

The Life of Henry George by His Daughter

HENRY GEORGE. By Anna George DeMille. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; 276 pps.; \$3.50

Reviewed by
Caspar W. Weinberger

HENRY George, whose writings made him, in his own time, as influential and powerful an influence on mankind as Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, was deeply respected by such varied intellects as Tolstoy, G. B. Shaw, Woodrow Wilson, Charles Darwin and Sun Yat-sen, and was altogether one of the most remarkable men of his century.

Mired in the deepest poverty during most of his early and middle years, relieved by occasional promotions from his San Francisco and Sacramento typesetting jobs to editorial positions, he studied and watched with increasing unrest the poverty of others like him and the general economic dislocation that followed the Civil War. He wrote his beliefs into "Progress and Poverty" and even more than Byron, awoke to find himself famous.

The book has been compared with the great tracts and persuasive works of all time, and surely its influence upon the world was astonishingly great. The idea of the Single Tax, and the glorious vision of relieving a suffering mankind caught the imagination of a world that longed for a simple answer to problems that even then seemed impossibly complex.

Like so many prophets, George was more honored abroad than at home. Shaw later said when he was swept into the van of the British Socialist movement, he found that a great majority of the members had been converted by reading George. His works were read and discussed in all quarters there, and he drew immense crowds on his lecture tours. Australia, Germany, Denmark, China and

Canada were also eager to do homage to George. Indeed Danish policy even now is very largely based on Georgian doctrines.

The unearned increment of land—that is the increase in land values—belonged to the community, George believed, and those increases should be given to the

community without compensation to their former owners, said George. Once this was done, he would stop any homage to government. He believed that this "single tax" would give labor its just due and, as he believed with Jefferson that the best governed people were those who were gov-

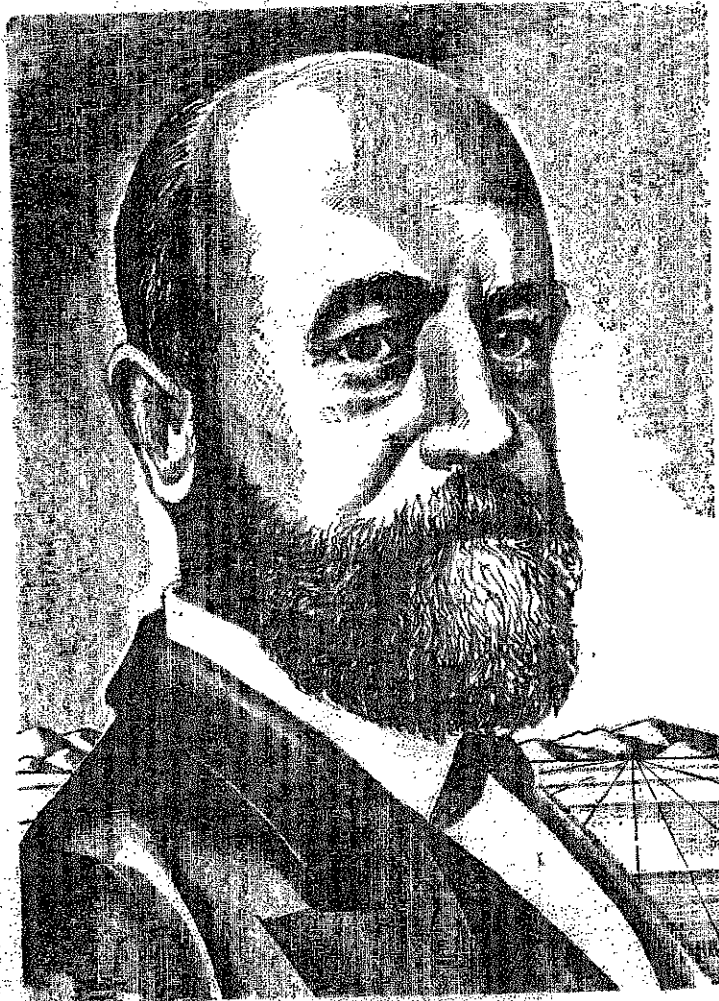
erned least, he favored no other government action. He greatly feared interference with the rights and liberties of individuals. Karl Marx, then in London, regarded him with tolerant amusement and spoke of "Progress and Poverty" as "capitalism's last ditch." George, for his part said that Marx was superficial, unscientific, and "entangled in an inexact and vicious terminology."

This biography of the amazing "philosopher from San Francisco" as he was called abroad, is written with a forced detachment by Henry George's daughter, with an introduction by his famous ballet director granddaughter, Agnes DeMille.

THE author worshipped her father, we are told, but she was determined to write an impartial, objective survey. She has done that and, while occasionally the brilliant, commanding, exciting figure who was her father comes to life, for the most part the reader must regret that Mrs. DeMille did not write out of the warmth and vigor of her own affection.

All the same this is an exciting and moving story. The descriptions of Henry George's two campaigns for Mayor of New York—in the midst of the second one, he died—are most dramatic. There are also many intimate touches of home life—pictures of the philosopher, whose writings shook the world, with his family, and in the extreme and grinding poverty in which his first married years were lived out in San Francisco.

For generations who have never heard of the Single Tax or its creator, and for those to whom Henry George is but a name buried in a paragraph of history this should prove a fascinating introduction to an author whose works and ideas caught the imagination and roused the fervent devotion of an incredible number of people all over the world.



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