

## NEW BOOKS.

## HENRY GEORGE AND HIS FOES.\*

A man who believed in himself, fought hard, and died in the harness, Henry George compels the respect even of his *ex-officio* enemies, the college professors. In his lifetime he attacked these gentry again and again. Sometimes they retaliated by ripping up his doctrines in their class-room lectures. Sometimes, as in the case of the late Francis A. Walker, they rejoined in print, bringing on a controversy from which neither party emerged with entire dignity, for in science as well as in theology polemics are apt to bespatter and ruffle the feathers of the combatants. And while these wordy conflicts were going on, the on-looker could not help wondering why the contestants took so little pains to understand each other, and why they struck so many hard blows in the air. Yet it is a thing to be thankful for that disputants do not understand each other, for otherwise they would not dispute, and this world would be a less amusing place for the rest of us. George's controversies—and he was never long out of one—have given an emotional interest to topics usually regarded as dry. They have made many a lively page of reading amid what he would call the arid waste of current economic discussion, for according to him almost all economic discussion has been an arid waste for a hundred years. They have made the authorities look to their halos and the worshippers to their hallelujahs—both excellent results, for which all praise to him, whatever be our economic faith.

To be sure, he was not always quite polite in his moments of imagined victory. He was rather apt to stand on his enemy's head and chuckle over the completeness of the overthrow. But this is pardonable in view of the early days when he was merely a dangerous agitator, not to be reasoned with, but only stormed at—in the days when the good and the wise threw stones and called names. He has dealt with his adversaries unfairly, but how unfairly have they dealt with him! Each side has condemned the other for the wrong

reasons, has neglected the essentials and refuted the irrelevant, and has taken that high triumphant tone of superior logic with which the polemist is wont to reassure himself and exasperate his antagonist. Mark how his argument crumbles to pieces at a touch! See how a plain tale puts him down! These little swaggering accompaniments have their uses, if the way to obtain success is to claim it.

In his long battle with the recognised teachers of "what is reputed to be political economy," Henry George has been far more persistent and uncompromising than they. He accepts nothing of theirs, while they accept some things of his. For instance, he was among the first to point out that wages came from products, not from capital—a theory now generally accepted. If he read their works, he must have done so with a determination not to be convinced. This was natural in view of his success. He took himself seriously in the manner of reformers, and his numerous converts encouraged him in the belief that he was one of the prophets. As his cause gained strength and became a factor in practical politics, partisanship was intensified. The economists were said to have obscured economic laws partly from native stupidity, partly because they were allied by self-interest with the rich. It was a waste of time to read them, and, in fact, economic training in general was a waste of time, for the laws of the science were simple, and Henry George knew all about them. His theory offered a remedy for the evils of our industrial system, and if that theory were not accepted, it was because the recusant did not want them remedied. The economists regarded him as a fanatic; and he retorted that they were either dishonest or the unconscious dupes of the money power.

Minor reformers such as he do not believe in the intellectual conscience. If a man does not think as they do they grind out motives for him. They found a bad heart with a good head. They demand a sweeping redress of wrongs and that at once. They cannot understand why any one should hesitate about the means when the wrongs are so cruel, so obvious. The line is as

\* The Science of Political Economy. By Henry George. New York: Doubleday & McClure Company. \$2.50.

sharply drawn between the emotional and the critical man, and the impossibility of mutual understanding is as absolute as between men and women. The controversy is eternal. In its essence it is absurd, for the difference lies in the facts of temperament, not in the processes of logic.

In Mr. George's last work, *The Science of Political Economy*, his aggressiveness is increased by the success of his earlier book. In *Progress and Poverty*, he says, he recast political economy in the points which most needed recasting. In the present work he has aimed to reconstruct the entire science. The need of it, he found, was great, for the best known teachers of political economy were afraid to tell the truth, lest it should be dangerous to the wealthy classes. Whatever be the cause of the injustice in the present distribution of wealth, "colleges and universities as at present constituted are by the very law of their being precluded from discovering or revealing it." Economists since Adam Smith's time have added nothing to knowledge, but have merely confused what was known before. This book is intended not merely as a corrective of some things which they have written, but as a substitute for everything which they have written. Ricardo, Mill, Senior, Say, Roscher, Wagner, Marshall, etc., all must go. As to the hirelings who occupy chairs of political economy in the capitalistic colleges and universities of to-day, their wickedness or dullness figures on almost every page. Such is his attitude throughout the book. It is ill suited to his purpose, for it needlessly arouses antagonism. It would be pleasanter to hear those things from his followers than from himself, and so many of his followers are ready to say them, that he might have spared his modesty without danger to his cause. This, of course, has nothing to do with the merits of his claims. It is criticism merely from the lay point of view; but the book is designed to convert laymen to the Single Tax and other doctrines of the author, and it is worth while to inquire whether that object would not be more surely gained by a more moderate tone. There is a demand for modesty even in the very great, and the egotism of an author is apt to make one forget the merits of his cause. Nor is it wise of the present author to allow

his pride over the fact that the "forecastle and the press-room" were his *alma mater*, and that he escaped a university training to betray him into intolerance toward those who through no fault of their own have passed through a college course. He should have had all the more respect for those whose virtues survived the evil influences of higher education and made them Single Taxers in the end.

Bearing in mind that Mr. George claims to have derived nothing from the writings of the nineteenth-century economists, we are surprised to find many points of agreement between him and them. In the first part of the book he outlines his views on the relation of man to the universe, the meaning of civilisation, the growth of knowledge, and the laws of nature. Here he owes nothing to the economists, for he discusses matters which are not usually included in economic treatises; for instance, Paley's argument from design and the nature of a final cause. On this latter point the following passage illustrates the somewhat elementary character of this part of the work. He is speaking of the use of the terms "ultimate cause" and "final cause" to express the same idea.

"This use of seemingly opposite names for the same thing may at first puzzle others as at first it puzzled me. But it is explained when we remember that what is first and what last in a chain of series depends upon which end we start from. Thus when we proceed from cause to effect, the beginning cause comes first, and is styled the 'primary cause.' But when we start from effect to seek cause, as is usually the case—for we can know cause as cause only when it lies in our own consciousness—the cause nearest the result comes first, and we call it 'proximate cause;' and what we apprehend as the beginning cause is found last, and we call it the 'ultimate' or 'efficient' cause." . . .

Then follow several chapters which are more properly a preparation for the study of political economy. Among the truths which he declares as if for the first time is the principle that men always seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion. "The failure clearly to apprehend this as the fundamental law of political economy has led to very serious and widespread mistakes as to the nature of the science." Yet for years the "scholastic economists," as he calls them, have dwelt on this so insistently that it has become a tiresome commonplace. Again, the most minute

philosopher could not detect any difference between his view of the relation between the inductive and deductive methods in economic science and that set forth in fifty elementary text-books, nor between his explanation of natural law in distribution and that given by recent writers. Yet here as always the combative tone of the propagandist. On the relation of land to the other factors of production he differs of course, for this is the starting-point of his single-tax philosophy, but nothing is here added to what has been given in *Progress and Poverty*.

No subject in political economy has been more tortured than that of value, and Mr. George has good reason to complain of the incoherency of many recent writers on this point. It is disappointing that his own explanation not only does not explain, but adds one of the mistiest chapters to be found in the whole literature of the subject.

Much the same sort of disappointment accompanies the study of all Mr. George's works. He leads one to expect more than it is in his power to give. It is true that political economy suffers from the lack of unanimity among its teachers. It is true that a student can find "no consistent body of doctrine that he may safely accept." There is no doubt that it might be more clearly expounded than it is. And when Mr. George, pointing to these facts, says he will clear away the rubbish and substitute a simple and consistent body of doctrine, he offers a very agreeable prospect to the student; but it remains only a prospect. There is neither simplicity nor consistency in his own explanation of economic laws. As a reconstructor of political economy he failed completely, although he may have "recast it" in some points. What he did was merely to found a political party, and this fact only emphasises the more his failure as an economist; for the man who shall really reconstruct economic science will not found a political party in his own lifetime. He will be a very lonely man. The mere number of believers offers no proof of the soundness of an economic doctrine. The truth of a theory of value will never be settled by a majority vote. It is a mathematical axiom that where the greatest number of persons are gathered

together, there also are to be found the greatest number of fools.

But is the complexity of the accepted political economy inherent in the science itself, or due, as Mr. George has said, to the dulness or wickedness of its professors? The view that all the recognised authorities in the nineteenth century have been the dupes or slaves of capital is not to be taken seriously. As to their dulness, De Quincey said long ago that he could brew their fungus heads to powder in a mortar with a lady's fan; and much that has been written since reads like mere diaries of the authors' perplexities. But it is doubtful if an economic treatise can ever be really popular. Adam Smith's was not, nor was John Stuart Mill's. The difficulty of understanding some of the laws and concepts of the science is apparent from Mr. George's own books. But that much of what is now written is needlessly involved and shows indifference to the human bearings of the subject is equally clear. A genius would find a way to carry the truth further and let it lose nothing in the telling.

And in some points Mr. George has the advantage of his more sober and scholarly opponents. His enthusiasm is delightful; his writings are full of vigour and of human sympathy. There is no doubt that his whole heart was in what he wrote and said. And these things make his occasional slips in the matter of correct English and good taste seem too trifling to mention. One forgives even his naive joy over his supposed discovery of all economic truths.

*Frank Moore Colby.*

#### THE MEANING OF EDUCATION.\*

Persons possessed with one dominant idea are singularly uninteresting nowadays. Perhaps their prepossessions do not mount to the level of belief, the conditions of which are, if I remember aright, that one must "leave oneself by or with a person or thing" until conduct is saturated with a new influence. Propagandists take pains not to be seriously mad. Otherwise M. Brunetière, who idealises military authority to the exclu-

\* The Meaning of Education. By Nicholas Murray Butler. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.00.