

THE HENRY GEORGE COMMEMORATION ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE LAND VALUES CONFERENCE IN GLASGOW, 10th SEPTEMBER, 1911.

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The circumstances of time and place under which we meet tomorrow and the following day seem singularly appropriate to the purpose of the Conference which has brought us together. We are meeting at a time when the desire for social reform is in the air as it never was before; when what Mr. H. G. Wells calls the "white passion of Statecraft" has taken possession of men's minds with an intensity which itself constitutes a danger—a very real danger—a time when there has arisen in the minds of men who never felt it before, a kind of disgust with the inequalities of human lots, and a noble rage at the tyranny of what is mistakenly called Capital; along with a vague and inarticulate wish to "wreck this sorry scheme of things entire and mould it nearer to the heart's desire"; a time, in short, when all thoughtful men and women are feeling out with such enlightenment as they possess for some guidance in the direction of a true theory of economic human relationships. Moreover, and this most important of all, we are meeting at a time when, owing to the recent passing of the parliament bill, progressive legislation has become possible which never was possible before in the history of this old country. Indeed without attempting to wear the mantle of the prophet, one may say that we are met at the close of one age and the beginning of another.

Tomorrow, as you are aware, we are to meet within the precincts of one of those institutions of which there have been a long series beginning with the great Exhibition of 1851 (exactly sixty years ago), and which are set up from time to time with the special design of marking human progress in its constant warfare with the obstructive forces of Nature, and with the limitations of time and space.

Within a fire-proof building specially designed in imitation of Falkland Palace, one of the most beautiful mediaeval mansions in Scotland, will be found the most extraordinary collection of historic relics that has ever been brought together. We may see the cradles in which our ancient Royalties have been rocked to sleep and the beds in which they have died. In the words of Burns, "There's a wealth o' queer nick-nackets, iron caps and jingling jackets, parritch pats an' auld saut buckets, frae afore the flood." There are portraits by the hundred, and documentary mementoes of the great and the good (and some of the bad) who have lived and died before us, who have left their foot-prints on the sands of time, and their marks for good or ill upon the pages of Scottish History. The whole storied past of Scotland lies unrolled before the visitor, its triumphs and its failures, its patriotism and its courage, and all the evidences of those National characteristics which have given it its place among the nations. To a spectator with something of the historic sense,

and sufficient imagination to reconstruct the past, the contents of that building alone offer a feast of material for reflection.

Within a few yards of this may be found another building dedicated to the name of one of whom Glasgow is pardonably proud to claim the paternity, the late Lord Kelvin. There one may see demonstrations of the most recent achievements in the harnessing and control of that mysterious force which is said to be ultimate, and, perhaps the only unresolvable fact in the science of physics, the force of Electricity; that force of the Nature of which we are so pathetically ignorant and our ignorance of which is concealed from us by our familiarity with its every-day manifestations.

Facing this building is the Palace of Art, in which has been brought together what by consent of those who know best is considered the finest conceivable representation of Scottish art from the time of Raeburn onwards. The exclusion of all but work of Scottish origin is calculated to make the heart of a patriotic Scot expand in pardonable pride in the achievement of his country in the pursuit of the beautiful.

In the hall devoted to the National Industries the triumphs of labor-saving inventions in their relation to the production of the necessities of life are amply demonstrated, and craftsmen may be seen producing commodities which minister to the cultured side of life, with an ease and rapidity which raise one's respect for the human intelligence.

When wearied with observations which make some draft upon the thinking faculties, one may turn to that art which of all others speaks to the heart and emotions, and there too in the world of music, he will find that the highest achievements in composition and execution have been laid before him.

Again, as though to make the geographical location of this feast of rich things more appropriate, there stands immediately outside the Exhibition wall, perched upon an eminence and overlooking the whole, the noble University of Glasgow; as though to remind us amidst our semi-serious triflings that man lives not by bread and music alone but by a right understanding of the Eternal Verities.

And almost within sound of hearing by the help of a favoring wind, comes the sound of thousands of hammers from the best-equipped shipbuilding yards in the world, lining the banks of one of the most famous of rivers. In all directions signs of abounding prosperity greet the eye and ear; and finally, the local patriot will tell you, these things are happening in one of the few model municipalities of the World. Glasgow is indeed a city of which a little civic pride is pardonable. We have a transit system which is the envy of the world, a supply of water, gas, and electricity second to none, and a local government as nearly perfect, and as free from corruption of any kind as under present conditions can ever be expected.

But yet, in spite of all these considerations, there are some of us, and thank God our number is growing every day, who are seriously asking ourselves the question "Cui Bono?" What is the good? Is it any use to continue longer throwing our caps in the air, and jubilating upon each fresh

victory of mind over matter, when we see with our eyes that these victories are not increasing the sum-total of human happiness by a fraction, but are only deepening and intensifying its misery. We see science out of its apparently boundless resources cheapening the cost of commodities as though to make them available for all, but yet it remains that the cheapest things in the world are human life and human souls, and no effort hitherto made has succeeded in permanently raising their price. To a reflective mind the pageant of human life at such times of jubilation presents a strange spectacle indeed. In the foreground of the stage are dancing and light music and all the outward signs and semblances of joy; but from within in a deep, sad undertone comes the moan of poverty and destitution, and that most terrible of all sounds, the voices of children crying for bread.

In short, we are face to face with the same old problem, which only becomes intensified by its juxtaposition with such displays,—the problem which has troubled humanitarians ever since society began to assume its present form. It is the same problem which vexed the righteous soul of Carlyle seventy years ago and to which he never found the right answer, though he seems at times to have come surprisingly near to it. "Why is it," he cried frantically, "why is it that any well formed horse with its stupid head and clumsy hoof can always fetch a good price in the market, while a man with that marvellous head on his shoulders, and those wonderful hands at the ends of his shackle-bones, is not only worth nothing to society, but society can afford to pay him a good round sum if he will only consent to go and drown himself."

It is the same problem which in his middle age diverted the whole current of the emotional life of John Ruskin out of the direction in which he might have been so useful to a people at leisure to receive instruction in the fine arts, into the arena of economics, where he only succeeded in darkening counsel with fine words and beautiful phrases, and in leading his admiring followers into blind alleys whence they had to find their way out as best they could. It is the same problem which took hold of the fervent soul of that poet and artist-craftsman, William Morris, and aroused in him the passionate desire to reconstruct from top to bottom on a basis of collectivism.

Many indictments have been laid to the charge of the present economic structure of society, but not among the least of them to me is the enormous waste of human emotion which has been directed to fulmination against its cruelties and in propounding inadequate remedies.

Among our own circle of acquaintances we all know multitudes of good ordinary men whose moral force is at present being absorbed in a vain attempt to apply palliatives and amelioratives to the wounds of society, and who are only saved from despair by the fact that they are only ordinary men and cannot see the hopelessness of the task they are engaged in. But I could multiply indefinitely the number of really great men like those I have named whose energies have been consumed in a fruitless revolt at the injustices which have seemed to them the natural outcome of economic laws, and whose lives have closed in a pathetic and helpless despair of discovering a remedy.

And, indeed, viewing life from the point of vision to which we have attained, this pathetic despair seems the only natural or logical resting place for a mind and heart capable at once of seeing the depth of human misery, and the utter inadequacy of all the means hitherto adopted for its alleviation. I say without hesitation that to a man with a clear head and a warm heart who has not come within sight of the truth for which we stand, who has not stupified himself with the narcotic of an irrational religion or an irreligious philosophy, the present aspect of society ought to bring him to a despair of the deepest kind. Such a man ought to feel that there is nothing left to hope for, nothing left to pray for, but in the words of Huxley, for the advent of some friendly comet which with a swish of its mighty tail, would sweep the wretched world out of existence, or resolve it back to the cosmic dust from which it originally sprang.

I do not forget what we are so frequently reminded of, that the revolt against injustice has been the parent of much of the finest poetry and art that have been given to us; that the inequalities in human lots, and the contrasts of wealth and poverty, have evoked the tenderest of Christian sympathies: that the good Samaritan would not have been so good a Samaritan had there been no thieves to rob the poor traveller and leave him wounded by the wayside. To all of which I reply in the familiar words of St. Paul, "Shall we continue in sin then, that grace may abound?", and I am filled with rage when I think of the vast number of great souls who might have guided a free people among the delectable mountains of the things of the spirit or unfolded to them the joys of the intellects, but whose powers have been wasted in a futile rebellion, and whose spirits have been embittered by the conclusion forced upon them, that only a malevolent or demoniac guiding-hand can be traced at the back of things.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I sometimes feel it an ungracious or ungrateful thing to draw comparisons between those best gifts of the gods, our great men; but I think that we who have been inspired by the teaching of Henry George to look forward to the tender grace of a day that is not dead but which has yet to be born; a day when no man will require to beg of his lordly fellow-worm for leave to toil: when the bounty of the earth will naturally distribute itself to each according to the value of his services to his fellows, to a day when honest poverty will become the contradiction in terms which it ought to be in a moral world: I say we may be pardoned if we think of him as the greatest among the great men the English-speaking peoples have produced during the nineteenth century, and if we confidently believe that posterity will ultimately accord him one of the most important niches in the temple of fame. You will doubtless sympathize with the difficulty I labor under of saying anything about this great man which has not been said before and said well, for which I envy you. Most of you know and understand his social philosophy as well or better than I do myself; and so I must recollect that I am not addressing an audience to whom I can hope to convey any new idea of the man and his work. My sole aim must be then to stimulate you and myself

to a quickening of that fervour of spirit, that deep and intense sympathy for suffering humanity, and that singleness of purpose in finding and applying the remedy, which were the ruling passions of Henry George's life.

I have said before that I think the chief obstacle to the right understanding of Henry George's theory of economics is its extreme simplicity. Socialists sneer at it as an attempt to bring about the millenium by a mere juggling with taxation. Engineers and other practical men who are accustomed to the adjustment of forces, to the overcoming of resistances, stresses, and strains, are offended by the suggestion that so simple a reform as a re-adjustment of the basis of taxation should produce the mighty change in the face of society which we confidently believe will follow. It is indeed a strange fact that alike in religion, art, science and in political philosophy, the last things to be seen and believed in are the great simplicities.

I am, and I believe you are, suspicious of all attempts to express the teaching of any philosopher in a maxim or aphorism, or to serve up wisdom in tabloid form. Yet if the message of Henry George to humanity can be stated in a couple of sentences, I think it might be put thus: "Collect your public money in the wrong way, and you will have society divided into two sections of the enormously rich and the frightfully poor, with a more or less struggling middle class between, full of envy for those above and pitying contempt for those below; with all the physical, moral and intellectual deterioration of character which accompanies such a condition. Collect your public money in the right way, and you will have wealth distributing itself naturally according to the contribution each has made to its production: you will have the reward of industry always tending to a maximum: you will have no poverty except such as is self-imposed or the result of accident; you will have the human spirit liberated so that it may follow the things of the spirit and allow the ape and tiger within to die of disuse like atrophied muscles."

I submit that all the writings of George may be regarded as an elaboration of this proposition, along with a clear exposition of the direction in which the right way lies.

The propaganda in which we are engaged and the Conference in which we are about to take part have for their object the task of finding how best to apply the principle affirmed to existing conditions of society and existing methods of collecting public money. I can conceive of no more noble mission on which a body of earnest men and women can set out. I can never hope to be associated with a movement so calculated to evoke every enthusiasm, every spark of religious fervor or humanitarian sentiment. A friend asked me the other day whether this Sunday meeting of ours was to be a religious one. "Yes," I replied, "all the Conference Meetings are to be religious ones," and I quoted to him Elbert Hubbard's revised version of the fourth Commandment which runs thus, "Remember the week-day to keep it holy." That I said, exactly expresses the spirit of the Radical Reformer. If we can keep the week-day holy we are willing to let the Sunday look out for itself. If we can moralize and Christianize the common, sordid, every-day economic

relationships of men and women, we are content to let the higher relationships which involve Religion, Art and Philosophy, propagate themselves; for we believe as Henry George did that the spirit of man tends constantly upward and not down, and that it only requires to be released from its present economic thralldom to seek its highest good as it has never done before.

Consider for a moment the implications which underlie this simple proposition which I have put forward as the epitome of George's teaching, i. e., that the difference between the right and the wrong way of collecting public revenue makes all the difference between a social heaven and hell. The ordinary philanthropist equally with the Socialist and the unthinking man of the world believes, or acts as though he believed, that the social hell is the normal condition of society, unless when buttressed and bolstered and tinkered with by kind-hearted persons. The follower of Henry George on the other hand believes that the misery of the world is not due to natural causes, but entirely to artificial or man-made laws which permit certain men or classes of men to shut others out from the universal workshop which is the physical basis of life; and that this cause of our misery can be removed by the simple expedient of using the implement of taxation to force open the closed opportunities.

Now under the former hypothesis the conservative and the socialist are right in maintaining that an eternal tinkering and patching of the structure of society are necessary to prevent it from breaking up and perishing like former civilizations, from its own inherent tendencies. Apart from what we may do, such people seem to think things have a perverse tendency to go wrong, and the natural way for wealth to distribute itself is for some to have more than they can wisely use, and others to have less than sufficient to keep body and soul together. Under this hypothesis the only ideal condition of society to be contemplated by reasonable men is one where half of the community is perpetually engaged in holding the other half up, and preventing it from slipping into the abyss lying beneath its feet. Under such a theory of life as this it is obvious that no man should be able to retain his reasoning powers intact, and continue to believe that any beneficent power, either of a personal or impersonal kind, guides the destiny of this world. Anything even remotely resembling a religious faith should under such a theory be quite impossible.

Under the latter hypothesis, however, the outlook on life is very different, for it assures us that if we can only by means of the instrument of taxation set up a principle of equalness in our relation to Mother Earth, the physical basis of life, then it will be found that things have a tendency to go right of themselves and not wrong. Now consider the difference in the human outlook which such a change of hypothesis involves. It then becomes possible to entertain the idea of an over-ruling and beneficent power at the back of phenomena. It suggests the liberating of an immense amount of spiritual energy engaged in righting wrongs, and setting it free to develop human life in the direction of its higher potentialities.

Apart, however, from the effect upon speculative beliefs and religious

faith flowing from the teaching of Henry George, many other changes in our views of life will, I believe, follow upon its acceptance and adoption. For one thing I believe a complete re-valuation of the assets of human life will take place. Things formerly regarded respectively as valuable and valueless, will probably change places. In a very true sense, "every valley will be exalted and every high hill brought low." Some of those qualities now considered virtues will become vices. The hustling business man who makes a pace which others cannot keep up with, and which, where livings were easily earned no spiritually-minded man would want to keep up with, will be regarded as a nuisance. Saving, or the habit of accumulation which under present conditions is considered a laudable quality, will be looked on as a mean attempt to get the better of one's fellows. Ostentation or display in private life will become what is called "bad form." Interest in public affairs, in public pictures, in public architecture, in public possessions of all kinds, will strengthen and deepen when the conditions of life become as easy as they will be when access to the great workshop is offered to all. I say with confidence that one result of the new scale of human values which I expect to follow from the re-adjustment of the basis of taxation will be a new public opinion which will give its diploma of "good form" to plainness in private life and to magnificence in public things.

Permit me here again to quote a passage from Carlyle. "When an individual is miserable, what does it behave him most of all to do? To complain of this or that, of this thing or that? To fill the world and the street with lamentations and objurgations? Not at all; the reverse of so. All moralists advise him to complain not of any person or thing, but of himself only. He is to know of a truth that being miserable he has been unwise. Had he faithfully followed Nature's laws, Nature, true to her own laws, would have yielded him felicity; but he has followed other than Nature's law; and now Nature's patience with him being ended, leaves him desolate; answers him with a very definite No. Not by this road, my son; by another road shalt thou attain well-being; this thou perceivest is the road to ill-being. Quit this road. Neither with nations is it otherwise. The ancient guides of nations, Prophets, Priests, were aware of this and down to a later age impressively taught and inculcated it. The modern guides of nations, who go under a variety of names, Journalists, Economists, Pamphleteers, have entirely forgotten this and are ready to deny it. But it nevertheless remains entirely undeniable, nor is there any doubt that we shall yet be taught it and be made to confess it. The old prophet was right and not wrong in saying to the unhappy nation, 'Ye have forgotten God.' You have not lived according to the laws of fact but have lived and guided yourselves according to the laws of delusion, imposture, and mistake of fact; behold Nature's long-suffering with you is worn out, the unveracity is exhausted and you are here."

For generations back we have been asking our moral philosophers, our political economists, our teachers and guides, to show us the social and economic Kingdom of Heaven, and they have replied with such light, or with such

darkness as was in them. They have said, *Lo here, and Lo there.* They have appealed to the authorities. They have preached free trade. They have preached protection. They have added law after law to the statute book. They have made more and more complicated that fabric of conventional and legal restrictions upon liberty under which we live, and still the nation is miserable.

Thirty years ago there appeared among us him whose memory we are celebrating to-day. He came a humble tradesman like the most of us, bringing no flavor of academic culture, wearing no decorations of University degrees, and speaking with nothing of the authority which attaches to wealth or social status. His answer to our question was a very simple one indeed. "The Kingdom of Heaven," he seemed to say, "why, it is under your very feet. Your hand is upon the key! You have only to alter your present method of collecting your public revenue, and the whole conditions of your social life will change."

Is it to be wondered at, I ask you, that so simple a remedy for a sick world should have been rejected by the wise and prudent? Is it surprising that the doctors of law, the Scribes and the Pharisees with their observances and their tithes and mint and cummin, should have turned their backs upon this reformer and hurled at him the opprobrious epithet that was fastened upon a greater than he two thousand years ago, that "he was a pestilent fellow and a seditious stirrer up of strife?" It was after all only what might have been expected. Knowing as we do that each human soul among us is the prisoner of a temperament, that custom lies upon us with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as death, I cannot wonder that many conscientious men failed and still fail to lay hold of the simple truth taught by Henry George.

Pardon me if I seem unduly to emphasize the simplicity and harmlessness of the reform for which we stand, but observing as I do a tendency even among its own advocates to regard it as a revolutionary change, I feel the necessity of bringing this aspect of it into greater prominence. It was only a poet who said "a hair perhaps divides the false and true," but in these words he enunciated a truth that has been affirmed by the masters of science, the workers in the arts, and the teachers of ethics. The crossing of that mysterious and elusive hair-line which separates the right from the wrong does indeed mean a revolution, but it is the kind of revolution following upon the letting in of daylight and fresh air to a chamber from which both have been excluded. It is the kind of revolution experienced when broken bones knit together, or when the blood of a paralytic begins to circulate freely in veins and arteries, and when sensations not devoid of certain pains and irritations begin to be felt.

In any other sense I cannot regard the change as a revolutionary one. That it will injure any member of society in any real or permanent sense I do not for a moment believe. What it will do will be to remove the leverage which wealth at present possesses over poverty. When we all have enough or can easily earn enough, wealth will have no power to oppress us. The lever will have lost its fulcrum and will have become an instrument for which some

other use must be found; for it is always true as Ruskin said that the power of a guinea in one man's pocket depends accurately and scientifically on the absence of a guinea in some other man's. The art of being rich is at bottom the art of keeping other people poor. Now when other people are not poor, wealth will have lost its power. That is the only sense, I believe, in which the removal of the land monopoly can be called a revolutionary movement. My wish, however, is that we should focus our minds upon the simplicity of the remedy, the ease of its application, and the beneficent results that will surely follow, believing as we do, that even if the power at present attaching to a large income vanishes; if a rich man finds he cannot engage a footman on any terms, or his wife find a lady's maid at any wage under that of a cabinet minister, that even then the distressed millionaire will find compensating advantages which at present it is difficult to dream of. I hope you will agree with me that our attitude toward individual wealth is like that of philosophic radicals to the House of Lords, a desire not to abolish it so long as it may be of any real service to its owners and the community, but only to abolish its power to oppress or to limit freedom.

These then are my reasons for venturing to recommend that we refrain from fomenting the vulgar desire to "get at" the rich landlords, to repudiate existing contracts, or to encourage ill-will to large incomes so long as there are fools who want them. What we wish to do is to open opportunities which are at present closed, and so to make sure that all men who want to use their hands or their brains or their capital for the earning of honest livings will always find those opportunities awaiting them. This, I believe, will result from the proposed change in the basis of rating and taxation, without any thought of touching the present possessions of the rich; and this is why I insist upon the importance of holding to the simple kernel of George's teaching as I have tried to epitomize it.

In conclusion let me congratulate you and myself upon the opportunity which now offers of doing what in us lies to let light into the minds of some of our fellows, and to bring nearer that time of which wise men have foretold, of which poets have dreamed, of which prophets have prophesied, when industrial warfare will be at an end, when Capital and Labor will fight not against each other, but hand in hand against the common enemies of hunger and cold, and ugliness and ignorance; and when the political economy of Henry George will be in full and beneficent operation.

MOREOVER the profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field.—Ecclesiastes 5: 9.

THREE-FOURTHS of the land owners of Oregon would be benefited by abolishing taxes on improvements and personal property, and one-half the remainder would be benefited indirectly. The assessment rolls prove this beyond any doubt.