

The Man Who Invented Plenty

ADDRESS BY A. C. CAMPBELL, AT THE HENRY GEORGE CENTENARY CONFERENCE

HENRY GEORGE'S "Progress and Poverty" has been spoken of as a book that marks an era. That is high praise, and true. But it is not high enough. This book made an era. In relation to matters in which we as Georgeists are interested, the history of mankind is divided sharply into two periods, the past, the era of scarcity; and the present, the era of plenty.

Nobody on earth knew—really knew—that the day of scarcity had passed and the day of plenty had dawned, until Henry George pointed out the fact. If any of you think I am wrong in that, I fear I shall have to leave you to hold your own opinion, except as the few facts that I shall give may possibly cause you to take a more favorable view of what I have said.

That Henry George intended to deny scarcity as well as to declare plenty is seen in the very title and subtitle of his book:

"Progress and Poverty"—An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy.

In writing the book he lost no time in making good that intention, for he began the very first page of his introductory chapter in this way:

The present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power. The utilization of steam and electricity, the introduction of improved processes and labor-saving machinery, the greater subdivision and grander scale of production, the wonderful facilitation of exchanges, have multiplied enormously the effectiveness of labor.

There was the declaration of plenty for a beginning. But to give his view of what that plenty meant, he anticipates all the argument of the ten books, into which his work is divided, by a bit of prophecy, a vision, if you like. He invokes the shade of one of the great ones of the century before—"a Franklin or a Priestly," as he puts it, and presents to the reader what this great soul would have thought of the condition of the world which had before it so many great improvements in wealth-producing power. And this is the conclusion he found in that ghostly brain:

Plainly, in the sight of the imagination, he would have beheld these new forces elevating society from its very foundations, lifting the very poorest above the possibility of want, exempting the very lowest from anxiety for the material needs of life; he would have seen these slaves of the lamp of knowledge taking on themselves the traditional curse, these muscles of iron and sinews of steel making the poorest laborer's life a holiday, in which every high quality and noble impulse would have scope to grow. . . . Foul things fled, fierce things tamed,

discord turned to harmony. For how could there be greed where all had enough? How could the vice, the crime, the ignorance, the brutality, that spring from poverty and the fear of poverty, exist where poverty had vanished? Who should crouch where all were freemen? Who oppress where all were peers?

Now, if I may change the scene: Just imagine old George John Douglas Campbell, eighth Duke of Argyle, descendant of a line of Scottish chiefs, head of a great clan, owner of lands and palaces; statesman, scientist, philosopher, interpreter of religion; receiving a book as a present from its author as shown in a letter dated San Francisco. And when he opens the book he finds, by its bulk and style, that it is a long argument on political economy. And it begins with the outlandish suggestion that this is a world of plenty, and this suggestion immediately followed by a vision of the ghost of some illustrious departed who sees that all the people are to be rich and good and happy. And when he read on—as he seems to have done, however skipingly and with whatever apparent determination to misunderstand—and found that this spread of plenty was to be brought about by the unheard-of proposal to tax all landlords out of their holdings well, what could you expect? Of course you would expect what actually came to pass—His Grace sat down and wrote an article for a great British review in which he called upon his fellow-lights of literature to sympathize with one another in the infliction upon them of the wild, outrageously immoral views of people from everywhere. He patronizingly argued with this presumptuous person in San Francisco, Henry George by name, not with a view to convincing him, of course, but to show his own scholars and well-to-do readers how utterly foolish were the supposed arguments of these visionaries who would tread the shaded and orderly paths of learning. And, as if he was conscious that he himself was not doing so tremendously well in the argument, he fell to calling names—he dubbed George "The Prophet of San Francisco."

Of course, His Grace, the Duke of Argyle was wrong. But he was not the only one who read the message of Henry George with little understanding. I thought for years how much more clearly I read that message than did the illustrious head of the clan whose name I bear. Of late, I have not been quite so sure. At least the Duke recognized George as a prophet—false prophet, of course, but, nevertheless, outside and apart from the common run of men. I was very clear in my own mind that Henry George was right in everything he said, both in "Progress and Poverty" and in the article in which he answered his critic. But I did not realize what this man George said—said so plainly as I read it now—that the past of scarcity was the past, and the future of plenty had begun and was well on its way.

We are sixty years into that future since the year 1879.

I heard Henry George speak to an audience in Toronto

I had the honor to be an active member of the Committee of the Anti-Poverty Society that arranged for his coming to that city. Only one word of his as spoken on that occasion remains in my memory. With a gesture of hope and confidence, and in ringing tones, he declared: "Men and brethren, the future is ours."

I believed that then; I believe it more than ever today. But I should have been sad indeed had I thought that in 1939 we should see so much poverty, and, relatively, so little progress.

I honor all those devoted believers who have carried on the work that Henry George left to be done. But the very fact that such a company, such a glorious succession of great souls, could work through two full generations and yet find the world as it is today, compels me to believe that the Henry George movement has not carried on as it might have carried on. I make that statement in all humility, for I realize keenly, as one who early in life, and early in the movement, took up this great cause, that my own share of the work might have been far better done. As Shakespeare's most perfect hero, Orlando, says: "I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults."

I hope you will not think me presumptuous in thus bringing my errors before you. You are not interested in these things. And neither am I, except as introducing what I hope may prove a suggestion for more work on a better line.

In the sixty years since "Progress and Poverty" was written, the logic of events has convinced many, many people who never heard the name of Henry George, that the word of Henry George was true:—certainly this present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power. If George with the eye of a true seer, the inspiration of a true prophet, could declare that the few almost rudimentary inventions of his day enabled man to produce plenty, what shall we say of this very day and hour in which we live? Some people tell us that since the year 1900—or, to be safe, let us count from Henry George's date, 1879—there has been greater progress in discovery and invention than in all the experience of mankind up to that year. Consider: The whole world has been discovered or re-discovered in that time, not merely made known as existing, but mapped and scientifically described.

We have made vast new systems, little known and less used—if at all—in 1879:—hydro-electric systems; telephone and radio systems; air navigation systems; permanent highway systems. We have covered the earth with new forms of agriculture, of mining, of manufacture. But why attempt the whole catalogue? If, in Henry George's time there was plenty to be seen by the one man of clearest vision, the plenty of our time is mountainous, and actually obtrusive. It would hardly be

unfair to say that, threatened with overwhelming plenty we turn, as it were in despair, back to the old ways of shortage, scarcity, even if we have to seek that goal through the fires of world war.

Mankind in general now knows by sheer experience what Henry George knew sixty years ago by sheer prophecy—that this is a world and age of plenty.

My proposal is that we should use the advantage that this gives us.

My fellow Georgeists—I mean those with whom I am in closest contact—change the subject when I talk my everlasting talk of Plenty. They talk Single Tax. I realize that this is courteous in them, and I thank them for indicating that, having plenty and knowing that we have plenty, we should go ahead.

That is exactly what I want to say to these courteous people and to all other followers of Henry George. We should go ahead from this point of plenty.

Of these people whom we meet in everyday life, there is hardly one who does not know that plenty is the one great new fact of today. But, if you are to lead these people to the Single Tax you must first stand where they stand. No use to stand far ahead of them and ask them to catch up with us. We have read "Progress and Poverty" from the first word of the title to the last line of the index. But what do these people in the street know about what we have read? How are they to know whether wages are paid out of capital or out of the aurora borealis? What do they know about the cause of interest, or the difference between taxing land and taxing land values? They know only two things: They know that there is plenty, and they know that they want plenty. But the one big thing is the one thing they do *not* know. They do not know that, in declaring their belief in plenty, they declare themselves to be converts and followers of Henry George.

I would tell them that—I would tell them that they stand exactly where we stand and have always stood. Then I would invite them to come on with us. They are converts and followers of the man, who, sixty years ago, by almost unexampled powers of foresight and insight *discovered* the principle of plenty. But now they should know that this same man is the man who *invented* plenty.

Please consider a comparison.

Suppose a man—the man who first saw and realized, and perhaps proved, the expansive power of steam—suppose that he worked it out by an elaborate series of tests and comparisons. Then what? That would mean only one thing—in a practical world—that he was preparing for the coming of other men, especially a Scotsman named James Watt who was to consider all the science of the case, including the complete inventions down to his own time, and tie it all in with an idea of his own—and call the whole thing, when complete, the steam engine.

I have said, and I repeat: Henry George was the discoverer of plenty. I do not say that no person ever saw the principle of plenty before George saw it; I do not say that no man ever spoke or wrote about it before. We find both the idea and the very word itself in some of the most ancient books we know. But these things are observance of fact, merely casual and unrelated fact, just as a million men must have observed the fact of the power of steam before anyone ever thought of it as embodying a principle.

But Henry George did not stop with discovery. He invented plenty, just as definitely as James Watt invented the steam engine. We who are here know that the so-called Single Tax is not a mere unrelated suggestion. It is the means by which the principle of plenty is to operate as a force in society, just as the power of steam operates as a mechanical force through the steam engine.

Henry George saw it in that way. Over and over and over again, from the beginning of "Progress and Poverty" to its end, he presents this idea of plenty. He carries it through the statement of the Single Tax, he bears it in mind and refers to it in his demonstration of the correctness of the Single Tax in principle and the soundness of it in practical application; and he sees it as clearly as ever in the vision with which he ends the book. Here is what he says: "With want destroyed; with greed changed to noble passions; with the fraternity that is born of equality taking the place of the jealousy and fear that array men against each other; with mental power loosed by conditions that give to the humblest wealth and leisure; and who shall measure the heights to which our civilization may soar? Words fail the thought. It is the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor. It is the glorious vision that has always haunted men with gleams of fitful splendor. . . . It is the reign of the Prince of Peace."

It is a great thing to discover a new force at work in the social life of mankind; it is an illimitably greater thing to work out the details of a social mechanism that shall show mankind how that newly-discovered principle, instead of leading to undeserved poverty for many, undeserved riches for a few, shall spread, in beneficent nature's fashion, for the enjoyment of all; instead of breeding jealousies, divisions, antagonisms and world war, shall bring the day foreseen by the greatest poet of democracy:

"When man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."

This present meeting of ours is easily the greatest occasion of our movement. It declaredly is a century mark. I am confident that it is more than that. A century is only a period of time; the advance of public opinion cannot be marked in periods by the almanac. I have shown that all the world notes with wonder and with hope, the fact of plenty as turned out by modern methods and

machines. This means that at this time the learning, the institutions, the beliefs, of mankind are brought before the judgment seat of public opinion to be re-examined, re-appraised and re-arranged in accord with the new principle of plenty instead of with the old principle of scarcity. Instead of the old procedure of assuming that a man is a vagrant and a burden upon society unless he can show to judge and jury that he has his own means of support, it is now assumed that a man shares the world's plenty, both in making it and in enjoying it, until the contrary is proven:—and if proven, that case calls for readjustment in accord with the known principle of plenty.

I have quoted this great book of ours, "Progress and Poverty," to show that its one purpose is to prove and commend and apply the principle of plenty. But to whom is all this tremendous argument and more tremendous prophecy addressed? To all the world, of course. But to whom directly and specially? May I read this that I find between the title page and the first page of the introduction?

"To those who, seeing the vice and misery that spring from the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege, feel the possibility of a higher social state and would strive for its attainment."

Since that time there have been tens of thousands of men and women who have striven in this great cause. I have freely confessed that some of us have not done all that we might have done nor achieved our best. But, for one, I see in present conditions a new and most attractive opportunity. The truth of plenty that was seen, and declared, and proved, by the Prophet of San Francisco in his time, is accepted as a matter of course by millions of people today. The way to spread that plenty to the end of achieving the higher social state is to set in operation that finest economic device, the Single Tax on land values, which our leader invented and prepared for use by all mankind. The millions who believe today in the plenty which Henry George so clearly made known in 1879 await the leadership that shall cause them to understand and adopt this great invention.

We are a company of Georgeists assembled from all parts of the world. We are assembled in honor of the centenary of our leader. We are assembled in the great metropolis of which he became an illustrious citizen—the city in which his body rests and his monument is raised. We are here at a time of celebration of an idea, a sentiment, a vision such as our leader lived by and lived for—The World of Tomorrow. The world of tomorrow is a world of plenty. There remains the work of science, of skill, of goodwill, of brotherhood that shall translate plenty for all into plenty for each.

To that work we are especially called by the fact that we are followers of the Prophet of San Francisco, the man who invented plenty.