



## THE CALL OF LIBERTY

—HENRY GEORGE

The following article was written and delivered as speech by Henry George, on July 4, 1877, one hundred years ago. It is excerpted from his book "Progress and Poverty" abridged edition, paper back, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 50 E. 69th. St., NY, NY 10021 for \$3.00.

The reform I have proposed accords with all that is politically, socially, or morally desirable. It has the qualities of a true reform, for it will make all other reforms easier. What is it but the carrying out in letter and spirit of Independence—the "self-evident" truth that is the heart and soul of the Declaration—" **That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.**"

These rights are denied when the equal right to land—on which and by which alone men can live—is denied. Equality of political rights will not compensate for the denial of the equal right to the bounty of nature. Political liberty, when the equal right to land is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages.

We honor Liberty in name and form. We set up her statues and sound her praises. But we have not fully trusted her. And without growth so grow her demands. She will have half-service.

Liberty! it is a word to conjure with, not to vex the ear in empty boastings. For Liberty means Justice, and Justice is the natural law—the law of health and symmetry and strength, of fraternity and co-operation.

They who look upon Liberty as having accomplished her mission when she has abolished hereditary privileges and given men the ballot, who think of her as having no further relations to the everyday affairs of life, have not seen her real grandeur—to them the poets who have sung of her must seem rhapsodists, and her martyrs fools. As the sun is the lord of life, as well as the light; as his beams not merely pierce the clouds but support all growth, supply all motion, and call forth from what would otherwise be a cold and inert mass all the infinite diversities of being and beauty, so is liberty to mankind. It is not for an abstraction that men have toiled and died; that in every age the witnesses of Liberty have stood forth, and the martyrs of Liberty have suffered.

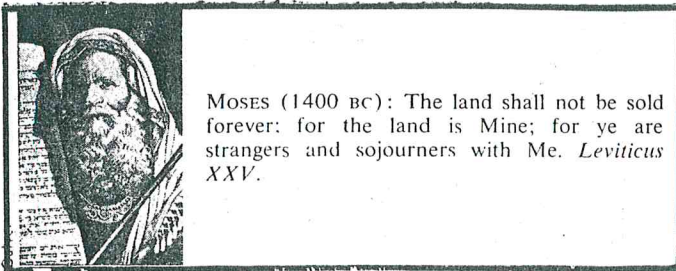
We speak of Liberty as one thing, and of virtue, wealth, knowledge, invention, national strength and national independence as other things. But of all these, Liberty is the source, the mother, the necessary condition. She is to virtue what light is to colour; to wealth what sunshine is to grain; to knowledge what eyes are to sight. She is the genius of invention, the brawn of national strength, the spirit of national independence. Where Liberty rises, there virtue grows, wealth increases, knowledge expands, invention multiplies human powers, and in strength and spirit the

freer nation rises among her neighbours as Saul amid his brethren—taller and fairer. Where Liberty sinks, there virtue fades, wealth diminishes, knowledge is forgotten, invention ceases, and empires once mighty in arms and arts become a helpless prey to freer barbarians.

Only in broken gleams and partial light has the sun of Liberty yet beamed among men, but all progress hath she called forth.

Liberty came to a race of slaves crouching under Egyptian whips, and led them forth from the house of bondage. She hardened them in the desert and made of them a race of conquerors. The free spirit of the Mosaic law took their thinkers up to heights where they beheld the unity of God, and inspired their poets with strains that yet phrase the highest exaltations of thought. Liberty dawned on the Phoenician coast, and ships passed the Pillars of Hercules to plough the unknown sea. She shed a partial light on Greece, and marble grew to shapes of ideal beauty, words became the instruments of subtlest thought, and against the scanty militia of free cities the countless hosts of the Great King broke like surges against a rock. She cast her beams on the four-acre farms of Italian husbandmen, and born of her strength a power came forth that conquered the world. They glinted from shields of German warriors, and Augustus wept his legions. Out of the night that followed the eclipse, her slanting rays fell again in free cities, and a lost learning revived, modern civilization began, a new world was unveiled; and as Liberty grew, so grew art, wealth, power, knowledge and refinement.

Shall we not trust her?



MOSES (1400 BC): The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me. *Leviticus XXV.*

In our time, as in times before, creep on the insidious forces that, producing inequality, destroy Liberty. On the horizon the clouds begin to lower. Liberty calls to us again. We must follow her further; we must trust her fully. Either we must wholly accept her or she will not stay. It is not enough that men should vote; it is not enough that they should be theoretically equal before the law. They must have Liberty to avail themselves of the opportunities and means of life; they must stand on equal terms with reference to the bounty of nature. Either this, or Liberty withdraws her light! Either this, or darkness comes on, and the very forces that progress

has evolved turn to powers that work destruction. This is the universal law. This is the lesson of the centuries. Unless its foundations be laid in justice the social structure cannot stand.

Our primary social adjustment is a denial of justice. **In allowing one man to own land on which and from which other men must live, we have made them bondsmen in a degree that increases as material progress goes on.** This is the subtle alchemy, that in ways they do not realize, is extracting from the masses in every civilized country the fruits of their weary toil, is instituting a harder and more hopeless slavery in place of that which has been destroyed and is bringing political despotism out of political freedom.

It is this that turns the blessings of material progress into a curse. It is this that crowds human beings into noisome cellars and squalid tenement houses; that fills prisons and brothels; that goads men with want and consumes them with greed; that robs women of the grace and beauty of perfect womanhood; that takes from little children the joy of innocence of life's morning.

Civilization so based cannot continue. The eternal laws of the universe forbid it. Ruins of dead empires testify, and the witness that is in every soul answers, that it cannot be. Something grander than benevolence, something more august than charity—justice herself—demands of us to right this wrong. Justice that will not be denied; that cannot be put off—Justice that with the scales carries the sword. Shall we ward the stroke with liturgies and prayers? Shall we avert the decrees of immutable law by raising churches when hungry infants moan and weary mothers weep?

Though it may take the language of prayer, it is blasphemy that attributes to the inscrutable decrees of Providence the suffering and brutishness that come of poverty; that turns with folded hands to the All-Father and lays on Him the responsibility for the want and crime of our great cities. A merciful man would have better ordered the world; a just man would crush with his foot such an ulcerous anthill. It is not the Almighty, but we who are responsible for the vice and misery that fester amid our civilization. The Creator showers upon us His gifts—more than enough for all. But like swine scrambling for food, we tread them in the mire—tread them in the mire, while we tear and rend each other!

In the very centres of our civilization today are want and suffering enough to make sick at heart whoever does not close his eyes and steel his nerves. Dare we turn to the Creator and ask Him to relieve it? Supposing the prayer were heard, and there should glow in the sun a greater power; new virtue fill the air; fresh vigour the soil; that for every blade of grass that now grows two should spring up, and the seed that now increases fifty-fold should increase a hundred-fold. Would poverty be abated or want relieved? Manifestly no! Whatever benefit would accrue would be but

temporary. The new powers streaming through material universe could be utilized only through land. While land remained private property, the classes that now monopolize the bounty of the Creator would monopolize all the new bounty. Rents would increase, but wages would remain at subsistence level.

Can it be that the gifts of the Creator may be thus mis-appropriated with impunity? Is it a light thing that labour should be robbed of its earnings while greed rolls in wealth—that the many should want while the few are surfeited? Turn to history, and on every page may be read the lesson that such wrong never goes unpunished; that the nemesis that follows injustice never falters nor sleeps. Look around today. Can this state of things continue? Nay; the pillars of the state are trembling even now, and the very foundations of society begin to quiver with pent-up forces that glow underneath. The struggle that must either revivify, or convulse in ruin, is near at hand, if it be not already begun.

The fiat has gone forth! With steam and electricity, and the new powers born of progress, forces have entered the world that will either compel us to a higher plane or overwhelm us—as nation after nation, as civilization after civilization, have been overwhelmed before. Between democratic ideas and the aristocratic adjustments of society there is an irreconcilable conflict. We cannot go on permitting men to vote and forcing them to tramp. We cannot go on educating boys and girls in our public schools and at the same time refuse them the right to earn an honest living. We cannot go on prating of the inalienable rights of man and at the same time deny the inalienable right to the bounty of the Creator.

But if, while there is yet time, we turn to Justice and obey her, if we trust Liberty and follow her, and dangers that now threaten must disappear, the forces that now menace will turn to agencies of elevation. Think of the powers now wasted, the infinite fields of knowledge yet to be explored, the possibilities of which the wondrous inventions of this century give us but a hint. With want destroyed; with greed changed to noble passions; with the fraternity that is born of equality taking the place of the jealousy and fear that now array men against each other; with mental power loosed by conditions that give to the humblest comfort and leisure; and who shall measure the heights to which our civilization may soar? Words fail the thought! It is the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor. It is the glorious vision that has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendour. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl! It is the reign of the Prince of Peace!



#### BASIC GEORGIST ECONOMICS IN A NUTSHELL

Labor, using capital, produces all wealth; but labor cannot create the materials out of which to produce wealth. It can get what it needs for this purpose only from the land, and then with or without the aid of capital, change its form or location to make it fit some human desire. Labor **must** have land before it can employ itself.

Land held out of use creates an artificial scarcity, and the greater the portion held out, the greater the scarcity. This is why every civilized country exhibits symptoms resembling those of over-population. It is not that a country does not have the resources from which its people could be comfortably supported, but because so many of these resources are held out of use, labor either must work the poorer land, or must pay the high rents land speculations cause, for permission to use the better grades. And as rents increase, labor is forced to give us a larger and larger portion.

—Bowen and Rusby from **Economics Simplified**