

## MISSION TO IRELAND

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THE GEORGES had intended to land at Liverpool. News which came to Henry George in New York two days before his departure, however, caused the family to change its plans and disembark at Queenstown.

Parnell, along with John Dillon and J. J. O'Kelly, had been sent to jail, where now some, five hundred political prisoners languished under the "crimes" or "coercion" act. While George was still at sea the Irish Land League issued a "no-rent manifesto" in protest, calling upon agricultural tenants to refuse to pay rent until the Government should change its policy.

In retaliation, the Dublin authorities suppressed the Land League. Patrick Egan, the treasurer, went to Paris to protect the League's funds. The women, under Miss Anna Parnell, sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, organized the Ladies' Land League (L.L.L.) to help carry on. George decided that he should hasten to Ireland to study the situation firsthand.

On the Queenstown tender the passenger agent called the American aside and offered to change his name on his luggage and on the passenger list, else—as news of his coming had been cabled to Ireland—he would certainly be dogged by the police from the moment of landing and subjected to arrest. George refused the man's kindness. Upon arrival he met with no official hostility; on the contrary, he was given a welcome which was only short of a demonstration.

Ireland, with its population of little more than five million, was being patrolled by 15,000 military constables and forty thousand picked troops. "I got indignant as soon as I landed," George wrote, "and I have not got over it yet."<sup>1</sup>

He went at once to Dublin to interview Parnell, Dillon, and O'Kelly. At first he was unsuccessful:

I cooled my heels during three days outside Kilmainham Jail, in an attempt to see men who really represent four-fifths of the people of this country, and as after at length getting in, I at length got out again, there were two great Englishmen whom I wished could have been alive to visit the place—Charles Dickens and John Stuart Mill. It would require the pen that described the “circumlocution office” to fitly describe the officials at Kilmainham and the pains they seem to take to make visits to the suspects, as few and as unpleasant as possible. It would require the author of *On Liberty* to fitly warn his countrymen of what such treatment of *suspected* men really means.<sup>2</sup>

A fortnight later he was able to report:

I have seen the most famous and best loved men of Ireland—the men who are today the real leaders and representatives of the Irish people; but have seen them with the greatest difficulty and under conditions which in other countries surround the worst malefactors. . . .

It was the first time I had ever met Mr. Parnell.<sup>1</sup> I was most favorably impressed by him. Features and bearing and expression speak a strong, well-poised, and determined character, a man fit to be the leader of men.

Our conversation was exceedingly interesting for a conversation of its kind, but it was an exceedingly provoking kind, for the two warders strained their ears lest anything contraband should be said. . . . Of the things I most wanted to talk to Mr. Parnell, nothing was permitted. . . . No politics of any kind, of any country were to be spoken of, said the warder. . . . So then we spoke of Bishop Nulty, but when I attempted to allude to Bishop Nulty's views, and how he believed there can be no settlement of the Land Question until land is acknowledged as the common property of the whole people, I was peremptorily stopped. There could be no allusion to land, even with the League left out, within the sacred precincts of Kilmainham.

Baffled in these directions we talked of ancient history and of the persecution of the early Church, of the triumph of Christianity over Paganism, of the course of civilization and the effects upon European thought, of the discovery and settlement of America, of the progress of astronomical science, of the laws of human thought, etc. . . . Not even the gold-banded chief warder, though he looked very uneasy, could sniff “politics” in such topics as these, nor yet when I sought to obtain Mr. Parnell's views on such religious topics

as the perseverance of the saints, the relation between faith and works, the final triumph of the right, the ultimate chaining of the devil, etc. And so, in a conversation that, understood literally, might have been taken for that of lunatics, I managed to get something of Mr. Parnell's views. He is more than satisfied with the spirit shown by the people, and is confident of success. . . .<sup>3</sup>

George had been waited upon by four committees and invited to deliver a public lecture in Dublin. Delivered some weeks after his arrival, in the historic Rotunda, the address was an immense success. The enthusiasm was so great that it was only by ordering his cab driver to whip up the horse and get him away from the crowd that George escaped having his carriage unhitched and dragged by his audience through the streets. He wrote to Taylor, "I am sorry now that I did not let them do it as it would have compelled the press agents to have taken more notice of it."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, who a few months previously had written a pastoral letter which was a scholarly summation of the land question, granted the American an interview. George wrote privately to Patrick Ford that the visit "was most delightful. . . . Here," he said, "is a Christian Bishop. He treated me with the greatest honor, and what is more with the greatest frankness and cordiality. I never met a man that seemed to me more to fill the idea of a *Rev. Father in God*. How I wish he were Pope."<sup>5</sup>

*The Irish World's* correspondent reported the publication of the Bishop's pastoral letter and quoted from Dr. Nulty: ". . . I infer that no individual, or class of individuals, can hold a right of private property in the land of the country; that the people of that country, in their public corporate capacity *are*, and always *must be*, the real owners of the land of their country—holding an indisputable title to it, in the fact that they receive it as a free gift from their Creator, and as a necessary means for preserving and enjoying the life He has bestowed upon them."<sup>6</sup>

George's dispatch commented:

The individual who has improved land Dr. Nulty declares entitled to the benefit of that improvement, and should be secured in its enjoyment and be entitled to receive either a selling price or rent for it, but the value of the land which arises from the growth of the community and not from what any particular individual has done

(that is to say, rent in the strict use of the term) belongs to the whole community and ought to be taken in taxation for the use of the whole community.

In the fact that rent proper—or that value of land which is not due to the individual exertion of the occupier or improver—constantly increases with the growth of society, Dr. Nulty sees—as everyone must see who recognizes the true relation of this fact—a most beautiful relation of creative design.<sup>7</sup>

George prevailed upon the Ladies' Land League to have Bishop Nulty's article printed and sent broadcast over Ireland. The result was a widespread distribution through priests and laity alike. The Tory papers reprinted it as "an outrageous official declaration of communism from a Catholic bishop."<sup>8</sup>

The persecution in Ireland continued. The official League paper *United Ireland* was seized, but the plates of the number about to be issued were spirited to George's lodgings and hidden under his bed<sup>9</sup> until they could be packed into a trunk and shipped secretly to England. There the League managers wasted precious time and money, getting out one edition in London, another, an entirely different one, in Dublin,<sup>10</sup> and a third, from the Dublin plates, in Liverpool. George sadly was coming to realize that in the Irish movement there was a lack of management and therefore a sacrifice of opportunity and resources; that the men trying to lead were showing jealousy and incapacity. He still had faith in Parnell, although he did not consider him as strong as Davitt; but he believed Parnell's sister to be an admirable organizer and secretary, and that the women's group had been accomplishing very much under great hardships.

It was when Miss Parnell learned from an informant that the Ladies' Land League was about to be proscribed, and that one of the Dublin jails was being made ready to receive her and Nannie Lynch, her assistant, that the two women lost no time in escaping to England. As a precaution they sent the official records of their organization to Mrs. George for safekeeping. George in the meantime had gone to London. The remaining members of the L.L.L. persuaded Mrs. George to preside over their business meeting. Knowing nothing of parliamentary procedure, she had consented with reluctance. Her nervousness was hardly lessened by the presence of Government detectives, reporters and correspondents. But she carried through, and the

fact that Miss Parnell was absent and that an American woman had taken the chair saved the Ladies' League from proscription.

In London, George learned from Kegan Paul of the London publishing house of Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. of the astonishing success of *Progress and Poverty*. Selling an American work on economics had seemed impossible at first and the firm had difficulty in disposing of the first twenty copies of the five hundred which D. Appleton had sent to England. Then it began to sell, and an English edition was being prepared with expectations of a quick return. George wrote to Francis G. Shaw, "I find I have made a reputation quite out of proportion to the sale of the book. This, when I can utilize it, will be our power."<sup>11</sup>

In January, the family was together in London where "we are staying with Miss Helen Taylor," George wrote Shaw. Miss Taylor was the stepdaughter of John Stuart Mill. She impressed George as "not a Malthusian, not a materialist, but rather a mystic."<sup>12</sup> After the death of her mother she had become Mill's constant companion and confidante. It was the habit of the man and the girl to take long walks—sometimes for twenty miles.

This intimate contact of the young, groping mind with the mature intellect of the great economist was an extraordinary education for the girl. When the Georges became acquainted with Helen Taylor during the Irish struggle she was outwardly a typical English woman of the Victorian era—domestic, soft-voiced, gentle in manner, and wearing, when in the house, a white lace cap on her smooth, brown hair. She had thrown herself deeply into the Irish cause. Upon reading *Progress and Poverty* she had become a fervent disciple of George, saying that John Stuart Mill, had he lived, would have embraced not only the cause of Ireland but also George's teaching. As hostess to the Georges, she was most reluctant to let them go. She was able to talk politics and economics with the eldest or to teach the youngest \* to make, from the tinfoil wrappings of chocolates, tiny spoons with which to shovel sugar in the big silver bowl.

After several weeks with Helen Taylor, the Georges visited Mr. and Mrs. Henry Myers Hyndman at their home in Portland Place, London. Later they were guests of Thomas Briggs

\* "The youngest," was, of course, the author.—Editor

and his family in Dulwich. Hyndman, a journalist, had been denied employment by the British press because of his Irish sympathies. He was such an ardent socialist that George felt it "a pity to see a man of such force following so blindly such a superficial thinker as Karl Marx."<sup>13</sup> Hyndman tried in vain to bring George to his viewpoint. He had hoped, as he subsequently related, "to convert him to the truth as it is in Socialist economics. It seemed to me quite incredible that a man who could go so far as he had gone would not traverse with ease the remainder of the distance, and thus obtain a sound conception of the whole subject."<sup>14</sup>

Hyndman had found in the British Museum a copy of the lecture delivered by Thomas Spence in 1775, proclaiming common rights in land and proposing that land values be taken for public purposes. George had never heard of Spence. But instead of being disconcerted by the discovery of a predecessor who had anticipated several of his own independently achieved positions on the land question, he reasoned that his theories would be accepted more readily if it could be proved that they were old. Therefore he persuaded Hyndman to reprint the Spence lecture, a copy of which he sent to the *Irish World* for publication.

Despite the fact that he was a Marxist, Hyndman lived in a rather formal style. The informal manners of his American guest often irritated him. He related that George's "indifference to some of our English prejudices was at times rather annoying." For instance,

On one occasion we were passing the top of Great Portland street, going home to lunch, when George espied a barrow-load of whelks being sold by a coster-monger. "I say, Hyndman," quoth George, "I like the look of those whelks." "All right," said I, "if you like them I'll have some sent in for you." "No," was the answer, "I like them here and now." Expostulation was useless. So George consumed his whelks from the barrow while I, got up in high hat and frock coat of the non-whelk-eating-at-the-corner civilization, stood by and saw him do it.<sup>15</sup>

Hyndman considered that while the economist was "humorous, good-natured and fond of discussion, his was not by any means a first-rate intellect."<sup>16</sup> George left no record of what he thought of his host. But the smallest of Hyndman's American guests developed a prejudice against him. It dated from

the time he almost sent her into hysterics by pretending to bite off the toes of her doll.

The same doll, Rose, and "The Babe" or "The Child," as the George family called its youngest member, were inseparable. Once when they were staying in Dublin the Babe fell down and broke Rose's crown and even her mother's magic fingers could not heal it. Indeed, Dr. James E. Kelly, a surgeon who called so often to talk Irish and world affairs, found that in this case he could not operate successfully. And then the father, who was just starting for London, entered the consultation, suggesting that there might be someone on the other side of the Irish Channel who could operate on Rose. Gently he laid the doll on a bed of compromising documents in his bag and covered her with the rest of the precious papers. A few days later he wrote to Mrs. George from London, "I have been spending the afternoon and some cab fare in moving about with Rose. All along Regent Street they wanted ten or fourteen days to fix her, which meant sending her to Paris. I found a place over Waterloo Bridge where they will head her, paint her and put back her old wig for 6/ and have left her, to be done tomorrow afternoon."<sup>17</sup>

While in London the Georges were entertained frequently and met many interesting people. Henry George was usually indifferent to his appearance. Now he contrived to look well groomed in the evening clothes which a fashionable tailor had made for him before he left New York. (Perhaps because they had cost so much, he took scrupulous care of them.) Mrs. George had made for herself a handsome evening gown of garnet satin and velvet. Against its dark red her arms and neck gleamed beautifully white. For less formal affairs she favored a stiff, black silk dress, without which no lady's wardrobe, at that time, was complete.

Most of her own clothes Mrs. George made herself, and all of the clothes worn by her daughters. When she found that she was to be in London for some time, she went to the English agency of the American company, Wilcox and Gibbs, to rent a sewing machine.

"We'll let you have it for £5," said the salesman.

"That's far too much," exclaimed the American woman. "I own one at home for which I paid \$85, and I can't afford to pay £5 for renting a duplicate just for a few weeks' use."

"You may *buy* it here for £5, Madam, even though it does

cost \$85 in your country where it is produced. You Americans, with your protective tariff, are very kind to us!"<sup>18</sup>

This was a vivid lesson in the stupidity of "protection" which Mrs. George quoted many times.

George wrote to Ford that "I have succeeded in passing myself off for an Englishman, but I can't for an Irishman; my accent betrays me."<sup>19</sup> His wife, while abroad, almost always was taken for an Englishwoman, not only because of her poise but because she did not have the nasal, rasping quality supposed to be typical of "the American voice." Greatly to her amusement, shopkeepers often took her into their confidence: "We'll be getting a 'igher price than this, mum, in the spring, when the Hamericans 'll be coming h'over."<sup>20</sup>

One night Mr. and Mrs. George were dinner guests at the beautiful home of Walter Wren,<sup>21</sup> the celebrated Oxford coach, where they met Walter Besant, novelist and founder of the Society of Authors. On another occasion they were guests of Sir Francis Jeune (afterwards Lord Chief Justice) and Lady Jeune, at one of their "small and earlies." It was in reality a large and late, for the crowd was so great that it took half an hour to get upstairs to greet the hostess. Tennyson was there, looking like a dreamer; and Browning, described by Mrs. George as looking "like a prosperous merchant draper," was also there. George met neither of them: he was more interested, in fact, in another guest—Herbert Spencer.

Although he had once written to his wife, "Instead of trying a novel, why not read Herbert Spencer on the chrystalline system, when you want to go to sleep?"<sup>22</sup> he admired the English philosopher, had quoted him in *Progress and Poverty*, and had long wanted to meet him. Here at Lady Jeune's the coveted opportunity came.

The two men had hardly exchanged greetings before Spencer asked George what he thought of the situation in Ireland. The American at once condemned the action of the Government and praised the work of the Land League. He expected the Englishman who, in *Social Statics*, had condemned private property in land and had declared for what is now called land nationalization,<sup>23</sup> would, like himself, see the solution of the agrarian struggle in Ireland only in terms of the fundamental economic principles which they both had defined.

But Spencer, to George's surprise, condemned the imprisoned Land Leaguers. "They have only got what they deserve," he



said vehemently. "They are inciting the people to refuse to pay their landlords what is rightfully theirs—rent." George was nonplussed. "It is evident we cannot agree on this matter,"<sup>24</sup> he replied in some astonishment, and walked away, bitterly disappointed in the man whose work he had revered.

Joseph Chamberlain, according to J. L. Garvin, his biographer, had read *Progress and Poverty* and had been "electrified."<sup>25</sup> Indeed there was much in common between the great English liberal and Henry George. After dining with Chamberlain and John Bright, as guests of Walter Wren, George wrote of the meeting to Patrick Ford:

We started in on the Irish affairs with the soup, for Bright asked me point-blank what I thought of what I had seen in Ireland and I had to tell him, though it was not very flattering. We kept it up till half past ten, when Mr. Bright had to go down to the House... but Chamberlain remained until nearly twelve. Bright has got to the end of his tether, and will never get past where he is now; but Chamberlain is an extremely bright man, and his conversation, which was unreserved, was extremely interesting to me, and would make a most interesting letter if I could use it, which of course I cannot, for to print private conversation with men of his position, or even to allude to them in print, without permission, would stamp a man as not fit for decent society.

Chamberlain has evidently been reading the *Irish World* for he alluded to some things in my letters, and he told me laughingly to look out when I went back to Ireland that I did not get reasonably suspected.<sup>26</sup>

Though the "no-rent" movement in Ireland at this time was as strong as ever, Parnell and a few of his co-workers had grown weary of the fight. They made an agreement with the Government to "slow down" Land League agitation in return for release of the suspects and extension of the Land Act. When Parnell, O'Kelly, and Dillon were released from Kilmainham Prison on May 2, 1882, surprise and joy were general among the Irish factions. Those on the inside, however, suspected the compromise. George wrote to Ford that members of the Ladies' Land League seemed deeply depressed.

But the authorities who freed Parnell, who had been denounced for treason, were at once discredited. Viceroy Cowper and Chief Secretary Forster resigned. On the evening of Saturday, May 6, 1882, when the new Chief Secretary, Lord Fred-

erick Cavendish, and the Under Secretary, Thomas Burke, made their official entry into Dublin, they were assassinated in Phoenix Park by a band of fanatics who called themselves the "Invincibles."

News of the deed quickly spread around the world and did much harm to the Irish cause.

Davitt, who had been jailed again after his return from the United States, had been released from Portland Prison, near London, early that day. George had been with him until late that night. Early on Sunday morning George was awakened by the arrival of a telegram from his Dublin friend, Dr. Kelly, telling of the assassinations.

There were no Sunday papers in London. George, dressing rapidly, sped from his lodgings to Westminster Palace Hotel, where Davitt was staying. "At five o'clock," Davitt relates, "Henry George entered my bedroom with an open telegram in his hand and a scared look in his kindly blue eyes. 'Get up, old man,' were his words. 'One of the worst things that has ever happened to Ireland has occurred.'" <sup>27</sup>

George recounts that when Davitt read the telegram he exclaimed, "My God! Have I got out of Portland for this!" The Irishman added, "For the first time in my life I despair. It seems like the curse that follows Ireland!" <sup>28</sup>

George took the message to Dillon and O'Kelly. Dillon went for Parnell, who joined the others at the hotel. By the afternoon nearly all the Parnellites had gathered there.

In the meantime a manifesto had been written by a few of Parnell's followers, <sup>29</sup> condemning the crime in the name of the Irish people and their leaders. "It was sent at once," writes Davitt, "to the press agencies in Great Britain, cabled to John Boyle O'Reilly of Boston, for the widest publication in America, and wired to Mr. Alfred Webb of Dublin, to be printed as a placard and despatched by Sunday night's last train to every city and town in Ireland, so as to be posted on the walls of the country on Monday morning." <sup>30</sup>

George reported to *The Irish World*: "The feeling of the Irish members was the same horror and dismay felt by Davitt and expressed in the Manifesto. They felt that a great disaster had overtaken their cause and the stigma of a great crime had been laid upon it. . . . Nothing could better have served the purpose of the worst enemies of Ireland, nothing could have given more grief and shame to her best friends than this tragedy." <sup>31</sup>

On that black Sunday night, the Georges were guests at a dinner given by a Member of Parliament. The guests felt there would be violent retaliation against the Irish in England, and therefore the Irish leaders should flee to France. Mrs. George, who regarded moral courage as almost the highest human attribute, argued that Davitt "should go to Ireland by the first train and be as a leader to his people in this hour of dismay." Her statement was received with amazement. "But fury and bitterness are running so high—he might be killed by a Government supporter," someone objected. "How could Michael Davitt die better than with his people," asked Mrs. George.<sup>32</sup>

Her husband was to remind her of these words years later.