THOMAS PAINE

"Poor Tom Paine — here he lies,
Nobody laughs, nobody cries;
Where he's gone and how he fares,
Nobody knows and nobody cares."

This contemptuous, and, I think, contemptible doggerel, published in a New York paper shortly after the death of Paine as a proposed epitaph, did not express the real popular sentiment of the time, nor the feeling toward Paine that has been handed down even to our own time. Another sentiment was far more active. Conway in his life of Paine has put it better when he says that Paine "was put in the place of a decadent Satan, hostility to him being a sort of sixth point of Calvinism, and fortieth article of the Church."

It is admitted that his writings did more than those of any other to arouse and crystallize the feeling of the people of the Colonies in favor of the Declaration of Independence, and to maintain the spirit of patriotism during the Revolutionary War. Is it not worth our while, indeed is it not our duty as just and patriotic Americans, to look carefully into the life and work of this man and learn if there be a sound basis for the envenomed hostility that attaches to his memory, or whether he may not be the victim of the proverbial ingratitude of republics? It is within the memory of many of us that our great American historian, Motley, rescued the name of one of the greatest statesmen and patriots of the Dutch struggle for inde-

1An address delivered at the Rochester meeting of the New York State Historical Association, October 9, 1919.
pendence, John of Barneveld, from the odium and disgrace which had buried his memory for a century and a half, and showed his work to be in the highest degree patriotic and of greatest value to the United Netherlands. Like Paine he was socially crucified, largely because he was not in accord with the majority in religious and political opinion.

Paine is one of the most interesting characters and careers in our history. He was born in England in 1736, just at the time when people were beginning to question the right of Kings to autocratic rule and to ask if the people had not some rights which even Kings were bound to respect. His father was a Quaker of the early type, one who distrusted revelation in the form of the direct communication of God's will to man as it is set forth in the Scriptures, and who relied rather upon the wonders of creation and upon the inner light. A part of Paine's unpopularity in his last years was due to his devotion to the religion of his father.

Paine's business career was not a successful one. He had read and thought, however, and he had been an active member of literary and debating societies, in which public questions, the rights and wrongs of the people, were the popular subject of discussion.

In November, 1774, Paine landed in Philadelphia, bearing a letter from Benjamin Franklin introducing him as "an ingenious worthy man." His first real work in Philadelphia was as editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. The proprietor's attention was called to him by an article contributed by him to the magazine against African slavery. It has been said that all the real arguments against slavery which filled volumes during the anti-slavery movement were concisely set forth in the article by Paine. In his brief editorial career, he published articles against duelling and cruelty to animals and in favor of greater rights for women. These were all new questions and it took a century to bring the country up to the advanced ground where Paine planted his standard. But these efforts, while they show the direction of Paine's thought toward equality of right and opportunity for all humanity and his sympathy for all created beings, were not the great work for which he was foreordained.
It cannot be necessary before a society such as this to go into much detail as to the public sentiment of the colonists on the question of independence shortly before its declaration. Samuel Adams believed in it, but his following was small. In March, 1775, Franklin assured Chatham that he "had never heard in America an expression in favor of independence from any person drunk or sober." In May of that same year Washington on his way to Congress, when warned that the path he was pursuing might lead to separation from England, replied: "If you ever hear of my joining in any such measures, you may set me down for everything wicked." Four months after Lexington, Jefferson wrote of "looking with fondness toward a reconciliation." This undoubtedly represents the general sentiment of the time among the colonists. They wanted wrongs redressed and certain principles established, but no separation.

This, however, was not the sentiment of Thomas Paine, particularly after the bloody 19th of April, 1775. He devoted the autumn of 1775 to the preparation of his pamphlet, "Common Sense," and it appeared in print early in January, 1776. Its effect was dynamic. One hundred and twenty thousand copies were put out as fast as they could be printed and distributed— an unprecedented sale and, considering the times and the small population, marvelous. There was no argument for separation which Paine did not embody in his pamphlet with a directness and cogency that compelled conviction. Many may have felt, but Paine gave their feelings expression. To us who have inherited from long lines of ancestry a full belief in the principles for which our forefathers fought in the Revolutionary War, such an argument almost seems superfluous, but the feeling of the colonists until April 19, 1775, toward separation had been hostile, and even after that tragedy it was dormant, not even nascent.

The hostility to Paine has, during the past one hundred years, been so strong that the inevitable tendency of history has been to minimize the effect of Paine's work, but every careful student of history must admit that it was tremendous. Joel Barlow long afterwards said that "the great American cause owed as much to the pen of Paine as to the sword of Washington."
Edmund Randolph ascribed our independence first to George III and next to Thomas Paine. Washington said his book "worked a powerful change in the minds of many men," and that "its doctrine was sound and reasoning unanswerable." Dr. Benjamin Rush said, "'Common Sense' burst from the Press with an effect that has rarely been produced by types and paper in any age or country!" It will be remembered that New York was the last of the colonies to agree to a separation and its dominant thought was at first to answer Paine, but after an effort it concluded that it could not find the arguments.

Paine was too recently from England not to know something of the tendency and ambition of the British Government. History shows us now that George III made the last fight for arbitrary power in England, and the American Colonies were to receive the first effects of its exercise. "Common Sense" denounced such power and is all clear statement and close reasoning, but it also abounds in terse philosophical statements which could not fail to arrest attention. I quote a few: "Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness." "Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one." "Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest is worth inquiring into." "When we are planning for posterity we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary."

But with the Declaration of Independence, to the accomplishment of which Paine had so largely contributed, his work for the freedom of the country was but well commenced. We find him enlisting as a private in a Pennsylvania company, and when that was disbanded he received an appointment on General Greene's staff, and he performed the duties of this office during the remainder of the war, except as he was called away to do other and more important work. He was the first Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Continental Congress, had charge of its correspondence, and so was virtually our first Secretary of State. From this position he shortly resigned, on account of disagreement with prominent members of Congress.
over Silas Deane's actions in France. Subsequent disclosures show that Paine was right and the Congressmen wrong.

When Congress, in 1780, found French help absolutely necessary, they asked Colonel John Laurens, of Washington's staff, to go to France to lay the situation before the French Government. This, he reluctantly consented to do, provided Paine would accompany him. Paine accepted the appointment and was influential in the negotiations which brought the much needed help. Lamartine said that "the King loaded Paine with favors." But these services, important as they seem, were nothing in comparison with the work of his pen.

It was a gloomy outlook for the patriots at the end of 1776. The American forces had lost the battles at or near New York, had retreated across New Jersey and, ill clad, ill fed, had assembled on the Delaware. Desertions were frequent and Washington's letters were full of dark forebodings. Paine had participated in the hardships of the army on this retreat and, at night, worried and worn, he had written his first "Crisis," which appeared December 19th. It was read by the camp fires with inspiring effect. Its beginning has passed into the common speech of man, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis shrink from the service of their country; but he who stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman, . . . What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated." And then he shows how much had been accomplished and that perseverance and fortitude alone were needed to achieve a glorious issue. It was a trumpet call to the wearied soldier and the blast rang in his ears a week later at the Battle of Trenton. Paine's bitterest enemy wrote of its effect, "hope succeeded to despair, cheerfulness to gloom, and firmness to irresolution." Washington expressed his "lively sense of the importance of your (Paine's) works."

But the ink was hardly dry on this "Crisis" before Paine was at work on another which was to bring back into line those who
were allowing Lord Howe’s proclamations and propaganda to shake their loyalty. So at every dark and trying time in the Revolutionary War a “Crisis” appeared which did wonders to uphold the weak-hearted and enable the Government and Washington to pursue their ways. In all, fifteen of these publications appeared. They all abound in striking statements. I quote: “Britain was too jealous of America to govern it judly; too ignorant of it to govern it well; and too far distant from it to govern it at all.” “Those who expect to reap the blessing of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it.”

Again at a time of a great money stress when the Government could not meet the most pressing demands, we find Paine instituting a popular subscription and heading it with a personal contribution of $500 from his own scanty means — and thus a serious situation was met. An incident which shows the public recognition of the value of Paine’s services was the conferring on him of the degree of M. A. by the University of Pennsylvania on the fourth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. But the importance of Paine’s work was more fully published in a letter signed by Robert Morris, Robert Livingston and George Washington, setting forth the value of his past services and the need for future work by him and recommending that he be paid $800 per year from some national fund to cover his pressing necessities, and again by a resolution of Congress “that the early, unsolicited and continued labors of Mr. Thomas Paine, in explaining and enforcing the principles of the late revolution by ingenious and timely publications upon the nature of liberty and civil government, have been well received by the citizens of these States and merit the approbation of Congress.” One may say that all the great leaders of the Revolution highly appreciated and approved Paine’s work.

Can there be any doubt even from this brief statement of Paine’s activities during the “times that tried men’s souls,” that he deserved well of the Republic?

But the war was over and a mind like Paine’s, active and ingenious, could not drop into “innocuous desuetude” when the storm and stress were passed. He had great inventive talent, and in the years immediately following the conclusion of peace
he developed several useful devices. The idea which chiefly absorbed his mind was the conception of a bridge constructed of iron. The most of his correspondence of the time was concerning the bridge. In Franklin and Jefferson he found sympathetic auditors. At this time when almost every stream, great or small, is spanned by iron or steel structures, it seems almost incredible that a little more than a century ago almost everybody was "a doubting Thomas" on the question of building bridges of iron except the real Thomas. At his own expense he built and exhibited at Philadelphia a span of sufficient size to show the strength and practicability of the construction. Paine was a poor man and feeling that his idea had value and that he should get value out of it, he determined to exploit it in Europe. He took it first to Paris and after demonstrations and tests, his idea or invention received the endorsement of the French Academy of Sciences. He next went to England expecting to receive government approval and protection for his patent from that country. Suffice it to say that while the Paine idea has been used in every steel or iron bridge, except the cantilever type, built since that time, Paine never received a dollar for his really great invention.

It was while Paine was engaged in promoting his bridge enterprise in 1790 that Burke published his long pamphlet "Reflexions on the Revolution in France," that paper so condemnation of all patriotic French acts and aspirations and so contradictory to Burke's whole career and oft expressed beliefs. This pamphlet was a clarion call to battle for Paine; he dropped everything else and in the shortest space of time wrote and published his "Rights of Man." Conway says "the political student may find in Burke's pamphlet the fossilized, and in Paine's the living, Constitution of Great Britain." Burke was looking backward but Paine was looking hopefully forward. "The Rights of Man" was pronounced by Jefferson, Madison and Andrew Jackson to be an exposition of what had been contemplated in the government of our country. It was probably the earliest complete statement of republican principles. It had a circulation in England of nearly 200,000 the first year. It was translated into French and was enthusiastically received by the people of France.
The latest Encyclopedia Britannica says of it that "those that know the book only by hearsay as the work of a furious incendiary will be surprised at the dignity, force, and temperance of its style." The English government of the time did not find its style temperate. Its circulation was suppressed and an indictment was found against Paine for treason. He was tried and convicted in his absence, for at the time of his trial he was in France, and a sentence of outlawry pronounced against him. This result may have been due to the exigencies of the situation. Pitt is quoted as saying, "Tom Paine is quite in the right, but what am I to do? If I were to encourage his opinions we should have a bloody revolution."

But how different was Paine's treatment by France. He was made a French citizen by the National Assembly and was elected a delegate to the French Convention by three different departments — Oise, Puy de Dôme and Pas de Calais. He accepted his election from the last named constituency and took his seat in the Convention. He was promptly made a member of a committee of nine to frame a constitution for France — being second only to Siéyès on the committee. No man did nobler work on that committee than Paine. The result of the work might almost be called Paine's constitution, so much of its substance was due to him. This constitution was adopted by the Convention, but its operation was suspended and it did not go into effect until after the downfall of Robespierre and "The Mountain."

Paine's influence in the Convention was reduced to a vanishing point during the rule of Robespierre and his associates. Paine took strong ground against the execution of the King. His cry was, "Kill the King but spare the man." Danton's answer to Paine's appeal for the life of Louis was, "Revolutions are not made of rosewater." It was his attitude in this matter that aroused the relentless hostility of Robespierre. Perhaps this hostility was increased by Paine's unswerving belief in God. A careful examination of Paine's conduct during the French Revolution fails to show any act or word which was not in full accord with the true spirit of that great movement. Despite this, when Robespierre secured control of the government, Paine was thrown into prison and kept there for more than ten months
and until the overthrow of "The Mountain." It is a sad illustration of the ingratitude of republics that the incarceration did not call for a protest from our country until James Monroe succeeded Gouverneur Morris as Minister to France, and then Monroe on his own initiative took active and successful measures to secure Paine's release.

The reason for American indifference may not be far to seek. Paine's "Rights of Man" aroused almost as much antagonism in government circles in this country as it did in England. We are loath to believe that the great leaders of the Federalist party were strongly in favor of a monarchical form of government, and were hoping and working for its adoption in this country—but such is the fact. Jefferson, late in life, wrote of the time of his return from France to New York to become Secretary of State in Washington's Cabinet: "but I cannot describe the wonder and mortification with which the table conversation filled me. Politics was the chief topic, and a preference of kingly over republican government was evidently the favorite sentiment." Alexander Hamilton believed republicanism to be an "iridescent dream." He wrote, "It is a King only, above corruption, who must always intend the true interest and glory of the people." Parton says, "It was the great aim of Hamilton's public life to make the Government of the United States as little unlike that of Great Britain as the people would bear it." His frequent expression was "men in general are vicious," and he was disgusted with the "town meeting" government and anxiously awaited the time when our government should essentially conform to the English model. John Adams fully believed in the hereditary principle—the government by the "well born." He wrote, "to the landed and privileged aristocracy of birth, Europe owes her superiority in war and peace, in legislation and commerce, in agriculture, navigation, arts, sciences and manufactures." Washington was a thorough aristocrat, who brooked no familiarity from his associates.

A veritable volume of utterances of similar import could be quoted from great Federalist leaders. Nor were they unconscientious and self-seeking men who thus thought. As they looked about in the world the only great governments were run
on the hereditary monarchical plan and a conservative mind not unnaturally asked if it were not safer to follow a long line of precedents rather than to pursue a new and untried road. To combat these views and tendencies was Jefferson's great work from the time of his return from France until his death, and how well he succeeded is a large part of the history of that same period. Jefferson did much to save democracy to our country and so to the world. Paine's book "The Rights of Man" did powerful service in creating the public sentiment which followed Jefferson to the end. Jefferson appreciated this influence and he wrote to Paine shortly before the latter's return to this country — "I am in hopes you will find us returned generally to sentiments worthy of former times. In these it will be your glory to have steadily labored, and with as much effect as any man living. That you may long live to continue your useful labors and to reap the reward in the thankfulness of nations is my sincere prayer."

But to the man of opposite belief who conscientiously favored the hereditary monarchical form of government because he thought it safest, or to the self-seeker who favored it because he hoped to be Earl of Boston or Duke of New York, Paine's "Rights of Man" with its unanswerable logic was inopportune — it was vicious. Here began that unpopularity which followed Paine to his death. He had alienated and made hostile a large and influential body of men. To this as a basis of unpopularity, Paine added a structure, which has ever since been the subject of strong attacks, and which alienated a much larger body — the orthodox churches. As I have said, Paine was born of Quaker parents. His father at least was a deist, who did not believe in any revelation nor in Christ's divinity, but held that our guidance in life is the "inner light." These beliefs Paine imbibed. Both father and son believed fully in the existence of God. Scarcely any writer has stated more emphatically a belief in God or argued more cogently in support of such belief than has Tom Paine, the so-called atheist. May I quote a few illustrative sentences from his works: "We are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful sense of the manifold blessings which we have undeservedly received from the hands of that Being, from
whom every good and perfect gift cometh.” “I believe in one God and no more; and I hope for happiness after this life.” “It is only in the Creation that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite . . . Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the immensity of the creation. Do we want to contemplate his wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the Whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the creation.” “When we contemplate the immensity of that Being who directs and governs the incomprehensible whole of which the utmost ken of human sight can discover but a part, we ought to feel shame to call such paltry stories the word of God.” These quotations seem to me to give a complete idea of Paine’s religious belief. You might almost express it in Kant’s familiar statement, “Two things fill the soul with wonder and reverence, increasing evermore as I meditate more closely upon them: The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” These are in reality Paine’s “works of creation” and “inner light.”

The French Revolution was not only a dynastic upheaval but a religious upheaval; it sought not alone relief from the feudal and hereditary systems, but sought also relief from the tyranny of the church. The pendulum swung beyond limit in both cases. Robespierre, with a large and increasing following, was an avowed atheist, whose only acknowledged god was reason. Danton, on the contrary, claimed to be religious, and he searched the scriptures diligently for precedents for his cruel and nefarious acts, and his search was too often successful. And these were the men who seemed for the time to be shaping the destinies of a great nation. It was in this unsettled state of thought that Paine wrote, had translated into French, and published his “Age of Reason.” I hardly think it can be doubted that Paine believed this work was as necessary to the accomplish-
ment of a great purpose, namely, that of staying the growing
tide of atheism and stopping the misuse of the Bible, as was the
publication of "Common Sense" or the "Rights of Man." All
were a necessity of their time, necessary to great ends.

I confess that theological distinctions are often beyond my
limited comprehension. Paine fully believed in God, in a future
life, in the guidance of the "inner light," but he did not believe
in the Trinity nor in revelation. Have there not been many,
prominent in the social, political and literary life of our country
whose belief was essentially that of Paine? To distinguish his
belief from that of the others, it has been said that he was a
rationalist. Theologically the rationalist "believes as probable
the existence of a God and the immortality of the soul, and as
indisputable facts the great principles of the moral law," whether
contained in the Scriptures or in the works of philosophers.
This was Paine's belief, if you eliminate the words "as prob-
able" and insert "as undoubted." Exactly where this doctrine
leaves off and liberal Unitarianism, liberal Universalism or
Hicksite Quakerism begins, I am unable to determine. Is there
so essential a difference between Paine's doctrines and those of
many highly honored of our citizens to account for the vast
difference in treatment?

On any rule of right or fair dealing, it cannot be explained.
The treatment of Paine and of his memory cannot be accounted
for by his manner of life. There was a short time in Paris, when
his intimate associates among the Gironists were being led
daily to the guillotine, that he drank to excess, but at other
times, in all his public life, he lived temperately, and the attempt
to show that he led a licentious life has signally failed. Joel
Barlow, who knew Paine intimately, bore testimony to his high
character and said: "He was always charitable to the poor
beyond his means, a sure friend and protector to all Americans.

There may be some explanation, though no excuse, for the
treatment accorded Paine by his countrymen in the last years
of his life and to his memory since his death. Whatever Paine
had to say, he said clearly, tersely and emphatically, and with
small regard to the opinions and feelings of opponents, so that
his statements concerning the Bible in his "Age of Reason"
were to the Trinitarians not only false but dangerous and brutal. In his critical analysis of the Bible and in his criticism of the authenticity and authorship of its various books, he was a pioneer, and forgiveness does not come readily to a man who starts a revolt against a long established system. Conway, in his introduction to a recent edition of "The Age of Reason" says of Paine: "He plagiarized by anticipation many things from the rationalistic leaders of our time, from Strauss and Baur, being the first to expatiate on 'Christian Mythology,' from Renan, and notably from Huxley, who has repeated many of Paine's arguments." But the battle for freedom of thought in religion had to be fought, not only in France but in England and America, and Paine's "Age of Reason" has been the leader in that contest. A hundred years ago this book was publicly burned in England and many a man was prosecuted for printing and circulating it, but to-day, it is free and many of its teachings are generally accepted. Canon Bonney, of Manchester, in 1895, the centennial of the publication of the complete edition of the "Age of Reason," said: "I cannot deny that increase of scientific knowledge has deprived parts of the earlier books of the Bible of the historical value that was generally attributed to them by our forefathers. The story of creation in the Book of Genesis, unless we play fast and loose with words or with science, cannot be brought into harmony with what we have learned from geology. Its ethnological statements are imperfect, if not sometimes inaccurate. The stories of the Fall, of the Flood and of the Tower of Babylon are incredible." Does this not represent intelligent evangelical belief to-day? If so, what a change a century has wrought! A man who bore any part in effecting such a change must have been a force.

Such, in brief, was the eventful and stormy life of Thomas Paine during his public career. He returned to this country and shortly retired to a farm near Mount Vernon, New York, which had been given to him by the State of New York in recognition of his aid to our cause in the Revolutionary War. There he lived, practically neglected by his former friends and ostracized by general society. There he died and was buried. But Fate seemed to have denied peace to his body either in life
or in death. His body was removed from the grave a few years after burial by William Cobbett, that stormy petrel of journalism, who was a great admirer of Paine. He removed the body with the intent of taking it to England for interment. Where his body at last found rest, no one knows. I believe, however, that some angel of God upturned a sod and laid the patriot there.

JAMES A. ROBERTS.
John Plowright

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CHRISTIAN POLITY: THE INFLUENCE OF HENRY GEORGE IN ENGLAND REASSESSED*

HENRY GEORGE WAS BORN IN PHILADELPHIA ON 2 SEPTEMBER 1839, AND DIED IN New York on 19 October 1897. In the course of his lifetime he passed from hardship through extreme poverty to a position of international fame (and infamy) as the advocate of the “single tax”: the doctrine that the state should tax away all economic rent — that is, the increment deriving from the use of the bare land (but not from improvements) — and abolish all other taxes. ¹

Considered in simple material terms, this doctrine may be criticized from two opposed viewpoints: from the “right,” as systematic spoliation, and from the “left,” as tending to perpetuate the systematic spoliation of the mass by the non-landed owners of capital. Although I will examine George in these terms while assessing the impact of his thought in England, I will also contend that George is done an injustice when considered solely in such terms. Robert Skidelsky serves to show the serious distortion of George’s thought which arises from this failure; had he considered the full title of George’s Progress and Poverty (1880; the subtitle reads: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions, and of the Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy), he could not have assumed that George regarded material progress as either “automatic” or desirable in itself. ² In short my aim is to point out that feature of George’s thought which John Dewey recognized as “too often ignored,” namely “his emphasis upon ideal factors of life, upon what are sometimes called the imponderables.” For it is, as Dewey appreciated, “a poor version of his ideas which insists only upon the material effect of increase of population in producing the material or monetary increment in

¹ The author wishes to express a general debt of gratitude to Derek Beales, David Cannadine, and Maurice Cowling, and thank them for specific comments on earlier drafts of this piece.
the value of land.” Indeed, I seek to show that the ethical, and specifically Christian element in George's work was in fact central to the thought and success of this self-taught and self-appointed “Prophet of San Francisco.” Only thus is it possible to understand how it was that George conceived himself, in 1897, to be choosing a martyr's death.  

I

George's impact upon reformist thought in England is hardly open to question. In April 1884 William Morris pronounced the prominence of "the land question at this hour" to be "in great part due to Mr. Henry George." Subsequent analysis has tended merely to confirm this contemporary assessment. The Webbs believed "the wide circulation in Great Britain of... Progress and Poverty during the years" 1880 to 1882 "completely revolutionised" the land question and generally initiated "the new current of thought." Edward Pease similarly held that Progress and Poverty gave an extraordinary impetus to the political thought of the time." J. A. Hobson considered George "to have exercised a more directly powerful formative and educative influence over English radicalism" between 1882 and 1897 "than any other man." George Bernard Shaw not only recorded that his own "attention was first drawn to political economy as the science of social salvation by Henry George's eloquence" but testified that "beyond all question" Progress and Poverty "had more to do with the Socialist revival" in the early eighties "than any other book." Max Beer concurred in this view that it was "Henry George's books and lectures" which "stimulated many of the younger generation of intellectuals and working men." It was upon George's "catchword 'unearned increment' much more than on Marx's 'surplus value' " that "the thinking of the English socialist movement was based,"

2 George consciously chose what he considered to be martyrdom for the sake of his cause when informed by doctors that his death would almost certainly result if he persisted in his New York mayoralty campaign. See George, Jr., pp. 594-597.  
R. C. K. Ensor has claimed. More recently, A. M. Mc峰值 and D. M. Ricci have reaffirmed Hobson's suggestion that the Fabian extension of the concept of rent to include the profits not only of land but also of capital was facilitated by the fact that the "idea of rent as a definitely social product emerges with tolerable frequency in George's writings." Nor was George's direct influence confined to socialism. In 1937, Winston Churchill singled out George as the "solitary new teacher" admitted, albeit "very suspiciously," to the "mental parlours" of Victorian radicalism alongside Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, Richard Cobden, John Bright, and William Gladstone. This achievement was all the more remarkable because "Gladstonian Radicals are a very arrogant brood" and otherwise "not a chink, crack or crevice had been opened in their system of thought by half a century of shock or change." Other scholars have claimed that George's importance has been exaggerated. While allowing that George "must be reckoned as one of the formative influences of the 1880s," John Saville asserts that he should not be "regarded as the most important single cause of the new trend in ideas," arguing that Sidney Webb, Hobson, Pease, Beer, and the most important recent writers on George — C. A. Barker and E. P. Lawrence — have all exaggerated George's place in the history of British radicalism and socialism. They have neglected, Saville says, or insufficiently emphasized, "two general matters relating to George and his influence in Britain," namely, the extent to which he "entered British society at a point in time when the anti-landlord movement was" already "an integral part of both middle class and working class radicalism," and the extent to which his seeming acceptance of land nationalization with his "biting indictment of social conditions made George eminently acceptable to the early socialist movement." As Saville states elsewhere, it was "the anti-landlordism of George rather than the nostrum of the single-tax that appealed to British audiences." The passage of time is at least as liable to confuse as to facilitate our understanding of events, and Saville's attempt to deny that George was the most important single cause of the "new trend in ideas" contradicts not merely other recent scholarly assessments, but the judgement of informed and perceptive contemporaries of George who themselves largely embody that

very trend in ideas. In contradicting the Webbs, Hobson, Pease, and Beer, Saville in effect claims to know more about their intellectual origins than they knew themselves. Such a contention is dubious, especially because Saville acknowledges that Hobson and Beer, at least, possessed some appreciation "of the long history of agrarian radicalism in Britain before 1880" (Saville, "George and the British Labour Movement," p. 18).

Hobson, in fact, was careful to stress the way in which "George, like other prophets, co-operated with the 'spirit of the age.'" First, the British reception of Progress and Poverty, Hobson pointed out, was reinforced by the "gradually deepening depression" in agriculture. Second, the continuing growth of large industrial towns, along with rising standards of sanitation and other civic needs, was driving home to municipal reformers "a sense of conflict between the public interest of the towns and the private interests of the owners of town land." Third, English conditions favoured George even more than those of America because English land was "vested in a smaller number of owners than any other country of equal population," while nowhere else did "the vast majority of actual cultivators" possess "so slight a property or interest in the land they cultivate." This afforded "a peculiarly effective presentment of the iniquity of landlordism, dramatically concentrated in a small class" and susceptible "to powerful concrete local illustration" (Hobson, p. 839).

By treating rural and urban aspects of the land issue as essentially one, moreover, George showed John Morley "how the town populations could be attracted to the question of land reform." 16 Joseph Chamberlain himself feared that the "wide circulation of such books as 'Progress and Poverty'" and their "acceptance among the working classes" might lead to "theories as wild and methods as unjust" as those supported by George being "adopted as the creed of no inconsiderable portion of the electorate." 17

Some contemporaries found the proposals of George and the similar land nationalization plans of Alfred Russel Wallace "not only crastic but alarming in their scope and magnitude," because "they were applied for the sake of a problematical gain the certainty of which they signally failed to demonstrate." 18 Walter Bagehot had warned that French misfortunes taught that "peasant proprietorship spreads not only the sense of property but a panic of property," and H. M. Hyndman, Wallace, and above all George induced such a panic in the Chamberlainite radicals in the 1880s that they

16 Morley to Joseph Chamberlain, 7 January 1883, Chamberlain MSS, J.C. 5/54/474.

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sought to secure counter-revolution by means of a peasant proprietary and an extended franchise. 19

II

George’s conception of political economy ran counter to the utilitarian mainstream of classical economic thought. The Benthamite task “was to persuade the uneducated (who happened to be poor) of the essential rightness of classical economics.” 20 So far from endorsing the plenty-producing “laws of economics,” George recognized that, with the single exception of the Ricardian law of rent (and not all of that), conventional political economy inhibited the very progress he desired, albeit largely because Malthusianism legitimated the claim that material progress was circumscribed. Essentially, however, George’s objection to Malthusianism, and to classical political economy in general, was ethical in character.

In the review of Progress and Poverty which George himself considered the best to have appeared at the time, the Reverend George Saxon recognized that political economy had “inherited that abandoned air of absolute finality which was once supposed to attach exclusively to the formularies of the clergy” so that it had become “generally regarded . . . as the ‘dismal science.’ ” The Malthusian dogma that “the niggardliness of nature, not the injustice of society, is the cause of the penalty attached to over-population” inhibited practical legislative effort on behalf of the poor. 21 Henry Rose made precisely the same point, explaining the popular reception of Progress and Poverty not only by reference to this widespread misconception of political economy, but to the strain to which religious faith had been subjected by Victorian scientific discovery:

Hitherto political economy had been little better than a scientific exposition of, and justification of, human selfishness. It had been allied with the art of slandering the Creator with a good grace. . . . Political economy had been something quite apart from the moral law, very much in the sense that the literal renderings of the scripture story of the Creation and the Flood had been something quite apart from modern scientific teaching in the domain of geology and of astronomy. Men were by implication, if not by direct teaching, required to believe the story of the Creation in the book of Genesis at the same time as they gave acceptance to geological and astronomical discovery. And equally, men by implication, if not by direct teaching, had been taught at least to refrain from questioning a

heartless and immoral political economy, which failed to enforce the equal rights of men to the land, which failed to give labour its place of priority in relation to capital, and which even went so far in direct antagonism against human laws and natural order as to make the very peopling of God's earth a curse. . . . All this was very heinous. But here was the book [Progress and Poverty] of a man who had not accepted as true all that he was told . . . and who made the grand discovery . . . of a political economy which is capable of being reconciled with our best perceptions of moral law. 22

Thus George's "political economy is the analogue of his religious thought" (Rose, p. 82).

George held that "the Malthusian doctrine parries the demand for reform, and shelters selfishness from question and from conscience by the interposition of an inevitable necessity." 23 In this it had become buttressed not only by the law of diminishing returns in agriculture "which put us to the mental confusion of denying the justice of the Creation" but also by social Darwinism, especially "analogies in the animal and vegetable kingdoms . . . to which . . . modern thought, in levelling distinctions between different forms of life, has given a greater and greater weight" (Progress and Poverty, p. 71). In short, George conceived himself to be confronted by an unholy trinity comprised of Malthusianism, classical political economy, and social Darwinism. In explicit contradiction to Mill's underwriting of Malthus, George affirmed his own faith "that the injustice of Society, not the niggardliness of nature is the cause of want and misery which the current theory attributes to overpopulation" (Progress and Poverty, p. 103). Malthusian theory is nothing more than "a gratuitous attribution to the laws of God of results which . . . really spring from the maladjustments of men" (Progress and Poverty, p. 109). 24

In George's view the institutionalized church, of which Malthus was a member, had abused its authority and was as culpable as the economic establishment, because "even the preachers of what passes for Christianity" were either so blind or so blasphemous as to present the Creator as condemning the masses to want. 25 There had been "no failure of Christianity," only a "failure . . . in the sort of Christianity that has been preached." 26 By exorcising Malthus the essentially ethical nature and scientific status of true political economy would be revealed. The important point is not that George engaged in economic theorising, but that his reason for so doing

24 See also George, Thou shalt not steal (1890; rpt. ed. London: The Henry George Foundation of Great Britain, 1941), p. 3.
was that he believed it possible to show that economic truth conformed with, or was even identical with, Christian truth.

This point has largely escaped notice because George was initially somewhat circumspect and his mode of presentation belies his actual motivation. *Progress and Poverty*, his most celebrated work, is atypical of his output because its major part is George's attempt to confute orthodox political economy on its own terms. The fact that this argument is predicated upon ethical — and specifically Christian — philosophy, although more obvious in George's other writings, is only apparent in the later portions of *Progress and Poverty*, with the result that even avowed Georgians sometimes treat the economic and ethical arguments as independent of one another. Thus Anna George de Mille abridged *Progress and Poverty* in such a way that the last chapter of Book X and the Conclusion were not only shortened but placed as an Addendum to Books I to IX. 27 Such arrangements violated both the letter and the spirit of George's work as he believed that the science of political economy comprehended "the greater part of those vexed questions" which underlay not only politics, legislation, and social theories but also philosophy and religion. 28

According to George, just as each man can come to a knowledge of God and religious truth without the intervention of the priesthood, so each man can perceive economic truth without the assistance of "expert" economists. It is not only possible but desirable to dispense with both priesthood and pundits, because both possess a vested interest in the status quo. Because economic truth is at one with religious truth, moreover, true political economy serves as a natural theology by means of which the individual may come to believe or to recover lost faith. In "distinguishing what is essential from what is merely accidental," the believer will come to appreciate what is needful to personal and social salvation, and will distinguish this from what may be regarded as adiaphora or superfluous (Political Economy, pp. 4-5). A certain minimal material satisfaction is the prerequisite of religious striving, because it is not money but the love of money that is the root of all evil and that results in the doctrine of the "devil take the hindmost" (Progress and Poverty, p. 329). Pointing out that money is produced with a view to its exchange, not its consumption, George notes that "we always seek for its substance materials least subject to wear and decay while it is usually carefully guarded by whoever for the moment may be in its possession" (Political Economy, p. 382). This rather Marxian Freudian slip confirms that, for George, no stigma is attached to money as such, when used as the means to individual fulfi-


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ment, but the use of money results in the alienation of one individual from another and the individual from God when idolized as an end in itself. More "clearly than in any other science" political economy "enables us to see . . . that the government of the universe is a moral government having its foundation in justice" or, to put it another way, "that the Lord our God is a just God" (Political Economy, pp. 350-351). George was thus not simply offering social salvation but religious redemption.

His proselytizing fervour was that of the convert, moreover, for through writing Progress and Poverty George recovered his own faith. George had received a strict upbringing in the Episcopal Church, but in his adolescence "he had come to reject almost completely the forms of religion, and with the forms . . . belief in the life hereafter." Instead, he "inclined towards materialism" (George, Jr., p. 103). He later attended a Methodist place of worship and married a devout Catholic, but "it was not until" he pursued those inquiries which resulted in Progress and Poverty "that . . . immortality became a fixed belief," for out of that inquiry came "the conviction that it was not by God's will, but because of violation of God's ordinance that men suffered involuntary poverty" (George, Jr., pp. 134, 252).

Three documents bear witness to this crucial spiritual transformation. First, there is the evidence of Progress and Poverty itself. In the "Conclusion: The Problem of Individual Life," George not only attributes the general decline in religious belief to Malthusianism, classical political economy, and social Darwinism, but testifies to the revival of his own faith through his inquiries (Progress and Poverty, pp. 395-399). Second, there is George's letter to Charles Nordhoff of 21 December 1879, which similarly records that out "of the train of thought which is set forth in that book [Progress and Poverty] . . . a faith" had come (George, Jr., p. 329). Third, there is George's handwritten postscript in his letter to the Reverend T. Dawson of 1 February 1883, which tells of the "vision" or "call" of "religion" which "impelled" him "to write Progress and Poverty" and "sustained" him thereafter (George, Jr., pp. 311-312).

George's God, though not conceived as necessarily personal nor possessing any positive shape or form, is nevertheless something more than an abstraction and engenders neither asceticism nor quietism (George, Jr., p. 545). The life and institutions of Moses represent a protest against the blasphemy, "preached oft-times even from Christian pulpits," that want and suffering are ordained and unalterable. God gave the land to the people; therefore its appropriation as private property constitutes a robbery and an iniquity, as it represents an abuse of God-given moral choice. George purports simply to free moral choice from material necessity, for it is the business of

government "to secure to men those equal and inalienable rights with which the Creator has endowed them . . . not . . . to make men virtuous or religious" (Social Problems, pp. 225-227). Yet "a truly Christian civilization" will not be possible until the "fear of poverty" has been dispelled and "the mad struggle for mere animal existence has ceased" (Social Problems, p. 95). In this sense religious faith is both the means by which George's political economy will be implemented and the end to which it is to be directed, because

the only power by which such a state of society can be attained and preserved is that which the framers of the scheme I speak of generally ignore, even when they do not directly antagonize — a deep, definite, intense religious faith, so clear, so burning as to utterly melt away the thought of self — a general moral condition such as that which the Methodists declare, under the name of "sanctification," to be individually possible, in which the dream of pristine innocence should become reality, and man, so to speak, should again walk with God.

(Social Problems, p. 113).

George's two main doctrinal statements are, first, that man, not God, is responsible for poverty, because the "power of falling lower" is necessarily involved in the God-given "power of rising higher" (Thy Kingdom Come, p. 5). Second, it follows from this that man possesses the capacity to eradicate poverty. Because George was inspired by his personal spiritual regeneration, because he sought to sustain his crusade by means of religious sentiment, and because the end to which he worked was the creation of material conditions permitting all to grapple with the spiritual problems of the individual life, Saville is mistaken in writing that George helped to undermine "the Victorian belief that social reform was impossible save through individual regeneration" ("George and the British Labour Movement," p. 21). Similarly, in writing that George, in The Condition of Labour (1891), "took advantage of the fact that he . . . based his thinking, as much as anyone else, on religious assumptions," Barker appears insensitive to the fact that George, much more than anyone else, consciously based his thinking on religious assumptions (Barker, p. 573). "No estimate of the man will be approximately trustworthy which does not fully take . . . into account" the fact that George was "a Christian" (Rose, p. 82). Further, "the essence of . . . George's economics is ethical" and "carries with it a profound belief in an All-Maker" (George, Jr., p. 578). As George himself put it, "our postulates are . . . the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith." 10

George claimed that in The Condition of Labour he aimed "to make a clear, brief, explanation of our principles, to show their religious character, and to draw a line between us and the socialists" (George, Jr., p. 567). It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that his antipathy to socialism

was fundamentally religious in character, for socialism fails "to see the order and symmetry of natural law, it fails to recognize God" and thus "Socialism tends towards Atheism" (Condition of Labour, p. 56). For this reason "the poor timid university socialists" have failed to recognize George's claim that his "beliefs tend towards, nay, are indeed, the only beliefs consistent with a firm and reverent faith in God." 31

To be fair, even intimates sometimes misunderstood George's Christian commitment. Some of his friends tried to discourage him from considering Herbert Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy when he was preparing to write A Perplexed Philosopher (George, Jr., p. 569). They failed to appreciate that, to George's mind, Spencer's offence in repudiating the principle that God had made the land for all the people equally, consisted not simply in his denying what he had hitherto asserted, but that, "with his later philosophy, he had allowed materialism to take the place of God" (George, Jr., p. 328).

As early as 1879, in the previously cited letter to Nordhoff, George had announced his desire to dissect "this materialistic philosophy which, with its false assumption of science, passes current with so many" (George, Jr., p. 329). Spencer's betrayal provided George with the ideal opportunity: the anti-materialist of the "religiously-minded" Social Statics (1850), cited with only slightly qualified approval in Progress and Poverty (pp. 256-259), had become the foremost representative of that spurious scientific authority, the effect of whose "blank materialism" was to impress the common mind with "a vague belief that modern science has proved the idea of God to be an ignorant superstition and the hope of a future life a vain delusion" (A Perplexed Philosopher, p. 236). In George's eyes Spencer had literally turned devil's advocate.

III

Given the nature of the appeal of George's gospel, it is difficult to share John Rae's surprise that Progress and Poverty "created an army of apostles, and was enthusiastically circulated, like the testament of a new dispensation." 32 As Hobson put it, the "spirit of humanitarian and religious appeal which suffuses Progress and Poverty wrought powerfully upon a large section" of "typical English moralists," especially "free trading Radical dissenters": men of "grit and character, largely self-educated, keen citizens" of the "lower-middle or upper-working class" (Hobson, pp. 841-842). Indeed, the

ethical and religious character of Progress and Poverty seemed likely to endear Georgeism to the Gladstonian Liberal party. George's single-tax crusade assumed the characteristic form of those "great political, semi-religious agitations of the nineteenth century" which were "not only a bid for independence and power on the part of men who had been denied both by the old [aristocratic] system," but "also an attempt to relate the secular to the eternal." In this context the religiosity of George's passion for social reform deserves emphasis: his indignation was not only righteous but religious.

Perhaps Gladstone wanted power for some purpose other than itself, and his mode of operation was not necessitated simply by the nature of his party. Gladstonian crusades were a means of providing moral cohesion for the nation through the parliamentary process and perhaps also an effort to forestall incipient socialism or, at least, the advent of overtly class-oriented democratic politics. Georgeism was attuned to Gladstonian Liberalism because it represented an avowedly "democratic" response to the dissolution of the national moral community, including a recognition of the need to fill the void left by the failure of the Church's moral authority. Whichever concern was uppermost in Gladstone's mind, Georgeism was adaptable to his aims. Indeed, insofar as Gladstone followed George in equating socialism with atheism their aims were identical. The writer W. H. Mallock appreciated the crusading character of Georgeism but claimed that George used "the combined excitement of religious and of class feelings" to cloak "the naked passion of covetousness." The result was thus the opposite of that desired by Gladstone, for while both were "intelligible to the lowest class of readers," George's doctrine possessed the "double danger" of exciting "their worst passions, by a false appeal to their best." 36

The Left, too, found George two-faced and his doctrines double-edged. Morris confessed his fear "that the capitalists," in their anxiety "to save the proceeds of their own still worse methods of plunder, would . . . throw the landlords overboard. . . . and . . . pit Mr. George as the reasonable and moral reformer against the unreasonable and immoral revolutionists" (Morris, p. 41). This fear was allayed while George was popularly identified

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with the socialists, and the middle class as a whole remained aloof. However, the Social Democratic paper Justice, Morris personally, and socialists generally became disillusioned with George for three reasons: his alleged success in "arbitrarily excluding" American Socialists "from the Congress of the United Labour Party," his "furious attack upon the Chicago Anarchists," and his "political intrigues" which benefitted "the Democratic party and President Cleveland." 37 George's chances of gaining support among the more cautious members of the middle and working classes improved correspondingly.

By the close of 1888 Justice conceived it to be "the duty of the Social Democratic Federation and of all Socialists in Great Britain to oppose Mr. Henry George with a resolute and uncompromising hostility," because he was fast becoming "the salaried and befeasted lackey of the plundering capitalist class," deserted by the workers as a class traitor, and befriended, "with two or three exceptions," by "hard-fisted money-grabbers and canting middle-class sermonisers of the baser sort." The single tax was denounced as a "burden-shifting trick which . . . would benefit the capitalists without helping the workers in the least." 38

Saville takes the George-Hyndman "Single Tax v. Social Democracy" Debate of 1889 as marking the fatal parting of the ways between Georgeites and Socialists (p. 25). Hyndman stressed the appeal of George's proposals to the bourgeoisie, arguing that the established economic rent of sixty million pounds per annum used to reduce "the general taxation upon industry . . . would go . . . into the pockets of the great capitalists," so that "the only people who would benefit would be the Rothschilds, the Barings, the Chamberlains, the Mundellas' and such like. In short, Hyndman regarded George as essentially "a reactionary and not a revolutionist." 39

The same point is made, albeit more prosaically, in the account of the debate in Justice, which recorded that "the anti-socialist element was" well-represented "in the higher priced seats" while socialism was strongest in "the galleries and . . . the back of the hall where the democratic shilling held sway." This account conflicts with the Verbatim Report in one small particular. Hyndman voiced the opinion that "the Capitalists and middle classes" comprised "the majority of the audience" (Verbatim Report, p. 18), but according to Justice "it was in the higher-priced seats . . . that there was the most sparse attendance." 40 But even if they were unsure as to the precise location

and numbers of the middle-class audience, the socialists were united in their belief that George was playing to it.

The disowning of George by the Socialists helped open the way for the Liberals to look with increased favour upon him. George's Free Tradism and internationalism also provided common ground. Indeed, these aspects of his creed were so pronounced that E. G. Fitzgibbon implied the single tax was secondary to them. 41 While personally neither claiming nor repudiating the "socialist" label, moreover, George appealed to the Liberal left wing by his claim to be outflanking socialism. 42

Skidelsky has argued that "British socialism . . . was the product of the success of capitalism not its failure" (p. 6). George himself argued that socialism remained conceptually constrained by the tradition of classical political economy it nominally challenged. Thus the socialist nostrum of nationalization was less a response to the inner contradictions of capitalism as such, than to the socialist adoption and reduction to absurdity of capitalist economics:

Socialism in its narrow sense — the socialism that would have the State absorb capital and abolish competition — is the scheme of men who . . . have . . . fallen into fallacies elaborated by the economists of a totally different school, who have taught that capital is the employer and sustainer of labor, and have striven to confuse the distinction between property in land and property in labor-products. Their scheme is that of men who, while revolting from the heartlessness and hopelessness of the "orthodox political economy," are yet entangled in its fallacies and blinded by its confusions. Confounding "capital" with "means of production," and accepting the dictum that "natural wages" are the least on which competition can force the laborer to live, they essay to cut a knot they do not see how to unravel, by making the State the sole capitalist and employer, and abolishing competition. (Protection or Free Trade, pp. 325-326).

George asserted that "there is in reality no conflict between labor and capital: the true conflict is between labor and monopoly" (Protection or Free Trade, p. 327). Even in industrial disputes it should not be forgotten who are the real parties pitted against each other. It is not labour and capital. It is labourers on the one side and the owners of land on the other" (Progress and Poverty, p. 223). In this context socialist criticism of George only reassured the controllers of industrial and finance capital that George's attack on landed property rights did not endanger their own. George himself insisted that rather than "weakening and confusing the idea of property" he sought to "surround it with stronger sanctions," and instead "of lessening the incentive to the production of wealth" he sought to "make it more powerful by making the reward more certain" (Social Problems, p. 115).


42 George, Protection or Free Trade (London: Kegan Paul, 1886), p. 324n.

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In the course of criticizing *Progress and Poverty*, Arnold Toynbee made his celebrated confession that the middle classes had sinned grievously against the working classes; whether forgiven or not, the middle classes should devote their lives to service.\(^{43}\) Although George echoed Giuseppe Mazzini’s address to “working men brothers,” the tone, resonance, and purport of his remarks resembled Toynbee’s as they were pitched, and pitched successfully, to precisely the same middle-class audience. Thus he appealed to “sympathy” not “selfishness,” calling upon men not “to demand their own rights so much as . . . to secure the rights of others more helpless.” The “idea of the Incarnation” embodied this, the best means of social improvement. This was so because the idea “of the God voluntarily descending to the help of men” contained for George “a deeper truth than perhaps even the Churches teach” in that historically “the deliverers, the liberators, the advancement of humanity, have always been those who were moved by the sight of injustice and misery rather than those spurred by their own suffering.” To the extent that men had been “deprived of their natural rights” he held that they also lost “their power to regain them” and thus have “been freed and elevated rather by the efforts and sacrifices of those to whom fortune has been more kind than by their own strength” (*Social Problems*, pp. 117-118).

This doctrine of social redemption could stand as the classic justification of the classic mode of Liberal political action: providing religious sanctions for secular purposes, with the ruling class continuing in power not because of their material wealth, but because “sympathy” in some way conferred spiritual authority upon them. They could offer limited material benefits to the down-trodden so that their spiritual life might be similarly illuminated. But the working classes could not be trusted to strive for their own social redemption because they would be interested in wealth for its own sake and accordingly refuse to accept that the material benefits accruing to their “liberators” occurred incidentally or as the means of permitting the bestowal of a greater degree of spiritual freedom. Hence the formula of “government by means of the middle for the working classes.”\(^{44}\)

IV

What distinguished George’s position from that of classic liberalism was the openness of his conviction that the material and the ideal were di-

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\(^{43}\) Arnold Toynbee, “*Progress and Poverty*: A criticism of Mr. H. George” (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), p. 53.

rectly connected, so that religious potential was grounded in material well-being. Although political economy "takes direct cognisance only of . . . the selfish instincts, yet in doing so it includes the basis of all higher qualities," because "the development of the nobler part of human nature is powerfully modified by material conditions, if it does not absolutely depend upon them." The laws of political economy therefore "control the mental and moral as well as the physical status of humanity." 45

For George Christianity remained vital, in part because of its "essential idea of the equality of men." George's Pelagianism is a corollary of this view. The "deep wrongs in the present constitution of society . . . are not wrongs inherent in the constitution of man" (Social Problems, p. 77). George was representative of the "Victorian frame of mind" in denying the doctrine of original sin. For Charles Kingsley, for example, "the essential idea of Protestantism was not the corruption of man by original sin," but "the dignity and divinity of man as God made him." 46 Similarly, Toynbee conceived the Fall as "a possibility of good not realised," and Winwood Reade's Martyrdom of Man (1872) represents a popularized, secularized inversion of the doctrine of original sin — the present generation suffers for the sake of future generations, rather than because of sinfulness inherent in the human condition. 47 As Rose notes, George's remarkable "faith in the unselfishness of human nature, when placed in the right conditions . . . has been one secret of [his] great moral influence" (Rose, p. 47). But although George's faith in man was one secret of his great moral influence with the mass, there is good reason to suppose that it also accounts, in large part, for his failure to impress Gladstone, because Gladstone believed in "a degeneracy of man, in the Fall — in sin — in the intensity and virulence of sin" (quoted in Clarke, p. 7).

George, who had "made it the work of his priesthood to correlate and unify political economy and the maxims of State government with Christianity," had "singled out Mr. Gladstone for special admiration" (Rose, pp. 83, 91) and sent him a presentation copy of Progress and Poverty (George, Jr., p. 323). But although Gladstone read the book, George looked to him in vain. Considerations mitigating against Gladstone accepting George — the single tax rendered Free Trade in land and Gladstonian Irish land legislation redundant, and presented Cobden's theories as inadequate — would appear to be outweighed by the susceptibility of Georgeism to Gladstonian ethical presen-


tation. 48 However, while true to the spirit of Gladstonian Liberalism insofar as its “governing passion” was “virtuous” but not spontaneous, Georgeism was not, despite Churchill’s claims, personally acceptable to Gladstone. Because of their difference over the issue of original sin, Gladstone could not accept George’s version of Christian ethics.

It is within this context of religious ethics that George’s refusal to compensate landowners must be understood. Despite important genuflections toward gradualist tactical considerations, that refusal was in fact a necessary consequence of the ethical argument underlying his entire work. In appropriating God’s bounty, the owners of private property in land had sinned against the rest of humanity, so that compensating landowners for the reappropriation of economic rent would not only compound a wrong but condone a sin. The question was one of morality and, as such, admitted of no compromise — including such compromises as Gladstone’s own land reform initiatives proposed. This issue illustrates that, so far from using religion to legitimate desired radical reform, George’s radicalism arose as the necessary consequence of his theology. Although Gladstone chose to impugn George by subscribing to Giffen’s repudiation of the economic argument of Progress and Poverty, it seems reasonable to suppose that differing conceptions of Christianity represented the real bar between the two men. 49 Indeed, in Gladstone’s eyes George’s “Christianity” undermined the intellectual foundation upon which true religion rests, for without the Fall there is no need for Christ’s Crucifixion.

Georgeism seems to have enjoyed greater success among the New Liberals, although the exact nature and extent of that success remain open to question. Offer’s thesis that Georgeism “proved to be . . . a destructive worm in the apple of the New Liberalism” must be viewed in the light of Churchill’s remark that “Mr. Henry George” is “not Mr. Lloyd George by any manner of means.” 50 It may be that the New Liberals were better disposed towards George than Gladstone was because their self-consciously progressive perspective encouraged them to make a false distinction between George’s appeals to class and to conscience, emphasizing the former at the latter’s expense. The New Liberals asserted that the Land Issue, the point where “Liberal tradition and the Socialist movement converge,” allowed “the disciples of Henry George” to “make common cause with the disciples of Richard Cobden” (F.


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W. Hirst quoted in Clarke, p. 82). Georgeism was susceptible to such an analysis, moreover, because while George's "appeal is more usually to individual than to social rights," his theory encompasses these "two widely different and philosophically inconsistent bases" (Hobson, p. 842). As material self-interest encouraged the adoption and propagation of George's economic doctrines, the temptation was increasingly strong (because linked to the escalating fiscal needs of the State) and the flesh increasingly weak (particularly because the changing complexion of the Liberal Party rendered its landed element increasingly impotent). Georgeism could thus accommodate the New Liberal shift in emphasis epitomized by the statement that although "man cannot live by bread alone" neither can "man . . . live without bread," an argument symptomatic of the subordination of what J. R. Vincent has called the Gladstonian "emotional subsistence level" to naked subsistence politics. 52

For George institutionalized Christianity, orthodox or classical political economy, and accredited pseudo-scientific authority were all intellectually suspect whenever they gave credence to the morally reprehensible doctrines of Malthusianism, the "iron law of wages," and social Darwinism, all of which he criticized for teaching that social improvement was scarcely possible. George regarded these formulations as the self- or class-interested perversions of a great truth: the fundamental identity of Christ's Gospel with "true, scientific" political economy, which accommodated the material progress requisite for moral improvement, or at least for the exercise of moral choice.

It is tempting to explain George's thought either as an ideology fitted to the needs of Victorian industrial and finance capital, or as a well-intentioned but misguided personal theology. The first explains too much, by discounting George's religion as rhetoric, while the second explains too little, by giving George the dubious benefit of our own religious doubts. As Mallock observed, "Mr. George's vindication of God's ways is on par with his vindication of his own scheme for amending them" (Mallock, p. 74). These two elements of George's thought — the ethical and the economic — must both be taken into account: they stand or fall together.

In the history of economic thought, George's reputation has fallen very low indeed, meriting little more than a footnote. 53 In purely economic terms this seems just. George's understanding of classical political economy,

like that of many of his admirers, was superficial. Although generally impressed with Ricardo's theory of rent, for example, he appears not to have realized that it rested upon the same proposition as the Malthusian theory of population which he reviled. In addition, George was seemingly oblivious to the fact that during that very period when his popularity was at its height, the "marginalist revolution" taking place in economics was, among other things, extending Ricardo's rent theory beyond land (Barber, pp. 163-221).

As I have argued, however, George's real significance lies outside the field of economics, and can only be appreciated by placing his ethically inspired economic thought in the broader cultural context of the conflict between science and religion. George belongs to that tradition of thinkers — Carlyle, Morris, Ruskin, Hobson, Tolstoy, and Gandhi — who have resisted the trend to regard economic thought as a body of scientific knowledge. Even in this company George is something of the odd man out; while the others directed their criticism towards industrialization, he set his face instead against the alleged iniquity underpinning an older economic order. Moreover, whereas they sought to "humanize" economics, his aim was nothing less than to "theologize" it. Ironically, what ultimately rendered George a figure of central significance for many contemporaries and of marginal importance for most of posterity was precisely this endeavour to predicate political economy upon Christianity.

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