

## HENRY GEORGE'S WORK.

From an Australian viewpoint by JOHN FARRELL in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, 11/7/03

SOMEWHERE in the later eighties a copy of "Progress and Poverty" reached the inland town of Forbes, and was passed from hand to hand among a few. The logic and the fervor of it inflamed them to immediate action. Here was political economy with humanity and hope in it; here was "the dismal science" transformed into a message of deliverance for the weary and heavy-laden of the world, and made more scientific. Henry George had analysed the contentions and tested the investigations of the men who, until then, had been accepted as authoritative and final in their pronouncement upon the majority of mankind of the doom of incessant toil and incessant deprivation; of Adam Smith, Bentham, Malthus. He had summed up against their main conclusions on grounds of pure reason; he had made it apparent to those who could put aside inherited formulæ of judgment and re-consider the whole subject in the light of a new presentation, that there was no enemy to the material and moral well-being of all men but Ignorance, that labour and capital were not opposed in their interests, but were equally oppressed by the exactions of monopoly, and that, if the requirements of equitable relationship between man and man were not enforced in man-made laws, there need be "no unemployed problem," no haunting anxiety among millions about next week's food supply, no strife between capitalist and employee for the crumbs which fall from the richly-loaded table of monopoly.

#### So the few men of Forbes who read "Progress and Poverty"

in those early days believed. They met of evenings, and every point of George's case was, as Iago puts it, "disputed on." They glowed with the desire to publish abroad the glad tidings; they blazed together; they founded the first Land Nationalisation League in this State. A couple of years later a newspaper to advocate Henry George's system of government had been established at Lithgow, which was afterwards transferred to Sydney, where for some years it was continued on the same lines. In April, 1889, the first Conference of the Land Nationalisation League was held in Sydney, representing branches in Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, Bathurst, Condobolin, Crookwell, Echuca, Forbes, Goulburn, Grafton, Granville, Lithgow, Nymagee, Sydney, Wagga, and Wellington. At this Conference the name of the organisation was changed to that of the Single Tax League, as better expressing the method by which it was sought to bring about the reform desired, and the idea of inviting Henry George to visit Australia took practical shape.

#### Mr. George agreed to come,

abandoning for that purpose a projected tour of the United States. Throughout the Australian cities which he visited his welcome was most enthusiastic. He was accorded a public reception at the Town Hall, attended by the most prominent public men of this State, after having been driven thither from Circular Quay in a drag supplied by a converted protectionist. His opening lecture was delivered before an immense audience at the Exhibition building on the wet, wild night of March 8, 1890. Thereafter he spoke to crowds in many of the inland towns of New South Wales and South Australia. In Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane, as in Sydney, his utterances were fully reported in the daily press. The educational value of the tour was to some extent expressed in a much clearer public comprehension of the purpose and scheme of the single tax movement than prevailed before it was undertaken. Clarity of thought, deliberation, precision of statement, were the notable characteristics of Mr. George as a public speaker. He told the present writer that the hardest trial of his life was passed through in his earlier efforts to address a public audience with some degree of calmness and self-control. But he had long overpassed

the period of stage fear when he came among us, and was one of the best speakers ever heard on an Australian platform. He schooled himself inflexibly to say the thing he intended to say and that only. If the right form of words did not at once present itself, he did not indulge in oratorical "sparring for wind" by the use of waste talk. He paused, perhaps for a whole minute, until the required phrase was at his command. This accuracy and absence of word-padding made him a high favourite with reporters; his addresses as taken down were almost invariably fit for transference into print, without any trimming whatever.

#### I think all those who came to close quarters with Henry George

during the few months of his stay in Australia must agree entirely with the general estimate of him held in America as a high-minded, simple, lovable man, inspired by the noblest humanitarian ideals, coldly logical as a controversialist, passionate with lofty eloquence as a preacher of righteousness. It was the writer's privilege to be in his company a good deal, especially during the South Australian portion of his tour. There were opportunities enough to see him behind the scenes, so to speak, but he really never was there. In the public view and in private he was the same man, of boundless compassion, deeply moved by the pathos of pain and suffering endured by others, modest in his own requirements and enjoyments, unconventional in small matters, without eccentricity or ostentation. No great reform ever had a worthier leader. "His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"

#### What of his Work?

There have been national fervors of belief before our day, great emotional upheavals of sentiment, founded on hopes that bore no fruit, and conditions that were misunderstood. The overwhelming power and passion of many passages of "Progress and Poverty," the intensity of its appeal, especially in the final chapters, to the highest motives of the mind and impulses of the heart, might well have to answer for the universal enthusiasm which, within a few years, translated the book into the principal languages of mankind.

Mr. Farrell goes on to explain the progress made since Henry George's Australian visit in the colonies, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Japan, and other countries. It would require, as the writer says, in closing a very readable article, many additional columns of print to detail the principal among the steps taken towards the realisation of Henry George's ideal of the way, the only way, in which the rewards to both labour and capital can be assured of continual growth, as the lock-out against them is broken through at an increasing number of points, and the material without which they cannot produce made more and more available. The fight for the freedom from the blackmailing and the hindrance of rent exactions which have no warrant in justice or natural law is a new and a tremendous feature of our time. It is a growth of the past twenty years.

"I have heard of an old prophesy—Horn and thorn shall make England forlorn. Enclosers verify this by their sheep and hedges at this day. They kill poor men's hearts by taking from them their ancient commons to make sheep-pastures of; and by imposing upon them great rents and by decaying tillage; so that now they are forlorn, having no joy to live in the world."—Francis Trigge (1604).

Child labour is increasing in Illinois and the country at large by leaps and bounds. An army of 1,750,000 little men and little women is marching every morning into our factories—some of them, worse yet, go in at night! Our industrial system is a heart which pumps in and out every day a stream of youthful blood, steadily growing feebler, darker, and more degenerate.—Star, Frisco.