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THE PHILOSOPHER OF FREEDOM

BY HENRY GEORGE, Jr.

Henry George, the second child and oldest son in a family of ten, was born in modest circumstances in the city of Philadelphia, Pa., September 2, 1839. His father and mother were both American born, but of British extraction, the father's side coming from Yorkshire, the mother's from Scotland. His father, Richard Samuel Henry George, was in the Episcopal church book publishing business in a small way when Henry was born, but soon afterward withdrew and obtained a position in the custom house at Philadelphia, which he held for many years.

Henry George received education in public and private schools until he was in his fourteenth year, when he went to work as errand boy in an importing house. In his sixteenth year he went to sea, sailing as cabin boy in an old sailing vessel and bound for Australia and India. Returning to Philadelphia after a voyage of a year and two months, he was placed by his father in a printing office to learn the trade. But the roving spirit was in him, and in December, 1857, he sailed from Philadelphia in a little United States government light house tender, the Shubrick, as ship's steward or storekeeper, for California, where he was attracted by the gold discoveries. There he met with the fate of many. Instead of finding gold, he found only hardship and misfortune. He worked his way as seaman on a topsail schooner to British Columbia, hoping to do better at Frazer river, where recent discoveries had caused much excitement. But no better fortune attended him. He returned to San Francisco and went to type-setting, but was restless and for a number of years struggled against hardships.

While he was getting but a precarious living he married Miss Annie Corsina Fox. Owing to opposition of the lady's family to him, the marriage was precipitate. Henry George was then twenty-two. He followed the vocation of printer, and set type on a number of the newspapers of San Francisco and Sacramento. Venturing with two others to establish a little job printing office, he was reduced to sore straits of poverty and when his second son was coming into the world he went out into the street, stopped a stranger and demanded five dollars with which to obtain living necessities for the wife.

Soon after this his fortune changed. On news of the shooting of President Lincoln, he wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper on which he was setting type in San Francisco. This communication showed, in the judgment of the editor, such marked ability that the young printer was invited into the editorial room and he never went to the printer's case again, until years afterward when he set up the first stickful of type for the book that was to make him world-famous, "Progress and Poverty."

Henry George filled various editorial positions until December, 1868, when he went to New York to try to obtain a telegraphic news service for a revived San Francisco daily, the Herald. The combination of the Associated press and the Western Union Telegraph company was too much for him and his trip was only partially successful. But it had significance in two other ways. While in New York he wrote a comprehensive article on the Chinese question on the Pacific coast, taking the position that the Chinese are non-assimilable, to which view he always adhered. This article attracted some attention in the east and was reprinted and extensively circulated on the west coast.

But more significant than this was a task he deliberately set himself to solve the enigma of wealth and poverty side by side in our civilization. He said of this in a speech at the time he was first nominated for the New York mayoralty, in 1886:

Years ago I came to this city from the west, unknown, knowing nobody, and I saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want.

And here I made a vow from which I have never faltered, to seek out, and remedy, if I could, the cause that condemned little children to lead such a life as you know them to lead in the squalid districts.

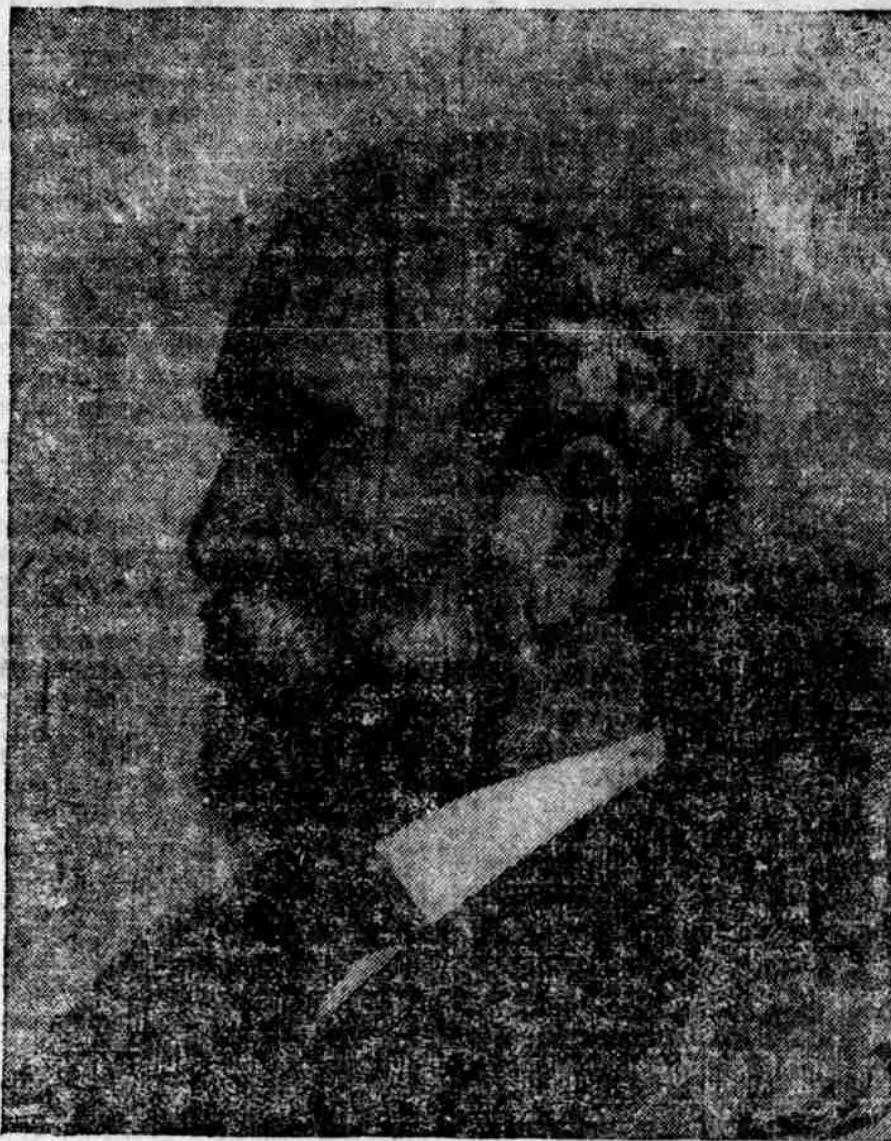
And to a Catholic priest, Rev. Thomas Dawson of Glenree, Ireland, he wrote touching this matter:

Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religious, I shall say something that I don't like to speak of—that I never before have told any one. Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have

land, irrespective of improvements, would reduce rent and increase wages and interest.

A thousand or more copies of this pamphlet were sold, but as Mr. George himself said, "I saw that to command attention the work must be done more thoroughly."

The work was done more thoroughly later in the form of "Progress and Poverty," the writing of which was begun in September, 1877, and the publication of which occurred in 1879, although none of the larger eastern publishing houses would touch it at their own expense. D. Appleton & Co. of New York made the most liberal offer, which was to print and publish the book if the author would make the plates. This offer Mr. George accepted and he had the type set and the plates made in San Fran-



done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true.

That vow bore its first fruits in San Francisco in 1871. Mr. George wrote and published at his own expense a forty-eight paged pamphlet entitled "Our Land and Land Policy." This he divided into five parts, namely: "The Lands of the United States," "The Lands of California," "Land and Labor," "The Tendency of Our Present Land Policy," and "What Our Land Policy Should Be." In this pamphlet he set forth the idea, entirely original so far as he was concerned, although he found later that others had conceived it also, that the value of land, irrespective of improvements, being a value that is due to the growth of population, is a common value and should be taken for public purposes; and that this appropriation should occur through the existing medium of taxation, all taxes other than this one tax to be abolished. He also showed that the three factors in production—land, labor and capital—correlate, and that where land is permitted to become the subject of speculation, speculative rent causes land to obtain more than its legitimate share in the distribution of wealth, so that wages and interest, the shares respectively of labor and capital, become correspondingly and illegitimately lessened. The tax on the value of land would, he argued, destroy land speculation, and thus preventing speculative rent, would restrain the factor land from obtaining more than its natural share in the division of the produce, and correspondingly protect the shares of labor and capital. He held, in other words, that to destroy land speculation by concentrating the whole burden of taxation upon the value of

cisco. The plates were then shipped to New York, and soon afterward began the phenomenal sale of the book by the man, whom the Duke of Argyll later derisively called "The Prophet of San Francisco." The book received wide notice in the press and soon was translated into many foreign tongues. Cheap editions were published in this country and England and were extensively circulated.

Henry George went to New York to live in the early eighties, and in the fall of 1881 went to Ireland as special correspondent of "The Irish World." This was during the Land League days and he took an active part in that agitation. He visited Great Britain in 1883, 1885, and 1889, and made extensive lecturing trips, the land question being his theme. He had large audiences and great stimulus was given to general thought along this line. In England and Scotland large and active propaganda organizations were formed under the name of the Land Restoration league, the pioneers in the present single tax movements in that country.

In 1886 Mr. George became the mayoralty candidate of the trade union organizations of the city of New York against Abram S. Hewitt and Theodore Roosevelt, the democratic and republican candidates, respectively. Without political organization, newspaper support or money for any but the barest campaign necessities, he was accorded second place at the polls with 68,000 votes, Hewitt being credited with 83,000 and Roosevelt with less than 60,000. This was in the days of the separate ballots and Mr. George always believed that he was "counted out" of the election, a judgment which has since been confirmed in the minds of many.

This mayoralty election experience caused Mr. George to start an active agitation for the adoption of the Australian ballot system in this country, which idea was quickly adopted by individuals and parties and it soon became enacted into the political machinery of all the states.

One of the ways in which Mr. George advocated this reform was through the columns of a weekly political and economic newspaper, The Standard, which he started early in 1887.

In that paper he also made a masterly defense of Rev. Dr. Edward McGlynn, who for openly supporting the candidacy of George for the mayoralty the year before was suspended from his pulpit by Archbishop Corrigan, although other Catholic priests had been permitted openly to aid the candidature of Mr. Hewitt. The archbishop subsequently ordered Dr. McGlynn to renounce as opposed to the teachings of the Catholic church his doctrines on the land question which were the same as those set forth in George's book, "Progress and Poverty." McGlynn refusing, the archbishop procured his excommunication. But the papal legate, Archbishop Satolli, reopening the case in 1892 had a committee of the professors of the Catholic university at Washington consider a written statement by Dr. McGlynn of his views on the land question. The committee reported that there was nothing in them opposed to the doctrines of the church, whereupon the legate removed the ban of excommunication and the Doctor was soon after appointed by Archbishop Corrigan to the charge of a little church at Newburg on the Hudson river.

Henry George made a lecturing tour of Australia in 1890 and on his return to New York suffered a stroke of aphasia from his years of intense work. He soon recovered from this, however, and in 1892 published his fifth book, entitled: "A Perplexed Philosopher," being an examination of Mr. Herbert Spencer's various utterances on the land question, with some incidental reference to his synthetic philosophy. George's second book, "The Land Question," had appeared in 1881, his third, "Social Problems," in 1884, and his fourth, "Protection or Free Trade?" in 1886. In 1891 Mr. George published a brochure called "The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII.," being an answer to the pope's encyclical and an exposition of George's land doctrines. But before writing this he had begun work on the most profound and, what he esteemed to be, the most ambitious of all his writings, "The Science of Political Economy," a book on which he was still writing when death overtook him in 1897.

Mr. George had always taken an intense interest and a more or less active part in politics. He was a democrat of the Thomas Jefferson type and he voted for Grover Cleveland, expecting him to raise the tariff issue on radical lines, but when Cleveland sent federal troops to Chicago during the railroad strike George openly denounced the president as the man who had done most up to his time toward the establishment of a dictatorship. Mr. George strongly supported Mr. Bryan for the presidency in 1896, and himself became a candidate for the New York mayoralty the next year. Worn out by long years of intense work and had fallen into ill health, he was warned by medical advisors against the fatigue and excitement of a campaign, but he brushed warnings aside with the statement that if the people called him to lead he would go forth regardless of personal consequences. The warnings were not idle, for early in the morning of October 29, 1897, four days preceding the election, he was stricken with apoplexy and he died before daylight came.

His funeral was one of the most remarkable tributes ever accorded a private citizen and his burial was in Greenwood Cemetery, in a lot beside