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COMMENT — How Herbert Quick Came to Embrace the Principle
Embraced by Henry George

Recently I was doing a little research for a lady in Iowa who is working on a Ph.D. thesis concerning Herbert Quick and the early Single Tax movement in Iowa. Going through issues of the old magazine Land and Freedom, I came across an excerpt from Quick's autobiography. He described his reaction upon reading Henry George's Progress and Poverty:

"I have often wondered whether many men have passed through such an experience as mine in the reading of this book. I found the very foundations of my philosophy in the process of dissolution. Like the foundations of the Cathedral of St. Paul's, they turned out to be nothing but sand and rubble, and the structure of conviction so dear to me was tottering to its fall; but the book did not destroy alone. It poured into the rotten base the concrete of a new and perfectly correlated doctrine, which has stood firm and unshaken ever since. But these foundations of belief which were moving, dissolving and undergoing reconstruction, were those of my very life. The dome which was trembling was that of the convictions which I had publicly proclaimed before my little world. Consistency is a very precious jewel, especially in him who even in a modest way has been a speaker and a writer; and I saw that if these were veritable truths which I was drinking in, I should be forced to repudiate my doctrines which I had held, and which constituted the bond between me and many dear friends. I was facing a crucial test of character, or I was being misled."

More and more enthralled by the unfolding argument, Quick went on to become a lifelong convert: "I have never for a moment lost that something like a transformation which came to me then." He wrote many popular books, some of which are mentioned in the recent Henry George Institute reprint, "The Real Trouble with Farmers", and he was quoted in the U.S. Congressional Record.

It seems to me that the quoted paragraph goes far toward explaining some of the difficulties in the way of gaining acceptance of our message. How many are willing to go through the mental stretching Quick went through, or accept the dissolution of cherished opinions, or risk being less popular in one's social circle?

I do not doubt that we should aim for good popularized presentations of our ideas, but we should not delude ourselves as to the impact. The results are commensurate with the effort, and if we want more Herbert Quicks, we'll have to reach out for those who are willing to come to grips with the full Progress and Poverty argument.

- R.C.