


HENRY GEORGE

(1839-1897)

BY ROBERT MURRAY HAIG

T is a peculiar fact that the most widely-read American book in the field of economics, Henry George's (*Progress and Poverty*), was written by a man who was not a professional economist. It is perhaps as strange that this man, who to such a marked degree succeeded in presenting obtuse material in a form attractive enough to charm thousands of those who seldom are drawn to serious reading, was one whose formal training was very inadequate and apparently ill-adapted to the development of ability as a writer. Henry George's youth was spent under very difficult conditions; nevertheless it is in these conditions that one must search for many of the causes of his distinction, both as a writer and as an economist.

George was the son of a publisher of religious books in Philadelphia and was one of twelve children. The father's business, which had yielded a comfortable income, began to decline soon after 1839, the year of Henry George's birth, and, largely because of this, the boy left school before he had reached his fourteenth year. After spending two years in minor clerical positions, he obtained his parents' consent to go to sea and shipped as a sailor before the mast on an East Indiaman bound for Australia. The ship was in command of a friend of the family who had been especially requested to make the voyage sufficiently unpleasant to quench the boy's nautical ambitions. This plan appears not to have been entirely successful, for, upon George's return after more than a year it was only after great urging that he yielded to his parents' desire that he remain ashore and apprentice himself as a typesetter. But these were years of depression in Philadelphia, and, finding employment difficult to procure, George's thoughts soon turned westward. Toward the end of 1857, he found a way of reaching the Pacific coast by signing as steward on the United States lighthouse steamer «Shubrick» which was about to leave for San Francisco. So it came about that Henry George at the age of eighteen reached California, where he was to live until he was forty under conditions which awakened him to an appreciation of the evils involved in the private ownership of land and stirred him to initiate a battle against this form of privilege which has spread over the entire civilized world and whose issue is even yet far from a final decision.

California at this time was developing at a tremendous rate as the

result of the discovery of gold a decade before. Because of this fact, some of the disadvantages of the private ownership of land stood out with great clearness. The state had inherited a legacy of conflicting land titles from the Spanish and Mexican régimes, and the stupid land policy followed after the American occupation permitted the seizure of a huge portion of the state's choicest land by speculators who withheld much of it from the market. Henry George was to witness the retarding and depressing influence of these factors.

Conditions moreover were unstable and exceedingly dynamic. Sudden changes in fortune were taking place on all sides. New projects were constantly springing up and old ones abandoned. There was little co-ordination and evenness in the economic situation. Consequently, though wages were high, employment was irregular. The story of Henry George's efforts to make a living illustrates the situation very clearly. He was constantly losing one position after a few weeks only to take up another which was no more permanent. His bitter personal experiences, for he was often without work and was reduced sometimes nearly to desperation, undoubtedly had a very profound effect upon the development of his economic philosophy.

Hardly had he landed in San Francisco before he set forth on a fruitless quest to the Fraser River goldfields near Victoria, Vancouver Island. Returning after a few months, he found work first in a printing office and then as a weigher in a rice mill. But soon he set off once more in search of gold, tramping across country for several months but finally abandoning the project before reaching the goldfields. Returning to San Francisco, he once more took up work at the printer's case. In 1861 he bought for a pittance a share in an ill-starred newspaper venture to which he contributed his labor for a considerable length of time. Shortly after the failure of this project, when without funds and without employment, he married an orphan against the wishes of her guardian and went to Sacramento to live. Here he remained for several years, but early in 1864, having lost his position, he returned to San Francisco. Here he set type, started a job-printing venture, peddled clothes-wringers, and solicited subscriptions to newspapers — anything to secure sufficient money to support his wife and child. In January, 1865, when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, his second child was born. He was without funds, and not knowing where to turn to secure food for his sick wife, he begged from a stranger he met on the street. He stated afterward that, if he had been refused the five dollars he asked of the man, he «was desperate enough to have killed him.» It is not strange that one who himself had had such experiences as this should be keenly interested in the question of the distribution of wealth.

During these years George had had little time for intellectual pursuits, but in his eagerness to improve his condition, he now began to

read and to write upon miscellaneous subjects, hoping to secure a reporting and editing position. Occasionally he wrote for publication, but it was not until he was twenty-seven years old that he was entirely released from the composing-room by being made a member of the staff of the San Francisco Times. He was with this paper about a year, and was then sent East on a commission for the San Francisco Herald.

The winter of 1868-1869 George spent in New York and he had the opportunity to observe economic conditions in the metropolis and to compare them with those in the far West. It was on this visit, he testifies, that he «saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want,» and as the result of what was essentially a religious experience — «a thought, a vision, a call,» he described it — he vowed to «seek out and remedy» the frightful conditions among the poor. Soon after his return to California he went to Oakland as editor of the Transcript. Land speculation, based upon the prospects for the extension of the trans-continental railroad, was rife in the town, and values had risen to «extravagant figures.» Having had his attention called one day to some acreage far out from the town which was being held for an enormous price, he suddenly found what he felt was a solution of the problem which had been raised so acutely in his mind in New York. He says: «Like a flash it came upon me that *there* was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, lands grow in value and the men who work it must pay for the privilege.» It was this seed thought which ripened into his little pamphlet (Our Land and Land Policy,) published in 1871, and which developed into the fundamental thesis of (Progress and Poverty) a decade later. He continued with newspaper work until 1876 when an appointment as State Inspector of Gas Meters removed for a time the most pressing of his financial worries and gave him sufficient leisure to read and to write. Early in 1879 he finished the book which was to make him famous.

(Progress and Poverty,) in spite of the enormous popularity which it later attained, made at first no appeal at all to the publishers. After submitting the manuscript to a number of houses, George decided that the only feasible plan was to print the book privately, and persuaded a printer-friend to make the plates and issue an author's edition of five hundred copies. With the plates available he again sought a publisher, and at last persuaded Appletons to accept the book, the edition appearing early in 1880. Before the end of the year a second edition bound in paper was published. In 1881 the book was printed in serial form in Truth, a one-cent daily paper of fairly large circulation in New York. The first English edition appeared in 1881 and met with «astonishing success.» Two cheap paper editions appeared

in England in 1882 and another in America in 1883. Translations soon began to be made. Thus it early became evident that the author's confidence in his book was amply justified.

This is not the place to undertake an exposition of Henry George's views or to attempt a criticism of them. Suffice it to say that the publication of *(Progress and Poverty)* marked the beginning of the present-day Single-Tax movement, and that the strength which the movement has developed is almost entirely due to the power and appeal of this book, coupled with the personality of its author. Henry George now (1880) moved to New York, and devoted the remainder of his life to spreading his gospel of land taxation. His activities carried him five times to England and once to Australia. He developed skill as a speaker so that his lecturing became perhaps as effective a tool for propaganda as his writings. His later books never attained the position of *(Progress and Poverty)*, although his *(Protection or Free Trade?)*, published as part of the Congressional record, was circulated very widely. For a number of years he edited a weekly paper, the *Standard*, devoted to the interests of the Single Tax. Writing, lecturing, and editing, he set in motion forces which aroused interest in almost every civilized country.

Early in life George had political ambitions, but these failed of realization. During his later years invitations to become a candidate for public office came to him several times, and he accepted because of the opportunity they offered to further his views on the land question. Thus in 1886 he became the labor candidate for Mayor of the city of New York, and ran second in a three-cornered fight which was won by Abram S. Hewitt. The following year he ran for Secretary of State of New York, but was badly defeated. Again in 1897 he was urged to become a candidate for Mayor, and, in spite of the fact that his health was broken and he was warned that to enter the contest would be highly dangerous, he consented and inaugurated a vigorous campaign. His strength proved adequate until five days before the election, but on October 28th, after an evening during which he delivered four addresses, he collapsed and suddenly died.

Even twenty years after his death it is not an easy matter to appraise the influence and the value of the work of Henry George. He never was an economist's economist, a fact which appears to have been a source of considerable disappointment to him. Although he won disciples by the thousand who accepted his book as a revelation and who labored for the accomplishment of his program with great fervor and devotion, the professional economists either ignored him or openly opposed him. Doubtless the explanation is partly that George's fundamental theory was already familiar and that his criticisms of the classical political economy were attacks upon an explanation which was already realized to be inadequate. But probably

more important was the conviction that George's remedy was more serious than the disease; that his proposal was an attack upon what was after all a predominantly middle-class investment which would result in more evil than good. But if the economists have not felt themselves justified in hailing Henry George as the great and only prophet, they, as a class, have come to regard land as a peculiarly attractive subject for special taxation, and the various modified forms of George's proposal have won a considerable number of adherents in academic circles.

The value of George's work is, however, not to be judged by the measure of its acceptance by economists. There is little doubt that the general movement toward land reform and the special taxation of land which looms so large in the modern programs of social reform should be mainly credited to the author of *(Progress and Poverty.)* And although it appears to-day less probable than ever that the Single-Tax program will be adopted in the complete manner advocated by George, the tendency of progress in taxation is indisputably toward an arrangement which much more nearly approximates Henry George's ideal than the existing system.

The authorities mainly used are: *(The Life of Henry George,)* by Henry George, Jr., (2 vols., Doubleday, Page and Co., 1911), and *(The Single Tax Movement in the United States)* by Arthur Nichols Young (Princeton University Press, 1916).

THE PROBLEM

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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.

At the beginning of this marvelous era it was natural to expect, and it was expected, that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the laborer; that the enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past. Could a man of the last century — a Franklin or a Priestley — have seen, in a vision of the future, the steamship taking the place of the sailing vessel, the railroad train of the wagon, the reaping machine of the scythe, the threshing machine of the

flail; could he have heard the throb of the engines that in obedience to human will, and for the satisfaction of human desire, exert a power greater than that of all the men and all the beasts of burden of the earth combined; could he have seen the forest tree transformed into finished lumber — into doors, sashes, blinds, boxes, or barrels, with hardly the touch of a human hand; the great workshops where boots and shoes are turned out by the case with less labor than the old-fashioned cobbler could have put on a sole; the factories where, under the eye of a girl, cotton becomes cloth faster than hundreds of stalwart weavers could have turned it out with their hand looms; could he have seen steam hammers shaping mammoth shafts and mighty anchors, and delicate machinery making tiny watches; the diamond drill cutting through the heart of the rocks, and coal oil sparing the whale; could he have realized the enormous saving of labor resulting from improved facilities of exchange and communication — sheep killed in Australia eaten fresh in England, and the order given by the London banker in the afternoon executed in San Francisco in the morning of the same day; could he have conceived of the hundred thousand improvements which these only suggest, what would he have inferred as to the social condition of mankind?

It would not have seemed like an inference; further than the vision went it would have seemed as though he saw; and his heart would have leaped and his nerves would have thrilled, as one who from a height beholds just ahead of the thirst-stricken caravan the living gleam of rustling woods and the glint of laughing waters. 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 could have scope to grow.

And out of these bounteous material conditions he would have seen arising, as necessary sequences, moral conditions realizing the golden age of which mankind have always dreamed. Youth no longer stunted and starved; age no longer harried by avarice; the child at play with the tiger; the man with the muck-rake drinking in the glory of the stars! Foul things fled, fierce things tame; 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?

More or less vague or clear, these have been the hopes, these the dreams born of the improvements which give this wonderful century its pre-eminence. They have sunk so deeply into the popular mind as radically to change the currents of thought, to recast creeds, and displace the most fundamental conceptions. The haunting visions of higher possibilities have not merely gathered splendor and vividness, but their direction has changed — instead of seeing behind the faint tinges of an expiring sunset, all the glory of the daybreak has decked the skies before.

It is true that disappointment has followed disappointment, and that discovery upon discovery, and invention after invention, have neither lessened the toil of those who most need respite, nor brought plenty to the poor. But there have been so many things to which it seemed this failure could be laid, that up to our time the new faith has hardly weakened. We have better appreciated the difficulties to be overcome; but not the less trusted that the tendency of the times was to overcome them.

Now, however, we are coming into collision with facts which there can be no mistaking. From all parts of the civilized world come complaints of industrial depression; of labor condemned to involuntary idleness; of capital massed and wasting; of pecuniary distress among business men; of want and suffering and anxiety among the working classes. All the dull, deadening pain, all the keen, maddening anguish, that to great masses of men are involved in the words «hard times,» afflict the world to-day. This state of things, common to communities differing so widely in situation, in political institutions, in fiscal and financial systems, in density of population, and in social organization, can hardly be accounted for by local causes. There is distress where large standing armies are maintained, but there is also distress where the standing armies are nominal; there is distress where protective tariffs stupidly and wastefully hamper trade, but there is also distress where trade is nearly free; there is distress where autocratic government yet prevails, but there is also distress where political power is wholly in the hands of the people; in countries where paper is money, and in countries where gold and silver are the only currency. Evidently, beneath all such things as these, we must infer a common cause.

That there is a common cause, and that it is either what we call

material progress or something closely connected with material progress, becomes more than an inference when it is noted that the phenomena we class together and speak of as industrial depression are but intensifications of phenomena which always accompany material progress, and which show themselves more clearly and strongly as material progress goes on. Where the conditions to which material progress everywhere tends are most fully realized — that is to say, where population is densest, wealth greatest, and the machinery of production and exchange most highly developed — we find the deepest poverty, the sharpest struggle for existence, and the most of enforced idleness.

It is to the newer countries — that is, to the countries where material progress is yet in its earlier stages — that laborers emigrate in search of higher wages, and capital flows in search of higher interest. It is in the older countries — that is to say, the countries where material progress has reached later stages — that widespread destitution is found in the midst of the greatest abundance. Go into one of the new communities where Anglo-Saxon vigor is just beginning the race of progress; where the machinery of production and exchange is yet rude and inefficient; where the increment of wealth is not yet great enough to enable any class to live in ease and luxury; where the best house is but a cabin of logs or a cloth and paper shanty, and the richest man is forced to daily work — and though you will find an absence of wealth and all its concomitants, you will find no beggars. There is no luxury, but there is no destitution. No one makes an easy living, nor a very good living; but everyone *can* make a living, and no one able and willing to work is oppressed by the fear of want.

But just as such a community realizes the conditions which all civilized communities are striving for, and advances in the scale of material progress — just as closer settlement and a more intimate connection with the rest of the world, and greater utilization of labor-saving machinery, make possible greater economies in production and exchange, and wealth in consequence increases, not merely in the aggregate, but in proportion to population — so does poverty take a darker aspect. Some get an infinitely better and easier living, but others find it hard to get a living at all. The «tramp» comes with the locomotive, and almshouses and prisons are as surely the marks of «material progress» as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches. Upon streets lighted with gas and patrolled by uniformed policemen, beggars wait for the passer-by, and in the

shadow of college, and library, and museum, are gathering the more hideous Huns and fiercer Vandals of whom Macaulay prophesied.

This fact — the great fact that poverty and all its concomitants show themselves in communities just as they develop into the conditions toward which material progress tends — proves that the social difficulties existing wherever a certain stage of progress has been reached, do not arise from local circumstances, but are, in some way or another, engendered by progress itself.

And, unpleasant as it may be to admit it, it is at last becoming evident that the enormous increase in productive power which has marked the present century and is still going on with accelerating ratio, has no tendency to extirpate poverty or to lighten the burdens of those compelled to toil. It simply widens the gulf between Dives and Lazarus, and makes the struggle for existence more intense. The march of invention has clothed mankind with powers of which a century ago the boldest imagination could not have dreamed. But in factories where labor-saving machinery has reached its most wonderful development, little children are at work; wherever the new forces are anything like fully utilized, large classes are maintained by charity or live on the verge of recourse to it; amid the greatest accumulations of wealth, men die of starvation, and puny infants suckle dry breasts; while everywhere the greed of gain, the worship of wealth, shows the force of the fear of want. The promised land flies before us like the mirage. The fruits of the tree of knowledge turn as we grasp them to apples of Sodom that crumble at the touch.

It is true that wealth has been greatly increased, and that the average of comfort, leisure, and refinement has been raised; but these gains are not general. In them the lowest class do not share.¹ I do not mean that the condition of the lowest class has nowhere nor in anything been improved; but that there is nowhere any improvement which can be credited to increased productive power. I mean that the tendency of what we call material progress is in nowise to improve the condition of the lowest class in the essentials of healthy, happy human life. Nay, more, that it is still further to depress the condition of the lowest class. The new forces, elevating

¹ It is true that the poorest may now in certain ways enjoy what the richest a century ago could not have commanded, but this does not show improvement of condition so long as the ability to obtain the necessities of life is not increased. The beggar in a great city may enjoy many things from which the backwoods farmer is debarred, but that does not prove the condition of the city beggar better than that of the independent farmer.

in their nature though they be, do not act upon the social fabric from underneath, as was for a long time hoped and believed, but strike it at a point intermediate between top and bottom. It is as though an immense wedge were being forced, not underneath society, but through society. Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below are crushed down.

This depressing effect is not generally realized, for it is not apparent where there has long existed a class just able to live. Where the lowest class barely lives, as has been the case for a long time in many parts of Europe, it is impossible for it to get any lower, for the next lowest step is out of existence, and no tendency to further depression can readily show itself. But in the progress of new settlements to the conditions of older communities it may clearly be seen that material progress does not merely fail to relieve poverty — it actually produces it. In the United States it is clear that squalor and misery, and the vices and crimes that spring from them, everywhere increase as the village grows to the city, and the march of development brings the advantages of the improved methods of production and exchange. It is in the older and richer sections of the Union that pauperism and distress among the working classes are becoming most painfully apparent. If there is less deep poverty in San Francisco than in New York, is it not because San Francisco is yet behind New York in all that both cities are striving for? When San Francisco reaches the point where New York now is, who can doubt that there will also be ragged and barefooted children on her streets?

This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social, and political difficulties that perplex the world, and with which statesmanship and philanthropy and education grapple in vain. From it come the clouds that overhang the future of the most progressive and self-reliant nations. It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed. So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. The reaction must come. The tower leans from its foundations, and every new story but hastens the final catastrophe. To educate men who must be condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal, is to stand a pyramid on its apex.

All-important as this question is, pressing itself from every quarter painfully upon attention, it has not yet received a solution which accounts for all the facts and points to any clear and simple remedy. This is shown by the widely varying attempts to account for the prevailing depression. They exhibit not merely a divergence between vulgar notions and scientific theories, but also show that the concurrence which should exist between those who avow the same general theories breaks up upon practical questions into an anarchy of opinion. Upon high economic authority we have been told that the prevailing depression is due to over-consumption; upon equally high authority, that it is due to over-production; while the wastes of war, the extension of railroads, the attempts of workmen to keep up wages, the demonetization of silver, the issues of paper money, the increase of labor-saving machinery, the opening of shorter avenues to trade, etc., are separately pointed out as the cause, by writers of reputation.

And while professors thus disagree, the ideas that there is a necessary conflict between capital and labor, that machinery is an evil, that competition must be restrained and interest abolished, that wealth may be created by the issue of money, that it is the duty of government to furnish capital or to furnish work, are rapidly making way among the great body of the people, who keenly feel a hurt and are sharply conscious of a wrong. Such ideas, which bring great masses of men, the repositories of ultimate political power, under the leadership of charlatans and demagogues, are fraught with danger; but they cannot be successfully combated until political economy shall give some answer to the great question which shall be consistent with all her teachings, and which shall commend itself to the perceptions of the great masses of men.

It must be within the province of political economy to give such an answer. For political economy is not a set of dogmas. It is the explanation of a certain set of facts. It is the science which, in the sequence of certain phenomena, seeks to trace mutual relations and to identify cause and effect, just as the physical sciences seek to do in other sets of phenomena. It lays its foundations upon firm ground. The premises from which it makes its deductions are truths which have the highest sanction; axioms which we all recognize; upon which we safely base the reasoning and actions of every-day life, and which may be reduced to the metaphysical expression of the physical law that motion seeks the line of least resistance — viz., that men seek to gratify their desires with the least exertion. Proceeding

from a basis thus assured, its processes, which consist simply in identification and separation, have the same certainty. In this sense it is as exact a science as geometry, which, from similar truths relative to space, obtains its conclusions by similar means, and its conclusions when valid should be as self-apparent. And although in the domain of political economy we cannot test our theories by artificially produced combinations or conditions, as may be done in some of the other sciences, yet we can apply tests no less conclusive, by comparing societies in which different conditions exist, or by, in imagination, separating, combining, adding, or eliminating forces or factors of known direction.

I propose in the following pages to attempt to solve by the methods of political economy the great problem I have outlined. I propose to seek the law which associates poverty with progress, and increases want with advancing wealth; and I believe that in the explanation of this paradox we shall find the explanation of those recurring seasons of industrial and commercial paralysis which, viewed independently of their relations to more general phenomena, seem so inexplicable. Properly commenced and carefully pursued, such an investigation must yield a conclusion that will stand every test, and, as truth, will correlate with all other truth. For in the sequence of phenomena there is no accident. Every effect has a cause, and every fact implies a preceding fact.

That political economy, as at present taught, does not explain the persistence of poverty amid advancing wealth in a manner which accords with the deep-seated perceptions of men; that the unquestionable truths which it does teach are unrelated and disjointed; that it has failed to make the progress in popular thought that truth, even when unpleasant, must make; that, on the contrary, after a century of cultivation, during which it has engrossed the attention of some of the most subtle and powerful intellects, it should be spurned by the statesman, scouted by the masses, and relegated in the opinion of many educated and thinking men to the rank of a pseudo-science in which nothing is fixed or can be fixed — must, it seems to me, be due not to any inability of the science when properly pursued, but to some false step in its premises, or overlooked factor in its estimates. And as such mistakes are generally concealed by the respect paid to authority, I propose in this inquiry to take nothing for granted, but to bring even accepted theories to the test of first principles, and should they not stand the test, freshly to interrogate facts in the endeavor to discover their law.

I propose to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow truth wherever it may lead. Upon us is the responsibility of seeking the law, for in the very heart of our civilization to-day women faint and little children moan. But what that law may prove to be is not our affair. If the conclusions that we reach run counter to our prejudices, let us not flinch; if they challenge institutions that have long been deemed wise and natural, let us not turn back.

THE REMEDY

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WE have traced the want and suffering that everywhere prevail among the working classes, the recurring paroxysms of industrial depression, the scarcity of employment, the stagnation of capital, the tendency of wages to the starvation point, that exhibit themselves more and more strongly as material progress goes on, to the fact that the land on which and from which all must live is made the exclusive property of some.

We have seen that there is no possible remedy for these evils but the abolition of their cause; we have seen that private property in land has no warrant in justice, but stands condemned as the denial of natural right — a subversion of the law of nature that as social development goes on must condemn the masses of men to a slavery the hardest and most degrading.

We have weighed every objection, and seen that neither on the ground of equity or expediency is there anything to deter us from making land common property by confiscating rent.

But a question of method remains. How shall we do it?

We should satisfy the law of justice, we should meet all economic requirements, by at one stroke abolishing all private titles, declaring all land public property, and letting it out to the highest bidders in lots to suit, under such conditions as would sacredly guard the private right to improvements.

Thus we should secure, in a more complex state of society, the same equality of rights that in a ruder state were secured by equal partitions of the soil, and by giving the use of the land to whoever could procure the most from it, we should secure the greatest production.

Such a plan, instead of being a wild, impracticable vagary, has

(with the exception that he suggests compensation to the present holders of land — undoubtedly a careless concession which he upon reflection would reconsider) been indorsed by no less eminent a thinker than Herbert Spencer, who (*Social Statics*), Chap. ix., Sec. 8) says of it:

«Such a doctrine is consistent with the highest state of civilization; may be carried out without involving a community of goods, and need cause no very serious revolution in existing arrangements. The change required would simply be a change of landlords. Separate ownership would merge into the joint-stock ownership of the public. Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body — society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. Instead of paying his rent to the agent of Sir John or his Grace, he would pay it to an agent or deputy agent of the community. Stewards would be public officials instead of private ones, and tenancy the only land tenure. A state of things so ordered would be in perfect harmony with the moral law. Under it all men would be equally landlords, all men would be alike free to become tenants. . . . Clearly, therefore, on such a system, the earth might be enclosed, occupied, and cultivated, in entire subordination to the law of equal freedom.»

But such a plan, though perfectly feasible, does not seem to me the best. Or rather I propose to accomplish the same thing in a simpler, easier, and quieter way, than that of formally confiscating all the land and formally letting it out to the highest bidders.

To do that would involve a needless shock to present customs and habits of thoughts — which is to be avoided.

To do that would involve a needless extension of governmental machinery — which is to be avoided.

It is an axiom of statesmanship, which the successful founders of tyranny have understood and acted upon — that great changes can best be brought about under old forms. We, who would free men, should heed the same truth. It is the natural method. When nature would make a higher type, she takes a lower one and develops it. This, also, is the law of social growth. Let us work by it. With the current we may glide fast and far. Against it, it is hard pulling and slow progress.

I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to,

possession of what they are pleased to call *their* land. Let them continue to call it *their* land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernel. *It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.*

Nor to take rent for public uses is it necessary that the state should bother with the letting of lands, and assume the chances of the favoritism, collusion, and corruption this might involve. It is not necessary that any new machinery should be created. The machinery already exists. Instead of extending it, all we have to do is to simplify and reduce it. By leaving to landowners a percentage of rent which would probably be much less than the cost and loss involved in attempting to rent lands through state agency, and by making use of this existing machinery, we may, without jar or shock, assert the common right to land by taking rent for public uses.

We already take some rent in taxation. We have only to make some changes in our modes of taxation to take it all.

What I, therefore, propose, as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste, and intelligence, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is — *to appropriate rent by taxation.*

In this way the state may become the universal landlord without calling herself so, and without assuming a single new function. In form, the ownership of land would remain just as now. No owner of land need be dispossessed, and no restriction need be placed upon the amount of land anyone could hold. For, rent being taken by the state, in taxes, land, no matter in whose name it stood, or in what parcels it was held, would be really common property, and every member of the community would participate in the advantages of its ownership.

Now inasmuch as the taxation of rent, or land values, must necessarily be increased just as we abolish other taxes, we may put the proposition into practical form by proposing —

To abolish all taxation save that upon land values.

As we have seen, the value of land is at the beginning of society nothing, but as society develops by the increase of population and the advance of the arts, it becomes greater and greater. In every

civilized country, even the newest, the value of the land taken as a whole is sufficient to bear the entire expenses of government. In the better developed countries it is much more than sufficient. Hence it will not be enough merely to place all taxes upon the value of land. It will be necessary, where rent exceeds the present governmental revenues, commensurately to increase the amount demanded in taxation, and to continue this increase as society progresses and rent advances. But this is so natural and easy a matter, that it may be considered as involved, or at least understood, in the proposition to put all taxes on the value of land. That is the first step, upon which the practical struggle must be made. When the hare is once caught and killed, cooking him will follow as a matter of course. When the common right to land is so far appreciated that all taxes are abolished save those which fall upon rent, there is no danger of much more than is necessary to induce them to collect the public revenues being left to individual landholders.

Experience has taught me (for I have been for some years endeavoring to popularize this proposition) that wherever the idea of concentrating all taxation upon land values finds lodgment sufficient to induce consideration, it invariably makes way, but that there are few of the classes most to be benefited by it, who at first, or even for a long time afterward, see its full significance and power. It is difficult for workingmen to get over the idea that there is a real antagonism between capital and labor. It is difficult for small farmers and homestead owners to get over the idea that to put all taxes on the value of land would be unduly to tax them. It is difficult for both classes to get over the idea that to exempt capital from taxation would be to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. These ideas spring from confused thought. But behind ignorance and prejudice there is a powerful interest, which has hitherto dominated literature, education, and opinion. A great wrong always dies hard, and the great wrong which in every civilized country condemns the masses of men to poverty and want will not die without a bitter struggle.