

## CHAPTER IX.

### "PROGRESS AND POVERTY" BEGUN.

1877-1878.

AGE, 38-39.

**U**NDER date of September 18, 1877, the pocket diary bears the simple entry: "Commenced 'Progress and Poverty.'"<sup>1</sup>

Another child was expected soon to be added to the family circle. In the period preceding and following its advent the husband was tenderly attentive. He spent his time chiefly with his wife, for a whole month not leaving the house more than half an hour each day. He conversed on all manner of cheering subjects and read much aloud—newspapers in the mornings, and magazines or books later. George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda" had just reached the Pacific Coast. Mr. George was not much of a novel reader, yet he read this to his wife, and afterwards "Middlemarch," which he liked better. He regarded George Eliot as a woman of great powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the work was begun on Sept. 18, the diary entry was not made until later, as the title, "Progress and Poverty," selected from among several, as one of his note books shows, was not decided upon until the writing had begun to take form. In a speech in 1893 (on "the Single Tax," Art Institute, Chicago, Aug. 29) Mr. George said: "I remember how much the name of 'Progress and Poverty' bothered me when it first suggested itself to my mind, for when I talked to my friends about it some thought it was too alliterative, while others thought that with what followed, it was too much like Benjamin Franklin's sign."

But in the parts of the day when he was by himself in his workroom, and he had taken his favourite thinking position—stretched out on his lounge, smoking—his mind reverted to the old problem that “appalled and tormented” and would not let him rest. The whole country was suffering an industrial depression. In many of the larger centres were social disorders. Great railroad strikes occurred in the East, and in six States troops were under arms. A riot broke out in Baltimore, and in Chicago artillery was used; while at Pittsburg more than two hundred lives were lost and wealth aggregating \$12,000,000 destroyed.

In California the depression was deepened by a drought during the preceding winter months and by a heavy decline in the output of the silver mines on the Comstock Lode, which brought down all the stocks on the California exchanges and for the time stopped the speculation of the outside world through this market. At this period when workmen all over the State were idle, the Central Pacific Railroad, controlling practically every mile of track in the State, proposed to reduce wages. In San Francisco workmen held mass meetings, to denounce on the one side the great monopolies, and particularly the railroad, as oppressing the masses of labouring men; and on the other, Chinese immigration, as subjecting them to starvation competition. But there was no disorder. The railroad magnates—Stanford, Crocker, Huntington and Hopkins—were by name stigmatised, and in some few instances Chinese laundries were stoned by boys. But there was no head or form to the discontent until timid Privilege, under pretext of restraining anarchy, organised under the leadership of William T. Coleman five thousand men in what was called a Committee of Public Safety, armed them with pick handles; obtained a reserve of 1,700 rifles and

500 carbines from the United States War Department, and supported them with United States vessels, which were sent down to the metropolis from the Navy Yard at Mare Island with Gatling guns and other arms.

The uprising among the society savers tended to bring to a head discontent among the disorganised working classes. All that was needed was a voice to ring out, and the voice that came—in clear, though harsh tones—was that of a drayman named Dennis Kearney, an uncouth, illiterate young man who had a facility for rough, profane speech. He had denounced working men and had carried a club in the Committee of Public Safety, but now jumping to the other side, he arraigned the aristocrats and monopolists, and Chinese immigration, and in the tide of passion that was flowing expressed for the moment the strong feeling of his hearers. The hungry and discontented flocked to his standard and in August of 1877 he organised the "Working men's Party of California," which, strengthening in organisation and numbers, by the commencement of 1878 threw general politics into chaos. The social discontent had changed into a political upheaval.

It was amid these circumstances inspiring serious thought that Henry George sat down on the 18th of September, 1877, to commence what resulted in a momentous work. The question that engaged his mind was the phenomena of industrial depressions. One had thrown him out of employment when a boy in Philadelphia in 1858 and sent him forth to seek his fortune in the new country. Others had overtaken him while he was a struggling young man. Now came a greater than all the others, manifesting itself all over the United States in discontent, turmoil and suffering.

Mr. George's purpose was to write a magazine article on the subject of progress and poverty. It was to be,

more than anything else, an inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth, and was to indicate a remedy. Using all opportunities, he pursued the writing, and when the article was in form he read it to his close friend, Dr. Edward R. Taylor, who had formerly been Governor Haight's private secretary and was now his law partner in San Francisco. Taylor was much impressed; so much so that he urged George to reserve publication of the article and to give the subject a more extended treatment. After consideration, Mr. George decided to yield to the suggestion, concluding at length to make this the more extended politico-economic work, which, soon after the publication of "Our Land and Land Policy" in 1871, he realised would be necessary if he were to present his views properly. Those views had cleared and strengthened during the years of debate in his newspaper work, by his speeches, and through private conversations among his friends and acquaintances; while much, if intermittent, reading had made his mind a very arsenal of information; so that with quickened and sharpened powers of perception, statement and argument, and a new driving force in the widespread turmoil and distress, the elements were set in action to produce from the acorn of "Our Land and Land Policy" the oak of "Progress and Poverty." He realised that this would require elaborate and difficult work; that from his point of view so much confusion enshrouded political economy that he would have to clear away before he could build up; and that he would also have to write at once for those who had made no previous study of such subjects and for those who were familiar with economic reasonings.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this decision to expand the

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to fourth edition and all subsequent editions of "Progress and Poverty."

writing, we find in the diary on November 5 an entry: "Started on 'Rent.'"

Meanwhile had come an important interruption. On October 2 the fourth child had been born—a girl. The other children—Harry, Dick and Jennie—were now fifteen, thirteen, and ten years old, respectively. The baby was named Anna Angela—Anna, after her mother, and Angela, as suggested by her aunt Sister Theresa Fox, because her birth came on the Feast of the Angels. The husband was all tenderness during this time of trial and he went to market daily for some dainty that might tempt his sick wife. From the pleasure he showed in providing these and other small luxuries, it was evident that his mind kept reverting to the terrible time when baby Dick was born and there was not a mouthful of food in the house to give to the mother.

Yet even now Old Adversity once in a while made his presence known. The year 1877 closed in hard times for the family, and memoranda among his papers show that Mr. George was personally \$450 in debt. The meter inspector's office which was thought to be so lucrative was at the time yielding next to nothing. It was perhaps the necessity of eking out his livelihood during the work of writing on his book that caused him to turn to the idea of lecturing.

This idea held out some hope for him, for there was now an organisation composed of his friends and based upon his principles to support him. In the latter part of 1877 a few men, among them William M. Hinton, James G. Maguire, John M. Days, John Swett, Joseph Leggett, Patrick J. Murphy and A. L. Mann, met a few times with Henry George and his brother, John V. George, in Maguire's law office on Clay Street, above Montgomery, to discuss the economic parts of "Our Land and Land

Policy." These discussions resulted one Sunday afternoon early in 1878 in a meeting in the City Criminal Court room, in which on other days of the week, Robert Ferral, formerly on the editorial staff of the "Evening Post," sat as judge. At this meeting, perhaps thirty persons attending, "The Land Reform League of California" was organised. It had for its purpose "the abolition of land monopoly," and it was the first organisation of any kind in the world to propagate Henry George's ideas. Joseph Leggett, a lawyer, who was born in the county of Dublin, Ireland, and who came to California in 1868, was elected president; and Patrick J. Murphy, a newspaper writer trained on the "Evening Post," became secretary.

About the first thing the League did was to invite Henry George to deliver a pay lecture under its auspices in one of the large halls of the city, and to take for his text the prevailing industrial depression and labour troubles. Accordingly he laid aside work on his book to lecture at Metropolitan Temple, on March 26, under the title of "Why Work is Scarce, Wages Low and Labour Restless." He was very nervous about his manner and voice, and in the afternoon went to the hall for practice, inviting his wife to go with him. He went upon the platform and made a few trials, reading from the manuscript of his intended lecture. Mrs. George sat midway in the auditorium, and their old friend, George Wilbur, who had also come, sat up in the gallery. Rev. Isaac S. Kalloch, who delivered Sunday discourses in the hall, came in while Mr. George was practising and said that if those were the sentiments he intended to utter that night he would talk over the heads of the workingmen whom he expected mainly to compose his audience, since their selfish instincts must be appealed to. Mr. George drew himself up and replied: "Working men are men and are susceptible of lofty

aspirations. I never will consent to appeal to them on any but high grounds."

By eight o'clock that night the lecturer was seized by "stage fright"; though for that matter he never in the rest of his life, even after his long election campaigns and lecturing trips, was free from high nervous tension before speaking. There was reason enough that night for nervousness. He told no one, yet he was about to prove the ends for which he had desired to be a speaker. As the book on which he was at work was to contain his written message to the world, so now he intended to commence with this lecture his spoken word—to set forth his perceptions, thoughts, convictions, philosophy; to proclaim the equal rights of all men to the land as one potent means of ridding civilisation of involuntary poverty.

His expectations of a big audience were badly disappointed. All his friends had been interested in the lecture, and advertisements and notices had appeared in the daily papers, but the house, the largest and finest of the kind in the city, was only partly filled. Yet though his audience was small, his words were the words of hope, in this way closing his lecture:

"Only a little while ago nations were bought and sold, traded off by treaty and bequeathed by will. Where now is the right divine of kings? Only a little while ago, and human flesh and blood were legal property. Where are now the vested rights of chattel slavery?"

"And shall this wrong that involves monarchy and involves slavery—this injustice from which both spring—long continue? Shall the ploughers forever plough the backs of a class condemned to toil? Shall the millstones of greed forever grind the faces of the poor?"

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is not in the order of the universe! As one who for years has watched and waited, I tell you the glow of dawn is in the sky."

Whether it come with the carol of larks or the roll of the war-drums, it is coming—it will come!

“The standard that I have tried to raise to-night may be torn by prejudice and blackened by calumny; it may now move forward, and again be forced back. But once loosed, it can never again be furled!

“To beat down and cover up the truth that I have tried to-night to make clear to you, selfishness will call on ignorance. But it has in it the germinative force of truth, and the times are ripe for it. If the flint oppose it, the flint must split or crumble!

“Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, but God giveth the increase. The ground is ploughed; the seed is set; the good tree will grow.

“So little now, only the eye of faith can see it. So little now; so tender and so weak. But sometime, the birds of heaven shall sing in its branches; sometime, the weary shall find rest beneath its shade!”

A gleam was in the speaker's eye, hope shone in his face; his shoulders were squared, his head was up. Intense earnestness and intense conviction were in his manner. It was as if he spoke with his soul. Yet when his voice sank to the deep tones and he uttered the words, “So little now, only the eye of faith can see it,” it seemed as though he spoke in an empty hall. He had started out to preach his word to the world. His voice was like a “cry in the wilderness.”

Mr. George drew little money from this lecture, as the expense very nearly equalled the receipts. Moreover, the city newspapers dismissed it with few words. But as some of the State papers noticed it favourably, he delivered it in Sacramento and several of the other cities, under the short title of “The Coming Struggle.” But he nowhere attracted large or even moderate sized audiences.

Measured in material results, the return from this lecturing effort was meagre, but he had made a start to



preach that faith which came from his heart's core; and that counted for more than all else to him.

Nor did he let this effort stand alone. He delivered another lecture a few months later, in June; one that must be considered to be in many respects the most finished address he ever gave. The Young Men's Hebrew Association of San Francisco, had just then been organized. It was composed of a number of bright, intelligent young men. They invited Mr. George to deliver their opening address. He accepted, but surprise and something like embarrassment seized the progressive members when he announced "Moses" as his text, as they had looked for some live topic of the day. Their feelings changed when they heard the discourse. The leader of the Exodus was held up as the colossal ancient figure of the Hebrew nation. More than that, he was hailed as "one of those star souls that dwindle not with distance, but, glowing with the radiance of essential truth, hold their light while institutions and languages and creeds change and pass"; a "lawgiver and benefactor of the ages," who pointed the way for the new exodus—the exodus of the people of this modern age out of the bondage of poverty, and laid down a code for the observation of common rights in the soil and the establishment of a commonwealth, "whose ideal was that every man should sit under his own vine and fig-tree, with none to vex and make him afraid." The discourse abounded in vivid passages and exquisite imagery, so that at its close Dr. Elkan Cohen, Rabbi of the Temple Emanuel, turned to Max Popper, chairman of the lecture committee, and said with deep feeling, "Where did you find that man?"

Nevertheless Dr. Edward Taylor, who also had heard the address, observed to Mrs. George as they walked to a car on the way home: "Considered in itself, that lecture

was a fine effort, but Mr. George is writing a book that is so much superior in importance that to stop for matters like this is like wasting time."

But if just now he gave no more time to lectures, he did give it to other things. Besides contributing an article entitled "Each and All" to a volume of miscellaneous essays published for the benefit of the Youth's Directory, a benevolent institution of the city, he gave much thought and labour to the organisation and establishment of the Free Public Library of San Francisco. As early as 1872 he had talked with State Senator Donovan in advocacy of this means of popular amusement and education, and in 1878 with other public-spirited citizens worked for the passage of a State law providing for the establishment of a number of public libraries in California. He became a member and the first secretary of the original Board of Trustees of the San Francisco library, the records showing the minutes in his handwriting and the same blue ink which he was using at the time in writing "Progress and Poverty."<sup>1</sup>

But the chief interruption to the work on the book grew out of politics. In obedience to a popular demand, the legislature had passed an act providing for the holding of a convention for the general amendment of the State constitution, delegates to which were to be elected in June. Seeing in this convention a possible opportunity to graft into the organic law of California his principles touching the taxation of land values, Mr. George issued early in May an address to the citizens of San Francisco, announcing himself as a candidate "for the support of such voters, or bodies of voters," as might deem that as a delegate he would fitly represent them. After declaring his general

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<sup>1</sup> This library, with its several city branches, is the most complete west of the Rocky Mountains.

principles, he told in what particulars he would endeavour, so far as he had power, to amend the constitution, giving chief place to this:

“That the weight of taxation may be shifted from those who have little to those who have much, from those who produce wealth to those who merely appropriate it, so that the monopoly of land and water may be destroyed, that wealth may be diffused among the many, instead of stagnating in the hands of a few; and an end put to the shameful state of things which compels men to beg who are willing to work.”

The Land Reform League, of course, became active in support of George and of his principles, and it moreover issued a list of questions to be put to all candidates for the convention. Mr. George was nominated by the Democratic party and afterwards by the new Working men's party, which, rising from the discontent with social and political conditions, and drawing from both of the two old parties, had a strength that no one pretended to ignore.

With the double nomination, Mr. George seemed sure of election. All that remained was for him to go before the Working men's ratification meeting, and acknowledging the leadership of Kearney, subscribe to their party platform. But there the difficulty lay. He went before the meeting where others had gone before him, and was asked the questions in which others had smoothly and quietly acquiesced. His reply was almost a shout, “No!” He said he would acknowledge no man leader to do his thinking for him; that moreover there were some planks in their platform that he did not believe in and must oppose. He would receive their nomination as a free man or not at all. Hisses greeted his speech and the nomination was revoked.

This left him with the single nomination of the Democratic party, and with small prospects of election, for that party was known to be greatly weakened by the political upheaval. The whole Democratic ticket was beaten at the polls, but George received more votes than any other Democrat. His friend, Assemblyman Coffey, who had run on the same ticket, on the following morning called at the meter inspector's office. Not finding him in, he pinned a card on the door bearing the message: "Accept congratulations on leading the Democratic party to the devil!"

Thus, for the second time standing for the suffrages of the people, Mr. George had been beaten; but he had the consolation now, as in 1871 when he ran for the Assembly, of knowing that he had kept faith with himself.

He turned once more to work on his book and did not again suffer any important interruption.