

CHAPTER IV.

THE "SAN FRANCISCO EVENING POST."

1871-1875.

AGE, 32-36.

IT was in 1859, before he came of age and while setting type on the "Home Journal," that, on an alarm of fire one day which brought most of the people of the neighbourhood into the street, Henry George found himself wedged in a doorway with a strange printer from another part of the building, both trying to pass through at the same moment. Seven years later on meeting him again, George learned that this man was William M. Hinton. George was then about to set off on the Mexican filibustering expedition and Hinton deprecated his going, because George would imperil his life and most likely cut off the means of his family's support. That commenced the friendship, and when "Our Land and Land Policy" had been published, Hinton was one of those to whom the author gave a copy. Born in England, in 1830, nearly ten years before George's birth, he was brought to the United States as a child, his father, I. T. Hinton, coming to Philadelphia in 1832 to sell a history of the United States written by himself and his brother, John Howard Hinton. George wavered during the summer of 1871 between remaining in California and going to New York or Philadelphia to establish himself, when he chanced one

day to talk with Hinton, of which conversation the latter says:

“Mr. George was talking of going East to settle. I had read his pamphlet, ‘Our Land and Land Policy,’ and was taken with it, believing its author showed marked ability. In talking with him about it and other things, I asked him why he did not start a newspaper. He replied that he had no money; to which I said that anybody could start one with money, but that the difficult and commendable achievement was to start one without it. I had no thought about entering upon such an enterprise myself, as I was getting a good living out of the job-printing establishment of Mahan & Co., of which firm I was a partner. I made the suggestion to Mr. George simply because at the time he had no employment. Yet as a result of this casual conversation, the idea catching fire in his mind, I found myself before long getting into the thing, though even then I purposed to stay only until it should be set on its feet, planning then to withdraw. Three of us entered into an equal partnership—George, who was to be editor; myself, who was to superintend the printing; and A. H. Rapp, a member of my job-printing firm, who was to be business manager. We got together about \$1,800 and this and some more that we got in by the sale in advance of delivery routes, constituted all the capital we had with which to start a daily newspaper. We lost no time, and on Monday, December 4, 1871, the first copy of the ‘Daily Evening Post’ appeared, with Hinton, Rapp & Co. as publishers, and Henry George as editor. Our office was at 605 Montgomery Street, west side, a few doors north of Clay.”

Following the example of very successful newspapers in the East, the price was set at one cent a copy, it being the first penny paper west of the Rocky Mountains. Indeed, the cent piece was not in commercial use on the Pacific Coast, so that it had to be introduced specially;

which was accomplished by inducing the largest financial institution in the Western country—the Bank of California—to import a thousand dollars' worth of pennies on the presumption of their usefulness in a multitude of minor commercial transactions. Then San Francisco was astonished by the spectacle of newsboys crying the new paper on the streets for a cent a copy, and ready with a large supply of pennies to make change. The novelty of the thing caused people to buy the little "Post." For the paper, consisting of four pages, was only eleven by fourteen inches, and the type very small. The early numbers contained little advertising and telegraphic, the space being filled with local news and editorials, written in short, sharp, direct style. In its salutatory it said: "In the higher, wider sense the 'Post' will be Democratic; that is, it will oppose centralisation and monopolies of all kinds. But it will be the organ of no faction, clique or party. It will endeavour to deal with all questions without cowardly reserve, but with firmness and candour; and whether it praises or censures, it will be without reference to party lines or party affiliations."

Towards the end of his life Henry George told of the early history of the "Post."¹

"The vigour of the little paper attracted attention and it began to run to as large a circulation as could be obtained with our press facilities. We could get only one double flat-bed press. An offer soon came from another newspaper man, H. W. Thomson, now dead, to buy at a good price a fourth interest. The third partner, Rapp, wanted to sell his share, and he did sell it for about \$2,500. Mr. Hinton and I concluded that we had better withdraw, and we sold our interests, each getting \$2,700. All three of the original

¹ Meeker notes, October, 1897.

partners had thus sold to Thomson. This happened within four months and a half after the first issue appeared. But no sooner was the policy changed than the circulation of the 'Post' dropped, and in less than sixty days Thomson offered the paper to us for a merely nominal sum. This Mr. Hinton and I accepted, and Frank Mahan, another printer, was given a small interest. I went along editing the paper, which immediately started to grow."

A feature that was quickly recognised by the public as indicating the independence of the new journal was its treatment of the land and taxation questions. Frequently quotations were made from "Our Land and Land Policy" and more frequently there were editorials favouring the taxation of land values to the exclusion of all other things. These editorials were always short and direct. This feature grew strong enough to become the objective point with the opposition press, which ridiculed "George's fad." But fad or no fad, the editor kept persistently talking of it and snapped up every challenge to discuss it with other papers. When in May, 1873, John Stuart Mill died at Avignon, France, the "Post" paid a fine editorial tribute to the passing of this "greatest living master of political economy," making commendation of the decision of those having the matter in hand that instead of raising a statue to him in America, they should publish a memorial edition of his writings—"his best monument."

In national politics the paper was strongly opposed to Grant, "carpet-bag reconstruction" and centralisation, and warmly advocated the nomination for the Presidency of Horace Greeley, editor of the "New York Tribune," who, although formerly a zealous supporter of war measures, now wished to ignore sectionalism and bind up the nation's wounds. Mr. George was elected a delegate to the

Democratic National Convention to meet in Baltimore, Maryland, early in July, 1872. He went East by way of Philadelphia, where he had sent his family just before starting the "Post," on account of his wife's ill health. Thence, accompanied by his wife, he went to Baltimore, where he was elected secretary of the California delegation, Ex-Governor Downey being chairman. On July 10, 1872, Greeley was nominated unanimously and a few days later the California delegation visited the candidate on his estate at Chappaqua, Westchester County, N. Y., George writing to his paper a long signed description of the occasion, closing with the words: "We all felt . . . that in this sturdy, benignant old man we had a candidate round whom we could all rally, and who fittingly represented the grandest idea of the time—the idea of reconciliation."

Then Mr. George hastened back to San Francisco to plunge editorially into the campaign. In this, as in all his fights, he grew more and more hopeful as his blood warmed in the conflict; but his wife, who now was growing to understand public affairs and therefore becoming more his counsellor in such matters, was not so sure, writing October 8, on the day of the Pennsylvania State election: "This is the day that in a measure determines Greeley's fate. I am not at all sanguine, but I won't give up even if the Republicans win this contest." Greeley was badly beaten; and George was sorely disappointed. But he was not the man to repine. At once he was up and doing on another line.

Meanwhile in August, when less than eight and a half months old, the "Post" had been increased in size and its price advanced to two cents; and a month and a half later, enlarged to the size of the ordinary newspaper and the charge for single copies made five cents, "to accommo-

date the price to the currency," the attempt to introduce the one cent piece proving after a long trial a failure.

As might be imagined, a newspaper that saw evils to oppose and did not hesitate to oppose them, could find plenty of work to do. As a matter of fact, the "Post" was kept busy with fights of one kind or another. One of these attracted wide attention. It was the case of the ship *Sunrise*, which sailing from New York harbour in May, 1873, had a passage to San Francisco marked by such cruelty towards the crew by the captain and first mate that three of the men jumped overboard and were drowned. Attempts were made to hush up the matter when the ship reached the Golden Gate, but Mr. George learned of it and at once demanded a prosecution. The captain and first mate fled, but upon the "Post's" offering a reward, were apprehended and brought to trial, the newspaper engaging special counsel. The officers were convicted to long terms of imprisonment. The "Post" subsequently took up some less flagrant cases of maritime brutality and established itself as a champion of sailor's rights.

That personal danger attended the editing of an aggressive Western newspaper has been often attested, and Mr. George had his share. Ex-Judge Robert Ferral, then one of the editorial writers on the "Post," says of one of these cases:

"I went with Henry George to attend an investigation of the House of Correction, or Industrial School, which was in charge of a brute named George F. Harris. At the gate stood the redoubtable Harris, with his hand on his pistol, looking more like a pirate than the superintendent of a public institution. Without the least hesitation Mr. George walked right up to him, looked the burly ruffian straight in the eyes, and passed into

the yard without a word. All through that investigation Harris avoided the steady, indignant gaze of the brave little man who pressed his charges of brutality and drove him from his position and out of the city."

Another instance of personal danger arose out of the Tarpey case in the beginning of 1873. Matthew Tarpey, a brutal but affluent land-owner in Monterey County, quarrelled with an unoffending woman named Nicholson about a tract of land. He dug a pit, lay in it for hours waiting for her, and shot her in the back and killed her when she took alarm and tried to run away. The country around became fiercely excited, and more so when it was rumoured that Tarpey's wealth would clear him as others had been cleared of late, and that the first step would be to move him to another locality for trial. Word went out at once that the citizens would stop that and take the matter in hand themselves, and despatches came to San Francisco that Tarpey would be lynched. John V. George, Henry's brother, was engaged in the business office of the "Post" and was a witness of what followed.

"Tarpey money and political influence were strong enough to hush the matter up in the other newspapers, but the 'Post' published the news of the intended lynching, and an editorial saying that there would be no regrets if the people should deal out to him the same measure he had meted out to others, and hang him to the nearest tree, as a 'ghastly evidence' that there was 'still a sense of justice in California.' Tarpey's relatives in San Francisco and others of influence came to the office to implore the editor to say no more, and several anonymous letters were received threatening violence if he did not stop, but he would not change his course, and next day, following news of Tarpey's death, he published as a leader an editorial a column and a quarter long de-

nouncing Tarpey's deed and justifying the lynching.¹ The effect of this was lost by the buying up of a large part of the edition of the paper by the Tarpey partisans.

"Next day a man, I think named Donally, came to the office inquiring for the editor. My brother was out and Donally hung around on the sidewalk. When my brother returned Donally approached and asked him if the article of the day represented his sentiments. My brother answered that it not only represented his sentiments, but that he himself wrote it, whereupon Donally impeached the article and called its author a liar. My brother struck him in the face, though Donally was a much larger and heavier man. The bystanders interfered and Donally left. Nothing came of this, although there was talk for a time of violence to the editor of the 'Post.' But the paper did not change its front and short editorials on the Tarpey matter kept appearing."

John V. George tells of another occurrence that almost resulted in the shooting of the aggressive editor. It grew

¹ Touching this method of effecting justice, the editorial said: "Lynch law is a fearful thing. It is only better than the crime it is invoked to repress in that the impulses of the many are generally truer and purer than the passions of the individual. It is liable to terrible mistakes, and it strikes at the very foundations upon which society is organized. To say that even in a case like this Lynch law is justified is to admit that the regular and legal methods by which society protects itself have failed, that our laws in their practical workings are but a snare and a delusion, and that justice in our courts is but a matter of chance. . . . The people of Monterey hung Tarpey themselves because they could not trust the law to do it. But it will not do to dismiss the case with the simple reflection that justice has been done. There is a deep moral in it, which we must heed, unless we are willing to drift back to a condition little short of anarchy. And there is a moral in it, too, for law breakers as well as law makers — not for murderers alone, but for thieving officials, corrupt representatives, and the robbers of all grades who make of law a protection and means of escape. Our society is not too highly organized to revert upon great provocation to first principles, and to do for itself, what its ministers and administrators refuse to do."—"Evening Post," March 18, 1873.

out of the paper's arraignment of city Chief of Police Crowley, whom it had helped to office, but now hotly denounced for not closing the gambling hells and clearing out the crime-infested Chinese quarter, as commanded by city ordinances.

"It was in May, 1873, two months after the Tarpey case. Accompanied by Mr. Hinton, his partner, and by City Supervisor Stuart Menzies, Port Warden Joseph Austin, and Daniel O'Connell of the 'Post' staff, my brother, one afternoon after the paper had gone to press went to the Mint saloon and restaurant, on Commercial Street, a resort for lawyers and politicians. As they entered, James Gannon, an ex-detective and supporter of Crowley, tapped my brother on the shoulder, saying that he wanted to speak with him privately. My brother stepped aside with him, when Gannon said, 'Let up on Crowley or there will be trouble,' and when asked what he meant, the ex-detective seized my brother by the neck with one hand and struck him in the face with the other. My brother tried to strike back, when Gannon reached down and drew a revolver. But before he could fire, Menzies, a very strong man, caught his wrist and held the weapon down, while he and Supervisor McCarthy, who was in the place at the time, pulled Gannon away. It was proposed at first to bring Gannon to trial, but the matter was dropped and he afterwards became very sorry for his part in it."

William A. Plunkitt, a school director in the early seventies and supported by the "Post" in an investigation into a big scandal in the purchasing of school supplies, has since said:

"Under Henry George's management the 'Post' was a bold, fearless, reform paper. The standard of political morality or public morals in San Francisco at that time was very low. While many good men

held public official positions, quite a number of important places in the municipal government were filled by characterless and unscrupulous demagogues. Mr. George neither respected nor feared that kind of public functionary. He lashed them as with 'a whip of scorpions.' The 'Post' and its editor thus became a power, esteemed and respected by all thoughtful and worthy citizens in San Francisco, and feared by all public malefactors."

A yet fuller picture of the editor is presented by another contemporary, Mrs. C. F. McLean, who was then Miss Sallie Hart, and who says that "while writing his editorials or correcting proof, Mr. George received any and all who, with or without excuse, 'dropped in to see the editor.'" ¹

"I was a teacher in the public schools of San Francisco when there arose a question of the reduction of the salaries of the teachers in the lower grades. Picking up the 'Evening Post,' I noticed an editorial protest, which inspired me to write a communication to the editor, which I signed with an assumed name. When the article appeared it was with an editorial request that 'Susan' call at the office. Saturday came and with it the first visit of my life to a newspaper office. The place was up two flights of stairs. . . . To my knock there came a cheery 'Come in,' and on opening the door I came face to face with Henry George. He was seated at a common table piled high with papers, while all about on the small floor space were other newspapers, all, to my unsophisticated eyes, piled in mournful confusion. . . . I was embarrassed, almost frightened, but in an instant my breath was fairly taken.

¹ "Henry George: A Study from Life," "The Arena," September, 1898. Mrs. McLean subsequently became an occasional writer for the "Post." She is alluded to in "The Science of Political Economy" (pp. 282, 283) as "the wife of the superintendent of a Western zoological garden, who, coming to New York with her husband on the annual trip he makes to buy wild animals, jokingly speaks of 'shopping for menagerie goods.'"

away, for the man in front of me said: 'Come in, my little girl.' However, I gasped out that I had sent the article signed 'Susan.' . . . 'Now, come sit down,' he said. 'You must excuse me, but you are so small, and you look so young; do sit down.'

"I sat down, and before I knew what I was saying I had told the editor before me all about myself. Even then I noticed his large head and bright eyes, and at once compared them with a picture of Henry Clay that had been familiar to me from childhood, and thought the head before me was the finer of the two. I remember now that my first interview with Henry George was brought to a close by a boy who, I thought, rather imperatively demanded 'copy'; therefore I hastily rose to go, but not before I had promised to call again soon."

Arthur McEwen was a brilliant young contemporary newspaper worker on the Pacific Coast with Henry George and testifies that it was the "editorial policy that marked the 'Post' off from the usual."

"It was as foreign to George to be either a demagogue or a follower in politics as it was for the 'Post' to keep subscribers and advertisers by thrifty silence. Women were appearing at local option elections soliciting votes and receiving disrespectful treatment. Instantly the 'Post' charged upon the ungallant blackguards, and in a day had every saloon in California for its enemy. Subscribers withdrew by the thousand and advertisements were withdrawn by the column, but that made no difference to George."

James V. Coffey, editorial writer on the "Examiner" at this time, and since Judge of the Superior Court of San Francisco, says that Mr. George "had apparently an unsystematic method of work, jotting down a paragraph here and a paragraph there; yet in the end the writing was smooth and connected." This apparently "unsys-

tematic method of work" doubtless came from dictating to a stenographer. Having a habit of procrastination, he put off his daily writing until he was cramped for time and had to work under great pressure. To relieve this stress he engaged a stenographer, Edward Lande, the first secretary he ever had. Lande was soon succeeded by Stephen Potter who remained until George left the "Post" and who says that his chief had an original way of working.

"He would dictate for a few minutes, and then leaving me to transcribe, would continue the thread of his thoughts with his own pen. In this way he would dictate and write, and get through an immense amount of work. I ought to say that at this time he had curious habits of abstraction, often even on the street he would stop, walk to the curb and stand there apparently deep in thought and oblivious to the stir about him. I have had to speak several times on such occasions to rouse him."

Henry George's career on the "Evening Post" terminated November 27, 1875. Starting the paper with scarcely any capital, it had from the business point of view a hard and long struggle until the close of 1873, when a comparatively large sum of money was obtained for it. We have Mr. George's own story for this.¹

"John P. Jones, then elected United States Senator from Nevada, sought an interview with me and declared himself interested in such a paper, offering to furnish us on our own notes, money enough to buy the best press that could be obtained."² I had seen in the

¹ Meeker notes, October, 1897.

² Mr. Hinton, in conversation with Henry George, Jr., in April, 1898, said that Jones put in two sums of money — \$30,000, for which he received 30 of the 100 shares of the stock of the paper, and \$18,000 for which he received notes. Jones professed to do this solely from motives of friend-

'Sun' office when in New York in 1869, the first perfecting press, the Bullock, and concluding to accept this offer of Jones, Mr. Hinton went East and made an arrangement with the Bullock Company for a press. It was brought out and set up, the first perfecting press on the Pacific Coast.¹

"Feeling that we now had facilities for larger circulation and that we should be making a mistake not to improve it, we concluded to establish a morning paper, 'The Ledger,' which we did in August, 1875. This was done on an extensive scale. It was a small daily paper, and for the first time in journalism, an illustrated Sunday paper. We disdained asking for advertisements and designed to fill up the whole with reading matter until advertisements should seek us.

"But a few days after it started there was a great fire in Virginia City, Nevada, in which many San Franciscans were interested; a heavy decline in some of the greatest of the mining stocks and the suspension of payment by the Bank of California. Then came an intense local money panic, during which it became impossible to collect money² and we had to suspend the 'Ledger.' While we were thus embarrassed John P. Jones demanded the return of the money he had loaned us or that the paper that we had made should be surrendered to him. I felt like fighting, and a short article in the 'Post' would have ended all hopes of his getting anything from it, but my partner, Mr. Hinton, pleaded the duty of our providing for the employees who were friends, and tired out with the fight, I finally suc-

liness, but if his real motive was the hope of influencing the paper to change its policy of hostility to President Grant, whom he warmly supported, he was disappointed, as his loan and purchase of stock did not affect the editorial columns.

¹The paper also moved to new and larger quarters, 504 Montgomery Street, corner of Sacramento, and was supplied with a new dress of type and office fittings.

²Mr. Hinton says that he saw a man bring an ingot of gold worth \$9,000 into the office of Hickox & Spier, money-brokers, and get only \$1,500 on it.

cumbed, and without a cent of compensation, on November 27, almost four years to a day after we started it, gave over the paper to the representative of Jones.

"I thus went out with a dependent family to make a living and not caring to ask or to receive any offer of employment from other papers, I wrote to Governor Irwin, whom I had been instrumental in electing a few months before, and asked him to give me a place where there was little to do and something to get, so that I might devote myself to some important writing. He gave me the office of State Inspector of Gas-Meters, which yielded, though intermittently, a sufficient revenue to live on and which required very little work."

But though Mr. George thus obtained a public office that would afford him a living, and though he had the purpose before him of engaging in more permanent writing, the loss of the "Post" seemed to him at the time a great misfortune, for not only was he at a stroke shorn of the fruits of years of labour, but was bereft of his weapon as an active factor in the affairs of the City and State—the keenest of losses to an energetic public man. But this in fact proved another and a momentous turning point in his career.