

A Short History of the Beginnings of "Single-Tax"

Showing the "Single-Tax" program as promulgated by
Henry George is the Method of freeing Labor
from Industrial Slavery. It is the solution
of society's most perplexing problems.

By C. LEBARON GOELLER

1839—Henry George was born September 2nd, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

1853—Left school for good after less than five months in High School. When his eldest son was ready to enter College Mr. George said to him: "Going to College you will make life friendships, but you will come out filled with much that will have to be unlearned. Going into newspaper work, you will come in touch with the practical world, will be getting a profession and learning to make yourself useful."

1855—Went to sea as a sailor before the mast.

1857—Learned the printer's trade in Philadelphia.

1858—Arrived in San Francisco, as he put it, "dead broke."

1859—Prospected for gold in California. Concerning this he said, "Having no other way of reaching the mines, I started out to walk. I was, in fact, what would now be called a tramp. I had a little money, but I slept in barns to save it, and had a rough time generally."

1861—Married Miss Annie Fox. "The young man drew from his pocket a single coin. 'Annie,' said he solemnly, 'that is all the money I have in the world. Will you marry me?'"

1865—January. Mr. George and Mr. Tramp owned a small printing office from which each drew twenty-five cents per day to live on. Later Mr. George wrote: "I came near starving to death and at one time I was so close to it that I think I should have done so but for the job of printing a few cards which enabled us to buy a little corn meal. In this darkest time in my life my second child was born." His biographer goes on to say: "The baby came at seven o'clock in the morning of January 27, 1865. When it was born the wife heard the doctor say, 'Don't stop to wash the child; he is starving. Feed him!' After the doctor had gone and mother and baby had fallen asleep, the husband left them alone in the house, and taking the elder child to a neighbor's, himself went to his business in a desperate state of mind, for his wife's condition made money — some money — an absolute and

immediate necessity. But nothing came into the office and he did not know where to borrow. What then happened he told sixteen years subsequently.

"I walked along the street and made up my mind to get money from the first man whose appearance might indicate that he had it to give. I stopped a man—a stranger—and told him I wanted five dollars. He asked me what I wanted it for. I told him that my wife was confined and that I had nothing to give her to eat. He gave me the money. If he had not I think I was desperate enough to have killed him."

In 1881 George wrote the following on the effect of extreme poverty. He had just returned some money he had borrowed from a friend and said: "It is not so much the want of money as the mental effect it produces—the morbid condition. The man who does not understand that does not know how it is possible for people to commit suicide."

This "starving in the midst of plenty" episode was the real turning point in Henry George's life, and this "riddle of the sphinx of fate" occupied the rest of his life. The *REMEDY* he published in his world-famous book *Progress and Poverty*.

1869—Went to New York City to fight the Associated Press-Western Union monopoly of news. Seventeen years later he wrote: "Years ago I came to this city from the West, unknown, knowing nobody, and I saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want. And here I made a vow from which I have never faltered, to seek out and remedy, if I could, the cause that condemned little children to lead such a life as you know them to lead in the squalid districts. . . . Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And then and there I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true."

1871—Wrote first book in fulfilment of the vow. The book was entitled *Our Land and Land Policy*. In his last book he wrote: "Something like a thousand copies of this were sold; but I saw that to command attention the work must be done more thoroughly." This book tackled the problem of want from the standpoint of its being a *land* question. His next book viewed the problem as a *LABOR* question—and made a perfect score.

1877—September 18th. "Commenced *Progress and Poverty*." Other titles for the book suggested themselves to him, as, "Must Progress Bring Poverty?" and "Wealth and Want" and "The Political Economy of The Social Problem."

1879—March. Finished *Progress and Poverty*. The publishers tell us that more copies of *Progress and Poverty* have been sold than all books on kindred subjects combined. Mr. George wrote in his *Science of Political Economy*: "Progress and Poverty has been, in short, the most successful economic work ever published. Its reasoning has never been successfully assailed. . . . Yet though the scholastic political economy has been broken, it has not been recast, as I at the time anticipated, by some of its professors taking up what I had pointed out; but a new and utterly incoherent political economy has taken its place in the schools." This is the present day *Economics*.

1880—George landed in New York City. A friend wrote about these times as follows: "These New York days were of extreme and honorable poverty. . . . George was resolute in his creed. He gave it to you as the truth to be accepted, in a sense of worship, a dogma of political infallibility. 'Does this not mean war? Can you, unless dealing with craven conditions among men, hope to take land from its owners without war?' 'I do not see' said George, 'that a musket need be fired. But if necessary, war be it, then. There was never a holier cause. No, never a holier cause'."

1882—Concerning a dinner tendered to Mr. George, Louis F. Post wrote: "The higher-ups did not attend. A second-class theater instead of Delmonico's banquet hall, furnished the accommodations. The price was two dollars instead of ten. And the diners, not many altogether, were almost exclusively of the organized wage-working class."

1886—Labor candidate for Mayor of New York City.

1887—Used the words "Single Tax" as the name of a philosophy opposing Socialism, in an article entitled, "Socialism vs. The Single Tax". In this year also he said: "Let me say that what we aim at is the abolition of poverty. We propose to accomplish this by abolishing injustice, and our particular aim is to abolish that fundamental injustice which deprives so many human creatures—aye, in cities like this the majority of the population—of their natural rights to the land which the Lord their God has given them. The relation between man and the planet he inhabits is fundamental, and the laws which affect the tenure of land, the relation between man and the land on which all must live, are the most important of all laws."

1888—Henry George wrote in an editorial in his paper, the *Standard* of January 21st: "It is not by the mere levying of a tax that we propose to abolish poverty; it is by securing the blessings of Liberty."

1891—In an article in the *Standard* in November, entitled "About Competition" Mr. George wrote concerning the name "Single-Tax": "We, who for want of a better term style ourselves single tax men, but whose fundamental idea would be better expressed by some such term as equal rights men, or individual rights men, or natural order men..." Later he wrote: "The work before us is the abolition of industrial slavery. . . Our great movement is for the emancipation of labor by the restoration of natural rights." Also: "Here is the difference, and it is fundamental and irreconcilable, between the Socialists and single taxers. They propose to cure the evils that have come of restriction by more restriction. We propose to cure the evils that have come of restriction by giving freedom. And a man cannot favor the Socialistic scheme and the single tax scheme at the same time, any more than he can go east and west at the same time."

1896—At the Jefferson Day dinner, May 18th, Mr. George said: "This name we now call ourselves by, the single-tax, is in many respects a misnomer. What we really propose is not a tax at all. What we really propose is that public revenues shall be drawn from that value that is a public growth; that we should take for the community that value that comes from the growth and improvement of the community, taking from no man, be he rich or poor, anything that is rightfully his. We call ourselves single-tax men simply because, under the conditions that existed when our movement began that was the name that was less liable to misinterpretation and misrepresentation."

The misrepresentation referred to is indicated by Jas. Russell Lowell's article, "Democracy" which is published in the Harvard Classics, and is the only mention of single-tax in the five foot shelf of books: "It is all very well to pooch-pooch Mr. George and prove him mistaken in his political economy. I do not believe that land should be divided because the quantity of it is limited by nature." Yet every person ought to know that Mr. George never proposed to divide up the land. See *Progress and Poverty*, Book 6, Chapter 2.

In an article in the *Standard*, William Lloyd Garrison, son of the great emancipator, called our movement the *New Abolition*, referring to Mr. George's idea of destroying industrial slavery. This is the best name ever proposed for the movement.

1897—October 29. Mr. George died fighting Richard Croker, then head of the organization known as Tammany Hall.

For further information as to how wages can be raised, want and poverty abolished, and hard times made a thing of the past, read Mr. George's book, *Progress and Poverty* (\$1.00 a copy postpaid)

Published by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation,
11 Park Place, New York City.