

## ON EAST NINETEENTH STREET

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THE GEORGE HOME revolved around the master of the house, or rather, around the work of the master of the house. Since he never exacted silence or any special concession, Henry George did not make his family conscious of his world-wide reputation. One of the remarkable things about this father was that all four of his children became, without any coaching, his staunch adherents. As the children grew up, each one of them took a turn at secretarial work for their father. But they were never sacrificed to this pleasant duty.

Mrs. George was ever anxious to help her husband in any possible way. Yet she did not neglect her own roles as mother and housekeeper. Her tact and managerial genius helped to make up for the shortcomings of their relatively small family income.

In the shabby, cozy sitting-room, the main feature was the center table, with its large lamp, around which the members of the household gathered for study, reading, games, and fancy needlework and mending. It seemed the symbol of family unity.

When *The Standard* office moved uptown to Union Square, the George family had moved downtown to 357 East 19th Street. The editor, accompanied by his brother, Val, and by his two sons, Henry and Richard, used to walk home for the midday meal. Frequently he brought guests with him—unexpectedly, as a rule, since there was no telephone. He had no inkling of the trouble this entailed, since Mrs. George never let him know what it meant to have to produce a meal suddenly. But usually, with the help of two kitchen maids, some kind of repast—however meager—could be provided even on short notice.

One noon when the father came home he spied his youngest daughter reading a book he had recommended out of his own youth. She was dissolved in tears.

"What is the matter?" he asked, kissing her.

"Masterman Ready<sup>1</sup> has just died," she sobbed.

"Oh, then I know how you feel," said he, sympathetically.

"Don't bother to come to lunch yet awhile. I'll arrange with your mother."

Later when the red-eyed youngster crept into the dining-room, the meal was almost finished. Apparently nobody noticed her, though her food had been kept hot.

George was usually impatient for his meals; it was his after-dinner cigar that he wanted. During these years he smoked one that had been named for him. He considered it the best to be had for five cents, which indeed was the most he could afford. It became a popular brand and was widely advertised. Many supposed he received a royalty, but this is not true. The firm producing the cigar did make him a present of his first box of "Henry George Cigars"—and that was all.

He cared little for food; although he had favorite dishes, usually he did not know what he ate. One night, when guest of honor at a formal dinner and quite absorbed in the conversation, he absent-mindedly emptied the large dish of olives placed near him. His wife's agonized signal reached him from the other end of the table only as the last olive disappeared into his mouth. He rarely ate candy, but on occasion when it was offered him he would exclaim (with eyes twinkling), "My, I must save you from this terrible unhealthy stuff!" And, helping himself to a handful, he would go back to work, munching.

"Time and again," according to Carney, their little Irish maid, "he'd come home bringin' ice cream from the store at any hour durin' day or night. Glory be, but they were strong fur ice cream—the whole of them! And he was turrible fond of cold-boiled potatoes! Now where do you s'pose he got that trick? And maybe he didn't love stewed tomatoes! Once, after he'd come to the lunch table first, 'Carney!' he sez, 'an' have yer got any stewed tomatoes?' An' him, only just havin' et the dishful I'd put there, meant fur the whole family! Thinkin' about them books he wrote, I guess he wuz. Sure he wuz a lovely man! Sometimes he used to be that quiet! One time when he was travelin' to the country, sudden-like, out of a great silence he sez to me 'Carney, there's me favorite flower,' he sez, pointin' to a line of sun-flowers. 'Oh, Mr. George, I sez, 'them yeller things growin' against a pigsty and an outhouse?' 'Shure,' sez he, 'an' bein' that brave and gay whilst they be doin' it!' But yer had

ter like him all the same if he was a bit queer. I mind how after bein' free from talk he'd suddenly jump up from the lunch table and go look outer the back window at the New York tree (ail-anthus) an' catchin' sight of a bit of cloud, 'Annie,' he'd call, "'tis a great white ship ter be seen. Come!' An' nothin' would do but Herself must leave her lunch and join him gazin' at the little splinter o' back yard sky—his arm around her, the whilst the omelette was fallin' flat. Wasn't he the happy man!"

Although Henry George lectured for pay, his income was always small as he so frequently reduced his honorarium. He had written to his wife from Chicago, in 1884, "I spoke at Battle Creek last night to another small audience. It was an association of Knights of Columbus and I threw off \$40 of my hundred, which let them out square."

In 1887, he wrote her from Kansas City, "I was on the whole better pleased with the audience and the speech than I have been, but there was not enough in it to make the \$300 I was to get for coming here, and I reduced the price to \$200. I cannot go around assessing these people and if I did not feel the want of money so much I would not take that much. . . . It is hard doing anything constructive on these trips—so many people to talk to. I stayed up till 3 o'clock this morning trying to lick into something like shape the most abominable report of my speech that ever pretended to be verbatim."<sup>2</sup>

In order to spread his doctrines he sacrificed his copyrights and royalties or gave away his books with no thought of the financial loss to himself. In a letter to Richard McGhee of Ireland, sent three years previously, he had said, "Owing to the fact that I have just now more credit than cash I can make a larger contribution in books than I could in money, and as you say that will do as well, I have ordered sent to you for Mr. McHugh's use 1,000 copies of *Progress and Poverty* and 500 copies of *Social Problems*. When you use these I will supply more."<sup>3</sup>

For some reason the belief persisted that he enjoyed ample means. To Gütschow he had written:

That you should share in the notion that I have made so much money somewhat surprises me and not a little amuses. I allow all such newspaper statements to go un-contradicted and do not publish my real condition to the world; but the truth is, I have made very little out of my books—a few hundred dollars a year, that is all.

With the exception of \$2,000 I got for the English edition of *Social Problems* I have had nothing from abroad. . . . The work that I have done does *not* pay. In lecturing, for instance, I have never made anything. The times that I have lectured for nothing and given up my fee have eaten all I got in at other times. I merely mention that that you may know the real truth.<sup>4</sup>

He might have added that he gave more money away than he could well afford. He rarely denied an appeal for help. The memories of his own dire poverty remained vivid, and he preferred to be an "easy mark" for the many than to fail the needy one. Once a friend chided him for giving money to beggars, saying that they were too lazy to work. "How can I tell about that?" George responded. "Let the responsibility for their actions rest on them."<sup>5</sup>

Time after time a little drama was enacted at his home. A stranger would be announced. Disliking to refuse himself to anyone who took the trouble to call, George would interrupt his work and go to the visitor. After the caller had left, Mrs. George, who had an uncanny way of sensing her husband's moods, could tell by looking at him if it had been another "hard luck story." She would ask, trying to mask a forgiving smile:

"Well, Harry, how much did you 'lend' this time?"

"Oh, only about—only five dollars," he would murmur, trying to be nonchalant. "He'll pay back—you'll see!" But although "he" rarely "paid back," somehow a "loan" was made to the next needy one who asked. Mrs. George's extraordinary ability in making the small income go far did not prevent him from deploring his own seeming inability to make or keep money, and he tried to train his children to be practical.

Once when Tom Johnson called at the house he took the youngest member of the family in his coupe to the St. James Hotel, where he made his New York home, to visit his own children. She told her parents afterwards, "On the way we stopped at Park and Tilford's, and do you know Mr. Johnson paid as much for one box of cigars as my whole month's salary!"

She \* referred to the allowance her father gave her so that she might learn the use of money. It began when she was seven, at two dollars and fifty cents a month, and each year was raised fifty cents a month. It was not "pin money" to be spent on candy

\* This, again, is the author, Mrs. de Mille.—Editor

and trifles but had to pay for her wardrobe. It meant tight economy although nearly all her dresses were made from her mother's or sister's, "cut down" and embellished with bits of trimming taken from a treasure chest known as the "sewing trunk."

Mrs. George taught her daughters to make their own clothes, as soon as they were old enough. But they never acquired her skill in making patterns, managing scant material, or in the use of the needle.\* Often they would sing as they sewed (indeed, someone always seemed to be singing somewhere in that house)—the mother with her sweet, full voice taking the alto part in snatches from Gilbert and Sullivan, from grand operas, or from ballads. Some of these ballads Mrs. George remembered from the "tripenny song book" a seaman had given her on the sailing vessel from Australia, when she was five years old, and from which book, on that long voyage, she had taught herself to read.

Henry George did not share her love for symphonic or "high-brow" music. It was the words which caught him more than the tune. He seemed to care only for folk tunes, or patriotic songs, or ballads that had dramatic significance. Frequently, when his children were at the piano, he would ask them to sing "Bonnie Dundee," "Caller Herrin," or "The King's Highway," with Weatherly's words

... Lord of a thousand acres wide,  
While I the beggar must stand aside,  
Go thy way! Let me go mine—  
I to beg and thou to dine!

When he was deep in thought he had a trick of gazing out a window and tapping a tattoo on the glass while he whistled over and over a few bars of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Yankee Doodle," or one of his other favorites. In both pitch and rhythm his performance left something to be desired, but usually his knotted brow would relax. One day, in the sitting-room, he drummed away for a particularly long time—oblivious, of course, to the others present, who all kept silent—until a small

\* Both my mother and her mother before her were artists in embroidery. My mother had an eye for color like a rug-weaver and loved to cover table cloths with shaded flowers of enchanting delicacy. Her mother stitched the details of their dresses—my mother's evening dresses and wedding-gown—with the expertness of a Parisian seamstress. These garments were made, Annie George used to say, "with the red blood of time."—Agnes de Mille

niece, Alice George, remarked in a stage whisper, "My, Uncle Henry's thinking *awful* hard today!"

Only on rare occasions could he be inveigled into singing one of the sailor chanties he had learned in his days before the mast. But the first and only time he tried to dictate into a dictograph, for his daughter Jennie, then acting as his secretary, to transcribe, he broke loose with:

Up jumped the shark with his crooked teeth,  
Saying "I'll cook the duff, if you'll cook the beef."  
Well done me lads all! So blow the wind wester  
How the wind blows  
Our ship she's in full sail—how steady she goes! <sup>6</sup>

This was followed by another sea song from his youth concerning the resentment of a certain bumboat lassie who was evidently peeved at the commander-in-chief of the fleet. "Kind admiral, you be damned!" <sup>7</sup> he roared into the machine with such gusto that both the apprehensive George domestics went scuttling upstairs, only to find the master of the house alone beside the speaking tube of the strange contrivance. Carney's <sup>8</sup> account of it was vivid:

Mary and me rushed up from the kitchen and there he was sittin' in front of a box and singin' into a chube. When he seen me, nothin' would do but I must sing 'Dublin Bay' into it (you know, the song I sing whilst I be doin' me cleanin'.) And so he turned the thing on agin', and me, with me feather duster in me hand, there I stood singin' into the horn. But the chune stuck in me throat. "Oh, Mr. George," I sez, "I can't. The machine makes me feel that queer!" "Carney," he sez, "'tis exactly the way it affects me!" An' with that he clicks off the phonygraph and goes leapin' down the stairs whistlin' 'Yankee Doodle' an' outer the house. An' that bein' done, Mary remarks "Well," sez she, "'tis a good thing he doesn't have to earn his livin' with his whistlin'!"

Carney gave a chuckle, and then snorted indignantly, "The nerve of her, speakin' like that!"