

## OF OSCAR GEIGER

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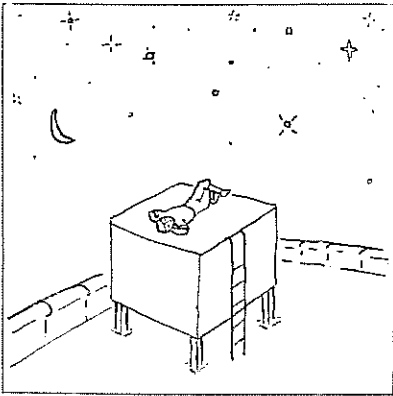
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## I. THE SOWER SEEKS THE SEED

### CHAPTER 1: EARLY LIFE



On February 24, 1873, Oscar Harold Geiger was born in New York - the only child of his Jewish parents. Hermann, his father, was from Vienna and made his living as a tailor. He was related to Abraham Geiger, the famous German rabbi. Oscar Geiger used to say his father was "among the first of American Jewry," and that he chewed tobacco. Of his mother he said little, but we learn that her name was Teresa Pharaoh and that she was of Bohemian origin.

The boy Oscar seems to have been an ardent scholar at a tender age, though he was mainly self-educated. He had to leave school at the seventh grade in order to help earn money for his struggling family. "I built dog-houses and privies," he said. And in his spare time he avidly read almost anything he could lay his hands on. If it was a dictionary he proceeded to read it through. He claimed to have finished the complete works of Shakespeare by the age of 14.

Geiger has preserved for us a memory of his childhood days: "I should have been an astronomer. The earliest memories of my childhood are the blue sky, the sun and moon and stars and the questions I asked about them. My curiosity was only more and more aroused as I grew older, and the years between twelve and sixteen found me reading all the books on astronomy that I could get in the libraries to which I had access, and gazing on every possible occasion through the telescopes that one found in those days on many street corners and squares in New York City attended by 'astronomers' who at times could not answer some of the questions that were asked.

"One of my favorite pastimes on clear starry nights in those days was lying flat on my back on top of a great square water tank on the roof of the tenement house in which we lived, gazing and 'thinking.' In this position and at this height (when five-story buildings were about the highest dwellings in the city), all artificial light from street lamps and windows was effectively excluded and the quiet and solitude of the night was soon forgotten in the clearness and nearness of my heavenly neighbors...

"Innumerable questions kept forcing themselves on my mind and often this would go on for hours and far into the night, and not a few times until my mother or father would come up to end my musings and send me to bed.

"At sixteen - perhaps because of an urge born during those impressionable years, and no doubt developed by these particular musings - I entered upon the study of theology against my parents' wishes, only to forsake it at twenty to seek truth in what, for the want of a more precise terminology, is called Philosophy.

"But never in all those years - nor since, for that matter - had I ceased to long for answers to my boyhood questions, and to others that kept hurling themselves against my ever-inquiring but yet unsatisfied mind."\*

When Geiger decided to take up theology, he had in mind a rabbinical career. He moved away from his parents and established himself in a garret, living alone so that he might spend all his spare time studying. This was a period of hardship. At night he read by street lamp, even by moonlight, so that he might save money for books, and there were times when he lived on nothing but turnips and water. In hot weather he had to throw water on the roof to keep from being roasted; in cold weather he froze. He was learning about the hell of poverty. Indeed the one question that "hurled itself" persistently against his sensitive mind was, "Why is there so much human suffering in the world?" He hoped that a study of theology would give him an answer.

Geiger's intense labors in Jewish theology led to his being ordained a rabbi at the early age of nineteen and to an appointment as principal of a Jewish orphan asylum, The Deborah Nursery and Child Protectory. To make himself appear older he grew a double-pointed rabbinical beard.

The young principal tackled his work seriously. His sympathetic and humanitarian approach, which would be accepted today, was in conflict with the typical institutional practices of those days. As an instance of this, there was a "bad boy" at the Protectory, whom the authorities sought to tame with the usual beatings and punishment, without success. Geiger ventured to handle him, amid general skepticism. He locked the boy in a room and let him rage alone for a few hours. Mealtime came and went. When Geiger returned, the boy was sullen, but his looks betrayed him by mutely imploring for mercy and food. And then Geiger fed him, while speaking to him in a soothing manner. "Ain't cha gonna hit me?" asked the astonished boy. "No," Geiger replied, "I think you've had your lesson." As he explained later, "I wanted first to show him he was at my mercy and then treat him kindly." The experiment was a success and the boy's behavior thenceforth was markedly improved.

It was Geiger's conviction that human nature is essentially good, but that it requires favorable conditions in which to thrive. Make conditions unfavorable or repressive, and "badness" will appear. Remove these and the badness will disappear.

As an illustration of the effects of conditions on human behavior, Geiger related another experiment he made in those early days. He went to the last uptown station on the elevated railway in Manhattan, where only a few people were waiting on the platform for the train. As an empty train pulled in, he observed that the people strolled in leisurely, the men waiting until the ladies were seated, and some even assisting the elderly ladies. Geiger boarded this train and followed it

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\*From an unfinished story written later in life by Geiger, entitled The Man from Mars, involving a Martian visitor to the earth who explains how economic truth was discovered on his planet. The portion quoted above - which is the opening of the story - may be considered autobiographical in character; corroborating Geiger's own accounts of his early youth. The rest of the story is fictional.

downtown, getting off at each station to watch the passengers entering. He noticed that as the crowds grew progressively larger at each successive station, their polite manners diminished proportionately. At the most crowded downtown stations, they waited furtively for the train, learning to stand at the spots where the doors would open, and keeping their elbows ready for action, regardless of sex. It was notable, Geiger added, that the uptown stations were in a poor neighborhood while the downtown stations were in a better class district.

Geiger's views must have been a little too advanced for any orthodox religion or institution. After approximately one year at the Protectory, serious doubts on his religion began to assail him, and there were arguments with the authorities. To add to his uncertainty, Geiger's parents appeared on the scene, appealing to him for financial assistance - which would mean quitting the Protectory for a more remunerative job.

This was a crucial moment; there was mental agony. He had spent the years of his youth in heart-breaking toil and study. Must they now be thrown away altogether? And yet, what had all that striving accomplished? Had theology given the answer to the one question that obsessed him - "Why is there human suffering in the world?" No; in all the labyrinth of theology, the answer to that question could not be found.

Oscar Geiger made his decision. He quit the Protectory, left behind his Torah and Talmud, his rabbinate and religion, and thenceforth became a citizen of the world - and a philosopher. This was a decisive break - but we cannot say that Geiger forsook religion in the wider sense of the word. He did insist on the methods of philosophy in a quest for truth, but the religious spirit was too deeply imbedded in him not to remain a dominant influence throughout his life. "For achievement," he used to say, "Moses was the greatest man in the world; and Aristotle is second." This remark, I think, reveals his estimation of the hierarchy of human thought.

Nevertheless, Geiger was sincere and consistent in his break with organized religion. Many years later he declined an offer to be pastor of a Unitarian Church in Boston. A few months before he died, the editors of the Biographical Encyclopedia of American Jews wished to include his name. "Thank you," he wrote in reply, "I prefer not to be listed." An important reason for Geiger's not wishing to be identified with this or that sect is best explained by himself in a letter to a Jewish friend: "I am not religious and in fact believe that anything which will help to tear down the walls, or bridge over the chasms that keep men apart must be good as it tends toward the ultimate goal of a common brotherhood of man." (In this letter the word "religious" is of course used in its narrow sense.)

It is true, however, that for a while after his break with religion, Geiger turned to atheism, for he could not reconcile the misery he observed and experienced with the idea of a beneficent Creator.

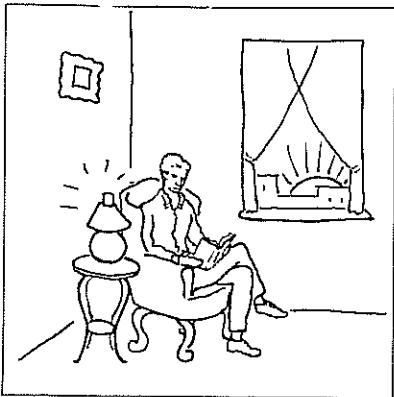
After quitting the Protectory, Geiger sought a secular job, in accordance with his parents' request. Koster & Beal's Variety Theatre and Restaurant advertised

for a bookkeeper, and Geiger applied. He succeeded in interviewing Mr. Beal, a pompous fellow with a thick German accent. "Vell," Beal inquired, "Vat do you know about bookkeeping?" "Not much now," Geiger answered, "but tomorrow I'll know all about it." Beal roared with laughter. "All right, come back tomorrow and ve'll see."

Immediately after the interview, Geiger procured a number of books on book-keeping and sat up all night studying this subject entirely new to him. He went back to the theatre next day, fully prepared. Beal and Koster plied him with questions, and were astonished at his thorough knowledge of the subject. He was hired and so he set to work at his first serious secular occupation.

The box-office cashier at the theatre was in the habit of purloining one or two hundred dollars now and then. This had previously escaped unnoticed, but Geiger was a sharp bookkeeper. Whenever it happened he would say to the cashier, good-humoredly, "I see another hundred was missing last night," but not a word to the managers. Finally it sank into the fellow's conscience. "I did wrong, I know," he confessed at last to Geiger, "but I needed the dough, and you can't be honest in this business." Then he displayed some honor by submitting his resignation to Koster and Beal. As he was leaving, he admonished them, "Never fire that bookkeeper of yours. Don't ask what I mean; but don't let him go. He's a good man."

## CHAPTER 2: CONVERSION



Geiger was living with his parents again. All the while he kept up his incessant reading, studying, investigating. Philosophy was his major interest, but his tower was not ivory. He also investigated the liberal and radical social reform literature of the day, for he was still seeking an answer to the problem of human suffering.

One day while in a bookstore, Geiger saw a bearded man enter, pick up some books and turn page after page of each book, merely glancing at each page. "What is that man doing?" Geiger inquired of the book dealer. "He's reading. He comes in often, and that's the way he reads." "Who is he?" asked Geiger, amazed. "Why, that's Henry George," was the reply.

Geiger had heard of Henry George, as indeed most New Yorkers of those days had. But he was as yet unacquainted with George's teachings. How he was introduced to this philosophy is a story he often recounted.

A physician friend of the Geiger family, Dr. James Ferrier, was a follower of Henry George. Ferrier sought to interest Oscar Geiger in George's doctrines, but he didn't make much headway with his expositions. Finally one day he handed Geiger a copy of George's Progress and Poverty, urging him to read it. Geiger, who didn't

need much urging to read anything, much less a work that promised to give the answer to human suffering, set to work on it that very evening. He read far into the night, fascinated as the argument unfolded. Here was a man whose lofty aim was to abolish poverty, to alleviate human misery, and who was testing every step of the way with the searchlight of reason. Here was the answer to Geiger's lifelong question - for here was a message that proved human suffering to be due, not to a negligent Creator, but to human ignorance and nonconformance to natural law.

While Geiger was reading, his worried mother occasionally knocked at the door of his room, begging him to go to bed. This continued all night, and in final despair she said, "Well, if you're not going to bed, at least turn out your light - it's dawn now!"

Dawn. The book was finished. And, in Geiger's own words, "Then the heavens opened and I saw God."

No time must be wasted. Something had to be done immediately about that burning message. Geiger hastened at that early morning hour to Dr. Ferrier's home and rang his bell furiously. The weary doctor, thus rudely awakened, poked his head out of the bedroom window.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he called down.

"What are we going to do about it?" shouted Geiger.

"Do about what?" cried the exasperated doctor.

"The book, of course! What are we going to do about it?"

"You've read the book already?"

"Of course!"

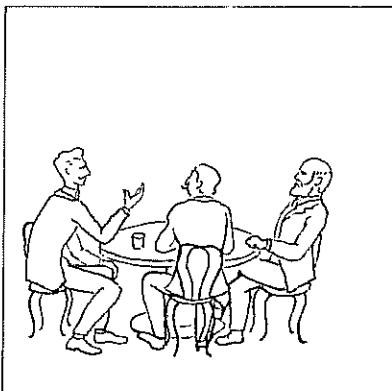
"Come in, my boy, and have breakfast with me!"

Just as with Dante, Geiger beheld the bright mountain and fain would mount it straightway. He was not yet aware of the leopard, the lion and the wolf, and he had yet to learn that by another way he must proceed, a long and difficult way.

But the breakfast conversation with Dr. Ferrier must have been fruitful, for in one of Geiger's letters written in 1934 we find this: "I started an educational institution in our movement thirty-eight years ago, got as high a student attendance as 155 and had to let it drop because of non-support. All instruction (including books) was free and Dr. Ferrier and I bore the entire costs. Single Taxers are all individualists and every one had a different idea as to how to bring about the 'millennium,' and so many adventures were kept going at the same time."

The 1896 enterprise that Geiger refers to was called "The Progress Club." Meetings were held in the old Majestic Theatre on Sundays. An entertainment was presented as an attraction and then the audience would learn of the real purpose for which they were there.

### CHAPTER 3: HENRY GEORGE



Shortly after his introduction to the philosophy, Geiger met Henry George in person through Jerome O'Neill, one of his newly found comrades in the movement. His period of acquaintance with George was not long - only for about a year, before George died in 1897. "Those were the happiest days of my life," Geiger used to sigh, in reminiscing. His dominant impression of Henry George was that of a great lover of mankind.

Geiger was almost more of a believer in the Georgist philosophy than Henry George himself. While the latter hesitated to claim that his reform would cure all economic ills, the former did not hesitate to assert that it would pave the way for curing all human ills. It is related that William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. (son of the great anti-slave crusader) once asked Henry George whether he thought his reform was a panacea for all ills. "No," was George's answer, "but freedom is."

Geiger "argued" with George about this on one occasion. "The single tax is the panacea, because it will bring about freedom," he insisted.

"Yes," George replied, "but you have to be conservative about making such statements."

"Is that your answer?"

"Yes."

"Then I win the argument!"

(Surely George could not have felt offended at losing such an argument!)

When George ran for Mayor of New York in 1897, Geiger took active part in the campaign. Samuel Seabury, too, was in this campaign, and worked with Geiger. Henry George called these two "the babies of the movement."

On one occasion Henry George gave to Geiger a more dignified name than "baby." George, Geiger and Jerome O'Neill were in a restaurant one day, discussing, when the disputed question of interest arose. Many of George's followers had already expressed dissatisfaction with his "reproductive modes" theory of interest, but most of them either had no satisfactory counter-theory, or their explanation was at variance with the rest of the philosophy. But on this occasion, Oscar Geiger argued that the cause and justification of interest was contained within the Georgist philosophy and that it was unnecessary to form any other explanation, including the "reproductive modes" explanation. Labor is the sole title to property. Capital is stored-up labor, and the producer of capital is entitled to his price if he sells

it. If he partially sells it, that is, lends it, he is equally entitled to his partial price, interest.\*

Henry George listened to Geiger's argument carefully, taking it all in, and even beaming at him. When Geiger was through, he expected some sort of comeback. But instead, George turned to O'Neill and remarked:

"Jerry, here is the future economist of our movement."



The Union Square Hotel, New York - Henry George's 1897 Headquarters. Photo-montage by H.B. Maurer.

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\*Geiger's theory of interest is set forth more fully in Part III, Chapter 4, "The Interest Question."



## II. THE SOWER SEEKS GOOD SOIL

### CHAPTER 4: VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS



While Henry George was alive and fighting, his magnetism drew together a great and varied melange of people in one grand united effort. After his death, when the aura of his personality withdrew somewhat and the smoke of the fray subsided, his followers began to differentiate themselves. Some had merely been excited by the fact that "something was being done," and drifted into other doings, notably those of a liberal-socialistic trend. Others understood the Georgist program only as a fiscal proposition and advocated it as such, limiting their appeal to the "pocketbook." There were a few who

grasped Henry George's message in its entirety, its economics, its philosophy, its spirit. Oscar Geiger was of this last group. In one of his letters he asserts that "the single tax is not merely 'a way of levying taxes,' but the basis of a social philosophy that enters into and improves every phase of human life, individual and social."

Geiger was determined to bring this philosophy to reality in the only way he felt it could be done - by carrying the message into more and more hearts and minds, the sources of action. He was, therefore, essentially a teacher, and public speaking was his chosen medium of expression. "As a means of expression," he used to say, "there is nothing like speaking directly to those who are to receive your message." His writing was done usually only as the occasion demanded.

But it should be said that Geiger's correspondence was voluminous. He himself tells us, in a letter written in 1932: "The writer has conducted an almost universal correspondence with thinkers, writers, preachers, lecturers and teachers who showed the need of economic guidance, and he believes he has been able to exert an influence upon thinkers in high places that eventually will make itself felt in scholastic, religious and economic thought as well as in legislation."

Louis F. Post was one of those whom Geiger felt he influenced. (Post, already a follower of Henry George, became Undersecretary of Labor in President Wilson's cabinet.) He accepted Geiger's revision of his own calculations on the probable migration from poorer to better land that would occur under the single tax.

In his early crusading work, Geiger incessantly spread the Georgist gospel wherever he could - at clubs, meetings, forums, street-corners, to friends, business associates, anyone who would listen. Once he was scheduled to speak at an out-of-the-way suburban meeting place. A blizzard raged that night, and he trudged all the way out to find that no one had turned up except the janitor of the place. Nothing daunted, Geiger spent the evening converting the janitor!

There was one street-corner the single taxers used regularly in those days, when street-corner speaking was a fine art - Broadway and 125th Street in New York, known as "Bughouse Corner." It was a meeting place for more than one social message, but the single taxers more than held their own.

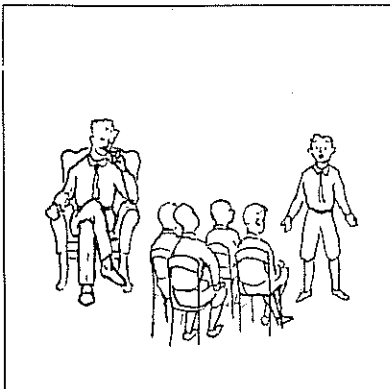
Geiger spoke regularly at that corner, nearly every night for five years, and he nearly always drew large crowds. In fact, Socialist lecturers at a nearby corner would complain that Geiger stole their crowds from them!

One night, before Geiger was to speak at his corner, he encountered an itinerant "astronomer" who offered a look at Mars through his telescope for five cents. "Is Mars inhabited?" Geiger inquired innocently. "Why, yes, there are highly civilized people on Mars," was the authoritative reply. "And who owns Mars?" Geiger persisted. The astronomer glared at him. "Why, the people of Mars, of course!" Geiger made use of this conversation in his open-air lecture. "That astronomer informs us," he announced, pointing out the uncomfortable fellow, "that the people of Mars own Mars. A Martian astronomer would likewise deduce that the people of the Earth own the Earth. Would the Martian guess that only five percent of the people of the Earth own the entire planet?"

It was on the street-corner that Geiger learned to be a fighter as well as a teacher, to meet challenges, to be ready with answers and proofs. He developed into an orator of power, combining an eloquence, logic, drama and feeling that never failed to impress his hearers. But he was not so much interested in developing his own prowess as in imparting the philosophy of Henry George, and he was deeply disappointed with his street-corner crusading. People came and went, and there were no visible signs of results.

Jim Robinson, one of the early leaders of the movement, sought to comfort Geiger in this wise: "Don't expect results from the masses. Machiavelli rightly divided mankind into three groups - those who think, who are, alas, few; those who understand the thinkers, who are also, alas, few; and those who think not at all, who are, alas, many. Don't waste time with this last group. Try to reach those who think and those who understand. They will lead the rest." This message instilled Geiger with new hope. That was the direction in which to strive!

## CHAPTER 5: PERSONAL HISTORY



Oscar Geiger did not engage in his Georgist educational work professionally. His occupation was fur dealer, which business he had entered in 1896 and which he was to continue uninterruptedly - save for changing to different fur concerns and twice setting up his own business - up to 1930. He studied the subject thoroughly and became respected for his knowledge of fur and fur-bearing animals. His articles appeared in trade journals and they attracted attention; he was known especially as an authority on the Alaskan seal. Geiger's various positions as

fur buyer and salesman often sent him traveling throughout the United States (he never left the country), but his life-long residence was destined to be New York, the scene of his birth and death. On one of his trips, he was caught in a raging blizzard in North Dakota. He arrived almost frozen at a small railroad station and sat down, unable to speak or move. The men there finally noticed his condition, and they chafed him and plied him with whiskey until he was restored.

In appearance, Oscar Geiger was tall and slim. He was about six feet and was rather large-boned. Du Maurier might have called him un faux maigre. His hands and feet were long and narrow and his shoulders were unusually low-sloping. Special shoes had to be made for him and he defied clothes dealers to fit him with ordinary suits. He had a receding forehead - the "philosopher's head" - and his dark, piercing eyes were also gentle. His face was angular, rather full during manhood, but fallen later in life, giving him a "hatchet face," not unlike that of Abraham Lincoln. During early manhood, Geiger wore a "handle-bar" moustache, in later years a smaller, trim moustache.

In personal habits, as with everything he undertook, Geiger was painstaking and thorough. Everything was executed with consummate care. The golf term, "following through," was a favorite expression of his, and he did not tolerate "loose ends." He kept himself immaculately clean and neat. He was a boxer and baseball player in youth and in later life took daily calisthenics to keep in trim. The gruelling toil and study to which he constantly subjected himself had its effect on his constitution. Seldom a year of his manhood passed that he was not confined for a while with some illness.

Geiger played the violin for relaxation and was also fond of smoking a pipe. In his social life, he characterized himself as a "dervish." He held himself rather aloof and had few close friends. He had no high regard for the mores of the day, and didn't go out of his way to "conform." Once he was invited to a gathering of society folk - the type that boast of their lineage. When asked about his ancestry, he announced with mock solemnity, "Ladies and gentlemen, I descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve and my crest is the fig leaf!" "That froze them," he used to chuckle.

But such flashes of wit were rare. In general he was in dead earnest, especially when speaking publicly. On such occasions any "wise-cracker" in his audience would meet with swift and sharp rebuke. He seldom parried wit with wit. He was sometimes like the prophet Elisha who summoned two bears to destroy the urchins who dared mock his bald head!

While Geiger was still living with his parents,\* after having quit the Deborah Protectory, he became acquainted with a young school-teacher who lived in the same tenement house, - a small dainty lady by the name of Nina C. Daley. He took an interest in Miss Daley and often escorted her to lectures, concerts, museums, the aquarium and the zoo. He read Shakespeare and Plato to her, and expounded the latest atomic theories. He was wooing her!

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\*His father died in 1899; his mother in 1906.

But Nina was a Catholic at the time, and there was some friction. Geiger tried to convince her that religion offered no rational explanation for life's problems; she in turn tried to convert him to Catholicism. To appease her, he undertook to study Catholic doctrine with the Paulist Fathers. Gaston Haxo tells us something of this episode. A novice began instructing Geiger, and soon learned that here was no ordinary catechumen. Geiger's penetrating questioning soon caused his disconcerted teacher to send him to another of the Fathers, better versed in doctrine. Geiger soon exhausted his new instructor, and so he was sent from one to another more learned than the previous one. Finally he came to one Father Callahan, a man to be respected and to whom confounding infidels was no novelty. Geiger and he became fast friends and they discussed endlessly. But at last philosophy versus theology proved too much for the priest. One day when Geiger came for his lesson, he found Father Callahan quite disturbed. "What have you done to me?" cried the unhappy ecclesiastic. "Your arguments have weakened my faith. I feel myself slipping." Geiger, taking pity on him, proceeded to convert him back to Catholicism with Augustine and Aquinas, until the priest's faith was completely restored!

Needless to say, Geiger remained a philosopher. His study of Catholic theology, however, led him to respect St. Thomas Aquinas as one of the greatest thinkers of the world. And in his thorough searching of the New Testament he came to consider that "Jesus was an economist of the first rank, but first of all, of course, a Prophet of Israel."

It was Nina Daley in the end who became converted to a philosophic quest for truth in preference to a religious and dogmatic view of things.

After six years of wooing and proselytizing, Oscar H. Geiger and Nina C. Daley were wed on May 14, 1902. He was twenty-nine and she twenty-four. They were married by Samuel Seabury, a judge by that time, and it is said to be the only wedding he ever performed.

A son was born to the Geigers on May 8, 1903. Like both his parents, he was an only child. The mother protested against naming him Henry George, but a partial victory at least was won by the father - the boy was named George Raymond.

When George was nine years old, his father brought him and a few of his friends together and formed a story-telling group. They met at the Geiger house every Friday evening and heard from "the Governor" (their affectionate title for the senior Geiger) the fairy-tales and folklore of the world, which Geiger considered an important key to the understanding of human nature.

This story-telling continued for three years, the group gradually growing as George's circle of intimates became wider. Then one night - after an appropriate story - Geiger threw this question to the group: "Which do you consider more useful to mankind, the cow or the horse?" "The cow!" some said. "The horse!" said others. When each tried to champion his case, Geiger said, "Don't tell me now why you think so; go home and think about reasons why the horse - or the cow - is more important, and give your reasons next week." At the next meeting, each boy pre-

sented his case on the horse versus the cow. When they were through, Geiger informed them, to their astonishment, "You have just had a debate." They enthused about it and wanted more.

And so the group entered a new period. They became a debating society. At first "the Governor" gave them much innocent resolutions as "That birds give greater pleasure than flowers to mankind," and gradually led them to more serious subjects. But his foremost consideration was that the boys were learning to think and reason, and to follow ideas to their logical conclusion.

As their interests and independence grew, George and his friends formed into a Round Table Literary Club. At this time the group consisted of ten members. Oscar Geiger was elected an honorary member "who shall act as critic, judge of debates, shall award efficiency marks, and shall render such talks as in his opinion are in accordance with the spirit of this Constitution."

Under Geiger's guidance the boys developed into a formidable debating team. When they tilted with other teams they were so victorious that on one occasion one of the judges remarked, "This isn't debating - it's slaughter!" In school, the boys were not afraid to challenge loose thinking on the part of their teachers. Once, one of the boys uncovered a fallacious statement in his high-school economics textbook. In vain the teacher strove with him. The head of the economics department was brought into the melee and this personage ended by admitting, "The boy is right - but we've got to teach what's in that book."

The Round Table took on the character of a seminar, and continued up to the time the boys entered college. Many subjects were covered - astronomy and physics, biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy and religion, as well as economics and the philosophy of Henry George. In discussing these subjects Geiger used what he called the "kindergarten method" - that is, the method of demonstrating, of making theory and practice one, of making education a living experience. He thought this method ought to be used all the way through college.

When one of the boys, Henry Lowenberg, decided to become a lawyer, Geiger encouraged him to study law all the way from the Code of Hammurabi down to contemporary law. When Lowenberg became established as a criminal lawyer, he introduced Geiger to a group of rehabilitated criminals - formerly notorious underworld characters - at a settlement house in lower New York. In his talks with them, Geiger learned that poverty in one way or another started all of them on their careers of crime. They, in turn, were gratified to find in Geiger a man who had faith in them as human beings.

George Geiger entered Columbia University at an early age and enjoyed a brilliant academic career. At first he took up journalism, but later turned to philosophy. For his doctorate thesis, his father suggested that he write on Henry George's philosophy. Doubtful, George consulted John Dewey, who had been his philosophy teacher. Dewey said, "Not only would I urge you to write a book on Henry George, but I myself would write a preface to such a book." George undertook the task and produced the definitive work, "The Philosophy of Henry George" with the dedication,

"To my father." (The book was published by Macmillan Company in 1933.) George was awarded his philosophy doctorate and later attained distinction as a professor of philosophy.\*

In suggesting the philosophy of Henry George as a thesis, Oscar Geiger had in mind that the American economist also dealt with "the grandest problems with which the human mind can grapple" - problems which absorbed Geiger, too. One of these was the problem of individual life. The importance of the individual is implicit in the Georgist philosophy, and this led George to express a belief in the immortality of the soul. Geiger shared this belief, it being part of his philosophy, too. But he wanted something stronger than belief - he sought for proof. "There are some things," he used to say, "about which we should be able to say 'I know,' rather than merely 'I believe.'"

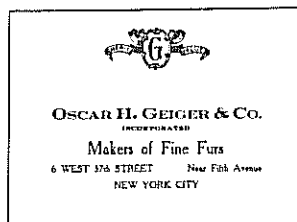
While Geiger was in his early thirties, one of his acquaintances, Lew Markwald, informed him of the Spiritualist movement, the aim of which is to offer proof of immortality through persons known as mediums. Geiger was interested but skeptical, so Markwald invited him to investigate. Geiger did so, and spent considerable time on research. He came into contact with many different mediums and gave them severe tests. In this way he succeeded in exposing many charlatans. After many years of patient research he came to the conclusion that, while many were frauds, and many were simply deluding themselves as well as others, there were still some genuine mediums who could offer proof that the individual does live on after the death of the body.

Geiger's Georgist associates were usually indifferent to or skeptical of his interest in Spiritualism. But some were interested.

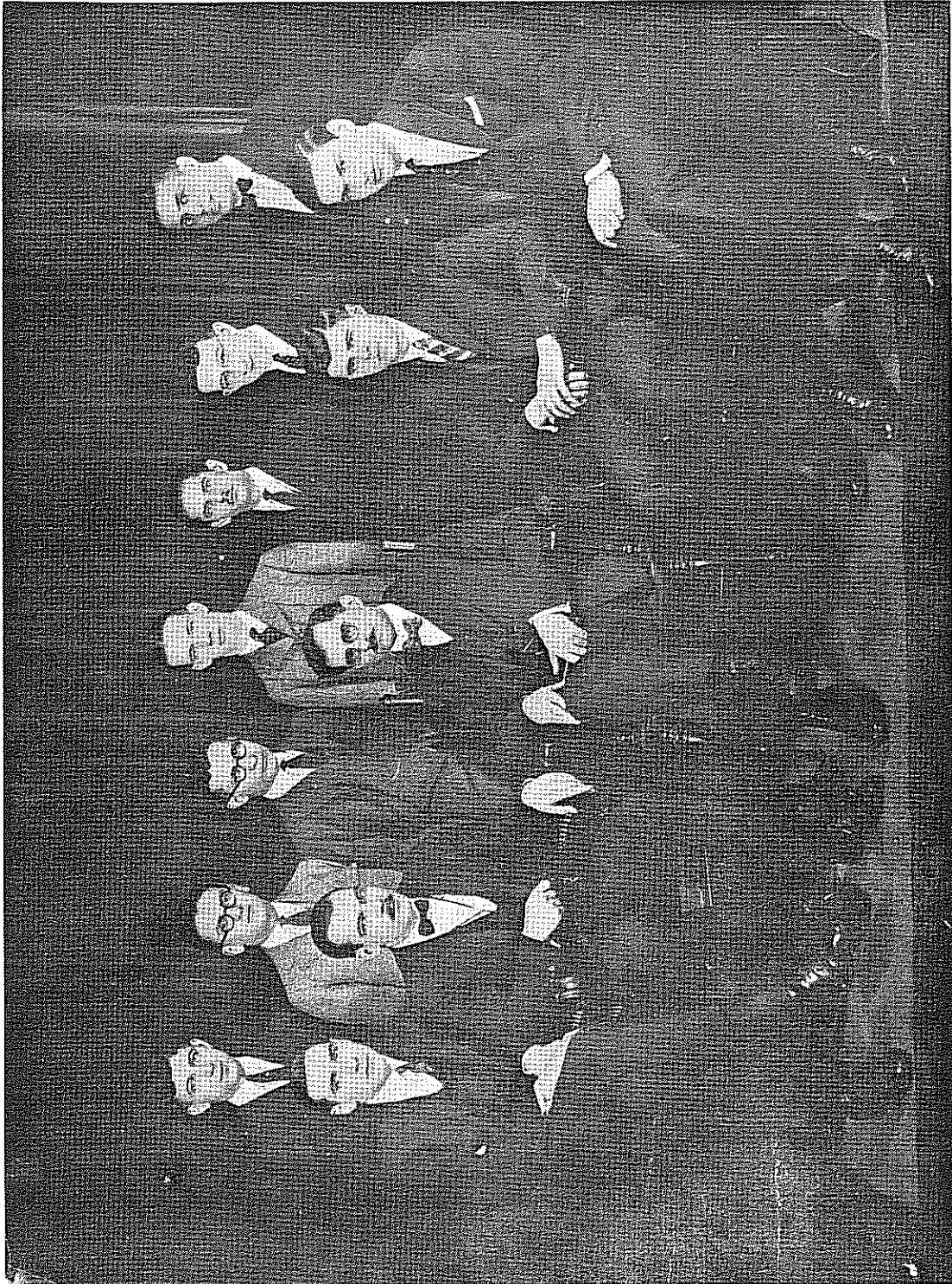
Richard George, Henry George's sculptor-son, famous for the busts he made of his father, accompanied Geiger in his researches.

Some years later Geiger became lecturer for the First Spiritualist Church (the only "church" he associated himself with after his break with organized religion). One of his consultants there was the famous Wagnerian singer, Olive Fremstad.

Geiger convinced the officials of the church that the principles of the Georgist philosophy were harmonious with those of Spiritualism. The officials agreed to help finance an organization to be devoted to teaching Georgist doctrines. They arranged to put up half the funds necessary, the other half to be raised from other sources. Geiger appealed to single taxers, but the other half was not forthcoming, and so the proposal had to be dropped. "Single taxers are all individualists..."



\*Among other Round Table boys, Milton Bergerman became Chairman of the Citizens Union, New York, and Harry Goldhurst became Editor of the Carolina Israelite.

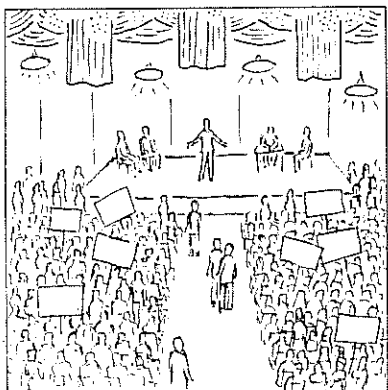


THE ROUND TABLE LITERARY CLUB

Standing, left to right: Henry A. Lowenberg, Harry Goldhurst, Milton Norwalk, John J. Duff, Robert Comperts, Sidney Davidson, Chester Edelman.

Seated, left to right: Murray De Leeuw, Elliott Barrett, Oscar H. Geiger, George R. Geiger, Milton Bergerman.

## CHAPTER 6: POLITICS



Although so many ventures in the Georgist movement had failed, Geiger did not cease to work for it and to seek new methods of spreading the philosophy. Nor did he lose his faith in the power of truth. On at least one occasion he had the satisfaction of seeing that the power of truth is recognized even by those who oppose it.

On this occasion, Geiger was taken by a friend to a banquet of Wall Street men. This was one of a monthly series, at which financiers and magnates discussed the current situation, off the record. The guest of honor on this occasion was Henry H. Rogers of the Standard Oil Company. After the dinner, Geiger noticed that the waiters were leaving the room and closing the doors. The discussion was to take place. Rogers took up the subject of socialism, communism and the various other radical "isms," giving reasons why Wall Street had nothing to fear from them. Geiger, who was next to Rogers' table, remarked to his friend, "He hasn't mentioned the single tax." Rogers overheard this. His fist came crashing down on the table. "The single tax!" he roared, "Gentlemen, that's something we must watch. That damned thing has teeth!"

Oscar Geiger was closely connected with the more or less official publication of the Georgist movement in America, the Single Tax Review (later renamed Land and Freedom) since its early days. This important publication was founded in 1901 by Joseph Dana Miller and edited by him at 150 Nassau Street, New York until his death in 1939. Miller was well known as a poet and man of letters, and his desertion of belles lettres to enlist as a full-time worker in the Georgist cause was mourned by the literary world. "But," said Miller, "poetry will not solve the world's problems."

During its long career, the Review of all the Georgist journals kept perhaps the most complete record of the movement's world-wide activities after the days of Henry George. Geiger was intimately associated with Miller in the editing of the Review, and in 1920 he became its treasurer. Besides many signed articles, Geiger wrote an inestimable amount of unsigned articles for the magazine. He was a guiding force on the paper and helped shape its policy - which was, to record all significant work done for the movement; to provide an organ for discussion and controversy; and at the same time, to offer suggestions of its own. The Review's outstanding suggestion was that a consolidated nation-wide organization be formed that would be more effective in propagating the single tax than isolated efforts here and there.

One organization sponsored by the Review was the New York State Single Tax League, formed in Albany on the Fourth of July, 1913. It sought to lift the movement to its rank as a great social philosophy and bring to it the crusading spirit of its early days. Naturally enough, Oscar Geiger was in it.



This League held a conference in Buffalo in September, 1914, at which Geiger was among the speakers. He set forth the need for education, for the popular understanding of the single tax in order for it to be adopted, and he presented a method whereby this work might be effected. This method he called "Reading Circles." His speech shows how clearly the educational idea was already formed in his mind at that early date.\*

The idea appears to have been taken up enthusiastically. During the winter of 1914-15 Geiger made a tour of the State, urging the formation of reading circles, and within a few months several were working successfully. "Inspired by a visit of that whole souled single taxer, Oscar Geiger," wrote one organizer, "we started a Reading Circle... It is one of the best means possible." One lady praised it because "the ladies can bring their knitting along"! But the project does not seem to have flourished for long, for we hear no more of it.

The entry of the United States into World War I prevented the undertaking of any large-scale Georgist activity. But almost immediately after the war vigorous efforts were made to form a nation-wide organization. Jim Robinson was the organizer, and he succeeded in pulling together single taxers from all over the country. The result was a national political party - the Single Tax Party - with serious intentions of entering the arena.

At first, Oscar Geiger was not in sympathy with the Party movement. He was associated with the Manhattan Single Tax Club, which was devoted chiefly to lecturing. But he became converted to the Party idea, not so much as a political project, but because it seemed to offer abundant opportunities for propaganda. He was also swayed by the reasoning that a Single Tax Party was "the only way a single taxer could express himself honestly at the polls."\*\*

Geiger had a leading part in the drafting of the Party's platform, which was adopted at the first National Convention of the Single Tax Party, on June 28, 1919, in New York. Party headquarters were set up at 246 West 14th Street.

The Party decided to enter the 1920 presidential campaign with candidates of its own. This was the first time anything of the sort had been attempted in the movement. It was decided to hold the convention in Chicago, in the summer of 1920, where other political conventions were also being held. There were only fifty Single Tax delegates, but they made front page news. "The Single Taxers Are Coming!" ran one headline.

At the time the Single Taxers arrived in Chicago, two other groups were holding conventions - the Farmer-Labor Party and the Committee of Forty-Eight. The latter was a group of several hundred liberals and radicals of all shades brought together from all the states (hence the name). The guiding spirits were Arthur Garfield Hays, J.A.H. Hopkins, Amos Pinchot and George L. Record, who hoped that a platform could be evolved on which all malcontents might agree. And so an open invitation stood for reformers all over the country to come to the convention.

\*"Reading Circles" is reprinted in full in Part III, Chapt. 7.

\*\*Proponents of the Party idea used to say, "We're good single taxers 364 days of the year and on the 365th we become Democrats or Republicans." This taunt at first angered Geiger, finally helped convince him.

The Single Taxers had in mind an attempt to swing the Committee of Forty-Eight first, before their own convention should be held. When the Single Taxers marched into the Forty-Eight convention hall, the Committee leaders regarded them with apprehension. Here was a unified group with a definite reform and willing to fight for it. Here was solidarity - while the rest of the Forty-Eighters, with not much other than grievances in common, were wrangling endlessly among themselves.

After three days of sheer babel at the Forty-Eight convention, the Single Taxers resolved to act more decisively. On the third day, forcing their way to the front, they were at last recognized by the Chairman. The Single Tax platform was read, its advocates moving that the Committee adopt it. It was vociferously seconded, having been the one definite plan the convention had yet heard. But the Committee leaders were not anxious to see it go through. They had been "flirting" with the Farmer-Labor Party, hoping to unite with it, and a definite Single Tax program might spoil their chances. So they selected one of their numbers to speak against an out-and-out single tax platform. But the tireless and stentorian Jim Robinson demanded that one of the Single Tax men speak for the platform. The Chairman, Paley Parker Christianson, was finally obliged to give in. Frank Chodorov,\* who was an eye-witness, describes what followed (in an article, "The Greatest Single Tax Speech I Ever Heard," Land and Freedom, September-October, 1934):

"Now there were fifty good Single Taxers at that convention, almost every one qualified to speak on the motion. There was Loew and Miller and Macauley and Robinson. But every one of us, as if by pre-arrangement, turned to the tall figure near the center of the aisle and called for 'Oscar Geiger.'

"I don't think he spoke for more than twenty minutes. But of the thousands of Single Tax speeches I have ever heard I never heard anything like that one. Maybe Henry George, maybe Father McGlynn delivered better orations; I never heard them. But there stood that tall, slender, Christ-like figure on the platform, pouring out his very soul in a plea for economic freedom and human justice until a halo seemed to form itself above him. The audience that but a few minutes before was one of the maddest and noisiest was now quiet as a church meeting. They hung on every word. Not a whisper. After three days of pandemonium and wrangling they had found an oracle who spoke to their hearts and quieted their souls. The message he brought them was the one they wanted to hear - the one common denominator that brought them together.

"What did he say? What you or I or any good Single Taxer might say. His speech was entirely impromptu. Some time later I asked him if he remembered his speech. He did not. But how he said it! It was like some thrilling scene, some inspiring piece of music, the details or notes of which you do not remember, but leave an indelible impression on your mind. The setting was perfect, the crowd large and really anxious to do something for humanity, the occasion momentous and Oscar Geiger poured forth his heart in an impassioned plea such as he only could do.

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\*Mr. Chodorov was Director of the Henry George School of Social Science from 1936 to 1941.

"The electrified crowd paused for a second, as if stunned, when he completed his address. Then from all parts of the hall: 'I move the question' - 'question' - 'question!' No opponent to the motion could have gotten a hearing. So Christianson moved the question and it was carried unanimously. I think it was the one and only plank in their proposed platform that was ever adopted."

The leaders of the Committee of Forty-Eight were still anxious to go ahead with their plan to join forces with the Farmer-Labor Party. So they adjourned the meeting as soon as they could, and the Committee procession marched with great fanfare to the hall where the Laborites were convening - new Girondins marching to their execution. En route they played a band, and the joke went around that this was the first funeral at which music was furnished by the deceased. The wily Farmer-Labor leaders agreed that whatever platform the Committee had officially adopted would be combined with the Labor platform. The unfortunate fact was that, in their haste, the Committee had not officially adopted any platform at all - and so they were swallowed up by the Farmer-Labor Party, never more to be heard of.\*

The Single-Taxers went ahead with their own convention after this episode, disgusted with the Committee leaders' loose game of politics, yet encouraged by the near-success of their own fight. If the Committee leaders had not been so anxious to merge with the Laborites, the Committee of Forty-Eight might have become an important coalition of liberal forces in favor of the Single Tax. As it was, it demonstrated the influence a determined and organized minority could exercise over a much larger unorganized group.

The Single Tax candidates for the 1920 presidential election were Robert C. Macauley of Pennsylvania for president and R.C. Barnum of Ohio for vice-president.

There was another political venture in 1924 - another nation-wide campaign. The name of the Party was changed this time to the Commonwealth Land Party - the name the British single tax party had adopted in 1923. It was Oscar Geiger who suggested this change for the American party. He felt the emphasis should be upon "land" rather than "tax." In fact, he never fully approved of the name "single tax," though he used it, feeling that it did not adequately express the reform proposed by Henry George. At the same time that the Party changed its name, the Single Tax Review changed its name to Land and Freedom with the issue for January-February 1924.

Oscar Geiger was the unanimous choice of the resolutions committee of the Commonwealth Land Party to write the platform - which was, like the former platform, accepted practically as he wrote it.\*\* The slogan of the Party was also coined by Geiger. As he wrote later: "I am proud of being the creator of the slogan, 'The Earth is the Birthright of all Mankind' (as originally written, these words were added: 'and all have an equal right to its use') - which I have had the satisfaction of seeing adopted in the United States, England, Australia and New Zealand."

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\*Arthur Garfield Hays, in his autobiography, City Lawyer (Simon and Schuster, 1942) gives an account of the Committee of Forty-Eight, but makes no reference to the Single Tax incident.

\*\*Both platforms appear in Part III, Chapt. 1.

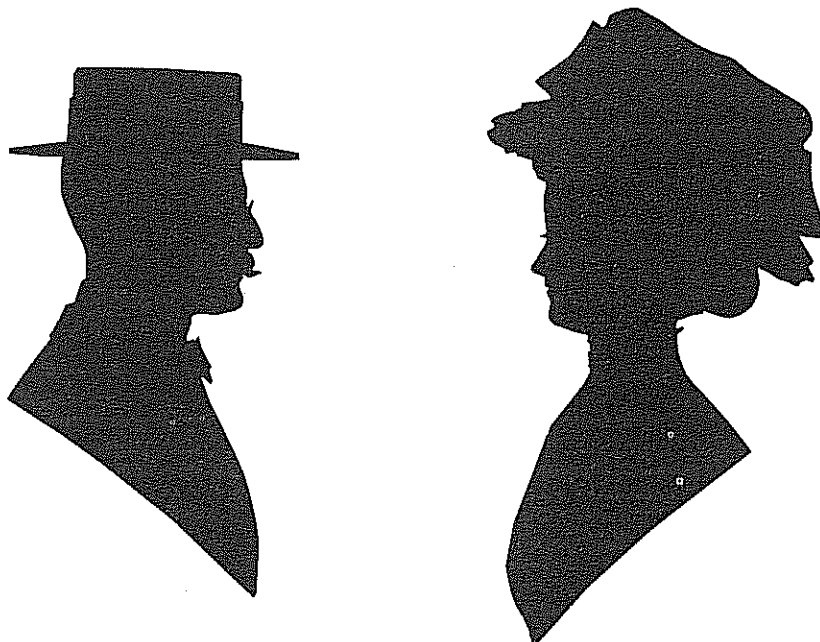
The 1924 candidates were William J. Wallace of New Jersey for president and John C. Lincoln\* of Ohio for vice-president. (Geiger ran for Congress.)

The campaign, in spite of all the effort put into it, did not rally the great numbers that were hoped for, to carry forward the movement. The movement as a whole, at that time, was in a sorry state. Old timers were dying and not enough new converts were being made to replace them. Straggling lecturers spoke here and there. Henry George's works were out of print. Were the savants right in pronouncing the Georgist movement dead?

No. Let some one write to the press "exposing" Henry George's fallacy and congratulating the world that it's all over now, and a storm of protesting letters would appear.

And then in 1925 the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation was established, devoted exclusively to printing the works of Henry George and allied literature. In 1926 a series of annual Henry George conventions was initiated by the Henry George Foundation of America. At one of these conventions, Dr. Mark Millikin of Cleveland, Ohio, expressed the hope that there would some day be a Henry George University. That suggestion made a profound impression on Oscar Geiger.

Not dead. But not enough life and progressive growth to be influential as a social reform movement. A seed blowing about throughout a vast wilderness. "So little now, only the eye of faith can see it...But it has in it the germinative force of truth." Waiting only for intelligent direction to set it in good soil.



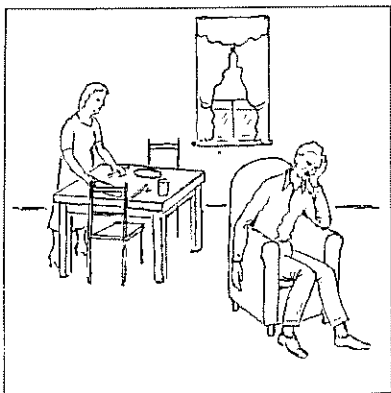
OSCAR AND NINA GEIGER  
Silhouettes by "Selwyn"

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\*Mr. Lincoln later became President of the Henry George School of Social Science.

### III. THE SEED IS SOWN

#### CHAPTER 7: DEPRESSION



Oscar Geiger was experiencing business difficulties long before the market crash of 1929. He had set up his own fur business twice, and twice he had failed. He was a sound business man and respected in the fur trade, but he was too well aware of the principles of economics to be mystified by his troubles. During the "roaring twenties," when most could see only halcyon days ahead, Geiger was able to predict an imminent depression which would be the worst yet. He had little faith in a "prosperity" based on unsound foundations. In 1932 he was to write: "Seven years ago, I gave this civilization fifty years more to live. Of course, that was before the depression. It seems now I was an optimist. Some of our best minds do not give it over ten years more and some even see in present conditions the working out of the figures in the Apocalypse estimated to spell the doom of this civilization in 1935." Geiger's own prevision was not apocalyptic but based on an awareness of the forces and factors involved.

In 1924, after having been employed for fifteen years by Thorn Furs, Inc. as salesman and confidential man, Geiger sought a change. In recommending Geiger to the Associated Fur Manufacturers, Max Thorn wrote: "I unhesitatingly say that for honesty, integrity, high-mindedness and seriousness of purpose, no man excels him. He is faithful to the very highest degree to any trust reposed in him, and is conscientious and painstaking in every task he has to perform." On this occasion Geiger received many similarly warm letters of recommendation. Judge Seabury also offered a testimonial: "...A gentleman of fine ability...in all respects most trustworthy...especially qualified for the performance of any duties which require knowledge of industrial problems."

In 1926, Geiger secured a job with Frederick Loeser & Co. as buyer and manager of the fur department, at \$9,000 a year. In 1928 he wrote to a friend, August Weymann: "I am no longer with Loeser's in Brooklyn; was let out in the reorganization that has followed the death of its late president...I am already placed at Russek's on Fifth Avenue and 36th Street where I start the first of August." But by the end of the year he was let out, and it wasn't until late 1929 that he found another job.

With the onset of the depression, things took a decidedly bad turn. In April, 1930, Geiger wrote to Weymann: "Three months ago...my employer offered me the alternative of taking about half the salary I had been getting or vacating the position. The firm was in financial difficulties and felt they wanted to keep me if I would accept the reduction. I accepted. A week or two later they dismissed all the supervisory and managerial heads of almost all departments and I was asked to take the management of the cloth coat and suit floor in addition to my former duties. I did. This kept me hustling all day without an instant's rest and I came home every night so fagged out that I had to take a drink of whiskey to be able to

eat, and fell asleep almost immediately after my meal...Last week I was let out as they were compelled to further draw in the lines. They are now required to make an offer of settlement to their creditors and the next two weeks will tell whether it will be thumbs up or thumbs down with them."

Whether it was thumbs up or down, Geiger was unemployed from that time on. There were no more jobs in the fur business in sight; he had left his last commercial position. In the beginning of 1932 he was to write: "Outside of the little (and it is so little that it virtually amounts to nothing) that I got for my lecture work, I haven't earned a cent for over a year and a half. I have wondered how much longer this must go on - indeed, how much longer it can go on."

As for the little remuneration Geiger received for his lecture work, he only asked for little. In reply to an invitation to speak at the Baltimore Open Forum he wrote: "I will be glad to speak...As to terms, I have none. I am in this work for the good I can do in spreading the gospel of Henry George...If you association can see its way clear to pay my expenses, I will go."

In 1931, James R. Brown, president of the Manhattan Single Tax Club, died. The officers of the Club offered the position to Geiger. "But," he explained in a letter to Weymann, "as this involved going on the road, and as Mrs. Geiger's mother had died just before that time and I could not leave her alone, I turned it down. They therefore sent Charles Ingersoll out and had me fill engagements in and around New York. Then the Schalkenbach Foundation gave me their lecture work."

With Geiger now devoting considerable time to lecture work, he became more acutely conscious of the woeful dearth of Georgist educational and propaganda work. He wrote: "There has been no lecture work of any account done in or around New York City (excepting that done by James R. Brown before he died) but the work I have been doing for years, and that was shamefully little as the field here is large."\*

To everything there is a season. Surely this was the season for sowing the seed.

#### CHAPTER 8: THE SCHOOL IS FOUNDED



For years the idea of an educational institution where economic truth might be taught had haunted Geiger. He had always felt that the only way the Georgist reform would make headway was through a thorough preparation by education. From time to time he had attempted to found such an institution, but without success. Such an undertaking requires more time, energy, persistence and concentration than one man could give to it while trying to earn a living and raise a family.

\*Geiger never stopped working with young people. For a period of about ten years - from the time the Round Table broke up to the founding of the Henry George School - he met every Sunday evening with a group of young men and women at a YWHA in Harlem, and conducted discussions on current events, economics and philosophy.

But now Geiger was out of a job. His thoughts turned to the problem of propagating the Georgist philosophy, and he was in fact devoting considerable time to it. "As long as I was in the work," he wrote in a letter, "I felt this was the time to realize my aims and ambitions." And in one of his letters written in 1934, we find these prophetic words: "Three years ago I decided to spend the rest of what time is allotted to me here, in trying to establish a school that by the time I am called away will be so well established that others can and will continue it."

As to just how the school so long dreamed of by Geiger actually came into being, we have scant information. We can, however, imagine the resolution growing in Geiger's mind, the road pointing more clearly to the fulfillment of his life's ambition - the depression deepening, the need for economic education become more apparent, Geiger at long last free for the work. We can imagine him talking it over with his closest Georgist friends, particularly Joseph Dana Miller, who nodded his wise approval and offered his cooperation. And as 1931 came to its dreary close, can we not imagine that flash of firm decision that would make 1932 richer by a school?

But we can only chronicle that on January 1, 1932, the Henry George School of Social Science was founded, with Oscar Geiger as Director and with headquarters in the tiny office of Land and Freedom.

The School began its career unpretentiously. One would have scarcely observed that an institution was being founded. It was still no more than Oscar Geiger engaging in the same lecture work as before. Nevertheless, notices were sent out announcing the formal opening of the School. It was a lecture and forum, to be held at the Youth House (some time in January). Morris Van Veen wrote of this occasion: "The night was bitter cold, but I went. I would have regretted all my life, after hearing what I did, to have absented myself. The master in a wonderful way told our story so simply, comparing past and present civilizations; showing their disintegration because of land monopoly; drew vivid pictures of conditions, and told the simple remedy that could restore to the people their birthright - namely taking the rent of land, the fund that society produces as an entity. Here we have a teacher who has the ability, the learning, the culture, the background, the power and the logic, truly, sincerely, convincingly, to tell the story."

Other lectures and forums under the auspices of the School were held at various meeting places. After several weeks, Geiger settled down to weekly meetings at the Pythian Temple.

Geiger had no desire to make the School a "one-man show," as he put it. He sought to interest others in taking part. Letters were sent to a number of Georgists informing them of the School and inviting them to form into an Advisory Committee. The general response was, on the whole, enthusiastic, and a large Advisory Committee was formed, consisting of almost every well-known active Georgist in the United States.

"It's a grand idea," wrote Frederic C. Howe, the noted author. "Some day I should like to be on the faculty." Howe became chairman of the Advisory Committee.

William Lloyd Garrison, grandson of the great antislave agitator, wrote: "I wish the new undertaking every success and regard the theory of a patient educational approach as the soundest mode of spreading the Georgean gospel. It becomes increasingly clear that unless George's ideas are translated into practice, we may expect to see a periodic and progressive breakdown at the end of each twenty-year cycle or thereabouts."

Thomas N. Ashton looked in the same direction as Mark Millikin: "I trust your association will eventually embrace a chartered School empowered to grant degrees to its graduates, to the end that some real bachelors of economics may be established in the academic field in competition with our present-day pseudo-professors of political economy."

The March-April 1932 issue of Land and Freedom featured the new School. Miller wrote: "The Henry George School of Social Science, under the direction of Oscar H. Geiger, seems to us a movement destined to develop into a great institution. It marks a new step in an untried field, and will provide an educational center out of which will grow young and active leaders to assist us in the great battle for industrial freedom that is surely coming. It approaches its work in a spirit of full cooperation, and the generous and whole-hearted responses that have come to it since its inception are extremely gratifying." (The March-April Land and Freedom included a complete list of the Advisory Committee.)\*

A meeting of the Advisory Committee was called on April 15. At this meeting steps were taken toward incorporating the School. A Board of Trustees was elected, consisting of Frederic C. Leubuscher as president, Anna George de Mille, daughter of Henry George, as vice-president, Joseph Dana Miller as treasurer, Harold Benedict as general secretary, and William Ryan as recording secretary.

After this we hear no more of the Advisory Committee. It seems to have accomplished its purpose in serving as a "feeler."

Geiger wished to have the name of Dr. John Dewey associated with the School. He considered Dewey the greatest living philosopher, and felt his name would add prestige to the School. It was Leubuscher who contacted Dewey, requesting the use of his name as Honorary President. Dewey responded graciously, accepting the invitation, and expressing interest in the new venture. Geiger was deeply gratified, and wrote to Dewey: "My life is now dedicated to the work of spreading the gospel of Henry George and I will do better work because of your name and your endorsement...My greatest hope is that out of these efforts may come the Henry George University with you as its head."

Funds were needed to carry on the School work. Geiger did not wish to charge his students for the educational work. He was particularly seeking young people, who could not be expected to bear the expenses of the work. Followers of Henry George were called upon for support. On May 14, 1932, a circular appeal for funds was sent out to Georgists all over the country. In this circular, it was made clear that the Georgist doctrines were to be taught as a great social philosophy:

\*See Appendix II.



"In the lecture field and elsewhere the fiscal aspects of the Single Tax have heretofore been largely emphasized; and while this method has its advantages, the prevailing chaos in state and industry, and the befuddlement in the minds of the highly placed, demand a more fundamental treatment of Henry George's proposals - a treatment that will meet all the current fallacious theories; a treatment that will oppose reaction of every kind; a treatment that will prove that Henry George's teachings point the only way out of our age-old and now threatening economic difficulties."

The very term "social science" in the title of the School indicated that Geiger meant to teach the entire Georgist system of thought, the science of society. However, by no means did he minimize the question of public finance. "The writer will accept second place to none," he wrote to an inquirer, "in his insistence that the entire rent of land be taken by the government in lieu of all taxation."

The response to the appeal for funds was not overwhelming. Geiger underwent personal privation in order that the few precious pennies that came in might be devoted to the School, and he even drew upon his personal savings for the work. All the while, Mrs. Geiger bore patiently with her husband in the struggle, and served as his secretary.

There were misgivings among some Georgists about the feasibility of the new educational venture. Some felt it was "defeative futility." But Geiger was convinced it was the right road to pursue, after so many other methods had failed. And he had an abiding faith that the work would succeed. "If I am doing the right thing," he would say, "if this work is in accordance with Nature's plan, help will come from somewhere, somehow." To this was added, as a result of his belief in the immortality of the soul, a conviction that Henry George was aiding in the work.

At the weekly Pythian Temple meetings Geiger lectured on the fundamentals of the Georgist doctrines. He also invited a number of prominent Georgists, versed in different aspects of the philosophy, to lecture on their special phase. Among these speakers were: Stephen Bell, the foreign news editor of Commerce and Finance, and an authority on the tariff; Harold S. Bottenheim, editor of the American City, and an authority on city planning; Byron S. Holt, collaborator with Irving Fisher, and a monetary economist.

The procedure of the forums was as follows: The lecturer delivered his talk uninterruptedly; then there was a question period, during which the audience would question the speaker. The last part of the meeting was thrown open for general discussion - this was usually the most exciting part of the forum!\*

Presently, Geiger began to see hopeful signs of fruition. The teaching week after week began to produce results. At the final Pythian Temple forum before suspending for the summer, young students expressed intense enthusiasm and an eagerness to "do something about it." Geiger was moved. "For forty years," he said, "I have been watching young minds opening up to the truth, and never have I been so

\*It was at one of these Pythian Temple forums in May, 1932, that I was introduced to Oscar Geiger and the Henry George School. The speaker was Geiger and the subject was "Natural Law in the Economic World."

touched as tonight." And he added: "You are the nucleus of a movement that will spread throughout the world."

He felt the School was accomplishing its mission. Though the Friday forums were ended for the season, the wholehearted interest of Geiger's young students prompted a new series of meetings to be held during the summer at a place in the Bronx rented for the purpose by Max Berkowitz. At these meetings, also held on Friday evenings, not only was the Georgist philosophy further explored, but Geiger entranced the ardent group with forays into astronomy, physics and philosophy.

In September, 1932, the School took another step forward. It was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents as an educational institution. The charter granted was a provisional one, with the understanding that if the School fulfilled expectations within five years, an absolute charter would be granted.\* Geiger was proud of this charter. He also looked forward to the day when the universities would recognize the School and grant their students credit for attending its courses.

During the fall of 1932, Geiger held forums three times a week. The Friday evening forums were resumed at the Pythian Temple. In addition, Wednesday evening meetings were held at the home of John Luxton in Brooklyn, and Sunday morning meetings at the Bronx place. Luxton and Berkowitz were known as Associate Directors. These forums continued until the spring of 1933.

Geiger believed that a more systematic method of teaching than the forum should be undertaken. He felt that Progress and Poverty was still the best exposition of the Georgist philosophy, and so he planned to use it as a textbook, in regular classroom fashion. He went through George's masterpiece painstakingly, culling from it the most vital points, and formulating a series of questions based on them. Geiger's plan was a ten-week course in Progress and Poverty. The students were to read an assignment in the book and come to each lesson prepared to answer and discuss the questions he would direct at them.

Geiger had two trial classes in Progress and Poverty at the Pythian Temple in May 1933, consisting of people who had attended the forums plus a number of new students. Both classes totalled about fifty. The results were gratifying. He realized that this was the right direction.

At that time the School had no building of its own. There were various meeting places and the office of Land and Freedom still served as headquarters. "The School needs a home," said Geiger.

Leonard T. Recker, vice-president of the John S. Swift Co. and one of Geiger's newly-made converts, also recognized the need for a "home" for the School. He offered to pay a full year's rent for an appropriate building to be selected as headquarters for the School. Geiger felt that this was a Providential act. "A door has opened," he said.

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\*The absolute charter was granted in 1937. See Appendix I.

The building chosen was a modest four-story brick building at 211 West 79th Street. The School entered its new home on July 1, 1933. On the first floor, the front room was converted into a classroom and the rear room into an office and library. Mr. and Mrs. Geiger used the second floor as a residence, and the two upper floors were held in reserve.

The summer was spent in preparing for classes in the fall. The work accumulated and Mrs. Geiger, having to attend to housework, could no longer serve as secretary. A young girl, Edith Lee Salkay, recently graduated from high school and a loyal follower of Oscar Geiger, was hired as secretary. Miss Salkay had already served unofficially as secretary at the forums, without compensation.

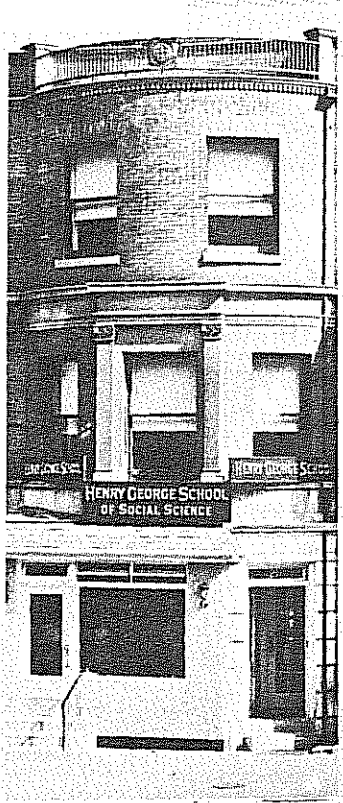
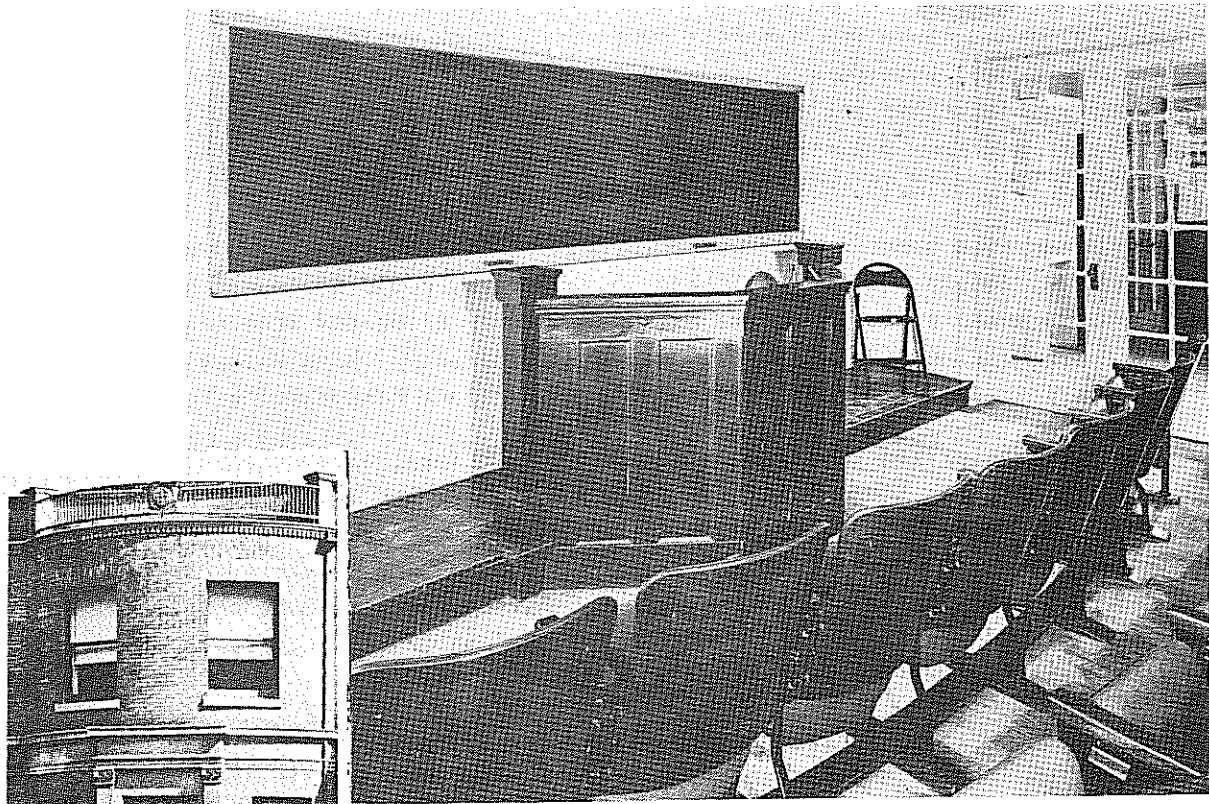
Geiger circularized the school teachers of New York, announcing a sixteen-week course in Fundamental Economics for a ten-dollar fee. The fee included three of Henry George's books (Social Problems, Progress and Poverty, and Protection or Free Trade) and a year's subscription to Land and Freedom. The teachers were offered certificates toward "alertness" requirements, having completed the course satisfactorily. The issuance of such certificates was one of the privileges granted by the School's charter.

While the tuition fee was supposed to be ten dollars for all students, Geiger was unusually liberal in offering "free scholarships," especially to young people. In fact, in his appeal to Georgists for funds, he suggested that every ten dollars donated would provide one scholarship, and so win one new adherent to the Georgist philosophy.

Eighty-four students registered for the term beginning September 1933. The sixteen-week course covered Progress and Poverty and Protection or Free Trade, with Social Problems as collateral reading. When this was completed, a second sixteen-week course was offered, consisting of Henry George's Science of Political Economy and George Geiger's Philosophy of Henry George. Of the eighty-four students, seventy-five went through this entire course of study.

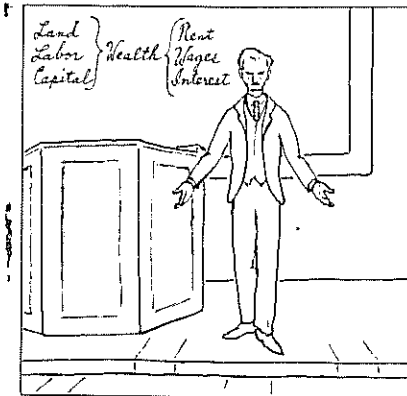
When a new term started in the Spring of 1934, Geiger had new students for Fundamental Economics as well as his advanced students. Classes were held every day, sometimes twice, sometimes three times a day. Geiger taught in all these classes. In addition the forums were continued on Friday evenings, this time in the School building. Every Saturday afternoon there was a "Young Folks' Discussion Group." This was intended to stimulate youthful minds on social questions and thus prepare them for the philosophy of Henry George. Continued attendance at this group won for the student a free scholarship for the course.

In addition to the classes and forums, Geiger conducted a correspondence course, giving each student considerable individual care and attention. And he never refused a request for a private lesson. One of his private pupils, Will Lissner, had been studying the current schools of economic thought for several years, and pronounced the course given by Geiger superior to all others he had studied. When Geiger asked him why, he replied, "Because you're the only teacher I've come across who answers all questions directly and thoroughly."



THE SCHOOL'S FIRST HOME, 211 W. 79th ST.  
Above, classroom; below, library.

## CHAPTER 9: UNTO THE END



Besides all his teaching, lecturing, and classroom work, Geiger had all the administrative work of the School on his shoulders - correspondence, interviewing, business, bookkeeping, directing. When the occasion demanded, he did not even hesitate to get down on his hands and knees and scrub the floors! He allowed few to cooperate with him. His standards were high and most performances did not satisfy him. In all his daily work he had only his wife and Miss Salkay to help him.

"I work all the time," he wrote, "a minimum of sixteen hours a day, including Sundays and holidays. I hardly get time to shave and eat. If it weren't for Mrs. Geiger's care and watchfulness, I believe I'd go without meals and remain unkempt frequently."

In undertaking this incredible toil, he had to quit many of his former activities. He resigned as president of the Brotherhood of the Commonwealth, a mutual insurance society for Georgists. He continued, however, as treasurer of Land and Freedom. He forewent the little recreations he used to allow himself.

Naturally, there were times when this overwork sent Geiger to the sick bed. His doctor begged him to rest - that was all he needed. Instead of resting, Geiger used the doctor's advice in his class, to illustrate his theory of letting Nature take her course. "The doctor knew that man cannot plan his own bodily health. All he can do is give Nature a chance. Make conditions favorable, Nature will do the rest."

Geiger was serious and consistent in his refusal to make detailed plans for the future. He did not even lay out a scheme for the directing of the School by a successor. One day he and one of his students, William Moore, were discussing this matter.

"But what's the matter with planning?" asked Moore.

"All the planning has been done," Geiger replied. "All we can do is follow the planning."

"But," Moore persisted, "what's to become of the School after you're gone?"

"Après moi, le deluge."

But his inner conviction was that the School would continue after he was gone. His use of the French monarch's remark was simply a device to express his trust in Nature. If he was doing the right work now, he need not be concerned about what would happen when he was gone. "Its growth is in other hands."

Geiger lived to see indications of the work passing to other hands. One of his students, Helen D. Denbigh, assistant principal of a Brooklyn public school,

had come to the School to learn why the poverty she saw among the pupils at her school had to exist. "You will learn why," Geiger had assured her. Miss Denbigh learned, not only the cause of poverty, but a social philosophy that inspired her to devote time and energy to the work.

In the spring of 1934, Miss Denbigh brought together a number of fellow students who had a glimpse of the same vision, and together they formed a Student Council, its aim being to assist in the work of the School. Miss Denbigh, as president of the Council, sent out a stirring "Message from the members of the Student Council of the Henry George School of Social Science to the followers of Henry George throughout the nation," urging that they join with the students in forming a Henry George Fellowship, the qualifications for membership to be an understanding of the teachings of Henry George, and interest and effort in forwarding the Cause for the ultimate freedom of man. The message also appealed to Georgists to support the work of the School.

"This is spring," read Miss Denbigh's message. "Seed sowing is in the minds of countless millions over the length and breadth of our land..."

"Seeds of truth can be sown and grown in the hearts and minds of men, women and bright youth. Such sowing has been faithfully done on a crowded street, in the center of a great city, in a school, the Henry George School of Social Science. This sowing has been done with as real a reliance upon human nature, and the great laws that govern it, as that of the seed-sower upon the earth itself and the majestic laws which there govern growth..."

"Can this sowing and growing continue? This depends partly on you..."

Geiger was overjoyed to see the initiative passing to those whom he taught. "The students have taken hold!" he wrote in his Land and Freedom report.

Geiger was also able to see the School beginning to be recognized as an influential institution. Various individuals and organizations in the field of social reform consulted him as a director of a school of social science, on matters of civic importance. The Teachers' Union asked him for a program for "the liberation of the City from banker domination," to which he replied directly, "I would put an additional tax on the assessed value of land in the City sufficient to get rid of the bankers and to pay for all the necessary expense of good government."

Harry Laidler, Executive Director of the League for Industrial Democracy, wrote to him as follows:

"Mr. Norman Thomas, a member of the Charter Commission, is anxious to secure a memorandum from you, if possible, regarding the best type of taxation system for New York City. I wonder whether you could send me any suggestions, particularly regarding the possible application of the Henry George tax program to the City of New York."

Geiger's reply was less direct, but it shows a good grasp of legislative matters: "The first thought that comes to me with reference to a change in the charter

of the City of New York that may tend to, or at least make possible, an approach to the application of the Henry George program is that there shall be secured for the City the option of taxing such property or properties and exempting from taxation such other property or properties as it may itself decide. In other words, that it may have, as we used to call it, 'Local Option in Taxation.' This secured, it will then be for the city to decide what is the best method of taxation and that, as I see it, will be the time for us to show what that 'best method' is."

A pupil of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Haridas Muzumdar, author of several books on India, became interested in the Georgist doctrines through the School. Muzumdar urged Geiger to write a series of articles on the subject for the Bombay Chronicle. The project was not carried through, but Muzumdar promised that Gandhi would be made acquainted with the Georgist philosophy.

But although there were hopeful signs of progress here and there, Geiger did not escape discouragement. The immense task involved in establishing the School solidly was a severe trial to him. It was a lonely, bitter struggle. The financial assistance that came was woefully small. Could not others see the need for this work? In a letter to Harry Weinberger, he wrote: "I had \$7800 when I started the School. I figured that by the time I used this up the School would have been sufficiently established to keep going by its own momentum. My money is now about all gone and I don't know where my food and shelter for the future are coming from." "What I did not count on," he lamented in another letter, "was that the 'followers' of Henry George would not, in the face of the great need for education in this direction, be ready to support such a school, and I am consequently just about 'at the end of my rope' and cannot without such support go on much longer."

"But the bitterest thought," wrote Henry George, "and it comes to the best and bravest - is that of the hopelessness of the effort, the futility of the sacrifice. To how few of those who sow the seed is it given to see it grow, or even with certainty to know that it will grow."

Only his deep faith kept Geiger unswervingly to the task. He was firmly resolved to give momentum to this educational work.

The care and work and worry finally told upon Geiger's physical constitution. Gaunt and haggard he was now. One evening, one of the students, Charles Joseph Smith, noticed his careworn appearance and was moved to quote: "...those who will toil for it, suffer for it, if need be..." There was a silence; and then: "Thank you, Mr. Smith - thank you!"\*

At the conclusion of the School's spring term, a commencement dinner was held at Town Hall, on June 7, 1934. Land and Freedom hailed it as "the greatest Single Tax dinner ever held in New York City, the greatest in its significance if not in point of numbers." On that occasion, student after student paid tribute to the man from whom they had learned the great philosophy. Someone remarked: "We can't af-

\*The oft-quoted passage which Mr. Smith left unfinished is from Progress and Poverty: "The truth that I have tried to make clear...will find friends; those who will toil for it, suffer for it, if need be, die for it." Mr. Smith became the trustee of Land and Freedom when Joseph Dana Miller died in 1939.

ford to lose Oscar Geiger. We need him for this work." Geiger arose with this sally: "Oscar Geiger is now living and working for the cause, and he intends to continue doing so even if he dies in the attempt!" (Great applause!)

That was more than a pleasantry, for Geiger did indeed have premonitions of "dying in the attempt." But he was ready for it. He had vowed that the rest of his life was to be devoted to the work - and if it meant the sacrifice of his life, he was prepared.

Geiger's friends and students begged him to take a vacation now that classes were over, and he promised that he would. His son George was home for the summer, and the family planned to accept an invitation from Miss Denbigh to spend a vacation at her summer home in Maine.

But Geiger's health was not improving, even with the prospect of some respite. All during the latter part of June he complained of constant headaches and a feeling of being continually tired.

Early in the morning of Friday, June 29, he awoke suddenly, feeling dizzy, suffocated. It was a heart attack. The doctor was summoned. When he arrived, Geiger was in pain. But soon he became calm, and drawing his last breath, he passed quietly away. His death was pronounced to be caused by a coronary thrombosis.

Funeral services were held at the School on Sunday, July 1. About one hundred and fifty students and friends attended, including nearly all the former Round Table boys, long since scattered. Lawson Purdy conducted the services and Charles O'Connor Hennessy, president of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, was the speaker. "I believe Oscar Geiger was happy," said Hennessy, "in spite of the sacrifices and privations he endured for the faith that was in him. Because, caring very little for material rewards he hungered and thirsted greatly after righteousness. And, thus exalted, he was true to his vision - and he kept the law."

Geiger's body was taken to Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx for burial. On this warm, sunny day Oscar Geiger was quitting the School building he had entered on a warm, sunny day just one year before.

Stephen Bell spoke at the grave. "The Henry George School of Social Science," he said, "in which so many have had their conceptions of the 'dismal science' gloriously transformed into a science of hope for all humanity, must be made a fitting monument to the memory of its founder as well as to the memory of the Prophet of Civilization himself... There are still some of us who were electrified thirty-seven years ago when John S. Crosby declared\* - 'If those mute lips could speak, they would say, Talk not of me, but of my principles and work and carry them on to fruition.' Thus would Oscar Geiger speak to us. Let us then take up this work and carry it on!"

Anna George de Mille kept repeating, "The School must go on." And the students and friends who turned sadly away after the funeral took up the watchword, "The School must go on."

\*At the funeral of Henry George.





**COMMENCEMENT DINNER OF HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL AT TOWN HALL, JUNE 7, 1934**

Oscar Geiger is seated in the center of the speakers' table, under the window. To the left of Geiger is Anna George de Mille, then Joseph Dana Miller. To his right is Helen D. Denbigh, then Charles O'Connor Hennessy. At the front table, beginning at the very front left, are John Luxton, Mrs. Geiger, Mrs. De Leeuw, Edith Salkay and Max Berkowitz. Leonard Recker is the nearest person at the table marked 5.

## P O S T S C R I P T

It would require another volume to outline the history of the Henry George School of Social Science since the death of Oscar H. Geiger, its founder. Some day this story will be told.

Suffice it to say for the present that the School did go on after Geiger's death, as he had predicted it would. It grew and became more influential, as he knew it would. And its problems passed into the hands of others. But it grew. A seed had been sown.

Geiger's reliance upon education as the next step in bringing about the Georgist reform; his founding and conducting of the School; his faith in its continuance and success - these were the consequences - or shall we say concomitants - of a philosophy of life. To that philosophy let us now turn.

NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, JUNE 30, 1934.

### **OSCAR GEIGER DIES; SINGLE TAX LEADER**

Director of the Henry George  
School of Social Science  
Here Stricken at 61.

#### **ORDAINED RABBI IN YOUTH**

Left the Clergy for Work With  
Theatre Managers—Was Fur  
Dealer and Economist.

Oscar H. Geiger, director of the Henry George School of Social Science and for more than thirty-five years a leader in the single-tax movement in the United States, died yesterday morning of a heart attack at his home at 211 West Seventy-ninth Street. He was 61 years old.

In his young manhood Mr. Geiger had been a clergyman, but left the clergy for a varied business career. After being ordained to the rabbinate he was principal of the Deborah Orphans Home here. Upon leaving the rabbinate he declined a call to a Unitarian church in Boston and found work in the theatrical business as a bookkeeper. For several years he was with Koester & Beals and other managers.

He entered the fur business about 1900 and the firm he established became widely known in the trade. From 1920 until his retirement a few years ago he also acted as fur buyer for department stores in New York and Brooklyn.

Follower of Henry George.

Mr. Geiger met Henry George in his youth and became absorbed in the study of economics, sociology and philosophy. He was a leading speaker for George in the publicist's campaign for Mayor in 1897, and George called him "the economist of the single tax movement."

After George's death Mr. Geiger founded the Progress and Poverty Club, a workingmen's study group, on the lower East Side, attracting a large following and combating extremist groups then popular there. During the campaign by which George's son, Henry George Jr., was elected to Congress Mr. Geiger spoke for the candidate.

Wrote Single Tax Party Platform.

Mr. Geiger was a member of the Committee of Forty-eight which founded the Farmer-Labor party at Chicago in 1930 and was the keynote speaker at the party's convention there. He wrote the platform for the Single Tax party in 1924. Frequently he addressed the annual conferences of followers of Henry George and maintained a large correspondence with students of land economics in various parts of the world. For many years he was treasurer of Land and Freedom, a magazine. A year ago he resigned as president of the Brotherhood of the Commonwealth, a mutual insurance company. He founded the Henry George School of Social Science three years ago.

Mr. Geiger is survived by his wife, Mrs. Nina Daly Geiger, and a son, Dr. George Raymond Geiger, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Dakota.

Funeral services will be held at 2 o'clock Sunday afternoon at the school at the West Seventy-ninth Street address. Lawson Purdy and Charles O'Connor Hennessy, friends, will speak. Burial will be in Woodlawn Cemetery.