HENRY GEORGE

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He stood for Justice.
Enraptured of her thrall,
Naught swerved the heart or brain;
Resigned his all at duty's call,
Yclept a martyr to be slain.

Grandly he stood for all or right,
Ever trusting in its might;
Onward, till his prophetic sight
Revealed to him that economic night
Grew gray, as the dawn of Justice shed
Effulgent brightness upon the martyred dead.

—*E. C. Clark.*

HENRY GEORGE.

By Ida Hibbard, Roselle, N. J.

Read by her at the conference of the Woman's Single Tax League June 27, 1902, at the Tuxedo, New York City.

A little more than five and twenty years ago, the movement which brings us together to-day had its inception. In a city on the other side of the continent, on the shores of the Pacific, a little band of men met to hear, from the lips of one who was destined to be the leader of the greatest social movement the world has ever seen, the truth as old as man's first perception of justice, that the Creator of this universe is not a God of special privilege to a few, a cruel oppressor to the many. That this world to which he calls human beings, contains plenty for the maintenance of them all, and that, as Dr. McGlynn used to say, "God is the Father of all His children, not the step father of any."

A daring little band, indeed, it was who, in what may be called this first single tax meeting, in far away San Francisco, five and twenty years ago, then threw down the gauntlet to Social Injustice, and entered the lists to contend with the giant forces of monopoly, and vested wrong, and well nigh hopeless must have seemed the contest in which they were enlisting.

But the power of Truth was with them, a power which once invoked is mightier than ten thousand entrenched falsehoods, and so to this little band of enthusiasts the words might have been said, perhaps to the inner ear of each they were whispered—which long ago in Judea inspired the hearts of a few disciples with such marvelous courage—"Fear not little flock for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

Single tax philosophy falls by natural right into religious expression for to many of the followers of Henry George he was not only the greatest man of the century, but a divinely appointed man as well, and his teachings not only the soundest political wisdom, but a religion offering the one possible way by which may be realized that kingdom of God on earth which we are taught to pray for, since justice being established in the ground-work of our social fabric the brotherhood of man may find room for expression, and the Fatherhood of God be demonstrated.

The late Dr. McGlynn, at the funeral of the man for the preaching of whose doctrines he had braved the thunders of Rome, said he deemed it was no blasphemy to say of him as was said of John, "There was a man sent by God whose name was Henry George." And, truly, when we consider the early life and training of Henry George it would, indeed, seem little short of miraculous that so slight a preparation could bring forth such mighty results.

As though like John's insight into spiritual things, his knowledge was a direct inspiration and came through the grace of God.

His early years were passed in the city of his birth, Philadelphia. His father, a plain, prudent man and a rigid churchman, brought up his family of seven children on a modest income.

At his own request Henry George was taken from school at the age of thirteen, and put to work in a shop—receiving for his wages therein two and a half dollars a week. But he had a passion for reading, and this, together with the lectures which he attended, served to continue his education. A little later we find him before the mast earning his daily bread by hard manual labor. One can almost picture the slight boyish figure, with dreamy poetical face, and fathomless blue eyes like the sea he sailed over, with the childlike look of kindliness, and trust in them they never lost. Perhaps that rough, open life was the best possible for the delicate lad who was to spend the greater part of his days over musty books, or at his desk, and gave him strength to accomplish the great work for which he was destined. And who shall say that the closeness to God the silent watches on the trackless deep would bring to a nature such as his, did not expand the soul, and prepare him for the reception of the message it was to be his part to deliver to the people. It was to the shepherds of Bethlehem, who in their nightly contemplation of the quiet stars had lifted up their

hearts in reverend love to the Ruler of those wondrous orbs of light, that the angels came with the first tidings of great joy; and tidings of great joy, indeed, is the message of Henry George to all who receive it. At nineteen he is in San Francisco, working at the printer's trade, and at twenty-one he is married, assuming at that early age the responsibility of a family; to the superficial observer, it would seem, shackling himself by bonds which would prevent the giving of his life to abstract studies, and public service.

But if Henry George were sent by God to speak His message to the people, Henry George's wife was surely sent to help him in the delivery. A confidence in his high trust that never faltered, a sympathy in all his aim's that was absolutely without a thought of self; and a sublime devotion to his welfare which never wavered, she gave to the end. Never was a union more perfect, and it may be truly said that Henry George's work is in part his wife's, since to her courage, sympathy, and unequalled love, he owed in large measure both the leisure for his work, and the freedom from the petty cares of life which her unfailing watchfulness secured him.

The public life of Henry George is well known, especially in this city where he laid his life down in a struggle for municipal purity, but, before passing to the brief statement of his teachings, which is all that the time will allow me, I would say a few

words of his private life which it was my great privilege to witness as a recipient of his large hearted hospitality.

It is said that a man is never great to his valet, and seldom it is that one does not suffer a sense of disillusionment from a glimpse behind the scenes, or fail to find one's idols very claylike on a close inspection. This was not so with Henry George. The closer one got to him the more his greatness appeared; the more his unique personality was manifest. Utterly simple in his manner, almost childlike in the directness of his speech and his lack of conventionality, he yet impressed one with a kind of awe as of one invested with authority, so that reverence mingled with the love even of those nearest and dearest to him. I never heard him deliver a ringing speech from the platform, but the words, "He speaks as one having authority," came to my mind. It was a quality quite apart from the power of the orator, and remained with him in the simple relations of home life.

Some one has said of Henry George that he was the friendliest man that ever lived, and, yet, in spite of this friendliness there was with him a sort of remoteness,—a something that set him quite apart as of a higher order. And all this united to a most perfect, and absolute democracy which knew no distinctions between man and man, and a kindliness impossible to convey in words. To have felt the warm clasp of his hand and have met the almost

tender benignity of his eyes was an experience to be remembered while life lasts.

With all his genius, and richly poetic nature, he was, in a sense, an eminently practical man, with unerring judgment in matters of plain sense and expediency, and, for that reason, was not only a great power in the world of letters, and on the public platform, but was a force as well in practical politics. It was said of him that he would sit quietly in political conferences while discussion as to ways and means was going on, seeming to take no part in the details of such matters, but, when some difficulty would arise, and arguments wax hot over the proper adjustment of some question, George would put in a few words which would set them all straight, and point out the only right way. Perhaps this came from his wonderful power to grasp at once the very core of any subject he considered, disentangling it from all superfluities—and from his unfailing principle that *right* is the highest expediency.

He was thirty-eight before the great work of his life was begun—the writing of "Progress and Poverty,"—the book on which his fame largely rests, the first and most brilliant of his writings.

He had before, in a short pamphlet, and in several addresses, outlined his theory on the land question which had for some time been seething in his brain, but this was his first elaboration of it.

It was written in an incredibly short space of time and at white heat.

The evidence it gives of the tremendous amount of work which must have preceded it impresses one almost as much as the clearness of its logic, the brilliancy of its imagery, and the wonderful rythm of its sentences.

The diction of "Progress and Poverty" alone places it with the foremost gems of English literature, and has caused it to be called not only a revelation in political economy, but a "poem, a prophecy, a prayer." Its opening chapters are devoted to a consideration of all the works on political economy which are of any importance, and a thorough sifting of their premises and arguments which is in itself a labor of great magnitude. It was a necessary labor, however, only second to his own elaboration of the true economic laws, since the errors of the old system must be fully exposed, before the truths of the new could be shown.

The errors of the old economists are fundamental, and vitiate their whole teachings. The giant task which Henry George undertook and so ably fulfilled, was the refutation of these errors. He has overthrown the theory of Mathus on population, and the current theory of wages, two corner stones in the structure of political economy of the old school from which is drawn the blasphemous deduction that population having the tendency to outstrip the means of subsistence, war, crime, and famine are

nature's cruel but necessary means of weeding out superfluous human beings; while the wage fund being a fixed sum in each community, an increase of laborers, among whom the fund must be divided, naturally tends to a lower and lower return to labor, until the lowest point is reached where the laborer will consent to live and reproduce. This result of the competition among laborers has been termed by Karl Marx "the iron law of wages," and is accepted by socialists as well as economists of the old school.

Both of these theories have been completely swept away by Henry George, and the creator of this universe has been shown to be no niggard in His provision for those He calls into being. The charge that God is either incapable of providing for his creatures, or is indifferent to their sufferings, which the Malthusian theory warrants, is refuted, and, he demonstrates also, that there is no such thing as a set wage fund in any country, but that everywhere, and at all times, the laborer creates his own wages as well as providing the return to capital, and the rent to the landlord. How absurd, on the face of it, is the idea held by current political economy that labor cannot be employed until a wage fund has been created, as if there were any way of creating a wage fund save through labor.

Now, as labor is the producer of all wealth, it follows that each who receives wealth must do so om the exertions of labor, even the spontaneous

offerings of nature can only be utilized through labor. But labor, though the active factor in the production of wealth, is powerless without access to the passive factor land, and labor, employed in the production of wealth upon land, is rendered much more efficient by the assistance of capital, which is stored up labor.

Therefore, we may sum up the three factors in the production of wealth, as Land, passive factor; Labor, active factor; Capital, assisting factor. And the return to each of these factors as the result of the combination is rent to land, wages to labor, and interest to capital. This all sounds fair enough. It is quite plain that labor has earned a share of the produet, also that capital which facilitates the exertions of labor, and which represents frugality and self-denial, which is, indeed, but labor removed to a second position, should receive a return; but rent to land—that is rent to landlords, for in political economy the term landlord implies, not as in general use the renter of houses *and* land, but the renter of land alone,—what have landlords done that they should receive not only a part, but the lion's share of the earnings of labor and capital? Truly nothing. The landlord, as landlord, does absolutely nothing save accord permission to other men to labor on that portion of the planet he calls his, and for which permission he receives tribute which enables him to live in luxury on the proceeds of their toil.

"Clearly," says Henry George, "that labor and

capital get so little is that landlords get so much." This power to exact tribute from others for the right to the use of the soil, which is an indispensible condition of life—for to deprive men of access to the earth is to deprive them of life itself—is the cause of poverty—the real force which is pushing wages down to the lowest point; which acts in conjunction with the competition of labor, as the upper and lower mill stones, between which the mere worker is crushed. Remove this power of the landlord to withhold or accord permission to use the soil, and let labor have free access to it, and the iron law of wages would cease to operate—involuntary poverty be done away with forever.

And examine the basis of titles to land, it will be found to differ materially from that to every other species of property. A man's right to his house, his book, his pen rests upon the right of the creator to his own product, since he either produced these things by his own labor, or obtained them from others who produced them, and who transferred their title to him. In the last analysis it rests upon the right of a man to himself. But to the land there can be no such title. No man created it, it was here before he came; it will be here so far as we can see, after he is gone. The last human being sent here in the providence of God comes endowed with an indefeasible right to its use as great as Adam could claim.

No man can give a better title to a thing than

he possesses himself. Trace back the titles of land to their origin and they will be found to rest upon crime and corruption. Upon fraud perpetrated on ignorant savages. On grants of kings of lands they had, perhaps, never seen. On cruel wars, and the blood of innocent people. Nor could it be otherwise. God himself has said, "The land shall not be sold forever for the land is mine," and natural as well as revealed religion tells us that the gifts God freely gives to all cannot without cruel injustice, be appropriated by a few.

No wonder in a world where the use of land is as indispensable as the use of air or water, there should be poverty and crime, when this element is declared the absolute property of a few, and the rest of humanity must scramble for a foothold, competing with fellow sufferers for an opportunity to labor on holdings of those whom Tennyson styles, "The Gods Almighty of the county side." Burns, too, speaks of the wrong which is apparent when a man must "beg a brother of the earth to give him leave to toil." The poet is always the seer. The divine gift of poesy carries with it the obligation to worship Truth and Liberty, and until he becomes laureate, at least, the poet is always the champion of the people against vested wrong. But the poet is not the only one who has raised his voice against the injustice of private property in land. From the psalmist down to Herbert Spencer, a long list might be given of those who have pointed

out its iniquity. Spencer, it is true, in his old age, corrupted by the adulations of nobles and dignitaries has turned apostate to his early creed, and would deny the work of his younger, and better days. But, fortunately for himself, this he cannot do. His chapters in Social Statics, wherein he clearly sets forth the equal right of all men to the use of the earth, will remain a monument to his genius when his later books have been cast aside as rubbish, and consigned to oblivion. But, although many have recognized the injustice of private property in land, it was not clearly seen how it might be done away with, without the worse evil of lapsing into the barbarism of wandering savages, where land is held in common but is put to no productive use, since men will not plant unless sure of reaping the harvest they have sown, and it is plain that *possession* of land must be assured before civilization is possible.

It is here that Henry George brought order out of chaos, harmony out of discord. The single tax, by which for want of a better name his theory has come to be known, furnishes a way by which the highest civilization is possible, is, indeed, developed, accompanied by absolute equality in the bounties of nature.

We tax land now on some basis of its value—Henry George proposes to abolish all other taxes, whether on improvements, wealth in any form, tariff

or internal revenue, and concentrate all taxation on the bare value of land.

The significance of the change is not apparent at first sight, nor how far-reaching would be its results; but consider: We do away by the change with the horde of officials who must be paid for out of the public purse; we remove those restrictions which now hamper industry, since to tax any form of wealth is to make it more difficult to produce, and, it would remove, also, those incentives to fraud and perjury which our present system encourages, but, further than this, it would by making impossible the monopolization of land, abolish poverty, and tend to a greater and greater equality of men, as material progress goes on.

For land being taxed on its bare value, irrespective of improvements, speculation in land would cease. Men would be obliged to put it to use, or to suffer others to do so, and we should no longer witness the spectacle of unworked coal mines on the one hand, and idle workmen and people in need of coal, on the other—and, further—While each has an equal right to the earth it is manifest that all cannot occupy or enjoy the same spot, any more than two ships can anchor in the same place, or two bodies occupy the same space—but if each pays to the community the exact value of the opportunity he thus appropriates, justice is maintained. The man who enjoys a valuable site, whether in the form of a natural advantage, such as a gold, silver or

coal mine; an oil well, or an advantage growing out of the pressure of population in certain centers, such as Wall street or Broadway, will pay a tax proportionate to the advantage he thus enjoys over others. And the man who occupies an inferior site, in his smaller tax, is thereby recompensed. Thus equality is maintained. And since land would be taxed only upon its value, there would remain a great deal of land on the outskirts which would have no taxable value at all, but upon which labor would be able to employ itself free of charge. With this natural outlet an overstocked labor market would be an impossibility, and wages would rise to the full measure of what a man could produce by his own exertions on those free opportunities. What such wages would be, we may to some extent imagine, by remembrance of what they rose to when California was first thrown open to immigration, and the placer mines free to any man who chose to labor for himself at gold digging; or, we may fancy what would be the effect on the price of labor, if a new continent were to loom up in the Atlantic to which no one held a title, and all were free to work for their own advantage. Employers would be competing with each other to secure labor as labor now competes to secure employment. Involuntary poverty, that dark blot on civilization,—which turns bitter the feast on the rich man's table, and throws its dark shadow over the gayest festivity—would cease to be, and crime, and drunkenness, its twin

concomitants finding themselves among such uncongenial conditions would slink away abashed—"With want destroyed," says Henry George—"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 powers loosed by conditions that give to the humblest comfort and leisure; and who shall measure the heights to which our civilization shall soar? It is the Golden age of which poets have sung and high raised seers have told in metaphor! It is the glorious vision which has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendor. 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!"

The hand that penned these lines lies powerless —the mighty heart and brain, that labored unceasingly in the Master's service, are at rest; but the work to which he gave his life, for which he laid down his life will go on. As he prophesied it has found friends, those who would "toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it." In every land where civilized man abides to-day are workers for the cause, and already is seen the flush of light along the horizon which foretells the coming of the day. And when that day shall come, when industrial slavery is ended, when "none shall crouch where all are freemen; none oppress where all are peers,"

when poverty, with its dread terrors shall be remembered but as some dark dream from which mankind has awakened to peace and plenty—the name which will be most brightly enscrolled in the Temple of Fame, the name which will be held dearest in the hearts of men will be the name of Henry George.