

RETURN TO AMERICA

WHEN Henry George returned to the United States in the autumn of 1882 after a year's absence he found himself "pretty near famous." Newspapers heralded his arrival and he was given a formal welcome by labor union members at Cooper Union and a ten-dollar-a-plate dinner at Delmonico's by leaders in science, letters, politics, and law.¹

The toastmaster at the banquet was Algernon Sidney Sullivan, and the speakers included Justice William H. Arnoux, Justice Van Brunt of the New York Supreme Court, the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, Thomas G. Shearman, Andrew McLean, Francis B. Thurber, Thomas Kinsella, and Representative Perry Belmont of New York. Henry George, mistaking the hour, arrived at the dinner late, and although he was carefully dressed in his smartly cut evening clothes, characteristically he had forgotten to have his shoes polished.

The *New York Times* reported on the following morning (October 22, 1882):

In introducing Mr. George, Mr. Sullivan . . . said he had "been to a great many dinners in that room. . . . Never before in all New York had representative men from all the classes of Society been assembled for the single purpose of making an acknowledgement to one whose sole claim to fame was that he was a philosopher and author" When Mr. George arose he was greeted with three cheers, the whole company rising to deliver them. He began by saying he could hardly express how much he appreciated the compliment tendered him: "You honor me for my ability and personal worth—so your invitation runs. I have read in the newspapers that I am a communist, a disturber of social order, a dangerous man, and a promoter of all sorts of destructive theories." *

* In *The Philosopher of San Francisco* Louis F. Post contributes an interesting sidelight on the honor tendered George by these leaders of New York business, political and social life. He writes:

Let the *Herald* take it up from here:

What is the terrible thing I want to do? I want in the first place to remove all restrictions upon production of wealth and in doing this I want to secure that fair distribution of wealth which will give every man that which he has fairly earned. What I contend for is that the man who produces, or accumulates, or economizes; the man who plants a tree, or drains a marsh, or grows a crop, or erects a building, or establishes a business, should not be fined for so doing; that it is to the interest of all that he should receive the full benefit of his labor, his foresight, his energy or his talents. In other words, I propose to abolish all taxation which falls upon the exertion of labor or the use of capital or the accumulation of wealth, and to meet all public expenses out of that fund which arises, not from the exertion of any individual, but from the growth of the whole community. . . .

Consider, Gentlemen, how this city would grow, how enormously wealth would increase, if all taxes were abolished which now bear on the production and accumulation and exchange of wealth. Consider how quickly the vacant spaces on the island would fill up could land not improved be had by him who wanted to improve it, without the payment of prices now demanded.

Before George's return from Europe, Michael Davitt had come to the United States in search of aid for the Irish cause.

The eulogies pronounced at that dinner, both from the guest table and the floor, with reference to this American with whose teachings none of the speakers but Mr. Kinsella, Mr. Shearman, and Mr. Saunders had any acquaintance, would have puzzled me beyond hope of solution if I had not stumbled upon the probable explanation of that large attendance of distinguished New Yorkers. Having occasion at the banquet lull between eating and oratory to carry a message to the guest of honor from my place in the rear of the room to his at the front, I was caught by the arm by Recorder Smythe as I returned.

"What part of Ireland does this man George come from?" the Recorder asked me.

"He isn't an Irishman," I explained; "he was born in Philadelphia, and his father before him."

The Recorder looked puzzled, as he murmured half to me and half to himself: "No-o-o; that can hardly be; I was told that he was born in Ireland."

After further and positive assertions to the contrary, I left Recorder Smythe in a reflective mood which seemed to have seized him. One seized me, too. As I came out of it I brought with me the astonishing success of that Delmonico banquet to Henry George. Our guests having doubtless heard of him as a British prisoner in Ireland, had probably leaped to the conclusion that he was an Irish patriot—a kind of patriot hardly less popular with New York politicians in those days than American patriots of the 100-per cent variety became some years later.—Editor

In the opening speech of his campaign which he delivered at the New York Academy of Music on June 26, the Irish leader went out of his way (evidently under pressure from the Parnellites) to protest that he had not "fallen into Mr. George's hands."²

On this occasion the Reverend Dr. Edward McGlynn, rector of one of the largest Roman Catholic churches in the city, St. Stephen's on East 29th Street, came out openly for George's solution to questions of economic injustice—much to the delight of George when he heard of the incident.

Father McGlynn was a native of New York and of Irish parentage. Two years George's senior, he had enjoyed a brilliant career in the priesthood, studying at the College of Propaganda in Rome and becoming, after his ordination at the age of twenty-two, assistant to the Reverend Dr. Cummings at St. Stephen's. Dr. Cummings, a man of somewhat liberal views, had considerable influence in the community. When McGlynn succeeded him at the age of thirty, the younger man continued to serve St. Stephen's in this tradition.

Father McGlynn appeared with Davitt on three other occasions. In the second speech he rebuked the Irishman, "Michael Davitt is only a pilot engine that goes before the head of the train. Let him not apologize for the truth that is in him." He added, "I am entirely of the opinion of Henry George as a matter of political economy... and therefore [think] that the plan of Henry George and Michael Davitt is the true one."³

Again, at the huge meeting held in Union Square on July 5, McGlynn exhorted Davitt:

Explain away not one tittle of it, but preach the gospel in its purity! It is a good gospel, not only for Ireland, but for England, for Scotland and for America, too. And if in this country we do not yet feel quite so much the terrible pressure of numbers upon the land, the same terrible struggle between progress and poverty, as is felt in other lands, no thanks are due our political system, but thanks only to the bounties of nature, and to the millions of acres of virgin lands with which God has blessed us. But when these virgin lands have been occupied; when the population shall have increased here as it has elsewhere in proportion to our extent of territory, we shall have precisely the same problem to solve, and the sooner we solve it the better.⁴

The priest's acceptance of his teachings meant very much to George, who had written from Ireland, "Sure as we live the world is moving. A Power infinitely superior to ours is forcing it on!"⁵

Father McGlynn's outspoken support of George could scarcely go unnoticed by the enemies of the Irish cause. Soon word came from Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda in Rome, ordering the American priest's suspension unless Cardinal McCloskey of New York should rule otherwise. An interview followed with the Cardinal and Father McGlynn sought to clear up his superior's misunderstanding of the doctrine which he had been advocating. The upshot of the interview was that the priest promised not to make any more speeches for the Land League, "not because I acknowledged the right of any one to forbid me, but because I knew too well the power of my ecclesiastical superiors to impair and almost destroy my usefulness in the ministry of Christ's Church to which I had consecrated my life."

Shortly after George returned to New York he called upon his new advocate. He found in the tall, handsome, dark-haired man with the resonant voice and gracious manner, the strength that endeared him to his huge congregation. The meeting convinced McGlynn, as he said later, that "Mr. George's genius and intellectual gifts do not exceed his gifts and graces of heart and character and his profoundly reverent and religious spirit."⁶

It was only a few weeks after this meeting that George's beloved friend, Francis George Shaw, died after a short illness.⁷ The loss of this wise and learned man, who had been a bulwark in time of need, hurt him deeply. As a last reminder of the faith and generosity of Shaw came a gift of \$1,000 in his will to the younger man—his "proxy."

"What a curious life mine is," George told a friend, "literally from hand to mouth; yet always a way seems to open."⁸

The Shaw bequest, he believed, was intended to relieve him from the strain of hack writing. Turning down Charles Nordhoff's appeal that he run for Congress, early in the new year, George started work on a book dealing with the tariff question. He found time, however, for other writing. In March of 1883, the *North American Review*⁹ published an article "Money in Elections" in which George advocated the Australian ballot,

even as he had advocated that reform in his "Bribery in Elections" published in *The Overland* of December, 1871.

In the meantime the cheap English edition of *Progress and Poverty* was meeting with so much success that the author was able to negotiate an American twenty-cent paper-covered edition through the publishing house of John W. Lovell. *The Irish Land Question*, paper-covered and selling for ten cents, followed this venture. (Since it did not deal exclusively with Ireland it was retitled *The Land Question*).

Both books did well. Although George received 10 per cent—the same royalty which Appleton had paid for the finer edition—he gave away so many copies of *Progress and Poverty* and made such large discounts and concessions to those who bought in quantities for educational purposes that his own earnings were small.

On both sides of the Atlantic appreciation of George's work was growing swiftly. He wrote to Taylor, "In England our ideas are spreading with extreme rapidity. A Birmingham gentleman, Thomas F. Walker, states that he himself has bought and distributed to the active men of the Liberal party two thousand three hundred copies of *Progress and Poverty*."¹⁰

In the United States, George found another advocate in T. V. Powderly, Grand Master of the Order of Knights of Labor. The organization had started among the garment workers of Philadelphia fourteen years earlier. By 1883, it had spread all over the country. Speaking in New York the previous December, Powderly had said:

In my opinion the main, all absorbing question of the hour is the land question. . . . The eight-hour law, the prohibition of child labor and the currency question are all of weighty moment to the toiler. But high above them all stands the land question. . . . You may make the laws and own the currency but give me the land and I will absorb your wealth and render your legislation null and void. . . . Give heed to the land question. . . . It were better to be called a communist than to be a party to the plundering of a people of the inheritance ordained for them by God.¹¹

Powderly was instrumental in placing copies of *Progress and Poverty* and *The Land Question* in local assemblies of the Knights of Labor. In this way the American laboring man became acquainted with "Georgism."

About this time Allen Thorndike Rice of the *North American Review* proposed that George edit an economic weekly.¹² After considering this flattering offer, George decided instead to contract with *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* for a series of thirteen articles at one hundred dollars each.

The articles, called "Problems of the Time" and starting with the April 11 issue, dealt with different aspects of economic questions. The fifth one, discussing "The March of Concentration,"¹³ showed that there was an increase in the size of land holdings in the United States and that the Census reports for 1870 and 1880 contradicted the figures which were given to prove that the average size of farms was decreasing. Therefore, he said, the reports were unreliable and without any worth.

Both censuses had been supervised by Professor Francis A. Walker, the Yale political economist who had been president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Walker was the author of books on money, history, economics, and statistics. Angered because of the criticism of his' work, he wrote to *Frank Leslie's* offering to send George "a more elementary study," illustrated with diagrams, to prove that the average size of farms was decreasing."¹⁴ In the same periodical George replied, Walker rejoined, and a lively little debate developed.

The *New York Sun* found the controversy amusing because, while the paper considered George suave and dignified, "his opponent squirms and sputters as one flagrant blunder after another is brought forward and the spike of logic is driven home through his egregious fallacies."¹⁵ Later the Census Bureau admitted that the 1870 tables had been based on improved area while those of 1880 were based on total area—which made Walker's comparison of the two impossible and proved George's charge of carelessness.

After these thirteen articles were finished, George arranged them as chapters, added eight more chapters, and a conclusion, and brought them out as a book entitled *Social Problems*. He dedicated the volume to the memory of Francis G. Shaw. Selling the English copyright for £400 cash, he wrote to Taylor, "This makes nearly \$3,600 I have had out of the book before the first copy is issued, which is a considerable difference from *Progress and Poverty*."¹⁶ Some weeks later he added, "I did let *Social Problems* go too low; but I wanted the money badly and

snapped at the first good offer. But I rely on the United States to give me more." ¹⁷

Easy to read, this book was the one the author himself used to recommend to beginners in political economy before they tackled *Progress and Poverty*.

It was before he published *Social Problems*, however, that George had told Taylor, "I have met with a misfortune. You know I put considerable work this spring on a free-trade book. I have lost the manuscript. . . . It cannot be found anywhere and has evidently gone into the ash barrel." ¹⁸

The Georges had been boarding at the time on Fourteenth Street, near Seventh Avenue. His precious manuscript, which would have made about one hundred printed pages, evidently was carried off and destroyed by a servant who had been given an accumulation of waste papers to dispose of when George's study was cleaned.* He wrote again to Taylor, "Writing well on exact subjects is of all work the hardest. Yet I should be delighted if I could see my way clear to keeping at it. How blessed are they for whom the pot boils of itself! I have now just \$25 in the world, about half a week's living with economy; no, not that. However, this is no new experience for me. That MS. is a very serious loss even in the financial aspect." ¹⁹

For all of this, George spent no time bemoaning his misfortune but set himself to reading thoroughly Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* with the idea of abridging and annotating it. He started the work but was never able to finish the annotation.

His own works had begun to command widespread attention. But Henry George never allowed fame to distract him from the tender things which he held most dear. During their separations there was a steady stream of letters—almost daily—

* The loss has an interesting though tenuous link to what is perhaps the most famous parallel of this kind in literary history. Forty-five years before, Thomas Carlyle had lost the manuscript of the first volume of the *French Revolution* in much the same manner. He had given it to his friend John Stuart Mill for reading and annotation. Mill lent the material to his friend, Mrs. Taylor (Harriet Hardy), and while it was in her care a serving maid carelessly committed it to the flames so that nearly all of it was lost. Mill later married Mrs. Taylor, and it was her daughter, Helen, who had entertained the Georges in England.

Mill induced Carlyle to accept £100 in compensation for the loss of the first volume of the *French Revolution* but Henry George had no one to recompense him for the loss of what was to become *Protection or Free Trade*.—Editor

between Henry and Annie George. After they had been married for twenty-three years he could write his wife:

You used sometimes to say that you liked to feel necessary to me. You don't know how thoroughly that wish is gratified. I know it even when I am with you; but feel it more when I am away. I often think how more and more you have grown into my life, so that in everything that draws a man there is only one woman in the world for me. I not only love you with all the fervor I did when I first clasped you to my heart; but with a deeper love. I have learned to respect your judgment and value your advice: your caresses, if they cannot seem more sweet, seem more needed, and even when you assume the imperious tone and art of the mistress there is a charm I would not feel from anyone else. I think the people who grow tired of each other are never truly married. There is in the perfect confidence—the absolute oneness of the truly married—something which far surpasses any fresh charm.²⁰

Throughout the years he had kept in close touch with his family in Philadelphia. He sent financial help as often as he could. The bond between him and his father had not weakened with time and Richard Samuel Henry George's interest in his career had been an inspiration despite the fact that the older man, who was nearly eighty when *Progress and Poverty* was published, never fully understood the book or recognized its significance. This lack of intellectual kinship was shared by George's mother, though she, like her husband, gloried in the acclaim which her son had received.

Henry George's sister Kate and her husband Jerry Chapman were the members of his generation who more nearly comprehended both his proposed fiscal reform and his economic philosophy—and enthusiastically championed both. If George had any mental or spiritual loneliness within the family circle it was far outweighed by the devotion which deepened with the years.

To his father, who wrote thanking him for a present received on Mr. George's eighty-fifth birthday, it seemed "only yesterday when you came to me saying that you would go to California and that you would try your fortune there. I did not object; and now the result has been all I could have wished."²¹

This was the last letter he wrote to his son; a few days later

he was stricken with pneumonia. All his children gathered around the bedside of the patriarch in time to receive his blessing before he died. One week later, his wife, made ill by grief, followed him. And Richard Samuel Henry George and Catherine Vallance George, who had been such loving partners through their long life together, were buried in the same grave in Mt. Moriah cemetery.