

Henry George League of Victoria

THE COMMEMORATION FUNCTION

The Annual George Commemoration was held on the 5th of September in Scots Church Hall, Russell Street. We departed from our customary dinner and reverted to the Social. Mr. Pitt the younger was in the chair. Mr. Craigie, who came specially from Adelaide gave the address and, as was to be expected, it was a masterly effort. He contrasted the Georgian idea with others looming up, particularly the great Frankenstein with feet of clay; and made plain how so much of our modern legislation is creeping Socialism. Mr. Craigie struck a blow at the Malthusian head which is bobbing up again, especially in certain clerical quarters. If folk would read Progress and Poverty they would see that George dealt devastatingly with the subject. Mr. Craigie dealt with the functions of Government showing that if Governments stuck to their true and legitimate functions we would soon arrive at our goal, viz., freedom.

We were besides delightfully entertained firstly by Mrs. Marshall, whose songs, and her singing of them, were alike most pleasing. Also by Mr. Alex Duncan who whistled so thrillingly that one could wish he had been heard by a certain eminent Melbourne musician who likes all forms of music except whistling.

It was a good gathering. Three at least of us who had heard the great George were present.

Mr. McDonald, our soundest economist and one most devoted to the cause, pluckily got there and we were all delighted to see him and his niece.

Supper time afforded opportunity for social intercourse.

MR. CRAIGIE'S ADDRESS

Mr. Craigie said we were gathered together to do honor to one of the great benefactors of the human race. Henry George was born on September 2, 1839. He started life as an office boy, but after many adversities he undertook newspaper work and commenced to write and speak on public questions. Henry George gave his life for the cause he had at heart and his followers must be prepared to make sacrifices. Their duty is to use their energies in spreading the doctrine which they know will make for the establishment of the brotherhood of man.

In 1866 Henry George was engaged in newspaper work, and was soon called from the printer's case to the reporter's desk. Because of his great ability within six months he rose to the position of managing editor. It was the great contrast of poverty with wealth witnessed by Henry George during a visit to New York in 1868-69 that was the primary cause of the formulation of his philosophy presented to the world in his great book "Progress and Poverty." Though engaged in the work of establishing a telegraphic news service George found time to study the problems which beset mankind. In his spare time he studied social conditions and found that special privileges were obtained by the few, whilst others huddled in filth and misery. Then an unknown man of 30 years, he refused to believe that what he saw was the natural order. Without advertising the fact he set himself the task of finding the laws governing the production and distribution of wealth.

That his resolution to do this was not an idle one we all know. He believed that poverty was a crime because nature had not been niggardly, but had provided plenty for all. In "The Crime of Poverty" he showed the cause of poverty must be a common one, because irrespective of the form of government, poverty was common to all countries. He found this common cause was the appropriation by the few of that natural element that all must have access to if they are to exist.

In denouncing land monopoly George met fierce opposition. This did not trouble him, but the apathy of the people did. This is evident from the illustration he gives in "Protection of Free Trade" of the bull winding the rope about the stake until he was unable to reach the rich grass all around him. This illustration might well be applied to many wealth producers today. Instead of demanding access to natural opportunities and working for greater freedom they demanded all kinds of palliatives and restrictions which merely fastened additional parasites on their backs.

Realising that men could not be driven to freedom, Henry George tried to lead them. He examined orthodox political economy and rejected many of its theories. He exposed the fallacy that Capital employed Labor and advanced the wages of labor, and showed that production was always the mother of wages. He rejected the Malthusian theory that population pressed upon subsistence, and showed how man by his knowledge and inventions overcame the pressure by increasing production. He investigated the Law of Rent, and showed how rent rises with the lowering of the margin of production, and that wages correspondingly fell with the lower margin. He showed that when land was held out of use the effect was to force the margin back, thus increasing rent and decreasing wages and interest.

Henry George's study of the social problem led him to see that man was a land animal, getting his food, clothing and shelter from mother earth, and that production of these things could only be secured by the free use of the earth. He found that opportunities to produce were limited by artificial means. People wanted work and the things which work produced, while the land on which their labor could be employed was kept idle or only partly used. He saw that the problem demanding attention was to explain why in modern society we had want amidst abundance. This same problem confronts modern society, and the solution can only be found in the philosophy of Henry George.

And what are the underlying principles of Georgian philosophy? George saw that everyone was born with equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That these rights carried with them a further right -- the equal right of all to enjoy free access to land. Everything needed for the satisfaction of human desires came by labor applied to land.

Others besides George had glimpsed this truth but it was left to him to unfold the true relationship of land to the labor question. George made it clear that equal rights to land did not mean parcelling out the land in equal portions, as some had suggested. Such action did not make for social justice. Certain

areas were worth more than others, either because they were more desirable for business or residential sites, or by reason of greater fertility.

Henry George made it clear there was no need to divide the land in the manner suggested, and that equal rights could be secured by easier means. He saw that justice could be done by the simple policy of collecting rent for public purposes. He recognised that land varied in value, and only by the free operation of the Law of Competition could its value be determined.

He saw that certain land with a given expenditure of labor and capital on it would return 20 bushels of wheat per acre, while other land with the same expenditure would yield only 10 bushels. Naturally every one desired the land of greatest fertility and with the best situation and social services, and the Law of Competition indicated the premium people were prepared to pay to have the exclusive possession of the more favoured sites. When this premium, or rent, was taken for public purposes and used to defray the cost of public works and social services, justice was done to all sections of the community.

Those living in the areas adjacent to the social services or where productivity was high, would pay the highest amount of rent into the public treasury, and other occupants would have their payments graded according to benefits received from social services. In this manner those on less favoured sites would be compensated for the disability they suffered, and through the payment of a lower rent the principle of equality of opportunity was assured to all.

Henry George showed that rent was sufficient to meet the cost of all NECESSARY government, consequently there was no need for the taxes levied on wages, or on the necessities of life. He showed that a policy of this nature would lower the cost of production, thereby encourage production and development to the fullest extent, reduce the cost of living and give all wealth producers the full earnings of their labor. He also made it clear that the application of his principles would put an end to war. When rent went into the public treasury there would be no desire on the part of privileged interests to "grab" the natural resources of any other country. The removal of tariffs, quotas, embargoes, currency manipulation, and all other restrictions from trade would produce peace and goodwill among the nations of the world, instead of the strife engendered by present restrictive policies.

When George discovered the remedy for social ills he set forth to preach it. He addressed meetings in U.S.A., Great Britain and Australia. In 1877 he stood for the Californian legislature but was not successful. In 1886 he was nominated as candidate for the Mayoralty of New York. He polled 68,110 votes, or about 8,000 more than was polled by Theodore Roosevelt, who was one of the candidates.

His last fight was one for social purity, but the strain of the campaign proved too much for him, and he died, as he probably would have wished to die, in a struggle to realise the principles he held dear.

Henry George gave to the world a number of splendid books dealing with all phases of the principles he expounded. No bookshelf should be without them,

as they give a clearer view of economic principles than any other books written.

Of Henry George it may truly be said: "Though his body lies mouldering in the grave, his soul goes marching on."

And so tonight we gather to revere his memory, and throughout the world, wherever two or three are gathered together for righteousness' sake, there will the name of Henry George be held in reverence. The bright example of his noble, self-sacrificing life will act as an inspiration to all his followers and give them strength to continue the glorious work done by him for the alleviation of suffering and the emancipation of mankind.