



Walter Locke

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### *This World Was His Home*

by Walter Rybeck

**A**S FAR as I know, Walter Locke, editor, columnist and philosopher, who died on October 23 at the age of 82, never called himself a Georgist. No school of thought, group, dogma or doctrine was big enough for his free roaming, individualistic mind. Yet, in his autobiography, *This World, My Home*<sup>1</sup>, which came off the press just three weeks before his death, Mr. Locke (on page 156) wrote:

Henry George was warning that back of all worldly problems lies the question of the land, man's common inheritance. That issue has been from his day to now overturning old world governments. Our day to face it cannot always be deferred.

To distill a great concept and its bearing on world events so simply and beautifully would be utterly impossible without having for it deep understanding and high regard.

Before Mr. Locke risked accepting me as an editorial writer of the *Dayton Daily News*, he asked what I had been reading, and I mentioned that I had been studying Henry George. He shook his head—whether in pity,

amusement or amazement I could not tell as I searched his rugged face and kind eyes. After a silence, he said, "I know of no book that gives more insight into social problems than *Progress and Poverty*."

As to his early acquaintanceship with the ideas of Henry George, I never learned from Mr. Locke. However, Sidney Evans of San Diego once told me that he was a member of a discussion group in Lincoln, Nebraska, led by Walter Locke, many years ago, and that George's ideas were debated.

During the depression days Mr. Locke became disenchanted with some who called themselves single taxers. He felt they were so preoccupied with a plan that they became blinded to the desperate needs of people. These needs for food, clothing and shelter were immediate, but the plan to which these single taxers held had no immediate chance of being accepted. A man of big heart, Mr. Locke was in accord with New Deal efforts to minister quickly and with whatever expedients to the raging misery, hunger, fear and desperation.

How far to compromise with evil

<sup>1</sup>Antioch Press, \$3.

in an imperfect world? All who knowingly benefit from an unjust land tenure system face this question. The important thing, Mr. Locke said on several occasions, is to avoid fooling yourself. He would trace the phenomenal rise, "through absolutely no effort on my part," in the value of lands he had purchased. If we are parasites, he said, we must admit it. This implies an obligation to tell others, to teach, which Mr. Locke did all his life. It also implies, I think, the faith of a deeply religious man in the power of conscience to lead toward correcting those evils that disturb men's sleep.

Vigorous in body, mind and spirit, Mr. Locke relinquished his duties as active editor of the Dayton Daily News at the age of 78. At that time he begged another associate to keep an eye on me, to make certain I did not let Henry George "creep" into my editorials. "It's hopeless, though," he said, lifting his head back and laughing heartily. "It takes a single taxer to recognize one."

In semi-retirement, Mr. Locke continued writing his daily column, "Trends of the Times." Unique in American journalism, these columns combined a perspective ranging from his log cabin home in West Virginia to the atomic age, an intimacy with poetry, reflection of nature, sense of history and politics, biting satire, gentle humor and prophecy. Reprints of his

"Trends" about corner lots on the moon (quite timely now)<sup>2</sup>, India's land problems and others introduced Mr. Locke to many contemporary Georgists, beside his regular following in the James M. Cox newspapers in Dayton, Springfield, Ohio, Atlanta, Georgia, and Miami, Florida.

Men of the past half century, trampling upon or by-passing so many things Mr. Locke cherished most, naturally did not hail him as one of their brightest lights.

Yet his light shines on. When men seek an answer to the vitality of young America, they must turn to *This World, My Home* for one of the finest rhapsodies on freedom in our literature.

Again, when men try to reconstruct this freedom, they will re-read the chapter, "Paradise Lost," about the Seminoles among whom he lived and taught, whose economic system provided that "each Seminole child had at its birth its free and equal access to the soil."

So, too, when men ponder why political and social reforms fail to fulfill fond early promises, they may discover in Mr. Locke's revelations of the oft-forgotten world of the spirit certain elements they ignored.

Walter Locke was an uncommonly good man who greatly enriched our world.

<sup>2</sup>HGN January, 1956

Dr. Charles A. Ellwood, professor of sociology at the University of Missouri, recently remarked:

"Thus it happens that we find the family life at the beginning of the twentieth century in a more unstable condition than it has been at any time since the beginning of the Christian era."

If this is the situation we face as American parents and children then I

would definitely recommend more Henry George economic books, courses, and activities for our youth.

If Henry George economic leaders and parents do the injustice of neglecting to increase economic activities, they will create in America's youth a spirit of instability, fickleness and unsteadiness, instead of building a feeling of constancy and firmness.

GEORGE H. HARMON