

The Growth of an Idea

By Joseph Dana Miller
Editor "Land and Freedom"

I like to dwell upon the remarkable career of Oscar Geiger, founder of the Henry George School of Social Science, whose name is now linked indissolubly with the history of the movement. It is not too much to say that he has brought definitely nearer the accomplishment of our great purpose. In the time to come when, in a world redeemed, the name of Henry George is hailed as the great pathfinder, Oscar Geiger and his work will not be forgotten. His fame is secure.

I am making no attempt to compare them intellectually. It was not in the power of Oscar Geiger to give to the world a "Progress and Poverty." He was not a superlative writer but a good one. But he had the vision, and his powers of reasoning were of the highest order. He was not unacquainted with the various schools of philosophy and he was a mathematician and was schooled in astronomy, frequently lecturing on that subject.

Few had a more profound knowledge of political economy. He knew his Henry George and his "Progress and Poverty" as few know them. He had built around these a philosophy that was all-satisfying. He was very daring in his applications and there were times when I hesitated to follow him. On one occasion I ventured to remonstrate with him and suggested that even if he were right it was perhaps injudicious to claim so much. His reply was, "I believe it—why should I not say it?" As if that were all!

He had the prophetic instinct. It is sometimes regretted by those nearest to him that he did not live to see the astounding growth of the School he had founded, that he could not possibly have foreseen it. But he did. Frequently he said to me: "This idea will grow more and more and when it has spread over the land and to other lands it will be said

that that little fellow did it." He was playful like that among his intimates and no trait of his character was more lovable than this.

His faith was greater than the faith of those who surrounded him. It seems incredible now that there should have been those who advised against the starting of this great venture or who urged him to delay it until some more propitious time. Many of lesser faith were swayed by his enthusiasm but had their doubts. "Where will the money come from?" I asked him. His invariably reply was, "It will come." Such was the faith that moves mountains.

One fault Oscar had. It was his undoing. He could not delegate his tasks to others. If anything was to be done, lessons to be prepared for the students, letters to be addressed, people to be seen, he must do all this himself. So he worked through the night. And he broke down. Strong as was his constitution, athlete, and capable of splendid physical effort, he demanded of himself too much. The constant strain on his soaring spirit broke suddenly. A great movement must make its sacrifices. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Let us turn now from Oscar Geiger the man to the institution that is the living and growing witness of his greatness, the Henry George School. From its early beginning when he was the only teacher with a mere handful of students, let me draw attention to the grand total of nine thousand graduates, an amazing increase over a period of a few years.

And still growing! It is not a fanciful estimate that in a few years it will have sent forth a larger number of graduates than any institution of learning in the world. This

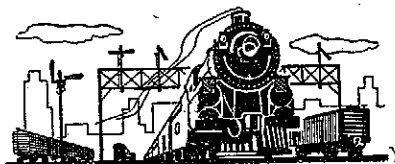
is well within the range of probability.

It may be said that the methods of teaching are being constantly scrutinized and improved. "Progress and Poverty" is the basic textbook, and the teachers—of whom there are now some sixty odd in New York City alone—see no reason for change in that Book of a Thousand Years if it were written tomorrow. Room for amplification and application there is, but none for revision. We are glad to see, too, that the spiritual ideals of the founder are the animating inspiration of the teachers and help to inform the dry bones of the science.

It has been my privilege to sit in many of the classes. It would be invidious to select names of any of the teachers for special mention. But all have aroused the spirit of inquiry among the students. And when it is considered that most of these teachers had only the faintest comprehension of the principles they are inculcating a few months back, the picture takes on a new significance. For these young people, teachers and students alike, are what George called "the file leaders of public opinion." It is inevitable that in the time to come they will influence popular thought and help to direct what Abe D. Waldauer happily called "the movement of mankind to the stars."

It is true that the students sometimes stumble. Who among us has not? But it is always noticeable that some one or more of the students volunteers a correction and the currents of thought move on to apparent agreement.

What is particularly to be observed, and which Director Chodorov has done much to encourage, is a spirit of tolerance among the students and teachers. No attempt is made to cram anything down the throats of the students and the result is a surprising open-mindedness. No attack is made upon socialism, communism or fascism. The School has its story to tell and it tells it. The antidote for false theories and



misconceptions is in the teaching. That is all that is necessary, and it works.

No Henry George adherent visiting New York City should fail to spend one evening at the School. There he will observe a scene of activity that will amaze him. Miss Teresa McCarthy, capable and efficient as well as amiable and charming, is in charge. She is aided by five or six stenographers and clerks who contribute to the admirable esprit de corps. All are competent

servants of a great cause and take pride in their work. And not to be overlooked are the volunteer workers, graduates who, after their daily labors, come to the School to help in the mighty work.

An irresistible impulse has been set in motion. The way has been found. And with the establishment of a permanent School building that is described elsewhere are the beginnings of a University from which the stream of world-wide educational movement will be directed.