

# BOOKS THAT CHANGED AMERICA

By Eric F. Goldman

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BUT industrial societies, even when run by the eminently survivable, have a way of developing depressions, and hard times ground on during six long years after 1873. For Henry George the depression was the last straw. From his thirteenth year he had worked furiously, as a delivery-boy, seaman, typesetter, gold prospector, salesman, and editor, only to find himself a defenseless nobody, unable to stave off the first blows of hard times. Somewhere out of his readings and



Henry George

his observation of the California land boom, George became convinced that what America needed was a single tax which would wipe out any rise in land values. In his rugless, ill-heated room George pounded into the sheets of yellow foolscap the Single Tax doctrine of "Progress and Poverty."

Publishers yawned. No doubt this was a meritorious work, the replies came, but what American book on economics had ever sold? Finally, George talked an old friend in the printing business into setting the type and D. Appleton Co. agreed to run off five hundred copies. A scattering of American reviews, a pat from the

*Revue Scientifique*, and "Progress and Poverty" limped toward oblivion.

THEN the Irish, who seem to have their own special arrangements with history, happened upon the volume. George's economic analyses attracted their New York leaders about as much as "God Save the King." But hadn't George found the devil in landlords, like the landlords who were oppressing Mother Eire? Soon "Progress and Poverty" was swirled aloft in a jig of praise, and thousands of Americans, Irish and non-Irish, were discovering the book which spoke of hunger and hope in prose of Biblical power.

Still the history of the volume continued its oblique course. Sales went on vaulting, farmers and factory hands who had rarely opened a book worked their way to the last page, Henry George was a national figure. But the point of it all so far as George was concerned, his Single Tax Movement, lumbered and stumbled. Thousands were like Clarence Darrow who, announcing that their whole thinking had been redirected by "Progress and Poverty," soon tossed aside its "Problem Solved" chapter. In a way never really understood by the author, the young Californian who wanted to get ahead so fervidly and was stopped so hard had caught the mood with which much of a generation was leaving the depression of 1873. In the course of advocating his Single Tax, George had broken with fixed laws about anything, and called for fluid thinking which could mean wide opportunities for ordinary Americans.

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"Every so often it happened. America would be rushing along, staking out farms and throwing up factories, exulting and worrying and denouncing, and suddenly somebody, facing a stack of blank paper, would touch the paper with magic. A book appeared and things were never quite the same."

These are the thirteen books which, according to Mr. Goldman in the above article, have changed America:

1. THOMAS, PAINE, "Common Sense" (1776). Ottenheimer, \$1.
2. The FEDERALIST PAPERS (1788). Dutton, \$1.25; Regnery, 80¢.
3. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852). Coward-McCann, \$2.50; Everyman, \$1.25; Dodd, Mead, \$2.95.
4. HERBERT SPENCER, "The Study of Sociology" (1874). Out of print.
5. HENRY GEORGE, "Progress and Poverty" (1879). Modern Library, \$1.25.
6. CHARLES SHELDON, "In His Steps" (1897). Broadman, 75¢; Grosset, 75¢; Judson Press, 75¢; McKay, \$1; Winston, \$1.50.
7. SIGMUND FREUD, "The Interpretation of Dreams" (published 1900; translated, 1913). Macmillan, \$5.
8. CHARLES BEARD, "An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution" (1913). Macmillan, \$4.50.
9. JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES, "The Economic Consequences of the Peace" (American edition, 1920). Harcourt, Brace, \$3.50.
10. JOHN DEWEY, "Human Nature and Conduct" (1922). Holt, \$3.25; Modern Library, \$1.25.
11. SINCLAIR LEWIS, "Babbitt" (1922). Harcourt, Brace, \$1.98.
12. LINCOLN STEFFENS, "Autobiography" (1931). Harcourt, Brace, \$6.
13. WENDELL WILLKIE, "One World" (1943). Simon & Schuster, \$2.50.