

## CHAPTER IX

### IRELAND

ON October 25, 1881, George disembarked at Queenstown and took the train immediately for Dublin. He travelled through a country seething with anarchy and rebellion. During the winter of 1881-82 the British Government and the Irish people were locked in a deadly grapple. Coercion was at its height. Forty thousand troops and fifteen thousand armed police acted as a British army of occupation. The government struck right and left at its opponents. It suspended the guarantees of civil liberty and filled the jails with "suspects" from every town, village, and hillside. The Irish retaliated with murder and outrage. They mutilated cattle; they ambushed policemen; they slaughtered landlords in cold blood. In the forefront of the battle was the Land League, liberally supplied with funds from America. American gold was a new factor in Irish politics. More than all the wailings of poets and orators about Dark Rosaleen, it stiffened resistance to British rule. It made political agitation profitable to the rank and file as well as to the leaders. In two years the League dispensed over £200,000. Never had such a shower of golden manna descended on the green fields of Ireland! The petty Irish bourgeoisie, avid of jobs, rushed to enrol themselves in the League. A League organizer earned £3 a week. A political prisoner got £1 a week, his family's keep, and a plentiful supply of luxuries in jail. In a poverty-stricken country these sums represented wealth. As long as the money lasted there were plenty of patriots ready to sacrifice themselves for Ireland. As a cynical Irish Nationalist put it, "It was the dollar and nothing but the dollar that made the mare go."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O'Donnell, *History of the Irish Parliamentary Party*, vol. i., p. 370.

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Two days before George left New York Parnell and his chief associates were lodged in comfortable confinement in Kilmainham Jail. The arrests were the signal for an intensification of the agrarian warfare. Captain Moonlight, as Parnell had prophesied, took command. The League at once issued a "no-rent" manifesto, which gave the government an excuse to dissolve it; but its work was carried on by the women's organization with the quaint Victorian title of the Ladies Land League. The "Ladies" were a mob of hysterical mænads who far excelled the men in ferocity and hatred. Unfortunately, they too had money to spend. They spent £70,000 in seven months. Crimes of violence multiplied, and a deeper cloud of horror descended on rural Ireland.

George at first was totally ignorant of the sinister influences behind the Irish land agitation. To him it was the first campaign in a universal war against the private ownership of land. The Irish were fighting for the gospel of *Progress and Poverty*. They would carry it to victory as, ages before, they had ensured the triumph of the Christian faith. From Ireland the light would spread to every corner of the globe. A few conversations with Irish politicians quickly deflated these airy notions. As the correspondent of an influential Irish-American paper, George had access to all the leaders of public opinion in Ireland, from Parnell in Kilmainham downwards. He interviewed most of them and found the experience very depressing. With Parnell he could establish no intimacy whatever. The haughty Anglo-Irish patrician felt an instinctive antipathy for the shabby little American journalist. He had not read *Progress and Poverty*. He was not a reader of books. Nor had he the slightest sympathy with far-reaching schemes of social reconstruction. He was a politician with his eye for ever on the next move in the party game. George's scheme involved an attack on private property, and any attack on private property would alienate the Church. Parnell could not run the risk of driving the priests out of the Irish movement. His own solution of the land problem was the establishment of a peasant proprietary, which appealed to his

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conservative instincts. From this position he refused to budge.

With Parnell's parliamentary colleagues George made no progress either. He must have thought them an odd collection of men to hold the destinies of a nation in their hands—the uncouth Biggar, with his fondness for barmaids and his family of bastards ; the venomous Healy, with his rasping tongue ; the slick journalists, M'Carthy and O'Connor, on the threshold of successful London careers ; the verbose Sexton, with the dreary drip of his rhetoric. The rest were professional politicians with an insatiable appetite for petty intrigue and a total lack of political conviction. Parnell had provided them with careers, and they were unlikely to quarrel with him over anything so unimportant as a question of principle. It needed a personal matter like the divorce to sting them into revolt. To George they were civil, but they showed not the slightest comprehension of his ideas. The only member of the group who had any sympathy with his point of view was Davitt, and Davitt was in prison. Since February 1881 he had been kept in close confinement in Portland Jail on a charge of infringing his convict's ticket-of-leave.

The only other prominent personage in Ireland whom George could claim as a supporter was Bishop Nulty of Meath. In a pastoral letter the Bishop had rather incautiously stated that “the land of every country is the common property of the people of that country.” The press at once pounced on this unlucky sentence. Extremists claimed him as a land nationalizer. His co-religionists denounced him as a communist. Between them the Bishop had a most uncomfortable time. He would have liked his statement to die a natural death, but neither friends nor enemies would permit this. George was one of those who were forever quoting the words of Dr. Nulty. He visited him at Mullingar, and published an uncensored interview with him in the *Irish World*. The Bishop was already in hot water with Rome, and would have been glad if his friends would leave him alone for a little. But this was just what they would not do. George wrote complacently to Ford :

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" I presume we have at last got Dr. Nulty into the trouble he has been so anxious to avoid. One of the reasons I went to Mullingar was to sound him about the publication of his platform. I believe I told you that I got the Ladies (Land League) to order a lot printed just as it appeared in the *Irish World*. Alfred Webb who was printing them suggested to me that perhaps the Doctor would not like it, and that he was doing such good work that we ought to be very careful not to embarrass him. So I did not ask his permission, for I did not want to commit him. I merely told him it was being done, and he made no objection.

Well, the thing is beginning to tell. It is going all over the country and some of the priests are distributing it, and it is getting pasted up, and the Tory papers and all the English papers are reprinting it as an outrageous *official* declaration of communism from a Catholic bishop; and from all I have heard of their temper, I shall be surprised if the English prelates don't try to raise a row at Rome about it.

But it is going to do an immense amount of good."

Good to whom? Certainly not to Dr. Nulty, who wrote an indignant letter to the *Freeman* protesting against this broadcasting of his opinions without his consent. His protest did not save him. He sank into deeper disgrace with the Vatican, and remained under a cloud till the affair of Parnell's divorce gave him a chance to rehabilitate himself. When the prelates declared war on the Irish leader Nulty joined them, though he had previously expressed a private opinion that Parnell need not resign, and in the disgraceful campaign that followed no one showed more rancorous animosity than the land-reforming Bishop of Meath.

In Dublin George was kept busy writing his weekly article for the *Irish World* and lending occasional help to the Nationalist movement. Once the plates of the proscribed *United Irishman* were brought to his lodgings and hidden under his bed till they could be smuggled across to London. Another time Mrs. George, totally unused to public functions, was hurriedly summoned to preside over a meeting of the Ladies Land League. It was rumoured that the government was about to make arrests, and the ladies with feminine logic argued that the presence of an

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American lady in the chair would embarrass the detectives. The detectives arrived and pounced on a male messenger who was leaving with important documents; whereupon the ladies in great alarm stuffed incriminating books and papers under their voluminous petticoats and scurried out of the room.

George addressed a few meetings in Dublin. He was well received, and Nationalist M.P.'s on the platform treated him to the usual amount of blarney. Sexton called him an apostle of humanity. But he could not succeed in interesting his audiences in his ideas. All they wanted was denunciation of England and praise of themselves. To rouse their cheers he had to tell them that the British Government was the worst in the civilized world, and that the Irish, "taking everything together," were the most peaceable people he had ever met. A crowd at one of his meetings, excited by such sentiments, tried to take the horse from his cab and drag him in triumph through the streets. George was highly indignant. He vigorously denounced the proceeding as "undemocratic." This only showed how little he knew the Irish. The Irish were not democrats. They were a nation of serfs who had not enjoyed freedom long enough to work the servile taint out of their blood. What they needed and wanted was what the Anglo-Irish Parnell gave them—a dictatorship. George was talking a language they could not understand. In this, as in other matters, he was no realist.

From Dublin George paid occasional visits to London, and during the first half of 1882 he lived almost continuously in the metropolis. For a month he and his family were the guests of Miss Helen Taylor, the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. Miss Taylor was a well-known woman in the London of her day. Possessed of great wealth, she amused herself by supporting all sorts of advanced causes. Her energy was boundless and her conceit colossal. She told an audience once that she would never marry because there was no man worthy of her. If she had been a poor woman her eccentricities would have smothered her in ridicule, but her wealth and her haw-haw manner enabled her to impose on many people who should have known better.

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Belfort Bax relates that when she swept into council meetings of the Social Democratic Federation all the members, including the poet William Morris, used to rise to their feet. Of George she made a complete conquest. She told him she accepted his theory, with a reservation about compensation to landowners, and he immediately wrote her down as "one of the most intelligent women I ever met, if not the most intelligent."

From her house the Georges went to live with the Hyndmans. Hyndman was another member of the upper middle class with a restless temperament and a weakness for left-wing doctrines. He had recently founded the Social Democratic Federation, and the Londoners were treated to the novel spectacle of a fashionably dressed gentleman selling socialist papers in the Strand or haranguing the mob in Hyde Park. The Londoners were not impressed. They knew that fashionable gentlemen are not the stuff from which revolutionaries are made. "We may handle even extreme opinions with impunity," said George Eliot, "while our furniture, our dinner-giving and preference for armorial bearings in our own case link us indissolubly with the established order." This was exactly Hyndman's case. Beneath his socialist veneer he was a bourgeois to the core. His respect for the conventions was amusingly illustrated once, when he and George were walking home through the London streets. They passed a whelk barrow. George stopped. "I guess I'll take a few of these whelks," he said. Hyndman shuddered. "All right," he replied stiffly, "I'll have some sent in for you." "No," retorted George, "I want them here and now." Hyndman tried to explain that gentlemen did not eat whelks from a barrow, but George was obstinate. He consumed his whelks in the open street, and Hyndman stood agonizing beside him, in the silk hat and frock coat of bourgeois respectability. "I never see a whelk stall at a street corner to this day," he wrote in his memoirs, "but I feel inclined to help out in another direction."<sup>1</sup>

Hyndman naturally tried to convert George to his Marxian socialism, but failed completely.

<sup>1</sup> Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 282

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"I did not make sufficient allowance," he wrote, "for the seductiveness of error, or perhaps for the natural disinclination of a man who has written a world-stirring book to admit that he had only captivated his great audience by clever misapprehensions agreeably put. George was in his way as provoking as Kropotkin. He would be forced by sheer weight of argument to a certain point, and then the moment the pressure was withdrawn, back he would go to his old notions. . . . It was useless to be angry with him or to press him too hard, for then he only went off to some of his devoted single-tax worshippers, from whom he returned more single-taxey than ever."<sup>1</sup>

Hyndman showed *Progress and Poverty* to Marx not long before his death. The old warrior skimmed it through. "The capitalists' last ditch," he pronounced tersely.

In May 1882 a sudden change took place in the Irish political situation. Parnell was released from Kilmainham, after giving some kind of promise, written or unwritten, to slow down the Irish agitation. This meant throwing overboard the extremist policies preached by the *Irish World*, and supported by the Ladies Land League. Incidentally, it extinguished George's last hope of converting the Irish land war into a campaign for the single tax. The terms of the Kilmainham "Treaty" were not known to the public, but the extremists had a shrewd suspicion of what was in store for them. On the night when bonfires were blazing all over Ireland in honour of Parnell's "victory," the Ladies Land League met, said George, "like mourners at a wake."

The true significance of the "treaty" and the full extent of Parnell's surrender were not realized at first owing to the terrible tragedy which followed the liberation of the Irish leader. On Saturday, 6th May, in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, the new Irish Secretary Lord Frederick Cavendish, and the Permanent Under-Secretary Burke, were hacked to death by the murderous knives of a gang of ruffians calling themselves the Invincibles. George was in London when this terrible affair happened. He had spent a portion of the Saturday with Davitt, who had just been released

<sup>1</sup> Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 290-91.

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from Portland. Early next morning he received news of the crime, and hurried at once to Davitt's hotel. Davitt was still in bed. George burst into his bedroom with an open telegram in his hand and "a scared look in his kindly blue eyes." "Get up, old man," he said. "One of the worst things that has ever happened to Ireland has occurred." Davitt read the telegram. "My God!" he exclaimed. "Have I got out of Portland for this? For the first time in my life I despair."

The Phoenix Park murders sent a thrill of horror round the world and compelled the government to tighten up its policy of coercion instead of relaxing it as had been intended. This was a breach of the Kilmainham Treaty, but nevertheless Parnell loyally observed his part of the agreement. He damped down the exuberance of his Nationalist followers. He cut off financial supplies from the Ladies Land League and forced it to dissolve. He organized a new National League with a moderate programme, in which Home Rule ranked first and agrarian reform only second. Davitt's policy of "the land for the people" was rejected and Parnell's own scheme for a peasant proprietary became the official Nationalist programme. The party accepted his decisions without a murmur. Davitt alone feebly protested. But he could not stand up to Parnell. The son of the Mayo peasant was no match for the Anglo-Irish aristocrat. He could not compete in popularity with him. He could not raise the Irish people against him. As he himself confessed mournfully, "The Irish would never accept me as leader because I belong to the ranks of the people." When the party organizers began to accuse him of splitting the movement he got rattled and threw up the sponge. He announced his surrender in a speech at New York, where he went in the summer of 1882. George was deeply disappointed. He wrote to Ford:

"I got the New York *Tribune's* report of Davitt's speech. . . . It is several shades more apologetic than I should like to see it. Think of a man having seriously to defend himself from the charges of being captured by Henry George and run by the *Irish World*! . . . But whatever temporary events may



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be, we can afford to laugh at those who oppose us. They are simply drifting, while 'the stars in their courses are with us.'"

Ford, whose hatred of England amounted to a mania, was enraged at what he considered Parnell's treachery. He bitterly attacked him in the *Irish World*, accused him of using money collected for the land war to pay the election expenses of his henchmen, and poured scorn on his agrarian policy. "The heel," he wrote, "has been firmly put down on the principle of the land for the people. It must not even be discussed. The parliamentary party have it all their own way." He urged George to stump Ireland against Parnell. George realized that this would be a waste of time. For the moment Parnell's position was impregnable. All the trump cards were in his hands. He had the peasants, the Church, and the American Fenians on his side. Any attempt to dethrone him was bound to fail. An American like George could not hope to succeed where an Irishman like Davitt had failed.

In the late summer of 1882 George went for a sight-seeing tour in Western Ireland, where he had some lively experiences and twice saw the inside of what he called a "British bastille." As companion he had a young Eton master, Joynes, who later adopted socialist opinions, was dismissed from his post, and became one of the early supporters of Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. At this time he was touring Ireland as special correspondent for the *Times*. Later, he wrote an account of his experiences in a little book called *The Adventures of a Tourist in Ireland*. The two travellers took the train to Ballinasloe and then drove in a jaunting car to the little town of Loughrea. Loughrea was in the heart of the Clanricarde country, the most disturbed district in Ireland and the scene of innumerable outrages. A few weeks before Lord Clanricarde's agent, an old man of seventy, and his steward, had been shot by assassins concealed behind a loopholed wall. The police therefore were on the alert. When George and his friend drove into the town armed constables surrounded their car and conducted it to the police barracks. There they were detained for several hours—their only refresh-

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ment, as Joynes pathetically records, being a glass of milk—until the resident magistrate arrived and released them after a brief investigation. George duly lodged a protest, but he was more amused than annoyed by his experience.

“The whole thing,” he wrote, “struck me as infinitely ridiculous. There was after all a good deal of human nature in Artemus Ward’s declaration that he was willing to sacrifice all his wife’s relatives to save the Union. And in my satisfaction in seeing an Eton master lugged through the town as too suspicious a stranger to be left at large, I lost all sense of annoyance at my own arrest.”

Next day the tourists drove to Athenry. In its neighbourhood another revolting crime had recently been committed. A local landowner and his soldier escort were shot dead in their car before they could grasp their weapons. This time the police let the visitors view the sights of the town unmolested; but they watched them closely. Just before his departure George found he needed a new collar stud. He had to visit three shops in succession before he got what he wanted. Then he went to the station to take the train for Galway. On the platform several policemen closed in on him and marched him off to the police barracks; Joynes, though not under arrest, faithfully following. Again there was a weary wait until the resident magistrate arrived, the same who had examined George at Loughrea. The police inspector justified the arrest on the ground that George had visited the shops of three “suspects” in Athenry. This was the unlucky result of his hunt for a collar stud. The police also produced a copy of the *Irish Land Question* which they had found in the prisoner’s baggage and in which the inspector had marked several seditious passages. This gave George the opportunity to deliver a little lecture on the single tax, which he wound up by handing round copies of the incriminating pamphlet to every one in the room. The magistrate again released his prisoner, but too late to catch the last train for Galway, and George vigorously protested against the inconvenience which the police were causing him. During the rest of

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patriot, and all the New York politicians who wished to conciliate the Irish vote turned out in force to greet him. Tammany was particularly well represented. A few years later, when George was attacking Tammany, the men who cheered him at Delmonico's turned round and denounced him as an enemy of society. George could retort, with a twinkle in his eye, "These gentlemen gave me a complimentary dinner once."