

A Prophet in the Making: Writings before *Progress and Poverty*

I *The Fight Against Monopoly*

DURING the late summer and fall of 1868, a week after he quit the *Times*, George became managing editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Two weeks after he began work at his new job, he sent his family to Philadelphia. Before he joined them, he was busy at the *Chronicle*, establishing what was to be in broad terms the permanent point of view of the *Chronicle's* editorial policy. He attacked land speculation, monopoly in land-holding, and the supporters of cheap labor. But George was too aggressive, and he could not get on with Charles de Young, the *Chronicle's* owner. Though George's effect on the *Chronicle* was lasting and important, he did not remain managing editor long enough to see out the fall in the newspaper's employ.

The chance to go east came when John Nugent decided to re-establish his San Francisco *Herald*. He asked George to go to New York on behalf of the *Herald* to request permission to join the Associated Press. As an alternate plan should the *Herald* be refused its request, Nugent suggested that George organize a special news service for the San Francisco paper. At the beginning of December, George headed east by the overland route, taking the stage which connected the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific—the transcontinental railroad still short of completion. From his personal experience as an average traveler, he concluded that the railroad, despite its public subsidies and land grants, had not lowered the expense of coast-to-coast travel and that its roadbeds were particularly engineered with an eye for higher government subsidies. He considered Wells Fargo disgracefully incompetent in its handling of the United States mails.

As far as George was concerned, the results of monopoly were as obvious as they were inevitable.

While George was in the East, Nugent (in January) began publication of the *Herald*, even though it was barred—as was the *Chronicle* and several other California papers—from the California Press Association that alone had access to the Associated Press news service and its coast-to-coast wire. George could get nowhere with the Association, but he did manage to get an informal offer from Western Union in New York City for five hundred words a day at five hundred dollars a month. With the help of his boyhood friend John Hasson, George arranged with the Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) *Patriot and Union* to have its Associated Press news dispatches as soon as they were received. The dispatches were then sent from Harrisburg to Philadelphia where they were put on the Western Union wire to San Francisco. George's system of circumventing the press associations made it possible for Nugent to begin the publication of the *Herald* by announcing to its readers its access to transcontinental telegraphic news despite the monopoly of the state press association.

George understood the close relation of Western Union and the Associated Press, but he still hoped the telegraph company would continue to honor its oral agreement with him. After several months of harassing George, Western Union in April, 1869, finally refused to permit George the use of its services. It offered him a new contract at a 122 per cent increase which the *Herald*, of course, could not afford. The press monopoly had won, and George was disappointed and angry. He felt that the Associated Press-Western Union combine had arrogantly defied the rights of all to the access of news. A month or so earlier (March 5th), George had written a signed letter to the New York *Tribune* that had attacked the Central Pacific Railroad for its excessive charges and political power, as well as Wells Fargo for its reckless handling of the mails. Now, in late April, he wrote again to attack in public the monopoly in communications which he felt equaled that in transportation and public service—a more dangerously undemocratic monopoly. Only the New York *Herald*, among major newspapers, published George's protest against the Associated Press monopoly. Though the New York *Herald* ran the story in its Sunday edition of April 25th

and commented favorably in an editorial, George saw that no other major newspaper even touched the story. So far as he was concerned, the San Francisco *Herald* was a victim of a big business operation that had wounded the freedom of the press and made a financial killing in the bargain.

Before heading back to San Francisco, George's hand-to-hand combat with monopoly led him into the curious position of opposing Chinese immigration, a keen issue on the West Coast. Of course, his stand was part of his continual opposition to wage slavery. Just days prior to departure, he submitted an article to the New York *Tribune*, whose managing editor was his friend John Russell Young, and whose editor-in-chief was Horace Greeley, whom George several years later supported for the presidency against a second term for President Grant. The *Tribune* of May 1, 1869, carried George's article "The Chinese on the Pacific Coast" along with the first installment of Greeley's essays on political economy. George's letter "was to influence his coming California career rather more as a student and editor and social critic than as a young man interested in practical politics."¹ On leaving New York, George ironically observed: "I am doing well for a young man . . . I have already got the Central Pacific, Wells Fargo, and Western Union down on me, and it will be just my luck to offend the Bank of California next."²

Though he used almost any religious or racial argument to sway his readers, George's essential complaint against Chinese immigration stemmed from his conflict with the railroad. Chinese labor was coolie labor: "Plainly, when we speak of a reduction of wages in any general and permanent sense, we mean this, if we mean anything—that in the division of the joint production of labour and capital, the share of labor is to be smaller, that of capital larger. This is precisely what the reduction of wages consequent upon the introduction of Chinese labor means."³

In a speech in San Francisco some twenty years later (February, 1890), George recalled having asked an old gold miner in 1858 what harm the Chinese had done him:

"No harm now; but it will not be always that wages are as high as they are to-day in California. As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down, and some day or other white men will be glad to get these diggings that the Chinamen are now

working." And I well remember how it impressed me, the idea that as the country grew in all that we are hoping that it might grow, the condition of those who had to work for their living must grow, not better, but worse.⁴

More than ten years before his letter to the *Tribune*, George had been confronted with the problem that was to be the basis of *Progress and Poverty*.

He broke now with Nugent and the doomed San Francisco *Herald* (Nugent had tried to avoid paying George seven hundred dollars in back wages). At loose ends because he was not to be the western correspondent of the New York *Tribune*, though he had been so contracted, George turned briefly once again to typesetting. His family was still in the East; and Young, no longer with the *Tribune*, could do nothing about preventing the paper from canceling George's contract with them. In between causes, George found himself substituting for an ill friend as acting editor of the San Francisco *Monitor*, a local Catholic weekly. It was not long before land monopoly questions arose and the editorials became more and more Georgian. He kept slipping Irish grievances into the paper and even attacked the San Francisco *Bulletin* for its "Hanglo-Saxon" point of view, a strong indication, also, that in opposing Chinese immigration he was not interested primarily in jingoistic or racial questions but in economic problems and poverty amidst progress.

On a recommendation of California's incumbent liberal Democratic Governor, Henry H. Haight, with whom George had become acquainted, he became editor in September, 1869, of the Oakland *Daily Transcript*. He immediately renewed his attack upon monopolistic enterprises and parties. In editorial after editorial, George criticized the land monopolists and the railroads, taking care as always to indicate the worth of the railroad in and for itself. By spring, 1870, George had outgrown his job on the *Transcript*, and Governor Haight invited him to take over the editorship of the Democratic party's major paper, the Sacramento *Reporter*, known in earlier years as the *State Capital Reporter*.

Governor Haight's political plans grew. He decided to try to curb the power of the Central Pacific through anti-monopolistic legislation for which he sought popular support. With Haight's blessing, George attacked the railroad's subsidy policy and its

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monopolistic practices. Henry George, Jr., briefly describes the enemy as his father and Governor Haight had seen it:

. . . a monster of fairy lore, . . . gulping down lands, bonds and money showered upon it, all the while like a weakling pleading for more. The plain and palpable fact was that leaving out of consideration the imperial endowment in lands, it had already received several times more money, or what could immediately be turned into money, than was necessary to build the system, and that contemporary with the work of railroad construction had arisen the private fortunes of the big four manipulating the corporation—Stanford, Crocker, Huntington and Hopkins, who, from comparative poverty, had quickly risen to the class of multi-millionaires.⁵

Almost immediately after George took over at the *Reporter*, a press war began. He was involved again with Western Union and the Associated Press, for the new war was in reality little more than a resumption of old hostilities. But this time George gained the victory he had longed for a year before. The rival telegraph company that George predicted would challenge Western Union came into the communications field. The new company, the Atlantic and Pacific, and the American Press Association, with George's old friend Hasson as "general agent," broke the transcontinental monopoly of wire and news. Since the American Press Association had John Russell Young as its president, it came as no surprise that George was made the new press association's California agent. California papers, including De Young's San Francisco *Chronicle*, having been shut out by the Associated Press, had no choice but to join the American Press Association.

In editorials, George happily hailed the new free trade in news, and he reacted ironically to the plight of the California Associated Press papers that were now forced to cut their prices. For so long as he was editor of the *Reporter*, George kept the heat on the Associated Press and also on the railroads. George was beginning to make the point he was to make over and over again in the years to come: public transport and public communication should not be in the control of private corporations. It was essentially an argument for nationalization by necessity. Corporate monopolies had to be regulated for the public good by the government acting on behalf of the people as a whole.

George's pen had become a force to be reckoned with in California; and the Central Pacific, whose overwhelming influence in California was incalculable, struck back. After failing to tempt George by winning him over to its side or to insure his silence in the future, the Central Pacific arranged for a "neutral" party to buy the *Reporter*. Before Governor Haight's warning against a fast deal reached Sacramento (the governor was away from the capital at the time), the paper had been purchased by the "neutral" party with Central Pacific money. George was out, and from that moment the Sacramento *Reporter* became "the obsequious organ of the Railroad Company." In the year to come, the railroad corporation was to throw its full weight into the election in order to defeat Governor Haight, the entire Democratic party, and the subsidy policies with which George and Governor Haight were associated.

Monopoly, though temporarily stymied, had won again. George had only the satisfaction of losing on principle. He had helped to break the news monopoly, and he had had his say in editorials and in two long pamphlets, *The Subsidy Question and the Democratic Party* and *Our Band and Land Policy*. As a former supporter of Lincoln, he was well on his way to defending the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the "Republicanism of Jefferson and the Democracy of Jackson," which he was soon to declare broadly to be his fundamental point of view. In later years, he could look back to the vision he had had in New York City in the midst of his first large-scale struggle with monopoly as the beginning of his unswerving dedication to reform.

II *Visions, Illuminations, and John Stuart Mill*

During the years in which Henry George first began his life-long quarrel with vested interests, he had several insights into the problems that he felt beset society. One memorable occasion was his attempt to circumvent the Associated Press-Western Union combine as Eastern representative of the San Francisco *Herald*. In a letter dated February 1, 1883, to Father Thomas Dawson of Glenree, Ireland, he recalled the spirit that had moved him: "Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religious I will say something that I don't like to speak

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of—that I never before have told any one. Once, in daylight, and in a city street there came to me a thought, a vision, a call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true.”⁶

In his acceptance speech for his first New York City mayoralty nomination in 1886, he described what it was that made him pledge himself with such transcendental fervor to the reformation of society: “Years ago I came to this city from the West, unknown, knowing nobody, and I saw and recognized for the first time the shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want. And here I made a vow, from which I have never faltered, to seek out and remedy, if I could, the cause that condemned little children to lead such a life as you know them to lead in the squalid districts.”⁷

The reality of his New York vision and the loyalty he felt for his vow were given added impetus by his so-called Oakland “illumination.” While editor of the Oakland *Daily Transcript*, George was riding one day in the foothills outside the town when he came through a casual meeting to understand vividly and concretely “the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth”:

Absorbed in my own thoughts, I had driven the horse into the hills until he panted. Stopping for breath, I asked a passing teamster, for want of something better to say, what land was worth there. He pointed to some cows grazing off so far that they looked like mice and said: “I don’t know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre.” Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since.⁸

Of course, those who gained control of the land early and could patiently wait made great profits with no exertion. When land passed into private hands, all improvement in the area in question went to enriching the landowner and not to the people who

worked it or to the nation and the public to whom it truly belonged.

George's reading and correspondence with John Stuart Mill added the intellectual force necessary to sustain and formalize his own insights and mystical experiences, thereby strengthening his personal opinions about current social, political, and economic problems. His initial connection with Mill arose from his letter to the *New York Tribune* on Chinese immigration. Though he was one day soon, as editor of the *San Francisco Post*, to express some reservations about Mill, he read Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* in 1869 for what was apparently the first time. At least there is no evidence that he had read Mill any earlier than his stay in Philadelphia when he came east to arrange for trans-continental news dispatches to be sent to the *San Francisco Herald*. His argument against the immigration of coolie labor is based upon the wages-fund theory for which he was partially in debt to Mill. Chinese labor, he reasoned, would bring down wages and reduce trade not only in California but all across the country. Wage rates were determined in most cases by the size of the labor force, and any indiscriminate importation of what was a kind of slave labor would affect the nation's economy disastrously. Though he makes references to racial, moral, and religious differences between the Chinese and other people on the West Coast, the major and intellectual force of his argument is based upon economic principles. George clipped his letter to the *Tribune* from the paper and, after reaching California in the late spring, sent it to Mill. After all, since he had based his argument largely upon Mill's views, he felt it would be interesting to see what the master's reaction would be.

At an opportune time months later (November, 1869), George, then editor of the *Transcript*, received Mill's reply. In the November 20th issue of the paper, he published a long editorial and printed Mill's letter in full. After quoting Mill's recommendations, George concluded that Mill's opinion "entirely" justified his own. Mill had written that "Concerning the purely economic view . . . I entirely agree with you; and it could be hardly better stated and argued than it is in your able article in the *New York Tribune*. That the Chinese immigration, if it attains great dimensions, must be economically injurious to the mass of the present population; that it must diminish their wages, and reduce them

to a lower stage of physical comfort and well-being, I have no manner of doubt. Nothing can be more fallacious than the attempts to make out that thus to lower wages is the way to raise them. . . ." Mill did not miss touching upon the question of out and out slavery which was, indeed, involved in the importation of the Chinese: "One kind of restrictive measure seems to me not only desirable, but absolutely called for; the most stringent laws against introducing Chinese immigrants as Coolies, i.e. under contracts binding them to the service of particular persons. All such obligations are a form of compulsory labour, that is, of slavery. . . ."⁹

Needless to say, George made a great splash with the Mill letter. It was the first time he became truly notorious in his "home" city as a spokesman for a cause. His *Transcript* days that had begun suspiciously led, therefore, to his prominence as the editor of the *Sacramento Reporter* the next year. Indeed, the Mill business was harangued for months afterwards. After the initial reactions of pro-Chinese and anti-Chinese immigration newspapers in San Francisco, which only served to spread the fame of the *Transcript* and its editor, the *Chicago Tribune* commented editorially upon the controversy by citing a letter from Mill to Horace White, the editor, which said Mill's letter must have been inaccurately quoted by George. Of course, White published Mill's statement.

By this time George was already editor of the *Reporter*; and with the *Chicago Tribune* attacking him at long distance and with the San Francisco *Bulletin* sneering at him for purposely garbling Mill's original letter, he had ample reason to reprint the entire correspondence. He then sent the complete series of newspaper items to Mill, who with graceful kindness and absolute honesty, but without any further discussion, acknowledged that George had in fact reproduced his letter accurately and fully. The controversy over his reliability and honesty as a journalist had enabled George to restate his ideas and to make political hay out of it all in the midst of the Democratic campaign in California.

That George was grateful to Mill for ideas, as well as for courtesies, can be seen both in the tribute he paid Mill at the end of his editorial in November, 1869, and in the letter he wrote to him the next summer (July 16, 1870), some six months after

his Oakland "illumination": "In an endeavour to account for the continuance of pauperism in England, and the gradual sinking of the working-classes in the older parts of the states, I have come to conclusions which were cleared and strengthened by your works. . . ." In the early 1870's, as *Our Land and Land Policy* was to prove, George was beginning to organize his economic views.

III *George's Editorial Opinions and the San Francisco Post*

From 1869 to 1875, George's newspaper career in San Francisco was a hectic but a fruitful one. During this interval many of his fundamental ideas and perspectives were completely formed and clearly expressed. Though he certainly had not found as yet a definite scheme or system for his thoughts on the scale of the one in *Progress and Poverty*, random editorials in the *San Francisco Monitor*, in the *Oakland Daily Transcript*, in the *Sacramento Reporter*, and finally, more fully and frequently, in the *San Francisco Post* chart the development of his thinking. Coupled with his pamphlet *Our Land and Land Policy* in 1871, and his speeches in the late 1870's, yet to be discussed, his newspaper editorials consistently led him to the conclusions and to the style that found full expression in all his later work.

In several of his editorials in the *Monitor* in 1869, George attacked the land problems of Ireland, a subject with which he was to be very closely associated in the 1880's; his comments foreshadowed much that was to come. In the *Monitor* of September 11, he wrote: "beneath the Irish land question is the English land question. . . . What is there in the laws of entail and primogeniture that should set aside the God-given law, that these who toil shall enjoy the fruits of the earth?" On problems in California he said the state had reached a point of decision from which there would be no return. It could either go the way of the rest of the world, ridden to death by armies of capitalists and land speculators, or force the big land aggregators to bear the burden through "full taxation." He proposed graduated taxation so that larger estates would be made to pay higher taxes than smaller ones. George wanted to break the hold of the monopolizers so that public land would be protected from pri-

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vate absorption before the vast tracts of California and of the West were completely lost and the many natural resources captured by those engaged in building personal fortunes at public expense.

Later in the same year, while editor of the *Transcript*, George continued his probing of economic and political questions, especially those which interested him most—free trade and monopoly. His views were consistent in general with both his past and his future opinions: he was against protection of private interests. It was in the *Transcript* that, in order to support labor and encourage immigration from the eastern states, George had published the letter he had received from Mill supporting his stand on Chinese immigration. It had divided the press on the West Coast and had clearly placed George in the camp of the Democratic and Jeffersonian agrarians. During his tenure as editor of the *Transcript*, George consolidated his ideas about speculation and the national banking policy, both of which he opposed. But his notoriety as Mill's correspondent and as an opponent of Chinese immigration was the most prominent feature of the *Transcript* days. The papers who opposed George called him a demagogue and a "vulgar, self-advertising showman." Others felt he was not only correct but had seriously undertaken to examine a nasty problem with candor and honesty. As Barker has observed, George, as of March, 1869, "had essayed the burden of asserting nationality while denying monopoly—surely as awkward a burden as a democratic theorist has ever undertaken."¹⁰

As editor of the *Sacramento Reporter*, George's political and economic thought not only continued to mature but also started to formalize. He took what could be described as a recognizable *contemporary* political stance. Two major issues governed his experiences on the *Reporter*—state control of monopolies and taxation. Having sided with an old-line Democrat like Governor Haight, George had not only attacked the subsidies given the railroads but had also aligned himself with the Democratic party's unsuccessful effort to maintain and to increase its power in the state. The positions he took were familiar to him and were as much an outgrowth of his father's political associations as they were an inevitable development of his own ideas. These positions are best indicated in "What the Railroad Will Bring Us."

Without Lincoln and the struggle to end human bondage, the Republican party and he had little in common. As editor of the *Reporter*, he was given the opportunity of attacking the unfair taxation of small property holders and of existence or subsistence farmers. He was led to the point of pleading for the nationalization of at least one giant monopoly while preaching steadily in his editorials that the "great NEED of California" was "free trade."

George, in his desire for social revolution, went so far as to support the international labor movement then gathering force in Europe, but at that time he knew little of the radical socialism with which it was imbued and which in later years he could never bring himself to trust. Always a political maverick, he opposed Governor Haight and the state's Democratic organization on several occasions because he wanted them to resemble him rather than make himself over to reflect them. On no point was he more clear about his point of view than on the question of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. George felt that the Democrats of California were not giving the amendment their wholehearted support and he said so. For George, monopoly was wrong on any scale. Therefore, *because*, more than *despite*, his opinions on Chinese immigration, which stemmed from his belief that the Chinese were being used by organized capital to depress wages, George could not accept in any way the logic or morality of those who opposed equal rights for white and non-white citizens. For George, the Civil War was unfinished, and it was the duty of the Democratic party, in his eyes, to take the lead in reform, despite its latent racism and its opposition to Lincoln. Long a supporter of the eight-hour day, wage slavery was to George merely another form of human bondage; and he felt that the Democratic party was more given to listening to the pleas of the wage earner than was Grant's party. This position is that which many political liberals have taken in the hundred years of American history that have elapsed since George's struggles for social reform in the decade after the Civil War.

George's longest and most important association with a newspaper in the 1860's and 70's was with the San Francisco *Daily Evening Post*. He finally had the opportunity to create a paper of his own. With two partners, the printer W. M. Hinton, who

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admired *Our Land and Land Policy*, and A. H. Rapp, George began publishing the *Post* on December 4, 1871. In order to survive, of course, the paper had to make money. It was, therefore, a typical California newspaper and not at all like George's New York weekly of fifteen years later, *The Standard*, a reform movement journal. In what would be called today an advertising "gimmick," the *Post* introduced the copper penny to San Francisco on a large scale as part of an opening campaign to get readers. The partners had persuaded the Bank of California to release one thousand dollars in pennies to advertise the first newspaper to sell for one cent west of the Rockies.

From the beginning, the prime object of the paper was to interest the workingman—the Henry George man. George wanted the policies of the *Post* to form and to organize the thoughts and opinions—the aspirations—of the wage earner on the West Coast. In his first editorial, which was to give the paper its direction, he announced that the "Great Work of Reform" requires "a union of the good men of both parties," "economy in government," a reduction in taxes, a reformed civil service system, and a decentralization of power and wealth, including a de-emphasis upon the nation's tendency to encourage the growth of business and landholding monopolies. The paper enthusiastically supported Horace Greeley against Grant and mourned his "utter" defeat in the 1872 election. Unbridled capitalism, led by Grant's cavalry, seemed to George to be overwhelming all the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian principles to which he was dedicated more intensely than ever.

From December, 1871, until November, 1875, the *Post* proclaimed the views of Henry George. Arguing against the San Francisco *Examiner* and proving with simple illustrations his contention that a land tax would help the farmer and not burden him as his opponents contended, George wrote "that to take the tax off of personal property and improvements, and to put it on the land, would leave the owners of land and improvements less to pay than they have now."¹¹ It would also force land speculators who were holding land in an unimproved condition to release it to those who would willingly put it into production. George was beginning to stress the single tax doctrine of his later years while reiterating in many of his *Post* editorials the views he had expressed in the *Reporter*. "If one would see where

taxation is really felt, he must go to the people whom the tax-gatherer never visits; . . . where in heathen ignorance, little children are toiling out their lives amid the clatter of wheels and looms; to the slums and tenement rows, where the man from the new West cannot go without a sinking and sickening of the heart."¹² George argued that "the income from the land should support the Government, and not go to the enriching of one small class of the population."¹³ He was elaborating and re-investigating the ideas he had presented in *Our Land and Land Policy*. Though the fundamentals of his attacks upon monopoly and land speculation had changed little, the structure of his argument became more complex and the import more intense and far-reaching; his comments on taxation in the *Post* were specifically detailed.

In the *Post*, also, George pressed his Jeffersonian theory of the "natural right" of men to the land and studied the relation of labor and capital to land or property; his attacks upon and investigations of theories of wages and population, which anticipated his discussions of the wages fund theory and the Malthusian doctrine in *Progress and Poverty*, reappear again and again in the *Post* editorials. He also expressed his belief that rent was a social product, that it was an economic evil when appropriated by private parties, and that taxation of labor was mistaken and unfair and discouraged incentive for social improvement.

One particular editorial from the *Post* (April 21, 1874), which he called "A Problem for Working Men," not only sums up his general editorial views expressed during the four years he was editor of the paper but also shows how the *Post* editorials are related to both *Our Land and Land Policy* and *Progress and Poverty*:

Is it not universally true that as population grows and wealth increases the condition of the laboring classes becomes worse, and that the amount and depth of real poverty increases? . . . The explanation that as population increases there is a greater strain on natural resources, and that labor in the aggregate becomes less productive, does not suffice, for the economies of production and exchange . . . more than compensate for any greater strain on natural resources. . . . Why is it, then, . . . as population increases, and wealth increases, that the largest class of the com-

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munity not only do not get any of the benefit, but become, actually poorer?

. . . As population increases, land, and hardly anything else but land, becomes valuable. . . . Land ownership levies its tax upon all the productive classes.

What is the remedy?

To make land-owners bear the common burden—tax land and exempt everything else.

George's "New Declaration of Independence" was aimed at wage slavery. California was then, as it essentially still is, a state in which the landholdings were vast and the landholders powerful.

The *Post* had other interests than those of land agitation and related subjects. The attacks upon land monopoly were complemented by several liberal campaigns against other forms of injustice. Besides criticizing wide-open gambling, crime, corruption, and lynchings, the *Post* took the lead in publicizing the case of the ship *Sunrise*, which involved indefensible cruelty, and, at least, manslaughter. Like Cooper and Melville before him, George was a fierce opponent of maritime brutality and an outright spokesman for the common seaman. Because of his early experiences at sea, again like Cooper and Melville, he was well acquainted with the seaman's problems and with maritime management-labor difficulties and their relation to human rights.

The *Sunrise* case involved the deaths of three seamen who jumped from the ship and were drowned because of the cruelty of the captain and his first mate while the ship was en route from New York to San Francisco. The *Post* investigated and publicized the incident in spite of efforts made to suppress the entire matter. Demanding prosecution, George offered a reward for the apprehension of the captain and his mate after they had apparently disappeared from the scene. Hiring its own special counsel, the *Post* pursued the case until the captain was tried and convicted. The case closed as a newspaper story with an appeal for the foundation of a society for the protection of seamen. A seaman, in George's eyes, was a wage earner, not a slave; and he would not stand by without protest in order that unfair employment practices could continue. The case received national and international attention, and as in his battle with the Associated Press and Western Union, George had taken on the role of David.

This time, however, the judge of the people had won a clear victory.

George dreamed of the just state; and while the role of a David in San Francisco was important, it was in the role of a Moses that George was yet to be heard. His vision of the perfect state and his editorial judgments on social rights and wrongs led him inevitably to the problem of how laws could be framed so that the perfect state could come into being—a state in which the judgment of social inequities would become a needless activity. His July Fourth comments in 1874 incorporate his vision: “The great American Republic must be a republic in fact as well as form; a Christian republic in the full grand meaning of the words . . . till time shall come when warships, and standing armies, and paupers and prisons, and men toiling from sunrise to dusk, and women brutalized by want, and children robbed of their childhood shall be things of the dark past.”

In his four years as editor of the *Post*, George continued to round out editorially his social philosophy and his political economy while launching many campaigns to save California from the power of special interests which ranged from police corruption to liquor licensing. And while no abuse of public trust was small enough to escape his notice, he was the first to recognize the greater issues when they arose. The “Christian republic” of which he dreamed could be established only through progress that did away with poverty. After leaving the *Post* on November 27, 1875, George was able once again to reflect upon the “enigma” of the times, the “riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed.” The problem was to introduce his major work four years later, but the problem and the symbolism in which it was expressed harked back to the “millennial” letter he wrote to his sister in 1861.

IV *Preludes to Progress and Poverty*

George's career in the 1870's can be divided into two distinct periods of almost equal length: 1871 to 1875, and 1875 to 1879. In the first period, his time was almost entirely devoted to his successful newspaper career as editor of the San Francisco *Post*. In the second, it was given to reflection and to the composition of *Progress and Poverty*. The decade is bracketed by his first extended statement on political economy, *Our Land and Land*

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Policy (1871) and by the lectures and essays of the late 1870's which lead on to his major work completed in the spring but not published until the fall of 1879.

Our Land and Land Policy attempted at least a brief answer to the Sphinx. Coming as it did almost halfway between his letter of 1861 and the beginning of his international career as the "Prophet of San Francisco," *Our Land and Land Policy* is an important step in George's intellectual development. The pamphlet (dated July 27, 1871) was actually a forty-eight-page booklet expanded from an earlier version of thirty-one pages. It was closely printed and vigorously argued, sold for twenty-five cents, and contained a folding map of California showing the land grants made to the railroad. Though he was already theorizing on an international scale, the booklet was clearly aimed at national, state, and local problems.

Our Land and Land Policy is divided into five parts, each with subsections: (1) "The Lands of the United States," (2) "The Lands of California," (3) "Land and Labour," (4) "The Tendency of Our Present Land Policy," and (5) "What our Land Policy Should Be." Parts three and five present the essentials of the argument he develops fully in *Progress and Poverty*: the land monopolizers and speculators or owners of large tracts obtain the majority of the benefits of economic progress; if they were heavily taxed, most social problems would be solved. Parts one, two, and four were aimed at careless state and national policies that were causing economic waste, sapping natural resources, and irresponsibly concentrating landownership in the hands of the relatively few.

George's distributist doctrine and the tone of *Progress and Poverty* are already in evidence in *Our Land and Land Policy*. Once more the reader may observe the Emersonian Sphinx metaphor:

There is a problem which must present itself to every mind which dwells upon the industrial history of the present century; a problem into which all our great social, industrial, and even political questions run—which already perplexes us in the United States; which presses with still greater force in the older countries of Europe; which, in fact, menaces the whole civilized world, and seems like a very riddle of the Sphinx, which fate demands of modern civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed—the problem of the proper distribution of wealth.¹⁴

His basic Jeffersonian philosophy is proclaimed earnestly, provocatively, and with Jeffersonian rhetoric:

But man has also another right, declared by the fact of his existence [in addition to his right to the fruits of his own labor]—the right to the use of so much of the free gifts of nature as may be necessary to supply all the wants of that existence, and as he may use without interfering with the equal rights of any one else, and to this he has a title as against all the world.

This right is natural; it cannot be alienated. It is the free gift of his Creator to every man that comes into the world—a right as sacred, as indefeasible as his right to life itself.¹⁵

George was going to end poverty by ending the monopoly of land. The land belonged to everybody to use freely, and once this “natural right” was abridged dire consequences inevitably resulted. What is more, monopoly meant class division, and ultimately inequality and class war. The greater the concentration of wealth, the poorer the majority of people became. Such developments meant the end of Democracy, the destruction of the Republic, and the re-establishment of the Old World in the New. Shortly after publishing *Our Land and Land Policy*, George began publishing the *Post*. It was only after he left the paper in 1875 that he was able to return to these ideas at greater length than editorials would permit.

His series of addresses in 1877 and 1878 are important because they began his career as a speaker and contributed to the development of his style. They also illustrate his growing awareness of his personal mission. Whereas in 1871, after having published *Our Land and Land Policy*, he had written on a particular matter in the *Overland Monthly*, “Bribery in Elections,” from 1877 through 1879 he philosophized on a broader base. In 1871 he attacked corruption at the polls, railroad money in the elections, and advocated the Australian ballot system in order to insure privacy at voting places through compulsive security and official government ballots. At the end of the decade, he was concerned with economic theory and its practical application throughout the world.

In 1877, he wrote two important speeches. The first was read at the University of California, then established permanently at Berkeley, and was entitled “The Study of Political Economy.”

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The second was his Fourth of July oration. Referring to Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Mill in the university address, George spoke sharply and suggestively. He had some vague hopes that perhaps he was destined for the unfilled chair of political economy at the university, but he surely must have expected as little academic enthusiasm for his opinions on political economy as for his ideas on education:

Education is not the learning of facts; it is the development and training of mental powers. All this array of professors, all this paraphernalia of learning, cannot educate a man. They can but help him to educate himself. Here you may obtain tools; but they will be useful only to him who can use them. A monkey with a microscope, a mule packing a library, are fit emblems of the men—and, unfortunately, they are plenty—who pass through the whole educational machinery, and come out but learned fools, crammed with knowledge which they cannot use—all the more pitiable, all the more contemptible, all the more in the way of real progress, because they pass, with themselves and others, as educated men.

Such was the way the self-educated George spoke at Berkeley. Formal educational institutions and Henry George were never destined to get on well with one another. Even at the height of his popularity in the United Kingdom, George suffered at Oxford University one of his rare failures. Though he became a very effective speaker in later years and could move an audience, it was in general an audience who labored with body and soul in order to live and who had known starvation. These were the audiences who responded to him in the spirit in which he addressed them. His success with radical intellectuals depended upon their already developed sympathies with human suffering and want which were similar to his own.

George's Fourth of July oration, "The American Republic," was an apotheosis of Liberty. He was at his rhetorical best, but had still to learn that an effective speaker cannot simply talk *at* an audience. The language of the address, however, was the language of his later speeches and essays. In the speech he briefly reviewed the rise of liberty in the Judaic ethic and its progress through Christian and European history. At the same time, he referred to land and labor problems, emphasizing the injustice of the concentration of wealth, the degradation of the

poor, and the loss of freedom through economic bondage. "In the long run," he said, "no nation can be freer than its most oppressed, richer than its poorest, wiser than its most ignorant." "The ultimate condition of any people," he said, "must be the condition of its lowest class."

Two other essays, "Why Work Is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labour Restless" and "Moses" were written while he was already at work on *Progress and Poverty*. The first of these two statements of his views anticipates in much detail the chapter "The primary cause of recurring paroxysms of industrial depression" in Book V of *Progress and Poverty*, but "Moses" carries in essence the entire spirit as well as much of the substance of George's appeal. Describing the purpose of "Why Work is Scarce," George wrote to John Swinton that the essay was "an attempt to put into popular form a great truth which marries political economy with common sense, and which once appreciated is the key to all the social evils of our time." "Moses," on the other hand, was a declaration of his mission to the world and a personal and national statement of the American Dream.

George first delivered his lecture on Moses in June, 1878, to the Young Man's Hebrew Association in San Francisco. Though he may have felt the power of the prophet stirring within him when he interrupted his labors on his major work, he was as well prepared as he ever would be to express the essence of the message he was to amplify later in the many books and speeches. "Moses" is a succinct enunciation of his social philosophy, and rising as it did out of the great heat generated by the composition of *Progress and Poverty*, it has much in common with that book: both are prophetic in tone and both are addressed to the same problem.

In "Moses," George examines the enigma of poverty amidst plenty specifically in terms of the ethical and moral foundations of Western society, and he does so in keeping with a theme that recurs throughout nineteenth-century literature from Coleridge and Carlyle to Emerson and Arnold—the hero and his relation to culture and anarchy. If, George says, "we try to trace to their sources movements whose perpetuated impulses eddy and play in the currents of our times, we at last reach the individual. It is true that 'institutions make men,' but it is also true that 'in the

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beginnings men make institutions.'” For George, Moses is a culture hero, a representative man, whose biography he describes in transcendental terms.

“Moses” is a provocative address, and it can be understood why George repeated it in Scotland, England, and New York. It is Emersonian, not simply because George had read Emerson from his youth, but because it is a poetic essay strikingly like a sermon. But it is also Emersonian because it is devoted to the American Dream of the individual in a *New* England instead of an *Old* England. The modern world, and specifically America, George conceived as unlimited in its potential: a veritable promised land was inevitably to rise out of the wilderness of technological achievement. Only the inability of men to understand what Thoreau or Jefferson knew could bar the way: the land belonged to everybody, to the people as a whole, and must not fall into the hands of private ownership; for the land is man’s only because God has given, perhaps lent, it to him. It belongs to *all* men as children of God, and it is to be forever held in usufruct for all of the people: “Everywhere in the Mosaic institutions is the land treated as the gift of the Creator to His common creatures, which no one had the right to monopolise. Everywhere it is, not your estate, or your property, not the land which you bought, or the land which you conquered, but ‘the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee’—‘the land which the Lord lendeth thee.’” To George, who had witnessed the deeding of lands to the Central Pacific and the actions of countless land speculators in California, only economic and moral disaster could be the ultimate result:

Trace to its root the cause that is thus producing want in the midst of plenty, ignorance in the midst of intelligence, aristocracy in democracy, weakness in strength—that is giving to our civilization a one-sided and unstable development, and you will find it something which this Hebrew statesman three thousand years ago perceived and guarded against. Moses saw that the real cause of the enslavement of the masses of Egypt was, what has everywhere produced enslavement, the possession by a class of the land upon which and from which the whole people must live. He saw that to permit in land the same unqualified private ownership that by natural right attaches to the things produced by labour, would be inevitably to separate the people into the

very rich and the very poor, inevitably to enslave labour—to make the few the masters of the many, no matter what the political forms; to bring vice and degradation, no matter what the religion.

The lesson of "Moses" is based upon "the idea of the brotherhood of men" which "springs from the idea of the fatherhood of God"; for "the great distinctive feature of the Hebrew religion . . . is its utilitarianism, its recognition of divine law in human life." Moses had "a character blending in highest expression the qualities of politician, patriot, philosopher, and statesman," which re-educated and led his people from a slave psychology to that of a free people. In the characteristic fashion of the American writer, George, like Melville or Whitman, sees America repeating the experiences of the Israelites. By implication, he sees another Exodus from the old to the new, and he even draws the attention of his audience to the parallel experience of the small tribe of colonials who sought a new land of milk and honey in the wilderness of the New World. "Egypt was the mould of the Hebrew nation—the matrix, so to speak, in which a single family, or, at most, a small tribe grew to a people as numerous as the American people at the time of the Declaration of Independence."

Like the founders of America, again by implication, Moses sought no glory for himself but desired that specific safeguards be made against the foundation of any kind of hereditary succession. "As we cannot imagine the Exodus without the great leader, neither can we account for the Hebrew polity without the great statesman. Not merely intellectually great, but morally great—a statesman aglow with the unselfish patriotism that refuses to grasp a sceptre or found a dynasty." When a people have become free both in mind or spirit and in body, the function of the code they live by is to protect this hard-won freedom, to make the enslavement of the past impossible in the present or in the future of that people: "It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity, that is the aim of the Mosaic code. Its sanctions are not directed to securing the strong in heaping up wealth so much as to preventing the weak from being crowded to the wall. At every point it interposes its barriers to the selfish greed that, if left unchecked, will surely dif-

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ferentiate men into landlord and serf, capitalist and workman, millionaire and tramp, ruler and ruled."

"The aim of the Mosaic code is," says George, "a commonwealth based upon the individual—a commonwealth whose ideal it was that every man should sit under his own vine and fig tree, with none to vex him or make him afraid." Above all, the Mosaic code is a safeguard against economic enslavement. The Sabbath is the sign that none are "condemned to ceaseless toil." Pressing his point, George will not let his audience forget the harsh realities of the nineteenth century:

We progress and we progress; we girdle continents with iron roads and knit cities together with the mesh of telegraph wires; each day brings some new invention; each year marks a fresh advance—the power of production increased, and the avenues of exchange cleared and broadened. Yet the complaint of "hard times" is louder and louder; everywhere are men harassed by care, and haunted by the fear of want. With swift, steady strides and prodigious leaps, the power of human hands to satisfy human wants advances and advances, is multiplied and multiplied. Yet the struggle for mere existence is more and more intense, and human labour is becoming the cheapest of commodities. Beside glutted warehouses human beings grow faint with hunger and shiver with cold; under the shadow of churches festers the vice that is born of want.

George was positive that he was ethically and morally right, and therefore economically sound and socially just. "I ask," he said in "Moses," "not veneration of the form, but recognition of the spirit" of the Mosaic institutions:

How common it is to venerate the form and deny the spirit. There are many who believe that the Mosaic institutions were literally dictated by the Almighty, yet who would denounce as irreligious and "communistic" any application of their spirit to the present day. And yet to-day how much we owe these institutions! This very day the only thing that stands between our working classes and ceaseless toil is one of these Mosaic institutions. Nothing in political economy is better settled than that under conditions which now prevail the working classes would get no more for seven days' labour than they now get for six. . . .

Let the mistakes of those who think that man was made for the Sabbath, rather than the Sabbath for man, be what they

may; that there is one day in the week that the working man may call his own, one day in the week on which hammer is silent and loom stands idle, is due, through Christianity, to Judaism—to the code promulgated in the Sinaitic wilderness.

George's views were based upon the traditional Protestant and democratic spirit of dissent and rebellion against tyranny. And it was these views that had made him defend the execution of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico years earlier. Like Milton, he believed it to be the right of the people to depose the unrepresentative and unjust tyrannies of the princes of this world. Regicide was not only defensible but even laudable.¹⁶ Moses is seen to be the prime author, in spirit at any rate, of the Declaration of Independence:

From the free spirit of the Mosaic law sprang that intensity of family life that amid all dispersions and persecutions has preserved the individuality of the Hebrew race; that love of independence that under the most adverse circumstances has characterised the Jew; that burning patriotism that flamed up in the Maccabees and bared the breasts of Jewish peasants to the serrated steel of Grecian phalanx and the resistless onset of Roman legion; that stubborn courage that in exile and in torture held the Jew to his faith. It kindled that fire that has made the strains of Hebrew seers and poets phrase for us the highest exaltations of thought; that intellectual vigour that has over and over again made the dry staff bud and blossom. And passing outward from one narrow race it has exerted its power wherever the influence of the Hebrew scriptures has been felt. It has toppled thrones and cast down hierarchies. It strengthened the Scottish covenanter in the hour of trial, and the Puritan amid the snows of a strange land. It charged with the Ironsides at Naseby; it stood behind the low redoubt on Bunker Hill.

At the beginning of his newspaper career, George wrote for a short while under the pseudonym of "Proletarian"; and when he was speaking in the British Isles in the 1880's, he spoke as a proletarian against vested interests, both clerical and lay. The "unholy alliance" he called it. The "harlot's curse," to borrow a phrase from the verse of a native English proletarian of the previous century, was on England, and George never let his audiences forget it. The "squalor and brutishness with which the very centres of our civilisation abound" was impossible to de-

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fend. The audiences that heard the "Moses" address in Dundee in February, 1884, or in Glasgow the following December heard George at his best. "The life of Moses, like the institutions of Moses, is a protest against that blasphemous doctrine, current now as it was three thousand years ago—that blasphemous doctrine preached oft-times even from Christian pulpits—that the want and suffering of the masses of mankind flow from a mysterious dispensation of providence, which we may lament, but can neither quarrel with nor alter." There was no doubt about who was to inherit the earth. There was no doubt about what "self-evident" truths were being preached. The opposition recognized a familiar voice. "We hardly know where to begin in pointing out the fallacies in a train of reasoning which starts from the assumption that all men are created equal and ends with the conclusion that private property in land is a monopoly in some sense which distinguishes it from private property of other kinds."¹⁷ Henry George was preaching an unwanted democratic socialism based upon the American Declaration of Independence so far as his opposition was concerned.

In "Moses" George set the whole tone and direction of his social and economic reevaluation of modern society. "It was no sudden ebullition of passion that caused Moses to turn his back," like Milton's Christ, on all the glories of the Egyptian and Grecian worlds. Moses brought his "strength and knowledge . . . to the life-long service of the oppressed." "In institutions that moulded the character of a people, in institutions that this day make easier the lot of toiling millions, we may read the stately purpose."

George returned to his desk in order to finish *Progress and Poverty. Our Land and Land Policy* at the beginning of the decade and the four essays of the last three years of the 1870's were only preludes to it. George, like Moses, had a dream of a land of plenty in which there was to be neither poverty nor slavery and where each man was to be his own master.