

## A Pamphlet Changed My Life

*A Yorkshireman by birth, Mr. Standring settled in Western Australia 36 years ago. Widely travelled, he served with the Royal Navy in the first world war and with the Merchant Navy in the second. A trained engineer, he has been proprietor of an engineering concern for the past 25 years. He is a finance committee member of the Nedlands Municipal Council, director of studies of a Social Science School, an officer of the Henry George League of Western Australia, and a vice-president of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade. With Mrs. Standring he attended the Union's international conference at St. Andrews, Scotland, in 1955.*

**M**AYBE it all started before I was born. My father had heard Henry George speak at Bradford and had later read his *Progress and Poverty*. He was never an active "single taxer" but on the rare occasions when he mentioned the author in my hearing he spoke of "the greatest orator I ever heard" and it was evident that he held his book in the highest esteem for its moral and intellectual character. Many crowded years were to pass—years of war and economic depression, during which I travelled the world before I read *Progress and Poverty* but "as the twig is bent, so the tree grows." Henry George's gift of expressing his deep subjective feeling for all that was true and beautiful, together with his self-sacrificing, unsentimental love of his fellows, was the mark of his greatness.

It moved me profoundly. George's mind was a University. With his power of objective analysis he could have been distinguished in whatever other field he might have chosen. He showed the harmony that exists between the diverse aspects of truth but, in integrating them, he did not create a system. He demonstrated one already existing.

I look back through the political and economic conflicts of this century. All my life has been a time of crisis, or preparation for or recovery from crises. I was always convinced that all this tragic waste of human endeavour could be avoided by the application of a bit of simple reason, if one could only find the trick of it. An omnivorous reader, I turned to the wise and prudent for a solution. Alas, the more they knew, the more confusing and inadequate they became when set one against another.

A great religious movement whose aim and object it was "To Conquer Hate" claimed me for a time. Yet when it had gained strength and was in a position to start conquering, my attempt to influence its activities to examine and combat the unjust social and international relationships which set men against one another was loftily ignored. It was indelicate to mention such things. Instead was the idea that if cook's son and duke's son could meet on equal terms for a few hours a week the respect they would find for each other would solve



the social evils without altering the unjust social relationship which might exist between them. If some British young men could visit Berlin and exchange souvenirs and snaps, the unjust provisions of the Versailles treaty with its threatened harvest of ruin might be forgotten. I left the movement in anger, sorrow, and concern.

I cite this experience because it illustrates the limitations which so many religious leaders impose on their work. They proclaim Love and turn a deaf ear to the cries of outraged Justice and the hatred which springs from it. This it is that so greatly weakens their leadership. If speaking Truth causes strife, then better a little honest strife than fear-gagged silence.

One day in the early 'thirties, when the great depression was slowly lifting, a passing stranger who will never know what he did for me, threw a pamphlet through my factory door. It was *The Single Tax, what it is and why we urge it*, by Henry George. Here was truth in a few words, self-evident at first sight; basic; unanswerable. Joyfully, I sought a friend—a fellow Yorkshireman—a brave, life-long worker for political and social reform, who was able to throw more light on the matter. He admitted, however, that when he had first been asked whether he favoured the Single Tax he had replied, "certainly, tax the blighters by all means," believing it to be a tax on bachelors!

Since then I have been sometime President and sometime honorary secretary of the Henry George League of Western Australia and, together with my friend and colleague, Graham Hart, have taken part in political work, and have done a good deal of broadcasting.

There is evidence that some of the seed sown over the years has borne fruit. Yet more than once I have been told, "You're wasting your time," and have often been asked "Where does it get you? What's the use?" Readers will have had the same doubt-inspired questions thrown at them. A friend whom I had not seen for some years once asked, "Do you still believe in the Henry

George philosophy?" I answered with another question. "Well, Ted, do you still believe in the multiplication tables?" I hope he understood.

Where it "gets you" depends a good deal, as the Cat hinted to Alice, on where you want to go. Human relationships are in chaos. There is grave danger of a massive breakdown of our social organisation. If some of those who knew what had gone wrong with society, and knew how it could be righted, saw no need to exert their influence, the task of the others would be a little harder, and the danger would be further prolonged.

The power for good which an individual can exert is greater than is commonly realised.

"We little know which deed some future year  
May mark to mortals our passing here."

John Masefield's words appear graven on the granite seacrest memorial to the English explorer William Dampier in the Nor'West pearling port of Broome. They are a message of hope and encouragement to us. No man ever knows or can trace the full effects of his influence on others but be it true or not that "He can who thinks he can," it is quite certain that "He can't who thinks he can't."

We *can* succeed. What is more, we *must*! For, as I have seen in my travels through five continents, the world is cursed with poverty. Where it is extreme, it breeds cruelty in rich and poor alike, distorting human character and corrupting social and political institutions. Moreover, poverty causes wars. One way in which this can happen is suggested by following through Dr. Adler's idea that a basic motive of human action is to maintain the ego. Poverty denies men the normal gratification of their work, leading them to seek a vicarious glory in the deeds of their group or nation, however inglorious they may be. Henry George showed how poverty could be utterly eradicated and an age of justice, peace and prosperity ushered in. If we who understand his message grew discouraged or faltered in our endeavours, we should have failed in the highest service and have foregone the deepest satisfaction

which life can offer. The poor and the disinherited would be betrayed for we alone hold the key to their emancipation.

Thirty-six years have passed since I first landed here in Western Australia. It is a vast, near-empty land with a population not yet as large as Manchester's spread over nearly a million square miles. One of our local government areas exceeds the size of British Isles by 6,000 square miles. There has been a close economic parallel between this State and California where Henry George wrote and from which he drew many of his illustrations in his search for social justice. First there was a slow agricultural development. Then came a sudden rush to the alluvial goldfields and a rapid increase in population. At that time it was common for employers to meet ships at Fremantle wharf seeking labourers. Then, as in California, large-scale deep mining was developed, and labour gradually transferred to agriculture. During my residence here I have seen land values increase a hundredfold and more in some areas, bringing fortune for a privileged few and making life a continuous uphill struggle for the majority. And hand-in-hand with a wrong system of land tenure and taxation goes tariff protection. The development of this State has been severely retarded by the incidence of the federal tariff. It was this, together with the high cost of the federal government (which, when W.A. entered federation, was to cost "no more than a dog licence") that caused West Australians in 1933 to pass an overwhelming vote in favour of seceding from the Commonwealth. The position is similar to that which led the southern states to precipitate the American Civil War. The tariff-hungry manufacturing end of the country has left the primary producers to get what they can on a highly competitive world market, with all the costs of production stacked against them.

Here no less than elsewhere in the world, there is urgent need for the Henry George policy of freedom and equal opportunity for all.

## Points from Parliament

**Competition.** MR. F. J. ERROLL replying to MR. HECTOR HUGHES (Lab., N. Aberdeen) stated (*February 4*) that the President of the Board of Trade had neither the power nor the inclination to prevent competition among retailers.

A very good answer. Mr. Hughes had wanted the President to make illegal the sale of prepacked household goods which are not marked with the retail price at which they may be sold.

**Compensation to Golf Clubs.** MR. A. TILEY (Cons., W. Bradford) mentioned "public concern because large sums of the taxpayers' money are being awarded to golf clubs and others as compensation in lieu of the development of their land" and asked whether the Minister would consider making a change in the law regarding the conditions on which compensation is granted.

MR. BROOKE: "Compensation paid has, of course, to be repaid if development is subsequently carried out. On the information before me, I do not see what additional conditions could be imposed."—*February 4*.

**Ilford—New Park Needed.** MR. T. IREMONGER (Cons., S. Ilford) referred to "the lack of suitable recreational open ground for the inhabitants of the Newbury Park area of Ilford, especially children and old people." MR. BEVINS replied that "in view of the need to restrict expenditure" the Ilford Borough Council had been asked to defer buying land for this purpose for which they had sought the Minister's consent last summer.

—Written answer, *February 4*.

Elsewhere in **Ilford** a shop site was recently sold at the rate of £1 million an

acre. If the Corporation was required to draw its revenue from land values, it would have an ample income and, at the same time, would find land considerably cheapened. The children and the old folk would not have to wait for their park.

**Gifts to Property Owners.** "Up to the end of 1957 out of a total of 109,000 grants approved for private dwellings in England and Wales, more than 57,000 had been made by rural district councils."

—MR. H. BROOKE, *February 14*.

These grants are wrong in principle. They are an attempt to secure—with taxpayer's money—some of the improvements to private dwellings which would be undertaken by private individuals and property companies, using their own money, if rates were levied on land values. To cite one case: the slums in Woolloomooloo, in Sydney, have been redeveloped

(Continued on page 49)