make it easier for other individuals to follow their propensities for doing evil.

Thus there are those who are of opinion that it would be injurious to introduce free administration of justice, as all sorts of quarrelsome and litigious persons would then foregather and make the functions of the courts of law impossible. It is not taken into consideration that, by placing obstacles in the way of the administration of justice, you do not prevent people from having recourse to the courts of justice when it is unnecessary; but you do create a shelter for those who want to do wrong, because they take it for granted that the injured person will not refer the case to the courts of justice as this will be too expensive.<sup>2)</sup> Free administration of justice is a very effective legal protection. Enforced poor-relief is in the same way so far from being a means of helping people that on the contrary, it quite kills private charity, diminishes the possibilities of employment and encourages those who would fain lead an idler's existence. Thoughtless private charity makes begging a trade. There are offices where for a shilling you can hire children who look as if they might arouse the pity of the passers-by. People should be helped to help themselves, and this is done by clearing away the hindrances which have arisen for men's free use of their powers. But no posters should be set up by way of public poor-relief or private charitable associations whose actual inscription is, briefly: Here the works of charity of our esteemed public are performed in the most business-like manner and at the cheapest price.<sup>3)</sup>

Nor can the State take education upon herself without doing an injury. We cannot speak of the child's right to education. We

---

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. p. 289.

<sup>2)</sup> Opus cit. p. 286.

<sup>3)</sup> Opus cit. pp. 345—359.

have no other right than the right of freely using our powers and we do not interfere with this right by omitting to educate the child.<sup>1)</sup> This view, which goes directly counter to the demand for national education which was made by Owen and Cobden, does not imply that Spencer considers education as a thing of no importance. At the back of his view there is, on the contrary, a high estimation of the value of education. But he is ruled to such a degree by the idea that evolution depends on the development of character through inherited qualities, that he takes it for granted that those parents who do not themselves provide for their children's education are bad individuals, their progeny are therefore also bad and should not be tended and taken care of. If you leave it to the poor themselves to provide for the education of their children, those among them who possess the best qualities will take pains to give their children a good education, and in this way this superior race will be given an increased superiority over the more indolent and dull. There will be an increase of the best fitted instead of an increase of the least fitted. And the point is that you cannot by education change the children's dispositions; it is only because intelligent people's children have receptive dispositions that they profit from education and develop their gifts; bad people's children have not the necessary gifts and education does not improve them, but it only makes them more shrewd. Greater knowledge is in itself without value. Progress in knowledge without a corresponding progress in moral character is even injurious. Moral character depends on the inner strength, which nobody outside can create in man. "We see", wrote Spencer again in his old age, "that the spreading of the ability to read and write makes the masses susceptible to bad influences which would have passed over their heads, if they had not been able to read a demoralized press that arouses their barbaric instincts, their rampant jingoism, their fantastical dreams of anarchic social conditions, and their blind susceptibility to sensationalism and lies."<sup>2)</sup> Compulsory education is not, as many people think, a safeguard against crime,<sup>3)</sup> but a means in the hands of the ruling

---

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. p. 361.

<sup>2)</sup> Herbert Spencer, Facts and Comments. 1907. pp. 65 ff.

<sup>3)</sup> Opus cit. p. 378.

classes to prevent the growth of free evolution from taking a different direction from that desired by the ruling classes.<sup>1)</sup> The State prevents all other education than that which she sanctions and it would be consistent in her to forbid all private education.<sup>2)</sup>

Spencer also condemns State regulation of trade, as it is in reality a tyrannical interference with people's right to use their powers, and shows the government's deficient sense of her duty, which is first and foremost, nay, solely and wholly, to guard the rights of the individual.<sup>3)</sup>

The views which Spencer sets forth here he kept all his life, nay, if anything, they became more pronounced in later years; but they also took a different direction in the course of time. In 1850 Spencer was faced by the situation which had been created by Chartism and the strong socialist-communist movement. Against this and its demands for State intervention and State aid he turned with all his force. He was permeated with the belief that man's powers should be allowed free play everywhere, as artificial interference would only impair them and create untenable conditions. In his early youth (1841) he carried on a profound discussion with his friend, E. Lott, concerning the impossibility of allowing the State to provide for education, and in the following years he wrote a series of letters on science to "The Nonconformist" which purported to prove that the static laws which rule in Nature, are also applicable to man and society.<sup>4)</sup> It is absurd to believe that everything will go wrong when men do not constantly interfere and put things right. The men who believe that interference is necessary ought to know that the laws of society (i. e. the laws of Nature) are of such a kind that natural evils will remedy themselves by virtue of the principle of self-adaptation. The function of society can therefore only be to defend men's natural rights, to protect person and property and to prevent the stronger's aggressiveness towards the weaker, in short, to administer justice.<sup>5)</sup> Spencer here turns against

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. p. 372.

<sup>2)</sup> Opus cit. pp. 361, 334.

<sup>3)</sup> Opus cit. p. 329.

<sup>4)</sup> Herbert Spencer, An Autobiography. p. 192. See above "Facts and Comments".

<sup>5)</sup> Opus cit. I p. 209.

Bentham; the object is not to create welfare, but to vindicate justice. But he overlooks the fact that Bentham saw the most important means of welfare exactly in the vindication of justice itself and Spencer's own defence of the judicial system is, in its way, decided by its being most beneficial. He only gives the doctrine of welfare a wider basis as applicable to the physical world as well. The opinion that society is an intricate machine, where the task of government becomes to keep everything in equilibrium, cannot be maintained; we can, on the contrary, Spencer holds, prove that the great difficulties in the regulation of social conditions are due to a disturbance in the natural laws which has mainly been caused by the government. The government tries foolishly to keep things in an unconstant state of balance. Left to themselves things will maintain a constant state of balance.<sup>1)</sup>

Spencer became therefore an ardent opponent of communist plans, like those of Owen and Fourier. But he also differed from Stuart Mill (1806—1873), who, two years before the publication of "Social Statics", in his work "Principles of Political Economy" had defended the laissez-faire system, which system, by its more fluctuating nature, became a more practical support for this policy than Spencer's more extreme views. Mill wanted also to limit the interference of the State but he did open to her, a field where she might perform those offices for the citizens that they could not do for themselves without violating each others' liberty. It was possible for the State to secure the poor a more regular and definite aid than could private charity; the State might provide for children's education and the promotion of mental culture, for the building of roads, harbours, etc., all that is demanded by general interest or for the benefit of future generations and from which present generations derive no immediate profit. The State may intervene where the citizens themselves are helpless, when she does so in such a manner that it does not increase or confirm their helplessness, but diminishes it.<sup>2)</sup> This general argument in which everybody could find what he wanted expressed better the government's desire to be allowed to judge according to circumstances than did Spencer's book, but it

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. I p. 211.

<sup>2)</sup> John S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy. Book V. Chap. XI, see especially § 16.

also left the question unanswered: whether the citizens' incompetence to do what was necessary was not aggravated when they were relieved of the responsibility. Spencer's book therefore fell rather flat in England; it gained considerable attention in America. The small circle of English philosophers who read it and appreciated it, did so mainly on account of the interest which its general view on evolution aroused, as this accorded with Darwin's view. But then came the extension of the franchise in 1868, and in 1870 a new law concerning elementary education was carried through; in 1880 a long period of Liberal reform was initiated by Gladstone under pressure from a House of Commons that had been formed on the basis of the largely extended franchise. Under this Liberal form of government Spencer's continued assertion of the rights of the individuals ran counter to the policy of the government, but not to the demands of the people, as "Social Statics" did originally. This involved a change in Spencer's attitude to the land question, a change which became the cause of a violent controversy with Henry George.

During the intervening years Spencer's interests had furthermore centred on a summary representation of his cosmic philosophy. As Descartes had shown that the physical world must originate in chaos, which consists of matter in movement, only assuming these movements to accord with mechanical laws, so Spencer proposed to show that mental life also can be explained on the basis of matter and movement. Descartes had already made the experiment in so far as he explained the animals as machines and supposed that man alone possessed a soul. He based this supposition on essentially religious grounds and he did not succeed in fitting this alien element of the soul into his scientific system. Spencer now intended to do what Descartes fell short of doing. Man and society are links in the great process that through increasing differentiation and order leads from physical Nature to constantly higher systems.

The new inquiries into the culture of primitive men that Lubbock, Taylor, and Sumner Maine began in the sixties and which made research in these fields of such great significance were also utilized by Spencer. His sociology is, in a large measure, built on an extensive, but uncritically gathered mass of material which he used to prove that human societies are all subject to a law of evolution which, from chaotic and very simple social conditions through

war, leads to order; further development of society takes place by means of a differentiation that establishes it and increases its productive capacity. Under the military régime man is coerced into doing his duty, under more advanced industrial conditions men do what they feel inclined to do. It is thus seen that the whole of civilization rests on liberty.

*Henry George.*

It was the Spencer of these new ideas against whom Henry George (1839—1897) took up the cudgels.

It would be a great mistake, if Spencer's adverse attitude to the demands that the State should relieve poverty were taken as a proof of heartlessness. "Love for one's fellow-men", he says, "is in its essence highly civilizing. The feelings which accompany every kind action bring us a bit nearer to the ideal."<sup>1</sup>) It was one of Spencer's special objections to State aid that it does away with private charity; and to private charity he objected that it is given at random and promotes begging. To help people to help themselves is the way to work, and that gives ample opportunity of displaying charitable feelings.<sup>2</sup>) But the State has made it difficult for people to help themselves, because she has created conditions that make poverty irremediable. She has done so by allowing private proprietorship of land. Here Spencer follows the same train of thought as Thomas More, which we saw prevailed in the age of Chartism. The State has committed the enormous injustice against nineteen twentieths of mankind of violating their claim to land.<sup>3</sup>) Could it really be justice to let all these land-less people live in a world of misery without a place to live in, without access to the simplest necessities of life or opportunity of obtaining them except through the permission of the few (the land-owners)?<sup>4</sup>) Could it be just that the masses were given no seats at the table of life because all the seats were occupied? Surely not.

It is on the basis of this reflection that Spencer constructs his idea

---

<sup>1</sup>) Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*. p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>) *Opus cit.* p. 357.

<sup>3</sup>) *Opus cit.* p. 293.

<sup>4</sup>) *Opus cit.* p. 345.

of the proprietorship of land. If one piece of land be private property, all land may be private property to the exclusion of everyone but the owners<sup>1)</sup> Land cannot be private property when we talk of the equal rights of all. No possession of land of however long standing, or cultivation or improvement of land can create a right of property. Such proprietorship rests on plunder and the use of power and can never become legal. Society still maintains this fundamental view that land is common property, and reserves to itself the right of expropriating it without the owner's sanction but with compensation for the expenditure involved.<sup>2)</sup> But this is not the same as communist possession and use of land. The use may be wholly private on condition that the holders pay a ground-rent to society.<sup>3)</sup> The circumstance that we do not have to deal with the original plunderers, but with people who have directly or indirectly paid fairly and honestly for their land makes it impossible simply to take the land from them; we must come to an agreement with them. In a just way to fix and wind up these claims which the present owners have incurred through expenditures and improvements becomes one of the most difficult tasks society will have to solve one day.<sup>4)</sup> But this does not change the true state of affairs that to deprive men of their right to land is to take their life and liberty.<sup>5)</sup> All other private property is in Spencer's view an extension of the existing land conditions. The instinct of proprietorship is a natural instinct and a social-communist regulation of property would therefore involve a violation of human nature.<sup>6)</sup> But the right of property can only be justified when it is made subject to a land system which surrenders land to private use in return for the payment of rent to society. The profit which is made on land beyond this rent is private property.

If thus every man had a right to possess land or a share in the aggregate profit there would be no general or irremediable poverty,

<sup>1)</sup> Cf. Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*. W. W. VI. pp. 324, 338; A. S. Ørsted, *Eunomia* I. 1815. pp. 9, 35.

<sup>2)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*. pp. 132—140.

<sup>3)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 141.

<sup>5)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 142.

<sup>4)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 143.

<sup>6)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 151.

but only accidental poverty which might be remedied by help to self-help.<sup>1)</sup> Thus in 1850 land became to Spencer a place to live in which the landlords had debarred to the land-less and thereby deprived them of their subsistence. When the people urged the State to help them it became natural to refer them to the landlords; it was they who must relinquish the places of work and store-houses. The landlords performed no work, according to the prevailing views, but were a hindrance to the development of industry. They were to allow others to occupy their land and should then be given compensation for what money they might have invested in their land or spent on improvements.

These views accorded in all essentials with those which Spence had already set forth, and which Ricardo and John S. Mill had adopted. Mill declared straightway<sup>2)</sup> that when the owner did not use or improve his land no true assertion of private ownership could be made. It was absurd that the owner of land should be merely a sinecurist quartered on it. When private property in land is not expedient, it is unjust. It is not hard to be excluded from that which others have produced, but it is terrible to be born into the world and find all the gifts of Nature appropriated and no place open for the new-comer. The State may regard the land-owners as public servants, and must then be at liberty to dismiss them. The land-owners' claim to their land rests wholly on the State's general policy; the principle of private property gives them no claim to land, but only a claim to compensation for the share of their interests in the land which the State thinks it expedient to appropriate. The ownership of land is a monopoly which may perhaps be considered a necessary evil, but which becomes an injustice when it is not paid for. He proposed an increased land-tax.<sup>3)</sup>

Mill's views were to the effect that unearned incomes should be nationalized. Two years after the publication of his book and the same year in which Spencer's "Social Statics" came out, a Scotsman, Patrick E. Dove, set forth the claim in his book "Science of Politics" that all taxation of incomes created by work, should be abo-

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. p. 357.

<sup>2)</sup> John S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy. Book II. Chap. 2. § 6 and Chap. 15 § 1.

<sup>3)</sup> John S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy. Book V. Chap. 2 § 5.

lished as it was robbery and hampered the free development of trade; all taxes were to be levied on land. Dove's book passed unnoticed; it went farther than Mill's, Spencer hardly knew of it and his way of thinking was, at all events, different from Dove's.<sup>1)</sup>

About 1880, when the state of English agriculture became rather hopeless in the competition with the cheap wheat from America, a desire made itself felt in England that Parliament should carry into effect the idea of the nationalization of land. The year before (1879) Henry George's book "Progress and Poverty" had come out and aroused great attention. It was generally expected that Spencer would support this movement and its advocates constantly referred to the chapters of "Social Statics", that treated this question. But Spencer now took up a quite different attitude and did it in so confused and unfortunate a way that Henry George in his explicit description of the whole state of affairs "A Perplexed Philosopher" was justly able to accuse Spencer of having abandoned his view for the sake of private interests, without having the courage to declare openly that he had changed his opinion. Nobody can defend Spencer for the duplicity and subterfuge of which he was guilty when he had, at a time when the landlords' fury was at its height, to defend his opinions of 1850. The landlords now feared that the confiscation of the land would really be brought about, a thing which they had not at all counted on in 1850, and their economic position had been quite changed in the intervening time. But nevertheless Spencer's new attitude cannot be defended on such undignified motives.

The ideal which all people had entertained before 1850, and which Spencer himself had entertained in "Social Statics", was for the masses to occupy the land and find a place of work and store-house. He rejected the communist village theories of Owen and his friends and he thought that the new form for the possession of land should be individually independent small holdings. But this was out of the question thirty years later. Then it was no longer a house and home in the country that the small citizens demanded, but improved incomes in city life. Land was no longer in public opinion a place of work that must by all means be given back to the people, but a

---

<sup>1)</sup> See further Patrick E. Dove, *The Theory of Human Progression*, 1850 (2nd Edition, 1895).

value that the State finances needed in order to proceed to comprehensive social legislation. Henry George's "Single Tax Theory" was not understood by Spencer, he called it a fantastic idea and he put his book down, he writes, after having read it for a few minutes<sup>1</sup>); especially he did not understand that to Henry George it was not a question of confiscating land and demanding compensation for the value which the land-owners had taken from the people, but that the point in Henry George's new theory was that it was not the land itself which should be seized, but the value of the land; Henry George wanted to attack the private land-owners' way of seizing the products of the land from those who created them.<sup>2</sup>) For Spencer the question was constantly that of settling a robbery that had once taken place, and getting the spoil back; in Henry George's view it was a question of the constant activity of a robber which should be put a stop to; a robber who did not rob people of land, but who through his possession of land deprived them of everything else. To Spencer it was a matter of having a certain existing value which had once been separated from common property, given back to it; to Henry George the object was to defend common property from constantly being deprived of its ever increasing revenues.

But because Spencer took this view of the land-question and imagined people crowding into the estates, the question of compensation became very important to him and the thought of cultivation of land under the supervision of the State unbearable. He still admitted that all ownership of land had been established by robbery, but in the working out of his philosophical system he had come to the conclusion that robbery was the normal beginning of all culture. The objection had been made against Rousseau's ideas that it was incomprehensible how isolated individuals should think of establishing a society by means of a contract. Spencer answered this question, in his own way, by proving that war had made society, the victor had driven men together and held them there against their will, and on this basis peaceful relations had developed in the course of time and grown into that which is now called a contract in

---

<sup>1</sup>) Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher*, 1893, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>) *Opus cit.* pp. 220 f.

industrial communities. But seen from this point of view the assertion that ownership of land originated in robbery lost its significance; neither was it the descendants of the original robbers who now owned the land nor the descendants of the robbed who now demanded land.

The access to land, i. e. to the practical use of land Spencer treats in his new essay "Justice".<sup>1)</sup> He there describes protractedly how private ownership of land has developed gradually from the primitive ownership of the tribe, and he loses himself in a description of the natural superiority of private cultivation over the cultivation of former days. He shows the hugely increased value that has been created by this kind of cultivation and maintains that it would be unjust to deprive the land-owners of their values without granting compensation. His comparison of land to light and air as the principal necessities of man, and his assertion that you have no more right to debar man from access to land than to deprive him of light and air, shows that by the term "access to land" he only means a right to live there and not the power to exploit labour which is involved by the monopolization of land. About 1850 the crowding into the cities, which was caused by the monopolization and enclosure of land, became a threat to society; but forty years later this was no longer the case. People did not want to go back to the land, it did not pay to cultivate it. Henry George reproached Spencer that he took the word "land" in the restricted sense and not in the wider sense in which it is used by science as the quintessence of all the powers of Nature. But in 1850 Spencer also had taken the term "land" in the restricted sense of arable land. No blame can be attached to Spencer because in 1850 he did not know Henry George's theory which was not set forth until 1879 — unless we might expect him to have read Dove's book.

This also harmonizes with the curious computation that Spencer made in the appendix to his new book. The seizure of land that had taken place in the dawn of the ages had, in the course of centuries, been paid back in poor-rates. He estimated the poor-rate that had been paid since the days of Queen Elizabeth at 374 million pounds

---

<sup>1)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, 1893. II Chap. XI.

<sup>2)</sup> Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher*. p. 178.

sterling while the land that had been seized could at most be worth 500 million pounds.<sup>1)</sup> That this way of computation is not to the purpose and, furthermore, quite overlooks the accumulation of interest, does not matter, it only shows clearly that Spencer only had in his mind the land that had once been taken from the people and did not consider the robbery which was constantly being committed by the land-owners.<sup>2)</sup>

For these reasons Spencer thought that private ownership of land should be continued under the supervision of the State. In this way a more intensive cultivation of the land would be ensured, while the disadvantages incidental to State administration would be avoided.

The land-owners' attitude had also undergone a great change since the writing of "Social Statics". At that time people were still influenced by the state of affairs during or immediately after the Napoleonic wars, and the view prevailed that the land-owners performed no work, but only reaped the benefit from work. But during the recent decades English agriculture had had a very prosperous period, as a number of great land-owners had worked hard to bring large stretches of land under more intensive culture and created large scale production of corn and cattle. During those years more than one million acres had been laid under the plough and there was once more a demand for agricultural labourers. But, on the other hand, middle-class people had no possibilities of carrying on independent farming as they were without the necessary capital. In "The Man versus the State" (1884) Spencer expounds the scriptural phrase "you shall eat your bread in the sweat of your brow"; he does not turn it against the great land-owners, but against the work-

---

<sup>1)</sup> It is interesting to read what Kant says concerning this state of affairs: Das Vermögen wohlzutun, was von Glücksgütern abhängt, ist grösstenteils ein Erfolg aus der Begünstigung verschiedener Menschen durch die Ungerechtigkeit der Regierung, welche eine Ungleichheit des Wohlstandes, die anderer Wohltätigkeit notwendig macht, einführt. Verdient unter solchen Umständen der Beistand, den der Reiche den Notleidenden erweisen mag, wohl überhaupt den Namen der Wohltätigkeit, mit welcher man sich so gern als Verdienst brüstet? *Metaphysik der Sitten*. W. W. VI. p. 454.

<sup>2)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*. 1893. II. App. B. pp. 440 ff.; R. Wilson, *The Province of the State*. 1911. pp. 254 ff.

ing-class. Henry George scoffs at him for this,<sup>1)</sup> but he overlooks the fact that the land-owners' attitude had really undergone a great change, and that Spencer was quite right in maintaining that the land was better exploited by private owners than under a socialized system. The demand for the socialization of land might be taken as a demand from the lower classes to be provided for by State regulations, and this Spencer must of course condemn.<sup>2)</sup> Spencer erred by not retaining the sharp distinction between land-owner and tenure of land that he had made in "Social Statics". Even though the great land-owners exploit the land better than do the small owners, they do also get an increased profit which does not accrue from their work but from the mere possession of land. The question of who exploits the land best may be answered in different ways and people may prefer one form of cultivation to another, but this cannot supersede society's claim to be paid a full ground-rent. This was the claim that Henry George made. The task of society is not to distribute or rent land, but to watch over the individuals in their struggle for the possession of land, so that they all have the same legal claims and nobody is favoured with a monopoly to the detriment of the others. Society's seizure of the ground-rent is the means of laying open the ownership of land to those who are best fitted to use it. This is the kernel of the "Single-Tax System".<sup>3)</sup>

It had hitherto been taken for granted that ground-rent would increase with the growth of communities and with the consequent increased demands for the exploitation of land. It had not been perceived that this would only happen by the cultivation of constantly poorer land or by a more intensive cultivation of the better land, as must be the case when the population increases and continues to live on the same area. But in the seventies there was a decline of the ground-rent in all Europe and especially in England as American competition made prices drop. The fertile land of the prairies and extensive cultivation threw English corn out of the market. Now followed ten years with incessant rain and no sun and then

---

<sup>1)</sup> Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher*. pp. 86 ff.

<sup>2)</sup> *Opus cit.* p. 99.

<sup>3)</sup> *Opus cit.* pp. 48—50.

came another ten years with a baking sun and a ruinous drought. Only the land-owners who were backed by large capital could retain their land under these circumstances, as they alone could sustain a decline in their income. It was impossible for the small farmers to carry on under the falling ground-rent and this also debarred them from revolutionizing their whole form of management, and instead of the production of corn and cattle go in for the making of special products like butter, bacon, eggs, etc. Large areas now once more went out of cultivation. Not only were they again employed as pastures for sheep, but also for luxurious purposes, for deer-parks and hunting-grounds. The land of England was no longer a source of revenue, but it became a place for the spending of money that had been acquired elsewhere. Rich merchants bought estates that involved great annual expenditure, but which gave them social esteem. No income fell to the great land-owners from the land which was laid out for farming, while they received a constantly increasing income from the growing areas that were withdrawn for building purposes, and from the royalties on coal and iron mines which were paid by the industrialists.<sup>1)</sup> The agricultural population decreased and constituted only a small percentage of the entire population, and all that was done to promote the parcelling out of land into small holdings came to nothing, as these could not thrive without a common organization, and because the falling ground-rent placed the independent farmer in a constantly more unfavourable situation.

This change in the conditions of English agriculture began to make itself felt at the time when Spencer's theories aroused a controversy with Henry George. English agriculture had, by means of an increased use of capital, raised its income in such a way as to be able to feed the ever growing population. Before the intervention of American competition it was reckoned that the improvement in English farming would make it possible for it to keep pace with the increasing population and it was thought to be out of the question that we should become dependent on foreign countries for food.<sup>2)</sup> England had, however, now been reduced to this state and

---

<sup>1)</sup> R. L. Outhwaite, *The Land or Revolution*. pp. 33, 46.

<sup>2)</sup> *The Land and the People*. Times Series. 1913. pp. 29 f.

the problems which this entailed in her foreign policy are well-known. England should not have to strive to be able to feed herself, but should maintain her position within the Empire in such a way as to be able to retain her markets. She supports her gigantic industrial development on the agriculture of her Dominions and Dependencies; and it should be the object of her policy to retain this supremacy. The central point in the controversy between Spencer and Henry George is whether it is possible for farming as a livelihood to be of any importance in industrial England and whether the answering of this question is of any importance in the problem of the confiscation of the ground-rent.

Ground-rent is the increased value which is produced by cultivation of fertile land or which is derived from the favourable situation of land, and it is given as a gift from society. Increase in ground-rent is equivalent to increase of the owner's income and makes it possible for him to leave off working and live on the profit derived from the increased ground-rent. He who owns land the ground-rent of which is on the increase will be able to sell it at a profit. But he who owns land whose ground-rent is decreasing ought to be able to bear a loss. The great estate-owners can sustain such loss better than the farmers and the more so as they value the possession of the estate rather for the social status it gives than for the profit it yields. As a rule the great capitalist can do with a proportionate reduction of income better than can the small capitalist, and if the estate is only partly farm-land and also comprises mining and town land, while the small proprietor's land is only suited for farming purposes, the latter will be unfavourably placed as compared to the great owner when a decline in the ground-rent of farm-land occurs. The estate-owner can be content with a lower income from his farm-land when his mines yield increased royalties and his building-sites are sold at a great profit to the city corporation who need his land.<sup>1)</sup> If the question is put as to the price at which the estate-owner is willing to sell an allotment, it is evident that he will demand a higher price than is warranted by the ground-rent, and the buyer will be very badly situated. If the aim is to deprive the estate-owners of their land in order to parcel it out or rent it, this cannot be done without offering them a compensation, which will run into

<sup>1)</sup> The Budget; The Land and the People. 1909.

a high figure; in this way the State will be given a considerable guardian authority. But Henry George was very much opposed to this way of solving the question; he calls it a clumsy way of solving the land-question.<sup>1)</sup> Nor does Spencer wish to avail himself of this expedient; for it is only a form of State intervention, it being impossible for the individual to procure land unaided. That the system of small farming had no possibility of thriving in England in that day — and has had none since — was evident. In the face of this to demand that the State should set up small holdings went quite counter to Spencer's social principle of the independence of the individual.

But it is not at all a question of finding a method for the use of land, which cannot be made to pay under a free system of economics, i. e. the artificial parcelling out of land. It is solely a question of abolishing the injustice which the State allows to exist by supporting private ownership of land. Introduction of ground-rent and abolition of all taxes on value derived from labour is the self-evident principle of justice, which places all alike, not in giving everybody an allotment for his own private use, but in giving him a share in the collective ground-rent of the kingdom. Henry George was right in objecting to Spencer that he set out in "Social Statics" to urge the abolition of private ground-rent, and that it was no use winding up with a vague supposition that some day in the course of ages the state of affairs might be such as to make the abolition of private ownership warrantable.<sup>2)</sup>

What pangs of conscience were suffered by Spencer we can gather from an attempt which he made in 1893 in his "Principles of Ethics" to support the right of proprietorship on a fictitious contract between the land-owner and the ex-land-owner, under which the latter got part of the product in compensation for his share in the land<sup>3)</sup>; poor-relief might instead of being a tax forcibly levied by the government, be based on every man's right to a share in the ground-rent; this arrangement would be more just and do away with the shortcomings of the present system.<sup>4)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher*. p. 28.

<sup>2)</sup> *Opus cit.* pp. 80, 104.

<sup>3)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*. II. p. 97.

<sup>4)</sup> *Opus cit.* II. p. 378.

The omission of which Spencer made himself guilty in not asserting everybody's equal right to the value of the earth became fatal to his view on the State as the guardian of justice. "Because of this omission", writes Henry George, "Spencer's individualism became just as short-sighted and brutal as socialism which takes it for granted that nature should be left alone. They both commit the same fault and shut their eyes to the fundamental injustice which is the root of the evils against which socialism protests blindly. Spencer is like the man who demands that everybody should swim across the river without assistance and quite overlooks the fact that one is provided with a swimming belt and the other drawn down by a leaden weight. He is like the parson who thundered to the slaves: "you must not steal", but did not mention the theft that had made them slaves.<sup>1)</sup> By acknowledging the system of the fundamental injustice "the private ownership of land", Spencer shows that his definition of the function of the State, which is, to secure the survival of the fittest, cannot be carried through.

Whether ground-rent is rising or falling it belongs to society and, when it is in private possession, the possessors are given a power over trade that gives them mastery over other people. Land becomes in their hands a pecuniary power which differs from all other forms of capital by not having been produced by the labour of man, and by existing independently of labour. Land endures, while machinery, houses, and factory-plants perish; if you invest your money in land you make perishable capital imperishable while you increase your pecuniary influence in the community. However uncertain agricultural conditions in England may be, the ownership of land is always a pecuniary force. The question of ground-rent is not a question of providing the impecunious with allotments, but a question of breaking the dependent position in which labour stands towards capital, for it will remain in this position as long as capital can exist without labour. This it can only do under the system of private ownership of land. But so long as labour is dependent, poverty will spread and every guarantee of the victory of the fittest will vanish.

---

<sup>1)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*, II. p. 97.

<sup>2)</sup> *Opus cit.* II. p. 378.

The fittest are in Spencer's (and Darwin's) opinion not those who are best able to look after themselves, but those who best promote the survival of the species, the group, or the tribe. The qualities which are most desirable for the individual to possess when the welfare of the race is considered are pre-eminently those which may be included in the expression "love for one's fellow-beings". When Spencer attacks the increasingly held opinion that it is possible for and incumbent on the State to exercise charity, he does so because he is of the opinion that the State cannot exercise charity without falsifying it and wronging many people, and that the exercising of charity by the State will quench the growth of private charity. There is no other way to make sure that the fittest will survive than to guard the right of individuals so that competition among men becomes a competition in ability and not in violence. But this right must first and foremost be guarded in the most fundamental sphere, the access to land. The granting of a legal prerogative for the possession of land to a few, and the debarring of it from others at will is equivalent to the establishment of theft and arbitrariness as a judicial order. The protection which, under these circumstances, may be given to the weak becomes a matter of charity, and does not hold the least guarantee that the best fitted are protected. Spencer's attitude towards the land question may, to a great extent, be accounted for by his fear that the community would demand land from the land-owners in order to exercise a large scale charity towards the poor, and this would not give the least security that the land fell into the right hands. It is the fear of the nationalization of land, which had been proposed by John S. Mill, and which many held to be the ideal way of fighting poverty, that dominates Spencer, and he did not realize the difference between Henry George's claim and the claim for nationalization. The present-day adherents of Henry George's theory have found themselves obliged wholly to condemn the claim for nationalization.<sup>1)</sup>

The State is entirely unable to safeguard the individuals. It is a playing-ground for class-egoism, red-tape slackness, intrigues, and favouritism, where even the best principled are corrupted.<sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> R. L. Outhwaite, *The Land of Revolution*, p. 70; R. Marriott, *The English Land System*. 1914. Chap. IV; S. D. White, *Land-Value Policy*.

<sup>2)</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Man versus the State*. 1884.

Spencer considers the parliamentary system as "a collective folly" where extreme slovenliness and absurd parsimony form the boundaries within which the central administration acts. We cannot leave it to the State to exercise charity without imperilling social justice. Charity has no room within social institutions. "But in the composite set of social relations which surround every citizen there is a special group with which he is more closely connected than with the others and which exacts more from him than the others. Everybody who is capable of rendering assistance, is in his daily life brought into contact with a great number of people who through illness, unemployment, death or other misfortunes particularly need help; and it should be recognized that everybody within such a group is entitled to help."<sup>1</sup>) We often err in forgetting that public charity or helpfulness demands that every citizen should strive to watch that the political machinery, whether it is that of the State or of the municipality, works effectively". "The price of liberty is indefatigable watchfulness".<sup>2</sup>) Thus we see that Spencer is not far from thinking that what we call true and beneficial helpfulness might become the task of the State, if only the State machinery can be brought to work more perfectly.

Already in "Social Statics" Spencer had maintained that the method to adopt was to help people to help themselves; the State has, however, made it difficult for people to help themselves by creating conditions that make poverty irremediable (see above p. 56). He now puts forth the same assertion, but, in this instance, he himself debars the State from altering the conditions which have made poverty irremediable. He debars the seizure of ground-rent, because he no longer reckons with the possibility that the city people will go into the country in order to procure a living there, and will cultivate the soil better than do the land-owners. But by altering his view on the land question in general and by surrendering his unconditional demand that everybody's right to land should be realized, he confuses the relation between justice and helpfulness. By underlining that "every member of each group is entitled to help", he breaks down the important barrier between right and

---

<sup>1</sup>) Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics*. II. p. 390.

<sup>2</sup>) *Opus cit.* II. p. 418.

helpfulness. Right takes precedence over the individual; from being the individual's claim on society, it becomes society's claim on the individual. It is the State that determines what is right and the State may consequently be defined as the social function through which society asserts its supremacy over the individual. The origin of the feeling of justice may be quite different from what Spencer assumes. Maybe Humboldt was right in his belief that the State must still in ages to come help people to become free. But to whatever conclusion we come, there is no doubt that if the fundamental injustice which makes the majority dependent on the will of the minority is allowed to exist, the function of the State must be a system of futile interferences which, in maintaining perverted right, cripples charity.

Spencer distinguishes between egoistic and altruistic justice.<sup>1)</sup> The former is rooted in the individual's claim to possess what he acquires through the unhampered use of his capacities. Altruistic justice is created through diverse social contracts which demand that everybody should enjoy the same rights. Spencer had early come to the conclusion<sup>2)</sup> that the feeling of justice is born through the combination of man's eager desire to assert his independence with his capacity to grasp the conditions of his fellow-men and sympathize with them. Spencer refers us to Adam Smith as the father of this view. It is the same view which he maintains in his old age. But to however great an extent it may make the individual the servant of society, it is always a testimony that the individual is the central point.

Henry George's idea of justice is directly opposite to this. However tenaciously the individual may stand on his right, only the fact that society stands as the central authority which recognizes right not only according to its contents, but according to its form, makes the claim a legal claim, and not only a more or less logically well-founded demand for power. Henry George's idea of justice is that of the old Testament, God's demand that you shall preserve the soundness of your soul. In his book "Progress and Poverty" he settles with the Darwin-Spencerian doctrine of evolution in the

---

<sup>1)</sup> Opus cit. II. p. 29.

<sup>2)</sup> Herbert Spencer, An Autobiography. 1904. I. p. 229.

closing chapter "The Law of Human Progress" and he repeats this statement in his later controversy.<sup>1)</sup> It is not man's increasing self-assertion that ensures progress, but his constantly clearer perception of God's law, as the law of society to which man should submit. As man becomes unjust when his soul is unsound, society sickens when justice is violated. This sickness shows itself in the great misery which cuts us to the heart; a just man would do away with such a society. Poverty is the mark of disease in society and is like an eruption on a diseased body. But the cause of the disease is injustice, the seizure of man's right of ownership to land and the giving of him up as a victim to constant robbery.

Whether Spencer or Henry George were right, whether justice has its root in the individual or in society, must be left to be determined by a closer and more exact examination of the origin of justice. But whatever may be the result of such examination the points on which Spencer and Henry George actually differ are their different attitudes to the three problems which we mentioned above as being the essential problems of the nineteenth century. Spencer is the representative of those who in the enormous progress in trade saw the fruit of the individual's power, a power which should not be interfered with. Poverty is to him mainly a sign that many individuals are wanting in sufficient strength and they should not be provided for, but their strength should be made to increase by teaching them to have confidence in themselves and be responsible for themselves. Henry George, on the other hand, regards poverty as the essential problem. No society that suffers such poverty to exist can survive. But he does not consider this poverty as arising from men being too weak and too wanting in enterprise; he regards it as the consequence of unjust laws that have tied them hand and foot.

Spencer therefore looks with distrust at democracy as a political system, that enforces the tyranny of the weak and detracts from the power of the capable. The equality that is demanded by justice is equality in the opportunity of the unhampered use of one's powers; but it is only just to recognize the inequality which arises from the different way in which the individuals use their powers. On

---

<sup>1)</sup> Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher*. pp. 138 ff.

this point Henry George agrees with him in all essentials, but he has greater confidence in democracy. He foresees, however, not without anxiety the ruin of those democratic communities in which the fundamental injustice of the present land-system is allowed to exist. In America as described by Tocqueville there were few property-less; all had a chance of enriching themselves, and those who had become rich had generally themselves begun at the bottom. But in America as Henry George knew it, this was no longer the case.

Thus the question was brought to the fore whether Henry George's remedy for poverty had any prospect of being carried through, and whether it would create any economic possibilities beyond what would be created by social aid. It is not clear whether trade should be supported in a land like America, or whether the sickness in society, which is signified by poverty, is due to other causes, and should be cured by other means. It becomes a question of the relation between civil society and socialism, whether the individualistic basis on which American society was built was strong enough to hold its own against the state of affairs which grew more and more absurd, the placing of political power in the hands of the majority, while property remained in the hands of the minority.