

CHAPTER I (Henry George) FROM THE BOOK:
THE FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE
A Series of Essays on the Taxation of Land Values
Published by John Bagot, Limited, 1912

HENRY GEORGE.
1839—1897.

Henry George, the author of "Progress and Poverty" and other books whose titles will be found at the foot of this notice, together with many pamphlets, was born at Philadelphia, U.S.A., on September 2nd, 1839. His father was Richard Samuel Henry George, the son of Captain Richard George, born in Yorkshire, England, and one of the well-known shipmasters of Philadelphia when that city was the commercial metropolis of America. His mother, second wife of his father, was the daughter of John Vallance, born in Glasgow, Scotland, an engraver of repute in the early days of the American Republic, and whose name may be seen on some of the Commissions signed by President Washington.

Henry George's school life, of a varied character, but latent with possibilities to a mind susceptible of great imagination, ended before he was fourteen. At home he was well grounded in the Bible and missionary lore. He lived in an atmosphere of books, and delighted in history, travel, and adventure, with a mixture of poetry and fiction. It is said of him, "He absorbed information as the parched earth a summer shower, and what he thus took in he retained." He worked, for a short time only, first in a china and glass importing house, and afterwards in the office of a marine adjuster, but an overmastering desire for seafaring life took possession of him, and on April 7th, 1855, he left New York as foremast boy on the Hindoo, an old East Indiaman, bound for Australia and Calcutta. The voyage lasted till June 14th, 1856, and young George appeared to have had enough of the sea, for he settled down in a printing office to learn the art of type-setting, his education in this respect being afterwards completed in California. Thus, as was afterwards said of him, "his alma mater had been the fore-castle and the printing office."

Henry George commenced his real struggle, both for personal and family subsistence and for the emancipation of his fellow-men, out west in California. After eighteen months' at case, in two printing offices, he made a voyage to Boston and back in a topsail schooner laden with coal, and subsequently secured the position of steward on the United States Lighthouse Steamer Shubrick, bound for San Francisco. His

biography is the record of almost continuous failure for all the time he remained in the City of the Golden Gate. It was here he married Annie C. Fox, the daughter of a British naval officer, who when in Australia, took to wife Elizabeth A. McCloskey, a strict Roman Catholic and scarcely out of her sixteenth year—Irish on both sides. There were two children, Annie and a sister, and after the death of the mother, Annie Fox settled in San Francisco with her grandmother and an aunt. On December 3rd, 1861, when Miss Fox had determined to leave the house of her aunt, because of disagreement, Henry George said to her (drawing from his pocket a single coin): "Annie, that is all the money I have in the world. Will you marry me?" If you are willing to undertake the responsibilities of marriage, I will marry you," she gravely answered. And it was so, although George had to borrow clothes to be wed in and get credit for the two weeks' board of their honeymoon. So the struggle continued. But let George tell the story: "I came near starving to death, and at one time I was so close to it that I think I should have done so but for the Job of printing a few cards, which enabled us to buy a little com meal. In this darkest time of my life my second child was born." The mother heard the doctor say: "Don't stop to wash the child; he is starving; feed him!" Many years afterwards, the father remarked to Dr. James E. Kelly, in Dublin: "I walked along the street and made up my mind to get money from the first man whose appearance might indicate that he had it to give. I stopped a man—a stranger—and told him I wanted |5. He asked what I wanted it for. I told him that my wife was confined, and that I had nothing to give her to eat. He gave me the money. If he had not, I think I was desperate enough to have killed him."

Henry George's hard struggles helped him to solve what he called the riddle of the Sphinx of Fate. In San Francisco, in his day, there was little poverty, but the city had not reached a height of material progress. Afterwards in New York he found heaped up wealth interlocked with deep and debasing want. When he reached London, there was existing the greatest material prosperity of any age and any clime, but along with it poverty and all its attendant vices such as the world had never seen. Was this the natural order of things? He could not believe it. Suddenly, he tells us, there came to him in the streets of New York a great light, a call, a vision. He made a vow that he would never rest until he had found the cause and discovered the remedy for deepening poverty amid abounding wealth.

Henry George had written much on the Land Question before he sat down in the month of August, 1877, to write "Progress and Poverty." A booklet of half-a-hundred pages, entitled, "Our Land and Land Policy," issued in 1871, foreshadowed the greater work, and many speeches and newspaper articles showed the bent of his mind.

In March, 1879, in the dead of the night, when he had finished writing his great book, George told the Rev. Thomas Dawson, an Irish priest, "I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up and up. It has made me a better and a purer man. It has been to me a religion, strong and deep, though vague — a religion of which I never like to speak, or make any outward manifestation, but yet that I try to follow." The book shared the fate of many famous predecessors — the publishers would have none of it. Accordingly, after D. Appleton and Co., the New York publishers, returned the manuscript, the author got William M. Hinton, who had a small printing plant in San Francisco, to get out an author's edition. He had been associated with Henry George in other work, and the latter writes in his diary: "My old partner, Mr. Hinton, who had got himself a printing office, thereupon said that he had faith enough in anything I should do to make the plates; and I put the manuscript in his hands. . . . Commenced to set type on book. Set first two sticks myself." We have a copy of this author's edition before us, of which five hundred copies were produced, on a subscription of 12s. each. One of the first he sent to his father, then in his eighty-first year. The one before us, purchased at a second-hand booksellers' shop in Los Angeles, bears the following inscription "Property of M. F. Cummings. Presented by the Author, 1879." It is a splendidly printed book of 516 pages, on good paper, and does credit to Hinton and his coadjutors. Of it the author wrote: "If the book gets well started, gets before the public in such a way as to attract attention, I have no fear for it I know what it will encounter; but for all that, it has in it the power of truth. . . . The professors will first ignore, then pooh-pooh, and then try to hold the shattered fragments of their theories together; but this book opens the discussion along lines on which they cannot make a successful defence." Also: "It will not be recognized at first— maybe not for some time—but it will ultimately be considered a great book, will be published in both hemispheres, and be translated into different languages." All this has already come true. The Appletons subsequently sent for the plates and published an edition, and Kegan Paul published an edition in London. These were followed by cheap paper editions, one of which, of 50,000 copies (issued by Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co.), was sold at sixpence. It has been translated into most of the European languages, and into Chinese, and its total sale up-to-date cannot be less than two millions. Perhaps the most remarkable issue has been the "pocket edition" put forth by the printers of this book, of which no less than 30,000 copies have been issued in two years at the very low price of fourpence. But the heyday of the success of "Progress and Poverty" has yet to come. The barriers of prejudice and ignorance are now rapidly giving way, and the time is near at hand when "Progress and Poverty" will take its place alongside the Good Old Book, of which it is the

counterpart.

Henry George found his opportunity with the growing popularity of his book. He was able to follow up his written Gospel of Emancipation with the spoken word. The United States, Great Britain and Ireland, and the Australasian Colonies were visited in turn and revisited. Four times he came to Great Britain, and everywhere and on all occasions the people heard him gladly. He died as he had lived—a man of the common people. On one of his tours, the late Mr. Henry Labouchere introduced him as “George V, the man whose sympathies were with the poor and lowly instead of with the high and mighty.” Writing to his wife on the 23rd anniversary of their first meeting, he says “We are not rich—so poor just now, in fact, that all I can give you on this anniversary is a little love-letter.” And he died fighting for the people he loved so well. On the eve of victory—he was contesting the Mayoralty of New York—“his last campaign”—he addressed four large meetings. The doctors had warned him of the consequences of this contest, but he went bravely on to the end.” I have never claimed to be a special friend of labour,” he exclaimed to one great gathering.” Labour does not want special privileges. . . What I stand for is the equal rights of all men.” As he left one of the meetings a woman called out:” God bless you, Henry George! You are a good man.” Turning round, he reverently exclaimed:” And may God bless you, too. You must be a good woman to ask God to bless me.” In the early hours of the next morning (Friday, October 29th, 1897) Henry George passed away in the presence of his devoted wife and a few of his family and friends. Then the press of the world acclaimed his greatness, and many thousands of poor men and women shed tears over the irreparable loss they felt they had sustained.” He was a tribune of the people,” said one newspaper, which had opposed his policy;” poor for their sake when he might have been rich by mere compromising; without official position for their sake when he might have had high offices by merely yielding a part of his convictions to expediency. All his life long, he spoke, wrote, thought, prayed, and dreamed of one thing only—the cause of the plain people against corruption and despotism. And he died with his armour on, with his sword flashing, in the front of the battle—scaling the breastworks of entrenched corruption and despotism. He died as he lived. He died a hero's death. He died as he would have wished to die—on the battlefield, spending his last strength in a blow at the enemies of the people. Fearless, honest, unsullied, uncompromising Henry George!”

Henry George's other books include” Our Land and Land Policy,” “Social Problems,” “The Peer and the Prophet,” “The Condition of Labour,” “Protection or Free Trade,” “The Perplexed Philosopher,” and “The Science of Political Economy.”