chism and Debates

Lords of Misrule

Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain

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'The Apostle of Plunder': The Influence of Henry George in England Reconsidered

> Go to any workman's meeting, be it convoked by Tories or Whigs, by Radicals or Socialists, and listen to the speakers. Let them speak about what they like. They may be supported by the audience or not, but let them, however incidentally, touch on the land question and attack the great landowners, and immediately a storm of applause will break out in the audience. Go to a meeting of Londoners and denounce there the owners of the soil of the metropolis; go to the miners and denounce the mining royalties – and you are sure of finding one who supports you, however mixed the audience.[1]
>
> The rain is falling which moistens and fertilises the whole face of the country. The air is free to all, and the light is direct from heaven; the aristocracy cannot bottle up the sunlight and the air. In this open air it is fitting for us to demand an equally broad share of liberty which, to the Englishman, is in the air he breathes; without it, he dies.[2]

Contemplating his pessimistic view of the future in *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley speculated that there might be a sane path for man's future development that he had overlooked. 'In this community', he wrote, 'economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative.'[3] Huxley's pairing of the American economist Henry George and Kropotkin recalls the celebrity status of George in the years between 1880 and 1930. Now almost forgotten, or dismissed as methodologically and conceptually unsound, George occupies an uncertain position in the history of radicalism. Despite bridging the worlds of economic thought and political activism, and

offering British radicals their most inspirational text since Thomas Paine, there has been no major study of his life since the mid-1950s. Even after Steven B. Cord's attempted rehabilitation of Georgeite economics in 1965, he is still usually dismissed as a 'crank' or the 'dreamer' of Cord's title.[4] For historians of British radicalism his emphasis on land reform symbolises the under-developed nature of British socialism. This follows the view of some of his contemporaries. Walter Besant wrote: 'The book he wrote was one of those which precede Revolution, but do not preach Revolution.'[5] For the generation who built the Labour Party his ideas were compromised by his apparent connection with Liberalism. For historians of ideas, he is quite simply a fossil, expressing outmoded palliatives to the new economic problems posed by industrialisation during the nineteenth century. Marx and his followers dismissed him as someone who fundamentally misunderstood the relationship between capital and labour.[6] Georgeism therefore represents a puzzle. At one level popular in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, but apparently much less significant in hindsight and diminishing as the twentieth century progressed, by the 1930s it had become a byword for eccentricity, associated with the declining years of Liberalism and with Single Tax fundamentalism.

Yet for contemporaries George was the 'philosopher king' of the nineteenth century. His major work *Progress and Poverty* was selling 400,000 copies annually by the end of 1884 and has been continuously in print since its publication in 1880.[7] Amongst his readers were Queen Victoria, urged to consult the book by Dr Randall Davidson, future Primate of England, and Tolstoy, who dreamt about him.[8] Moreover George's tours of Great Britain in 1881, 1882, 1884, and 1889 were sell-out affairs that galvanised a new generation of political radicals.[9] George Bernard Shaw testified to the power of his oratory after attending one of his meetings,[10] and reformers as assorted as Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden, and Robert Blatchford were Georgeites first, and representatives of Labour second. In Britain much of the early hostility to 'socialism' was precipitated by the spasm of opposition to his visit, and grew out of the misidentification of socialist doctrine with his land reform ideas. This chapter seeks to reconcile these conflicting images of George by placing his Single Tax notions in context, by questioning prevailing assumptions about George and his relationship with Liberalism, and by recapturing a radical milieu that distrusted government, exalted the Jeffersonian idea of the small proprietor, and campaigned for the abdication of the great landowners. In so doing it raises questions about the role of George in relation to recent continuity debates within radicalism, and examines

the relationship between Georgeism, Liberalism, and a newly emergent Labourism during a period of incipient Liberal decline.

Progress and Poverty begins with a vision of hopes blighted. Concentrating on the technological and commercial achievements of the nineteenth century, it emphasises 'the persistence of poverty, amid advancing wealth' and questions the benefits of a system that by depressing overall wage levels increased the disparities of wealth between rich and poor in overcrowded cities. Contemporaries commented on the apocalyptic tone of the book. In its opening pages George prophesied social breakdown, and the collapse of civil society as outcasts gathered outside the citadels of the nineteenth century's cultural achievements: 'Upon streets lighted with gas and patrolled by uniformed policemen, beggars wait for the passer-by, and in the shadow of college, and library, and museum are gathering the more hideous Huns and fiercer Vandals of whom Macauley prophesied.'[11] George's solution to such social problems was a straightforward one. Drawing on the Ricardian doctrine that all wealth derives from land, George saw the antidote to poverty in a transformation of land tenure. Land, he suggested, should be available to all. He proposed a single tax on the site value of land replacing all other taxation and forcing proprietors to put it to its full use, or to sell it on to those who were willing to improve it. This he hoped would lead to a lifting of the tax burden on the poor, the restoration of small peasant proprietorship, and result in the systematised break-up of the great aristocratic estates in the British Isles.[12] Behind his ideas were the vestiges of Cobdenite thinking on the land.[13] The intellectual roots of Georgeism lay in Cobden and J.S. Mill's distinction between productive and unproductive wealth. For classical political economists in the nineteenth century economic surplus seemed to be drained off by unproductive landowners. If landowners were forced to be more productive by a single tax on land values, and the poor could be re-settled on the land, the glut on the labour market in cities might be reduced, and the value of wages increased. It thus acted as a possible redress for the problems of both town and countryside. Moreover, a single land tax would lead to the abolition of income tax and indirect taxation, creating the 'Free Breakfast Table' of long radical lineage.[14] For Cobdenites attracted by George's ideas the Single Tax would finally destroy the last great unjust monopoly, that on land. Mirroring the injustices of that monopoly, Georgeism was unforgiving of landowners, and postulated a non-compensatory system for those unable to meet the demands of the Single Tax. It was this feature of his plans that led to George's nick-name: 'The Apostle of Plunder'.

Georgeism emerged in answer to the land revelations and disclosures of the limited distribution of small rural proprietorship made in the 1870s. In 1872 Lord Derby commissioned a land survey to counter radical arguments about aristocratic dominance of the shires. Reformers from John Bright onwards levelled the accusation that the land mass of the British Isles was concentrated in the hands of a narrow elite. The figure of 30,000 was traditionally used and became notorious as an index of narrow oligarchic rule. Bright famously declared that 'fewer than 150 men own half the land of England'.[15] The 'New Domesday' Survey provided ammunition for the researches of John Bateman, who demonstrated that this was a considerable understatement. Confirming the narrowness, rather than the wide diffusion of land-holding in the United Kingdom and Ireland, the survey revealed that a much smaller proportion of the population, barely 7000, controlled some four-fifths of the land acreage of the United Kingdom. Bateman's disclosures added weight to the anti-aristocratic platform. The Survey became the bible of radical land reformers, much quoted and revered as a revelation of injustice. Bateman reported that the work was frequently consulted in London clubs: 'The copy of the work at the "Ultratorium" was reduced to rags and tatters within a fortnight of its arrival – a lesson which was not wasted on the library committee of my own club, who caused the book to be so bound as to defy anything short of a twelve-year-old schoolboy.'[16] Armed with Bateman's disclosures, by the early 1880s radicals were able to declaim with confidence against aristocratic monopoly of the land. The Georgeite MP for Salford, Arthur Arnold, arrived 'at the astonishing result that the representative owners of four-fifths of the soil of the United Kingdom could be placed within the compass of a single voice in one of the great public halls of the country. The landlords of more than 52,000,000 of acres might meet together in the Free Trade Hall of Manchester, and discuss the accuracy of these statements.'[17] Inspired by Bateman, Georgeites saw the movement as a purgative of the sectional interests of aristocracy that sullied government and manipulated the political system for its own ends. The Duke of Buccleuch, revealed by Bateman's survey as the largest landowner in Britain, became a byword for this unjust land monopoly, owning land 'over which he can ride thirty miles in a straight line'.[18]

George's strongest impact, however, was in the towns. Georgeite land policies are often misinterpreted as a solution to the problems of arable farming. In fact they were designed primarily to tackle issues of urban, rather than rural, living. From the 1880s high unemployment and fears about the 'degeneration' of urban man inspired by Boothite revelations

about the condition of the poor in the East End of London fostered a moral panic about the fabric of urban life. Contemporaries believed that the crisis on the land diminished the potential of the fitter rural population to replenish tainted urban stock.[19] For many reformers the phenomenon of aristocratic ownership of prime sites in towns and cities provided a barrier to the development of municipal ownership, and prohibitively increased urban rent. Georgeites often claimed that there were incentives in urban areas for proprietors to subsist off ground rents and leave building land stagnant and undeveloped.[20] Moreover, titled landlords inflicted inflated rents on the shopocracy which was in turn passed on to the consumer in the form of higher food prices. Jane Cobden-Unwin noted relative indifference to Georgeism in the countryside, but suggested: 'In the towns it is different. The municipalities, conscious of their great opportunities for effective social work and at their wit's end for means to finance them, are generally eager for the power to rate vacant sites and undeveloped sites on their capital values.'[21] George's followers argued that the stabilisation of municipal finances would do much to alleviate poverty, and reduce endemic urban problems like crime. Urban Georgeism thus provided an antidote to aristocratically inspired emigration policies and Malthusian over-population doctrines in Britain's towns and cities.[22] The campaigns of urban Georgeites set the tone for the later land agendas of Liberalism. During the Liberal Land Campaign of 1909–1910, Lloyd George chose the great urban centres of Limehouse and Newcastle for set-piece speeches highlighting the urban implications of land-holding.[23]

Georgeism is difficult to locate within late nineteenth-century politics. As a doctrine it was always inchoate. Georgeite scholars have identified at least three different strains of Georgeism.[24] Whilst drawing particularly on Cobdenite free trade ideas, Georgeism clearly had ramifications for all those concerned with the re-distribution of rural proprietorship, either to individual farmers or to the state. In the late nineteenth century it expressed a desire for the pastoral redemption of the British race. Beyond Georgeism proper was a penumbra of fringe organisations advocating communal living, small allotment schemes, town planning, land nationalisation, and the sequestration of crown lands. During this period most movements rooted in self-sufficiency showed a tinge of Georgeism.[25] Charles Gide in *Political Economy*, the definitive economic textbook of the day, saw little difference in practice between the two systems of 'Single Tax' and Land Nationalisation (or more properly compulsory state purchase of unused and waste land).[26] Those who have discerned in the tensions between the Georgeite English and Scottish Land

Restoration Leagues, and the Land Nationalisation Society a fracture line between Liberalism and socialism, have made an unconvincing case. The membership of the three organisations overlapped, and *Land and Labour*, the journal of the Land Nationalisation Society acknowledged that: 'The two methods... are not antagonistic, but at the most alternatives... for the forcing open of the land to use which one method proposes to do directly, is exactly what the other proposes to do indirectly, and the practically revisable rent is only the Single Tax under another name.'[27] Theorists of the two approaches to land reform appreciated the similarities, noting that they constituted a break with the pure Cobdenite aim of reform of entail and primogeniture, and sought kindred remedies to low wages and pauperism. The land nationaliser A.R. Wallace was a great admirer of George's work, even recommending it to his colleague Charles Darwin.[28] The influential role of Helen Taylor, John Stuart Mill's step daughter, in introducing George to British radical circles also brought him into contact with the ideas of the later, collectivist Mill on land, still expounded by Taylor at land reform meetings in the 1890s.[29] A movement that encompasses an economic critique, elements of sect, with characteristics of a mass political agitation is not easily compressed within traditional explanatory categories like parties or movements. This may account for the recent paucity of historical analysis of the organisation. The Single Tax is best understood as a cipher, a catch-all banner unfurled against aristocracy that epitomised the injustices, imbalances and historical wrongdoing of Britain's 'territorial magnates'. It occurs within the programmes of both Liberalism and Labourism during these years, and constitutes the last major attempt to resolve the nineteenth-century land question.

For historians the popular support for Georgeite ideas remains problematic. There has been a tendency to dismiss Georgeism as a 'fad' or even as a sect, connected with land millenarianism and end-of-century angst. This reading views Georgeism as nostalgic and anti-modern, describing the movement as populated with rural fantasists and 'back to the land' fundamentalists.[30] Less contentious is Georgeism's connection with progressive taxation measures. In the hands of the Liberals, Georgeite ideas are often seen as part of a broader debate about the economic implications of state intervention. Here George is bracketed with L.T. Hobhouse, J.A. Hobson, and Charles Masterman as part of a grouping within the New Liberalism that sought a limited redistribution of wealth by reducing indirect taxation, exploring social welfare reform, and squeezing the unearned increment of land for the good of the community.[31] This view stands in fundamental opposition to a more

traditional reading of George that locates his ideas within the ambit of a declining and fragmented Liberalism. In this reading the structural weaknesses within the Liberal Party are stressed, and Georgeism is portrayed as a vehicle for a backward-looking Cobdenism, mired in the past, and dependent on traditional Liberal slogans that rallied the faithful, but increasingly failed to connect with the electors at a time when the New Liberalism was moving towards a more social democratic consensus. This places Georgeism within a broader debate about Liberal decline, in which his ideas are portrayed as emblematic of a revived Cobdenism, blocking reform, preventing the exploration of non-traditional Liberal strategies, and failing to stem the haemorrhage of urban electors deserting Liberalism for the Labour Party.[32] Fabian radicals like Cecil Chesterton saw Georgeism as a conscious distraction amongst Liberals, concentrating radical energies on the 'land robber' and distracting attention away from the more deadly 'capitalist robber': 'It is the capitalist, not the landlord who is the most active and dangerous enemy of the labourer, and the talk about "the land monopoly" is merely a clever if somewhat transparent dodge to the part of [the Liberals] to divert public indignation from himself to his sleeping partner in exploitation.'[33] Cobden's daughter, Jane Cobden-Unwin, made substantially the same point, remarking: 'not a few people probably regard the abolition of private property in land as the most effective barrier *against* socialism'.[34] Finally the Georgeite presence within Labourism has also been explored. Where Georgeism surfaced in the early Labour Party, it is sometimes argued, it fulfilled the role of a half-way house between radical Liberalism and something more. The analogy here is with a revolving door. Many early Labour reformers once exposed to Georgeite ideas, absorbed them, rejected them, and then moved on to a more socialist future in the Independent Labour Party (ILP).[35] This is at the core of George Bernard Shaw's view of George as 'stopped on the threshold of socialism'.[36] Georgeism emerges from this analysis as shifting and insubstantial. For David Matless land reform was a forgotten avenue of Labour advancement, rejected in the 1920s as Labour increasingly recast itself as the party of the urban masses and became amnesiac about its erstwhile zeal for land reform. By the 1930s it had almost entirely abandoned rural issues to the Tories and vacated the rural constituency.[37]

To account for the popularity of Henry Georgeism is to enter the world of late nineteenth-century autodidact culture. George himself symbolised the best features of autodidacticism.[38] An entirely self-educated scholar who had served at sea in merchant ships, travelled America as a hobo, and visited Melbourne during the Gold Rush, he

portrayed himself as a seer whose unconventional route to knowledge had equipped him with a privileged insight into the inner workings of society. The secrets of Georgeism could only be revealed through a similar programme of study, contemplation, and instruction.[39] The size and length of *Progress and Poverty* contributed to this process. The inaccessibility and sometimes tortuous prose of the book were part of its mystique as a document with a revelatory impact. The fact that George was an unofficial economist, working outside the academy whose ideas were often held up to ridicule by the conventional thinkers of the day and who was heckled off the stage at the Oxford Union, only increased his image as an honest man who spoke an unacknowledged truth.[40] Critics of *Progress and Poverty* tended to be dismissive of its status as debating club fodder; writing at the height of Henry George fever, E.G. Fitzgibbon sneered at its cult status amongst 'asses' bridge juvenile debating society orators'.[41] For ardent Georgeites, however, *Progress and Poverty* provided an exercise in the retrieval of the people's history. Land reformers hoped to correct a situation in which landlordism thrived on ignorance of titles, duties, landlord responsibility, and the fake pedigrees of usurping families. In the Georgeite introduction to the land reform writings of William Ogilvie, D.C. Macdonald wrote that 'in order to perpetuate landlord serfdom it is necessary to keep our mothers systematically ignorant of their children's birthright'.[42] In its analysis of land confiscations, evictions, tithe exactions, and villages scattered by rapacious landowners, *Progress and Poverty* catalogued the atrocities of a suffering yeomanry, and rekindled a burning sense of injustice at the process of its destruction (see Appendix 2). For Georgeites this was a re-education necessary to sustain the movement, recruit followers, and pave the way for a purified social order following the imposition of the Single Tax. Georgeite newspaper like *The Single Tax* and a vast array of land reform pamphlets therefore fulfilled a basically educational and instructive role. To enhance this process Georgeism catered for all levels of understanding. In the 1890s specialist puzzle books were prepared for children featuring shape games in which landlordism was depicted as a rat, and its nemesis appeared in the form of a cat, gradually revealed, that symbolised the power and adaptability of the Single Tax. This was the meaning behind the enigmatic banner carried by the children of the Single Tax MP, Josiah Wedgwood, at land reform demonstrations: 'Have you seen the cat?'[43] In addition, Georgeite ideas were marketed in the form of popular board games. In the 1900s, the Maryland Quaker, Lizzie Magie, patented a game called 'The Landlord's Game' as an educational tool that highlighted the inequities of landownership, and in

later incarnations became the basis for Monopoly. There was occasionally an element of conspiracy theory evident in such material, in which a true understanding of the secret forces manipulating the economy shed light on the problems of the past and of the future.

At the heart of the appeal of Georgeism was the continuing popularity of the American democratic ideal. Admiration for American democratic liberties had a long pedigree within British radicalism. For British reformers Georgeism was in a direct line of inheritance from Jeffersonian democracy.[44] Viewed in these terms, Georgeism was simply a continuation of an older style of radical culture that looked to America for inspiration in the purification of democratic institutions. America offered up the vision of a meritocracy that lacked a resident aristocracy, had no state church, and provided a utopia for the small proprietor. Ernest Jones wrote of the contrast between British soldiers rewarded for their service with 'a wretched medal' whereas American veterans received a stake in society with 'a happy cottage'.[45] Recently, however, there has been a marked tendency to see such sentiments as emblematic of an earlier phase of radicalism, still important in the 1840s, but of much less significance following the end of the American Civil War, and the increasing recognition of America's shallow materialism, coupled with the exposure of corrupt Tammany Hall politicians.[46] Anti-Georgeites frequently accused him of plotting to import a similar flawed American style of politics into Britain.[47] To suggest an end to previous radical visions of an idealised 'Yankeedom' is perhaps to understate the enduring appeal of American meritocratic values. Much of the popularity of George in Britain was rooted in the frontier inheritance he apparently symbolised. Newspaper reports of George's visit in 1884 portray him inaccurately as a Davy Crockett figure, hardened in the wilderness, and offering the same cheap land proposals that had fuelled the land rushes on the frontier under the Homestead Acts.[48] There is evidence that he may have artfully conspired in this image of himself as a 'plain, straight-thinking American' in the mould of Lincoln or of General Grant.[49] For many British radicals George represented the common transatlantic inheritance of liberty rooted in John Locke, memories of 1688, and the achievements of the American Revolution. Georgeite hagiography made much of the proximity of his birthplace in Philadelphia to the historic State House 'of revolutionary fame' where the Declaration of Independence was signed.[50] For the Scottish Georgeite D.C. Macdonald, George was 'a child of 1776 in spirit and in truth'.[51] A common store of recent political experience underpinned such notions. For many reformers the American and British traditions of liberty were cemented by British

radical support for the North during the American Civil War and in campaigns against the slave trade.[52] Some Georgeites used the image of slavery recalled by this common culture as a shorthand to describe the position of the landless labourers of England, and portrayed the landlord's claim for compensation in the same terms as the slave owner's, as an unjust and immoral demand. George himself saw the fight against unjust landlordism as a continuation of the struggle to end slavery in the United States: 'The struggle for relative human rights had not triumphed at Appomattox, as enthusiastic patriots of the period like myself had confidently believed.'[53] Former anti-slavery campaigners who remained popular in Britain, were enlisted in his campaign, notably William Lloyd Garrison's son Frank Lloyd Garrison, and songs, poems, and stories by prominent American writers expressive of American liberties remained at the core of the Georgeite phenomenon and of radical culture more generally.[54] The New England poet Henry Longfellow was often cited, as were other voices representative of a transplanted Puritanism. John Greenleaf Whittier, who George quoted at the beginning of *Progress and Poverty* and who had featured in the Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star*, was perennially popular, as were James Russell Lowell and Walt Whitman, the former an abolitionist, the later a Union soldier in the Civil War.[55] In later years hymns by Whittier and Lowell were frequently sung at Labour Party meetings.[56] In his journalism William Clarke highlighted the compatibility of New England crusading puritanism and the Scots Lowland Covenanting tradition in the Borders where such writers were widely read, and the Scottish Land Restoration League found the bulk of its supporters.[57]

Moreover, Georgeism posed as the purgative of American democracy. For many land reformers the true pressures that polluted the arcadia of the 'Republic of the West' were those imposed by corrupt landowners in Great Britain. Writing in the mid-1870s, Charles Bradlaugh blamed the long arm of landlordism for the excesses of Tammany Hall. The depredations of the Irish gangs that ran New York were laid squarely at the door of aristocratic misrule in Ireland, where the clearing of the land had bred a race of dispossessed migrants, non-conversant with the habit of democracy. The tools of Tammany were ignorant itinerant Irish workmen, thrown off their smallholdings by the scourge of Irish landlordism: 'These men, to escape death by starvation, left their own shores absolute paupers; and the country of their adoption has had to pay some of the penalties attending the early practice of full political rights by a mass of men not yet educated to the consciousness of their duty.'[58] Similarly for Bradlaugh, the prevalence of slavery in the American

South was a legacy of 'the English monarch to the new republic'. For most radicals, the slave owners of the American South were an aberrant fragment of aristocracy that sought to emulate the gracious landed living of English forbears. Aristocracy thus served as a medium to retard the progress of American democratic values. Radicals stressed the degree to which dynastic aristocratic government in England had supported the slave-holding South, 'and permitted, without protest, the building in, and issue from, its ports of war, vessels to be used against its ally the North'.[59] Some gloated at the irony of the collapse of numerous aristocratic fortunes, undercut by cheap grain imported from the US in the 1870s. It was depicted as revenge for the pressures leading to migration and for aristocracy's hostility to the Federal cause: 'They stole the land, oppressed and degraded the poor in a multitude of ways, depopulated their estates, and forced many millions of the hard workers to emigrate. They never suspected that the emigrants would return and invade the land from which they were driven, and destroy the ruthless power that once expelled them... Not with warships and implements of destruction do they come, but with corn!'[60] The return of Georgeism was thus a gift from the infant republic. It provided restitution for the religious and political persecution of 'the Pilgrim Fathers', who featured regularly in Georgeist rhetoric.[61] At the same time for many radicals it was also a harbinger of a more intimate Atlanticism during an era of increasing harmony between the Anglo-Saxon powers over matters of race and empire.

There was a strong revivalist quality to Georgeite meetings noted by both his admirers and detractors alike. For his enemies they were like 'Negro camp meetings', for his friends they had a luminous quality perhaps more fitting to the pulpit.[62] This tied in strongly with George's own concept of *Progress and Poverty* as a social gospel presented in religious terms and revealed to him through divine intervention.[63] Philip Snowden who saw George speak in Aberdeen in the 1880s wrote that his demeanour was of a preacher: 'In appearance he was of middle height, well built, had a full brown beard, and would have passed for a Nonconformist minister.'[64] The radical MP Josiah Wedgwood wrote that after exposure to George's ideas 'I acquired the gift of tongues' and spoke of 'most elect, thrice-born Georgeites'.[65] Other observers recalled themselves transported by his words in a semi-mystical way. In his autobiography *From Crow-Scaring to Westminster* the agricultural labourers' leader George Edwards includes his discussion of George in an account of his devotional literature, and remembered nocturnal readings of his works: 'Many a time have I gone out at eleven o'clock at night and wiped my

eyes with the dew of the grass in an endeavour to keep myself awake.'[66] In the Australian colonies Bruce Scates has recorded claims of miracle cures of ailments and illnesses following contact with *Progress and Poverty*.[67] In the early 1880s Georgeism drew on the legacy of the tour of the American evangelists Moody and Sankey. Taking Britain by storm in 1873–1875 and returning at the height of George-fever in 1883, they set the tone for a revivalist moral populism that sought to empower the people and undermine the religious monopoly of the existing Nonconformist sects. As John Coffey points out, in the aftermath of the 1867 struggle for reform they were seen as dangerous levellers eroding traditional religious and social hierarchies.[68] Henry George's strong Congregationalist beliefs and his upbringing as the son of a religious publisher coloured his platform presence in a similar way to Moody and Sankey. Writing in the 1950s, Heilbroner was inclined to see him simply as a popular millenarian.[69] Contemporaries were scarcely less frank about the religious undertones to Georgeism. William Morris described *Progress and Poverty* as a 'new gospel',[70] whilst Keir Hardie, who was probably converted by Moody and Sankey during their tour of Britain, renewed his faith at the feet of the master.[71] Throughout George's career religious appeals provided the cornerstone of platform Georgeism. Speaking in Glasgow in 1888 on the subject 'Thy Kingdom Come' he made this explicit, reworking the parable of the ungodly rich turning the poor man away from their table, and speaking of Christianity as 'a great movement of social reform... The Christian revelation was the doctrine of human equality... It struck at the very basis of the monstrous tyranny that then oppressed the civilised world; it struck at the fetters of the captives and the bonds of the slave.'[72] Foundation texts of the movement included psalm cxv.16: David's injunction that 'God hath given the earth to the children of man' and *The Book of Common Prayer* interpreted as counselling merciful treatment of defaulting tenants.[73] Elsewhere Georgeites referred to the moral leadership of the Old Testament prophets, God's distribution of the land to the tribes of Israel, and portrayed George as armed with the renewed moral authority of a returned law-giver. Years earlier Joseph Arch had referred to the emotive symbolism of the radical leader leading his people, 'the white slaves of England', like Moses, back to their lost rights.[74] As part of this rhetoric dispossessed clansmen in the Highlands were often portrayed as the Children of Israel driven from their native land into exile by a new Pharaohism: 'The clansmen have been deprived of their inheritance and, to an extent, only paralleled by the children of Israel, have been scattered and dispersed.'[75] Unsurprisingly then, Georgeites saw themselves as

missionaries, taking their faith and the Georgeite message to 'the open road' which they wandered like mendicant friars, preaching the one true word to the people.[76] For their part, landowners were stigmatised as selfish, ungodly, and heedless of divine teachings. In 1895, *The Labour Annual* satirically announced the establishment of a 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst Landlords' to instruct them in their Christian duty.[77]

Georgeism legitimated the long-standing British radical campaign against the abuses of landowning. A movement which had been seen as purely visceral and instinctive was now provided with intellectual justification by *Progress and Poverty*. When George lectured on the theme of the 'Robbers of the Poor' or was greeted with banners marked 'God Gave the Land to the People' he was making substantially the same point articulated by a previous generation of radicals. A sustained campaign since the 1830s provided hard evidence of the restricted and privileged nature of Britain's ruling caste, a rapacious 'few' as opposed to the needy many whose doings were chronicled in radical *exposés* of perpetual pensioners and placemen.[78] Speaking at Manchester in 1850 the Chartist leader Ernest Jones harangued his audience: 'We have not tried to destroy, but to make the robber disgorge his plunder. The nation is the great landlord; the aristocracy were its tenantry, who won leases from its ignorance, perpetuated them by fraud, violated them by force, and now hold them by your apathy and disunion.'[79] In Georgeite rhetoric the claims of the territorial landowners to vast swathes of England and Scotland were punctured, and their pretensions to the moral leadership of the nation overthrown. The Norman Conquest was at the heart of this critique. For Georgeites the Conquest was a powerful and emotive symbol that began the process of the dispossession of the English yeomanry. Over centuries it created a territorial aristocracy who deprived the people of their true rights and reduced them to internal exile in the land of their birth. Examining this theme the popular historian Robert Heath wrote of an 'English Via Dolorosa' for the peasantry.[80] The land movement was suffused with the memory of the sixteenth-century peasant revolts that resisted this process in 'mansion-ridden country'.[81] Jack Cade and Wat Tyler were frequently invoked as predecessors of the land agitation and platform audiences reminded of those forced 'by the unanswerable arguments of musketry and the hangman's rope... to submit to the loss of common rights'.[82] Here words like 'robbery' and 'swag' had emotive connotations. Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village' became the lament for those driven from the land, much cited in oratory and debate.[83] Most radicals saw the true literature of the British Isles as deriving from

this sense of dispossession in which impassioned champions of the soil like Robert Burns and William Shakespeare expressed the people's pain and loss. Burns was the most celebrated casualty of landlordism, ruined by financial pressures, and seeking to free the Scottish peasantry from the 'mental-fetters' of a 'laird-ridden' Scotland.[84] For Georgeites, titles and land were part of the currency of 'Old Corruption'. Even moments of liberty like 1688 were sullied by the process of narrow aristocratic rule. The dream of liberty unfulfilled or compromised in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution haunted land reformers, apparently providing the opportunity for a tiny, unrepresentative cadre to usurp the constitution and establish oligarchic rule under Lord North, Pitt the younger, or the Duke of Portland. Secularists and radicals shared this view, seeing oligarchy as suppressive of democratic politics and natural rights: 'For the last 163 years this landed aristocracy has been the real governing class, superseding the crown, and until 1832, entirely controlling the people.'[85] For most Georgeites the steady erosion of the landed yeomanry through enclosures and the destruction of the commons, begun in the past but gathering pace in the nineteenth century, represented an unholy alliance between the traditional folk-demon of the lawyer, and an ascendant landlordism. Eli Hallamshire, the working-man land reformer who coined the slogan 'Three Acres and a Cow' characterised this movement as a three-pronged assault on the rights of the people by 'the three great locusts [who] cause the blight of England', 'the perpetual pensioner, the lawyer [and] the Conservative MP'. Traditionally lawyers were compared to the plagues of Old Testament Egypt: 'like the reptile curse of pharaoh they enter every man's house, and come up into every man's kneading-trough and money-box'.[86] Land reformers were keen to reverse this dispossession and in so doing re-claimed the term 'plunder' frequently used against them in the land debates of the 1880s. For them the true plunderers were the landowners and aristocrats who had stolen the land from the people. The land nationaliser A.R. Wallace, saw the land campaign of the closing decade of the nineteenth century as a legitimate reclamation of an Englishman's birthright and condemned the role of the great landowners in breaking up the sacred ground of the English at monuments like the prehistoric henge at Avebury.[87] For George speaking in Bolton in 1884: 'He averred that he was no confiscator, but the reverse. He did not propose to break the sixth commandment, but to enforce it.'[88] At the Land Reform conference of 1880, reformers were told to wear the abuse heaped on them with pride: 'Land Law reformers should not be deterred by shouts of "spoilation" and "robbery" of "communist" and "socialist".'[89]

Georgeism was, above all, a movement of moral censure, expressive of the transgressive behaviour of Britain's noble families. Georgeites were experts at stripping away the allure and mystique of noble titles. They prided themselves on their refusal to succumb to the mythologies veiling aristocratic origins and claimed that they saw through the invented 'flummery' that girded the world of titles, the court, and ancestral inheritance. The real key to understanding the appeal of George and the rhetoric he inspired is the minute attention he paid to the origins of aristocratic connection and position in Britain. Georgeism carried on the tradition of Jack Wade's *Black Book*, and accounts of aristocratic libertinage by William Benbow who moved in a radical underworld of pornography and blackmail during the Regency that provided material for the critics of the aristocracy's self-indulgence.[90] Throughout his speeches George artfully played on the dubious ancestry of the great noble families. The aristocracy, which he represented as a class of gilded pleasure-seekers, is depicted through the prism of Georgeism as fundamentally fraudulent: 'The people who believe in blue blood and in the sacredness of long pedigrees may well feel ashamed as they read the annals of the peerage, and see how nearly every noble family either originated in vice or has thriven upon crime.'[91] In *Our Noble Families* Tom Johnston, a Georgeite and later strong ILPer, vilified the pretensions of the Scottish gentry, depicting them simply as a northern arm of Normanism, bolstered by blackmailers, cattle rustlers, and landgrabbers: 'Descended from border thieves, land pirates and freebooters, they still boast their pedigree. The blood of knaves and moonlighters has by process of snobbery become blue blood; lands raped from the weak and the unfortunate now support arrogance in luxury.'[92] In George's speeches the aristocracy moved in a world of mirrors in which titles could be disposed of, bought, upgraded, or traded in for better ones. Georgeites were obsessed with dubious honours, extinct peerages, illegitimate offspring, returned (presumed dead heirs) and debauched aristocrats. *Pace* George such slurs took on a new life, becoming a common feature of anti-aristocratic rhetoric from the 1880s onwards.[93] Georgeite exposures of the aristocracy set out to reveal the true sources of their wealth and status, the company they kept, and the conduits whereby they gained access to titles and position: 'Even parvenu peers, moreover, find it equally easy to forge pedigrees and to buy professional distinction. Only five noblemen are now allowed to sit in the Lords because their ancestors sat there in the thirteenth century.'[94] George also appreciated the importance of the large territorial landowners to the superstructure of the Victorian state and their centrality in defence, local government,

and the social life of the countryside. Their settled 'timelessness' he saw in stark contrast to the casualties and victims of landlessness, low wages, and unemployment in the towns. This contrast was symbolised for Georgeites through the dichotomy of the aristocrat and the tramp. The tramp, who featured strongly in *Progress and Poverty* and loomed large in George's own experience, symbolised the rootlessnesss and desperation of the urban poor divorced from the land; the aristocrat was the titled thief who had deprived him of his livelihood. Robert Blatchford, for a long time a Georgeite, best expresses this tension in *Britain for the British.* Quoting from George he offered the following story:

> A nobleman stops a tramp who is crossing his park, and orders him off *his* land. The tramp asks him how came the land to be his? The noble replies that he inherited it from his father. 'How did he get it asks the tramp?' 'From his father' is the reply; and so the lord is driven back to the proud days of his origin – the Conquest. 'And how did your great, great, great, etc., grandfather get it?' asks the tramp. The nobleman draws himself up and replies, 'He fought for it and won it be'. 'Then,' says the unabashed vagrant, beginning to remove his coat, 'I will fight *you* for it'.[95]

The same image of dispossessed beggars recurs in the words of the famous 'Land Song' that was the anthem of Georgeism:

> The Land, the Land! 'Twas God who gave the Land!
> The Land! The Land! The ground on which we stand.
> Why should we be beggars with the ballot in our hand?
> God gave the land to the people!

The accusation most frequently levelled against George was that he was a plagiarist. Some described his notion of the Single Tax as entirely derivative. Contemporaries variously attributed the germ of his ideas to Thomas Spence, to the eighteenth century Scottish economist William Ogilvie, to the French physiocrats, to Herbert Spencer, or to the benevolent Scottish paternalist Patrick Edward Dove.[96] Georgeites defended him fiercely against these charges, arguing that 'he was always delighted to meet with authorities in England or Ireland in agreement with his views' and did much to encourage the re-printing of forgotten land reform tracts.[97] George himself was sensitive about these antecedents, and occasionally apologised for them in public. When Philip Snowden heard him speak he devoted much of the lecture to describing the

contents of a pamphlet he had discovered in Aberdeen University anticipating his arguments.[98] For many Georgeites the rediscovery of land reform ideas by different generations demonstrated that they were in some mystical way immutable and innate, and were therefore an expression of a universal truth, implanted by god and expressed through 'social saviours of our race!'[99] The situation is best summed up by the land nationaliser Charles Wicksteed: 'He has perhaps said little that is absolutely new, but what he has done is to bring light and truths partially or wholly understood by others into one grand focus, which is nothing short of a revelation to those who understand it.'[100]

The real relevance of the proto-Georgeism identified by his supporters is that the ancestry of his ideas placed George's arguments in a long and hallowed tradition within British radicalism.[101] George could claim the authority of Paine, Thomas Spence, and more recently Joseph Chamberlain.[102] Spence in particular was a 'John the Baptist' figure for George. Memories of his residence in Newcastle and of Chartist land-reformers like Bronterre O'Brien were revived on Tyneside at the time of George's visit in February 1884.[103] Such recollections stirred the memories of elderly Chartists, leading the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* to put aside space for letters recalling the experience of previous land-reform agitations.[104] These veterans frequently endorsed a Georgeite perspective on the compensation of landowners. One example may stand for many:

> Between 30 and 40 years ago I was a member of a phrenological society which held its meetings in a large room in a court in... the Groat Market, Newcastle. One night the land question incidentally cropped up. The late Mr. John Kane, who was a member, told the oft-told tale of how many of the great landowners got their land. Their ancestors came over with William the Conqueror, and that arch-robber divided the land of this country amongst them. I ventured to remark that would not justify us in taking the land from the present owners, as they had nothing to do with the robbery. Mr Kane, in his usual sarcastic way, replied: 'The receiver of stolen goods is as bad as the thief'.[105]

For many reformers the antecedence of Georgeite ideas was even older and placed him in contact with the shade of the seventeenth century Puritan tradition that inspired the Chartists and the reform campaigners of 1866–1867. J.A. Hobson emphasised the continuing importance of this tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century stressing its

'moral fervour' surviving into 'our times'.[106] It further manifested itself in the discussion journals of the period where George was portrayed with figures like Hampden and Oliver Cromwell as an embodiment of 'The Puritan Ideal'. The agricultural self-sufficiency journal *Seed-Time* devoted space to a discussion both of the continuing relevance of the Puritan movement and of Wiclif, the translator of the first vernacular Bible in English, as a possible intellectual ancestor of the author of *Progress and Poverty*.[107] Individual Georgeites were also inspired by the Puritan example. In Stafford, Josiah Wedgwood recalled the example of the robust defender of the 'Good Old Cause' Thomas Harrison, whilst the words of the unrepentant Cromwellian Richard Rumbold (architect of the Rye House Plot against Charles II) facing execution on the scaffold in 1684 were popular in land reform journals: 'I never could believe that providence had sent a few men into the world ready booted and spurred to ride, and millions ready saddled and bridled to be ridden.'[108] A revived land agitation in the 1880s led to the exhumation of those Commonwealthmen who had campaigned for a purified republic under Cromwell. James Harrington, author of *Oceana* and a favourite of the Chartists, was especially revered for his prediction that most land would inevitably end up in the pockets of the gentry, and for his maxim 'power always follows property'.[109]

Georgeism drew together the strands of existing radical experience and recrafted them for a late nineteenth-century audience. Traditional radical culture manifested itself strongly in the movement in a number of ways. Like other radical campaigns of this type the Georgeite agitation had its martyrs for the cause. Indeed, the Georgeite platform was constructed around the notion of suffering and exile amongst the dispossessed English peasantry. In his correspondence George appealed for more martyrs, along the lines of those imprisoned for furthering the cause of the Irish Land movement: 'There will be some risk of going to prison for a while, but this work requires men who are willing to face that.'[110] George, himself, was the movement's chief martyr, detained by the Royal Irish Constabulary as a suspected Fenian whilst evangelising in Ireland at the time of the Phoenix Park murders in 1882. This episode not only linked him with the Irish Land War and traditional radical images of a suffering Ireland, it also ensured advance publicity for his speech in the Memorial Hall in London.[111] For some reformers this was a distant echo of the gentleman leader, crucified at the hands of the state for the cause of the people. George pandered to this image, appearing in evening dress 'the only one on the platform to do so' at the St James's Hall meeting in January 1884.[112] Above all, George was a man who was

portrayed as a self-sacrificing leader, wearing out his health in his campaign against the adamantine force of aristocracy and feudalism. In his correspondence he complained of nights without sleep, and of an unremitting schedule of speaking engagements.[113] The true essence of Georgeism resided in this appeal of David against Goliath. Far from being a 'gentleman leader', George was the antithesis of all things aristocratic, a plain, simple man, lacking the polish and urbane sophistication of Britain's landowning dynasties. George was the embodiment of the 'little man' tasking on powerful forces ranged against him, and seeking to bring down an unaccountable and unelected power. At Oxford University in 1884 admiring descriptions portrayed him 'confronting what promised to be a very hostile audience, he stood like a lion at bay and fairly cowed his opponents'.[114] As with a previous generation of radical leaders, self-sacrifice, dedication to the task in hand, and a total disregard for personal circumstances were a fundamental component of his platform presence. To the ageing Chartist George Julian Harney, he was reminiscent of the last Chartist leader, Ernest Jones. At the time of his death other obituarists lauded his zeal, self-sacrifice, and failure to make money from his writings.[115] During his tours of the United Kingdom an unremitting stream of fan mail expressed an open adulation for him. One zealot remarked that 'if I might speak for England, I would say that it is more deeply indebted to no living man than to you'.[116] Such sentiments validated the Georgeite platform and cemented the connection between leader and led.

Like radicals before them, Georgeite culture revolved around 'singing their rights'.[117] Its songs, poems and political symbolism were often rooted in an older radical milieu. The 'Land Song' is the most enduring example of Georgeite propaganda. Sung heartily at the close of public meetings, and even available in an early travelling phonograph version, the 'Land Song' came to express the hopes and aspirations of Georgeism. Indeed for many it was a substitute national anthem for the movement that looked forward to an England renewed. Josiah Wedgwood, who claimed authorship of the song, recalled that at a meeting chaired by his wife her words: '"We will now conclude with the usual song"' evoked the response '"God Save . . ."' and 'a burst of irreverent laughter.'[118] The 'Land Song' came to symbolise a pure, uncompromising strain of Georgeism. Georgeite dinners for the faithful at Josiah Wedgwood's house in Stoke usually concluded with it.[119] In 1920 it was sung lustily in parliament by dissident Liberal and Labour MPs protesting at the repeal by the Coalition of the Land Valuation Act of 1909 introduced by Lloyd George to value and tax the estates of

the wealthy. Here it served as a public rebuke to his treachery.[120] The land movement also saw a rediscovery of, and visceral connection with, the style and poetic forms of Chartism. A follower of Birmingham's radical priest, the Rev George Dawson, found resonances of his sermons in the rhetoric of the movement, whilst Chartist land reformers like Ernest Jones and Bronterre O'Brien became the patron-saints of the agitation. The movement's legacy of songs and poetry was frequently invoked from the platform; verses by Gerald Massey, the Chartist poet, entitled 'The Earth for All' were quoted in land reform journals in the 1890s:

> Behold in bonds your Mother Earth,
> The rich man's prostitute and slave!
> Your mother Earth that gave you birth,
> You only own her for a grave!
> And will you die like slaves, and see
> Your mother left a fettered thrall?
> Nay! Live like men and set her free
> An heritage for all![121]

Elsewhere in land reform publications the land nationalisation resolution of the 1848 Chartist convention was recalled, while Chartist veterans were visible at meetings to welcome visits by the campaigning Red and Yellow Vans.[122] An even earlier style of radicalism was revived by a re-writing of William Hone and George Cruickshank's 'The Political House that Jack Built' of 1809 to read:

> This is the land that God gave,
> This is the landlord that stole
> The land that God gave,
> This is the farmer that pays
> The landlord that stole
> The land that God gave...[123]

The true essence of Georgeism was to be found distilled in the old folk rhyme recited by generations of reformers

> Great is the crime in man or woman
> Who steals the goose from off the common
> But who shall plead the man's excuse
> Who steals the common from the goose.

Georgeites drew comfort from the fact that Richard Cobden, converted to the cause of parliamentary reform in the final year of his life, and dedicating his last public speech to the issue of the land in Rochdale in 1864, was heard to recite this verse on his deathbed.[124] For some in the Georgeite camp, this made him retrospectively a Georgeite.

Moreover, Georgeism provided a practical solution to the problems of restrictions on rights of public meeting in Victorian Britain. Georgeite agitators offered a powerful rationale for the occupation for public meetings and demonstrations of the undeveloped 'brown field' sites in towns and cities that were representative of the imbalances in land-ownership and property prices criticised in *Progress and Poverty*. Georgeite agitators like Matthew Gass in Glasgow colonised these sites, staking out a claim to the land in his regular orations at Glasgow Green.[125] Their re-occupation, however briefly, were symbolic victories against unjust patterns of landowning in Britain and the under-utilisation of the land in Britain's towns and cities. The land reform journals followed these struggles for public access to urban space closely, providing regular updates on their progress. Georgeite ideas were much in evidence in movements of mass trespass against urban landowners like Lord Sackville at Sevenoaks in Kent, who sought to impede access to his estate for the purposes of rational recreation and popular entertainment. Georgeite sympathisers described him as one 'who like so many of the so-called noblemen of England, appears unable to understand that the earth is the common inheritance of mankind'.[126] In addition Georgeites congregated in the disputed parks and green spaces that were the traditional meeting places of reformers.[127] During a speech at Newcastle, George congratulated reformers in the North-East for their preservation of Newcastle Town Moor for the people of Newcastle, and contrasted this success with the erosion of rights of access to the open ground in London:

> That moor belongs to the people, and is public property. That is one of the best and pleasantest things I have seen in England, that very moor... It is a relic of the old commoner rights of our ancestors. But look at the difference! Go down there to London, and you will see large squares surrounded by high railings in the most populous parts of the city. You will never see a human being inside them except a gardener, and yet, around them, within a stone's throw there are hundreds and thousands of little children playing in the gutters for want of a better place to play in.[128]

Finally Georgeite culture was characterised by a system of signifiers and oral and written codes that confirmed access to the inner ranks of the movement and an understanding of the Georgeite spiritual quest. These often had antecedents in traditional radical culture. *Progress and Poverty* included numerous examples of Georgeite ideas, couched in the form of parables, Socratic dialogues, and representative examples of Georgeism in practice. The most frequently quoted is his illustration of wages. To prove his point that wages were not drawn simply from capital, but were the product of labour in refutation of Adam Smith on this issue, he cited the example of 'an absolutely naked man, thrown on an island where no human being has before trod, [who] may gather birds' eggs or pick berries... there is no capital in the case'.[129] These images of castaways on islands recur in land reform parables. There is a suggestion of the 'noble savage' in George's lonely castaway. It is, however, less Rousseauist than it seems. An island partitioned on Georgeite principles of land-holding was a common way of explaining his ideas, and echoes the Spencean interest in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In 1782 Spence re-worked *Robinson Crusoe* into a vision of an idealised utopia colonised by friendly local tribes with a collective system of land-holding and no lawyers.[130] Such blueprints for the simple exposition of Georgeite argument created a shared dialogue and simplified George's main points for communication at public meetings and in the private conversions of new disciples. Other examples used varied from the troubled family ownership of a brickworks, through to a dialogue between an elderly, but trusting couple, John and Mary, about low wages that concludes with the moral:

> He who can tell why John does not get what he earns answers the riddle of the modern sphinx. The fact is that being dependent on others for employment because divorced from land, he never can, and never will, get what he earns, no matter how useful and how productive his labour may be.[131]

The nature of Georgeism has been distorted by an over-emphasis on the sect-like quality of the movement. One contemporary described George's supporters in terms reminiscent of ragged millenarian enthusiasts as 'poor and almost unknown, a knot of resolute English agitators [who] seized the opportunity arising from the interest excited by the fallacies of the Californian dreamer'.[132] Georgeism may best be seen not as millenarianism, Britain had experienced a spasm of such movements in the 1840s when industrialisation was novel and they lingered only on the fringes, but rather as of a piece with other contemporary attempts

to locate the origin of modern property rights.[133] For European land campaigners like Charles Letourneau, Baron von Haxthausen, and George Ludwig Von Maurer, aristocratic usurpations undermined the relationship between land and Germanic tribal society, requiring a restitution that would reinvigorate the small proprietor and enable 'a recovery of the collective life of the *volk*'. Restored peasant commonwealths, it was believed, might ameliorate the worst excesses of *laissez-faire*.[134] Georgeism provided the British expression of such notions. It coincided with a cultural movement to reclaim the architectural form of the peasant cottage, rustic styles of dress, methods of husbandry, and cottage garden cultivation.[135] From the 1880s onwards reformers sought to supplant the retrogressive forces of squire and parson in the countryside and in local government. In revived peasant communities settlers and incomers inspired by notions of Tolstoyan anarchism, spade husbandry, and alternative living, sought to re-invigorate the withered husk of rustic life in an environment purged of landowners and the Church.[136] George therefore was central, rather than peripheral, to the popular radicalism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Often dismissed as fanciful, or lacking in substance, Georgeism captured the radical imagination during an important interlude between the collapse of radical reformism in the aftermath of the 1867 reform bill, and the emergence of organised labour.[137] George's view of the power of the territorial landowners now looks less eccentric than it once did. Recent reappraisals of Victorian culture stress the survival of the eighteenth-century aristocracy into an era of industrialisation and the degree to which they still derived their revenue from lucrative landholdings in the towns.[138] The Duke of Norfolk in Sheffield, the Mosley family in Manchester, and the Grosvenors in London all held family fortunes dependent all or in part on urban rent as detailed in *Progress and Poverty*. Viewed in these terms land reform made perfect sense. Georgeism was a popular creed, for example, amongst the pit-men of the Scottish coal-belt and the North-East of England where aristocratic control of local mineral wealth subjugated the hitherto independent collier to a new regime of wage slavery in the mines.[139] Indeed for many years the Scottish Labour Party remained firmly wedded to Georgeite beliefs. Many of the contradictions of Keir Hardie in particular are explained by his worship at the Georgeite shrine in an area of the Scottish Lowlands where the power of the major landowners proved an issue of continuing political pre-eminence into the 1920s.[140] Like Ramsay MacDonald or H.H. Champion he was a land reformer first, and an advocate of Labour second. In some ways Georgeism was an ur-belief, expressive of the point of view of

producers as opposed to non-producers, and spreading across the political divide to suffuse Lib/Labbery during a period of progressivist ascendancy. Through Georgeism, reformers vented spleen against the feudal survivals within the British state and exposed the spiritual and intellectual destitution of an aristocratic life lived in idleness. For the Liberals it carried on Cobden's crusade against the territorial aristocracy; for early ILPers it stigmatised the 'pseudo-feudal offscourings' comprising financial speculators, self-made employers and armaments manufacturers making their way through the political establishment into the peerage.[141]

Georgeism was, however, ultimately an unsuccessful solvent for the New Liberalism. It divided quite as much as it united. Although it sought a common dialogue against privilege it frequently injected a profound note of discord into the Lib/Lab camp. The suspicion of landed wealth it expressed sowed alarm amongst the traditional Whig grandees and their fellow travellers. In 1884 when George debated in print with Gladstone's friend and former front bencher the Duke of Argyll he demonstrated the fragility of the relationship between the landed and non-landed wings of the Liberal Party.[142] Argyll, whose son the Marquis of Lorne had married Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, in 1871, symbolised the great Scottish landowning establishment and the intractability of landlords in the face of land reform in Ireland: in 1881 he resigned from Gladstone's government over the Irish Land Act.[143] Georgeism therefore probed the gap between radicalism and Whiggery and exposed the fractures in the Liberal alliance. The Tories artfully played on this tension in order to reinforce their role as the defenders of landlordism and ground-rent proprietors in the capital.[144] There remained a whiff of treason about Georgeite sentiments. Single Tax proposals had implications for the integrity of Crown Lands and the royal estates.[145] In 1884 George's visit generated controversy regarding his republican sympathies after incautious remarks about pensioning off the queen, and references to the idle and dissolute character of the heir to the throne at a rally at St James's Hall. During a period when republicanism remained a sensitive issue, George seemed to be openly attacking the royal house when he declared at the meeting which was chaired by the noted republican Henry Labouchere: '"He could speak of all our kings before George the Third, and looking at that list he said they were a lot of the worst scoundrels"... A reference to the Prince of Wales called forth a very mingled demonstration, but when it had subsided Mr George quietly remarked that his view was that it was not good for any man to be "elevated above his fellows so far".'[146] Subsequently he recanted, but George's frequent attacks against privilege and strong anti-Normanism

meant that he never quite dispelled the feeling that his crusade against aristocratic landholding extended to all aspects of inherited wealth and authority within the political system. This was the 'great deal of wild talk' John Bright complained of at the time of George's tour in 1884.[147] Contemporaries versed in Georgeite ideas and classical republican precedents were aware that the ideal republican state was rooted in the land, whilst the Marquis of Lorne, Argyll's son, had already been the subject of vicious attacks for his inclusion in the Civil List during the republican campaign of 1870–1871.[148] Little wonder then that a sonnet dedicated to George by an admirer commented: 'Each glutted King and Priest who hears/Shall tremble, knowing that the hour is come.'[149] Such sentiments enhanced George's reputation amongst radicals, but laid him open to charges of extremism. Land militants traditionally inhabited the underworld of radicalism. In the countryside opponents of Georgeism portrayed the movement as a new *jacquerie* advocating land seizures, in which the Georgeite Yellow Vans imported the bacillus of revolution into the countryside. Georgeite orators were frequently attacked by vigilantes co-ordinated by local aristocrats.[150] On his 1884 tour George was denied access to public halls and meeting places by local notables, whilst in 1907, when the Tory MP Sir Alexander Acland Hood accused Georgeites of denouncing landowners as 'idlers, land-grabbers and despoilers of the poor', Campbell-Bannerman retorted: 'what obscure public house had he been spending his time in?'[151]

Georgeism has consistently been understudied and misrepresented. The assumption that it paved the way for socialism is Whig history. In reality the transition from radicalism to socialism was seldom achieved, problematising the position of the Labour Party in the 1920s and 1930s. Georgeism, consequently, remains difficult to integrate into the historiography of labour, and the structural history of the Labour Party. Nor can it successfully be portrayed as a ploy for short-term electoral gain by an embattled Liberalism, in which attacks on privilege distracted attention away from the industrial bosses, and forestalled a potential unravelling of urban Liberalism, precariously straddling the widening chasm between capital and labour. In his investigations into Georgeism, J.A. Hobson was in no doubt that Georgeites were integral, rather than peripheral to the popular politics of the 1890s:

> In my lectures upon Political Economy, I have found in almost every centre a certain little knot of men of the lower-middle or upper working-class, men of grit and character, largely self-educated, keen citizens, mostly nonconformists in religion, to whom Land

> Nationalisation, taxation of unearned increment, or other radical reforms of land tenure, are doctrines resting upon a plain moral sanction. These free-trading Radical dissenters regard common ownership of and access to the land as a 'natural right', essential to individual freedom.[152]

Moreover, hostility to aristocracy continued to feature strongly on Liberal platforms. For most Liberals, the image of aristocracy persisted as an embodiment of selfish economic and social interests. In the election of 1906, Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform Campaign provided the opportunity for the revival of popular memories about the connections between aristocratic interests and protection. Aristocracy, it was alleged, by opposing free trade had augmented their wealth with the inflated profits of over-priced grain during the 'Hungry Forties'.[153] Georgeism was never simply a meaningless echo of older radical forms, or a mere reflexive habit of radical activism. The ideas it embodied continued to have a powerful resonance into the first quarter of the twentieth century. It has long been misrepresented as an expression of rustic pastoral nostalgia, yet the most relevant aspect of Georgeism was the key it provided to the problems of overcrowding, pauperism, and low wages in the towns. When in 1884 George spoke outside the Royal Exchange in London (metaphorically urging his audience to tear down the Temple of Mammon) he was articulating ideas that overwhelmingly found favour with discontented urban workers.[154] Here the American roots of Georgeism allowed him to translate the campaign against the triumvirate 'money power' of banks, railway companies, and monopoly capitalism, into a British domestic setting. Urban land redistributionists saw the earth as a people's resource, a 'National Inheritance' that might be sequestered and diverted into old-age pensions and unemployment benefit.[155] Furthermore, for many urban Georgeites, the Single Tax was a vehicle used to enhance, buttress, or implement municipal socialism, and programmes of urban renewal.[156]

Where Georgeism did express a surviving rustic tradition it was an enigmatic one, crossing the porous political boundaries between Liberalism and Labourism. In Scotland, where the great estate system was a source of particular contention, it contributed to the assertion of anti-landlord values and the crumbling of the traditional Liberal culture of the Lowlands. Here Liberals recoiled from it, seeing it as a reborn Jacobinism; Jane Cobden-Unwin spoke of the Scottish 'revolutionary spirit, of which we see little in England'.[157] J.S. Mill portrayed the abuses of landownership tackled by reformers as falling outside conventional

Liberal debates about property and requiring different more collectivist remedies.[158] Following Mill, Georgeism is suggestive of a constituency in part outside Liberalism and unsure of its relationship to the party. For land reform fundamentalists the Single Tax was a national crusade that superseded party boundaries and made traditional political divisions irrelevant. Speaking in Manchester in 1882, Joseph Arch referred to land reform as 'not a political question, but a grand national question which every man in the three kingdoms ought carefully to study'.[159] George himself expressed scepticism of conventional political parties, and derided politicians as 'a pharisaical priesthood'.[160] There were echoes of the American populism of the 1890s in his evangelising crusade against sterile machine politics and the narrow sectional interests they relied on.[161] Many confirmed Georgeites thus circled both the Liberal and Labour parties uneasily. The similarities Georgeite culture bears to both early socialist fraternal organisations and the self-help culture of Liberalism, demonstrates the congruences and overlaps existing in the crowded territory of late nineteenth century land reform politics.[162] J.A. Hobson represented the followers of George as 'typical English moralists' who held an identity in their own right that was non-party specific.[163]

The political inheritance of Georgeism also remains problematic. The inchoate character of Georgeism meant that it never became tethered to any one particular party, and defied institutionalisation within party programmes. Ian Packer has argued that despite the importance of the land issue to the Liberal Party, Lloyd George was an eclectic thinker, who incorporated only minor elements of the Georgeite platform into his budgets.[164] Some Georgeites, disappointed by the timidity of Lloyd George's Single Tax proposals in 1909, suggested that Liberalism had never been a suitable vehicle for the movement, causing considerable traffic by Georgeites in and out of the Liberal and Labour parties.[165] In the 1920s Georgeism still featured heavily in Labour Party policy documents, long after it is usually believed to have faded. Filtered through Fabianism it was a marked feature of the progressivism of the LCC. It was raised at the London party conference of 1923; as late as 1929 Lloyd George was still castigated by Labour supporters for his post-First World War repeal of the 1909 Land Duties.[166] Above all the popularity of Georgeism challenges the notion of a single monolithic Liberalism in the final years of the nineteenth century. Georgeite divisions over both the Boer War and the First World War also showed that there was little to unite Liberal Georgeites within the framework of the Liberal Party. Accordingly Georgeism exposes still further the fractured and partial nature of

Liberalism even during its meridian in the 1880s. Liberalism had a number of antecedents and destinations, and many Georgeites were both half-absorbed and half-excluded by the Liberal consensus. Nevertheless, Georgeism enabled some radicals to travel with the Liberals, who after all held the reins of power, whilst campaigning for something more outside the Liberal platform in conjunction with Labour.

There is more to Georgeism than just an elemental attachment to the land. Now that trade-union based Labourism has been reduced to the representation of the sectional interests of labour, and traditional class categorisations superseded, its emphasis on land-holding confirms the new historiography of the nineteenth century and gives it a fresh feeling in comparison to the traditional narratives of class and anti-employer sentiment usually ascribed to the early Labour Party. Its strong religious undertones and a campaigning style that included biblical-style parables, Socratic dialogues, Norman Yoke tropes, and a view that the land should be returned to the people of England who were exiled from it, marked it out as part of the common intellectual terrain of radicalism. Scraping away the Liberal accretions of Lloyd George's interpretation of the Single Tax, Georgeite economics retained a radical potential and a popularity that has been overlooked by historians working in this area. Far from being simply a half-way house for proto-Marxists, it posed a fundamental challenge to the landed aristocracy, and for many reformers expressed a radical potential emblematic of discontents outside, or barely addressed by, parliamentary Liberalism.