

## HENRY GEORGE'S ARGUMENTS

By Nicholas Murray Butler  
President of the Columbia University

(From an Address delivered at the 177th Commencement of Columbia University, 2nd June, 1931.)

It is a full half century since no inconsiderable part of the world was plunged into vigorous and often excited controversy over the thesis and the arguments of a book by Henry George. He called it *Progress and Poverty*. The very title was abundant in challenge, and the argument of the book was more challenging still. Henry George pressed the question as to why it is that with all the vaunted progress that society has made and is making, there should still be so much poverty and want, and such apparently permanent lines of division between the great mass of those who prosper and the great mass of those who do not. While Henry George lived and met the public face to face upon the platform, his vigorous personality gained him many followers and made many advocates of his opinions. The years that have passed have set his economic analysis and economic teaching in due perspective, and enable us now to consider them with a just sense of their permanent importance and with regard to the soundness of their underlying principles.

It may be said at once that so far as Henry George pointed to privilege as an unbecoming, unfair and indeed disastrous accompaniment of progress, his teaching has passed into economic theory everywhere. Sound economists in every land accept and support economic equality and economic opportunity as fundamental.

To-day in every part of the world, and much more vigorously than a half century ago, this same question is being pressed upon the attention of mankind. Why is that progress in which we take such pride, so uncertain, and indeed so inconsequent, in meeting not only the hopes, but the needs of so many human beings? . . . The material means with which to satisfy every human desire and to afford every human comfort can now be produced in quantities hitherto unknown and at costs most moderate, and yet so many of those who need these things desperately cannot possibly acquire them.

These are all familiar facts. They have been stated over and over again. The only possible reason for restating them is that nothing adequate or even earnest is being done in regard to the grave matters to which they relate. Repetition is perhaps the only way by which a sluggish, a self-centred and a somnolent public opinion can be stirred to look deeply into these questions before it is too late.

Too late for what? Too late to stem the tide of discontent, of disorder and of political and economic revolution. Great masses of men will not indefinitely sit quietly by and see themselves and those dependent upon them reduced to penury and want, while that which we call civilization has so much to offer, commands such stupendous resources and seems capable of accomplishing almost anything. Somewhere and somehow there is a gap, a want of balance, in our social, our economic and our political system which we have not found ways and means to fill or to supply. . . .

If we are effectively to allay discontent and successfully

to remove temptation to disorder and revolution, we dare not sit indefinitely in contemplative inaction. To-day progressive and enlightened liberalism is everywhere true conservatism. Stubborn resistance to betterment may well be the first step toward catastrophe.

### Dr Butler's Question

In a speech at Paris, 19th June (condensed from the *New York Times*), to an important gathering of American business men, Dr Butler, the President of the Columbia University, provoked prolonged cheers when he frankly declared that "we must not sit and wait—nor stand and wait—and not abuse the people with a plan, but must present a better plan that shall testify, to our time and to the time that shall come after us, that all the sacrifices that have been made for 300 years all over this world to build institutions of liberty, of freedom, of civil, political and economic opportunity—to build them into governments and social systems—that that has not been wasted."

Dr Butler began his address by saying that when asked to speak he had replied by taking the title of Henry George's famous book, now fifty years old, *Progress and Poverty*. This work, he explained, offers material for a great many speeches.

"Why is it," the educator went on, "that with all the progress which the world is making in so many directions—science, letters, fine arts, every form of industry, commerce, transportation—why is it that there still exists so much want, so much of all that which for lack of a better name may be summed up under the single word poverty?"

"Henry George asked that question fifty years ago. To-day everywhere in this world, East, West, North, South, Europe, America, Asia, Africa, that question is being asked—Why is it that, with all that man has accomplished to his great satisfaction and pride in this last generation or two, why is it that the world to-day is in the grasp of the greatest economic, financial, social and political series of problems which have ever faced it in history? Why is it?"

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The answer to this question is to be found in Henry George's famous book, *Progress and Poverty*. It is a book for all ages. It expounds the better plan Dr Murray desiderates in the interests of civilization itself. The wrong in society is economic more than political and has been unerringly traced by Henry George to land monopoly and tariff barriers. These are the two abiding obstacles to progress in every land, and so long as they remain nothing of a permanent character can be done to solve the menacing burning problems of the day.

A correspondent, B. of Cheshire, a supporter of our Sustension Fund, has been moved to send a special donation of £5 with a letter of goodwill in which he writes: "I am sure the United Committee deserve to be complimented on the passage of the Land Value Tax provisions of the Budget."

We appreciate the compliment. "*Land & Liberty*" badly wants at least 100 similar concrete votes of confidence at this time. This is a serious word to all concerned with the well-being of the journal, and the success of its mission.

### FORM OF BEQUEST

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