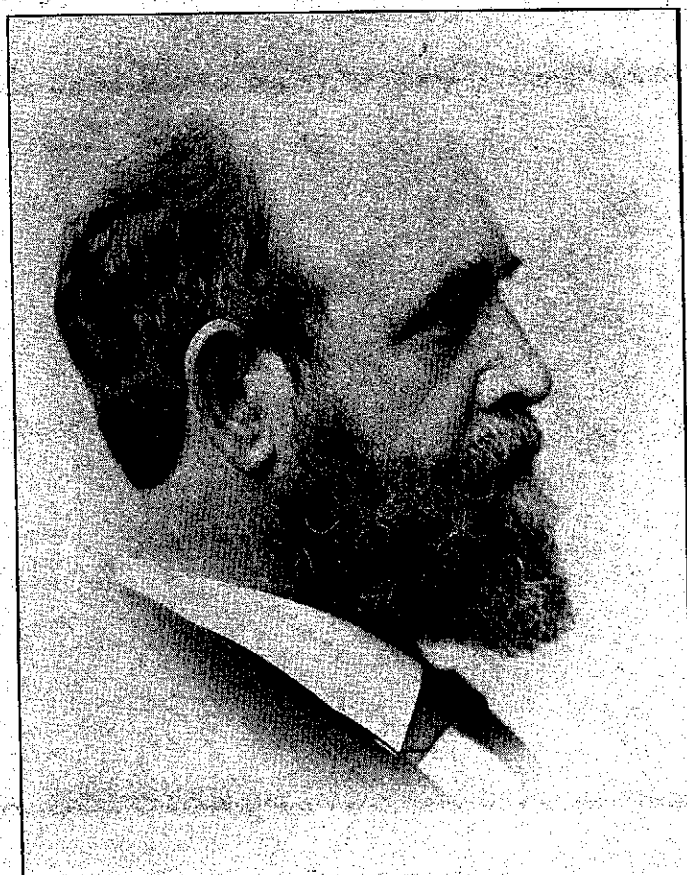


HENRY GEORGE

UNORTHODOX AMERICAN



by ALBERT JAY NOCK

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A depression was on in the year 1864. In those days depressions did not go by their Latin name as a rule, except when people wanted to put on airs about them, but were called by the simple English name of hard times. This streak of hard times lay very heavily on the Pacific Coast. It was aggravated by a great drouth that burned up the grain crop and pasturage, and killed most of the cattle on the ranches. There was no business in farming or ranching, industries were closed down, and commerce was at a dead halt.

At this time Henry George was twenty-five years old, living miserably in San Francisco, where, after a long struggle with misfortune, he had set up in a small way as a job printer. He had a wife and child, and his wife was shortly to give birth again. He could get no work, whether at printing or anything else, nor could he ask help from any one, for all the people he knew were wretchedly poor. Long afterward, speaking of this period, he said that as things went from bad to worse—

"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 corn meal. In this darkest time in my life my second child was born."

When this event happened he had no money, no food, no way to provide his wife with any care; he was alone in a bare lodging with a helpless suffering woman and a newborn baby. In a desperate state of mind he left the house and took to the last resort of the destitute.

"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 five dollars. 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 had seen depressions before. When he was sixteen years old he saw one in Australia, where he lay in port for a month as foremast-boy on an old East Indiaman sailing out of New York for Melbourne and Calcutta. There he found times "very hard ashore, thousands with nothing to do and nothing to eat." Two years later, in 1857, another depression threw him out of work in Philadelphia and sent him wandering to the Pacific Coast. After 1864, too, he was to be wrecked by still another depression, when the appalling hard times which followed the panic of 1873 broke up in succession two newspaper enterprises which had employed him, and he was once more set adrift and penniless.

Thus it was that the question occurred to him, why do these depressions happen? Why should there be any hard times? Nobody seemed to know. People took depressions as they took tuberculosis or typhoid, or as people in the Middle Ages took the bubonic plague, as something bound to happen, something that had to be put up with. They had always happened about once every so often, undoubtedly would always go on happening, and that was that. Yet in the nature of things there seemed no reason why they should happen. There was plenty of natural opportunity for everybody, plenty of everything that anybody could possibly need. The country was not poor and overpopulated—far from it. On the contrary, it was fabulously rich and had only a thin and stragglng population. Nevertheless, every so often, with a strange regularity, hard times came around and vast masses of the people were left without work and without bread.

There must be some reason for this which no one had as yet discovered, and Henry George made up his mind that if he lived he would find out what it was.

Somehow he did manage to live. By one means or another he got over the peak of his greatest distress, and four years later, in the winter of 1868, he came from California to

New York on an errand for a newspaper. He was then not quite thirty years old, and did not even yet have a dollar in his pocket that he could call his own. New York showed him something brand-new in his experience. Up to this time he had not been in a position to see any great show of inequality in the distribution of wealth. Life was simple in the Philadelphia of his boyhood days, and in the rough and new California of his youth one person lived much like another. But now, in the New York of 1868, he saw our western Palmyra in all the shoddy glory of its post-war period, and by all accounts it must have been a most dreadful sight, as repulsive as the pens of Dickens and George William Curtis pictured it. Shoddy riches, shoddy show, shoddy ideals and taste, shoddy people—and on the other hand, whole populations of troglodyte slum-dwellers living at an almost inconceivable depth of wretchedness and degradation.

Years afterward George said that here "I saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want." What was the cause of it? Again, nobody seemed to know. Like depressions and plagues, it was taken as part of the regular order of nature. It had always existed in large commercial and industrial centers, apparently it was bound always to exist, and it seemed to be just another one of the things that had to be put up with. There was no cure for it, so far as anybody knew. All that could be done was to take some of the curse off it by charity of one sort or another, and this was being done; in fact, it was beginning to be organized on a large scale, more lavishly perhaps than in any other country.

Nevertheless, George reasoned with himself, the thing had to have a cause, for nothing in nature ever happens without a cause. If that cause could be found, a cure might be found; but trying to deal with an effect without knowing anything about its cause would be mere fumbling in the dark. Here, then, was

a second question, to which George pledged his lifetime for an answer. The first question was, what is the cause—not any superficial and apparent cause, but the true fundamental cause—of recurrent industrial depressions? The second question was, what is the true fundamental cause of the enormous inequality in the distribution of wealth?

George succeeded in answering these two questions to his own satisfaction while he was still a comparatively young man. This was the only success he ever had in his life; whatever else he touched failed. His one success, however, such as it was, led him through one of the strangest and most remarkable careers ever achieved in America, or for that matter, in the world.

II

In principle, as the politicians say, Henry George's boyhood followed the course laid out by the story-books that used to be written around the romance of American life. He did not exactly run away from school or run away to sea, but he did what came to the same thing. He served notice on his parents so firmly that they decided to let him have his own way. In the matter of schooling they perhaps thought it was just as well, for he seems to have been an all-round failure at any kind of book-learning. Between the ages of six and fourteen he tried his luck at four different schools, three of them private schools, and all of them first-rate as schools went in those days—and probably they went about as well then as they do now—but he was not worth his salt at any of them. He worried through the grammar grades, entered the high school, stuck at it almost half a year, and then struck his colors for good and all; he never had another day's schooling.

He said afterward, rather austere-ly, that in his half year at the high school he "was idle, and wasted time." He may have done so, but if he did it was exceptional, for as boy or man he was never shiftless or dissipated, but always a hard worker, with an uncommon amount of intellectual curiosity and scientific imagination. The worst of him was that he was hasty and impatient, and of a roaming, restless disposition which probably made his parents think that his best hope of getting any kind of discipline lay in the fore-castle, and that since he wanted most of all to go to sea, it

might be the best thing for him if they should let him go.

One matter connected with this period in his life is worth notice. When he was forty years old, he suddenly appeared before the world as the master of a superb English prose style, a style that very few writers have equalled. Everybody of any literary experience at once began to wonder where in the world he could have got it, and how, and when. His record was open. With virtually no schooling, he had been a sailor, a typesetter, a tramp, a peddler, printer, shopclerk, newspaperman, weigher in a rice-mill, ship's steward, inspector of gas meters, gold-seeker, farm laborer. There was clearly nothing in any of these pursuits, or in all of them put together, to raise a man's prose style to that high level. How did he come by it?

It is usually said that he learned to write by hard practice, mainly between 1865 and 1870, and it is true that his actual career as a writer began in that period. But he did not get his style then, for he always had it. Scraps of a diary that he kept on shipboard show that he wrote the same clear, precise, and beautiful English at seventeen that he did at forty. For example:

"Wed. 11. I was roused out of a sound sleep at twelve o'clock to come on deck and keep my watch. On turning out I found a great change in the weather. The wind had shifted to N.W., and come out cold and fierce. The ship was running dead, before it in a S.E. direction, making about eight or nine knots an hour. After keeping a cold and dreary watch until four A.M., we were relieved. . . . In the afternoon all hands were engaged in getting the anchors on the fore-castle and securing them for a long voyage. The colour of the sea is green on sounding, the shade varying according to the depth of water, and a beautiful blue outside; and so very clear that objects can be seen at a great depth."

Or this, which any critic would pass unquestioned as having been written by R. H. Dana—

"The wind, which had been strong from aft the day before, during the middle watch died away and was succeeded by a calm until eight A.M., when a stiff breeze from the south sprang up, accompanied by shadows of rain. At twelve M. all hands were called to reef. While reefing the fore-topsail, the parrel of the yard gave way, causing a great deal of trouble and keeping all hands from dinner.

It was two-thirty P.M. before our watch got below to their plum-duff, which had been allowed in honour of the day. The rest of the day was rainy, with wind constantly varying, keeping us hauling on the braces. Thus closed the most miserable Fourth of July that I have ever yet spent."

When a boy of seventeen turns off such English as that, day after day, for his own eye only, no one should be surprised at what he does for the public eye at forty. It is not easy to hit just that blend of precision, clearness, simplicity and grace—let the reader try it. George never wrote a sentence that needed a second reading to tell not only what it meant, but the only thing it could possibly mean, or be made to mean. In this respect he stands with the most formidable champion of the established order that he ever had to face—Professor Huxley—and with all its force of clearness and precision, his style has also a grace of warmth and color which Huxley's has not.

But as George himself would have said, a man's style must come from somewhere, it must have a cause. A person is not simply born knowing how to do that sort of thing. More probably he got it from the kind of English that he was brought up to hear and speak at home, and from his familiarity with the English of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Such of the family's letters as exist are extremely well written, and his schoolmates and cronies—Bishop Henry C. Potter and his brother, Bishop Horstmann, James Morgan Hart, Doctor R. Heber Newton and his brother—were certainly bred to have a decent respect for their native tongue, so in all probability George heard excellent English from his infancy. His father was a vestryman of old St. Paul's, who brought up his children in the strict ways of old-style Evangelical Protestantism, with the result that Henry seems to have known the King James Version practically by heart, so that his own English may have been modelled, more or less consciously, on its narrative style.

He went to sea in April, 1855, and his voyage on the "Hindoo" lasted a year and two months. She was an old wooden affair of 600 tons, in none too good shape, bought second-hand for a kind of tramp service after twenty-five years of hard wear and tear as an East Indiaman. She went out of New York in lumber for Melbourne. The record is that she carried half a million feet, which seems

close to an overload for a ship of her tonnage—an awkward cargo, at any rate. She took a deal of tinkering, as the passage just quoted from George's journal shows. Before she was a week out her tiller broke in half, rotted at the core, but fortunately the sea was calm enough to let the crew fix tackles on the rudder to steer by, while the carpenter rigged a new gear. Except for incidents like this, and a few days' stretch of heavy weather in the Indian Ocean, the voyage was uneventful, enabling George to learn the sailor's trade in as easy circumstances, probably, as he could have had. His captain seems to have been a very good sort, who saw to it that the crew got as decent treatment as the state of the ship allowed.

George did not go ashore much, though the "Hindoo" lay off Melbourne nearly a month. He looked the town over once, and did not care for it. This was three years after the gold rush of 1852, and a "readjustment" had set in—in plain language, hard times—which made everything look down at the heel. All the people he saw were poor, idle, and dejected. Calcutta also disappointed him. He did his duty by the scenery up the river, finding it very fine, and he took in the features of native life that seemed quaint to an American eye, the bamboo huts, home-made earthenware, the strange shape of the river-boats, some of which, he wrote, "had sails to help them along, in which there were more holes than threads." He noticed the handsome country residences of the rich English living on both sides of the river, and also, by way of contrast, the number of corpses floating downstream in all stages of decomposition, covered with obscene black birds picking them to pieces. "The first one I saw filled me with horror and disgust," he wrote, "but like the natives, you soon cease to pay any attention to them."

Altogether it was not quite the India that a boy dreams of at a distance. He found it, as he afterwards said, "a land where the very carrion birds are more sacred than human life." A brief look at things ashore was enough for him, and when the "Hindoo" had got her thousand tons of rice aboard, he was glad to leave the land and go back on the open sea. He had sailor's blood in his veins, by his father's side of the family, two generations back, which may have given him something of the true sailor's virtuoso spirit. At the end of a year's voyage, although

looking forward eagerly to seeing his family and friends in Philadelphia, he wrote in his journal, "Oh, that I had it to go over again."

The sea was not through with him, however. After the reunion with his people was over, the next thing was to cast about for something to do. His father got him a place with a printing firm to learn typesetting, where he stayed nine months, long enough to become a good journeyman compositor, and then quit in consequence of a row with his foreman. He had an offer from another firm, but the pay was nothing worth thinking of, and he did not take it. The depression of 1857 was coming on, and the few employers who had a place open were offering sweatshop terms. Finding that there was simply nothing doing in Philadelphia, he went to Boston, working his way on a topmast schooner that carried coal. There was nothing doing there either; so, on his return, attracted by reports of the fortunes being made on the Pacific Coast, he shipped on the lighthouse-tender "Shubrick," which was going on the long voyage around the foot of South America, for service out of San Francisco.

While learning his new trade of typesetting in Philadelphia, he took lessons at night in penmanship and bookkeeping, with useful results. When his handwriting was fully formed, it was small and highly characteristic, but very clear and neat. Part of his father's idea in having him learn to set type was to improve his spelling. Like some other great writers, notably Count Tolstoy, he could not spell. This branch of the mechanics of writing seems to call for some obscure kind of natural gift or aptitude, which George never had. He thought typesetting helped him a little, but it could not have helped him much, for he misspelled even the commonest words all his life.

While he was working at the case, too, there happened one of those trivial incidents that turn out to be important in setting the course of one's life. He heard an old printer say that in a new country wages are always high, while in an old country they are always low. George was struck by this remark and on thinking it over, he saw that it was true. Wages were certainly higher in the United States than in Europe, and he remembered that they were higher in Australia than in England. More than this, they were higher in the newer parts than in the older parts of the same country—higher in Oregon and California, for instance,

than in New York and Pennsylvania.

George used to say that this was the first little puzzle in political economy that ever came his way. He did not give it any thought until long after; in fact, he says he did not begin to think intently on any economic subject until conditions in California turned his mind that way. When finally he did so, however, the old printer's words came back to him as a roadmark in his search for the cause of industrial depressions, and the cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth.

III

Like all those who anticipated Horace Greeley's classic advice to young men, Henry George went west for quick money and plenty of it. He had no notion of mining, but of prospecting; that is to say, his idea was not to work a mine, but to pick up mineral land, and then either sell it or have it worked on shares with somebody who would do the actual mining. In short, as he would have phrased it in later years, his idea was to make his fortune by appropriating the economic rent of natural resources, rather than by applying labor to them.

But there were too many ahead of him who had the same idea. Although the mineral region of California is as large as the British Isles, he found that these lively brethren had pre-empted every foot of it. He tried Oregon with no better luck, living meanwhile as best he could, by all sorts of expedients—farm work, tramping, storekeeping, peddling—and when he finally went back to his trade, he did it as only another makeshift, for the vision of sudden wealth still haunted him. In a letter to his sister he says that in a dream the night before he was "scooping treasure out of the earth by handfuls, almost delirious with the thoughts of what I would now be able to do, and how happy we would all be"; and he adds wistfully that he supposes he dreamed all this as starving men dream of splendid feasts, or as desert wanderers dream of brooks and fountains.

His trade kept him only very precariously, for times were not easy even then, and there was no great demand for printing or printers. He got a job with one newspaper, then with a second, where, he says, "I worked until my clothes were in rags and the toes of my shoes were out. I slept in the office and did the best I could to economize, but finally I ran in debt thirty dollars for my

board bill." He left this job and went adrift again; and then, with no work, no prospects, and with but one piece of money in his pocket, he made a runaway match with a young Australian girl named Annie Fox.

They married not wisely—there is no doubt about that—but wonderfully well, for their marriage appears to have remained perfect until his death in 1897 dissolved it. Balzac called attention to a little-known truth when he said that "a great love is a masterpiece of art," and there are probably about as few really first-rate artists in this field as in any other. Moreover, a masterpiece in this field of art must be a collaboration, and the chance of two first-rate artists finding each other is extremely small, practically a matter of pure luck. A Daphnis in any age may wander over the whole earth without meeting a Chloe, and a Cynthia may survey whole legions of men and never see a Claudius. George's meeting with his wife was almost the only piece of sheer good luck he ever had, but it was a great one. On the night of the twelfth of October, 1883, he wrote this note, and put it by her bedside for her to find next morning:

"It is twenty-three years ago to-night since we first met, I only a month or two older than Harry, and you not much older than our Jen. For twenty-three years we have been closer to each other than to anyone else in the world, and I think we esteem each other more and love each other better when we first began to love. You are now 'fat, fair and forty,' and to me the mature woman is handsomer and more lovable than the slip of a girl whom twenty-three years ago I met without knowing that my life was to be bound up with hers. We are not rich—so poor just now, in fact, that all I can give you on this anniversary is a little love-letter—but there is no one we can afford to envy, and in each other's love we have what no wealth could compensate for. And so let us go on, true and loving, trusting in Him to carry us farther who has brought us so far with so little to regret."

George kept to his trade, since nothing that looked more lucrative turned up, and after his starving-time of 1864 he began to make a little better living as a printer, though not much better, and he also began to consolidate some sort of position in San Francisco. No sooner was he fairly launched, however, than he threw his future to the winds by enlisting in a filibustering expe-

dition to help out the Mexican patriots who were fighting the French emperor's ill-fated scheme for setting up a vassal empire in Mexico, with the Austrian Archduke Maximilian on the throne. The expedition was a comic-opera affair, planned in a fashion that amounted to piracy, and Providence certainly stood at George's elbow when the Federal authorities put a stop to it before it got under way.

Not satisfied with this grotesque performance, George immediately went into another. He took part in organizing the Monroe League, which was to father a second crusade into Mexico. The league had an elaborate ritual which might have been got up by Gilbert and Sullivan, swearing in its members on a naked sword and the republican flag of Mexico; and Mrs. George, poor soul! was sworn in as the only woman member. One wonders what she really thought of it. The league shortly perished of inanition without having done anything, and George made no further efforts in behalf of the afflicted Mexicans.

These two incidents reveal the one defect in George's natural endowment, which in spite of his superb gifts, his prominence, and his apparent influence over a large and enthusiastic public, made him in the long run ineffectual. He was unquestionably one of the three or four great constructive statesmen of the nineteenth century, perhaps of any century—he ranks with Turgot. His character was unmatched in the whole public life of his period. He was nobly serious, grandly courageous, and so sincere as to force even his enemies, of whom he had many, to speak well of him. He had great brilliance, some wit, and the command of a fine irony; but he had absolutely no humor. He was as humorless as Oliver Cromwell, a born crusader of the Old Testament type, convinced that he had an Old Testament mission to hew Agag in pieces. All his life he had labored under the unhumorous man's inability to learn what none of us probably enjoys learning, that Truth is a cruel flirt, and must be treated accordingly. Court her abjectly and she will turn her back; feign indifference, and she will throw herself at you with a coaxing submission. Try to force an acquaintance—try to make her put on her company manners for a general public—and she will revolt them like an ugly termagant; let her take her own way and her own time, and

she will show all her fascinations to every one who has eyes to see them.

IV

George now committed himself to newspaper work, moving from paper to paper in all kinds of capacities, from typesetter to editor and part owner, and by 1868 he had become prosperous enough to start a bank account. His editorial career was very spirited; he was in one row or another all the time, and while it may be said that in his treatment of State and local grievances he was on the popular side, he always lost. He made things lively for the Associated Press news monopoly, but though he got an anti-monopoly bill through the legislature, all that happened was that the monopoly broke his paper. He fought the Wells-Fargo express monopoly, and lost again—too much money against him. He attacked the Central Pacific's subsidies, and ran for the Assembly as a Democrat on that issue, but again there was too much money on the other side—the Democrats lost, the Central Pacific quickly bought up his paper, merged it with another, and George was out.

So it went. Every turn of public affairs brought up the old haunting questions. Even here in California he was now seeing symptoms of the same inequality that had oppressed him in New York. "Bonanza kings" were coming to the front, and four ex-shopkeepers of Sacramento, Stanford, Crocker, Huntington, and Hopkins, were laying up immense fortunes out of the Central Pacific. The railway was bringing in population and commodities, which everybody thought was a good thing all round, yet wages were going down, exactly as the old printer in Philadelphia had said, and the masses were growing worse off instead of better.

About this matter of wages, George had had other testimony besides the old printer's. On his way to Oregon a dozen years before, he fell in with a lot of miners who were talking about the Chinese, and ventured to ask what harm the Chinese were doing as long as they worked only the cheap diggings. "No harm now," one of the miners said, "but wages will not always be as high as they are today in California. As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down, and some day or other white people will be glad to get those diggings that the Chinamen are working." George said that this idea, coming on top of what the printer had said, made a great impression on him—the idea that "as

the country grew in all that we are hoping that it might grow, the condition of those who had to work for their living must become, not better, but worse." Yet in the short space of a dozen years this was precisely what was taking place before his own eyes.

Still, though his two great questions became more and more pressing, he could not answer them. His thought was still inchoate. He went around and around his ultimate answer, like somebody fumbling after something on a table in the dark, often actually touching it without being aware that it was what he was after. Finally it came to him in a burst of true Cromwellian or Pauline drama out of "the commonplace reply of a passing teamster to a commonplace question." One day in 1871 he went for a horseback ride, and as he stopped to rest his horse on a rise overlooking San Francisco Bay—

"I asked a passing teamster, for want of something better to say, what land was worth there. He pointed to some cows grazing so far off that they looked like mice, and said, 'I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre.' Like a flash it came over me that there was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege."

Yes, there it was. Why had wages suddenly shot up so high in California in 1849 that cooks in the restaurants of San Francisco got \$500 a month? The reason now was simple and clear. It was because the placer mines were found on land that did not belong to anybody. Any one could go to them and work them without having to pay an owner for the privilege. If the lands had been owned by somebody, it would have been land-values instead of wages that would have so suddenly shot up.

Exactly this was what had taken place on these grazing lands overlooking San Francisco Bay. The Central Pacific meant to make its terminus at Oakland, the increased population would need the land around Oakland to settle on, and land values had jumped up to a thousand dollars an acre. Naturally, then, George reasoned, the more public improvements there were, the better the transportation facilities, the larger the population, the more industry and commerce—the more of

everything that makes for "prosperity"—the more would land values tend to rise, and the more would wages and interest tend to fall.

George rode home thoughtful, translating the teamster's commonplace reply into the technical terms of economics. He reasoned that there are three factors in the production of wealth, and only three: natural resources, labor, and capital. When natural resources are unappropriated, obviously the whole yield of production is divided into wages, which go to labor, and interest, which goes to capital. But when they are appropriated, production has to carry a third charge—rent. Moreover, wages and interest, when there is no rent, are regulated strictly by free competition; but rent is a monopoly-charge, and hence is always "all the traffic will bear."

Well, then, since natural resource values are purely social in their origin, created by the community, should not rent go to the community rather than to the individual? Why tax industry and enterprise at all—why not just charge rent? There would be no need to interfere with the private ownership of natural resources. Let a man own all of them he can get his hands on, and make as much out of them as he may, untaxed; but let him pay the community their annual rental value, determined simply by what other people would be willing to pay for the use of the same holdings. George could see justification for wages and interest, on the ground of natural right; and for private ownership of natural resources, on the ground of public policy; but he could see none for the private appropriation of economic rent. In his view it was sheer theft. If he was right, then it also followed that as long as economic rent remains unconfiscated, the taxation of industry and enterprise is pure highwaymanry, especially tariff taxation, for this virtually delegates the government's taxing power to private persons.

George worked out these ideas in a tentative way in a forty-eight page pamphlet with the title, "Our Land and Land Policy, National and State," which did not reach many readers, but added something to his reputation as a tribune of the people. The subject mullied in his mind through five years of newspaper work, at the end of which he lost his paper and was once more on the ragged edge. He had begun a magazine article on the cause of industrial depressions, but was dissatis-

fied with it—one could do nothing with the topic in so little space. What was needed was a solid treatise which would recast the whole science of political economy.

He felt that he could write this treatise, but how were he and his family to live meanwhile? He had used his influence on the Democratic side in the last State campaign, and had been particularly instrumental in selecting the governor; so he wrote to Governor Irwin, asking him "to give me a place where there was little to do and something to get, so that I could devote myself to some important writing." The governor gave him the State inspectorship of gas meters, which was a moderately well-paid job, and a sinecure. This was in January, 1876; and in March, 1879, he finished the manuscript of a book entitled "Progress and Poverty; An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions, and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth; The Remedy."

V

No one would publish the book, not so much because it was revolutionary (though one firm objected to it emphatically on that ground) but because it was a bad prospect. No work on political economy, aside from textbooks, had ever sold well enough either in the United States or England to make another one attractive. Besides, the unparalleled depression of the 'seventies was making all the publishing houses sail as close to the wind as they could run. Logically, a book on the cause of hard times ought to interest people just then, but book buyers do not buy by logic, and publishers are aware of it.

By hook or crook George and his friends got together enough money to make plates for an author's edition of five hundred copies; George himself set the first few sticks of type. At three dollars a copy he sold enough of these almost to clear the cost; and presently the firm of Appleton, who had rejected the manuscript, wrote him that if he would let them have his plates, they would bring out the book in a two-dollar edition; and this was done.

It fell as dead as Caesar, not even getting a competent press notice in America for months. George sent some complimentary copies abroad, where it did rather better. Emile de Laveleye praised it highly in the "Revue Scientifique"; it was translated into German, and its reviews, as George said, were "way up." Some sort of sale began in March, 1880,

with a brilliant review in "The New York Sun," which was followed by more or less serious treatment in the Eastern press generally; but it amounted to almost nothing.

The truth about the subsequent meteoric success of "Progress and Poverty" as a publishing venture is that it was a purely adventitious success. The times were not only just right for such a book, but they stayed right for nearly twenty years. The course of popular interest played directly into its hands, not only in America, but in the whole English-speaking world. It is significant that in countries where the course of interest ran otherwise, as in France, for instance, it had no vogue. In the English-speaking world, its immense vogue was almost wholly that of an instrument of discontent, or in the vernacular of the book trade, a hell-raiser. Even so (to a person who has had any experience at all of the human race), the fact that a solid treatise like "Progress and Poverty" should have had an aggregate sale running well over two million copies is almost incredibly fantastic; yet that is what it had.

From first to last, the history of American civilization is a most depressing study; but that of the decade from which "Progress and Poverty" emerged is probably unmatched in the whole record, unless by the history of our own times. There is no need to dwell on it here; one feels utterly degraded at any reminder of it. George's book nicely caught the tide of turbulent reaction which brought in "the era of reform" under Cleveland in 1884, and ran fairly full throughout the 'nineties. George's death in 1897 marking the approximate point of its complete subsidence.

This tidal wave carried George himself as well as his book; he threw himself on its crest. He expected some good to come of the great general unrest, and he bent all his energies to the task of educating the awakened social forces and giving them what he believed to be a right direction. The temper of the times filled him with hope. A sincere republican, he was a second Jefferson in his naive idealization of the common man's intelligence, disinterestedness, and potential loyalty to a great cause. Therefore hell-raising quite suited him; Peter the Hermit had raised hell, and Savonarola had seen no other way to get the common man properly stirred up. Before George was nominated for the mayoralty of New York in 1886, Tammany sent

William M. Ivins to buy him off with the promise of a seat in Congress. Ivins told him he could never be mayor—and in fact there is little room for doubt that he was fraudulently counted out—and George asked why, if that were so, there could be any objection to his running. Ivins told him frankly that it was because his running would raise hell; and George replied with similar frankness that that was precisely what he wanted to do.

With this purpose in mind, George came to New York on the heels of his book, selling out what little he possessed in California. "My pleasant little home that I was so comfortable in is gone," he wrote sadly, "and I am afloat at forty-two, poorer than at twenty-one. I do not complain, but there is some bitterness in it." During his first year in New York, while his cherished book lay dead, he lived in obscurity, wretchedly poor; and then the time came when he could take advantage of something on which the eyes of the whole English-speaking world were fixed—the Irish rent-war.

VI

Ireland at that time was front-page news on every paper printed in the English language. Parnell and Dillon crossed the ocean, spoke in sixty-two American cities, addressed the House of Representatives, and took away a great fund of American dollars wherewith to fight the battles of the rack-rented Irish tenant. They were followed by the best man in the movement, Michael Davitt, who came over late in 1880 to tend the fire that Parnell and Dillon had kindled. George met him and got him "under conviction," as the revivalists say, and then wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Irish Land Question; what it involves, and how alone it can be settled."

From that moment Henry George was, in the good sense of the term, a made man. The pamphlet was a masterpiece of polemics, a call to action, and a prophecy, all in one. Published simultaneously in America and England, it had an immense success. George was amazed at the space it got in the Eastern papers. "The astonishing thing," he wrote, "is the goodness of the comments. . . . I am getting famous, if I am not making money." It is hard to see how a man who had ever done a day's work on a newspaper could write in that unimaginative way. With Irish influence as strong as it was on the Eastern seaboard, and with every Irish-

man sitting up nights to curse the hated Sassenach landlords and their puppet government, how could the newspaper comments not be good? The Eastern papers simply knew which side their bread was buttered on.

A rabble of charmed and vociferous Irish closed around the simple-hearted pamphleteer, probably not troubling themselves much about his philosophy of the Irish land question, but nevertheless all for him. He was against the government and against the landlords, and that was enough. In this they were like the vast majority of readers who were led to peck at "Progress and Poverty" because they had heard that the book voiced their discontent; probably not five per cent of them read it through, or were able to understand what they did read, but they were all for it nevertheless, and all for glorifying Henry George. The American branch of the Land League immediately put George on the lecture platform, and when the Irish troubles culminated in the imprisonment of Davitt, Dillon, Parnell, and O'Kelly, an Irish newspaper published in New York sent him to the seat of war as a correspondent.

He reached Dublin, dogged by secret-service men, and gave a public lecture with such effect that his audience went fairly wild. He wrote a friend that he had "the hardest work possible" to keep the crowd from unharnessing his cab-horse and dragging his carriage through the streets to his hotel. His reports to "The Irish World" got wide distribution. When he crossed to England, interest opened many doors to him outside political circles, and curiosity opened many more. He dined with most of the lions of the period, Besant, Herbert Spencer, Tennyson, Justin McCarthy, Wallace, Browning, Chamberlain, John Bright, and made an excellent impression. He wrote his wife that he could easily have become a lion himself if he had liked, but he thought it best to keep clear of all that sort of thing.

He spoke in England, and addressed huge audiences in Scotland. Returning to Ireland, he got still wider publicity out of being locked up twice on suspicion. His notoriety was helped, too, by the humorous character of the proceedings before the examining magistrate, which reminded all England of Mr. Nupkins's examination of the Pickwickians. George took this occasion to write the President a blistering letter about the truckling imbecility of

the American Minister, Lowell, and this not only gave him another line of publicity but also had a good practical effect. The Secretary of State sent out a circular letter prodding up the service, and asked George to file a claim for damages, which George refused to do, saying he was not interested in that, but only in seeing that the rights of American citizens in foreign lands were properly defended.

All this celebrity was a great lift for "Progress and Poverty." The book suddenly became an international best seller. "The London Times" gave it a five-column review which made its fortune in all the British possessions; the review came out in the morning, and by afternoon the publishers had sold out every copy in stock. When a new edition was rushed out, one house in Melbourne ordered 1300 copies, and 300 were sent to New Zealand. George was invited everywhere, banqueted everywhere, asked to speak on all sorts of occasions, reported everywhere; and when he left the British Isles for home, he was perhaps the most widely talked-of man in either hemisphere.

He had intended to stay abroad three months, but remained a year. When he landed in New York he found himself, as he modestly said, "pretty near famous." At once the newspapers blew his horn, the labor unions got up a tremendous mass meeting for him, and, strange as it seems, some of the upper crust of Wall Street gave him a complimentary dinner at Delmonico's, with Justice van Brunt, Henry Ward Beecher, and Francis B. Thurber among the speakers. No one knows why they did this. Possibly it was a more or less perfunctory gesture toward an American who had made a name in England; possibly an inexpensive and non-committal move to please the influential Irish; possibly a gesture of amity toward a man well on his way to becoming a dangerous enemy, but who might be led to see something on their side of social questions. Whatever prompted the occasion, it was a notable affair, and George rose to its measure with easy and affable dignity.

In a sense, this banquet marked the parting of the ways for George, though probably no one was aware of it at the moment, George least of all. A reformer has a choice of three courses. He can carry his doctrine direct to the people, and promote it by methods that are essentially political; he can convert people of pow-

er and influence, and promote it largely by indirection; or he can merely formulate it, hang it up in plain sight, and let it win its own way by free acceptance. The first is the course of the evangelist and missionaries; and to a firm believer in eighteenth-century political theory, like George, it is the only one possible—it is wholly republican, wholly in the American tradition. It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened if, for a while at least, he had followed up his one chance to get at the minds of those who really controlled the country's immediate future, or if he had taken the third or Socratic course; but he did neither. He was a staunch republican, committed to republican method.

For the next two years George lived before the populace, speaking and writing incessantly, and directing the development of his doctrine into a distinctly political character. At that time the press was much more an organ of opinion than it is now, much freer and more forceful, so that his writings were in demand. Even a popular publication like "Littell's" asked him for a series on the problems of the time, while at the other end of the scale "The North American Review" made him a proposal to start a straight-out political and economic weekly under his editorship.

Yet though his method was that of the evangelist, he did not adopt the tactics of the demagog or the practical politician. He was probably the most effective public speaker of his time—"The London Times" thought he was fully the equal of Cobden or of Bright, if not a little better—but he never took advantage of an audience, or flattered the galleries, or left the smallest doubt of where he stood and what was in his mind. When, for example, somebody introduced him in a maudlin way to a working-class audience as "one who was always for the poor man," George began his speech by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am not for the poor man. I am not for the rich man. I am for man."

In fact, it soon became apparent that his hell-raising was raising as much hell with his supporters and potential friends as with his enemies. Like Strafford of old, he was for "thorough," no matter whose head came off or whose toes smarted. All the Irish leaders, even Davitt, cooled off to the freezing point when they found that he was down on the Kilmainham treaty and dead against any compromise on the issues of the

rent-war, or any watering down of the program of restoring one hundred per cent of Ireland's land to one hundred per cent of Ireland's people. The Socialists were not unfriendly at first, and some of George's followers thought a sort of working alliance with them might be vamped up for political effect, but when George attacked their doctrine of collectivism and stateism, they most naturally showed all their teeth. George held with Paine and Thomas Jefferson that government is at best a necessary evil, and the less of it the better. Hence the right thing was to decentralize it as far as possible, and reduce the functions and powers of the state to an absolute minimum, which, he said, the confiscation of rent would do automatically; whereas the collectivist proposal to confiscate and manage natural resources as a state enterprise would have precisely the opposite effect—it would tend to make the state everything and the individual nothing.

George was moreover the terror of the political routineer. When the Republicans suddenly raised the tariff issue in 1880 the Democratic committee asked him to go on the stump. They arranged a long list of engagements for him, but after he made one speech they begged him by telegraph not to make any more. The nub of his speech was that he had heard of high-tariff Democrats and revenue-tariff Democrats, but he was a no-tariff Democrat who wanted real free trade, and he was out for that or nothing; and naturally no good bi-partisan national committee could put up with such talk as that, especially from a man who really meant it.

Yet, on the other hand, when the official free-traders of the Atlantic seaboard, led by Sumner, Godkin, Beecher, Curtis, Lowell, and Hewitt, opened their arms to George, he refused to fall in. His free-trade speeches during Cleveland's second campaign were really devoted to showing by implication that they were a hollow lot, and that their idea of free trade was nothing more or less than a humbug. His speeches hurt Cleveland more than they helped him, and some of George's closest associates split with him at this point. In George's view, freedom of exchange would not benefit the masses of the people a particle unless it were correlated with freedom of production; if it would, how was it that the people of free-trade England, for example, were no better off than the people of protection-

ist Germany? None of the official free-traders could answer that question, of course, for there was no answer. George had already developed his full doctrine of trade in a book, published in 1886, called "Protection or Free Trade"—a book which, incidentally, gives a reader the best possible introduction to "Progress and Poverty."

He laid down the law to organized labor in the same style, showing that there was no such thing as a labor-problem, but only a monopoly-problem, and that when natural-resource monopoly disappeared, every question of wages, hours, and conditions of labor would automatically disappear with it. The political liberal got the hardest treatment of all. George seems to have regarded him as the greatest obstruction to social progress—an unsavory compound, half knave, half fool, and flavored odiously with "unctuous rectitude." When John Bright, the Moses of liberalism, followed George on the rostrum at Birmingham, calling his proposals "the greatest, the wildest, the most remarkable . . . imported lately by an American inventor," all George could find to say was (in a private letter) that "the old man is utterly ignorant of what he is talking about"—which was strictly true; and of Frederic Harrison's lectures at Edinburgh and Newcastle he said only that "his is the very craziness of opposition, if I can judge by the reports."

VII

Thus intellectually he was out with every organized force in the whole area of discontent; out with the Socialists, out with the professional Irish, the professional laborites, professional progressivism, liberalism, and mugwumpery. His sympathies and affections however were always with the rank and file of revolt against the existing economic order; his heart was with all the disaffected, though his mind might not be entirely with them. This being so, the two years following his first visit to England fastened upon him the stigma of a mere proletarian class-leader whose principles and intentions were purely predatory. As Abram S. Hewitt most unscrupulously put it, his purpose was no more than "to array working men against millionaires."

Then at the end of these two years there happened the one thing needful to copper-rivet this reputation and make it permanent. When the labor unions of New York City de-

ecided to enter the mayoralty campaign of 1886, they looked to George as the best vote-getter in sight, and gave him their nomination. With this, whatever credit he may have had in America as an economist and philosopher vanished forever, leaving him only the uncertain and momentary prestige of a political demagog, an agitator, and a crank.

George had misgivings, not of defeat but of discredit in his role of candidate, but they came too late. The course he had chosen years before led straight to the quicksand of practical politics, and now his feet were in it. He temporized with the nomination, demanding a petition signed by thirty thousand citizens pledged to vote for him, which was immediately forthcoming—and there he was!

The campaign was uncommonly bitter. The other candidates were Hewitt and Theodore Roosevelt, and their methods bore hard on George in ways that Hewitt, at any rate, must somewhat have gagged at, for he was a man of breeding—still, he lent himself to them. It was easy to vilify George, because the allegation that he was a sheer proletarian leader was true enough, as far as this campaign went; he was, officially and by nomination, a labor candidate. Some among his supporters, of course, understood his ideas and purposes and believed in them, but these were relatively few; the majority were mere Adullamites. Hewitt won the election nominally—in all reasonable likelihood he was counted in—but George's vote was so large that "The New York Times" saw in it "an event demanding the most serious attention and study"; while "The St. James Gazette," of London, in a strong grandmotherly vein, advised "all respectable Americans to forget the trumpery of party fights and political differentism, and face the new danger threatening the commonwealth."

As far as George was concerned, there was no need of this warning, for his day in politics was done. This one campaign was the end of him. He was no longer a man to be feared or even reckoned with. To those on the inside of practical politics, he was henceforth hopelessly in the discard as the worst of all liabilities, a defeated candidate. To America at large, he was only another in the innumerable array of bogus prophets and busted spellbinders. Then, too, the temper of the times changed. Disaffection broke up into sects, and popular attention was soon addled by

a kaleidoscopic succession of men and issues cleverly manipulated on the public stage—Cleveland and "reform," Hanna and the full dinner-pail, Peffer and populism, McKinley and imperialism, Bryan and free silver, Roosevelt and progressivism; foreign embarrassments, jingoism, the Spanish War, Mrs. Mary Ellen Lease, Mrs. Eddy, Carry Nation, Jerry Simpson, La Follette and the Wisconsin idea, organized charity, "foundations" for this-or-that, the rise of the higher learning, woman's suffrage, the Anti-Saloon League, "commission government" for cities, the initiative and referendum—was ever such a welter of nostrums and nostrum-peddlers turned loose anywhere on earth in the same length of time? No wonder that Mr. Jefferson, mournfully surveying America's prospects, said, "What a Bedlamite is man!" Before a year was over, George had dropped into a historical place amidst all this ruck, from which he has never emerged, as just one more exploded demagog. He ran for a state office in 1887, but got little more than half the votes in New York City, his stronghold, than he had got in the mayoralty campaign only a year before.

The last ten years of his life were devoted largely to a weekly paper, "The Standard," in which he continued to press his economic doctrine, but it amounted to very little. He revisited England, where he found his former popularity still holding good. He also made a trip around the world, and was received magnificently in his former home, California, and in the British colonies. His main work during this period, however, was writing his "Science of Political Economy," which his death interrupted; fortunately not until it was so nearly finished that the rest of his design for it could be easily filled in.

In this period, too, his circumstances, for the first time in his life, were fairly easy. He had received some small gifts and legacies, and latterly a couple of well-to-do friends saw to it that he should finish his work without anxiety. It is an interesting fact that George stands alone in American history as a writer whose books sold by the million, and as an orator whose speech attracted thousands, yet who never made a dollar out of either.

His death had a setting of great drama or of great pathos, according to the view that one chooses to take of it. The municipal monstrosity called the Greater New York was put

together in the late 'nineties, and some of George's friends and associates, still incorrigibly politically minded, urged on him the forlorn hope of running as an independent candidate for the mayoralty in 1897. Seth Low, then president of Columbia University, and Robert van Wyck, who was the impregnable Tammany's candidate, were in the field—the outcome was clear—yet George acceded. It is incredible that he could have had the faintest hope of winning; most probably he thought it would be one more chance, almost certainly his last, to bear testimony before the people of his adopted city with the living voice.

He had had a touch of aphasia in 1890, revealing a weakness of the blood vessels in his brain, and his condition now was such that every physician he consulted told him he could not possibly stand the strain of a campaign; and so it proved. He opened his campaign at a rapid pace, speaking at one or more meetings every night, nearly always with all his old clearness and force. Three weeks before election he spoke at four meetings in one evening, and went to bed at the Union Square Hotel, much exhausted. Early next morning his wife awoke to find him in an adjoining room, standing in the attitude of an orator, his hand on the back of a chair, his head erect and his eyes open. He repeated the one word "yes" many times, with varying inflections, but on becoming silent he never spoke again. Mrs. George put her arm about him, led him back to his bed with some difficulty, and there he died.

VIII

"Progress and Poverty" is the first and only thorough, complete, scientific inquiry ever made into the fundamental cause of industrial depressions and involuntary poverty. The ablest minds of the century attacked and condemned it—Professor Huxley, the Duke of Argyll, Goldwin Smith, Leo XIII, Frederic Harrison, John Bright, Joseph Chamberlain. Nevertheless, in a preface to the definite edition, George said what very few authors of a technical work have ever been able to say, that he had not met with a single criticism or objection that was not fully anticipated and answered in the book itself. For years he debated its basic positions with any one who cared to try, and was never worsted.

Yet, curiously, though there have been a number of industrial depressions since George's death in 1897,

some of them very severe, the book has been so completely obscured by the reputation which George's propagandist enterprises fastened on him, that one would not know it had been written. In the whole course of the recent depression, for instance, no utterance of any man at all prominent in our public life, with one exception, would show that he had ever heard of it. The president of Columbia University resurrected George in a commencement address two years ago, and praised him warmly, but from what he said he seems not to have read him.

It is interesting, too, now that successive depressions are bearing harder and harder on the capitalist, precisely as George predicted, to observe that George and his associate anti-monopolists of forty years ago are turning out to be the best friends that the capitalist ever had. Standing staunchly for the rights of capital, as against collectivist proposals to confiscate interest as well as rent, George formulated a defense of those rights that is irrefragable. All those who have tried to bite that file have merely broken their teeth. There is a certain irony in the fact that the class which has now begun to suffer acutely from the recurring prostrations of industry and the ever-growing cost of stateism, is the very one which assailed George most furiously as an "apostle of anarchy and revolution." Yet the rapid progress of collectivism and stateism could have been foreseen; there was every sign of it, and the capitalist class should have been the one to heed those signs devoutly and interpret them intelligently. Bismarck saw what was coming, and even Herbert Spencer predicted terrible times ahead for England, and still more terrible times for America—a long run of stateism and collectivism, then "civil war, immense bloodshed, ending in a military despotism of the severest type."

IX

Like John Bright, nearly every one credited the "American inventor" with a brand-new discovery in his idea of confiscating economic rent. George did in fact come by the idea independently, but others whom he had never heard of came by it long before him. Precisely the same proposal had been made in the eighteenth century by men whom Mr. Bright might have thought twice about snubbing—the French school known as the Economists, which included Quesnay, Turgot, du Pont de

Nemours, Mirabeau, le Trosne, Gournay. They even used the term *Pimpot unique*, "the single tax," which George's American disciples arrived at independently, and which George accepted. The idea of confiscating rent also occurred to Patrick Edward Dove at almost the same time that it occurred to George. It had been broached in England almost a century earlier by Thomas Spence, and again in Scotland by William Ogilvie, a professor at Aberdeen. George's doctrine of the confiscation of social values was also explicitly anticipated by Thomas Paine, in his pamphlet called "Agrarian Justice."

George's especial merit is not that of original discovery, though his discovery was original—as much so as those of Darwin and Wallace. It was simply not new; Turgot had even set forth the principle on which George formulated the law of wages, though George did not know that any one had done so. George's great merit is that of having worked out his discovery to its full logical length in a complete system, which none of his predecessors did; not only establishing fundamental economics as a true science, but also discerning and clearly marking out its natural relations with history, politics, and ethics.

The key to an understanding of George's career may be found in the story that Lincoln Steffens tells about an afternoon ride with the devil on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus. The devil was in uncommonly good spirits that day, and entertained Steffens with a fine salty line of reminiscences half way up the avenue, when Steffens suddenly caught sight of a man on the sidewalk who was carefully carrying a small parcel of truth. Steffens nudged the devil who gave the man a casual glance, but kept on talking, apparently not interested. When Steffens could get a word in, he said, "See here, didn't you notice that that man back there had got hold of a little bit of truth?"

"Yes, of course I noticed it," replied the devil. "Why?"

"But surely that's a very dangerous thing," Steffens said. "Aren't you going to do something about it?"

"No hurry, my dear fellow," the devil answered indulgently. "It's a simple matter. I'll be running across him again one of these days, and I'll get him to organize it!"

It is impossible, of course, to guess what George's historical position would now be if he had had less of the Covenanter spirit and more of the experienced and penetrating hu-

mor of a Socrates, with a corresponding distrust of republican method in the propagation of doctrine. The question is an idle one, yet to a student of civilization the great interest of George's career is that at every step he makes one ask it. Perhaps in any case the Gadarene rout would have trampled him to the same depth of obscurity. Probably—almost certainly—his doctrine would have been picked up and wrested to the same service of a sectarian class-politics that would have left it unrecognizable. Experience, humor, and reason go for very little when they collide with what Ernest Renan so finely called *la matérialisme vulgaire*, *la bassesse de l'homme intéressé*. Yet one can hardly doubt that George would emerge from obscurity sooner, and his doctrine stand in a clearer and more favorable light if he had taken another course.

Much more important, however, is the question whether George's faith in the common man's collective judgment was justified; whether such

faith is ever justified. Does the common man possess the force of intellect to apprehend the processes of reason correctly, or the force of character to follow them disinterestedly? The whole future of eighteenth-century political doctrine, the doctrine on which our republic was nominally established, hangs on this question—the question, in short, whether republicanism has not put a burden on the common man which is greater than he can bear.

George never had a moment's doubt of the answer. Yet, seeing what sort of political leadership the common man invariably chose to follow, and the kind of issue that invariably attracted him, he ended the argument of "Progress and Poverty" with a clear warning, too long to be quoted here, against the wholesale corruption of the common man by the government which the common man himself sets up. It is well worth reading now, whether one finds the root of this corruption in the common

man's weakness of mind and character, or whether one finds it, as George did, in the unequal distribution of wealth. Whatever one may think about that, there is no possible doubt that George's warning has the interest of absolutely accurate prophecy.

It is rather remarkable, finally, since the reading public's whim for biography has set writers to pawing over so many American worthies, that no one has written a competent full-length biography of Henry George, who was not only one of America's very greatest men, but also was in so many respects typically American, and whose spectacular career was also so typical. His disabilities were precisely those of the civilization that produced him, and his life was sacrificed on the altar of those disabilities, precisely where the life of that civilization is being sacrificed. What more by way of interest could an able and honest biographer ask?