

## EIGHTH PRIZE, TEN DOLLARS.

---

MISS MARION McNEIL KNOWLES, LOCKPORT HIGH SCHOOL, LOCKPORT, N. Y.  
PRINCIPAL, EDMUND EVANS.

---

Henry George's philosophy as portrayed in his book "Progress and Poverty" is wise, judicious and wholly practical. He goes clearly and carefully from one step to another and concludes by proving that by appropriating rent by taxation and by abolishing all taxes except that upon land that the government would become the practical owner of the land, and he also shows that this is the only way to remedy the present evil of poverty in the presence of our ever-increasing progress. He touches upon and explains the effect of such a system on the production of wealth, upon distribution, on individuals and classes, and finally upon social structure and social life.

The first step of this great thinker is to state the problem of why there is such abject poverty though the world is progressing in a phenomenal manner. He then tells of the current idea concerning capital and labor; that is, that the wages or rather the compensation of labor, in the sense that everyone works, come from capital. He shows that this is incorrect by citing an example of society from its simplest stages to the most complex. In the beginning, when a man fished, he received his catch as his reward or wages, but when three men were fishing and there were some ripe berries near and one man leaving, went and picked berries and then exchanged his wages or berries for fish, was he not receiving his wages in fish? And so, the miner, hundreds of feet beneath the surface, is just as truly grinding the flour for his daily bread as if he were in the mill superintending the dumping of the wheat into the hoppers. When a man receives his wages in money it is just exactly the same as if he took coal or whatever it may be to that amount. Thus does Henry George utterly disprove the theory that wages come from capital. Wages are the visible symbol of a man's labor.

As to the way in which wages rise and fall, Henry George says, "Wages depend upon the margin of productiveness, or upon the produce which it can obtain at the highest point of natural productiveness open to it without the payment of rent." From this we can plainly see that if land is free and labor is not assisted by capital the whole produce goes to labor as wages. If labor is assisted by capital but land is free wages will consist of the whole produce less that part necessary to induce the storing up of labor as capital." Whereas if all natural opportunities are monopolized, wages will be forced down by competition among workingmen until they are at the lowest point at which men will labor. Since there is no business in which capital and labor can engage that does not require land, and since according to Henry George, "Rent of land is determined by the excess of its produce over that which the same application can secure from the least productive land in use," rent being used in the economic sense, that is, the return which a man receives for securing the exclusive right to use natural resources, it follows that if land is free wages will rise, for if both good and bad soil are open to the individual wages must increase, for in the axiom quoted we are told that wages are governed by the results obtainable from the *highest* point of natural productiveness open to the laborer without the payment of rent.

Is there a remedy for this condition of affairs? Henry George says there is and furthermore proves that his is the only solution of the problem. It will abolish all suffering, want and anxiety as to the future. This panacea is simplicity itself. Leaving everyone in undisturbed possession of his present holdings, the government, appropriates rent by taxation. And to further carry out the plan, all taxes should be abolished except that upon land. Thus the State becomes the practical landlord of all landed property without assuming a new duty nor taking upon itself another obligation.

But if we would have such a system the small farm owner feels as if he would be the one and the only one who would be taxed, quite overlooking the fact that *all* land, that is, city property and factory sites, large estates and great cattle ranges would be included. People ask, "What would be the effect of such a system?" First, the author considers the difference it would make in the production of wealth. Instead of prices going up because of taxes and duties, the common things, those necessary for our daily existence, such as the farmer's plow, the sewing machine, coffee, tea, meats, spices and thousands of other articles, would be within the range of everyone's purse and bank accounts could be started where now people appeal to charitable organizations for aid. If a man is industrious and saving until he is able to buy a home for himself, under the present regime he is assessed and taxed upon the house he has been thrifty enough to erect. If his income increases he is taxed, while a lazy, unambitious man is exempt. The man in the hovel is not forced to pay as his industrious neighbor in his new dwelling. The shipowner must pay for his temerity as if he injured the State by promoting commerce. But under Henry George's system the nation would encourage industry, honest endeavor and thrift. If all taxes were concentrated on land the great landowner would be unwilling to retain large tracts merely for the sake of keeping people off. "What is the sense of paying a heavy tax on a great deal of uncultivated land?" he would ask himself, and the result would be thousands of miles of arable soil thrown open to the small farmer and homesteader.

However, would this vast increase in the production of wealth be distributed equally? The author shows that it would. For relieving "labor and capital from all taxation," as it would if the burden were laid upon rent, would tend to produce equality; if this were increased until taxation covered rent the result would plainly be entire equality. All wealth in a village or city would be divided into two parts. The result of all their endeavors would go to labor and capital and the other half would go to the community in taxes, which would ultimately be used for the welfare and betterment of its citizens. This latter share would benefit the weak, the very young and the very old. The money saved by the non-necessity of maintaining the vast army of present-day paupers, tramps and other dependents would be amazing. Henry George tells us New York City alone spends over seven million dollars on official charity yearly. Furthermore, the enormous expense of guarding society from these evils today must be considered.

Now as to the effect of the Single Tax upon individuals and classes the author more fully explains farther on in his treatise. As he says, it is self-evident that such a system would benefit the mechanic, the day laborer, the professional man and in fact all those who work for wages or for part wages. But take the small landowner, say a clerk who has saved and has been able to buy himself a home. Will he lose if all land values go down? Assuredly not, for his lot remains as useful to him as before Single Tax appeared, and if he ever wishes to buy again he will benefit by the change, for it is not as if his was the only property to fall in value, for all land is in exactly the same relation. Further, since taxes would be levied upon the value of the bare land, acre for acre, the cultivated farm would be taxed the same as the uncultivated park. As has before been said the speculative landowner would be practically forced into opening his holdings to the small farmer, and population would naturally become more widely diffused and more evenly settled. The monopoly of land gone, large fortunes need no longer be feared.

This brings one naturally to the effect of this proposed reform upon social organization and life. With crime and poverty abolished the State would not have to bother with charities, penitentiaries, criminal courts and the vast horde of other duties now thrust upon the government. Not only the time but the money thus saved could be applied to the public good, museums, playgrounds, parks, libraries, gymnasiums and many other things. Government ownership of railroads, telegraph and

telephone wires could be brought about. By giving labor its real and full earnings and by abolishing all taxes except those upon land values, want and the dreadful fear of want will disappear. The hideous striving for wealth will fade away and everyone will be contented, happy and free to follow his divine right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Good, upright men would be willing to help administer the public resources, and electric lighting and other companies could be operated by the government as effectively and economically as under a private control.

Granting all this to be true, Henry George further proves that other remedies are insufficient. Taking the first one sometimes advocated, that is, "greater economy in government," an enormous reduction in taxation would become possible if the army and navy were abandoned and our ships sold, but not any greater than the arts have accomplished recently and these have only succeeded in increasing rent, and so would this reform.

Of the second, "the better education of the working classes and improved habits of industry and thrift," it is the current theory that a poor boy who is able to obtain an excellent education, thus acquiring skill in some vocation, is on the road to peace and prosperity; and this is so, but if every poor boy or girl became skilled the demand for their services would almost immediately cease for the places would very soon be filled. As to increased thrift: if everybody practiced rigid economy wages would inevitably fall and anyone wishing to get ahead by scrimping would have almost literally to starve in order to succeed.

Concerning the third, that of "combinations of workmen for the advance of wages," he says, "So great are the difficulties in the way of the effective combinations of laborers that the good that can be accomplished by them is extremely limited, while there are inherent disadvantages in the process."

As to "government direction and interference," this system is neither sensible nor far-sighted, as is illustrated in the graduated tax upon incomes; this tax is meant to reduce great fortunes, but instead a class of officials spring up who put a tax upon honesty and encourage corruption and bribery.

The last and perhaps the most important of these six remedies is "a more general distribution of land." It has been proven in the western part of the United States that a farm of five thousand acres can be cultivated to greater advantage by the present day machinery than one of three hundred and twenty acres. In so far as the ownership of farms is restricted so would be the production of wealth. "A subdivision of land would tend to make a larger class comfortable but would not benefit the laborer."

Thus Henry George proves the six most popular proposed remedies, namely, greater economy in government, greater education of the working class and improved habits of industry and thrift, combinations of workingmen for the advance of wages, government direction and interference and finally a more general distribution of land, entirely inadequate and impracticable. He furthermore proves conclusively that the only way in which peace, prosperity and happiness can be enjoyed is under a system of Single Tax and that tax upon land values.

---

Though Truth and Right seem often overborne, we may not see it all. How can we see it all? All that is passing, even here, we cannot tell. The vibrations of matter which give the sensations of light and color become to us indistinguishable when they pass a certain point. It is only within a like range that we have cognizance of sounds. Even animals have senses we have not.—"Progress and Poverty."