

John Kieran on Henry George

THE CLASSICS CLUB, a group which publishes a series of literary masterpieces, chose Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" for its March selection. The Selection Committee consists of Pearl Buck, John Kieran, William Lyon Phelps and Hendrik Willem Van Loon. The Foreword to the Classics Club edition of "Progress and Poverty," written by the celebrated John Kieran, reads as follows:

"It is particularly fitting that a special edition of 'Progress and Poverty,' by Henry George, should be prepared for the series of great works of literature sponsored by the Classics Club. Time and the judgment of intelligent readers have stamped this book as a lasting literary classic. It was offered in 1879 as a studied work of immense research, deep thought, wise reasoning and novel or even radical—in the root sense of that word—conclusions on fundamental economics of social existence. But in the fire of enthusiasm, with qualities that perhaps he did not suspect in himself at the time, Henry George builded better than he knew. The worth of this work as an economic exposition may be debated elsewhere. It is enough to state here that no student in that field should be allowed to speak above a whisper or write above three lines on the general subject until he has read and digested 'Progress and Poverty.' It is prescribed reading for any degree of learning in that department of education.

"But beyond that, and in a wider field, it is cherished for its intellectual stimulus, its lasting appeal as pure literature. It is the eloquent outpouring—even in the printed words the reader seems to sense the intensity of the spoken voice—of an ardent soul, an alert spirit and a cultured mind on an age-old problem that touches hearth and home and the way we pass the span of life that is allotted to us. The style is striking; the metaphors are sparkling; the allusions are illuminating. Here we find economic propositions buttressed by hidden history, by forgotten geography, by ancient documents, by casual conversation, by philosophy and philology and chemistry and music and all the arts and sciences known to scholarship. In 'Progress and Poverty' there is displayed by Henry George an amazing acquaintance with the manuscripts of the masters in all fields of knowledge and research. The references made and the excerpts offered delight and, at the same time, humble the reader. That one man should have gathered in such an array of economic, scientific, historical and literary material! What industry went to the gathering! What art in the welding of all this into his own work!

"It is for these reasons that 'Progress and Poverty,' primarily offered as a profound study of the financial structure of organized society, now occupies a permanent place on the bookshelves and in the hearts of those who, anchored in an easy chair, travel in spirit through the wide and wonderful realm of classic literature."