

Our Debt to Henry George

By STEPHEN H. FRITCHMAN

HENRY GEORGE is one of America's gifted teachers of the common people. Like Tom Paine, whose *Crisis* fell into thousands of hands and stiffened the will for political freedom, so Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* reached into millions of American homes and taught plain citizens the ABC's of economics. Hundreds of millions of people are today some degree happier—some degree further along the road to freedom, because Henry George taught plain working people how to act in their own interests.

Above all else, let us remember that Henry George took from the Bible the great text "the fruit of the earth is for all" and taught it to a living generation with the eloquence and dedication of a Hebrew prophet. He wrote with passionate love and anger, with devastating logic and unmeasured sacrifice of mind and body, to give men the weapons of their own liberation. He wrote with Biblical force of man's suffering and hunger amid potential plenty. I hope hundreds of you will read *Progress and Poverty*—not because its economics is the last word. Taxing the value of the land is one and only one answer to our present plight. But because man shall and should inherit the earth—all men everywhere as soon as possible—with justice and not as a boon from any elect few—this is still a truth to be welcomed from pole to pole. I read *Progress and Poverty* as I read Jeremiah and Isaiah, to kindle a flame of love for human equality and fortify my will in days of frustrations. The Henry George societies are to be congratulated in their endless labors to bring this teacher and his contagious faith to ever new generations on every continent.

Once in a Lifetime

It is every Unitarian minister's duty sometime in his professional life, to deliver one sermon on Henry George. I have found in discussing Samuel Adams and Lincoln Steffens and even Benjamin Franklin that one cannot assume every schoolboy and girl learned the basic facts about these giant figures in American history. It is an illusion to think so.

John Haynes Holmes in New York preached his sermon on Henry George in 1943 and from it I should like to share one paragraph for it represents Dr. Holmes in his peak of power. "Henry George," he said, "welded single tax into an argument, both inductive and deductive. He suffused it with eloquence, passion and even poetry . . . which were irresistible. He organized it into a political movement. He transformed the land value idea from an academic theory into an outstanding public issue."

Professor John Dewey wrote a few years before his death that Henry George was one of the small number of definitely original social philosophers. "The practical side of George's contribution," said Professor Dewey, "is bound to come forward for increased attention as the

"Man Shall Inherit the World—Our Debt to Henry George," was the topic of a sermon by Stephen H. Fritchman, minister of the First Unitarian Church, Los Angeles, on March 28. Only a small part of it is reproduced. The portion which was biographical is omitted because the life and trials of Henry George are presumably well known to readers of *The Henry George News*.

Another Unitarian minister, John Haynes Holmes of New York, wrote of George in 1945, "In the face of such a life, and such a death, details of economic theory became insignificant. Here was a man who loved his fellow men, who rebelled against their subjection to want and woe, who sought justice for the poor, and fought for freedom for the oppressed. Henry George was one of the world's great prophets of emancipation."

"'Progress and Poverty' is the only treatise on political economy I know of which ends with a statement of faith in the immortality of the soul. In this George found assurance of those 'eternal laws' which must at last bring vindication to the cause of truth."

problems of tax reform and public finance come up for attention. We are just beginning to realize," he said, "the large part that unregulated land speculation played in the crisis of 1929. This speculation in land could have been averted by social appropriation through taxation of rent."

And as we today, years after John Dewey's death, see the land speculation going on in spots where uranium is discovered or new oil deposits found, we see the cogency of the Georgian emphasis on land reform. The answers will not be Henry George's in any mechanical fashion, but his insight and genius can infuse our thinking with ardor and courage. The great basic insight remains a vast challenge in our own mid-century. All the natural resources (a community eventually including the entire planet) belong equally to all people, not to single persons or corporations. It belongs to those now living on the earth. This Henry George doctrine is being grasped by hundreds of millions of people as never before. No hydrogen bomb removing an island from the Pacific will stop the fulfillment of this truth. Those of us who preach, and I hope, practise, equality of all peoples, all races and nationalities as brothers, cannot avoid the logic of Henry George, of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the Jewish prophets Amos and Isaiah before him . . . "the fruit of the earth is for all." There are long campaigns of education and persuasion needed. But the greedy shall not forever inherit the earth. Man shall inherit the earth . . . the man who toils and serves. Society, the community, shall enjoy the fruits of its labors . . . and some shall be afraid. This is the heritage of Henry George, a great American, whose name and deeds shall last as long as records of man's dreams and travail survive the ravages of time.