

## Jerry Simpson of Kansas

*The following interesting highlights of the career of one of the most colorful of the many vivid personages that the great state of Kansas has contributed to the National scene were written by HENRY WARE ALLEN, himself a veteran battler in the crusade for economic freedom and occupant of a secure place among the distinguished sons of the Cornflower State. This article appeared originally in The Kansas Magazine; it is reprinted here by permission.*

★ JERRY SIMPSON, a native of New Brunswick, was born March 31, 1842, this year being his centenary. At an early age he came with his parents to Illinois. When the Civil War broke out he enlisted in the Union Army serving in Company A, Twelfth Illinois Infantry. For several years he was a sailor on the Great Lakes. In 1878 he came with Mrs. Simpson to Jackson County, Kansas, and afterwards to Medicine Lodge, Barber County. In politics he was first a Republican, then in turn a Greenbacker, a Populist, and then a Single Taxer.

Kansas became the center of a revolution unique in the world's history, for as a rule revolutions occur in large cities only. Corn was bringing only 9c and 10c a bushel and was being used for fuel, while wheat had to be sold for only 40c a bushel. The farmers of the middle west thus impoverished started this rural revolution. Jerry Simpson as a leader in this movement was elected to Congress in 1890 and this event was heralded by Victor Murdock through the press of the nation as a spectacular achievement of "Sockless Jerry Simpson." His advent in Washington had been accordingly anticipated as that of a country bumpkin, a bucolic ignominium. But it was quickly discovered that this was a mistake, for Jerry Simpson proved himself to be a natural leader of men, well read, at ease in any situation, and remarkably brilliant in repartee. Many years later Col. W. P. Hepburn of Iowa stated to Victor Murdock, "In my time I never knew a man in the House quicker in rejoinder than Jerry Simpson." Jerry Simpson was promptly chosen leader of the small group of Populists in Congress and was afterwards said to be the real leader of the Democrats as well.

In common with Hamlin Garlin, Herbert Quick, and a host of other farm leaders Jerry Simpson had read Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" and had been inspired as by a great light to greater effort for justice in the relations of man to man. Just as there is an intimate relation between the lust for power, despotism, and tyranny, so there is a corresponding affinity between love of justice, regard for human rights, and love of one's fellow man. These virtues were predominantly those of Jerry Simpson. In this respect as

in others he resembled Abraham Lincoln. He belongs in the company of those champions of human rights who are as conspicuous above the level of mankind as are lofty mountain peaks above the level plain, notable among whom have been Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Robert Burns, William Lloyd Garrison, Abraham Lincoln, Wendell Phillips and Henry George.

At the period when Jerry Simpson was in Congress the tariff was a burning issue. The farmers of the middle west had to pay artificially high prices which prevailed in a protected market on what they had to buy, while the prices on what they sold were fixed in Liverpool and elsewhere in world-wide markets. In Congress Jerry Simpson soon made the acquaintance of Tom L. Johnson, both men being followers of Henry George and consequently advocates of international free trade. Incidentally Grover Cleveland had been elected on a platform of "Tariff Reform." This was essentially a compromise term, an appeasement effort. It was indefinite and was construed to mean all things to all men. The Dingley Tariff Act was passed June 26, 1884, and as might have been expected it raised instead of lowered tariff rates.

Then occurred a most interesting and sensational episode in Congress. Tom L. Johnson of Ohio conceived the idea of getting Henry George's "Protection or Free Trade?" incorporated into the Congressional Record. In substance he said, "Mr. Speaker, I desire to supplement my remarks upon this question by quoting the first five chapters of the book 'Protection or Free Trade?' wherein my own views on this question are presented much better than I can express them myself." Unanimous consent was extended to Tom Johnson as requested and this process on subsequent days was repeated by Jerry Simpson, W. J. Stone of Kentucky, Joseph Washington of Tennessee, John Fithian of Illinois, and Thomas Bowman of Iowa.

The book was then printed at a cost of one cent per copy with a second edition in larger type at two cents per copy. A total of about 1,400,000 copies of this book were printed and circulated, the expense being paid by Tom L. Johnson, the Democratic National Committee, the Reform Club of New York and by Single Tax men throughout the nation. A publication in the City of Mexico, "The Mexican Trader," printed in English and Spanish provided a copy of this edition to its subscribers with an editorial written by a Henry George man who was living in Mexico City at the time.

Jerry Simpson died October 23, 1905, in Wichita. Again, like Lincoln, he was unorthodox as to church affiliation and when the end was approaching he sent for his old friends Victor Murdock and David D. Leahy, who came to his bedside in St. Francis Hospital. The last rites were conducted by the Masonic Order, the funeral address being an eloquent tribute by Victor Murdock.