

1924-09 Wm Lloyd Garrison's review of Henry George's P&P, by HG and Anna George de Mille

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Henry George's Progress and Poverty. An abridgement authorized by Anna George de Mille. Pp. 214. Price, \$1.00. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924.

The time is propitious for the publication in condensed form of this distinctive social document. In the present compact and readable volume some 200 pages carry the message formerly set forth in more than 500. This condensation has been done with discretion, intelligence, and sympathy.

As an economic treatise *Progress and Poverty* spans easily the gap of forty-five years, with its luminous exposition, its frank and persuasive argument, and its gift of ready illustration in terms both homely and picturesque.

The publication of the original edition in 1879 was the occasion of an epidemic of explosive criticism in the columns of conservative journals, which compelled all serious social students to seek to understand the significance of its provocative gospel. It appeared at a time when the quickening rhythm of pulsing industrialism, —whose pattern of feverish prosperity, crashing panic and vicarious social misery, —was arousing widespread apprehension and discussion. George's brilliantly argued proposal "To abolish all taxation, save that upon land values" embodied both a precious promise and a profoundly disturbing challenge.

The import of his book was more readily comprehended in the British Isles than in the United States, inasmuch as the political instinct and training of a compact population schooled in the lessons of feudalism had there prepared the ground for the new doctrine. In *The Fabian Essays In Socialism* G. Bernard Shaw refers to the "Numbers of young men, pupils of Mill, Spencer, Comte and Darwin, roused by Mr. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* in the Eighteen Eighties." And the echoes of the discussion carried across the oceans to Melbourne and Sydney, to Auckland and Wellington, where the new ideas were to bear fruit in due course. In his article Shaw said further,

The phenomenon of economic rent has assumed prodigious proportions in our great cities. The injustice of its private appropriation is glaring, flagrant, almost ridiculous.

In the fantastic reflection of current American politics, and of chaotic international diplomacy, it is equally observable that the same principle of private appropriation applied to oil, coal, iron ore, and other essential values in the land is nowise less glaring, flagrant and grotesquely ridiculous than when Shaw offered his trenchant comment.

The recapture of economic rent for public revenue through a legal and orderly process of taxation was the central idea of the Georgian proposal from the fiscal standpoint. The intended social effect was the disemboweling of land monopoly, in the belief that the margin of opportunity created thereby would provide well-nigh unlimited frontiers of production to the oncoming generations of actual users and occupiers of the land. This social theory rested upon the succinct Jeffersonian doctrine that "The land belongs in usufruct to the living." Echoes of

George's social purposes may be heard today in Senator La Follette's campaign pronouncement (of July 4, 1924) which has for its keynote the following challenge:

To break the combine power of the private monopoly system over the political and economic life of the American people is the one paramount issue of the 1924 campaign The supreme issue, involving all others, is the encroachment of the powerful few upon the rights of the many.

Whatever else *Progress and Poverty* may or may not have accomplished, it undoubtedly presented the evidence and provided the argument which demonstrated to a multitude of readers that land monopoly is the fundamental method of levying tribute from them asses; that its laws of operation are universal; and that its application is rarely tempered by mercy.

Deeper than logic or intellect there lay a power in George's appeal; for he presented what was, in effect, not merely a fiscal, political or social program, but an essential philosophy of life. It was a social evangel, vibrant with a religious fervor that was not afraid to rest its case upon the ideal of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. An ideal perchance of insufficient complexity to satisfy the intensely evolving concepts of the new century, but sufficient to touch the heart of the common man of George's generation, and to incense the Tory mind which resented any assumption that God was to be found, forsooth, on the side of the less heavily equipped battalions. How rapidly the weight is shifting today from the old battalions to the new, let Ramsay MacDonald's occupancy of a foremost chair among the seats of the mighty bear eloquent witness. Other symbols of change, intense and dramatic, are equally visible to him who would face frankly the realities of the new day. It is in the light of these changes, which were broadly sensed, and in part directly influenced, by the "Prophet of San Francisco" almost half a century ago, that the newly published volume of *Progress and Poverty* should be read, considered, and inwardly digested.

Fashions in literature change with changing times; but books which are touched with inspiration and inward illumination live in a gracious glow like saints and heroes crowned in pictured radiance. Through unselfish devotion to truth, and to the spirit, they serve to lift mankind to levels of wider knowledge and deeper understanding of life; and in good time they take their appointed place among the active and liberating forces of human enlightenment.