

# The New York Times.

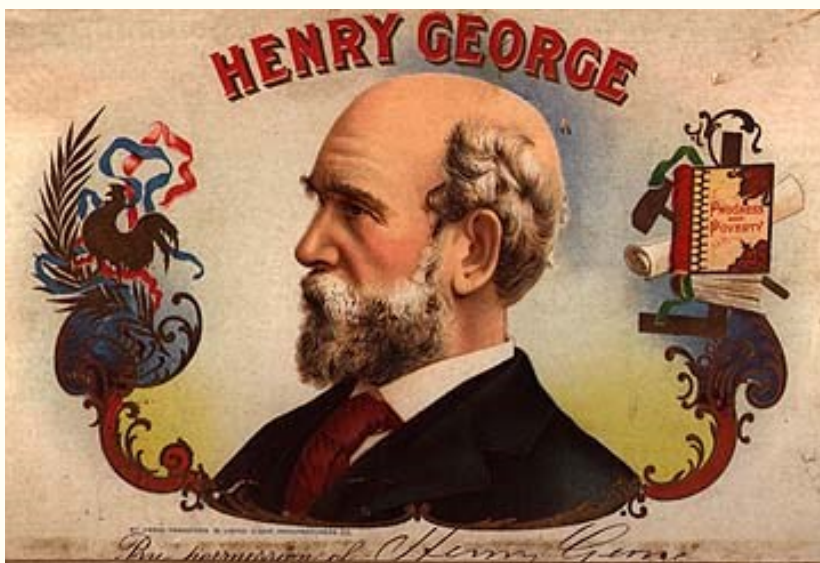
NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1881

## PROGRESS AND POVERTY

[AFTER READING MR. HENRY GEORGE'S BOOK.]

Oh splendid age when Science lights her lamp  
At the brief lightning's momentary flame.  
Fixing it steadfast as a star, man's name  
Upon the very brow of heaven to stamp,  
Launched on a ship whose iron-cuirassed sides  
Mock storm and wave. Humanity sails free;  
Gayly upon a vast untraveled sea,  
O'er pathless wastes, to ports undreamed she rides.  
Richer than Cleopatra's barge of gold,  
This vessel, manned by demi-gods, with freight  
Of priceless marvels. But where yawns the hold  
In that deep, reeking hell, what slaves be they  
Who feed the ravenous monster, pant and sweat,  
Nor know if overhead reign night and day?

EMMA LAZARUS



*"I flatter myself that if  
I cannot sing myself, I  
have at least been the  
means of inspiration  
for one who can."*

- Henry George

## “PROGRESS AND POVERTY” BY EMMA LAZARUS – 1881

### SOURCE

This poem was written by Emma Lazarus and was published in the *New York Times* on October 2, 1881.

### BACKGROUND

Emma reads Henry George’s book *Progress and Poverty* and is transformed by his ideas. The book, which was published in 1879, speaks to the major issue of the day: inequality. George proposes we solve the problem of inequality by taxing landowners and using the money to support the public good. This would ensure that both business owners and their workers had access to the benefits of the wealth produced through their labor.

Although Emma grew up in a wealthy family and never had to work, she lived near Union Square, an area in New York where workers were regularly gathering to demand better wages and hours. Reading George’s book changed the way she understood the problem the workers faced. Emma was so inspired by George’s ideas that she wanted to spread his message and champion his cause. She did that by writing this poem – which she gave the same name as his book “Progress and Poverty” – in order to make the connection for readers between the two.

Henry George was so happy to read the poem. He knew that his book was important, but he also understood that not everyone was going to take the time to read through what was a dry book on economics. He was excited that Emma’s poem could bring the meaning to life.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

*As you read the source consider how it informs these questions:*

- What does it mean to be American?
- What is our responsibility as Americans to others?
- How can the arts help people express, understand, and debate ideas?

### HISTORICAL NOTES

*Definitions of terms used in the source.*

**Science:** Emma is referencing the promethean colossus of science – the idea that science is always good and will improve conditions for everyone. Here, Emma is saying that the way society is set up only allows the rich to benefit from science. She uses the example of a ship to explain her point of view. If you own the ship or can be a passenger, science works in your favor, but if you are a worker on the boat or someone who can’t afford a ticket, you don’t necessarily benefit from the goodness of scientific improvements.

**Iron-cuirass sides:** A type of armor made of small interlinked metal.

**Gayly:** While today the word is associated with being gay, in Emma’s time it was regularly used to mean cheerfully.

**Cleopatra:** Famous Egyptian queen who led the kingdom until she died in the year 30 BCE.