

Causerie

By THOMAS N. ASHTON

POWERS OF DARKNESS

NEARLY sixty years ago the author of "Progress and Poverty" laid down a pen from which had flowed a volume of thought destined to foreshorten the days of parasitism on the products of labor. Though this foreshortening may not appear, fifty-nine years later, to be appreciable, the fact remains that without the advent of the powerful paragraphs of "Progress and Poverty," under one title or another, all our boasted arts, sciences, culture and religion would have been in vain—society would have been doomed to a perpetual hell upon earth.

The public reception of "Progress and Poverty" was various, and naturally so in a realm now long known as "The Land of the Almighty Dollar." Many people—many minds, and the individuality of the human mind necessarily promises more conflict than concord. Only as several minds agree upon the moral view of a question do the several minds agree upon the truth thereof. Individual morals, therefore, largely determine one's acceptance of the teachings of Henry George and whether or not one shall *do* something about his teachings.

Let us not flatter ourselves, however—we who accept the moral findings in the pages of "Progress and Poverty"—that we are holier-than-thou because of original virtue. What man begets his own virtue? What man begets any thought from within? Is it not that unto some are given, by Divine dispensation, the power to perceive and to grasp a truth? Are not some given this power—not as favored children of the Creator—but as agents commissioned to spread simple truths? We have been chosen, not as recipients of future celestial degrees, diplomas and medals, but as employees in a factory assigned to carry out, mayhap, a heart-breaking, arduous task with no reward except to see, at most, some fruits of our labors. Virtue is its own reward—trite, true, tasteless and without the fragrance of a single rose—virtue naturally in consequence—the maximum pay for him who holds truth first.

We are not to be surprised, therefore, at the various public receptions accorded to "Progress and Poverty." We may be surprised at the rapidly cooling morality manifested by practically all of Henry George's caustic or kindly critics as they completed their reviews of the early edition of his treatise.

At least two score and one of the foremost newspapers, periodicals and magazines editorially stated their opinions, between 1879 and 1881, of George's book. Of these forty-one molders of public thought nine were condemnatory—"essentially unsound—no wilder theory was ever broached—the most pernicious treatise—wild and impractical—premises false and its reasoning fallacious—a mad doctrine—a sweeping confiscation—and we cannot

admit the remedy." Yet some of these rabid reactions generously included damnation by faint praise for the honest purpose of Henry George.

Thirty-two other editorials circumspectly acknowledged the thought-provoking proposal of the author. Thirty-two editors, out of forty-one, caught the moral tone of George's utterances and answered accordingly, but it is now evident, after half a century, that the morality of these editors immediately cooled as fast as the ink dried on editorial columns. Their moral duty ended with an admission of George's logic.

Three generations mark a long period, as measured by man, in which the editorial views of this nation easily might have molded public opinion ten times over in expounding the unanswerable analysis laid down by Henry George. Easily this nation might have avoided the sordid misery born in the economic chaos which now is without parallel in degree in the annals of our nation.

Nine editors mocked the logic of Single Tax. Thirty-two contemporaries, benignly agreeable, turned back to the routine publication of taxation complaints, charity "drives," murder, robbery, rape and arson, cultural thought, collegiate profundity and labor rows—catering always to that old alibi "what the people want."

Though the inescapable consequences, dug from history and forecast by Henry George, lightly have been dismissed by his ostensible peers, the cancer of parasitism on labor and capital has grown apace until panicky thoughts now dominate shallow intellects in the halls of erudition and of statecraft, in the land "where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The Powers of Darkness quiver.

Yet the answer is . . . Henry George.

TAXING TAXES

In the Land of the Pilgrim Fathers—where the hills come down to the sea—where the ocean's surging waters seek the quiet of a lee—where Boston beans and succotashmeet fish cakes once a cod—where Johnny cakes and corned beef hash raised culture from the clod—a tax upon taxes was conceived.

It's this-a-way:

The New Year scarce had found its way through slithery sleet and snow to Beacon Hill, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-seven, when "The Great and Honorable General Court of Massachusetts" (Legislature to you) in its wisdom solemnly marched—with measured step and slow—into its sanctum sanctorum and softly closed the door. Amidst sagacious nods and sober miens, portly pods puffingly pushed the Legislative machine into motion. The mills of the gods-and-culture began to grind.

In no time at all—as measured in terms of eternity and on May twenty-ninth, to be exact—two hundred and eighty fish-fed cerebra of legislative sapience emerged