

Henry George's Funeral Rites

(From the *New York Sun*, Dec. 31, 1920.)

A VETERAN New Yorker, who had attended the stately burial of Bishop Burch on Thursday, looked out eastward from the grounds of the slowly growing Cathedral—across the treetops of Morningside Park and mile after mile of city roofs—and remarked:

"New York has had some impressive funerals in the twentieth century, but it had one in the closing years of the nineteenth which excelled all its successors and stands out in my recollection as the most emotional and dramatic public event that has ever come within the range of my observation. And that was the funeral of Henry George.

"No, it was not the pageantry of the thing that counted; it was the outpouring of unrestrained human feeling in recognition of a noble life and a noble death, at a time of intense political excitement.

"It would be difficult for a first class professional dramatist to concoct a cumulation of events leading up to a man's sudden death in a way better calculated than those actual events of New York history to throw an aura of glory about the dead man and move the hearts of a great city to a passionate demonstration of homage equalling that which Paris had poured out some years earlier at the bier of Victor Hugo.

"Just consider the circumstances. Henry George, the author of 'Progress and Poverty,' whose saintly character all men recognized, whether or not they agreed with his novel conceptions in the field of political economy—Henry George, the friend of man, died in the closing week of the fiercest Mayoralty campaign in the memory of New Yorkers, a campaign in which he was one of the candidates!

"Not only that, but all the world knew that he had entered that campaign with the full knowledge that it would probably kill him—deliberately taken his life in his hand, not because he wanted to be Mayor of New York, but because his election would have been an invaluable advertisement for the Single Tax doctrine, the adoption of which he firmly believed would establish the reign of social justice.

"So the people looked upon Henry George as a martyr, and all classes of society took the same view. His body lay in state in Grand Central Palace, and if he had been a king instead of an oldtime printer his spirit would have had cause for gratification at the demonstration over that peaceful body—the gray beard and the domelike brow visible through a glass panel in the coffin lid beneath the blaze of an immense electric light—on the Sunday preceding election day.

"Thousands upon thousands of people waited in the streets from early morning to obtain places in the seemingly endless line that drifted past the candidate whose strange and premature 'election' had thrown the politicians into confusion. Sobbing women lifted their children to look upon the face of the 'martyr.' Tears became contagious, and rough men sobbed without shame.

"In the afternoon the line was cut off for a great memorial meeting, which brought the flower of New York to that hall of mourning. There had been four candidates in that extraordinary campaign. The three survivors all attended the memorial meeting and made reverent speeches in honor of the rival whose place in the public affections had made him feared by them all. Those candidates were Seth Low (Fusion), Gen. Benjamin Tracy (Republican) and Robert A. Van Wyck (Tammany). They're all dead now.

"There had been some foul work during the campaign. Henry George had been first jockeyed out of the Fusion nomination and then viciously attacked by former friends and champions who had sold out to Tammany. A day or two before his death, when his failing heart was barely keeping him alive, a pretended admirer had visited him with the object of picturing him to the public as an ambitious fanatic who had lost his reason.* It was on top of that, when public feeling seemed to be nearing a boiling-over point, that Henry George found peace. And then the passions of the election suddenly became foolish and petered out.

"The speeches of the candidates sounded a little strained and shamefaced.† The public in the galleries were more interested in looking down upon the illuminated apostolical head in the coffin and in observing the expressive personality of Henry George's lifelong friend and medical adviser, Dr. J. E. Kelly, who had warned him of the condition of his heart before he took the candidacy, and who since his death had made known his martyrdom to the public. And then there was an oration by Father McGlynn.

"If anything had been needed to bring all those dramatic elements to an emotional climax, that something would have been supplied by the oration of the powerful priest whose excommunication for his defiance of Rome in espousing the political economy of Henry George had shaken the world in an earlier generation. Five years prior to Henry George's death in 1897 Rome had taken back Father McGlynn into its fold and given him a parish near New York.

"It was as a grief stricken giant that he appeared upon the platform to praise the man he had loved and fought for. His rugged face was working with emotion, his voice rumbled in his chest. His first words were a keynote to what he had to say, for, adapting the gospel words about John the Baptist, he said:

"'There was a man sent of God and his name was—Henry George.'

"And when, after a few minutes of broken and disconsolate utterance, the orator found his inspiration, the man was transfigured, and that great audience listened breathlessly to what was possibly the greatest mortuary address of modern times."

*This article appeared on the day following Henry George's death in the *Morning Journal* (now the *New York American*), then as now, edited by William R. Hearst. The author was Alfred Henry Lewis, since deceased.—EDITOR SINGLE TAX REVIEW.

†The *Sun* is in error. The candidates did not speak, but all sent tributes.—EDITOR SINGLE TAX REVIEW.