

CHAPTER XI

THE NEW YORK MAYORALTY CAMPAIGN

TILL the beginning of 1886 George's main preoccupation was the completion of his book on free trade, which he had begun and abandoned three years earlier. A large part of the writing was done during the summer of 1885 at a farmhouse on Long Island. George's interest in the life of the farm and his observation of the habits of the animals supplied him with the illustration with which the book commences.

"Near the window by which I write," he began, "a great bull is tethered by a ring in his nose. Grazing round and round he has wound his rope about the stake until now he stands a close prisoner, tantalized by rich grass he cannot reach, unable even to toss his head to rid him of the flies that cluster on his shoulders. . . . This bull, a very type of massive strength, who, because he has not wit enough to see how he might be free, suffers want in sight of plenty, and is helplessly preyed upon by weaker creatures, seems to me no unfit emblem of the working masses. . . . I shall go out and drive the bull in the way that will untwist his rope. But who shall drive men into freedom? Till they use the reason with which they have been gifted, nothing can avail. For them there is no special providence."¹

The original feature of George's treatment of the tariff question is his attempt to carry the argument beyond the point at which free traders generally leave it. They are content to prove that free trade increases a nation's wealth and must therefore improve the condition of the working classes. What, according to George, they fail to observe is that the beneficent influence of unrestricted trade is de-

¹ *Protection or Free Trade*, pp. 2-3.

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stroyed by the existence of private property in land. The higher wages which the workers earn are stolen from them by the landowners in increased rents. This is why poverty prevails in free trade countries, and why free trade by itself provides no solution of the social problem. It requires as its complement the single tax.

“Free trade means free production. Now fully to free production it is necessary not only to remove all taxes on production but also to remove all other restrictions on production. True free trade, in short, requires that the active factor of production, labour, shall have free access to the passive factor of production, land. To secure this, all monopoly of land must be broken up, and the equal right of all to the use of the natural elements must be secured by the treatment of the land as the common property in usufruct of the whole people.”¹

The book appeared in the spring of 1886 under the title *Protection or Free Trade*. Owing to an accidental circumstance it had almost as large a circulation as *Progress and Poverty* itself. In 1892 Tom Johnson, one of George's closest friends, was a member of Congress. He persuaded half a dozen of his colleagues to join with him in reciting long portions of *Protection or Free Trade* in their speeches, till the whole book appeared in the *Congressional Record*. Congressmen were entitled to reprint at small cost portions of the *Record* and send copies post free to their constituents and others. Johnson took advantage of this privilege to reprint a complete cheap edition of *Protection or Free Trade* from the pages of the *Record* and to broadcast copies at the government's expense all over the United States. Nearly a million copies reached the public in this way.

George was glad to get the book off his hands. He had found the work of composition fatiguing, and he even assured a friend that he would never write another book. It was a distinct relief to get back to the occupations which his restless spirit found more congenial—to lecturing, article-writing, and the general work of propaganda. All the summer he was kept busy pushing the sale of his book (he

¹ *Protection or Free Trade*, p. 309.

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was acting as his own publisher), and then in the autumn came one of the great chances of his life. He was invited to stand for the mayoralty of New York. Such an opportunity for propaganda was too good to be lost. George accepted the nomination and flung himself joyously into the fight.

The invitation came from a group of trade unions in New York. The year 1886 was a period of feverish agitation in the American labour world. All over the United States something like a mass uprising of the working class was taking place. Hundreds of strikes broke out in the industrial areas, most of them engineered by the Knights of Labour, then at the height of their power. On the 6,000 miles of Jay Gould's railway system traffic was paralysed for two months. In Chicago 60,000 workmen laid down their tools. Police fired on strikers at the M'Cormick Harvester Works. New York tramwaymen attacked cars run by blacklegs. To complicate the situation an anarchist outrage at Chicago scared the middle classes out of their wits and stiffened the opposition of the employers to trade union demands. The ground heaved with revolution. America seemed on the brink of social war.

In New York the tempers of trade unionists had been frayed by the action of the police and the courts. The police mercilessly batoned strikers; the courts fined and imprisoned them on trivial pretexts. The workers felt they were not getting a square deal. Their enemies had control of the governmental machine and were using it unfairly against them. Out of this feeling of dissatisfaction arose a movement in favour of independent labour representation on the municipality. The Central Labour Union, a local federation of trade unions, decided to run a labour candidate for the mayoralty. There was no trade unionist or professional labour leader sufficiently outstanding to rally the working class voters, so the selection committee approached George. He had many of the qualifications of a good working class candidate. He had once been a working man himself; he had strong radical sympathies; and he had written a famous book. Moreover, he would attract some of the better class voters who hated graft.

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A combination of middle and working class reformers might poll sufficient strength to carry the election. At a special conference of trade union delegates it was decided by a large majority to offer the nomination to George.

When the invitation came, George did a very sensible thing. He asked the trade union leaders to guarantee him a minimum vote of 30,000. He was willing to run, but he did not wish his candidature to be a fiasco. The condition, at first, seemed impossible of fulfilment, but a thorough canvass of the working class quarters procured 34,000 signed pledges to vote for George. These were produced and verified at a great meeting in Cooper Union, and George finally consented to stand.

"I am your candidate for mayor of New York," he told his audience. "It is something that a little while ago I never dreamt of. 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 lives as you know them to lead in the squalid districts. It is because of that that I stand before you to-night, presenting myself for the chief office of your city."

In putting his cause to the test of a political battle George was under no illusion as to the forces he would have to fight. He had plumbed the rotten depths of American politics. He knew the sordid reality that lay concealed behind the imposing façade of American democracy. The constitution handed down by the founders of the Republic had become the convenient instrument of a vulgar plutocracy. The sovereignty of the people had passed into the hands of political bosses, sprung from the dregs of the populace. Nowhere did the American demos show to less advantage than in the towns.

"In all the great American cities," George had written in *Progress and Poverty*, "there is to-day as clearly defined a ruling class as in the most aristocratic countries in the world. Its members carry wads in their pockets, make up the slates for nominating conventions, distribute offices as they bargain

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together, and—though they toil not neither do they spin—wear the best of raiment and spend money lavishly. . . . Who are these men? The wise, the good, the learned—men who have earned the confidence of their fellow-citizens by the purity of their lives, the splendour of their talents, their probity in public trusts, their deep study of the problems of government? No; they are gamblers, saloon keepers, pugilists or worse.”¹

The electorate was worthy of its masters. In New York an illiterate proletariat, venal as the populace of old Rome, was the obedient servant of a ring of grafters who worked their will on the city finances. It was this mass of corruption that George proposed to vitalize by the passionate eloquence of his appeal. The attempt seemed hopeless. Professional politicians smiled at the man who sought to blast a way through mountainous error by the mere power of his tongue. George alone, with his invincible optimism, did not despair of success. Even if he were beaten, the election would give him a platform from which his words would reach millions. The political contests of New York were followed eagerly by the rest of the country, and sometimes attracted the attention of the European press. The indefatigable propagandist could not let slip this unique opportunity to publish his doctrine to the world.

For years New York had been misgoverned and pillaged by the political machine known as Tammany. Founded in the eighteenth century as a social club and named after a legendary Indian chief, the society—with its “sachems” and its “sagamores,” its “braves,” and its “wiskinskies”—became first the Democratic caucus of New York, and then an unsavoury nest of scoundrelly grafters. Under Boss Tweed the machine robbed the city of 200 million dollars. When in 1871 the Tweed ring was exposed and overthrown Tammany politicians had to walk warily, but incredible to relate they quickly recovered their hold over the city. By 1886 they were firmly entrenched in the municipality; the city officers from the mayor downwards were their nominees; and the large alien vote of New York was at their command. They looked forward without anxiety to the autumn elections.

¹ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 378.

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In the summer of 1886 Boss Croker succeeded to the chieftainship of Tammany. Croker was the child of Irish immigrants, and was himself born in Ireland. He proved to have more than his countryman's usual share of political talent. Famous in his youth as a gangster and prize-fighter, he was enlisted by Boss Tweed in the Tammany bodyguard, and gravitated in due course to the highest position in the society. For fifteen years this kind-faced man, with his winning smile, ruled New York with the power of a king. He was perfectly frank as to his motives. "I am out for my pockets all the time," he told an inquiry committee. And when he retired in 1900 to his native Ireland he had an income which the British Inland Revenue Department assessed at £20,000 a year.

When rumours of George's candidature reached Croker's ears he realized the need for prompt action. The appearance of an independent candidate was often the signal for one of those periodic revolts of the New York electorate against its masters. The movement, if possible, must be stifled at the outset. Croker's first ingenious idea was to offer the Tammany nomination to George himself. When this was turned down an emissary was sent to offer the independent candidate a safe seat in Congress if he would withdraw. The indiscreet negotiator blurted out that while George could not possibly win, his running would "raise hell." To which George replied, "I do not want the responsibility of the office of mayor, but I do want to raise hell! I am decided and will run."

Since the enemy could not be bought off, Croker looked round for a respectable Democratic politician to carry the Tammany flag. It would not do to run one of the usual grafters. Faced with the alternative of an honest candidate, the electorate might bolt. Somebody must be found who would appeal to the better class citizens. Croker's choice fell on Abram Hewitt, the Democratic Congressman for whom George had done secretarial work when first he came to New York. Hewitt was a rich philanthropist whose name had never been tarnished by the breath of slander. From every point of view he was an ideal candidate. But why a man of his unquestioned integrity

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should have consented to become the tool of Boss Croker is one of those mysteries of American politics which only natives can understand.

Croker's last move was to appeal to the Republicans to stand down and allow the anti-George vote to be concentrated on Hewitt. Here he failed. The Republican bosses thought they saw a chance of victory in a three-cornered fight, and they put up a young man of good family, a future President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt had already made some progress in politics. He had served in the New York State Legislature, where his piercing voice, shouting "Mr. Speakah! Mr. Speakah!" had wakened the echoes of the chamber and compelled the attention of somnolent senators. But his impulsiveness had estranged his leaders, and he had withdrawn for two years to play the gentleman cowboy in the Dakota Bad Lands. Now he was eager to return to politics, and the mayoralty election offered a convenient card of re-entry. Roosevelt, in his free trade days, had met George at the New York Free Trade Club, but he had no understanding of his ideas. In his brusque way he dismissed him as "an utterly cheap reformer."¹

The armies were now drawn up for battle and the leaders proceeded to address their troops. George's programme, which his labour supporters swallowed without demur, was, as the press declared, a mere "epitome of his popular essay on *Progress and Poverty*." Hewitt took the line that he was called on to save society from dissolution, and his speeches contained blood-curdling references to the horrors of the French Revolution and the atrocities of the Commune. Roosevelt declared for clean government and a war on the spoilsmen. To his intense disgust, the Republican candidate soon discovered that he was out of the running. He had hoped to slip in between his two rivals. But as the campaign progressed it quickly became evident that the fight lay between George and Hewitt. The "timid good," as Roosevelt scornfully called them, plumped for the Tammany candidate. Even the Republican bosses in the end recommended their supporters to vote for Hewitt.

¹ H. E. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 112.

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Roosevelt polled much less than the usual Republican strength and had the humiliation of finishing third. To a man of his intense egoism this was a bitter blow. He seldom cared to refer to his discomfiture, and in his *Autobiography* the whole episode is dismissed in three lines.

The army which rallied round George's banner was a motley host of labourists, socialists, single taxers, and municipal reformers. Prominent among his supporters were Powderley, head of the Knights of Labour; Gompers, founder of the rival Federation of Labour; Daniel de Leon, stormy petrel of American socialism; Tom Johnson, a wealthy Western industrialist, later distinguished as reform mayor of Cleveland; August Lewis, a prosperous straw goods manufacturer; Thomas Shearman, a corporation lawyer; Louis Post, an active journalist. It was lucky for George that he had some wealthy friends, for, though contrary to American usage, collections were taken at his meetings to defray the cost of the campaign, and cartloads of coppers were transported daily to the party headquarters, yet there remained a substantial deficit, which was wiped out mainly by Johnson and Shearman. Louis Post ran a successful campaign paper, the *Leader*, the work on which was done gratuitously by newspapermen who sympathized with George, though the papers for which they did their paid work opposed his candidature.

Several clergymen threw themselves into the fray, and figures in priestly robes were seen expounding the virtues of the single tax from platforms and "cart tails." Most interesting of all George's clerical supporters was Father M'Glynn, priest of St. Stephen's, one of the largest Roman Catholic congregations in New York. M'Glynn's independent mind and social sympathies had already led to differences with his ecclesiastical superiors. Some years before he had delivered speeches in support of the Irish Land League which had produced protests from Rome and earned him a reprimand from his archbishop. Since then he had been a marked man, but this did not deter him from coming out boldly on the side of George. He offered to speak in his support at a meeting in Chickering Hall. When the advertisements of the meeting appeared, Arch-

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bishop Corrigan of New York peremptorily forbade M'Glynn to speak. M'Glynn refused to obey this injunction, having already undertaken to speak, but he promised to address no more meetings during the campaign. He sent George to interview the Archbishop and persuade him that *Progress and Poverty* contained nothing contrary to the theology of the Church. George obtained no satisfaction, and the Archbishop made a use of his visit which was hardly fair. When a labour leader, a Roman Catholic, appealed to Dr. Corrigan not to allow the Church's influence to be used in favour of the old corrupt politicians, the Archbishop disingenuously replied, "The only politician who has ventured to approach me directly or indirectly in the campaign you refer to is Mr. Henry George."

M'Glynn persisted in delivering his speech, and Archbishop Corrigan at once suspended him from his functions for two weeks. The fact of the suspension, however, was not made public till after the election, and M'Glynn did not disclose it to his friends. He continued to attend George's meetings, but kept his promise not to speak. When the press announced that he had withdrawn his support from George he publicly contradicted the report, and on polling day he courageously drove round the town with the independent candidate in an open barouche. The further "disciplining" of M'Glynn, culminating in his excommunication, will be related in the next chapter.

The hostility of the Catholic Church was a serious handicap to George. It robbed him of a large part of the Irish vote. One of the many Irish politicians on Tammany got at Vicar-General Preston, Archbishop Corrigan's deputy, and procured from him a letter in which he denounced George's doctrines as "unsound, unsafe and contrary to the teachings of the Church." This letter, printed and distributed as a campaign document, was a not unimportant factor in the final result. On the other hand, George made unexpected inroads on Tammany's peculiar preserve—the alien population of New York. As always before an exciting election, the number of naturalizations went up enormously. This was one of Tammany's regular methods of

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increasing its voting strength. But, in this instance, not all the new citizens were for Croker. A German applicant was asked by the naturalization officer, "Do you swear to support the constitution of the United States?" "No, no!" was the angry response, "I swears to support Mr. George as mayor."

During these strenuous weeks the labour candidate did not spare himself. He spoke early and late, often addressing a dozen meetings a day. His oratory was his party's chief asset. Not only the mob, but men of culture and refinement fell under its spell. A little before this Hamlin Garland heard George speak at Brooklyn and recorded his impressions in *A Son of the Middle Border*.¹

"His words were orderly and well chosen. They had precision and grace as well as power. He spoke as other men write, with style and arrangement. His address could have been printed word for word as it fell from his lips. This self-mastery, this graceful lucidity of utterance combined with a personal presence distinctive and dignified, reduced even his enemies to respectful silence. His altruism, his sincere pity and his hatred of injustice sent me away in the mood of a disciple."

An army of enthusiastic followers fought valiantly by the side of their leader. In halls and clubrooms, at street corners and on vacant lots, speakers shouted themselves hoarse in favour of Henry George. New York was submerged beneath a deluge of oratory. The speaking arrangements were in the hands of Gompers, who never failed to speak himself when no one else was available. Like many small men, this little Dutch Jew had a voice of surprising range and power, which made it inadvisable for any other speaker to mount a soapbox in his vicinity. George himself had to cut short one of his open-air addresses because Gompers was speaking three blocks away.

The closing incident of the campaign was a great working class parade on the Saturday before the poll. Through drenching rain thousands of men marched to Union Square, where George took the salute. There were no bands, but the processionists supplied their own marching music with

¹ Page 379.

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the rhythmical chant of their party slogans. Broadway rang with the refrain "George! George! Hen-ry George!" The size of the demonstration startled the bourgeoisie and caused a last-minute stampede from the Republican to the Democratic camp, with important effects on the result.

November 2nd was polling day. It was now that the weaknesses of George's party organization told most heavily against him. The modern system of publicly controlled elections did not exist at this time in America. The parties had each to print and distribute their own ballot papers. This not only destroyed the secrecy of the ballot (the voting papers were printed in different colours) but it often ensured the defeat of a poor candidate who could not afford to print ballot papers in sufficient quantities. George's lack of funds hampered him here, and it also prevented him from having inspectors at every polling booth to see that the Tammany officials did not "stuff" the ballot boxes with faked voting papers or poll the same man over and over again. "How can George hope to win?" asked a cynical Tammany "heeler," "he hasn't enough inspectors." It was true. When the result was announced, George came second on the poll. The figures were :

Hewitt	90,552
George	68,110
Roosevelt	60,435

Many connected with the election believed and asserted that George had really won, but had been "counted out" by the usual Tammany methods. This is not impossible. It is certain that grave irregularities occurred. Hundreds of ballot boxes, for instance, suspected of containing a labour majority were pitched into the East River.

George, however, was well satisfied with the result. He had achieved a great personal triumph. He had polled an unexpectedly substantial vote, and he had beaten Roosevelt. To his disappointed followers he addressed words of hope and encouragement :

"Thank God, men of New York," he told them, "we in this fight have won a victory that makes the true republic of the

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future certain. We have lit a fire that will never go out. We have begun a movement that defeated and defeated and defeated must still go on."

In his elation George looked forward to fresh triumphs and a further enlargement of his personal fame. He did not realize, what is so painfully clear to us now, that he had reached the pinnacle of his career. Since the publication of *Progress and Poverty* the curve of his reputation had been steadily mounting. Now it took a slight downward bend. The change was hardly perceptible at first, but the passage of the years made it plainly visible. His star had reached and passed its meridian. The 1886 mayoralty campaign marks the highest point of his public endeavour. Never again did he bulk so largely in the public eye. Never again did he taste so intoxicating a triumph. Never again did his cause seem so certain of ultimate victory.