

AUSTRALIA

HENRY GEORGE remained in New York only a few months after his return from Europe. On January 22, 1890, he set sail for Australia in response to invitations from the Sydney Single Tax Association, urging him to make a lecture tour similar to the ones which he had made in Great Britain.

Mrs. George accompanied him on what he called their "be-lated honeymoon." She had little chance to prepare for the journey around the world, for George rushed in from *The Standard* office only an hour before train time and hurled his books and papers together. He packed not one article of wearing apparel, and this task had fallen in haste to Mrs. George.

When they were ready to leave, the husband had collected so many books and papers that there was not room for all of them in his valise. So, one by one he commandeered every piece of unused hand baggage in the house. A four-wheeler had been engaged and the two daughters were to have the thrill of driving in a carriage with their parents to the station. But alas, the thrill was never experienced. Tearful farewells had to be said on the sidewalk, for after Mr. and Mrs. George and their luggage were packed into the carriage, there was no room for children and barely room for a typewriter, which had to be pushed through the cab window into the owner's lap.

Bound for the West Coast to board their ship for Australia, the travelers stopped in St. Louis for a few hours' visit with Sister Teresa Fox, Mrs. George's sister, at the convent of St. Vincent de Paul, and to attend a large dinner given in their honor. They also stopped for meetings in Kansas City, Denver, and Los Angeles.¹

George often said that when he took his wife on trips she paid her traveling expenses in the clothes or tickets she saved him from losing. He rarely returned from a lecture tour, for instance,

with the handkerchiefs, collars, or cuffs he had started with and frequently he had lost or exchanged umbrellas, shoes, hats, shirts, or even overcoats. Once he wrote her, "I have done pretty well in some respects on this trip. I wore the swallow-tail always except in Kansas City, where I had to go straight from the train. And I flattered myself I had lost nothing until tonight, when I found I have left my nice new dress boots somewhere. . . . I find it very convenient to have plenty of clothes."²

In spite of his wife's watchful eye, there were lapses on this trip West. She wrote from St. Louis to her sons that "your father, this far on the journey, has exchanged his own for other people's hats only five times!"³

The return of the Georges to California was a triumph. They were met by Dr. Taylor and a party of old San Francisco friends⁴ who boarded the train at Martinez, overflowing their car, and escorted them into the city they loved so well. The *San Francisco Examiner* observed on their arrival: "A gentleman fifty years of age and no taller than the first Napoleon, looked out of the window of the west-bound Pullman. . . . It was Henry George, California's political economist, who had caught the world's ear and interested its intellect. . . . He has always been fearless and in becoming an agitator has never ceased to be a gentleman. San Francisco recognizes and appreciates that merit."

On February 4, from the same stage in Metropolitan Hall where twelve years before the "gas measurer" had made his first plea to an almost empty house, George now faced a capacity audience which had paid to hear him. He was now a world citizen. "Ye gods, what a transformation!" exclaimed Mrs. George's cousin, William Cleveland McCloskey, in a letter written some years later:

From the merest tyro at public speaking to a finished, polished orator! That night was a memorable one in Henry George's career. The hall was packed to the dome and there was an overflow meeting outside. There were over 100 prominent citizens on the stage, and as he advanced to the center after being introduced, I shall never forget the demonstration. For some minutes it was pandemonium and he was visibly affected. He was home again among his friends.

For two hours he held his audience spell-bound, and at the conclusion the people swarmed upon the stage and showered him with praise and congratulations. There was a marked change in the man.

He was absolutely master of himself. Without notes and with the air and assurance of a finished orator, his voice full, round and resonant, he might well have compared with the greatest orators of the day.⁵

George accounted for his years since leaving San Francisco in these tones of dedication and humility:

When after growing up here, I went across the continent, before the railway was completed, and in the streets of New York for the first time realized the contrasts of wealth and want that are to be found in a great city; saw those sights that, to the man who comes from the West, affright and appall, the problem grew upon me. I said to myself there must be some reason for this and I will not rest until I have found the one and discovered the other. At last it came clear as the stars of a bright midnight. I saw what was the cause; I saw what was the cure. I saw nothing that was new. Truth is never new. . . . I have done no more to any man than point out God's stars; every man will see them who will look.⁶

So many were unable to attend this meeting that a second one, a free one for working men, was held in the same hall a few nights later. George also spoke in Oakland and in San Francisco before a group of clergymen at the Y.M.C.A. Old friends gave a banquet for him and professed to find him unspoiled by his worldwide reputation—still “light hearted,” still “little Harry George.”

Before sailing he wrote August Lewis, in New York, that “I have hardly averaged three hours' sleep since reaching here, and even then have not been able to see but a small number of the old friends that have come to greet us.”⁷

Bidding farewell to the crowds who went to the wharf to see them off, the Georges embarked for Sydney on the steamship *Mariposa*. During their twenty-four-hour stop at Honolulu they were given a dinner by some officers of United States warships stationed there. Most of these men were avowed believers in the Georgist philosophy. Indeed, the books of Henry George were rather popular in the Navy, where there was time, even in those days, for serious reading. One officer, William Sims, afterward an admiral and commander of American naval operations in European waters during the First World War, had been a guest in the George home on East 19th Street in New York. He had written his father that “*Progress and Poverty* [is] a truly won-

derful book" which "points to a future that surpasses all imagination. . . . I don't think any unprejudiced man can read it carefully without being convinced of its truth."⁸

The *Mariposa* landed the Georges at Auckland, New Zealand, where early on the morning of March 1, 1890, they were met by a group of Single Taxers. The group drove first to the residence of the venerable Sir George Grey, who had once played the role of dictator and had four times been governor of important British colonies. Sir George, who had advocated a land tax upon assuming the premiership of New Zealand (then a colony) in 1877, had been one of the first to read and acclaim *Progress and Poverty*. George wrote glowingly to *The Standard* of this visit and concluded, "I hope to return to New Zealand if only for the purpose of seeing him again."⁹

During the few hours' stay in Auckland members of the New Zealand Anti-Poverty Society, meeting in one of the hotels, presented George with a beautiful illuminated address. And Sir George Grey, who incidentally was himself a large landowner, made a speech in which he again proclaimed his faith in *Progress and Poverty*. The two men, who struck up an immediate and fast friendship (though they were never to meet again face to face), continued their conversation so long at the wharf, where they had walked together, that the captain of the *Mariposa* considerably delayed the ship's sailing.

The Georges' arrival in Australia had a deep significance for both of them. For Mrs. George it was the first visit to her native land since she had left it at the age of five years. For George it was a visit to the land of enlightenment. This great Pacific subcontinent had fascinated him ever since, as a lad of fifteen, he had sailed to Melbourne. In the later years of his social and economic awakening he had come to look with hope upon this country where the secret ballot had originated, where railroads and telegraph systems were publicly owned, and where savings banks and parcel post were part of the postal service.

Their reception in Sydney was enthusiastic. George was compelled to make a brief speech from his carriage to a huge crowd in front of the Town Hall, and then another and longer one inside, where he was officially welcomed by Mayor Sydney Burdekin and by city and colonial dignitaries (Australia, too, had not yet attained dominion status). He told how he had fought to have the Australian system of voting introduced into the United States, and reported that ten states had adopted the method and

that others were sure to follow. "He delivered such an address," wrote John Farrell, an Australian single taxer, "as had never before been heard in Sydney and received such a hearing as had seldom been accorded to a public speaker."¹⁰

A bewildering succession of meetings, receptions, luncheons, dinners, and interviews followed the Georges' Town Hall appearance and continued until the day of their departure from Australia three and a half months later. "Taken altogether," reported Farrell, "we expected nothing like the success which has attended his presence here, and we did not expect to find Mr. George such a powerful and moving speaker. He has the rugged earnestness and plain honesty that most impress an audience, together with a splendid voice which he knows how to use."¹¹

The Sydney newspapers devoted much space to the visitor. The *Herald* reporter noted that although the very words of Henry George could be found in the newspapers, these words "do not tell what the lecturer said. You must add the magnetic quality of personality." For George had "held his audience of various political shades spellbound, and he spoke without manuscript, notes, or other accessory" and achieved "an intellectual feat."¹²

The Australia Star, a protectionist paper, took a somewhat different view: "Let a man have an attractive literary style, or a magnetic tongue, and he can convince multitudes that any absurdity he chooses to teach represents an absolute truth. But as a rule the deluded creatures find out in a short time that they have made a mistake. Most of Henry George's American disciples have forsaken him."¹³

Generally speaking, however, the press was pleased with Henry George, whose immense reputation had preceded him but whose simplicity and geniality seemed to belie the usual conception of a world celebrity. One reporter wrote that "out of thirteen different orations, in no case was there any repetition of words or phrases, although in each case the central truth was portrayed with the utmost clearness."¹⁴

The campaign was repeated in the smaller towns of New South Wales before the Georges visited the other colonies. Everywhere there were receptions by mayors and other high officials, brass bands, torchlight processions, beautifully illuminated addresses. And for Annie George there were lovely bouquets, tied with ribbons lettered "Welcome Australia's Daughter." And for the couple there were such exotic and

typical gifts as an emu skin, made into a rug; an emu egg exquisitely mounted in silver and onyx; and two stuffed specimens of the rare and almost extinct platypus.

Typically, too, George made friends all over Australia. He thought his audiences both intelligent and enthusiastic. But he regretted, and sought to avoid, the fuss which was usually made over him. Sometimes the train on which he and Mrs. George were traveling would stop, at a place and time not scheduled, in order that the dignitaries of a small town might come aboard to deliver a eulogy to the American. Sometimes he could not escape them. But if he got wind of an impending "reception" he would try to escape from the back of the railway carriage when his train entered the depot, leaving the acceptance of these honors to his embarrassed wife. However, he usually got caught—sometimes in the station itself in the act of sneaking away to his hotel—and was always led by enthusiastic admirers to brave the official welcome.

When George went to Victoria his admirers feared that he would have a poor welcome there because the colony was a stronghold of protectionism. Some of them were so alarmed that they urged Mrs. George to persuade her husband against talking on the tariff question. This, of course, was futile. Not long after her marriage Annie George had written her husband, "I would not give your independent spirit for all the money in California."¹⁵ Nor would she give it now for all the warnings—friendly, of course—in Australia.

Henry George's first lecture in Melbourne was delivered in the town hall and was chiefly an exposition of the Single Tax. But he did not avoid the controversial tariff question. "I am a free trader—a free trader absolutely," he proclaimed. "I should abolish all revenue tariffs. I should make trade absolutely free between Victoria and all other countries."¹⁶

The audience was far from hostile. Indeed, it gave him the traditional three cheers of approval, and hundreds remained afterward to enroll in a Free Trade League. Struck by George's courage, the *Melbourne Evening Standard* remarked: "No one will question the manliness of Mr. Henry George in boldly facing a Melbourne audience and attacking their favorite doctrine of protection not only with the arms of logic, but of withering scorn; and the fact that he not only carried with him the forbearance, but continuous and enthusiastic applause of an im-

mense audience, is more than anything a testimony to the public admiration of genuine pluck."¹⁷

Two meetings followed in the same hall, with audiences steadily increasing in size. His third appearance was at Exhibition Hall before an audience of three thousand, where George debated "Free Trade versus Protection" with Mr. W. Trenwith, M.P. "The debate really cannot be considered seriously," remarked *The Melbourne Telegraph*. "Trenwith never rose to George's height. In plain English the local man was utterly lost."¹⁸ The consensus seemed to be that George's visit to Australia was "an event of more than ordinary significance."¹⁹

The Australian campaign closed formally in Sydney on May 31. At a huge meeting in Protestant Hall, where George spoke on "The Fallacy of Protection," the chairman, G. H. Reid, M.P., who was president of the Free Trade League, said, "You need not be told that the man whose rare eloquence and deep sympathy will soon entrance your attention has a perfect horror of flattery. Still, I don't think we should allow him to make his farewell address without the assurance that his name, famous in so many lands, has now become in Australia a household word. . . . He has thrice earned it. He has earned it as a thinker, he has earned it as a writer, and he has earned it as an orator."²⁰

On the last day a reception was held in Temperance Hall. A huge, handsomely bound album containing photographs of Australian friends was presented to Mrs. George. The spokesmen for the presentation committee addressed their speeches directly to her. Always shy, she looked to her husband for help. But his face was wrinkled with merriment at her consternation. He winked at her, dropped his handkerchief on the floor, and, as he stooped to pick it up, managed to say, *sotto voce*, "How do you like it?"²¹

George had received cabled and written invitations from Sir George Grey to revisit New Zealand, and from the Premier and the Attorney General of Tasmania to go there. However, after three and a half months of hard traveling across the great distances of Australia, and daily lecturing (frequently he spoke twice a day), he felt too tired to prolong his tour.

More lectures were delivered in Melbourne and in Adelaide, South Australia. And then, saying a reluctant good-by to the country that had given them such precious friendships and such inspiration, the Georges left for home on June 10, 1890.

Aboard the S.S. *Valetta* they crossed the Indian Ocean, the

Red Sea and the Mediterranean to Brindisi, where they disembarked. Their tour through Italy was hurried and it was made at the worst time of the year—in the hot summer—but they were thrilled by the beauty and the historical interest of the country. From Italy they went through Switzerland and France to Great Britain, where they remained for only a few days.

George made one speech in Glasgow and another in London. Together with the Reverend J.O.S. Huntington of New York, who had supported him in the New York mayoralty campaign, he called upon General and Mrs. William Booth of the Salvation Army. Catherine Booth had written him three years before, "I believe you have found the true solution of our social difficulties so far as any temporal solution can avail." Now, to his great satisfaction, he learned that Mrs. Booth was planning to introduce economic reform propaganda into the program of the Salvation Army. Before her plans were completed, however, she became ill and died. George sensed—quite accurately—that her death ended any concrete plan for propagation of the Single Tax within the organization where she had wielded so much influence.

The sixth visit to England, short though it was, encouraged George even though men in high places seemed to be misrepresenting him. *The London Democrat* asked, "What on earth could Mr. Gladstone have meant by his reference to Mr. George in his speech at Lowestoft? Speaking of the agricultural laborers, he confessed that 'there is much to be done for them, not according to the ideas of visionary politicians, who seem, some of them, to think that under the guidance of Mr. George or somebody else, the land of the country can be taken and redistributed, and be divided among the population. These, Gentlemen, are not real and important political discussions. . . .'"²²

Mary Gladstone evidently was not at Lowestoft to instruct her famous father. "It is a thousand pities," *The Democrat* concluded, "that someone does not persuade Mr. Gladstone to read *Progress and Poverty*."²³