

TWO MORE BOOKS

FOR A succession of summers in the 1890's the Georges spent their holidays at a place in Sullivan County, New York, called Merriewold Park. It was a lovely stretch of wild woodland which Louis F. Post had discovered when the doctors had advised him to take his wife to the pine country for her health. The land was so cheap that a number of Single Taxers had joined in the purchase of a large tract. The little cabin-like homes were hardly more than camps. Life was simple and most informal.

When their clothes were too worn to give away, the Georges used to save them to wear at Merriewold. Henry George went about looking more bedraggled than ever. One time when he bicycled to a neighboring farm, a strange dog mistook him for a tramp and bit him. George said he did not mind the bite half as much as the motive back of the bite. It was a disappointment to find a dog that could be such a snob as not to recognize a friend beneath towsey garments, for he always loved dogs. Friends who owned them used to shut up their animals when Henry George was coming to call, hoping then that the guest might give undivided attention to his hosts.¹

On their first visit to Merriewold the Georges stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Post. William Croasdale also lived there in the summers and had just completed a house. He was having difficulty in finding someone to clear away the debris left by the builders. Mrs. George learned of his dilemma and undertook the job on a "contract" basis—a dance, with ice cream and cakes for refreshment, to be the pay. Commandeering all the youngsters at Merriewold she put them to cleaning windows while she and the other women swept and dusted the house. In the meantime, Croasdale, Post, and George, working in the big room which

they had turned into their summer editorial office, clicked serenely away on their typewriters.

When the night of the housewarming came, the clean, new cottage had been decorated with wild flowers and lighted gaily with candles. Everyone was invited to the party. But Mrs. Anna Post was too weak to walk even the short distance to the Croasdale home and it seemed as though she must forego the fun.

Henry George had a different notion. He swung a hammock in sailor fashion from a long pole which he and Post could balance on their shoulders. In this litter, with Mrs. George walking beside to steady it and the children marching ahead and behind carrying Japanese lanterns and singing a song Mrs. Post had written, the invalid traveled to her last party.

Never was lord of manor more full of pride, never was host more gracious, than William Croasdale. He resembled Theodore Roosevelt, though his face was much broader. Croasdale's laughter was loud and hearty, and on the night of his housewarming, frequent. He was particularly amused at the country fiddler who kept interrupting his own music to instruct the city dancers in the way they should turn. As his young guests consumed ice cream and cake, he regaled them with tales of his own youth. "I found that I could save most of my lunch money by just buying dried apples, eating them dry and then drinking lots of water," he said. "M'ium, m'ium—you'd be surprised how nice and full I used to feel afterwards—and all for two cents!"

A few weeks after this sweet and simple Merriewold evening—this was in 1891—William Croasdale was taken ill and died in the little house he loved so well. And a few weeks later Mrs. Anna Post died.

For George, Merriewold became hallowed by memories of these dear friends. He came to the place whenever he could. He worked in the quiet of the woods, stopping for an occasional swim in the lake or for a row on its surface or to watch the children play. He used to call for a game called "Trades," the object of the game being for one group of children to guess what occupation the other group was acting out in pantomime. Forgetting that he was supposed to be merely an onlooker, George would cry out gleefully "carpenters!" or "shoemakers!" This often spoiled the game for the youngsters. But they liked him, and any chagrin they might feel was overcome by pride in his enjoyment of their acting.

One of the cottagers had brought along a city boy to do the

chores. His flame-colored hair was cut in such a way that it stood on end. He had a bright mind and George liked to engage him in conversation. After one of these little talks and the boy had gone away, the man stood silently gazing after him. He suddenly turned to his youngest daughter and said, "Do you think if I gave Morris five cents he'd let me run my fingers through his bristles?"

The little girl squealed in horror. "Oh, please don't ask him," she said. It would embarrass him terribly!"

George sighed resignedly. A few days later, however, he called her back into consultation. "Do you think," he asked her, "if I gave him *ten cents* he'd let me?" Her horrified "NO" was emphatic. But he brought up the question again—"Do you think if I gave him *fifteen cents*?" She grew panicky, for fifteen cents was enough to make almost anyone feel he could endure anything—even having his head rubbed. In dismay she looked pleadingly into her father's eyes. And there, at the corners, the little crinkles had come out! Of course, he was only fooling.

After William Croasdale's death in August of that year Louis F. Post took over the management of *The Standard*. He and George spent all the time they could in Merriewold. They acquired an old, dilapidated woodsman's cottage which they furnished, mostly with soapboxes, for their workshop. Much of the writing on his new book George did in these surroundings.

His new enterprise was an open letter in answer to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter of May, 1891. Many persons, including Cardinal Manning, had felt that while this message from the Vatican confused socialism and anarchy with the Georgist philosophy, it was aimed specifically at the latter. Certainly Archbishop Corrigan welcomed it as a vindication of his own attitude toward Father McGlynn.

George wrote to Father Dawson, "It is very sad to see the general tendency on the part of clergymen to avoid the simple principles of justice. As Tolstoy put it, they are willing to do anything for the poor but get off their backs. This is leading them into the advocacy of principles which will tend ultimately to atheism. . . . You see the result in Ireland of ignoring principle."²

And seven months later he wrote to the same friend, "I wish that the spirituality of the Church could in some way be separated from its political and corrupt machine, which turns

into merchandise the efforts and sacrifices of the men and women who are really God's servants." ³

His answer to the papal encyclical, which he called *The Condition of Labor*, grew under his pen to a book of 25,000 words. In it he explained carefully, and in what has been called some of his best writing, how and why he differed from the Anarchists and Socialists and what he advocated in the hope of economic reform.

The book was published simultaneously in New York and London, and, translated into Italian,⁴ was brought out in Rome by the same firm which had recently published the Italian edition of *Progress and Poverty*.⁵ A specially bound copy was presented to the Pope through the medium of Monsignor Caprini, Prefect of the Vatican Library. But George never received a word of acknowledgment.

One of the most understanding reviews of the work, thought George, appeared in the Swedenborgian periodical, *The New Church Messenger*, from the brilliant pen of Alice Thacher, who was to become the second wife of Louis F. Post. She contended in this criticism that George "has never written anything that more clearly, briefly and logically presents his conception of economics. . . . Its author applies spiritual principles to the solution of natural problems in reply to a supreme Church dignitary who has applied in these problems principles that are only natural. . . . That the science of economics should be placed on this spiritual level is much. That spiritual doctrine should be brought down to the level of economics is much more. There is a summing-up value in the fact that the Pope, speaking for the old economics, says: 'Nature'; George, speaking for the new, says, 'By Nature you mean God.'"

Friends who had been alarmed at the author's recent physical breakdown were relieved when they saw the power and strength of his latest writing. "I have just finished the 'Letter,'" wrote John Russell Young. "I envy you the vigor and truth and splendor of your style which has not been surpassed in any political writing since Burke. However, that is with me an old opinion. Only I am more than pleased to find that your illness has not dulled the temper of the sword, as I was afraid might come." ⁶

The book had been written specifically "for such men as Cardinal Manning, General Booth, and religious-minded men of all creeds." ⁷ It deeply touched some of them. Father Richard

L. Burtzell⁸ of the Epiphany Church, New York, who was Father McGlynn's adviser, wrote, "Accept my hearty congratulations for your cogent and most satisfying and wonderfully written reply to the Pope." And Father J.O.S. Huntington of the Order of the Holy Cross quoted his own father, Bishop Huntington, who said, "I wish there were money to circulate ten thousand copies of Mr. George's 'Letter'—not only as an economic argument but as a religious tract."⁹

Although the "Letter"—*The Condition of Labor*—had four printings in England and was widely circulated in the United States, it did not attract the attention for which the author had hoped. But in December of the following year (1892) George reported to Father Dawson:

Something wonderful has happened on this side of the water. The Pope has quietly but effectively sat down on the ultramontane torism of prelates like Archbishop Corrigan. Their fighting the public school has been stopped. Dr. McGlynn is to be restored, and the fighting of the Single Tax as opposed to Catholicism effectually ended. I have for some time believed Leo XIII to be a very great man, but this transcends my anticipations. Whether he ever read my "Letter" I cannot tell, but he has been acting as though he had not only read it, but had recognized its force.¹⁰

The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church apparently had come to the realization that Father McGlynn's excommunication had been unjust. Whether this was due to the exemplary and dedicated life which the priest lived after the censure had fallen upon him, or whether it was owing to the deep evidence of Henry George's spirituality which came to the surface in *The Condition of Labor*, or whether, finally, it was out of fear of public reaction, Father McGlynn's reinstatement did come about. When Archbishop Satolli visited the United States he listened, as a representative of the Pope, to Father Burtzell's arguments for a reversal of the act of excommunication. Written and oral examinations of McGlynn followed. These were found to contain nothing contrary to the teachings of the church. Accordingly, the priest was reinstated. Moreover, he was given permission to continue to teach the Georgist philosophy at the Anti-Poverty Society, Cooper Union, or anywhere else he chose.

Henry George sent a telegram of congratulation to his friend, and their estrangement seemed ended. On December 30, 1892, George wrote to Father Dawson:

Of course you have heard the news of Dr. McGlynn's restoration to his faculties, which seems to have been without anything like any public promise or apology. It took place on Christmas Eve, was announced directly from the Ablegate in Washington, and on Christmas Day the Doctor said Mass three times and spoke at the Anti-Poverty Society in the evening. It has completely "flabbergasted" the Archbishop and his party, some of whom have been actually talking of getting up a meeting in protest, but the cooler among them have prevailed.¹¹

Next spring Father McGlynn made the trip to Rome which he had always consented to do—provided that he could go as a priest, in full communion. He had twenty-five minutes alone with the Pope, who had already received the report of the McGlynn case from Monsignor Satolli. In fluent Italian Father McGlynn stated his case. "But surely you admit the right of property?" asked Leo XIII. The American replied, "Why of course I do, and we would make absolutely sacred the right of property in the products in individual industry." The Pope conferred his blessing.¹²

A year after *The Condition of Labor*, George wrote and published another book, *A Perplexed Philosopher*. This was an answer to Herbert Spencer's recent repudiation of his beliefs on the land question in his book *Justice*, published in 1891. George, who had acclaimed *Social Statics* far and wide, felt compelled to refute what he considered Spencer's changed viewpoint and shift toward materialism. In *The Standard* George wrote that Spencer's position would be "a shock to many Single Tax men," but he recalled, "I got that shock over seven years ago when, in a London salon crowded with men distinguished in literature, science and politics, I for the first and only time, met Herbert Spencer and heard him declare with the utmost vehemence that he was in favor of any amount of coercion in Ireland that was necessary to give the tenants freedom to pay their rents."¹³

George explained the motive for *A Perplexed Philosopher* in the introduction. After paying his respects to Spencer's great intellect, he wrote:

Since philosophy is the search for truth, the philosopher who in his teachings is swerved by favor or by fear forfeits all esteem as a philosopher. . . .

The philosopher whose authority is now invoked to deny to the

masses any right to the physical basis of life in this world is also the philosopher whose authority darkens to many the hope of life hereafter. . . .

What gives additional interest to the matter is that Mr. Spencer makes no change in his premises, but only in his conclusion, and now, in sustaining private property in land, asserts the same principle of equal liberty from which he originally deduced his condemnation. . . .

Not only do I hold the opinion which Mr. Spencer now controverts, but I have been directly and indirectly instrumental in giving to his earlier conclusions a much greater circulation than his own books would have given them. It is due, therefore, that I should make his rejections of those conclusions as widely known as I can, and thus correct the mistake of those who couple us together as holding views he now opposes.

One day while George was sitting in his shirtsleeves laboring over the proofs of this book, Peter Burt arrived unexpectedly from Glasgow at *The Standard* office. Burt was a young Scotsman who had traveled about Scotland with George and regarded himself as a devoted follower of the American economist. Completely forgetful of time and space, George greeted him as though he were a daily visitor, "Hello, Burt!" he exclaimed. "I've fairly flayed this fellow [Spencer] alive!"

George himself had had many critics in his controversial lifetime. Obviously, he could not reply to them all. But in answer to an attack in the September, 1890, issue of *Nineteenth Century*, he hit back at Professor Thomas F. Huxley, his critic, through the character of "Professor Bullhead" in the satire entitled "Principal Brown" at the end of the book.

He also devoted a long chapter to the injustice of "compensation of landowners if their exclusive ownership be abolished." He had touched on this subject in *Progress and Poverty* but here he treated it at greater length.

A Perplexed Philosopher was widely read. But it was not as widely read nor was it translated into as many languages as George's other books. Incidentally, it brought no response of any kind from Herbert Spencer.

Shortly before the publication of *A Perplexed Philosopher* George reached the conclusion that *The Standard* had become too much of a burden, financially and otherwise. He preferred, in any case, to devote his energies to other projects. And so he

suspended publication of the paper, stating in the last issue: "The work that *The Standard* was intended to do has been done, and in the larger field into which our movement has passed there is no longer need for it. . . . I did not start *The Standard* for the purpose of establishing a paper, but for the purpose of advancing a cause. . . . Let us say good-by to it; not as those who mourn, but as those who rejoice. Times change, men pass, but that which is built on truth endures."¹⁴

George had felt for some time that he would like to direct his pen to a full treatment of the subject of political economy, destroying the confusions, establishing the terminology and clearing the whole field irrefutably. "Something about interest and currency is badly needed," he thought. He had wanted to write on Immortality. He had wanted to republish *Robinson Crusoe* with copious notes of his own on the economics of the story. He had wanted to devise a primer of political economy.

But now that he had made his answer to Leo XIII in *The Condition of Labor* and to Herbert Spencer in *A Perplexed Philosopher*, and now that he was free from the strain of editing a weekly newspaper—now, at last, he turned to the full treatment of the science of political economy which had been his ambition for long.