

**Henry George Discusses 'Progress & Poverty'**

From "The Science of Political Economy," Bk. II; ch. 8.

IN JANUARY, 1880, preceded in 1879 by an author's edition in San Francisco, appeared my "Progress and Poverty." . . . In this book I took the same question [of involuntary poverty] that had perplexed me. Stating the world-wide problem in an introductory chapter, I found that the explanation of it given by the accepted political economy was that wages are drawn from capital, and constantly tend to the lowest amount on which labor will consent to live and reproduce, because the increase in the number of laborers tends naturally to follow and overtake any increase in capital. Examining this doctrine in Book I., consisting of five chapters, entitled "Wages and Capital," I showed that it was based upon misconceptions, and that wages were not drawn from existing capital, but produced by labor. In Book II., "Population and Subsistence," I devoted four chapters to examining and disproving the Malthusian theory. Then in Book III., "The Laws of Distribution," I showed (in eight chapters) that what were given as laws did not correlate, and proceeded to show what the laws of rent, interest and wages really were. In Book IV. (four chapters), I proved that the effect of material progress was to increase the proportion of the product that would go to rent. In Book V. (two chapters), I showed this to be the primary cause of paroxysms of industrial depression, and of the persistence of poverty amid advancing wealth. In Book VI., "The Remedy" (two chapters), I showed the inadequacy of all remedies for industrial distress short of a measure for giving the community the benefit of the increase of rent. In Book VII. (five chapters), I examined the justice; in Book VIII. (four chapters), the exact relation and practical application of the remedy; and in Book IX. (four chapters), I discussed its effect on production, on distribution, on individuals and classes, and social organization and life; while in Book X. (five chapters), I worked out briefly the great law of human progress, and showed the relation to this law of what I

proposed. The conclusion (one chapter), "The Problem of Individual Life," is devoted to the problem that arises in the heart of the individual.

This work was the most thorough and exhaustive examination of political economy that had yet been made, going over in the space of less than six hundred pages the whole subject that I deemed it necessary to explain, and completely recasting political economy.

"Progress and Poverty" has been, in short, the most successful economic work ever published. Its reasoning has never been successfully assailed. . . . Yet though the scholastic political economy has been broken, it has not been [expanded], as I at the time anticipated, by some one of its professors taking up what I had pointed out; but a new and utterly incoherent political economy has taken its place in the schools.

The new science speaks of the "science of economics" and not of "political economy;" teaches that there are no eternally valid natural laws; and, asked if free trade or protection be beneficial if the trusts be good or bad, declines to give a categorical answer, but replies that this can be decided only as to the particular time and place, and by a historical investigation of all that has been written about it. As such inquiry must, of course, be left to professors and learned men, it leaves the professors of "economics," who have almost universally taken the places founded for professors of "political economy," to dictate as they please, without any semblance of embarrassing axioms or rules.

"Progress and Poverty" is not a text-book, but only an attempt to discover the natural laws which control a great social problem.\*

As to my books—a question that I am frequently asked: "Progress and Poverty" is the most thorough, but it is in reality a scientific book, and though in writing it I did my utmost to make its reasoning as clear as possible, there are yet parts of it which from their very nature are difficult to those who have not been accustomed to close thinking. It is a book to be read, not once, but several times. "Social Problems" is, in my opinion, a better book for most people to begin with, and "The Land Question" and "Property in Land" being shorter, are even better adapted for the first reading of a large class.\*\*

Note—(\*) Progress and Poverty, Bk. I; ch. 2; next to last par.

(\*\*) Mr. George's Newspaper, "The Standard," Dec. 31, 1887.