

JUL 16 1939
Tribute to Henry George

Philatelic Honor Is Recommended for
His Next Anniversary

68619-1 THF
TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

Your editorials last week in philatelic appreciation of Benjamin Franklin were well worthy of praise.

Benjamin Franklin we revere, I think, as the embodiment of the four virtues of the American genius: honesty, thrift, imagination and independence. His brilliant personification of these essential qualities has been primarily responsible for the esteem in which we have held him. These virtues, 149 years after his death—are they still those by which we the people stand or fall?

From the facts it is dreadfully apparent that Dr. Franklin's qualities are no longer a living force in our political life. Without political morality our civilization is doomed, if the testimony of history is real. And so we have got to revive, somehow, the four virtues of Benjamin Franklin.

Honesty was born in the market place and thrift has a synonym—economy. Imagination consists in learning how to do things better or more easily. Independence means making one's own way in the world asking no favors. Each of these qualities can survive in only one kind of society—a society of freedom.

A free society in turn requires a general understanding of the ultimate necessity for free men and private property. The first is thoroughly understood by the great body of the people, if not by the labor chieftains, bureaucrats and some industrialists. The right to private property, on the other hand, has been compromised increasingly, and to the point where even its desirability is in question in some powerful quarters.

This has been due to the fact that we have been unable, generally, to define private property in a scientific manner, and to develop an adequate social philosophy. It is essential that we learn to do so as a nation if our civilization is not to destroy itself. This simply means that Americans have got to learn the fundamentals of political economy.

The science of political economy reached maturity in the mind of a man whom Professor John Dewey has classed among the first ten social philosophers the world has produced. That man was born 100 years ago in Philadelphia, and his name was Henry George. His master work, "Progress and Poverty," has been read more widely than any other book on fundamental economics.

It is unfortunate that George has been

remembered chiefly as an advocate of "Single Tax." As such, he has been airily dismissed as a would-be demagogue with a shiny panacea. All too many of his followers, along with the shrug-shouldered scholastics, still limit their understanding of the man to the fiscal reform which he proposed. Henry George is important because he articulated a philosophy of freedom based upon a scientific understanding of society.

He did not invent "economic rent" any more than Postmaster General Franklin invented "honesty." Franklin made it easier for us to remember to be honest; George, in his correlation of the laws governing the distribution of wealth, placed an understanding of the fundamentals of political economy within the grasp of any man endowed with social consciousness.

George was largely self-educated. Unhindered by the shibboleths of the European-subjectivist-Marxist school of economic thought, and endowed by circumstance with an unparalleled view of the country as a whole at the time the West was won, it was possible for him to be scientific in his approach to the problem of poverty. He solved that problem for Americans in a truly American way, and gave us the solution in prose that stands with the loveliest in our literature.

The validity of George's solution has never been refuted; may it be given us generally to understand it, to the end that in freedom Dr. Franklin's virtues may shimmer through the fabric of our national life.

The issuance of a postage stamp next Sept. 2 commemorating the birth of Henry George one hundred years ago surely would be fitting homage to a truly great American.

ARCHIBALD C. MATTESON Jr.
New York, July 11, 1939.