

CHAPTER XII

THE UNITED LABOUR PARTY

WHEN the mayoralty election was over a reporter interviewed George and asked him what he intended to do. "I shall buy a bottle of ink and a box of pens," he said simply, "and again go to writing." In the previous summer George had discussed with his friends the possibility of establishing an independent single tax paper. These plans, interrupted by the electoral contest, were now resumed and completed. On January 8, 1887, appeared the first number of a new weekly, the *Standard*, with George in the editorial chair.

"Confident in the strength of truth," he wrote in his opening leader, "I shall give no quarter to abuses and ask none of their champions. . . . I hope to make this paper the worthy exponent and advocate of a great party yet unnamed."

Within a few weeks the *Standard* reached the respectable circulation of 40,000. This initial success it owed to the public interest in the M'Glynn case, which the *Standard* featured prominently in its columns. M'Glynn's affairs were now rapidly approaching a crisis. Corrigan's disciplinary measures had failed to intimidate him, and he continued to reiterate in speeches and interviews his belief in the single tax. His criticism of a pastoral letter in which the Archbishop had made a veiled attack on land nationalization led to his suspension for a second time. Finally, in January 1887, Corrigan removed him from the pastorate of St. Stephen's and transmitted his case to Rome.

In the painful controversy that followed mistakes were made on both sides. M'Glynn proved unnecessarily stubborn. Corrigan showed himself unduly eager for a condemnation. Passion and private prejudice prevented a

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calm consideration of the real point at issue. At Rome the case was unsympathetically handled by the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Simeoni, "the embodiment of timid and suspicious conservatism," as an American bishop described him. Simeoni started with a prejudice against M'Glynn. It was he who, some years earlier, had forwarded the Vatican's protest against M'Glynn's speeches on the Irish question. On that occasion he had been disappointed that Archbishop M'Closkey (Corrigan's predecessor) had not forced M'Glynn publicly to recant. The present complaint seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to bring a rebellious priest to reason. Simeoni proceeded to act on this assumption. He sent M'Glynn an order—first, to come to Rome; second, to retract in writing the opinions he had expressed publicly on the land question. The second was a most unreasonable demand. It was the lawfulness of M'Glynn's doctrines that was in dispute. To ask him to condemn them in advance was asking him to plead guilty. M'Glynn protested strongly against this attempt to prejudge his case and refused to go to Rome.

Here he was certainly imprudent. The refusal to obey Simeoni's summons exposed him to a charge of contumacy. He should at all costs have gone to Rome and demanded that his case be investigated by the Church tribunals. He was not so friendless as he imagined. As it happened, there was a new cardinal at the Vatican in the spring of 1887 who was interested in his cause. This was Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, the leader of the liberal section of the American hierarchy. Gibbons disapproved of Corrigan's action. It was the kind of thing that might irritate American opinion and strengthen the view that the Roman Catholic Church was an alien institution, striving to undermine American liberty. All his life Gibbons had exerted himself to dissuade the Vatican and the American hierarchy from decisions that would excite the suspicion of the American public. During this visit to Rome he persuaded the Pope to withhold his condemnation from the Knights of Labour, and he was instrumental with Cardinal Manning in keeping *Progress and Poverty* off the Index. It is practically certain that he would have had sufficient

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influence to procure M'Glynn's acquittal. The important thing was that the case should be thrashed out, and Gibbons wrote personally to M'Glynn urging him to appear at Rome. M'Glynn replied, through his canonical advocate Dr. Burtzell, that he would come on certain conditions. Gibbons communicated the contents of this letter, verbally, to the Pope, but for some reason or other it was not passed on officially to Propaganda. Simeoni, having received no reply from M'Glynn, sent him a peremptory order to appear at Rome *within forty days, on pain of excommunication*. M'Glynn, unaware that his letter had not reached Propaganda, ignored the summons. The deadlock was complete. On 4th July the *final blow* fell. M'Glynn was declared "cut off from the communion of the Church, from its sacraments and participation in its prayers, and should he persevere in his contumacy, deprived of the right after death of Christian burial."

No termination of the case could have been more unsatisfactory. The technical cause of M'Glynn's excommunication was his refusal to obey a summons to Rome. The real cause, his land theory, was never submitted to the issue of a trial, and no authoritative pronouncement was made on its conformity or nonconformity with Catholic doctrine. In this unsettled state the question was left to trouble the peace of the Church and disturb the consciences of honest Catholics who had given intellectual assent to the single tax theory.

As for M'Glynn, his resolution remained unbroken by his punishment. He sturdily maintained that his excommunication was unjust, and an unjust excommunication, he held, could not stand in canon law. Some priests sympathized with him and felt the weight of Corrigan's displeasure. Many Catholic laymen considered that he had been harshly treated. But the American press on the whole justified the Archbishop. In its hatred of the single tax it defended an action which in other circumstances it would almost certainly have denounced as un-American. M'Glynn retained the loyalty of his old parishioners, and they contributed generously to his support, so that he was in no danger of want. For the next few years he devoted himself to

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lecturing and writing. He found a congenial outlet for his social sympathies in the Anti-Poverty Society, of which he was the chief founder. The society was a Christian Socialist organization which met on Sunday evenings and waged war on social abuses in the name of religion. Special hymns were sung, and speakers indulged freely in biblical imagery and language. M'Glynn was president and George vice-president—the priest and the prophet, as their admirers liked to call them. This union of religious sentiment with social aspiration made a strong appeal to many minds, and the society enrolled a large membership. It provided a useful rallying ground for single taxers, and its weekly meetings helped to keep their doctrines prominently before the public.

Single taxers, however, had another organization from which they expected greater things. This was the United Labour Party. The heavy vote polled by George in the mayoralty election encouraged his supporters to keep alive the organization built up during the contest and to make it the nucleus of an independent single tax party. The history of the United States is not encouraging for third parties. Seldom have they been able to break down the monopoly of the older political organizations. Free Soilers, Greenbackers, and Populists have disappeared, leaving scarcely a ripple on the surface of American politics. Even Theodore Roosevelt had to confess his inability to hold together his Progressive group after its defeat in 1912. "There are no loaves and fishes," he said cynically. George was dubious of the wisdom of the new departure, but he had to admit that the experiment was worth a trial. After all, the Republicans themselves had started as a third party. They had squeezed out the Whigs in the eighteenth-sixties. Why then should the single taxers not in turn squeeze out the Democrats? If their programme had half the virtues they ascribed to it, it must end by capturing the allegiance of the electorate.

The new party was launched at a great meeting held at Cooper Union shortly after the mayoralty election, and steps were immediately taken to organize branches throughout the State. The party's title was intended to attract

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the working class vote. The local branches usually called themselves Land and Labour Clubs. By August 1887 the party organization was sufficiently advanced to permit the holding of a convention at Syracuse. Here the first signs of weakness and schism showed themselves. Like the block of citizens who had voted for George in 1886, the United Labour Party was a medley of discordant elements. It included among many other shades of social and political belief a small but vocal section of socialists, whose presence in the party was particularly obnoxious to George. He held that, as single taxers were so often unjustly called socialists, they must avoid giving the slightest ground for the accusation by associating with those who claimed the name as an honour. Socialists, moreover, were among George's most incisive critics. They made no secret of their poor opinion of the single tax, which in their eyes was of no value except as a first step towards more radical reforms. This attitude irritated George. Accustomed to be treated by his friends as an infallible prophet, he felt ill at ease in the company of such lukewarm adherents, and he decided that either he or they must go. The dispute came to a head at the Syracuse Convention. The most distinguished spokesman for the socialists was Laurence Grönlund, author of the widely read and influential book, *A Co-operative Commonwealth*. The anti-socialist case was stated by George and M'Glynn. After a prolonged and acrimonious debate George carried his point. The socialists were expelled.

Weakened by these dissensions, the United Labour Party entered on its first electoral battle. At the New York State elections of 1887 it ran candidates for several offices. The governorship was not vacant, but the Secretaryship of State had to be filled, and George was nominated for this important post. Candidates were also run for some minor positions. Johnson, Shearman, and Lewis subscribed liberally to the party funds, and a vigorous campaign was instituted throughout the State. George and M'Glynn were the party's star speakers, and their oratorical efforts were supplemented by a lavish distribution of literature. Over a million tracts on the single tax were broadcast among the electors. At the close of the campaign George expressed

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his confidence in the result. "The vote to be received by our party," he told the press, "will astonish the politicians." It did, but not in the way George anticipated. For the Secretaryship of State the votes were :

Cook (Democrat)	480,355
Grant (Republican)	459,503
George (United Labour)	72,781
Huntington (Prohibitionist)	41,897

In the whole State George had polled only 4,000 more votes than he received in the 1886 mayoralty election. In New York itself nearly half his supporters had deserted him. The defeat of the new party was decisive and crushing. On the night of the election George and Louis Post watched the returns as they appeared on the bulletin board of the *New York Herald*. When they turned to go Post asked George, "Do you see the hand of the Lord in this?" George stoutly replied, "I don't see it, but I know it's there."

There was really little cause for surprise in what had happened. George, as usual, had been wildly optimistic. He had exaggerated the strength of his friends and underestimated the number and influence of his foes. Among the factors which explain his defeat, the enmity of the socialists counted for something, though not for much. Their voting strength was negligible. More formidable was the hostility of the Roman Catholic Church, which threw the whole weight of its influence against a party which counted an excommunicated priest among its leaders. Even Patrick Ford, who had remained loyal to George up to this point, now deserted him—a serious loss for a politician with so little press backing. But, of course, the real reason for the disaster was the numerical weakness of the single taxers. Events like the mayoralty election had given them a false idea of their strength. They forgot that citizens who might support George on a purely municipal issue would in a State election prefer to vote for their own party candidates. George's heavy poll in 1886 was a protest against Tammany, not a demonstration in favour of the single tax. The State elections of 1887 made this desolatingly clear.

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George tried to put the best face on matters, but inwardly he was deeply chagrined by the smallness of his vote. It convinced him that he had acted foolishly when he accepted the leadership of a third party. He felt like a general without troops, and he resolved to extricate himself at the first opportunity from his ridiculous position. Unfortunately, the manner of his withdrawal gave it the appearance of a betrayal and did infinite harm to the single tax cause. The circumstances were these. In December 1887 Grover Cleveland, the Democratic President, was approaching the end of his first term of office. As a gesture for the next election he sent a message to Congress urging a revision of the tariff. George seized this as a pretext to recommend that the United Labour Party should put no presidential candidate in the field at the next election, but give its support to Cleveland. His arguments were that the party could not hope to win; that a revision of the tariff was a good thing in itself; and that a discussion of the free trade question might raise wider issues. In his last book he had tried to prove that free trade, logically carried out, led on to the single tax. To these counsels of expedience M'Glynn offered an unbending opposition. Single taxers, he maintained, must fight their own battles and not be drawn by red herrings in the wake of the older parties, between whom, as George himself had once said, there was nothing to choose. Supporting Cleveland would mean fighting beside Croker and his gangsters (the condottieri of Tammany always marched under the Democratic flag), and this was a humiliation to which M'Glynn was resolved never to submit. For weeks the controversy dragged on in the pages of the *Standard*, and the disputants became hot and bitter. Each misrepresented the motives of the other. George accused his opponents of wishing to create a party for their own personal advantage. They retorted that he had been bought by the Democratic caucus. A sad result of this exchange of personalities was the rupture of the friendship between George and M'Glynn. For years they never met or communicated with each other.

George had plenty of backing in the movement and

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could easily have put up a good fight for control of the United Labour Party, but he had lost interest in it and persuaded his friends quietly to withdraw. The schism extended to the Anti-Poverty Society, and here also George left M'Glynn in possession. The whole movement was thrown into confusion. In the presidential election of 1888 single taxers fought on different sides. The United Labour Party put up a candidate who secured a handful of votes. George and his friends worked for Cleveland, and preached on Democratic platforms the undiluted doctrine of free trade, to the intense disgust of the party managers, who had given out as the marching song of their party parades :

Don't, don't, don't be afraid,
Tariff reform is not free trade.

It didn't much matter what it was, for " bold " Cleveland was beaten. He was re-elected in 1892, but by that time his enthusiasm for free trade had cooled, and the tariff revision for which his party was responsible was a meagre and disappointing reform. George had put his money on the wrong horse. He had wrecked his party and alienated his friends, and he had nothing to show for it. His reputation as a practical politician sank to zero. The man who in 1886 had startled party caucuses and fluttered the doves of Tammany was now regarded as a pasteboard Jacobin who had met his Thermidor. The professional politicians treated him with derision. The public reverted to its old idea of him as an amiable but impracticable idealist.

George, mortified and embittered by these reverses, was glad of any excuse to escape from the scene of his humiliation. At the end of the year he paid a short visit to England, and returned, in the following spring, for an extended lecture tour. The applause of crowds helped to restore his self-confidence. Though the curiosity of the British public about him was less keen than in 1884, he was still able to attract large and enthusiastic audiences. He spoke all over England and Scotland, and debated publicly with Hyndman and with Samuel Smith, M.P., a solemn but

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well-meaning Scotsman who had made a fortune as a cotton-broker in Liverpool and was famous for his philanthropic activities. In Ireland George had his usual ill-luck. He addressed a meeting in Dublin, which, we are informed, went smoothly until " a gentleman in the reserved seats " made an offensive remark, whereupon the audience drew their sticks and engaged cheerfully in a traditional Irish free fight. With his reception in England and Scotland George professed himself well satisfied. His meetings were large and appreciative, and notabilities who would have boycotted him in 1884 now sat on his platform. But he could not help noticing that the movement had suffered notable defections since his last visit. Many single taxers had become socialists. Five-sixths of the Fabians, according to Bernard Shaw, owed their conversion to *Progress and Poverty*. It was surely a malignant fate that made the individualist George the agent of a socialist revival. Radicals, too, had become lukewarm in their support. Labouchere, for instance, declared himself ready to tax urban land values, but he refused to abolish all taxes in favour of a land tax, and he expressed his utter disbelief in the power of the single tax to regenerate society. His attitude was that of many members of the Liberal party. To George, such views were a travesty of his doctrine. It was galling indeed to see his great social scheme reduced to the paltry dimensions of a fiscal reform. Yet to this day many so-called Georgists hold the single tax creed in this limited and unsatisfactory form.

While in England George was flattered to receive an invitation to carry his message to Australia. At the beginning of 1890 he set off with his wife on this, the last of his great lecture tours. The travellers crossed the American continent to San Francisco, where George's old fellow-townsmen gave him a tumultuous welcome, sailed across the Pacific, and reached Melbourne at the beginning of March. For the next three months they travelled thousands of miles over the Australian continent, George lecturing almost every evening, and sometimes delivering two or three speeches a day. The Australians, unaccustomed to distinguished visitors from the Old or the New World,

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welcomed him hospitably, crowded to his meetings, and treated him to a succession of dinners, banquets, and receptions which left him limp and helpless. Of course, he was taken to an Australian race-meeting. An enthusiastic single taxer who belonged to a racing club secured George's admission as an honorary member. "Has he any horses?" asked the secretary. "Two," said the single taxer. "*Progress and Poverty*, and they are running well in the United States."

The atmosphere of hero-worship which surrounded George in Australia was very pleasing, but the strain of continual travelling and lecturing was tremendous, and he was immensely relieved when the tour came to an end. He made the return voyage by way of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, visited some of the show-spots of Europe, and delivered some lectures in England and Scotland. On 1st September he disembarked at New York. The memory of his triumphs beneath the Southern Cross helped to obliterate the painful recollection of his political failure, and he applied himself with renewed zest to his writing and lecturing. But a sudden calamity struck him down. In Australia he had overtaxed his strength, and exhausted nature took its revenge. At the end of the year he was prostrated by a slight apoplectic stroke which produced aphasia, that distressing condition in which the patient either loses the power of speech or attaches wrong words to his ideas. George's rich friends at once came to his rescue and sent him off for a prolonged holiday to Bermuda. There he slowly recuperated, taking daily exercise, learning to ride the bicycle, and refreshing his mind with Shakespeare and Schopenhauer. By April 1891 he was able to return to New York. His restoration to health was not complete. The damage to his system was irreparable, and he was never, physically, the same man again. But he recovered sufficiently to undertake the literary work to be described in the next chapter, and to engage in the political activities which brought his career to its tragic termination.