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Source: *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Apr., 1946), pp. 403-410

Published by: American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3483503>

Accessed: 15-02-2022 00:37 UTC

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Henry George: Edward McGlynn*

By ANNA GEORGE DEMILLE

EARLY IN JANUARY, 1887, that which Henry George had long desired happened and he was able to start a weekly. It was welcomed by his followers far and near. From Mrs. William Booth of Salvation Army fame came an encouraging letter:

Ever since reading your books I have ardently wished that you could see your way to some measures for more extensively circulating your views on political and social reform; and I cannot refrain from expressing my great gratification at seeing in the *Pall Mall* a notice that you are starting a paper for this purpose. I wish you God speed, and though my peculiar position forbids my public advocacy of your views I shall not fail in private circles to recommend your paper wherever I can.

I believe you have found the true solution of our greatest social difficulties, so far as any temporal solution can avail; and although the task before you might well appall and discourage a Gabriel I believe if you are true to the interests of righteousness in the conduct of your paper, God will gird you for the battle and let you live to see (at least) the beginning of victory.

Remember for your encouragement what a forlorn hope the crusade against slavery must have appeared to Lloyd Garrison when he started his little unpatronized journal.¹

Money for the new enterprise came from subscriptions paid in advance and a five hundred dollar loan from Thomas Briggs of London. With Henry George himself as editor, William T. Croasdale, a trained newspaper man, as assistant editor, Louis F. Post as special writer, and others—a staff in all of eleven men, beside the compositors—*The Standard* was launched.

Believing as Henry George did, in the power of truth, he proposed, in the new weekly, to show no leniency to its detractors and to ask no leniency from them, but to conduct the paper with courage and honesty. In his salutatory he wrote:

I shall endeavour to be fair to opponents and true to friends. I do not propose to make everything that shall appear here square to my own theories, but will be willing to give place to views which may differ from my own when they are so stated as to be worthy of consideration.²

* Copyright, 1946, by Anna George deMille. A section of a previously unpublished study, "Citizen of the World"; see *AM. JOUR. ECON. SOCIO.*, 1, 3 (April, 1942), p. 283 n.

¹ Catherine Booth, 4 Rookwood Road, Stamford Hill, London, Jan. 2, 1887; in Henry George Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter abbreviated as HGC).

² Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 8, 1887.

The outstanding feature of the first issue was his eight and a half column article on the subject that was attracting international attention, entitled, "The McGlynn Case." It made a sensation.

The Church had not allowed the discussion to rest after Monsignor Preston's widely broadcast statement³ on the Sunday before election day, that George's teachings were "unsound and unsafe."⁴ Unfortunately, a few weeks after election, Archbishop Corrigan felt it incumbent upon himself to make an attack in a pastoral letter, read in all the Catholic pulpits⁵ and published in the papers. In this epistle he, believing it his duty "to be quick in discerning dangerous movements and prompt in sounding timely alarms,"⁶ commended his brethren to be "on guard against certain unsound principles and theories which assail the rights of property,"⁷ in such a way as to point clearly to George as their wicked perpetrator. The prejudiced attitude taken by his superiors had drawn fire from Dr. McGlynn. He had been obeying orders and keeping pretty well out of the political field, but in an unexpected interview in the *New York Tribune*,⁸ he defended the principles the Archbishop condemned, asserting that they were not contrary to the teachings of the Church.

Thereupon the Archbishop suspended Dr. McGlynn⁹ for the remainder of the year and wrote to Rome. Rome answered by cable, ordering Dr. McGlynn to come to the Vatican. The priest replied that several grave reasons, among them heart trouble (which, with other complications, ultimately caused his death), prevented him from complying, and that his doctrines about land had been made "clear in speeches, in reported interviews and in published articles."¹⁰

The Archbishop then extended McGlynn's suspension until either Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of the Propaganda, or the Pope himself should act. George had written an open letter in answer to the Archbishop's attack,¹¹ a dignified exposition of his economic theories, showing their compatibility with moral law. Now he made a long and full statement of the case in the first issue of *The Standard*:

³ Dated Oct. 25, 1886.

⁴ Post and Leubuscher, "The George-Hewitt Campaign," New York, John W. Lovell Co., 1886, p. 135.

⁵ Nov. 21, 1886.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 134. For further details of the McGlynn affair see Henry George, Jr., "The Life of Henry George," New York, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1943, and Stephen Bell, "Rebel, Priest and Prophet," New York, The Devin Adair Co., 1937.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁸ Nov. 4, 1886.

⁹ Nov. 26, 1886.

¹⁰ Letter to Corrigan, Dec. 20, 1886. See *The Standard*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Jan. 29, 1887. Also, "The Life of Henry George," by Henry George, Jr., p. 486.

¹¹ Dec. 7, 1886. See "The George-Hewitt Campaign," by Post and Leubuscher, p. 139.

Let it be observed that there can be no pretense that Dr. McGlynn in taking part in politics has done anything inconsistent with his duty as a Catholic priest. . . . The Catholic Church does not deny the propriety of the priest exercising all the functions of the citizen. To say nothing of the past when bishops and cardinals held the highest political offices, in Germany and France and Italy, the Catholic clergy have been in recent times energetic politicians and sometimes hold elective office. . . .

In the last Presidential election Dr. McGlynn made some vigorous speeches in behalf of the Democratic candidate without a word or thought of remonstrance."¹²

Still refraining from attack on the Catholic Church, but bitterly condemning the "Burbons" in the Church, George asks, apropos of McGlynn complying with the call to Rome: "What chance would a simple priest—a suspended priest at that—with his own Archbishop against him, have before a tribunal where united Ireland could barely get consideration?"¹³

This article, in the first number of *The Standard*, attracted such attention as to force two extra editions of the paper. Seventy-five thousand copies were sold. Few other papers espoused the priest's cause; practically all of them sided with the Archbishop.

But George fought on. "Is it not time," he asked, "that we should demand that American priests should be released from the abuse of ecclesiastical authority which makes them political slaves?"¹⁴ And his question "Is an American citizen, because he is also a Catholic priest, to be held to answer before a foreign tribunal, because of his actions in American politics?" was answered, it would seem, by Fr. Sylvester Malone, who said: "Archbishop Corrigan has no right whatever to interfere with Dr. McGlynn in the exercise of his political opinions, freedom to express which his American citizenship entitled him."¹⁵ And apropos of Fr. McGlynn feeling impelled to go to Rome, Fr. Malone asked: "Why should he? He is not accused of any fault as a priest. He is not accountable to Rome for his opinions on political economy."

On January 14th McGlynn was removed from St. Stephen's. Fr. Arthur Donnelly (brother-in-law of an ex-treasurer of Tammany Hall) was appointed to succeed him. The newcomer took possession without notice, even attempting, against the resistance of the two maids, to install himself in the private room which McGlynn had used for twenty years; giving the erstwhile rector no time to transfer his books or papers or personal effects.

¹² *The Standard*, Jan. 8, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 9, 1887. Vol. 1, No. 14.

Fr. Donnelly proceeded then to remove Dr. McGlynn's name from his confessional and later, attended by a police captain, went so far as to enter the church and order the two of the eight assistant priests who happened to be hearing confession, and those parishioners who had come for devotion, out of the place. Bitterness and hysteria ran high in the vicinity of St. Stephen's for Dr. McGlynn was adored by his flock. Wrote George:

Archbishop Corrigan has done his worst and has done his worst in the worst possible way. Dr. McGlynn has been removed from the church he has built up, and from the people to whom he was the very ideal of all that a pastor ought to be; and the removal has been accomplished by circumstances calculated to scandalize the church, outrage the priest, irritate the congregation and disgust the public.¹⁶

Mass on that first Sunday¹⁷ of Father Donnelly's pastorate was held under difficulties. The church was bitterly cold as the engineers had refused to make the fires. The choir and altar boys all having gone on strike, the service was long in starting.

The anger of thousands of Catholics was shown at a monster meeting held in Madison Square Garden¹⁸ to honor Michael Davitt, and which was turned into a protest in favor of McGlynn. Through all this excitement the suspended priest kept a dignified silence but on the 29th of March he held a meeting in the Academy of Music and delivered a fiery address on "The Cross of the New Crusade" to a large audience composed chiefly of his old parishioners. Following the meeting a group formed to promulgate education on the land question and to point the way to attack involuntary poverty. It had its inception in the brain of Thomas L. McCready of *The Standard staff*. George explained:

The purpose of the Anti-Poverty Society is not that of forming a new church. It will welcome to its ranks those of all creeds who desire to join it. It is not a political society, for though its aims may be practically realized through politics its purpose is that to which political action is secondary—to arouse conscience and excite thought. It is not a class society. Its object is to secure justice to all—to the capitalist as well as to the workman, to the employer as well as to the employed, to the rich as well as to the poor. It is not a charitable society. It does not propose to give alms or to attempt to alleviate poverty by half-way measures. It declares war against the cause of poverty itself. . . . On this broad platform men of all classes and all creeds may stand.¹⁹

¹⁶ *The Standard*, Jan. 22, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 3, Editorial.

¹⁷ Jan. 16, 1887.

¹⁸ Jan. 23, 1887. See *The Standard*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 29, 1887.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 18.

Edward McGlynn was chosen president and Henry George, vice-president. The first public meeting was held at Chickering Hall on the night of May first. Thousands unable to enter were turned away. McGlynn made the chief address. George wrote of it in *The Standard*:

The significance of the great meeting of the Anti-Poverty Society at Chickering Hall is the marriage again of what too long have been severed—the union of a religious sentiment with the aspiration for social reform: of the hope of heaven with the hope of banishing want and suffering from the earth. . . .

The simple words, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven,” as they fell from the lips of a Christian priest who proclaims the common Fatherhood of God and the common brotherhood of man; who points to the widespread poverty and suffering, not as in accordance with God’s will but in defiance of God’s order, and who appeals to the love of God and the hope of heaven, not to make men submissive of social injustice which brings want and misery, but to urge them to the duty of sweeping away the injustice—have in them the power with which Christianity conquers the world.²⁰

On the following Sunday the Anti-Poverty Society meeting was held in that huge theater, the Academy of Music, and Henry George was the chief speaker. The attendance and the enrollment of members were great. Denunciation and ridicule meted out by the press only served to advertise the weekly gatherings and to help them grow in size.

Early in May, Archbishop Corrigan informed Dr. McGlynn that he had been summoned to Rome and had forty days to comply or be excommunicated. Dr. McGlynn repeated his former statement that grave reasons would prevent his making the journey. While the priest seemed to have the newspapers and the powers-that-be against him, the larger part of his erstwhile congregation and thousands of others had joined the movement he was espousing. A tremendous parade and demonstration was held in his honor²¹ and as a protest against the threatened excommunication.

The forty days of grace passed and on July 3rd, Dr. McGlynn having made no move toward Rome, the bolt fell. From the Church he loved and had served for twenty-five years, the priest, whose private life had been exemplary and free from any breath of scandal, was excommunicated.

And Edward McGlynn was not the only priest to suffer unjustly. Several others who were known to have sympathized with him in his stand for freedom of expression, were sent from Manhattan to less important parishes. His life-long friend and legal adviser, Dr. Richard Lalor Burtzell, noted

²⁰ *The Standard*, May 7, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 18, “The New Crusade.”

²¹ Saturday night, June 18, 1887.

ecclesiastical jurist, was demoted from high diocesan honors and was, a few years later, transferred from his large parish, the Church of the Epiphany,²² in the city of New York to a little church²³ in Rondout on the Hudson. The Archbishop, in his statement to the Propaganda, said in explanation of this priest's removal, that he had the name of being "not only a personal friend of Dr. McGlynn's but also the leader of those few discontented priests who more or less sustain Dr. McGlynn, and moreover the counsellor, defender and abettor of the latter."²⁴

The Archbishop went so far as to prevent the burial in the Catholic cemetery of two people who, though they had been above reproach in their church duties, had attended the Anti-Poverty Society meetings. Hysteria was not confined to McGlynn sympathizers!

On August 17th, 1887, a New York State convention of the United Labor Party was held in Syracuse. The Socialists, although they had supported George and his platform the year before, now tried to swing the party in their direction. Just as in England George had refused to accept the socialistic dictum of state regulation, so now in America he could not accept it. Moreover the majority in the United Labor Party, agreeing with him, did not advocate the nationalizing of capital or the abolition of all private property in the "instruments of production." Bitterness resulted and the Socialists withdrew.

George was urged to accept the nomination for Secretary of State. He did not want the office nor did he think it good political policy to run at this time. However, it was an undeniable fact that an active campaign would bring his philosophy into active discussion. And possibly the intimation that the reason he was holding back was because he feared defeat at the polls, influenced him. He decided to accept the nomination,²⁵ saying:

For my own part it concerns me little what the result shall be. All that concerns me is that I shall do my best. For no matter what the setbacks, no matter what the temporary defeat, in the long run the good will triumph.²⁶

He waged an active campaign all through the State, accompanied by several reporters who, early in the trip, complained to Mrs. George of the

²² Second Avenue at 22nd Street.

²³ Church of St. Mary.

²⁴ Stephen Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

²⁵ Aug. 21, 1887, at the Anti-Poverty Society.

²⁶ *The Standard*, Aug. 27, 1887, Vol. 2, No. 8.

difficulty of their work, for since the candidate spoke extemporaneously and never repeated a speech, they had to keep constantly on the *qui vive* and got no rest.

This campaign brought to the forefront of George's ranks the scholarly publicist, William Lloyd Garrison, son of the great abolitionist. He had been won through his reading of "The Peer and the Prophet" and now spread the George doctrine from lecture platforms.

Dr. McGlynn, Louis F. Post, Rev. Hugh O. Pentecost, minister of a large Congregational church in Newark, New Jersey, Judge James G. Maguire of San Francisco, one of the first of George's converts, and others travelled over the state, campaigning for what was then beginning to be known as the "Single Tax" movement.

This name was first used as the title for an address delivered before the Constitution Club of New York,²⁷ by Thomas G. Shearman who culled it from Book VIII, Chapter IV, of "Progress and Poverty" where the author suggests "substituting for the manifold taxes now imposed—a single tax on the value of land." The label came to be widely used although Henry George and many of his followers knew it did not describe their philosophy of freedom but only indicated the fiscal means for applying that philosophy.

Money for the political campaign was, of course, scarce. Enough, however, was collected at meetings, from small outside donations and from a huge fair held for three weeks at Madison Square Garden, under the auspices of the Anti-Poverty Society, to pay for the dissemination of nearly a million tracts and to carry on a widespread and effective propaganda.

But all of this was of little avail against the power of the two big political parties plus the Socialists and the Catholic Church. One of the disappointments of the campaign was the turning of Patrick Ford, who in three successive articles in *The Irish World*, took the part of the church authorities, failing to make the distinction between priests as men with political preferences and as spiritual teachers. Ford ignored the fact that five years previously it was he who invited Dr. McGlynn into the Land League fight, at the time when Michael Davitt had come over from Ireland and when the priest had made speeches that brought upon him his first ecclesiastical censure.

The so-to-speak respectables were as little enthused about George as heretofore. Chauncy M. Depew sneered at "the strange and extraordinary theories of Henry George"²⁸ and Theodore Roosevelt delivered a speech

²⁷ Held on Jan. 12, 1887. See *The Standard*, May 28, 1887.

²⁸ Henry F. Pringle, "Theodore Roosevelt—a Biography," New York, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1931, p. 113.

against the "utterly cheap reformer"²⁹ in which he said "it is only a step from land confiscation to anarchy."³⁰ George never advocated confiscation of land and at that time to infer his association with anarchy implied contempt.

New York

²⁹ As he designated Henry George in a letter to Brander Matthews written on Nov. 2, 1892, and quoted in Pringle, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 116.