A Latter-Day David

(Editorial, *Boston Globe*)

HALF a century ago this very Autumn a slim man of 38 sat before a table in a bare little room in a house in San Francisco writing. On the face of this shabbily dressed man there was, however, no indication that want had disabled his spirit. One would never guess that here was a sturdy soul who had been struggling 19 years with adversity, discouragement and hunger; whose account stood, at the moment, exactly $450 on the debit side; who scarcely knew from one week to another whence tomorrow's meal would come.

His lips smiled. From deep blue eyes gleamed a vision, which he was transmitting to words on the cheap writing paper before him. He had begun a magazine article to win bread; but he had discovered something greater clamoring within him, a book. And, though he little dreamed it then, this book was to shake America out of her lethargy of indifference to economic and social thought, to set Ireland and Scotland afire, to summon George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells forth on their respective careers, to produce amazing repercussions in England, to initiate a reform movement in Germany, stir France, travel overseas to Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan, and awaken response even from Africa.

For this brave little David was loading a sling to hurl at the oldest foe of human happiness the world over, the gaunt specter that stalked by his own hearthside: Hunger. His name was Henry George. The book was "Progress and Poverty."

A MAN AND AN IDEA

There are two major themes entwined in the story of Henry George. Actually, they march as one to the music of a single idea. If his life was of itself one of the inspiring chapters in modern biography, that was because it was fired by loyalty to a high ideal which came to focus in an idea of society which "Progress and Poverty" sets forth. Few men achieve such dynamic unity. Fewer, having achieved it, maintain it as he did. Seldom have heroes faced greater odds with a sweeter nature or a more valorous one. And few have poured light into dark places of human misery with a more powerful eloquence and a richer observation of human life itself.

One of a family of 10, he began life in very humble circumstances in Philadelphia in 1839. At 13 he was done with school forever, and working for $2 a week to aid his family. Yet his love of learning was already awake, never afterward to slumber. And so was his will power—which was one of the remarkable factors in his career. At 18 he had voyaged across the world to India before the mast, had learned the printing trade, and was working passage around South America, bound for the gold fields of California.

There his hopes were disappointed, and the long struggle with poverty began in earnest. Prospector, storekeeper, typesetter, weigher in a rice mill, farmer, printer, peddler of clothes wringers, newspaperman, editor, lecturer, odd-job man, dogged by endless economic upsets over which he had no control, he still kept his courage firm and began at last to make himself felt in Pacific Coast journalism.

As he observed life and tasted its harsh fare, he thought about it. His thought first brought him into collision with the great railroad monopoly in California, then gathering in millions of acres of public lands. Failing to purchase him, they set out to crush him by obtaining control of the paper employing him. He founded one of his own.

THE CAREER BEGINS

Widespread unemployment and recurring business depressions stirred Henry George's mind profoundly and he perceived that both were related to the diminishing of free land and the growth of land monopoly in the hands of the few. The seed of "Progress and Poverty"sprouted. In 1879 it came to harvest in the book. But the book was rejected by all the established publishing houses; Henry George was compelled to set type for it himself.

The book made slow progress. America, till then, had been preoccupied with political thinking to the exclusion of economics and social problems. That national habit of thought had been deepened and intensified by the Civil War and its aftermath. So, although "Progress and Poverty" obtained some good reviews here and there, it lagged. Only an explosion of great proportions could attract attention. The explosion came.

Copies of "Progress and Poverty" had traveled overseas. Ireland was engaged in the mighty struggle led by the Land League against landlordism, and to this cause the book came as a stirring contribution. It ran riot in Ireland and its author was invited to come and talk to Land League audiences. Next thing America knew, it was startled one morning to read in the papers that an American writer, Henry George, had been arrested by the British Government because of his book and his lectures, both of which laid down the precept that the land belongs to the people and that monopoly of land is the major cause of poverty among the dispossessed masses.

WORLD FAME

The affair blew up a storm of international proportions. The *Times* devoted a whole page to a review of the book. Liberals and Irish members of Commons demanded the unconditional release of Henry George and the curbing of the unwarranted police activities of the Government.

The author returned to New York famous—and almost as poor as when he left it. For now came one of the proofs of his disinterested idealism; he ignored the possibilities of profit from his book. The income went to the issue of cheaper editions of "Progress and Poverty".

The remainder of his life was devoted to propagation of his gospel. Five times he visited Great Britain. He

ran for Mayor of New York to further the reform so dear to his heart, the defeat of poverty; and flabbergasted machine politicians gaped when the returns showed him supported by 68,000 votes. "What will you do now?" he was asked after his defeat. "I will buy a box of pens and a bottle of ink and go back to writing."

He did. The *Standard* was founded to push the anti-poverty campaign and become one of the most brilliant papers in America. "Progress and Poverty" became more nearly a universal topic than any other book of its time.

ONE OF STANDARD TREATISES

The essence of "Progress and Poverty" is the contention that wealth is the product of human labor, but that land is the creation of God; so that if wealth belongs to its makers, the land, whence man draws the means of labor, belongs to the community. Land value is not due to any act of its owner, but to increasing population presure. In other words, its value is given it by the community itself. Monopoly of land appropriates this "unearned increment of value" and at the same time deprives the common man of his opportunity to become independent as his forefathers were. They had plenty of free land; he has little or none. And so, while population increases, and monopoly grows, poverty increases and labor finds itself in more and more helpless a position. Henry George's solution was to abolish all taxes save a tax on land, which, in his reasoning, would produce equality of opportunity. Whether one agrees or not with his argument, "Progress and Poverty" is one of those rare books which are found on the shelves of every one who cares for brave encounter with a fundamental problem of human society.

A Lesson From Henry George

(Editorial Toledo (Ohio) Sunday *Times*)

A STRAY newspaper clipping going the rounds of the press has brought to our editorial consciousness a flood of recollections, to which the substance of the clipping has added a moral for these times.

It is now more than 30 years since a certain day when, as we sat at our desk grinding out "copy" for an impatient composition room foreman, who for half an hour had been whistling down the tube to our excruciating agony, the door of our dimly lighted sanctum opened, and on the threshold stood a stranger.

"My name is George," he said, advancing slightly, as we looked up.

There was something in that stranger's face that riveted instant attention—something in the voice and attitude that inspired instant interest. The thought of Henry George, father of the Single Tax and author of "Progress and Poverty," then just in the making of world-wide fame, was as far from our mind as the nebular hypothesis. We had never seen a portrait of Henry George, and there had been no intimation of his being within a thousand miles of the scene of our daily labors.

Yet that face—particularly that Shakespearean brow and those calm, earnest eyes—persisted in prompting our surprised intelligence with what seemed only the widest guess.

"My name is George," had been his sole introduction.

"Not 'Progress and Poverty'" we ventured desperately.

He smiled assentingly.

"Yes, 'Progress and Poverty'" he replied "I am Henry George."

There followed much felicitation, as convincing as we could make it, upon his "advent to our midst," and a conversation never to be forgotten and destined to be recalled in future years by many communications between us, although we never met again.

Within a year Mayor Tom L. Johnson of Cleveland had absorbed and become the special champion of the Single Tax theory, and Ohio rang with its reverberations in politics. The world greeted "Progress and Poverty" as an epoch-making book, England evincing as much interest in it as America, and translators of a dozen tongues were busy over its pages.

But now we come upon a very different manifestation of its author's genius—a love letter written to his wife on the twenty-third anniversary of their first meeting. They were at the time an obscure couple, as fame goes, and the struggle with family cares bore heavily on the shoulders of Henry George.

No separation had occurred, to occasion this letter, now brought to us in the newspaper clipping referred to.

Mr. and Mrs. George were at home. She had retired and he had been working at his desk late into the night. But he had not forgotten it was the anniversary of their first meeting 23 years before, and he penned this missive, to be discovered by Mrs. George in the morning.

"It is 23 years ago tonight," he wrote, "since we first met—I only a month or two older than Harry and you not much older than our Jen. For 23 years we have been closer to each other than to anyone else in the world, and I think we esteem each other more and love each other better than when we first began to love. You are now 'fat, fair and forty,' and to me the mature woman is more handsome and more lovable than the slip of a girl whom 23 years ago I met without knowing that my life was to be bound up with hers.

"We are not rich; so poor just now, in fact, that all I can give you on this anniversary is a little love letter; but there is no one we can afford to envy, and in each other's love we have what no wealth could compensate for. And so let us go on, true and loving, trusting in Him to carry us further who has brought us so far with so little regret. For 23 years you have been mine, and I have been