

occupy most of his time and attention. In December 1871 he went into partnership with two other men and founded the *San Francisco Daily Evening Post*. This became a vigorous reform newspaper in which he took every opportunity to push forward his land value theories. These, as a consequence, were known to his rivals as 'little Henry George's fad'.

In 1875 he left the paper, and entered into active politics, campaigning for the Democratic candidate in the Presidential election. He obtained from the Governor of California the position of State Inspector of Gas Meters, a job which gave him an adequate income and required little work. His motive for applying for such a sinecure was to enable him to get down to some serious writing. Apart from his political speeches, which gained him a reputation for being one of the best public speakers on the California coast, he gave general lectures. One of these, in March 1877, was to the University of California, where there was some talk of his appointment to the new chair of political economy. Such talk ceased after the academicians heard what he had to say.

For the study of political economy you need no special knowledge, no extensive library, no costly laboratory. You do not even need textbooks nor teachers, if you will but think for yourselves. All that you need is care in reducing complex phenomena to their elements, in distinguishing the essential from the accidental, and in applying the simple laws of human action with which you are familiar. Take nobody's opinion for granted, 'try all things: hold fast that which is good'. In this way, the opinion of others will help you by their suggestions, elucidation and corrections; otherwise they will be to you as words to a parrot.

All that array of professors, all this paraphernalia of learning, cannot educate a man. They can but help him to educate himself. Here you may obtain the tools; but they will be useful only to him who can use them. A monkey with a microscope, a mule packing a library, are fit emblems of the men and, unfortunately, they are plenty who pass through the whole educational machinery, and come out but learned fools, crammed with knowledge which they cannot use all the more pitiable, all the more contemptible, all the more in the way of real progress, because they pass, with themselves and others, as educated men.

'Monkeys with microscopes, mules packing libraries' was a little too much for the university professors. George heard no more of any university appointment. He continued a speaking campaign to put over his ideas on the economic problems of the day, and in September 1877 began his great work *Progress and Poverty*. A fourth child was born during the month. The meter inspector's office, which should have been lucrative, was at this time yielding next to nothing and he was getting onto debt.

Another great industrial depression was creating disorder in America. The railroads were on strike, troops were under arms, riots broke out in Baltimore and Chicago; in Pittsburgh more than 200 people were killed and a vast amount of property destroyed. These disasters gave a keen edge to the pen that was trying to dissect and diagnose the cause of this fever in society. In mid-March 1879 the book was done.

And when I had finished the last page, in the dead of night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up, and up. It has made me a better and purer man. It has been to me a religion of which I never like to speak, or make any outward manifestation, but yet that I try to follow.

After several rejections the book found a publisher and made a slow start. Meanwhile, owing to a political change, he lost his sinecure with the office of gas meter inspectors. There was no work in California and he moved east to try and get employment in New York. Here he did some writing and lecturing. Gradually *Progress and Poverty* caught hold of the popular imagination. This was not altogether surprising. America was still in the grip of a depression; bitter, violent strikes were disrupting the community; the murderous 'Molly Maguires' were making their presence felt. In such a society, a book that offered a solution to the problems of the time was eagerly seized upon.

The book was published in Great Britain, translations appeared across the world. A month after *Progress and Poverty* was completed, Michael Davitt was stirring up Ireland with his cry of 'the land for the people' in an attempt to end the landlord tyranny and rack-renting that were driving the peasantry into starvation. At the end of 1879 Davitt helped to organise the Irish National Land League in Dublin, and when the following year he came to New York, he met George, who offered his support. George swiftly wrote a pamphlet on *The Irish Land Question* in which he suggested that the only solution lay in observing the principle of common ownership in land, by taking, through the medium of taxation, the rental value for all people.

At this time he was still in a parlous financial situation himself. His lecturing and writing brought in little money and he had to borrow to keep going.

I am afloat at 42 poorer than at 21. I do not complain, but there is some bitterness in it. It is at such times that a man feels the weight of a family. It is like swimming with heavy clothes on. Still, if keep my health I do not fear.

In October 1881 he went to Ireland under the auspices of the *Irish World* to act as correspondent and to lecture. For once fortune smiled on him. The *Irish World* paid his fares both ways for him and his family an 60 dollars per week.

He got a rapturous welcome when he spoke in Dublin. He met the leading figures in the Irish Movement, including Parnell, who was in Kilmainham jail. In the meantime, *Progress and Poverty* had become a best seller in Europe and in America it was making him famous.

Dr. Edward McGlynn, a prominent New York prelate, spoke at several of Davitt's meetings when the latter came to America. At one of them he said:

If I might take the liberty of advising Michael Davitt I should say 'Explain not away one tittle of it, but preach the gospel in its purity. I say it is a good gospel, not only for Ireland, but for England, for Scotland and for America, too. And if in this country we do not yet feel quite so much the terrible pressure of numbers upon the land, the same terrible struggle between Progress and Poverty, as it is felt in other lands, no thanks are due at all to our political system, but thanks to the bounties of nature, and to the millions of acres of virgin lands with which God has blessed us. But when these virgin lands shall have been occupied; when the population shall have increased here as it has elsewhere in proportion to our extent of territory, we shall have precisely the same problem to solve and the sooner we solve it the better. And so I quite agree with Michael Davitt to the full, and with Henry George to the full.

George returned to New York in October 1882, famous, with a public dinner at Delmonico, a huge mass meeting with the labour unions at Cooper Hall, and invitations to write and lecture by the score. His ideas were becoming known across the length and breadth of the country, and organisations were springing up to encourage them to be put into practice. For the first time he felt a sense of satisfaction, of contentment with the situation.

I could die now and the work would go on. It no longer depends upon one man. It is no longer a 'Henry George' movement a one man movement. It is the movement of many men in many lands. I can help it while I live; but my death could not stop it. The Great Revolution has begun.

George was to live another 15 years, during which he was to tour the world, speaking, writing, exhorting the people to claim what he considered to be their natural birthright that fundamental gift of nature land.

Consider the possibilities of a state of society that gave opportunity to all. Let imagination fill out the picture; its colours grow too bright for words to paint. Consider the moral elevation, the intellectual activity, the social life. Consider how by a thousand actions and interactions the members of every community are linked together, and how in the present condition of things even the fortunate few who stand upon the apex of the social pyramid must suffer though they know it not, from the want, ignorance, and degradation that are underneath. Consider these things, and then say whether the change I propose would not be for the benefit for everyone even the greatest landholder? Would he not be safer of the future of his children in leaving them penniless in such a state of society than in leaving them the largest fortune of all? Did such a state of society anywhere exist, would not lie buy entrance to it cheaply by giving up all his possessions?

This was not a viewpoint easily taken, and the full force of vested interest aroused against him. In England, landlords formed a Liberty and Property Defence League to combat his growing influence. In 1885 Henry George made one of his most powerful speeches in this country. Addressing a great crowd outside the Royal Exchange (now a mall) he pointed up to the letters which are written across the front of that building '*The Earth is the Lord's*'. A man in the crowd cried out: '*The landlords*'. George responded: '*Aye, the landlords. They have substituted the landlords for the Lord above all; and the want of employment, the misery which exists from one end of the kingdom to the other the misery which encircles society wherever civilisation goes is caused by the sin of the denial of justice.*'

One of the results of his continuous battle against economic injustice was an invitation by the New York labour unions to stand as a candidate for the mayoralty of that city. Fighting as an independent candidate against a Democrat and a young Republican, Theodore Roosevelt he made a credible showing in coming second in the poll, especially as he and his followers were bitterly vilified as 'anarchists, nihilists, communists and socialists'.

In 1890 he was struck down by a brain haemorrhage, but recovered sufficiently to continue his strenuous life of writing and lecturing. In 1897 he again stood as a candidate for the mayoralty of New York. The campaign was demanding, too demanding for a man weakened by illness and five days before the election he died of a stroke. New York was stunned, 100,000 mourners filed past his bier in the Grand Central Palace, another 100,000 unable to get inside, prayed in the streets outside.

Only 58, Henry George had a more profound influence on the people than any other man of his time. *Progress and Poverty* had sold more copies than any other book on economics in the history of America. It had revolutionised men's ideas and it was to the revolutionary music of the Marseillaise that its author's body wound through the streets of New York.

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The Life of

Henry George

By

Geoffrey Lee

(Taken from his book '*The Peoples Budget – An Edwardian Tragedy*)

The words from his book *Progress and Poverty* which George's friends had inscribed as the epitaph on his gravestone give some idea of the energy and determination of the man.

The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if needs be, die for it. This is the power of truth.

The problems he believed his ideas could solve unemployment, poverty, inflation, strikes, are still with us. Perhaps his remedies for these ills are considered too strange, too drastic, or too difficult. Tolstoy thought that no one could dispute the truth of them. '*People do not argue with the teachings of George,*' he said, '*they simply do not know it. And it is impossible to do otherwise with his teaching, for he who becomes acquainted with it cannot but agree.*'

The easiest way to come to grips with George's solution is to see how very slowly, it evolved in his mind, during the course of a hard, active life. For Henry George was no dreamer in an ivory tower; no academic cut off from practical realities. Sailor, printer, journalist, gold prospector, candidate for the New York mayoralty, onetime tramp, he had known what it was to go short of food, to be without work, to slave for a pittance.

And during these difficult times he saw the reason for the poverty and the unemployment, for strikes and all the rest of it.

Henry George was born on September 2, 1839, in Philadelphia. His father, who came from a Yorkshire family, was a publisher of Protestant Episcopal church and Sunday-school books. His mother was of Scottish and English descent and the daughter of a distinguished engraver. Henry was the second of 10 children, and although the family was not rich and his father's religious views ensured a disciplined, even austere upbringing, he was well fed, clothed and comfortably housed.

A decline in the book trade forced Henry's father to leave publishing and take a position in the Customs House. The knowledge that his father was having to bring up a large, growing family on a clerk's wages probably influenced Henry's decision to leave high school before he was 14 and find a job. He went to work as an errand boy and clerk in a china and glass importing house.

This ending of his formal education in no way interrupted his search for knowledge. He read omnivorously; the Bible and other religious books, history, travel, adventure, fiction and poetry. The Quaker Apprentice Library and the Franklin Institute Library furnished many of the books, and to the Franklin Institute he went for lectures on the physical sciences.

Despite so much reading and studying he led an active life going skating and swimming. His chief playground was the wharves of the city where he loved to explore the river piers. It was here that the call of the sea manifested itself. The 'Hindo', an old East Indian man was due to leave New York early in April 1855, for Australia and India. It was captained by a friend of the family, and Henry persuaded his father to let him sign up for the voyage. After an arduous round trip lasting more than a year, Henry George returned to Philadelphia and started work as a printer. Although home life was a welcome change from the rigours of the sea he found the discipline of a pious household irksome.

With some friends he formed the 'Lawrence Literary Society'. This respectable title embraced an organisation that had wide ranging activities: 'its sympathy with ghost stories, boxing gloves, fencing, foils and devilry; its exercises tending to promote muscular rather than literary ability;

and its test of merit and standard of membership to drink Red Eye, sing good songs and smoke lots of cigars,' wrote one of its members.

At work George learnt to set type and fill his mind with all the information he could get hold of. It was an old printer who asked the question which was to spur his investigation into political economy.

The printer observed that while in old countries wages are low, in new countries they are nearly always high. George compared the United States with Europe, California and Australia with Pennsylvania and New York. The facts were true, but why was it so? Neither of them could supply an answer.

The question remained in his mind to recur again and again until he worked out the solution many years later.

At about this time a desire to travel and see the world was making itself felt again. Some neighbours had settled in Oregon and had asked him to join them. The traditional call of the west was irresistible. The lure of the gold rush, the knowledge that these were the lands of opportunity, proved too much and George set off once more. He solved the transport problem by signing up as ship's steward on a US lighthouse steamer, the 'Shubrick', which was sailing from the Philadelphia navy yard down the coast of South America through the Straits of Magellan and up to San Francisco.

When he arrived in San Francisco his plans to go to Oregon fell through. However, farther north in the Frazer river came news of fresh gold discoveries. This was an opportune stimulant and off he set. His mother was not so pleased.

She wrote:
I think this money-getting is attended with too many sacrifices. I wished it all in the bottom of the sea when I heard of your going to Victoria ... I shall never feel comfortable until you are settled down quietly at some permanent business. This making haste to grow rich is attended with snares and temptations and a great weariness of the flesh. It is not the whole of life, this getting of gold.

As it turned out there was very little getting of gold for George. The Frazer river was in full flood when he arrived at Victoria and all gold-seeking operations had come to a halt until the water subsided. In the meantime he went to work with his cousin Jim, who was running a store – a rough wooden shack – in the town. The work was hard and the living far from easy, as a letter written to his sister shows.

You innocently ask whether I made my own bed in Victoria. Why bless you, my dear little sister. I had none to make. Part of the time I slept rolled up in my blanket on the counter, or on a pile of floor, and afterwards I had a straw mattress on some boards. Tie only difference between my sleeping and waking costumes was that during the day I wore both boots and cap, and at night dispensed with them.

His gold-seeking was a failure and at the end of November 1858, he was back in San Francisco, penniless and without work. A period of restless wandering followed, with bouts of work in the printing trade and a stint as a weigher in a rice mill. In an attempt to have another go at gold mining he set off on foot into the interior. He tramped from farm to farm, sleeping in barns, and doing casual labouring work. But he was not physically strong, and was forced eventually to turn back to San Francisco and a printing job.

In 1860 he met a 17-year-old orphan girl, Annie Cosima Fox, and fell in love with her. The girl's grandmother, and her guardians, two uncles, did not think the impetuous printer an ideal match, but as George was a persistent suitor and the girl strong-willed, neither were much deterred by the opposition. George was working on the *Evening Journal* when the civil war broke out. California was little affected by the struggle but in the east life was completely disrupted. George's father was dismissed from his job in the Customs House at the age of 64 and forced to seek some other means of livelihood. His son was struggling for existence on an ailing paper which collapsed leaving him virtually penniless. With the one coin which he was left with he went to see Miss Fox. He held out the coin for her to see.

'Annie, that is all the money I have in the world. Will you marry me?'
In spite of this unpromising proposal Miss Fox accepted. She was now 18, he was 22. They eloped, got married on borrowed money, and within a few days were living in Sacramento, where Henry found work on a morning daily, *The Union*. The next few years were the hardest he was to know. Work was irregular, he lost his savings in a mining speculation. Eventually he returned to San Francisco with his wife, his first child, Henry George, junior, was born in November 1862. Henry set up a job-printing outfit with two partners.

During this difficult time he was to remember well the words of an old prospector he had met going to the Frazer river: 'As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down.' Henry George's diary briefly chronicles some of his trials and tribulations.

December 25, 1864. Determined to keep regular journal And to cultivate habits of determination, energy and industry. Feel that I am in a bad situation and must use my utmost efforts to keep afloat and go ahead. Will try to follow the following general rules for one week:

*1st. In every case to determine rationally what is best to be done.
2nd. To do everything determined upon immediately.
3rd. To write down what I shall determine upon for the succeeding day.*

Saw landlady and told her I was not able to pay the rent.

A drought had shortened the grain crop and killed cattle. A general depression brought business almost to a standstill. Mrs. George was expecting her second child. Her jewellery and trinkets were sold or pawned and only her wedding ring remained. They could no longer afford milk, but the milkman offered to supply it in exchange for printed cards. On the morning of January 27, 1865, the baby, Richard, was born. There was no food in the house. George, as he described years later, was at his lowest ebb.

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 \$5. He asked 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 that I was desperate enough to have killed him.

The next few months were the worst he was to know, although the tide was slowly turning. A diary started soon after the birth of his second child continues the story.

*Feb. 17.
I am now afloat again, with the world before me ... I am starting out afresh, very much crippled and embarrassed, owing over \$200. I have been unsuccessful in everything. I wish to profit by my experience and to cultivate those qualities necessary to success in which I have been lacking ...*

He now began to get more regular printing work and was writing occasional articles for different newspapers. In 1865 he was commissioned to cover an expedition of volunteers that intended to aid the Mexicans against their French invaders. In fact, he was to be a first lieutenant in the irregular band that hoped to act as a liberating army. In the event, the Federal authorities stopped their ship from leaving port and George settled for a quieter life by becoming a typesetter in Sacramento.

Here he did a brief spell in the National Guard, and joined a literary society where he spoke, from time to time, on matters of general interest. It was while listening to a speech at one of these meetings that he was converted from a protectionist viewpoint to a belief in free trade. This was a change of great significance, although its effect was not to manifest itself immediately.

George was writing sketches and letters to various papers when printing work was slack. He was even thinking of writing a novel, although public affairs were absorbing more of his attention. However, the news that a new paper was to start in San Francisco prompted him to apply for a writing job on it. He got a job, but in the composing room, setting type. On November 5, 1866, he started work on the paper the *San Francisco Times*. Within 11 days he had his first article published in it, and thereafter promotion was rapid: reporter, editorial writer and finally, in June 1867, managing editor.

In 1868 he wrote an article entitled: 'What the Railroad will bring Us', which was published in a San Francisco periodical. In it he outlined the situation in California, and with remarkable accuracy predicted the future of that rich state.

Is England, with her population of twenty millions to an area of not more than one third that of our State, and a wealth which per inhabitant is six or seven times that of California, a better country than California to live in? Probably, if one were born a duke or factory lord, or to any place among the upper ten thousand; but if one were born among the lower millions how then?

It is certain that the tendency of the new era of the more dense population and the more thorough development of the wealth of the State will be a reduction both of the rate of interest and the rate of wages, particularly the latter ...

The truth is, that the completion of the railroad and the subsequent great increase of business and population, will not be a benefit to all of us, but only to a portion ... Those who have lands, mines, established business, special abilities of certain kinds, will become richer for it and find increased opportunities, those who chance only their own labour will become poorer, and find it harder to get ahead first because it will take more capital to buy land or to get into business; and second, because as competition reduces the wages of labour, capital will be harder for them to obtain ...

Let us not imagine ourselves in a fool's paradise, where the apples will drop into our mouths; let us not think that after the stormy seas and head gales of all the ages, our ship has at last struck the trade winds of time. The future of our State, of our nation, of our race, looks fair and bright; perhaps the future looked so to the philosophers who once sat in the porches of Athens to the unremembered men who raised the cities whose ruins lie south of us. Our modern civilisation strikes broad and and looks high. So did the tower which men once built almost to heaven.

Later in the year he went to New York to try and establish a telegraphic news service for another paper which he had joined the *San Francisco Herald*.

The contrasts between rich and poor in New York made a deep impression on him. As he was to write later:
Years ago I came to this city from the West, unknown, knowing nobody, and I saw and recognised for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want. And 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.

This vow was no casual promise, but a passionate resolution. He refers to it again in a letter to the Revd. Thomas Dawson in Ireland.

Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religious, I shall say something that I don't like to speak of that I never had told anyone. 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 there and then 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.

On his return to San Francisco he persisted in his quest for an answer to the problem of the cause of poverty. In his leisure hours he had taken to riding, feeling the need to get away occasionally from city life and to clear his head of the whirl of perplexing thoughts. One afternoon while riding where speculators, anticipating the wealth that would follow in the wake of the approaching railroad, were making land prices rocket, he made a significant encounter and found the answer to the problem that had been haunting him.

Absorbed in my own thoughts, I had driven the horse into the hills until he panted. Stopping for breath, I asked a passing teamster, for want of something better to say, what land was worth there. He pointed to some cows grazing off so far that they looked like mice and said: 'I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre.' Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since.

Crystallised, as by lightning flash, my brooding thoughts into coherency, and I there and then recognised the natural order – one of those experiences that make those who have them thereafter that they can vaguely appreciate what mystics and poets have called the ecstatic vision.

George went to work formulating his theories in a 48page pamphlet called *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State*, which he printed and published himself in 1871. His proposal, to put a stop to the unearned income of the landowner, was to place a tax on the value of land.

The value of land and labour must bear to each other an inverse ratio ... and while production remains the same, to give more to the one, is to give less to the other. The value of land is the power which its ownership gives to appropriate the product of labour, and as a sequence, where rents (the share of the landowner) are high, wages (the share of the labourer) are low. And thus we see it all over the world, in the countries where land is high, wages are low, and where land is low, wages are high. In a new country the value of labour is at first at its maximum, the value of land at its minimum. As population grows and land becomes monopolised and increases in value, the value of labour steadily decreases.

George distinguished between those things which are the creation of labour, and land which is a gift of nature and not worked for, in any way, by any man. As man must have access to land in order to live and work, any monopolising of land by others puts the landless labourer at their mercy.

He suggested that the annual rental value of land should be taken as tax. He also suggested that it would be the only tax needed.

Land taxation does not bear at all upon production; it adds nothing to prices, and does not affect the cost of living. As it does not add to prices, it costs the people nothing in addition to what it yields the Government; while as land cannot be hid or moved, this tax can be collected with ease and certainty, and with less expense than any other tax; and the landowner cannot shift it to any one else.

A tax upon the value of land is the most equal of all taxes, because the value of land is something that belongs to all, and in taxing land values we are merely taking for the use of the community something that belongs to the community. By the value of land is meant the value of the land itself, not the value of any improvement which has been made upon it – what is sometimes called in England the unearned value.

The pamphlet aroused little interest and sold only about 1,000 copies. George realised that if his ideas were to make any impact a more detailed and thorough exposition was needed. However, that book was not to come until eight years later. In the meantime, newspaper work was to