

LAND AND FREEDOM / July-August, 1926

KNOWING HENRY GEORGE

By Poultney Bigelow

DURING the years I knew Henry George the short seventeen years of his active ministry his great book was translated into every tongue, including Japanese' and cheap editions flooded the English world. The German Government was the first that applied his doctrines practically, at the very moment of their author's death, and in the world's oldest community the province that gave birth to Confucius. Australian land legislation has felt the influence of *Progress and Poverty* and today its principles are welcomed universally, although vast prejudice is encountered when it comes to their practical application. In Henry George's own country, where the world might look for the first experiment in land reform, we find land speculation firmly rooted and hotly justified as the basis of national prosperity.

This view is reinforced by an almost universal distrust of anything done by government. We tolerate stupidity, waste, petty tyranny and medieval barbarism in our customs officials, our post office, our immigration matters, our censorship of morals, our suppression of wine, and in our navigation laws. We tolerate because we cannot do away with congress and majority rule. We vainly protest against the corruption and inefficiency of our ubiquitous inspectors and blackmailing officials, but there they are like fleas on the dog, and any relief can be but momentary.

Henry George lived in the slums of New York, for he was putty in the hands of his publishers. He paid for making the plates of *Progress and Poverty*, and he never knew financial ease. It was to him a source of bitter comment when of a Sunday morning I would fetch him for a stroll and a talk. He had to pick his way along sidewalks crowded with ash cans and refuse; neglected streets with abominable pavements; children with no place to play save the gutters. Yet we were in the richest city of the continent under government "by" if not

"for" the people. Of course George argued that when his plan should have been accepted, every man would live on his own land patch; speculation would cease; the public treasury would be full; government would provide parks, libraries, baths, music, education, and all sorts of good things without taxation save a moderate proportion of the "unearned increment."

It was a joy to be with George and to feel the glow of his invincible confidence in human goodness. Had I been younger he might have persuaded me that all thieves and murderers would turn into philanthropists did we but meet the advances in a kindly spirit. He was a saintly man; he walked with angels, and his heart expanded when the voice of God came to him and bade him struggle in the cause of humanity. He gave away his copyrights in order that the gospel of *Progress and Poverty* might reach the masses, and he gave his life as a sacrifice for the very men who gave him his death blow.

"Seventy Summers," Vol 2. by POULTNEY BIGELOW Longmans Green & Co., 1925.