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## **The Land and the People**

*Wherein Democracy Seemed to Fall Short of Its Promise -- Henry George, a Prophet of Economic Freedom -- "Progress and Poverty" and Its Revolutionary Influence on the Thought of the Economic Leaders in the New World and the Old -- Tom L. Johnson and His Work for Social Progress -- Joseph Fels -- Louis F. Post -- James H. Barry -- Robert Baker -- Other Single Tax Leaders.*

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was marked by greater interest in fundamental social and politico-economic theories among serious thinkers, than any preceding time in our history. From the establishment of the Republic, our people had imagined that with freedom of speech, press, and assembly guaranteed, and full manhood suffrage in operation, economic as well as political problems might be easily, justly, and efficiently dealt with. The abolition of privilege in the older forms, and the larger freedom and more prosperous life of the people under democracy, created a false sense of security. Men forgot that eternal vigilance is ever the price of liberty. One of the master lessons of history was strangely overlooked, namely, the ever-changing aspect or form of privilege and its unceasing effort to enslave the many for the mastership and enrichment of the favored few. Nor did it seem to occur to our thinkers that there might be some great economic principle that intimately related to "equality of opportunities and of rights," which was not considered in our present politico-economic regime. It remained for an American youth of small book learning, but richly endowed with philosophic insight, clarity of thought, aptitude for observation, and capacity for broad reasoning and logical deductions, together with moral vision, to give to the Republic the first great economic philosophical work that compelled the nation seriously to consider basic facts vital to the prosperity and well-being of the people.

**Henry George** was born in Philadelphia. His parents possessed little worldly wealth, but were characterized by sturdy principles, strong affection, simplicity, sincerity, and integrity. He had only limited common school advantages. Early he learned the printer's trade. After a voyage to and from Australia, where he worked his way on the ship, he went to California, working his passage. Here he lived for several years precariously, working at his trade, prospecting for mining claims, publishing a paper, and writing for the press on current topics. At times he lacked money for food and shelter, but he lived a fine, clean life and improved his opportunities by diligently reading good books. The problem of increasing poverty in the presence of growing wealth always troubled him. Finally he was sent to New York on an errand connected

with obtaining telegraphic news service for his employer's paper. While there he was appalled at the spectacle of grim want, in the form of an army of out-of-works.

It was at this time that something extraordinary came to him as clearly and compellingly as the vision and the voice came to St. Paul on the way to Damascus, and as the vision and the message have from time to time come to the prophets throughout the ages. Many years later, when writing to a Catholic priest who had expressed his regret that Mr. George was not of his faith, the author of "*Progress and Poverty*" made the following intimate confession, which was not given to the world until after his death:

"There is something else I wanted to say to you that I can only write with my own hand. Don't be disturbed because I am not a Catholic. In some things your Church is very attractive to me; in others it is repellent.... Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religions, I shall say something that I don't like to speak of -- that I never before have told to any one. Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call -- give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true. It was that that impelled me to write '*Progress and Poverty*' and that sustained me when else I should have failed. And when I had finished the last page, in the dead of night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up and up. It has made me a better and a purer man. It has been to me a religion, strong and deep, though vague -- a religion of which I never like to speak or make any outward manifestation, but yet that I try to follow....

"Each in the station to which he has been called, let us do what is set us, and we shall not clash. From various instruments, set to different keys, comes the grand harmony. And when you remember me in your prayers, which I trust you sometimes will, do not ask that I shall be this or that, but only for grace, and guidance, and strength to the end."

From that solemn hour, like Isaiah impelled with his august, "Thus saith the Lord"; like St. Paul after he fell into the light and rose a just man on the Damascus road; like the Maid of Orleans, led on to the achievement of deeds that neither king, general, nor noble could accomplish, this clear-visioned moral idealist after that momentous experience was driven on. A message must be given to the people. Great truths and basic facts that had long vaguely haunted his mind began to appear clearly. The earth, air, and water were the gifts of the common Father to His common children. To monopolize either of these requisites of life would be to rob some of God's children of their birthright. Man is a land animal and cannot live without access to her resources.

The earth, with its stored-up wealth beneath the surface, is the rich treasure-house of the great Father for all His children. No man has a right to seize and hold this wealth which he has not created and which is in justice a part of the common heritage. The value of the land is dependent upon two chief factors: its productivity, or the wealth it holds above and below the surface, and the value which society gives to the land. In both instances, clearly justice demands that society, or the common children, should derive the benefits of the wealth produced by nature or created by society. Monopoly in land violates the fundamental law of life and justice, enriching the individual at the expense of the people by permitting the privileged or favored ones to appropriate the unearned increment. Man should be secure in the possession of the land he uses, but society should exact her right by taxation of land values. Here, in barest outline, are some of the great truths that Mr. George clearly and logically elaborated in "Progress and Poverty."

From the hour when he received what seemed to be a divine call, he was possessed by the great theme and could not rest until he had completed the book. To secure a publisher was the next serious problem. No volume of economics published in America had as yet paid expenses, and publishers naturally saw no chance for return of their outlay on a book by an unknown author and setting forth such radical and unconventional opinions.

Finally Mr. George and his friends set up the book and had it plated, and the Appletons, who from the outset had been impressed with its clear, vigorous, pleasing style and the logical presentation of its message, accepted the plates and published the work as one of their own volumes. After a time the book created a genuine sensation, and soon, even from a financial view-point, it became a marked success. Likewise in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales its message created great enthusiasm. Indeed, few if any volumes of the last half century have exerted so compelling an influence over minds of noble mould.

Shortly after "The Arena" was founded, I went by appointment to the home of Henry George in New York City, to consult him about a paper which I wished him to prepare. He personally answered the bell and greeted me in that charmingly simple, easy, and winning manner that marks the genuine, sincere, and unspoiled nature.

I had suggested that he prepare an outline of his social and economic philosophy, but to my surprise he said that he would much prefer to write a paper in advocacy of free rum, to be one of a series of articles I had told him I was having prepared dealing with various aspects of the temperance problem. I expressed my astonishment at his choice of a subject, and he replied:

"Mr. Flower, intemperance is a great curse; we all admit that. But there is something more deadly than intemperance threatening the Republic today, and that is political corruption. The rum power in politics is a greater evil than intemperance, and it has arisen and become the evil that it is today -- an evil that is poisoning the political conscience of the nation -- because of restrictive legislation. Restrictive legislation," he repeated, "is the cause, and the rum power in politics is the effect."

For half an hour he outlined his views, advancing many arguments to sustain his position, and in the end I arranged for the paper he suggested.

Our conversation then drifted to his social philosophy, and I remarked that it seemed to me that his writings, more than those of any contemporaneous thinker, enthralled the imagination of the serious-minded, interested in political and social advance; they were germinal in character, fruitful in suggestions, and wonderfully inspiring. His face brightened as he replied:

"That is simply because they embody fundamental truths that are in accord with the principles of democracy and human rights. Democracy aimed at the enfranchisement of man through the political sovereignty of the people. The Single Tax would supplement this by liberating man's great source of livelihood from the grasp of monopoly. This, and the freedom of commerce and industry that would follow, would necessarily result in economic enfranchisement. The principles are fundamentally sound, simple, and easily understood. They appeal to the sense of justice in the thoughtful who are not blinded by prejudice, self-interest, or preconceived opinions."

My first impression of Mr. George as a deep thinker, a man of absolute sincerity and nobleness of purpose, overmastered by the light of a great truth, was confirmed in after meetings with him.

Mr. George was one of the clearest reasoners and fairest debaters of our time. If he thought a person was honestly mistaken or laboring under a misapprehension, he took the greatest possible pains to enlighten him. A striking illustration of this is found in his open letter to the Pope, on "The Condition of Labor," called forth by the encyclical denouncing the Single Tax. In his reply, Mr. George, in a masterly, sweet, and altogether admirable manner, shows how thoroughly in harmony with the teachings of Christianity is the Single Tax, and how completely the Pope had misunderstood the philosophy.

When, however, he dealt with one who had seen the light and then had become an apostate, he evinced much of the spirit of the great Nazarene when he scourged the money-changers from the Temple. This fact is impressively in evidence in his reply to Herbert Spencer's attack on the land theory. The great philosopher in his earlier days

had taken a position as fundamentally sound and boldly progressive as had Mr. George, and the author of "Progress and Poverty," in his work entitled "A Perplexed Philosopher," evinces a degree of severity found nowhere else in his writings.

Among the great politico-economic writers, Henry George is justly entitled to a foremost position as a fundamental thinker, a clear-visioned and rigidly logical reasoner. But beyond and above this, he was dominated by moral idealism, and this made his work germinal in character. He did more than any other great American economic philosopher to awaken and inspire the nobler minds among us. Indeed, I think his thought has been responsible, to a greater degree than that of any other writer, for awakening the spiritual enthusiasm, along economic lines, of fundamental thinkers in the Republic.

**Hamlin Garland** told me how "*Progress and Poverty*" opened a new world to him -- a world of hope and inspiration, when all life seemed hopeless and chaotic. Ernest Crosby, W. D. McCrackan, Bolton Hall, James A. Herne, J. J. Enneking, Thomas G. Shearman, Louis F. Post, Robert Baker, and scores upon scores of other robust American thinkers, experienced the same inspiration from this social evangel.

To **Count Tolstoy**, in far-away Russia, the message came as the dawn of sunrise following a starless night. Basically sound and redemptive in its influence, it was a message instinct with the spirit of justice, that came at a time when the materialism of the market was rampant, and it instantly appealed to men of vision, awakening a moral enthusiasm akin to that which reached its high-water mark in the dark days of the Revolution, when the Declaration of Independence flashed from the inspired brain of Thomas Jefferson.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the transforming influence of Mr. George's writings was seen in the career of **Tom L. Johnson**. Here was a man who, as a boy, had tasted the bitter bread of poverty; but by hard work, tireless energy, inventive genius, a talent for organization, and a brain for business and industrial achievement, he had rapidly mastered what seemed an adverse fate and had acquired wealth. He had come under the commercial spirit of the hour and would soon have become one of America's money kings, for he had early discerned the fact that in every great city lay inexhaustibly rich mines of wealth, which should by right belong to all the people and benefit the community in common; but since the electorate was asleep, these inestimably rich franchises were being seized by shrewd men who, through owning and operating the natural monopolies, were able rapidly to become fabulously rich because they possessed the taxing power; and joining the princes of privilege, he was already reaping a golden harvest.

## Poster from Tom L. Johnson's 1902 Campaign

But Tom L. Johnson was an idealist at heart -- a fine, true nature that the sinister and demoralizing code of present-day business ethics had not yet contaminated; and one day, when riding East on a tram, a newsboy laid on his seat a copy of one of Henry George's works. Mr. Johnson took it up and began to read it, at first in a casual, listless way. But soon the printed words had gripped his imagination and captured his reason. The sleeping ethical nature awakened. Moral enthusiasm and love of justice took possession of his mind. From that hour a new life opened. He became a militant apostle of fundamental democracy and social righteousness, and through his splendid work scores upon scores of other men were awakened. Among this number was **Frederic C. Howe**, author of "*The City the Hope of Democracy*," "*The British City*," and "*The Beginnings of Democracy*," and one of the strongest progressive leaders in the battle for civic righteousness that we have with us today.

**Joseph Fels** is another impressive illustration of the power upon the receptive mind of messages instinct with moral virility. Mr. Fels was a millionaire soap manufacturer. Like Henry George and Tom L. Johnson, he had entered the battle of life with no financial capital and with very limited education. To him "*Progress and Poverty*" was a social gospel, holding redemptive power for earth's burdened children, and a fundamental remedy in perfect accord with the basic principles of democracy and justice. To further the Single Tax propaganda Mr. Fels devoted his latter years and his millions. He inaugurated a world campaign, which he personally superintended until his untimely death. The work, however, is being continued through the active co-operation of his widow and the friends to whom he entrusted its direction.

Among the journalists who early became interested in the land philosophy of Mr. George, was **Louis F. Post**, at that time connected with "Truth," a New York daily. Through his influence "*Progress and Poverty*" was published serially in this paper -- something which contributed greatly to popularizing the work. Later Mr. Post assisted Henry George in the publication of "The Standard," and in 1898 he founded "The Public," of Chicago, which he and his talented wife, Alice Thacher Post, edited until 1913, when Mr. Post received the appointment of Assistant Secretary of Labor. "The Public" under his editorial management was the ablest and best all-round national editorial weekly, representing fundamental democracy, that has been published in America. In its columns not only the Single Tax, but all the great vital constructive issues, such as Direct Legislation, public ownership, proportional representation, and the warfare against privilege in all its forms, have been presented in a most masterly manner, both by Mr. and Mrs. Post and a corps of leading writers. It was also one of the few journals in America which resolutely opposed the advancing postal bureaucracy and other ominous bureaucratic, imperialistic, and subversive acts in government which strike at the vitals of democracy. Mr. Post is also the author of a

number of exceptionally able works, of which perhaps the most important are "*The Ethics of Democracy*," "*Social Service*," and "*The Ethical Principles of Marriage and Divorce*." On receiving from President Wilson the appointment as Assistant Secretary of Labor, Mr. Post resigned the editorial management of "The Public," which was assumed by Mr. Samuel Danziger, with Stoughton Cooley and Angeline Graves as assistant editors. And in justice to the new management it should be observed in passing that "The Public" has lost none of its old-time ability, editorial discrimination, moral courage, and loyalty to the fundamental principles of democracy.

Another editor who deserves a high place among the apostles of the Single Tax and fundamental democracy is **James H. Barry**, editor of "The Star," of San Francisco, which since 1884 has given to the Pacific Coast a clean, able, courageous, and always dependable editorial weekly. Mr. Barry also deserves a place on the honor roll of those who have gone to prison in defence of popular freedom.

Among the Congressional leaders of the Single Tax, Tom L. Johnson and **Jerry Simpson** of Kansas were long the two most active spirits. Later **Robert Baker** of Brooklyn led the forces of land reform and fundamental democracy in the National House. Mr. Baker, by his strong, fearless, and uncompromising stand for civic honesty, genuine democracy, and social justice, contributed much toward awakening the public conscience during his active service at the Nation's Capital. He was a veritable watch-dog of the people's interests and was extremely obnoxious to the servants of privilege and reaction.

At the present time, among prominent Single-Taxers in our National House, are **Henry George, Jr.**, and **Warren Worth Bailey**. Henry George, Jr., as journalist, novelist, and statesman, has materially furthered the great principles of social justice, clean and efficient government, and popular freedom, to which his distinguished father gave his life.

In New England, ex-Governor **Lucius F. C. Garvin**, **C. B. Fillebrown**, **William Lloyd Garrison**, and Prof. **Lewis J. Johnson** of Harvard University, have rendered distinguished service in popularizing the Single Tax, advancing various sound movements for the restoration and maintenance of popular sovereignty, and raising the standards of efficiency in state and municipal government. And these names are merely a few of a large number of men of thought and conviction who have rendered or are rendering invaluable service to the cause of good government, and whose work affords an impressive example of the contagion of a message instinct

with fundamental truth and appealing to the moral idealism or sense of justice and right in the heart of man.