

International Conference celebrating  
The Henry George Centenary, Hotel  
Commodore, New York City. August  
30th to September 2nd, 1939

## The Man Who Invented Plenty

By A. C. Campbell.

Usually we think of an invention as a mechanical device. But the Arabic system of numerals, for instance, is an invention, and it is not a machine. Plenty is an invention of this type.

No important invention is the work of any one person. The inventor combines in a new way materials or ideas already known. In this way, Henry George was as truly the inventor of plenty as Galileo of the telescope, or Sir Rowland Hill of the penny post.

It always has been assumed that scarcity accompanies civilization. People were reminded by their religious teachers that man was innocent in Eden. He was rightly content with his work in the Garden—"to dress it and to keep it." Also, he enjoyed its abundance. But becoming presumptuous and disobedient, he was driven out to a world of heavy toil for scant and uncertain reward. Philosophy, tradition, and common observation and experience, all helped to give semblance of truth to the notion that, though some people may be rich, many others must be poor.

This was for many centuries the belief of those who formulate a science of human society.

But besides the science that works out theories, there has grown up a movement that is commonly called "practical science," a school whose exponents handle the ponderables of the material world.

Toward the close of the last century, practical science had wrought such miracles of improvement that all were discussed under a general and striking name—"The Industrial Revolution." The modern form of this movement was dated as beginning with the invention of the steam engine as patented by James Watt in 1769.

This is a right thought. Industry for countless generations had been carried on almost wholly by power of muscle, whether of man or of beast, but Watt applied the expansive power of steam. In even more fundamental truth, he caused the heat of the sun, as latent for ages in the coal beds, to do the work. With a touch of poetic fancy, philosophers of history tell us that Watt anticipated, and bettered, the advice of a great nineteenth-century thinker who said: "Hitch your wagon to a star"; for Watt geared the wheels of all industry in with the motive power of our whole system, the great sun itself.

With the steam engine, machines of old forms were multiplied, and new machines were invented. Both kinds were assembled in great factories, and steam ran them all. Goods were produced in unheard-of

quantities. Trade expanded. Discovery extended to new countries whence new materials were brought to be fed into new machines, to produce new forms of goods, to be taken back to the new countries, to be traded for more new materials—and so on, round and round.

Some people, seeing all this, began to hope that plenty was coming, that the primal curse was to be lifted. But the word of revelation and the word of philosophy still were as before—that scarcity was inevitable.

Even industry itself joined in this word. For in industry there were good times and bad times. In “depression,” as it was called, the poor were in greater number ; in “expansion,” only a few of the poor could rise beyond the level of poverty.

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More wealth ; more poverty.

Here was a problem. As the years went by, that problem led to more theories. “Practical” people of good will tried to help the poor. But the problem remained. More wealth ; more poverty. It came at length to this : A new philosophy was needed, and a new philosopher to expound and apply it.

He came. His name was Henry George. He was an American by birth and citizenship ; one of the common people ; self-taught ; poor. But he had the vision. He had learned the language of the philosophers. He was ready to explain to the philosophers the true meaning of their own words. He was ready to show practical people exactly what they must do to solve the riddle of making plenty practical.

Achieving a short respite from daily labour for daily bread for himself and his family, Henry George devoted the time to writing a book. Difficulties that seemed at first impossibilities prevented immediate publication, but these were overcome, and the book appeared in 1879. It has been republished many, many times. It is now in print in every leading language and its teachings are spread by active societies everywhere.

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In his book, Henry George does not compromise. Far from it. The very title is both challenge and prophecy. Here it is :

*PROGRESS AND POVERTY*

*An inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth.*

*THE REMEDY*

And the very first words of his introductory chapter are these :

“The present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power.”

This meant not scarcity but abundance.

In those days there was a science of political economy. George believed it to be real science. He believed in nature and in a God who made nature and gave nature its laws. He believed that human society existed under natural law, and that it must obey that law or perish. Fundamental in the code of human society he saw the moral law.

The great political economist of that period was John Stuart Mill, whose death, about the time when George began to write his book, had saddened the world of progressive thought. George was one of Mill's strong admirers. On the question of plenty or scarcity, however, there was a marked difference of opinion. It was time for the new opinion to declare itself and prove itself. George, in his *Progress and Poverty*, Book II, Chapter 4, quotes Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, Book I, Chapter XIII, Section 2, as follows :—

“A greater number of people cannot, in any given state of civilisation, be collectively so well provided for as a smaller. The niggardliness of nature, not the injustice of society, is the cause of the penalty attached to over-population. An unjust distribution of wealth does not aggravate the evil, but, at most, causes it to be somewhat earlier felt. It is in vain to say that all mouths which the increase of mankind calls into existence bring with them hands. The new mouths require as much food as the old ones, and the hands do not produce as much. If all instruments of production were held in joint property by the whole people, and the produce divided with perfect equality among them, and if in a society thus constituted, industry were as energetic and the produce as ample as at the present time, there would be enough to make all the existing population extremely comfortable; but when that population has doubled itself, as, with existing habits of the people, under such an encouragement it undoubtedly would in little more than twenty years, what would then be their condition? Unless the arts of production were in the same time improved in an almost unexampled degree, the inferior soils which must be resorted to, and the more laborious and scantily remunerative cultivation which must be employed on the superior soils, to procure food for so much larger a population, would, by an insuperable necessity, render every individual in the community poorer than before. If the population continued to increase at the same rate, a time would soon arrive when no one would have more than mere necessities, and, soon after, a time when no one would have a sufficiency of those, and the further increase of population would be arrested by death.”

Without a word of comment, George clashes, head on, thus :—

“All this I deny. I assert that the very reverse of these propositions is true. I assert that in any given state of civilisation a greater number of people can collectively be better provided for than a smaller. I assert that the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the cause of the want and misery which the current theory attributes to over-population. I assert that the new mouths which an increasing population calls into existence require no more food than the old ones, while the hands they bring with them can in the natural order of things produce more. I assert that, other things being equal, the greater the population, the greater the comfort which an equitable distribution of wealth would give to each individual. I assert that in a state of equality the natural increase of population would constantly tend to make every individual richer instead of poorer.

"I thus distinctly join issue, and submit the question to the test of facts."

There could not be a more direct statement of difference of opinion. George quotes facts to disprove Mill's statements. But he realizes that to deny scarcity, and even to prove plenty, is not enough. The second, and greater, part of his book, is in line with the closing sentence of the first part: "—we have yet to find what *does* produce poverty amid advancing wealth."

He goes on to further discovery on lines well known to his readers. His great discovery answers the question: Why does not plenty distribute itself? He finds that there are obstructions to its flow. The greatest of these obstructions, and the cause of many others, is the misappropriation of the rent of land, which is a public fund; and, as a necessary consequence, the levying of taxes on trade and industry. This system proves to be wrong in morals, contrary to reason, and outrageous in practice.

Then he turns to invention of the social mechanism necessary to clear the natural channels of distribution of wealth.

His proposal is not to disturb title deeds, but to charge each owner, whether principal or subsidiary, the value of his holding; and make the proceeds of this charge the sole public revenue. This means the oft-discussed Single Tax.

George tests the principle on every side. He proves it to be in strict accord with the moral law and with the deepest thoughts of man in all ages. He proves it to be simple in operation, effective in ending poverty and in clearing the way for progress.

Since Henry George's day there has not arisen one prophet to dim the light of his word; nor one reasoner to disturb his main conclusions.

But, in the sixty years since *Progress and Poverty* was issued, there has come to the world poverty so widespread and so intolerable that some governments spend unthinkable sums to save its victims, while other governments plan to carry on world war and so restore the rule of scarcity by destroying both wealth and those who would make wealth.

Our civilization is in delirium, the result of its own mis-thinking. The common phrases of to-day are proof: "Poverty in the midst of plenty," "over-production," "over-population." Such words are worse than negation of thought; they poison and corrupt ideas.

There is one sovereign cure. It is to realize the fact of present and future abundance of supply for all; and in that comforting knowledge to guide individual conduct and the operation of public services and institutions in accord with the weightier matters of the moral law—justice, mercy and faith.

*(Issued for the International Conference celebrating the Henry George Centenary, New York, 1939, by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, 34 Knightrider Street, London, E.C.4.—Additional copies, price 2d. each or 5 cents.)*