HENRY GEORGE IN CALIFORNIA.

BY NOAH BROOKS.

IN the autumn of 1866 I was the editor of the "Times," a daily newspaper published in San Francisco. One day the foreman of the composing-room, after disposing of business concerning which he had come to my desk, somewhat hesitatingly told me that one of the compositors in his department had written several editorial articles, by way of experiment; and they were very good, so the foreman thought. But the young printer had destroyed his productions, after passing them around among his intimates in the office. Would the editor-in-chief like to look at one of the young man's writings? I said I should be glad to see one, and if he sent me anything worth printing it should be used and the writer should be paid for it.

A few hours later, a bundle of sheets of Manila paper was laid on my desk by Mr. Turrell, the foreman, who, with a smile, said that the young printer had happened to have ready an article which he was willing to submit to my judgment. I read the paper, at first with a preoccupied mind and in haste, and then with attentiveness and wonder. Considering the source from which it came, the article was to me remarkable. I recollect that it was written in a delicate, almost feminine hand, in lines very far apart, and making altogether a bulk which had at first misled me as to the actual length of the disquisition. The article was not long, and was entitled "The Strides of a Giant"; it was descriptive of the gradual extension of the Asiatic frontiers of Russia, the changes that had taken place in the relations of the European powers, and the apparent sympathetic approach of the United States and Russia toward each other.

In some doubt as to the originality of this paper, sent to me by a young and unknown printer, I first looked through the American and foreign reviews on my table, then, satisfying myself that the article had not been "cribbed" from any of these publications, I changed the title to "The Two Giants," and printed it as the "leader" in the "Times" of November 30, 1866. Let me say that when I told my foreman that, surprised by the excellence of the English and the erudition exhibited in the article, I had some doubts concerning the originality of the young printer's work, he warmly replied that the young fellow was a thoroughly honest man and would no more borrow ideas than he would steal. Oh, no; my good friend Turrell would risk his reputation on the young compositor's honesty.

Lest it be supposed that I am trusting to my memory for these details of an incident which happened more than thirty years ago, I will explain that this story (with the editorial article in question) was written out by some one familiar with the facts and printed in a San Francisco paper, November 7, 1897, soon after the death of Henry George. From that reprint I take the following striking paragraphs:

These two nations [the United States and Russia], opposites in many things, have yet much in common. Though the government of one be representative of concentrated authority, and the other of the farthest advance of radical progress, they alike rest upon the affections of the great masses of their people.

The one has just celebrated the one thousandth anniversary of her national life. The other has yet a decade to pass before completing her first century. Yet each feels in her veins the pulses of youth, and sees beyond the greatness of her future. Broad as is the domain of each, no impassable barriers hedge them in; rapid as is their progress, it seems yet hardly commenced; wonderful as is

their greatness, it is but the promise of what shall be. They have each a work to do—each a destiny to accomplish. Each has within herself the elements of immense wealth and power, which are to be developed and evolved. Each is engaged in great material enterprises—each, too, in greater moral works which look to the elevation of men. Through the pathless forests and over the virgin lands of the West, or toward the ancient centers of the human race, each in her way bears the torch of Christian civilization. One moving toward the setting and the other toward the rising sun, spanning each a hemisphere, the Far West meets the Further East, and upon opposite shores of the Pacific their outposts look upon each other. Priest Benjamin, traversing in his dog-sledge the regions of eternal ice, bearing eastward on the verge of the arctic circle to the savages of the frozen land the cross raised on Calvary and the creed of Nicæa, passed on his way the Western pioneers who are laying the wire that is to marry the continents and girt the globe.

It may be noticed that all this time the name of the ambitious young type-setter had never been mentioned between the foreman and me; but after I had printed two or three of his articles, and it was time to give the author an office check for his pay, I asked, and was told that his name was Henry George. The foreman said that, if I were curious to see the young man, I would find him at a certain case, so many cases from the entrance to the composing-room. I looked with some interest, and was disappointed to find that my vigorous and well-informed contributor was a little man, so short that he had provided himself with a bit of plank on which he stood at a case too tall for him. He was apparently then about twenty-five years old, but in fact was ten years older, as he was born in 1831. His auburn hair was thin, and the youthfulness of his face was disputed by the partial baldness of his head; his blue eyes were lambent with animation and a certain look of mirthfulness.

Near acquaintance with Henry George confirmed me in my strong prepossession in his favor. He was bright, alert, good-humored, and full of fun; yet his talk showed that he was a thinker, that he thought independently of all writers, and that he had wide, serious, and original views of life. The man's manner, his simplicity, his diffidence and absolute sincerity, captivated me, and I liked him thoroughly and at once. He continued to contribute to the editorial page of the paper, sometimes with a fertility of production that dismayed me; and, after a few weeks, a vacancy having suddenly happened in my editorial staff, I invited George to the place. He was given a comfortable salary, and from that time forth he set type no more.

The newspaper on which we were engaged was owned by a syndicate and was managed by a board of trustees. The chairman of this board had personal ambitions which did not harmonize with that political independence with which I conducted the paper. One night, early in 1868, after a somewhat violent altercation with the trustee who would be editor as well as publisher, I quit the editorial charge of the "Times," accompanied by my second in command, Mr. William Bausman. By this time, owing to favoring circumstances, George had risen to the third place on the staff, and so it happened that the young printer became editor-in-chief, by the sudden creation of two vacancies above him. But, in the nature of things, he could not long endure the meddlesomeness of the managing chairman of the board of trustees, and he soon threw up his engagement in disgust and with some words of righteous wrath. The paper lingered for a few months, and eventually died of an excess of lay management.

Just at that time, the San Francisco "Dramatic Chronicle," a small sheet that had been circulated gratuitously in the theaters of the city, emerged into a full-blown, lively, and entertaining daily paper, under the management of Charles and Michael H. De Young. This young and stalwart power in journalism speedily absorbed Henry George into its editorial staff, and his articles contributed not a little to the brightness and vigor of the newspaper. But, feeling hampered by the restrictions which the policy of the "Chronicle" laid upon the staff, George severed his connection with the paper after a few weeks of service. We had continued on friendly, even intimate, relations up to this time; but he very soon after this went to New York as a purveyor of telegraphic news for the "San Francisco Herald." This journal had been revived under the management of its former editor, Mr. John Nugent, after a long suspension. The "Herald" had cast in its fortunes with the party opposed to the Vigilance Committee of 1856, and in a single night was reduced to bankruptcy by the withdrawal of every one of its advertisements. George's connection with the revived paper was of short duration. The "Herald" lingered for a brief space and expired finally and forever. Mr. George returned to California from New

York in the summer of 1869, and, a few months later, accepted the editorship and a small interest in the "Reporter," a lively young newspaper in Sacramento. The "Reporter" supported Henry H. Haight, the Democratic candidate for governor that year, and opposed the policy of granting State subsidies to the Central Pacific Railroad Compañy, then a growing power in the land. The great railway corporation managed to secure control of the newspaper, and Mr. George was ousted from the editorial chair; the name of the paper was changed to the "Record," and it was thenceforth known as "the railroad organ."

George returned to San Francisco, in no wise dismayed by his Sacramento misadventures, and disposed to make merry over the plans of the railroad magnates to manage a newspaper. He wrote and published several pamphlets attacking civic and political abuses, and prodding with no gentle pen the monopolies that were beginning to be developed in the Pacific States. His radical ideas found an ample channel for their expression in December, 1870, when, with a few friendly associates, he started the "Post," a small daily newspaper in San Francisco.

In 1871 I left California for New York, where I was established in my calling, and where, in 1880, I again met Henry George, who had left California "for good and all," as he grimly expressed it. During the intervening years, after a manful struggle to maintain the "San Francisco Post," George had accepted the State office of inspector of gas-meters, which he held for four years. He had just published his now famous book "Progress and Poverty." When we met in New York, I chaffed George good-naturedly on the apparent inconsistency of his having accepted a State office which was commonly regarded as a sinecure, while he was preaching and teaching rigid reforms in public affairs. He warmly protested that the office of inspector of gas-meters was no sinecure; it imposed upon him a great deal of work; and I afterward learned from others that this was the real state of the case, although many people ignorantly believed, and perhaps still believe, that the office held by George was a good place for a lazy man. He confided to me at that time, however, that he could hire some of his work to be performed by others without entire loss of his official pay; and he had done that, he said, in order to get time to do some writing which he thought was important. In fact, while holding this office he had been slowly and with great painstaking evolving his single-tax theory, as that was now set forth in his first and most famous book. He came to New York hopeful for a fuller recognition than had been given to him in California. The materialistic, intensely practical people of the Pacific States did not understand Henry George. They thought him harebrained, unpractical, and a dreamer. On his part, he was disgusted with the disdainful cynicism with which he and his theories had been treated in California. Up to the time of his leaving the Pacific States he had not given much publicity to his single-tax theory; but he had others in plenty. He was a contributor to the early numbers of the "Overland Monthly," then edited by Bret Harte. There was printed in that periodical (October, 1868) a strong and well-written article by George, entitled "What the Railroad Will Bring Us," in which the writer took a rosy view of the probable future of California, then about to be connected with the older States of the Union by the Central Pacific Railroad, which was rapidly approaching completion. He was moved to prophesy that San Francisco would be the second, if not the first, city of the republic. But at the same time he predicted a greater concentration of wealth, with a long train of popular misfortunes and disasters, arguing that the poor would be poorer and the rich richer.

"Progress and Poverty" at first slowly made its way to fame. But it was not very long before all men were thinking and talking about the revolutionary ideas of the book. Gradually the former printer and editor was widely quoted on both sides of the Atlantic as a philosopher and reformer of great originality and boldness. Of the wonderful spread of his novel ideas, the vast circulation of his book, and the great interest that attached to everything he wrote or said, it is not necessary for me to speak. Henry George became a famous man, and his name was made known throughout all civilized nations. Going abroad, in 1881, he was received with honor and acclaim, and even those who violently opposed his economic theories respected him for his sincerity, his simplicity of manner, and his obvious devotion to the truth as he thought it had been revealed to him.

On his return from Europe, and at intervals thereafter, I met Henry George in New York. We often talked together about the old times in San Francisco, and many a hearty laugh we had over our amusing adventures in the editorial conduct of the

"Times." Up to the last day of his life he retained his buoyancy of spirits, his unaffected simplicity of manner, his deference to the opinions of others, and his almost boyish candor of demeanor. Unspoiled by attentions and honors that might have turned the head of any other poor young printer, George preserved his native dignity and self-respect, without betraying any spark of elation that might have been kindled in his heart by his sudden leap to fame. In his later years, especially after his first appearance in the mayoralty contest of New York, I thought I detected a note of querulousness in his voice, as if he were discouraged by the slowness with which his new philosophy made its way among men. He was gratified at the sale of his books, but the practical acceptance of his doctrines was slower than he wished it might have been.

It is quite possible, even probable, that the slight tone of querulousness to which I have referred was really due to the insidious approach of disease, rather than to any discouragement at the popular apathy concerning his theories. It should be borne in mind that Henry George was a firm and deeply sincere believer in the proposition that humanity and the best of humanity's institutions could be safeguarded only by the general adoption of the views on economic questions which he had made peculiarly his own. With the feeling that life is short and that his own life might at any hour be ended, he threw himself into the thick of affairs, desperately determined to "do his level best" to mitigate the numberless ills that afflict human society, regardless of what the consequences might be to himself. In his two mayoralty campaigns he refused to spare himself; and especially in the campaign of 1897, when he must have known something of the danger into which his ardent temperament was leading him, he persisted in labors that were mighty enough to tax to the uttermost the physical energies of even the most stalwart of men. He had a sublime faith in the ultimate triumph of the principles which he represented; and considering the self-sacrificing attitude which he steadfastly maintained, it is not too much to say that Henry George was a martyr to those principles.

But it should be said here that the young printer who had been thus raised up to the championship of ideas purely economic finally became something more than the champion of those ideas. The second campaign in the city of New York, under the influence of circumstances entirely beyond his control, broadened far away from his single-tax theories, and beyond any mere partizan platform. Eventually the fight became one for good government; it was a manful struggle against the "boss" system in politics, and against all forms of political corruption.

To those of us who knew the singular purity of Henry George's motives of life and action, it was not surprising that he should be found fighting with tremendous energy for honest government, for a system of politics that should be wholly disinterested and free from the immoral influences of combinations, rings, and "bosses." In course of time, the general public saw this, too; for it was apparent that this man represented something more than mere theories regarding the valuation and taxation of property. In the minds of the people he stood for things which are of good report in human society and government. So it came to pass that when he fell fighting like a gallant knight in the heated climax of a crusade, thousands of those who had no sympathy with his economic views lamented his untimely death with real grief. They felt that a powerful force for good had been removed from the ranks of living men.

In common with multitudes of others, my own last impression of the career of this remarkable man has been tinged with pathos deepened by the suddenness of his exit. There may have been something tragical in store for him in the ultimate failure of his hopes. We cannot tell. But there can be no question as to his devotion to the cause which he had made his own, none as to the heroic self-sacrifice with which he espoused the cause of the general good. What premonitions he may have had of the catastrophe that finally wrecked his life, we may not fully know. But it is certain that the persistence of his indomitable spirit brought him to his end. He died in November, 1897, just thirty-one years after I first descried him, composing-stick in hand, standing on the uplift of a strip of plank before the printer's case in San Francisco.