

THE SINGLE-TAX COURIER.

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GEORGE VS. SPENCER.

DEFENSE OF SPENCER BY HIS AMERICAN FRIENDS.

Controversy in New York Tribune of November 12 and 18 -

George's Reply. (on p. 7.)

To the Editor of the Tribune.

Sir - When nearly two years ago we sent over to Mr. Spencer a copy of "A Perplexed Philosopher," by Henry George, Mr. Spencer, intimating that he should himself take no notice of its calumnies, sent to us data amply sufficient to dispose of them should we think it fit to take the matter up; leaving us to do what we thought best. We decided to do nothing; chiefly because it seemed unnecessary to defend Mr. Spencer against so vulgar and unscrupulous an assault, and partly because to revive Mr. George's waning notoriety by giving him opportunity to bring his name again before the public seemed undesirable. But impunity seems in this case to breed audacity, as is shown by Mr. George's letter published in the Tribune of September 30. Though your London correspondent has pointed out that Mr. Spencer's ill health has for many years past (ever since he was here, in fact) rendered impossible for him that select social intercourse to obtain which he is said to have sacrificed his convictions. Mr. George ignores all this, and deliberately reiterates his allegations as though they were proved facts. Moreover, a letter of his published in England, piling one calumny on another, implies that nothing has been said in reply to his charges because there is nothing to say. Thus it has become needful that he should now be dealt with. Any man may be assailed with libelous statements by one whose animosity he has

excited, just as any man may have names called after him by a street-boy he has offended. Always there are a few who think there must be something in it, but people of the wiser sort ask what is the evidence. Mr. Henry George first insinuates, and then affirms, that Mr. Spencer's change of view on the land question has been prompted by a desire to ingratiate himself with the landed and ruling classes, and so to achieve social distinction of some kind. Where is the evidence? The only relevant facts are those which will be seen to have diametrically opposite implications.

Before passing, however, to evidence which bears directly on the matter, it should be noted that sundry incidents in Mr. Spencer's life show him to be regardless of private interests in his pursuit of public interests. Note his unceasing opposition to State Education, which he condemned early in his career, has repeatedly condemned in the course of it, and condemned most strongly of all in his latest work ("The Principles of Ethics," vol.I., p. 286-7), where its supporters are spoken of in language which is anything but respectful; he being conscious all the while that nearly all the whole of England and America, including the buyers of his books, were strongly in favor of it, and likely to be angered by its denunciations. Note again the still more striking disregard of his own welfare shown by a letter written to the Tribune in 1869 and published some time later, in which, after giving proof by press extracts that the English opinion and feeling - Tory, Whig and Radical - immediately before and after the War of Secession began was unanimously and strongly in favor of the North, he blamed Americans for having caused by their behavior the alienation of

England; doing this with the consciousness that he ran the risk of offending his American friends and the American people at large, and saying in a letter to his friend Professor Youmans; "I do not know what may be the result of this letter on my personal relations with the American public. But if it should be injurious I am content to bear the injury." Surely these are not the acts of a man who sacrifices his convictions to his interests! There could hardly be a more ridiculous belief than that one who thus insisted on saying what he thought, even at the risk of offending an entire nation which had shown him sympathy., should stand in "abject fear lest he should be denounced through Mayfair!" But now from these direct evidences let us pass to more direct ones.

In "The Study of Sociology," chapter xvi., Mr. Spencer instances Mr. Gladstone as "the exponent of the anti-scientific view" of the man of nature, and classes his conceptions with the superstitions of the Greeks. Mr. Gladstone is a large land-owner and was at that time Prime Minister, having benefits and distinctions in his gift. If Mr. Spencer sought to ingratiate himself with the dominant class, this was a strange way of furthering his aim. An incident exactly parallel to this occurred twenty years later. In "The Principles of Ethics," 376 (or in the separately published division, Justice, 131, from which Mr. George has himself quoted), Mr. Spencer ridiculed the reasoning of Lord Salisbury. Lord Salisbury, too, is a large land-owner, and he, too, was at that time Prime Minister, and was thus the temporary fountain of good things. Were it true that, as Mr. George insinuates on the title page of his book, "Just for a handful of silver he left us, just for a ribbon to stick in his coat," Mr. Spencer, could scar-

cely have chosen a more absurd way of achieving his aim than to speak disrespectfully of two Prime Ministers when in office.

But in elaborating his fictions Mr. George pays no attention either to these or still more conclusive facts, as we shall now see unmistakably. "A Perplexed Philosopher" contains the sentence: "The name of Herbert Spencer now appears with those of about all the Dukes in the Kingdom as the director of an association formed for the purpose of defending private property in land." (P.201.) From a paragraph in Mr. George's recent letter to the Tribune it appears that this passage refers to the Liberty and Property Defense League. It furnishes a test of Mr. George's quality. The facts, as shown by its documents now before us, are that there are no dukes at all among the directors (and only one among its members); that the list of its directors does not include "the name of Herbert Spencer"; and that its main business neither was originally, nor has ever been the defence of landed property, but has been the defense of individual liberties against State aggressions and the defense of other property than landed property, against governmental and municipal exactions, Out of the bills it has opposed in Parliament one-third concern the interests of land-owners and two-thirds those of people at large threatened with interference and burdens. Moreover, out of the 160 societies affiliated to it, as shown on pages 15 and 16 of its last report for 1893-94, now before us, only twenty-three are concerned with the interests of land and house property. It upholds Individualism against Socialism; and its watchword is "Self-Help versus State Help."

Supposing it were true that Mr. Spencer, is a member of the

Liberty and Property Defense League, or supposing even it were true that he is on the Council League, what would be the plain inferences? All his life long he has been an asserter of individual liberty, not only of each against others, but each against all. This is conspicuous alike in "Social Statics," in "The Man Versus the State," and in "The Principles of Ethics." From his early days to his last days he has also been a defender of the right of private property. There is a chapter devoted to it in "Social Statics;" there is a chapter devoted to it in "The Principles of Ethics," and in his essay, "From Freedom to Bondage," his argument against Socialism is an argument in favor of individual possession. What, then, would any sane man infer on finding that Mr. Spencer had joined the Liberty and Property Defense League? Simply that he joined a body which upheld the principles he had been always upholding. Nothing but an insane or unscrupulous animosity could prompt the assertion that he joined it because there were dukes (or rather a duke) among its members. But how, after recognizing the fact that even had Mr. Spencer been a member of the league no such conclusion could rationally have been drawn as is drawn by Mr. George, we come to the fact that Mr. Spencer neither is nor ever has been a member, which we assert on conclusive evidence in our possession. And even further, - as Mr. George might easily have learned by making inquiry in proper quarters before writing his book, if he had desired to know the truth - Mr. Spencer has twice definitely refused to become a member or to be identified with the movement, once when he declined an invitation to join the council, where he might have had just those social relations which Mr. George represents him

as desiring so much; and again on a later occasion, when he exhibited still more positively, the motives which swayed him. Misled by something Mr. Spencer had said or done, Mr. Crofts, on June 26, 1888, wrote him a letter, of which we have now before us a copy, written by him on the headed paper of the league:

"7 Victoria St., London, S.W., June 26, 1888. - Dear Sir:
Unless you have any objection I propose to send the subjoined paragraph to the press. I am, yours faithfully,

"W.C. Crofts, Secretary.

"To Herbert Spencer, Esq.

"'Mr. Herbert Spencer and the Duke of Westminster have joined the Liberty and Property Defense League.'"

Had he been the kind of man Mr. George imagines and asserts, here surely would have been an occasion for eagerly saying "Yes." What the actual result was is shown by the statement of Mr. Crofts, written on this same sheet of headed paper:

"Mr. Spencer replied by postcard June 27, 1888, to the effect that he could not consent to the proposed publication of his name as a member of the league. He had found that the identification of his name with any political movement tended to weaken his influence in certain directions."

A more absolute proof of Mr. George's misrepresentation of Mr. Spencer and his acts it is impossible to imagine. His statement is, in fact, a bundle of untruths. His description of the league is untrue. His account of its directing body is untrue. No less untrue is his statement that Mr. Spencer's name is "on their lists behind a long row of titled land owners." And more untrue than all, if it

be possible, is the assertion respecting Mr. Spencer's conduct; since, instead of being led by certain motives to join the league, he was deterred from joining it by opposite motives.

With this example of Mr. George's veracity we leave the whole question to be judged. Mr. Spencer, to whom publication of these personal details is very disagreeable, though now necessary, would not thank us for superfluous disproofs. What credence may be given to the various statements contained in "A Perplexed Philosopher," concerning Mr. Spencer's acts and intentions, the public can now form an opinion. They can also form an opinion of Mr. Henry George.

Yours truly,

JOHN FISKE,

W. J. YOUNG,

DANIEL GREENLEAF THOMPSON,

JAMES A. SKILTON,

LEWIS G. JAMES,

New York, Nov. 8, 1894.

THE REPLY.

To the Editor of the Tribune: Sir -

The letter signed by Messrs. John Fiske, W. J. Young, Daniel Greenleaf Thompson, James A. Skilton, and Lewis G. James, published in the Tribune of the 12th, is in no sense a reply to "A Perplexed Philosopher."

The real charge made in that book is that Mr. Spencer's denial of the ethical validity and social expediency of private property,

in land has been abandoned in ways, times and degrees which show that his change of front has been actuated by the desire to escape the denunciation and ostracism of that influential section of English society denominated by what he himself once aptly personified as "Sir John and His Grace," and which since 1882 has regarded those who hold the opinions he had in his first book so strongly expressed and never up to that time denied, in the same light in which abolitionists were once regarded here. The facts on which these charges are based consist of Mr. Spencer's own utterances on the land question from 1860 to 1892, reprinted in full from the authorized editions of his books and his signed letters to the English press, together with such references to the publications of Appleton & Co. of this city as show that for years after he had made the English public understand that he had completely stopped the issue of "Social Statics" it was still being advertised and issued here under his authority.

In his letter, which assumes to dispose of the "calumnies" of "A Perplexed Philosopher," to show that "its charges are baseless, and its alleged facts are fiction," the real charges and the real facts are carefully avoided. There are in it only two pretenses of meeting anything that has been said in that book. One of these refers to a poetical quotation and the other to a non-material illustration. The "reply" in the one case is ridiculous, and in the other it is based on the garbling of a sentence.

In the first of these the lines from Browning which appear on the title page of my book.

"Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat,
Just for a handful of silver he left us,

} transpose

are correctly quoted. But with the wooden literalness so comically shown in Mr. Spencer's treatment of the "religious idea" (which in this letter his five American followers seem to have caught as they have caught his controversial method and style), these lines are taken to mean that he has actually received or sought a pension and a title, and I am "refuted" by being told that Mr. Spencer has within twenty years spoken disrespectfully of two Prime Ministers!

The second of what I have in courtesy called "pretenses of meeting what is said in 'A Perplexed Philosopher,'" is an elaborate assertion that there are no dukes in the directorate, and only one in the membership of the English Liberty and Property Defense League, and that Mr. Spencer is not a member of the society; which assertion is backed up by a certificate from the secretary of the league that in 1888 Mr. Spencer declined to have his name given to the press as a member.

But how does all this concern the "Calumnies" of "A Perplexed Philosopher?" I have never said that there were dukes in the directorate of the Liberty and Property Defense League, or that Mr. Spencer was a member. In the few incidental references that are made in that book to the relation of Mr. Spencer to this society, I merely say that it has been active in pushing his "The man Versus the State," and that he has been to it, "if not an active member, at least a valued ally."

How, then, do the five American friends of Mr. Spencer make any connection between, "A Perplexed Philosopher" and their elaborate statements "from documents now before us" as to the membership of the Liberty and Property Defense League? They do so by the simple device of assuming that in a sentence which has no reference, either expressed

or implied, to the Liberty and Property Defense League, I in reality meant that society, and by then disproving, not what I had said, but what these gentlemen assume I had thought.

In "A Perplexed Philosopher," in closing my comment on chapter xl, of "Justice", I contrast what Mr. Spencer there says of the freedom of everyone in England to use his limbs and move where he pleases, with the passage in "Social Statics," in which he mentions four dukes by name as showing how private property in land permits monstrous denials of such rights. And I conclude with this sentence:

"The name of Herbert Spencer now appears with those of about all the dukes in the Kingdom as the director of an association formed for the purpose of defending private property in land that was especially active in the recent London County Council election."

The clear reference here is to the conservative association that was so active in the heated London County Council election campaign of 1892, where the main issue was the taxation of ground rents. Mr. Smalley, writing to the Tribune of the result of that election, speaks of it not by its official name, but as "A Ducal League," and attributes the defeat of the local Conservatives to the fact that "they had too many dukes." The reason I did not give the name was because I had mislaid the circular, which had come to me with a lot of Liberty and Property Defense matter. The formal name of the association (which I cannot even now give with certainty without sending to London) was, I think, the London Rate-Payers' League or Association, but not wishing to trust my memory for the official name, which, indeed, was of no importance whatever in my reference, I sufficiently designated it by description.

Now, in their letter to you, Mr. Spencer's friends take my sentence, cut off the determining words, "that was especially active in the recent London County Council election," put a period and quotation marks to the mutilated fragment, call it a sentence from "A Perplexed Philosopher," assume that it refers to the Liberty and Property Defense League, and then proceed at great length to show that there is only one duke in the membership of that society; that Mr. Spencer is not a member, and other things (interesting, if true, but which do not concern me), and then triumphantly declaring this an absolute proof of my misrepresentation and a conclusive reply to "A Perplexed Philosopher," tell the public that it can now "form an opinion of Mr. George."

This is pitiful.

I have nowhere spoken of Mr. Spencer except as an exponent of ideas. I have nowhere asked his motives, except where made necessary, to explain facts by that fundamental law of the human mind which beneath the expression seeks for cause. If I had been unable to entirely restrain the mingled pity and indignation which all men of true impulses must feel on seeing a great truth repudiated and finally denied, and what might have been a lasting reputation wrecked, yet this is not the essence of my book. "A Perplexed Philosopher" is not an attempt to point out the frailties of a man. It is a careful and conscientious examination, not only of the question that lies at the root of all the pressing social issues of our day, but incidentally of a philosophy which assumes to explain the deepest problems that vex the mind and soul of man.

Can the five leading exponents in this country of the synthetic or cosmic philosophy find no larger objections to that book than such as cannot even be replied to without some sense of degradation?

HENRY GEORGE.

November 15, 1894

December 6, 1894.