

IN the eighteen months devoted to writing this book, the deadening pressure of poverty and debt never for a moment lightened. In a letter to his sister Jennie, written fifteen years before, he had asked in a moment of bitterness why one should "wonder that men lust for gold and are willing to give almost anything for it, when it covers everything; the purest and holiest desires of their hearts, the exercise of their noblest powers." One would be glad to get away from the struggle which civilization imposes and rehabilitate oneself in solitude on some isolated hillside, "but, alas, money, money is wanted, even for that." He understood this better now, if possible, than when he wrote those words. His family had increased by two; he had a wife and four children; he had before him a colossal and prospectively unremunerative undertaking, something which no one had ever even approached; yet something which must be done, for every day it was delayed, uncounted thousands of miserable beings like him-

self were devoured by the insatiable demon of involuntary poverty.

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of poverty in determining the course of George's career. One can account in a sentence for every puzzling and lamentable anomaly which his career presents; he had the mind of a philosopher, a philosophic mind surpassed in power but by one or two in his generation, and an expository faculty surpassed by none; but the *temperament* of a philosopher he never had. He was no Hegel, nor yet was he a Plato, born with a clear-headed sense for the appraisal of things-as-they-are, unimpressionable and free from illusions. But this judgment, while competent, is general; to be quite just, one must also give full weight to the course of circumstances which tended so powerfully to enhance that temperament and make it actually the controlling factor in the direction of his life; and of all those circumstances the most constant, indomitable and inflaming was his poverty. The dismal, illiberal life of Murdstone's social coterie in Philadelphia; the tepid and stuffy domesticity of a vestryman's family; Salem House and Mr. Creakle; the dismal, illiberal religion preached by the Rev. Josiah Jupp; the highly

dubious estimate put upon the intellectual capacity and the moral nature of mankind; the untempered association with a narrow provincialism and participation in its fantastic assumptions concerning "democracy"; the narrow views of life and limited demands on life begotten of a journalistic and oratorical experience on the frontier; the incursions into practical politics: all these influences diligently fostered a temperament naturally incompatible with the abilities of a philosopher, but the one which had most to do with keeping that temperament in its ascendency was poverty.

II

Writing a book is one thing, and getting it published is another; getting it read is still another. A philosopher who knows so much about human life that he knows how little of it is worth minding, is rather indifferent to the written record. A Socrates, a Jesus, writes nothing, talks a little here and there, and leaves to others the making of a record of what he says, if any is to be made. A Marcus Aurelius scribbles a few notes, purely as memoranda for his own use and guidance, and they are preserved to us by

sheer accident; others have written more extensively, and then contentedly left their work at death, to be published or remain unpublished, as any who might be interested should see fit. The complete philosopher—the philosopher by temperament as well as by intellect—does not put any extravagant expectations on either the general capacity or the general will to accept discipleship, nor indeed does he think much about it. His business is with the construction and formulation of a doctrine; its propagation is not his business.

Far otherwise is it with one who, like George, has the intellect of a philosopher and the temperament of a propagandist, especially when he has the added gifts of a superb writer and an accomplished public speaker. The doctrine once formulated, “the intimations of the dæmon” are never enough to secure him against a superheated concern with its acceptance. When he stands forth either to recommend or defend his doctrine, they are never enough, in Disraeli’s fine phrase, to secure him against becoming inebriated by the exuberance of his own verbosity. This inebriety always to some extent distorts his view of the effect produced by his efforts; sometimes the distortion is monstrous

and fantastic, as when he mistakes the enthusiasm of the moment for a considered and rational approval, or as when he misapprehends a purely adventitious personal popularity, and takes it as testimony to the popularity of his doctrine. As has been said, *Progress and Poverty* had a sale running into the millions; yet in all probability it never once occurred to Henry George to wonder how many of those millions of copies were ever read.

III

In March, 1879, George sent his manuscript to the firm of Appleton, in New York, who promptly and politely declined to publish it. Their rejection of it was not unreasonable, for times were frightfully bad, and in a period of depression book-buying is almost the first activity to dwindle, and quite the last to recover. Logically it should be the time when everybody would buy a book on the cause of industrial depressions, but book-buying, like most activities of old Frederick's *verdammte Rasse*, does not go by logic. Moreover, the Appletons faced a grim precedent; no book on political economy published in America had ever paid. George set

friends in New York to work on the flinty hearts of other publishers, but without success; no one would touch it or have anything to do with it.

George then determined to publish the book himself, by subscription at three dollars a copy; he put out a prospectus and got some money, not enough to pay the cost of an edition, but enough, as he judged, to go on with. The circumstances of the book's publication were as pathetic as those of its writing. Hard as times were in the East, they were almost harder in California; George said later that he "could hardly walk a block without meeting a citizen begging for ten cents." An old partner in the printing business, however, who now had a shop of his own, agreed to make the stereotype plates. As a matter of sentiment, George set the first two stickfuls of type himself; the rest of the time while the plate-making was going on, like an honest author, he devoted to a final currying of his manuscript before it should be irretrievably out of hand.

He thus got out an "author's edition" of five hundred copies, and sold a good many of them. Meanwhile he sent unbound sheets to every likely publishing-house in England and America, proposing to furnish the plates—by far the

largest item of expense in publishing any book—if they would print and bind an edition and put it on the market. He got one favourable reply; only one; the Appletons agreed to print and distribute the book on those terms. They did so. They could not get concurrent publication in England; they told George it was not necessary to reserve the rights of translation since no one would want to translate it. Nevertheless, they loyally went ahead and published the book in January, 1880; and it fell from the Appletons' presses as dead as Julius Cæsar. In the course of the year it got excellent notices in the American press; the Belgian economist de Laveye praised it warmly in the *Revue Scientifique*; the Appletons brought it out in a cheap paper edition; it was translated into German; and still it did not sell. As compared with previous works on political economy it did perhaps as well as could be expected: but authors measure the success of a book by the number of its readers; publishers, by the volume of its sales; and measured either way, the success of *Progress and Poverty* was not encouraging.

George's long task was done, but he still had to live; his family also had to live. A friend in New York had written him that there was a fair

chance for him on the New York *Herald* and had sent him his railway-fare, so East he went in the late summer of 1880, leaving his family behind. The place on the *Herald* was a will-o'-the-wisp, like so many others that had lured him. He landed in New York as a mere adventurer, a waif, "afloat at forty-two," he wrote a friend, "poorer than at twenty-one. I do not complain, but there is some bitterness in it." Again he was looking for work, any kind of work, while back in California his wife was taking in boarders and his older son was working in a printing-office.

He found nothing to do at writing, but one of three friends, the only ones he had in New York, got him a long list of engagements to go on the stump for the Democratic party in the Garfield-Hancock campaign. He made one speech somewhere out of town, and queered his pitch so effectively that the committee recalled him post-haste to New York, and earnestly entreated him not to make any more speeches. The Republicans had thrown the tariff-issue into the campaign, stigmatizing the Democrats as free-traders, and as George put it, what the Democrats were after "was somebody to tell the workingmen that the Democratic party was as

good as the Republican party for the tariff." The speaker preceding George made that kind of speech, and George followed with a fervent plea for straight free trade. He said he had heard of high-tariff Democrats and revenue-tariff Democrats, but there was still another kind of Democrat, and that was a no-tariff Democrat; he was of that kind; he believed that what was wanted was "to sweep away the custom-houses and custom-house officers, and have free trade." The audience, he said, applauded this, but the eminent Democrats on the platform went into a dreadful dither, and George took leave of them "without a man to shake my hand."

This incident is worth great attention, piled as it was immediately on top of his experience of practical politics and the party-system in the West. It is quite justly made the stock example of George's magnificent integrity, his uncompromising faithfulness to principle. It is all that; but it must also raise in any reflective mind the question, How in the world could a man of such extraordinary philosophic powers survive all that experience and still retain a shred of confidence in political action as an instrument of social improvement? He had gone into the

Hayes-Tilden campaign, assuring his audiences that the contest was "not a contest for spoils, in which the people are simply permitted to choose which gang shall plunder them," and afterwards saw that it was exactly what he said it was not. He saw also that this had been the precise upshot—no one ever described it better—of the party-system in every local and state election in which he had taken part; and now came this experience when he was on the stump for Hancock! It is hardly conceivable that he should not have had some inkling of the fact that Murdstone invented the party-system with this end, and no other, in view, and that his faith in political action, political institutions and political men, should not be correspondingly modified. One might even suppose that he would have applied his lively intellectual curiosity and his almost unparalleled ability to the relatively simple task of getting down under the superficial appearance of these institutions and questioning their actual nature and intention. The average man, as Murdstone well knew, would not, and could not, do this; but George was not an average man.

His failure to do this had a profound practical significance; it undermined him ruinously

at every point. Warnings and intimations appeared in all the circumstances of his later career; he saw them and brushed them by. Instinct spoke out loudly; sometimes he unwittingly followed its dictates a little way, but in the end repressed them and turned back. His faith seems always to have remained the sheer superficial *Aberglaube* of the reformer, expecting impossible results from this-or-that nostrum or combination of nostrums aimed at special and symptomatic disorders—nostrums like “putting good men in office” or “turning the rascals out,” which were much in vogue with the insipid spirit of reform that was then at large. George was much disgusted when the eminent man of science, E. L. Youmans, the foremost American interpreter of Spencer, told him he did not vote because it was not worth while; George was caustic with Youmans, but did not let the incident suggest the advisability of examining Youmans’s position disinterestedly to see what might be in it, and why; he acted only on the arbitrary and purely authoritarian dictum of the average man inspired by Murdstone, that it is the duty of every citizen to vote. He would have made nothing of the great saying of Socrates, when rebuked for taking no part in Athenian politics,

that this showed only that he and his followers were the very best politicians in Athens.

George touched on political matters in his various writings, and all he said reflects this unexamined, unrationalized *Aberglaube* which ran back to two roots; first, the theory of the State as a social institution originating in some form of social agreement or contract for social purposes; and second, the prevailing theory of the moral nature of mankind—the perfectionist theory of Condorcet in popular form, powerfully reinforced and backed by the theological constructions of the Rev. Josiah Jupp. These two theories George seems never to have questioned; he had a period of youthful revulsion from the ancillary constructions of the Rev. Josiah Jupp, but it did not last long, nor did it at all affect his faith in the perfectionist thesis. What is the history of the State; in what did it invariably originate; what invariable intention and purpose has it expressed; what invariable intention does it now express wherever it exists; what inference can be drawn concerning its nature, and what concerning the individual's appropriate attitude and relation to it?—these questions apparently never occurred to George's mind. Perhaps the coöperation of the *Zeitgeist*

was needed to bring them forward, and that George did not have. Again, has experience so far given any reasonable assurance that the perfectionist theory of man's moral and intellectual nature is sound? Does it encourage any reasonable expectation that the average man has either the capacity or the desire to make much more of himself in a moral or intellectual way than he ever did make or is now making? George did not consider these questions; in all probability they never occurred to him. He demonstrated clearly enough that under the present economic system the average man could not be expected to do much with himself in those ways, but he seems never to have doubted either his capacity or desire; on the contrary, he firmly assumed that he had both.

With these convictions, George was an ardent republican; he could not possibly have been anything else. If the average man is economically free, his political and social freedom follow automatically. In that freedom, and in that only, he is able to become as wise and as good as he can be and wishes to be. So far, George's reasoning was sound beyond doubt or question; the thing hangs only on the degree of wisdom and goodness that, under those vastly improved con-

ditions, the average man would or could set for himself to reach. Assuming, as George did, that the average man's powers and desires are indefinitely greater than his present showing makes them appear to be, then it is presumable that their liberation would be all that is necessary to reform and moralize the State and convert it into a docile and disinterested instrument for the service of society.

Hence one must be staunch for republicanism, for in no more effective way could the State be returned to what in pure authoritarianism George conceived to be its original intention and function. This return could best be brought about and made secure by the collective motion of the average, the mass, acting in the political freedom which follows upon economic freedom. The logic of all this is sounder than its premises, for it is by no means probable that a new-found political liberty would be exercised in that way; indeed, if the expectations thus put upon the powers and disposition of the average be found excessive, it certainly would not be so exercised. But furthermore, as things stand, faith in republicanism is at the most no more than "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," because a true republic does

not exist nor has ever existed. Hence to speak lightly of a republic and republican institutions as if they did exist anywhere outside of dream-land, is to make an unwarranted and culpable assumption—as for example, when George in a public address told his hearers that “republican government is yet but an experiment.” Almost a hundred years before George made that speech, the superb scholarship and sterling honesty of John Adams had made it plain that the political organization of 1789 was not on a republican, but on an imperial model; it was but “a monarchical republic, or if you will, a limited monarchy,” for the powers of the executive were far greater than those of “an avoyer, a consul, a podestá, a doge, a stadtholder; nay, than a king of Poland; nay, than a king of Sparta.” It was but the kind of republic which Guizot said scornfully “begins with Plato, and necessarily ends with a policeman.” If this were true in 1789—and it was true—what was to be said of it in George’s day, after a century of continuous centralization and consolidation? But George did not need the scholarship of Adams to make him aware that republicanism was unrealized, nay, even unapproached; he had only to apply his reflective power to what he saw—to what, in

fact, he had himself described in the clearest of terms. Murdstone's masterpiece of political inventiveness, the party-system, whereby "the people are simply permitted to choose which gang shall plunder them"—was this a republican institution?

George's ideas on the general subject of government and the State were never clear nor did he ever attempt to clarify them. When he dealt with the subject in writing, he was superficial, inconsistent, sometimes by implication self-contradictory. He had occasional revulsions, but they never got him anywhere. In 1881 he wrote a friend, "Yes, look at the Republican party, and also look at the Democratic party. It is pot and kettle. I am done." Done he might have been with those parties for the time being, though even so, he was not actually done with the Democratic party. Done with the party-system he never was, nor with the principle of party-organization. At no time would his notion of finding an appropriate vehicle for carrying forward his reforms have risen above the utter ineptitude of constructing another political party.

Thus such ideas as he had in this order were essentially indistinguishable from those current

around him. He was sure that the State could be moralized only if and when the average man were moralized, and in this he was right. He was equally hopeful that the average man would moralize himself adequately, and would competently bring his moralization to bear on public affairs, as soon as his state of freedom—economic, political and social—had liberated his natural capacity and permitted his natural disposition freely to assert itself; and here he was walking on extremely treacherous ground. There was very possibly a far deeper insight expressed in a chance remark of the French painter Horace Vernet than appears in all George's presumptions upon human character. "*A la bonne heure,*" Vernet said with a gay irony, "give me a republic such as we understand it in France, all rulers, all natural-born kings, gods in mortals' disguise who dance to the piping of the devil. There have been two such since I was born; there may be another half-dozen like them within the next two centuries, because before you can have an ideal republic you must have ideal republicans, and nature can not afford to fool away her most precious gifts on a lot of jackleg lawyers and hobnail-booted riffraff. She condescends now

and then to make an ideal tyrant, but she will never make a nation of ideal republicans; you may quite as well ask her to make a nation of Raphaels, Michelangelos, Shakespeares or Molières."

IV

On being summarily relieved from duty as a campaign speaker, George knocked about New York through the rest of the summer, writing a friend that "I don't know precisely what I shall do," but at the same time saying that he was no Micawber, but would find something to work at, even if he had to go back to type-setting. In the autumn, by an odd coincidence, he got a job at devilling for Abram S. Hewitt, who was to defeat him six years later as a candidate for the mayoralty of New York. Hewitt was then a member of Congress, and had to write a report on a subject which was apparently in some way too much for him, so he hired George at fifty dollars a week to get it into shape. This kept George going very well for four months; and meanwhile *Progress and Poverty* was rubbing along, holding its own, or a little better, but in no respect behaving like an epoch-maker. It might have gone on so indefinitely, until its

limited market was saturated, and in default of a miracle it would have done so if a remarkable and most interesting event had not taken place. From the short-time point of view of the publicist, propagandist, crusader, this event was the best thing that could conceivably have happened; from the long-time point of view of the philosopher, it was the very worst imaginable. That event was the publication of a small work, hardly more than a tract, which George wrote at odd times while he was engaged on getting up Hewitt's report. Its title was *The Irish Land Question*.

This was a mere piece of pamphleteering, like his previous work on California's land-policy, but much better; it took rank at once with *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*. It merely generalized the Irish question in the simplest way, showing the situation there to be in all respects essentially the same as in England, America, or wherever the like system of private rent-monopoly prevails. Hence it affords probably the best general introduction to George's philosophy. If one were advising a student, one would suggest that he begin by reading this pamphlet, following it with *Protection or Free Trade*, and following that with *Progress and*

Poverty; for reversing this order, as is commonly done, makes difficulties which are easily avoidable.

Curiously, the simple-hearted man wrote this pamphlet with no notion whatever of the effect it would have on his personal fortunes. Irish landlordism was at the moment the most conspicuous public question before the English-speaking world, everybody was talking about it, it was a first-class "horrible example" to put before economic dipsomaniacs; well, there it was, apparently made to order for someone to pick up and use for driving home the central truth set forth at large in *Progress and Poverty*—why not do that? So George did it as simply so much in the day's work; and the next thing he knew, a prodigious rabble of charmed and enthusiastic Irish had hoisted him on their shoulders and borne him into world-wide fame. Irish-like, their enthusiasm and loyalty were personal, unreasoning, unquestioning, and all the stronger for that. They were unimpressed by George as a philosopher, they did not care a Sassenach sixpence for his generalizations or his logic. All they cared about was that he was notably and powerfully "agin the government";

he was all on their side, and all against the rapacious and accursed landlords.

From that moment George, the reformer, crusader, the protagonist of a "movement," was a made man. The bolted doors of opportunity opened to him of their own accord. In New York City his market-value went up like a skyrocket. Lecturing went up; writing went up; and most significantly, sales of the moribund *Progress and Poverty* doubled, redoubled and doubled again to proportions which assured it of becoming a world's best seller. Nothing could stop it, with Irish affairs in the state they were, and with America's metropolis bung-full of immigrant politically-minded Irishmen who had come over in a steady stream for years as involuntary industrial exiles. One would give anything for a racial census of *Progress and Poverty's* purchasers in New York City during the years 1881-1882.

The uprising against landlordism in Ireland had reached the stage of undeclared war; there was every evidence that it would last a long time and grow much worse before the issue was settled. The British State, headed by Gladstone, had been policing Ireland with a military constabulary of 15,000, and a force of 40,000 from

the regular army. As matters grew worse, the British State went on from one coercive measure to another, jailing Parnell, Dillon, Davitt, O'Kelly, with some hundreds of subordinate insurrectionists; suppressing the Land League; suspending the *habeas corpus*; searching and seizing without warrant—it governed sheerly as a ruthless and vindictive military despotism, until resistance was broken and a compromise patched up in the summer of 1882.

While George was still in California, hopefully perusing the first straggling reviews of *Progress and Poverty* early in 1880, Parnell and Dillon had come over under the auspices of the most influential Irish newspaper in New York, the *Irish World*, and made a tour of the country, stirring up a deal of enthusiasm and collecting almost a quarter-million dollars to carry on the war. It was an irregular proceeding, but as the American Irish had a great many votes and a very decent notion of how to use them, the government hardly saw its way to do anything about it. In the autumn of 1880, when George was in New York, Davitt came over to keep the fires burning. George met him, gave him a copy of *Progress and Poverty*, telling him it was distinctly down his street, and asked him

to push it in England, which Davitt promised to do. George no doubt had a newspaper-reader's knowledge of the Irish fracas, but this meeting gave him his only first-hand acquaintance with the state of things there. The upshot of it was his pamphlet on the *Irish Land Question*; the upshot of the pamphlet was an overnight thrust into international fame—reprints of it came out at once in London, Manchester and Glasgow—and the upshot of fame was an offer to go over to the seat of war as a special correspondent of the *Irish World*, at sixty dollars a week and expenses. George proposed taking his wife and two daughters with him, but had not enough money to take himself over, let alone a family. Hearing of this in some way, however, and knowing George to be always in straits, a well-to-do man who had already placed a thousand copies of *Progress and Poverty* in public libraries throughout the country, came forward with money enough to clear some of George's most pressing debts and send the family-party off; and so they went.

George had arranged with the *Irish World* to stay three months, but instead he stayed a year, almost to the day; he sailed from New York on the fifteenth of October, 1881, and

from Queenstown, on his return voyage, the fourth of October, 1882. It is not necessary to give a complete journal of his activities during the year in the British Isles; a light sketch of them will suffice. The thing to be remarked is that on leaving New York he laid aside the philosopher's robe, practically for good and all. Putting it vulgarly, he checked his whole philosophical equipment into storage late in 1881, and did not call for it again for four years; then he got it out for use while writing his *Protection or Free Trade*. Then he rechecked it, taking it out once more in 1891 for his *Science of Political Economy*, which his death left incomplete. Thus the course of his life from the autumn of 1881 to his death in the autumn of 1897, is one which those who have correctly appraised his superlative qualities of mind must follow with profound and unrelieved regret.