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ON THE ATTITUDE OF HERBERT SPENCER.

On The Land Question - A Reply to the London Correspondent
of the New York "Tribune."

Editor Tribune:

To the hard things its London correspondent says of me personally in the "Tribune" of last Sunday, I make no objection. Such things were said of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips and Theodore Parker, and Mr. Smalley voices the feelings of British landlords as those who denounced the opponents of slavery as robbers voiced the feelings of the American slaveholders. But he is mistaken in thinking that I have ever garbled any utterance of Mr. Spencer's, and evidently does not understand that gentleman's attitude toward the land question.

In "Progress and Poverty" I referred to what Mr. Spencer had said in "Social Statics," but included what he had said of compensation. I afterward had Chapter IX, of "Social Statics" - "The right to the Use of the Earth" - put in tract form for distribution; but the whole chapter, including the clause which it is charged was left out of the English tract, was given in full. In "A Perplexed Philosopher," I reprinted all that Mr. Spencer had said on the land question, giving each chapter or letter in full and separately, so that the reader may have before him Mr. Spencer's own language unmarred by mine. The "Tribune" in reviewing the book last year, said:

"In one respect, at least, Mr. George shows himself to be an honorable critic and a foeman worthy of the philosopher's steel. The

reader will find in this volume every word which Mr. Spencer has published on the land question from 1850 to 1892. The earliest passages in "Social Statics" are repinted without the suppression of a single sentence; then follow Mr. Spencer's famous letters to the "St. James Gazette" and "The Times" (London), under the head of "Repudiation," and finally the last utterances in "Justice" are cited in full and critically examined. Not merely is the philosopher treated with full justice, but there is no attempt on the part of Mr. George to quibble over phrases or to break the force of what he considers a recantation.*

Whoever has been guilty of any omission in Mr. Spencer's statement of his position, I certainly have not.

And though Mr. Smalley regards me as a wicked and utterly discredited bravo, I think he will be glad to learn that he is mistaken in thinking that I have employed insinuation or innuendo to convey my opinion of Mr. Spencer. It is hardly insinuation to declare that a man has first denied and then repudiated his perception of truth in order to keep on the pleasant side of a dominant class. It is hardly innuendo to declare him "as a philosopher ridiculous, as a man contemptible." This I do in "A Perplexed Philosopher." But I do it in clear Saxon statement, and not by insinuation or innuendo. And, what is more, I in every case first prove it from Mr. Spencer's own books, from his published letters to London papers and from the advertisements of his American publishers, D.Appleton & Co., and announcements of the English Land and Property Defense League. I nowhere allude to anything I may happen to know of Mr. Spencer directly or indirectly. I nowhere mention his personality, except as it may be

brought in by matter printed for the public.

For instance, after quoting in full Mr. Spencer's letter to "The St. James Gazette," in 1882 - the letter in which he first showed the slightest uneasiness with regard to the radical utterances of "Social Statics" - I say:

As hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue, so the very crookedness of this letter indicates Mr. Spencer's reluctance to flatly deny the truth to which he had borne witness. He no more wanted to deny it than Simon Peter to deny His Lord. But the times had changed since he wrote "Social Statics." From an unknown man, printing with difficulty an unsalable book, he had become a popular philosopher, to whom all gratifications of sense, as of intellect, were open. He had tasted the sweets of London society, and in the United States, from which he had just returned, had been hailed as a thinker beside whom Newton and Aristotle were to be mentioned only to point his superiority. And while the fire in the hall of the High Priest was warm and pleasant, "society" had become suddenly aroused in rage against those who questioned private property in land. So when "The St. James" and the "Edinburgh," both of them chosen organs of Sir John and His Grace, accused Herbert Spencer of being one of these, it was to him like the voices of the accusing damsels to Peter. Fearing, too, that he might be thrust out in the cold, he, too, sought refuge in an alibi.

But even here nothing whatever is rested on my statement. The slow and small sale of "Social Statics" in England and its going out of print rest on Mr. Spencer's own statement in the preface of his

"revised" edition, previously quoted, and the reference to gratifications of sense and intellect rests upon the quoted declarations of Mr. Spencer's American friend and apostle, the late Professor E.L. Youmans, in a volume published by the Appletons, and giving an account of the reception of Mr. Spencer in this country just before he wrote the letter to "The St. James."

Mr. Smalley may, if he chooses, present Mr. Spencer as a lifelong invalid and recluse. I am not concerned as to that, for it is only with the philosopher that I have dealt or care to deal, and even if I knew just where he goes to dinner, I should not concern myself to say. But to show Mr. Smalley that I have not gone beyond the printed record even for such an incidental statement as that in 1882 gratifications of sense, as of intellect were open to Mr. Spencer, I may be permitted to give the statement of Professor Youmans, appended to my text:

His recreations have been systematic - concerts, operas, theaters, billiards, salmon fishing, yachting, city rambles and country excursions, and it has been his fixed rule, when work grew burdensome, to strike his tasks abruptly and go away for pleasure and amuse himself till work again became attractive and enjoyable.

As Mr. Smalley has evidently not read "A Perplexed Philosopher," it may seem to him that in thus characterizing the motives and utterances of Mr. Spencer I have been guilty, if not of malignant innuendo" at least of mere abusive personality," or at the very least of a want of good taste and of the proper courtesies of literature.

This would indeed be true were I commenting on a frank and honest statement of changed opinion. But Mr. Smalley is mistaken in

assuming this to be the case. Mr. Spencer has never willingly and frankly indicated any change in his early opinions of the land question. He never attempted to modify or soften them until they had been brought to the attention and begun to excite the reprehension of the organs of the English aristocratic classes. And then, instead of frankly dealing with the matter, he has resorted to evasions, equivocations and the conveyal of falsehoods, until finally driven into a distinct utterance he has at length attempted to justify what once he declared little better than cannibalism, slavery or murder, in a way that would be an insult to his intelligence, and indeed to the powers of the human mind itself, to account for in any other way than by the influence of abject fear lest he be denounced through "Mayfair" as Mr. Smalley now denounces me.

All this is shown by the full quotation made in "A Perplexed Philosopher." If Mr. Smalley will read them, believer in landlordism though he evidently is, I do not think he can refrain from the same feeling for Mr. Spencer that the veriest Southern fire-eater would have felt for William Lloyd Garrison or Wendell Phillips, if, when "society" in Boston was aroused against abolition, they had, without waiting for the mob, sneakingly denied that they had ever questioned the right of a purchaser to "work and whip his own nigger."

No stronger arraignment both of the justice and expediency of "property in land," no more complete denial of the possibility of it ever acquiring ethical sanction was ever made than is contained in Chapter IX. of "Social Statics," Mr. Spencer treats existing land titles with utter scorn, declaring them to come from violence and fraud, and asking whether claims can thus be created? Whether the sale or

bequest can constitute a right? At what rate per annum a wrong can grow into a right? If all existing men agree to divide up land what becomes of all who are to be born? He points out that the right of property in a building or improvement involves no right of property in land, and that the necessity of apportionment of land for use does not involve the necessity of apportioning its ownership; that an agent of the State could collect rent as well as an agent of "Sir John or His Grace," and that to admit the rightfulness of property in land is to admit "That tenet of the Ultra-Tory school, that the land owners are the only legitimate rulers of a country."

"Social Statics" was published in 1850. It never passed beyond a first edition in England, and its utterances on the land question seem never to have been noticed there. But it was reprinted in 1864 with the consent of Mr. Spencer, by D. Appleton & Co., of this city, under an agreement to pay him a royalty, which, in the absence of any international copyright, does them honor. It ^{was} kept in continuous circulation by them, Mr. Spencer writing from time to time several prefaces and notes. But neither in this nor in any other way did Mr. Spencer ever indicate that he had in the slightest degree changed his views, until ⁱⁿ 1882, on his return from this country, he suddenly found that something of his denial of the validity of property in land had reached even "Mayfair" or was beginning to do so. Besides some reference in the high Tory organ, "The St. James Gazette," "The Edinburgh Review," which had evidently learned of "Social Statics," through "Progress and Poverty", had bracketed the two books and the two men together, and denounced us as writers "at war not only with

the first principles of political economy and of law, of social order and domestic life, but with the elements of human nature. * * * * These are the doctrines of communism, fatal alike to the welfare of society and the moral character of man,"

No one alive knew better than Mr. Spencer, or was in a better position to show the English public, that these were not the doctrines of communism, and involve no denial, but in reality a more scrupulous respect for the true right of property. But he replied, through "The St. James Gazette" in a confusing letter in which he conveyed the impression that all he had said was to express a by no means positive opinion that possibly at some future time the primitive ownership of the land by the community may perhaps be revived, and merely alluded to "Social Statics" as "a book of mine, published 32 years ago, which I have withdrawn from circulation in England, and of which I have interdicted translations."

As a matter of fact "Social Statics" was at that moment being published and circulated in this country by Appleton & Co., Mr. Spencer's authorized publishers, but that English public with which he was evidently concerned knew nothing of this. They took his letter for a denial that he had ever condemned property in land, and for a declaration that he had withdrawn everywhere the book against which this was charged. This, combined with the publication of "The Man and the State," which the Liberty and Property Defense League, a society formed in London for defending private property in land, became active in circulating, placing its author on their lists behind a long row of titled landowners, gave Mr. Spencer temporary peace. But even

in "Man and the State" there was no denial of the principles he was still disseminating in America, unless the false assumption that I am a Socialist and a Communist may be considered such.

In 1889 trouble came to Mr. Spencer again, for "The London Times" gave a report of a meeting held by John Morley in Newcastle, in which John Laidler, a bricklayer quoted "Social Statics". This brought the matter again into the heart of "Mayfair." Mr. Spencer immediately repeated his old ^{tac} statics, in a letter of which the "The Times" editorially said:

"So, without denying that he did once say something of the sort, he (Mr. Spencer) explains that it was 40 years ago, and that for the last 15 years he has been doing all that he can to suppress the book in which he said it, and that he never meant his words to have any bearing upon practical questions."

This led to a long correspondence in the columns of "The Times," in which, although none of them seemed to know what he had really said in "Social Statics", or that he was still having that book published in America, the poor philosopher was woefully heckled by Frederick Greenwood, Professor Huxley, Sir Louis Mallet and others for the admissions he had made in "The Times," letters, and the Newcastle bricklayer got a brief abstract of Chapter IX. of "Social Statics," asking Mr. Spencer to "tell us specifically what deductions he has abandoned, and why he has abandoned them."

Thus driven into a corner, Mr. Spencer could no longer "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds," and was soon forced to cut out of "Social Statics," as published by Appleton & Co., the vital parts relating to the land question, and to insert as an appendix in the end

of his new book, "Justice", an indorsement of land ownership, which, compared with his utterances in "Social Statics," is the most ridiculous and the most shameful pretense of reasoning ever put in print by any man assuming philosophic acumen and intellectual honesty. In this Mr. Spencer actually endeavors to placate Sir. John and His Grace by saying that in "Social Statics," which deduces the equal right to land from the fact of existence, and scoffs at the possibility of any exclusive right being derived from descent or purchase or use or prescription, he had omitted to consider that the existing descendants of the appropriators of land could not be distinguished from the existing descendants of those who were originally robbed of their natural rights, and that the landowners of England have during the last three centuries paid in poor rates a sum larger than the original "prairie value" of England - by which he means, if he means anything at all, the value of the land before there were any people!

I have in "A Perplexed Philosopher" characterized this new light of the Evolutionary Philosopher, as alone it can be fitly characterized, by the parable of Professor Brown, the gentlemen who, finding himself in danger of tar and feathers at Vicksburg previous to the war through the discovery that in early life he had spoken in favor of abolition, made his peace by declaring that the negroes had really^{been} enslaved by their own people, and counting the cost of bringing them here from the early days of the slave trade and of supporting and keeping them since, were really in debt to their owners \$40,000 apiece!

But even now, ~~after~~ Mr. Spencer, led on step by step, has drunk the cup of intellectual debasement and moral degradation to the last

dregs in the effort to apologize for and hide the memory of his early advocacy of a great truth, he finds again that though a man may announce a truth he cannot bury it. In the newspaper discussion of which Mr. Smalley speaks, "Social Statics" has come up to trouble him again. I will venture to say that if Mr. Spencer will permit it, the English Land Restoration League will publish what he has said on the right to land in "Social Statics" with what he has said in "Justice." But that is the last thing he really wants.

I have printed in "A Perplexed Philosopher" all that Mr. Spencer has to say on the land question from "Social Statics" to "Justice." In response to inquiries addressed to Mr. Spencer by hitherto warm admirers as to that book, he has replied that his friends in New York have in their hands material for proving that my charges are baseless and my alleged facts fictions, but that they, knowing me, and knowing American opinion have decided to say nothing. That they have decided to say nothing is undoubtedly true. But not for the reason that Mr. Spencer intimates. Neither Mr. Spencer nor any friend of his will venture to challenge these facts, and their mere collation destroys all confidence in the intellectual honesty of a man whom many people in this country at least have been for some time accustomed to regard as the greatest of philosophers.

Permit me to correct one more misapprehension on the part of your London Correspondent. He speaks of a text he once heard Theodore Parker announce, "Thou shalt not steal." Mr. Smalley must remember only the text, not the sermon, for he is evidently under the impression that Mr. Parker proceeded to denounce the sin of robbing

slave-owners by helping their negroes to run away. But he is mistaken. What Mr. Parker proceeded to denounce was the sin of holding human beings in slavery until they, or some one for them paid compensation. I wish he had really heard the sermon, In that case he would have commended it to his landlord friends, not to Mr. Verinder and me.

HENRY GEORGE.

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Oct. 18, 1894.