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Whether by accident or design, the International Georgist Conference will meet this summer in Cambridge, England. Exactly 100 years ago, the seeds of an international movement were planted as Henry George embarked on a lecture series in the British Isles. A different world than today's, George's charisma, matched with a relevant philosophy, made him the most famous of Americans.

Travelling the circuit from city to city in England, Scotland and Ireland, he packed auditoriums and received attention which marvelled him. "I can't begin to send you the papers in which I am discussed, attacked and commented on," an excited George wrote in 1884, "for I would have to send all the English, Scotch and Irish papers."

This was a period when the land question was in the forefront of economic ideas as the English began to perceive the relationship between land ownership and poverty.

It was in Glasgow, Scotland that Georgism took on an international flavor. After one public appearance by George, 500 people remained to form a group to propagate his ideas. The Scottish Land Restoration League was formed, and it spread rapidly to other cities and towns. Its counterpart in England was called the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.

George's whirlwind lecture series attracted its share of antagonists. One critic, the Duke of Argyll, blasted his theories in a magazine called Nineteenth Century. George's response, "Reduction to Iniquity," appeared in the same magazine. The verbal sparring was billed as the controversy between the Peer and the Prophet. Throughout the period, magazines and newspapers freely printed the Georgist view — a phenomenon somewhat limited today.

Eighteen eighty-four also found George at the center of controversy at Oxford University, pitting him against his most unfriendly audience and challenging him with Alfred Marshall, later to become one of England's most famous economists. Cambridge University was a different matter, as George was warmly received and discovered a most receptive audience.

It is in this setting that Georgists will meet — a university and nation that opened its mind to views we endorse. If from this conference we can rekindle the fervor generated 100 years ago, justice to the international movement will be served.

—Stan Rubenstein