

Practical Pedagogy

ROBERT C. BOWERS AT HENRY GEORGE
CONGRESS

IT is with pleasure that I acknowledge the invitation of the Convention Committee to address you this morning. The subject for discussion is without a doubt one of the most pertinent of our times. Even more pertinent than many of our favored topics of a more technical nature. Practical pedagogy, if it means anything, must carry the connotation of implied failure of pedagogy.

That certain representative groups of our teachers and leaders of education have somehow missed a great opportunity is evident on all fronts.

That our much vaunted education has failed to redeem our civilization from the bonds of distress of earlier peoples is not to be denied.

Everywhere in education, religion, politics are confusion, disagreement and chaos. Passion and prejudice, bullets and ballots are fired at real or imaginary opposing classes; while the dance of class hatred goes on.

Education in America has been pretty general for many decades. Is it not reasonable to expect now what once was hopefully indicated? What with the increase of general knowledge man would be brought nearer to an earthly happy hunting ground of schismless relations. On the contrary, professors, leaders of thought today seem only able to agree to disagree. So somewhere pedagogy has failed us; at some point in the past, the science of teaching has ceased to be practical. It is for us, who believe in natural economic laws of living together, to point the way. It is for those gathered here today to re-examine their beliefs and find, if we can, why pedagogy is now under a cloud.

"The most striking fact about the higher learning in America is the confusion that besets it." . . . "Our confusion is so great that we cannot make clear even to our own students what we are trying to do." . . . "To the love of money and a misconception of democracy I would add as a major cause of our disorder an erroneous notion of progress." . . . "The tremendous strides of science and technology seemed to the men of the nineteenth century to be the result of the accumulation of data." . . . "The way to promote progress was therefore to get more information." . . . "And so empiricism having taken place of the thought as the basis of research, took its place, too, as the basis of education." . . . "Thus the modern temper produces that strangest of modern phenomena, an anti-intellectual university." . . . Ladies and gentlemen, those are not my words. They are the words of one of the country's outstanding educators, Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, in a recent published article. In these words we have a scathing denunciation of the unconditional surrender of pedagogues to pedantry. Now the dictionary defines pedantry as the over-emphasis of trivial details

and the good Doctor says that empiricism has taken the place of thought as the basis of education. Again the dictionary tells us that empiricism is the pursuit of knowledge without the aid of science or knowledge of principles; hence quackery. Thus one of their own number tells us in resounding phrases that we have anti-intellectual universities, staffed by those who place over-emphasis on trivial details by practicing quackery.

Now whether we agree with the Doctor that such a sweeping condemnation of all that passes for culture in our methods of education is justified, is not of any material importance. But what is of far greater importance is the recognition by a great educator that something is wrong somewhere, that in some manner pedagogues have strayed from that strict definition, meaning the science of teaching. To conclude that our educators are turning loose every year, hundreds of thousands of youths whose only claim to an education is being a well tubbed young American with a statistical complex, would be to agree with a recent writer in the *Yale Alumni Weekly* who suggested that the curriculum is of little importance, for students really educate themselves by informed association with one another. If this is true there is no reason for worrying about anything. The thing to do is to skip the whole business and go fishing. But of course, it is not true. We cannot brush away this indefinable pattern of culture woven by the art of living together in such a facetious manner. Some place in this weaving there must be the broken threads of truth, lost by reason of haste, carelessness or perversion. Let us see. Let us trace back the trends of education and find, if we can, the causes which shifted pedagogy to pedantry. There must be a point of deviation from truth for authority, and if we find that point in education, perhaps we as scientists may bring hope to the souls of such calamity howlers.

Picture this visible civilization of ours in terms of a beautiful tapestry with its beautiful interwoven pattern of intellectual, spiritual and social wants, overlaid on the warp and woof of man's primary wants. Just as man has applied the strong warp and woof of his rug-weaving, if the power and environment to satisfy these have not been denied, so has he been able to embellish the brocade of civilization which we call modern society.

Now if the foundation threads of any woven piece are faulty, the beautiful design soon falls away. So our society. Those to whom is given the privilege of pointing to mankind the warp and woof of our social fabric must take care never to lose track of the true character of these threads, the very foundation of our delicate civilized pattern.

It is so easy to fall a victim of empiricism, to see only the complexities of the design, so easy to surrender to despair and cry wolf! wolf! So easy to look with jaded eyes at the efforts of others and so become smug and pragmatic.

It is not necessary to condemn the whole system, when seeking those points of diversion which seem to create a disjointed society.

Certain it is that the sciences have not failed us. Witness all the marvels of engineering within your very walls, or in your kitchen. You press a button, the light flashes on, you are hurled upward through space at the breathtaking speed. There is no confusion here. Why? For the very definite reason that the science of electrical engineering is as exact as all the other sciences. Not that mankind was handed a tablet of laws from a Moses of engineering, but that the pioneers who preceded the present day wonders admitted that there are natural laws and thereupon set about discovering these laws and applying them to every day life. Many generations pass while these laws are slowly evolved. Each step was proved. There was no surrender to rationalization because the proofs were so difficult. No hint that their was not an exact science since their conclusions seemed to be leading them away from accepted mass opinion, for by sticking to natural law, they soon found order. Nature, you know, will not tolerate confusion. No matter what pattern of the physical sciences you care to trace, the answer or form is always the same—Nature understood.

Yet all these sciences, capable of ministering to all the wants of mankind and making possible the "more abundant life," periodically seem to fail us, and their services and products fall away like the beautiful pattern of a rug which is destroyed by pulling out the warp and woof. This should bring to the mind of all those interested, the question, "Why," and to find the answer is it not obvious that it must be sought in the warp and woof of our education?

For several centuries, the science which sought to explain the natural laws of living together was known as "Political Economy." To their credit it must be recorded that the early pioneers in this study did make feeble attempts to seek natural laws concerning the distribution of wealth, but their clash with the special privilege of the day is too well known to this group to dwell upon. These old classicists did attempt to define what they were trying to study, all the sneers of the present day planned economists notwithstanding. They at least agreed that it was a science that treats of the nature of wealth and the laws of its distribution among the factors engaged in the production. But when the definition of wealth as a natural product of labor applied to land, forced consideration of accepted practices (established by fraud and coercion) the expounders scuttled for safety and produced those prunes and prisms of academic humbug, the wages fund theory and the Malthusian doctrine. No wonder their studies were later dubbed "the dismal science." It is evident that they feared to trust nature. Tolerance forbids me to assign other reasons but I suspect that our

present day friend, "economic determination," was known to mankind at that day.

Here is our first failure in the warp and woof of our educational system. The retreat and confusion of orthodox education in political economy has continued to the present day with only a few notable exceptions. In fact the retreat became a rout. Instead of political economy we now have "economics," described by the teacher as a science which is not exact. If it is not an exact science it is not a science. In fact after reading scores of volumes of these modern apostles of planned economics I feel it is a parlor pink discussion of the production of some articles of wealth and their possible use, flavored with a lot of money bug balony and a dash of class hatred for good measure. Just recently I exposed myself to a course in economics at one of our recognized universities to obtain a modern view of the subject. The class used a text book, selected by the school authorities and written by a well known writer to today. What the students were expected to learn is still a mystery. The author made one fundamental statement to the effect that under free competitive enterprise was the only economic system in which the consumer had a chance, and then devoted eleven hundred pages to an exposition of the idea that government ought to control industry and the development of various means to accomplish it. We just heard a lot of that kind of reasoning in the last campaign, with the addition of a few crocodile tears. The book was a flagrant example of empiricism. No definitions, no answers to the questions propounded, but a political means to exploit the economic means. Another writer has the insolence to defend his statement that economics is not an exact science like chemistry or astronomy because these have natural laws to govern them and economics is subject to the whims and actions of men, and in the whole book there is not even the mention of rent. In the name of the prophet . . . Confusion. No one handed the early chemists a tablet of the laws of chemical reactions and astronomers once used the Ptolmaic theory of the solar system. Yet the astronomers persisted in their search for natural laws when this system was shown to be fallacious. Now when a small error is made in the calculations for an eclipse, they simply admit an error in the application of a natural law, but the politically minded expounders of economics have had to deny that their science was a science in order to cover the mistakes.

Let me recapitulate. Have we found the broken thread in the warp and woof of our civilized pattern? It appears to me from our discussion we have discovered where pedagogy has surrendered to pedantry. It must be located at that point where those investigating the cause that associates poverty with progress, have refused to treat economics as a science and have ignored all those natural economic balances so ably correlated by Henry George. Here is the Waterloo of all our culture and

higher learning. A false and weak foundation in the teachings of the primary relations of man, a social animal.

Practical pedagogy has been given the challenge. It must prove to a sorely tried world that economics is a science as exact as any, because if it is not then the equitable distribution of wealth depends upon whether men are good or bad. Ballots or bullets will be used to enforce an imaginary system, with prunes and prisms to feed and amuse the multitude in the interim.

We who are gathered here today cannot subscribe to such a doctrine of futility. Upon us has fallen the mantle of practical pedagogy. We must cease compromising with the truth. It is for us to stop carping about the theories of George in the back parlor or convention hall, while maintaining a dignified silence on the front porch, or under the spot-light of public office. Those who do this are only following the old rule of economic determination and are of no value to a movement which proposes to establish justice among men. It is for us to go along the highways and byways to teach the central truth, fight for it, yea even die for it, no matter what public office we hold. A recent newspaper article quotes the present claimant to the office of mayor in the city of Pittsburgh, Cornelius D. Scully (supposedly a Georgeist) as saying he did not believe in using the prestige of public office for the purpose of propaganda, while at the same time he was engaged in a public speaking campaign to elect some ward heeler to office to further perpetuate the Federal spoils system. Yet this same man was among those racketeering politicians who forced the resignation of the first honest mayor the city ever had, William N. McNair, who was trying to tell the people the truth. If we compromise with the compromisers they will soon make Marxists of us all, while the Prince of Light fights in vain with the Prince of Darkness, and that unalienable right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is trampled under the feet of the barbarian hordes from within.

PRIVATE property in land is the primary cause of the monstrous inequalities which are developing in modern society. It is this, and not any miscalculation of Nature in bringing into the world more mouths than she can feed, that gives rise to that tendency of wages to a minimum—that "iron law of wages" as the Germans call it—that, in spite of all advances in productive power, compels the laboring classes to the least return on which they will consent to live.

—THE LAND QUESTION, BY HENRY GEORGE.

DID you ever see a company of well-bred men and women sitting down to a good dinner, without scrambling, or jostling, or gluttony, each knowing that his own appetite will be satisfied, deferring to and helping the others? That is human society as it might be.

—SOCIAL PROBLEMS, BY HENRY GEORGE.

Radical Literary Intelligentsia and Hard-headed Propertied Conservatives: A Study in Similarities

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IT is very discreditable for an "intellectual" to be found adhering to ideas which other "intellectuals" have come to regard as out of date. Or, at any rate, such appears to be the view of those who are currently rated as intellectuals!

The "Single Tax" is reputed to be out of date. Hence, mention of it arouses no tremor of real interest in the mind of the typical present-day intellectual; and his only reaction is likely to be a hasty disavowal of support for it.

The idea of taxing at a high rate community-produced land values, considered as a truly significant step in the establishment of an ideal economic order, seems to be completely ignored by most "liberal" and "progressive" magazines and newspapers. The subject is avoided as if it were a dangerous microbe. It appears to be the one subject that proprietors and editors of these journals think it not worth while to discuss and about which they won't editorialize.

And yet, to the casual onlooker who will think over the matter without prejudice, it cannot but seem peculiar that intellectuals—especially those who consider themselves to be "liberal" or "progressive" or "radical"—should have such a complex. For, after all, the salient fact is that, with property rights as they are now, *the many must pay to a comparatively few*, billions of dollars a year merely for *permission* to work and to live on the earth.

Since there are barren mountain tops, remote and forbidding islands, the trackless wastes of deserts, and other relatively undesirable places where men may attempt to live and to work without paying others for permission to do so, the last statement needs some qualification. The statement should rather be that a majority of us must pay to the rest of us, billions of dollars a year for permission to work and to live on the earth, in those locations which geological forces and community development have made comparatively livable.

On the face of it, the proposition that the payments made for such permission—and certainly for the enjoyment of community-produced advantages—should go to the community, seems altogether reasonable. On the face of it, allowing some men to charge others for such permission seems like allowing some to charge others for permission to sail boats on the ocean, swim in the lakes and rivers, breathe the air or enjoy the sunshine. Through what legerdemain of rationalization do our "intellectuals"