

On February 24, 1873, Oscar H. Geiger was born in New York - the only child of his Jewish parents, Hermann, his father, was from Vienna and made his living as a tailor. Teresa, his mother, was of Bohemian origin. The boy seems to have been an ardent scholar at a tender age, though he was mainly self-educated. He had to leave school at the 7th grade in order to help earn money for his struggling family.

"At 16," wrote Geiger, "I entered upon the study of theology against my parents' wishes." He moved away from his parents and established himself in a garret, living alone so that he might spend all his spare time studying. At night he read by street lamp so that he might save money for books, and there were times when he lived on nothing but turnips and water.

Geiger's intense labors in Jewish theology led to his being ordained a rabbi at the early age of 19 and to an appointment as principal of a Jewish orphan asylum. It was Geiger's conviction that human nature is essentially good, but that it requires favorable conditions in which to thrive.

After approximately 1 year at the Protectory, serious doubts on his religion began to assail him. He quit the Protectory, left behind his Torah and Talmud, his rabbinic and religion, and thenceforth became a citizen of the world - and a philosopher.

One day while in a bookstore, Geiger saw a bearded man enter, pick up some books and turn page after page of each book, merely glancing at each page. "What is that man doing?" Geiger inquired of the book dealer. "He's reading. He comes in often, and that's the way he reads." "Who is he?" asked Geiger, amazed. "Why, that's Henry George," was the reply.

A physician friend of the Geiger family, Dr. James Ferrier, was a follower of Henry George. One day he handed Geiger a copy of George's "Progress and Poverty," urging him to read it. He set to work on it that very evening. He read far into the night, fascinated as the argument unfolded. Here was a man whose lofty aim was to abolish poverty, to alleviate human misery, and who was testing every step of the way with the searchlight of reason.

Dawn. The book was finished. And, in Geiger's own words, "Then the heavens opened and I saw God." No time must be wasted. Something had to be done immediately about that burning message. Geiger hastened at that early morning hour to Dr. Ferrier's home and rang his bell furiously. The weary doctor, thus rudely awakened, poked his head out of the bedroom window.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he called down.

"What are we going to do about it?" shouted Geiger.

"Do about what?" cried the exasperated doctor.

"The book, of course! What are we going to do about it?"

"You've read the book already?"

"Of course!"

"Come in, my boy, and have breakfast with me!"

- extracts from: A Seed Was Sown
by: Robert Clancy **

* biography of Oscar H. Geiger, founder of the Henry George Schools of Social Science - pub. by HCSSS 50 E. 69th St. New York 21, N.Y.
Copyright 1952 - 2nd edition, 1954 - 124 pp. 11ms. \$1.00

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