

CHAPTER VII.

“PROTECTION OR FREE TRADE?”

1884-1886.

AGE, 45-47.

HENRY GEORGE at home had passed beyond the world of letters into the world of practical things. Besides being an author, he was recognised as a leader among the restless labouring classes—to be with the House of Want, rather than with the House of Have. The working men honoured his return with a mass meeting in Cooper Union. But men who made a business of politics or who moved in the privileged and fashionable world, held aloof, for instead of standing for glittering and unmeaning generalities, Henry George began to be understood to menace a revolution in political and social affairs. They instinctively drew away; and hence it was that a complimentary dinner given to him on the 30th of April, 1884, at the Cosmopolitan Theatre, New York, lacked the lustre of the Delmonico banquet of the year before; and a lecture in the Academy of Music proved a total failure, scarcely enough people being present to pay for rent and advertising. This lecture was given under the management of the theatrical and lecture firm of Brooks & Dickson, who made a six months' contract with Mr. George for a tour of the United States and Canada, he to get his expenses and sixty per cent. of the profits. Mr.

Brooks had been in England and had witnessed Mr. George's great success there, and both men looked for like success in this country. The utter fiasco attending the first lecture threw the firm into gloom, as they could see nothing but failure all along the line. Mr. George no sooner learned of their views than, with characteristic promptness, he released them from their contract and without consideration. Whatever lectures he delivered during the next year were under other management, generally his own.

Mr. George had during the British tour won great laurels as a platform speaker. Yet there were many who had spoken of his power as commonplace. The fact was that he was not even. He did not memorise, nor, except in the single lecture on Moses, did he read. He sometimes used a skeleton of heads, but his common practice was to speak without written notes of any kind. For this he prepared by meditation shortly before speaking; lying down, if possible, and perhaps smoking. He merely arranged a line of thought, and left the precise form of expression to inspiration when on his feet. This subjected him largely to conditions; a quiet audience, no matter how friendly, drawing forth a subdued speech, while a lively audience, friendly or hostile, provoked animation. He himself was conscious of this and said he could do best when facing opposition. Charles Frederick Adams tells how his friend returned from a lecture in Massachusetts one day and said: "Come out to lunch, Charley; I am so ashamed of that lecture as an artistic performance that I want to spend the money I got for it." Louis F. Post supplies an illustration of Henry George's two ways of speaking. He went to the working men's welcome meeting in Cooper Union on Mr. George's return in 1884.

"It was there that I had my first taste of his power as an orator. His London speech at St. James's Hall had been described by the English press in such superlative terms as an oratorical effort that I wondered. The London 'Times,' in a column editorial, had compared him as an orator with Cobden and Bright so much to their disadvantage that I began to question the standards of English oratory. George had seemed to me the best writer I had ever read, but no orator at all—at best only a plain speaker. And when he responded to the speech of welcome at Cooper Union I was still much puzzled by the estimate the London 'Times' had made. It was far from oratory in any sense. In matter it was excellent. George's oratory never failed in that respect. But in manner it was tame and unimpressive. After he had finished, and while some one else without oratorical ability was speaking, I went out for a ruminative smoke. Upon returning after possibly an hour's absence, a voice came up to me through the subterranean corridors as I entered the street door of Cooper Union, which made me think that now an orator had certainly come forth. As I descended, and a burst of applause followed a period, this impression grew. The voice was strange to me, and I wondered as its volume swelled what prodigy of platform eloquence this man could be. Hurrying forward with that impression deepening, and coming to one of the doors which disclosed the stage and a large part of an enthusiastic audience, there I beheld upon the platform, with one arm extended and head thrown back, his voice filling the hall and his sentiments stirring the blood of his auditors, no one else but Henry George. He had again been called upon to speak, and for nearly an hour he held his audience entranced, myself among the rest. Long before he had finished I knew why the London 'Times' thought him as great or greater than Cobden or Bright."

While he did some intermittent lecturing and speaking, Mr. George's chief purpose at this period was to apply himself to writing. The first thing he took up was an

attack made on him and his principles by the Duke of Argyll in an article in the "Nineteenth Century" for April, entitled, "The Prophet of San Francisco." The article had appeared during the closing days of the British lecture trip, and the "Nineteenth Century," the "Fortnightly," and the "Pall Mall Gazette" hastened to offer their columns for reply. When Mr. George decided to answer he chose the same periodical through which he had been attacked.

But Mr. George was reluctant to enter the lists. He treated the attack as chiefly abusive, and abuse he believed not worth heeding. Whatever of principle appeared he considered to be answered in advance in "Progress and Poverty." But the active men in the Scottish Land Restoration League pointed out that, besides being a Peer of the Realm, close in rank to Royalty itself, the Duke was titular chief of the great Campbell clan. A controversy between the "Peer" and the "Prophet" would, the League advisers argued, carry the land question into every household in Scotland and arouse the highlanders. So Mr. George set himself to the task of replying in the brief moments of leisure that remained to him during his tour. He sat up a considerable part of the night in Cork, previous to sailing for America, working on the article. He actually had it written, and the ordinary critic would perhaps have said, completely written; but it did not satisfy its exacting author. He said to his son: "I'll not send it off now, but take it to New York and polish it like a steel shot." And with the title of "The 'Reduction to Iniquity,'" the reply appeared in the July number of the "Nineteenth Century."

The Duke had dropped as suddenly and as far in Henry George's estimation as had that other philosopher, Herbert Spencer. George acknowledged his obligations

to the Duke as the author of the "Reign of Law," and as pointing out "the existence of physical laws and adaptations which compel the mind that thinks upon them to the recognition of creative purpose." Like the Duke, he had beheld "the grand simplicity and unspeakable harmony of universal law." But he now learned with amazement that the Duke's splendid philosophy broke down when it trenched on social affairs, and that "a trumpery title and a patch of ground" fettered "a mind that had communed with nature and busied itself with causes and beginnings." How little he cared for the Duke's unfairness and personal bitterness is shown by his passing them with contemptuous silence. But he considered the Scotsman as untrue to his own philosophy; and a dishonest philosopher kindled his wrath. For an intellectual leader who would consciously mislead, he had no mercy; so that in his reply, he coupled false philosopher and false philosophy, and together held them up to general scorn.

This one article, "polished like a steel shot," seemed to suffice. It was received by the Duke of Argyll in silence; nor did he ever attempt to make rejoinder. It was accepted by the reading world with the mixed feelings excited by the other writings from George's pen. But by all those in sympathy with the objects of the Scottish Land Restoration League it was hailed with demonstrations of joy. Accompanied by the Duke's article, it was soon published in pamphlet form under the caption of "The Peer and the Prophet," and in the hands of the League, was carried into the homes and factories of the cities, while it became a kind of "fiery cross" through the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, summoning the clansmen to the great struggle for natural rights. A similar pamphlet was published in the United

States with the title of "Property in Land," and became an effective instrument for propaganda.

The reply to the Duke of Argyll Mr. George regarded as a mere thing in passing, compared with the work to which he now settled down—the tariff book, or pamphlet, for he did not determine beforehand what size he would make it. A year had passed since the loss of the manuscript of the first book. Mr. George with his family spent the summer on a farm on Long Island, near Jamaica, worked by Walter Cranford, son of John P. Cranford of Brooklyn, an early and ardent advocate of the Georgeian ideas, and who with his purse gave much help to their spread. There on the Cranford farm Mr. George applied himself with steady industry to his task.

The book, intended primarily for working men, aimed, as he said in his preface, not only to examine the arguments commonly used, but, carrying the inquiry farther than the controversialists on either side had yet ventured to go, sought to discover why protection retained such popular strength in spite of all exposures of its fallacies; endeavoured to trace the connection between the tariff question and those still more important social questions, then rapidly becoming the "burning questions" of the times; and sought to show to what radical measures the principle of free trade logically led. In a letter to Walker of Birmingham (September 25) the author explained: "I first knock all the claims of protection; then turn around and show that the mere abolition of protection would accomplish nothing for the working classes; but that to accomplish anything for them, the principle of free trade must be carried out to its full extent, which means, of course, the abolition of all taxes and the appropriation of land values."

When the writing was well advanced, Mr. George had

some correspondence about it with Dr. Taylor of San Francisco, who suggested employment of the inductive method. George replied (September 14): "My view of the matter is the reverse of yours. I do not think induction employed in such questions as the tariff is of any use. What the people want is theory; and until they get a correct theory into their heads, all citing of facts is useless."

Mr. George was much interested in the animals on the Cranford farm and particularly in a fine blooded bull that was often tethered in a grass field just outside the window. The animal was much annoyed by flies, and in walking around would wind his rope short until his head was drawn close to the stake, and he could do little more in the hot summer sun than switch his tail and bellow. Often and often the philosopher stopped work to go out and drive the bull in the opposite direction and free his rope. This commonplace incident, oft repeated, suggested the opening illustration in the introductory chapter, which, instead of first, was about the last part of the book to be written at the Cranford farm.

In the fall the family moved to a house in Brooklyn, on Macon Street. Soon after that, on the urging of his boyhood friend, Rev. Dr. R. Heber Newton, Mr. George accepted an invitation to attend the Ninth Congress of the Episcopal Church, at Detroit, and speak to the topic, "Is our civilisation just to working men?" Rev. John W. Kramer, of New York, who was secretary of the Congress, afterwards said.

"Mr. George's first words were in answer to the question asked. He said: 'It is not. Try it by whatever test you will, it is glaringly, bitterly and increasingly unjust.' I remember the emphatic fervour with which this opening was uttered. It attracted the audience; it

startled men. But hearty applause came, given by many hearers who were not ready to agree with the strong statement, but who were for the moment captured by the sublime courage of the speaker. The address was published in full in the proceedings of the Congress."

The presidential campaign had for some weeks been in full swing, but for the first time in many years Mr. George could not warm up. Blaine, the Republican candidate, had avowed himself a champion of what George called the "protection humbug," and Patrick Ford was out with the "Irish World" strongly in Blaine's support. Benjamin F. Butler of Massachusetts was running as a Greenback-Labour candidate, but George quickly concluded that Butler was insincere in this and a mere "decoy duck for the Republican party." Yet the Democrats avoided the issue. George wrote Taylor as early as August: "I am utterly disgusted with the attitude of the Democratic party. It is a mere party of expediency, and as such can never win. Cleveland's nomination was an expediency nomination." George, however, in effect voted for Cleveland. Leaving for Scotland before election day, he paired with a friend who had intended to vote for Blaine. And after the election was over and Cleveland was known to have won, George wrote a signed article for William Saunders' London paper, "The Democrat," stating among other things that events had shown that now the tariff issue could no longer be avoided, that it would split the Democratic party in two and that it would raise the underlying question of why some grow so rich while others, though they work hard, are yet so poor.

The managers of the Scottish Land Restoration League had sent a pressing call to Mr. George to come and make a lecture and speaking campaign through the lowlands

which contained the important political centres, for it was the purpose to force the land question into politics. And in order that he might the easier do this, they raised a fund with which to meet the heaviest expenses. Mr. George decided that this would be the most important work he could do for the time and in October he crossed the Atlantic alone.

In order to draw general attention to the campaign, a big meeting was held under the auspices of the English League in St. James's Hall, London. The hall was packed. Mr. George, of course, was the central figure, and Miss Taylor, Michael Davitt, William Forsyth, President of the Scottish League, and others spoke. George had now come to full powers as a speaker and his address was thought by many to be the finest he had yet delivered in Great Britain. The effect of this meeting was to set the press, and particularly the Scottish press, agog on the subject.

The Scottish campaign opened in the City Hall in Glasgow on November 21. The hall was crowded with a pay audience and people were turned away. Lectures in other towns followed in close succession, the one in Kilmarnock on Christmas Eve being appropriate to the night and particularly fine.

Trouble had again broken out between the crofters and the half dozen or less landlords in Skye and the other Western Islands. Police from Glasgow and Royal Naval Marines had been sent there to keep the peace. The League arranged for several meetings in Skye for Mr. George, all of which were eminently successful, some of the soldiers attending and applauding the lecturer's sentiments. On returning to Glasgow, Mr. George was interviewed at length by a representative of the "Pall Mall Gazette" of London. In answer to the question what,

apart from his radical remedy, could he suggest in the way of immediate measures of relief for the crofters, he said:

“The withdrawal of the army of invasion, the suspension, at least as to crofter holdings, of all laws for the collection of rent; the suspension of all laws for the preservation of game, and of the law requiring gun licenses. The enactment of a short bill of this kind would greatly relieve the crofters, while larger measures were being considered, and would obviate the necessity for any charitable fund, such as the Earl of Breadalbane and the Rev. Mr. McDonald of Inverness, are raising, which could be turned to the relief of the landlords, if any of them really suffered by not getting rents. The suspension of the gun license and of game laws would enable the crofters to protect their crops, and vary their diet, while accustoming them to the use of arms, a thing in itself much to be desired among a free people.”

The campaign was closed as it began, with an address in London. The English League had asked the Lord Mayor for the use of Guildhall. Being refused that, they decided to hold a meeting of the unemployed outside the hall, or more precisely, in front of the Royal Exchange. The meeting took place Saturday afternoon, January 17. It was estimated that seven thousand people were in the gathering. William Saunders, Rev. Stewart Headlam, Rev. Mr. Hastings, Rev. C. Fleming Williams, William Miller, Peter Hennessy (tailor), A. Pike (shoemaker) and A. Brown (joiner) were among the speakers. The strongest point in Mr. George's speech was when he pointed to the inscription in great letters across the front of the Royal Exchange and said: “Look up there. ‘The Earth is the Lord's.’” [A voice: “The landlords'!”] “Aye, the landlords’. They have substituted the land-

lords for the Lord above all; and the want of employment, the misery which exists from one end of the kingdom to the other—the misery which encircles society wherever civilisation goes, is caused by the sin of the denial of justice.”

Before sailing for home, Mr. George was induced to lecture in Liverpool and also to cross the Irish Sea and address a North of Ireland audience at Belfast, the capital of Ulster. Both gatherings were large, the latter, filling Ulster Hall, numbering between four and five thousand people. Enthusiasm in both cities was very great.

The result of the trip across the Atlantic was summed up by Miss Taylor in a note to Mrs. George: “Mr. George’s name is in our papers every day for praise or blame, and he has more warm friends here than bitter enemies.” She might also have said that Joseph Chamberlain, the then leading Radical, had in a speech taken such advanced ground for the taxation of land values that his name was very frequently coupled with Mr. George’s. The visit had a further significance in that some of the friends urged George to return and stand for Parliament, assuring him that he could be elected in any one of a number of constituencies. He wrote to Durant in the matter (February 11): “I am at heart as much a citizen of Old England as of New England, but I think that from the accident of my birth I should be under disadvantage on your side of the water. At any rate, I should not deem it prudent to go over there, unless there was such a considerable call as made it seem clearly my duty. When this point is reached it will be time to talk about it.” Within that year a general election took place under the new franchise act and redistribution of seats, and to use Mr. George’s words “a little knot of thorough-going ‘Land Restorationists’” were “returned” to the new

Parliament, "with quite a large fringe of men sufficiently advanced for immediate purposes." However, Irish matters engaged British politics for some time afterward and little more than educational work could be done along land restoration lines in Parliament.

In addition to the foregoing signs of progress in Great Britain was one to which, if not Mr. George's recent trip, at least his former visits and the extensive reading of his books might reasonably be supposed to have been a contributing cause. It was the truly extraordinary report made in spring of 1885 by a "Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes," which recommended that a local tax of four per cent. of its selling value be placed upon vacant or inadequately used land, as tending to relieve general "rates" (*i. e.*, local taxes), and by forcing new land into use, to bring down the price of general building land.¹ The members of the Commis-

¹ This passage of the report ran as follows: "At present, land available for building in the neighbourhood of our populous centres, though its capital value is very great, is probably producing a small yearly return until it is let for building. The owners of this land are rated [taxed locally], not in relation to the real value, but to the actual annual income. They can thus afford to keep their land out of the market, and to part with only small quantities, so as to raise the price beyond the actual monopoly price which the land would command by its advantages of position. Meantime, the general expenditure of the town on improvements is increasing the value of their property. If this land were rated [taxed locally] at, say, four per cent. on its selling value, the owners would have a more direct incentive to part with it to those who are desirous of building, and a twofold advantage would result to the community. First, all the valuable property would contribute to the rates [local taxes], and thus the burden on the occupiers would be diminished by the increase in the rateable property. Secondly, the owners of the building land would be forced to offer their land for sale, and thus their competition with one another would bring down the price of building land, and so diminish the tax in the shape of ground rent, or price paid for land, which is now levied on urban enterprise by the adjacent land-owners — a tax, be it re-

sion were, Sir Charles W. Dilke, Bart. (chairman), H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Cardinal Manning, Lord Salisbury, Lord Brownlow, Lord Carrington, George J. Goschen, Sir R. A. Cross, Rt. Rev. W. Walshaw How, Bishop of Bedford; Hon. E. Lyulph Stanley, W. McCulloch Torrens, Henry Broadhurst, George Godwin, F.R.S., Samuel Morley, Sir George Harrison, E. Dwyer Gray and Jesse Collings. The large majority of the commissioners seem to have approved of this proposal. At any rate, but three formally dissented from it—Salisbury, Goschen and Cross.

While on this trip to Great Britain Mr. George, as on former occasions, met many people interesting to him, but one of particular interest was the Rt. Hon. James Bryce, notable in literature and politics, and who, the American found on personal contact, bore out his reputation for broadness of mind and democracy of spirit. The two men had a long talk on subjects of common interest to them. Mr. Bryce says of this meeting:

“Mr. George quite won the heart of my sister by admiring her cat which was quite a privileged character in our household—so privileged that it walked over my papers with impunity and spoiled many of ‘The American Commonwealth’ proofs by lying down on them while the ink was fresh.”

Mr. George intended to do some lecturing on reaching home, but the general lecture season had been bad and two or three that he tried proved unprofitable financially.

membered, which is no recompense for any industry or expenditure on their part, but is the natural result of the industry and activity of the townspeople themselves. Your Majesty's Commissioners would recommend that these matters should be included in legislation when the law of rating comes to be dealt with by Parliament.”

He therefore settled down to writing, which engaged him mainly until the close of the summer of the next year, 1886. Articles for the "North American Review" constituted much of this writing. First appeared in the July number, 1885, a "conversation" on the subject of "Land and Taxation" between him, representing his own ideas, and the eminent jurist, David Dudley Field, speaking for the established ideas. The managing editor of the "Review," Loretus S. Metcalf, brought the gentlemen together at luncheon and explained that in order to place in juxtaposition the two views he would ask them to converse, each from his own standpoint, on the subject of "Land and Taxation," while a shorthand writer should take down all that was said. Of this matter Mr. Metcalf later said:

"The gentlemen had not met before, but they quickly measured each other and fell into cordial, easy, deferential interchange of thought. The remarkable feature of this meeting was the exhibition on both sides of the art of exact expression. So accurately did each speak that, except to catch typographical errors, not a single change was made in either manuscript or proof. The conversation was a marvel of clear thinking and precise utterance."

Mr. George always considered that he had by far the better part of the conversation; indeed, later he had the article reprinted in tract form for general circulation.

In the "North American Review" for February, 1886, the author had an article treating of trans-Atlantic social and political affairs under the caption of "England and Ireland"; and in the April number one entitled, "More about American Landlordism," showing the concentrating tendency of ownership. Mr. Metcalf had now with-

drawn from the management of the "North American Review" and James Redpath, who took his place, engaged Mr. George to write a series of articles on "Labour in Pennsylvania"—Pennsylvania, the home of "protection" and strikes. The author visited the State and presented in four numbers between August, 1886, and January, 1887, his findings, based largely upon official statements and the evidence of the labourers themselves. The articles related chiefly to the great coal and iron regions owned by a comparatively few men, each in his own district as autocratic as a baron of old, for, said the writer, reaching the bottom of his conclusions, "the power of the sole landlord enables the operator or superintendent to exercise such control as he cares to and may deem prudent. He may enact dog laws, goat laws, chicken laws, liquor laws, or any other laws that he pleases, short of the point of producing a general revolt; may regulate trade and control amusements."

But though these magazine articles engrossed much of his time, what chiefly absorbed him after his return from Scotland up to the middle of 1886 was the completion and publication of the book, "Protection or Free Trade?" Some of the chapters of this work had appeared in serial form in a combination of newspapers in the fall and winter of 1885. From this the author obtained nearly \$3,000, which more than paid for the printing in book form early in 1886. The latter he concluded to do himself under the name of Henry George & Co., his son, Richard, being, in James Redpath's language, "Co." The office was in Astor Place, New York, in joint occupancy with an agency of Porter & Coates, Philadelphia publishers, the representative of which was Gaybert Barnes, whose acquaintance had been made through William Swinton. Besides handling the new book, Henry George

& Co. became the sole publishers of the cloth editions of the other George works.

It was while he was putting the new book through the newspapers that the acquaintance with Tom L. Johnson began. Mr. Johnson was a young man of just thirty-one, flushed with success as an inventor and Western street railroad manager and owner. He was born in Kentucky of a line famous in that State's politics. His father had been a planter and had lost all in the Civil War. Young Tom, with little more than a year's schooling, went to work at fifteen and quickly developed a mechanical and managing genius, which, with the acquisition of street railroad franchises in Cleveland and other cities, rapidly led to fortune. One day in a railroad car he bought and read Henry George's "Social Problems." That led him to read "Progress and Poverty," and to accept the doctrines that these books taught, even though their fundamental principle was based upon the destruction of monopolies, the very things that were the source of his rapidly increasing wealth. It was when he came to Brooklyn to purchase a street railroad that he called on Mr. George. He says of this interview:

"I had looked forward with more intense interest to the meeting than I was aware of, for when I tried to speak in a manly way of what was in my heart, I was conscious of much emotion. I said that I should rather have it to say to my children that I had met Henry George and had entertained him under my own roof as my guest than to be able to transmit to them any worldly blessing.

"I did not want to talk about myself. I did not go there for that. I went to talk to Mr. George about his cause; and I wanted in some way to call it my cause, too. But he stretched out on a lounge and I sat in a chair and I found myself telling him the story of my life.

“Then I said: ‘Mr. George, your book on the tariff question will soon be out. I want to help to do good with it. I want 200 copies so as to send one to each lawyer and clergyman in Cleveland.’ I also said to him: ‘I cannot write, and I cannot speak. The least I can do is to make money with which to push our cause.’

“Mr. George answered: ‘You do not know whether or not you can write; you have not tried. You do not know whether or not you can speak; you have not tried. Take an interest in political questions. It is well enough to make money, but the abilities that can make money can do other things, too.’”