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Henry George's Speaking in the Land Reform Movements:

The West Coast 'Training Phase'

By CLYDE E. REEVES

HENRY GEORGE'S FIRST SPEECH officially "in" the Land League Movements would be "Why Work is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labor Restless," delivered at the Metropolitan Temple, San Francisco, March 8, 1878, as the first of an intended series under the auspices of the "Land Reform League of California." According to George's son and biographer, Henry George, Jr., this league was "the first organization of any kind anywhere in the world to propagate Henry George's ideas."¹ It would be difficult to estimate how many others were to follow, but obviously there were a lot. Charles Albro Barker credits the League with being "the first of hundreds, perhaps thousands of its kind the world around."²

In a broader sense, however, George's speaking "in the Land League Movements" would include virtually all of his significant speaking activity from the completion of his "solution" for the world's land problem in a relatively finished form sometime in 1886 until his death some twenty-one years later. Once he had formulated his final, specific solution to the puzzle of the expanding slough of deep want in the midst of pyramiding great wealth, which he then put down in written form in *Progress and Poverty*, one of the world's all-time, world-wide best sellers in political economy, his message did not change in any of its essential aspects. Whether speaking in behalf of the Irish National Land League; the Land Restoration League of Great Britain; the Knights of Labour of Hamilton, Ontario; the Brooklyn Revenue Reform Club; the Free Trade Association of New York; the Trades and Labour Council of Melbourne, or the Society for Ethical Culture of Philadelphia, the substance of what he had to say was ultimately the same.

His diagnosis was invariably that the fundamental cause of social injustice was monopoly, and the most fundamental monopoly, the

¹ Henry George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1930), p. 294.

² Charles A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 245.

institution of private property in land. His remedy was simple: the elimination of the cause by eliminating to all intents and purposes the private "ownership" of land. His proposed method of accomplishing this by having the people take through taxes the full annual value of the land anyone was using, exclusive of any and all improvements upon it—the so-called "single tax"—was somewhat incidental. But it did round out the familiar four-part structure of his speeches that generally went like this: Here are some glaring examples of poverty and injustice from your own local and recent experiences and from my own. The basic cause of these and all others like them can be traced directly to just one thing, the private ownership of land. The necessary and only cure for these evils is the total elimination of private property in land. And here is a method that will do the job without disturbing present title or "nominal" ownership of anyone's home, place of business, private enterprise, accumulated wealth, or the fruits of any of his past or future labors; here is a means that will at the same time spur greater productivity and prosperity by doing away with all the other obnoxious and burdensome taxes that are now hampering production.

I

Land Policy, the Perennial Problem

GEORGE WAS NOT, of course, the only one working on the land problem at the time. Land policy was, and had been from time immemorial, a perennial problem of this old world. California, as a new part of a new country, was presenting one kind of a problem. Somewhat similar were the land problems of other relatively new areas such as Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and parts of Canada. In contrast, very old countries such as Ireland presented an acute land problem in an entirely different kind of a configuration. Scotland's problem was similar in some respects, yet significantly different in others. England's internal land problem was in some respects similar, in others quite different. But at the same time England externally was confronted with the added problem of having somehow to try to cope with the land problems of Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Canada, and, in fact, all of the significant parts of her widespread empire without damaging the vested interests of English landlords who owned huge tracts in all parts of her own dominions and even in the United States and elsewhere. In all of these countries, old and new, the problem of land policy was again becoming acute, and many men and groups were at work on it.

Among George's contemporaries was James McClatchy, a well-known California editor of the time who some feel was the man who gave George the stimulus that elevated him to the heights.³ For some time McClatchy had been mulling over the California land situation, along with a number of other irritating California problems. Michael Davitt, the "Father of the Irish National Land League," had been working on the Irish land problem specifically for seven and a half years in Dartmoor prison and generally since the great famine of '47 when, at the age of five, he had been forcibly evicted with his mother and the rest of the children and left by a Mayo roadside homeless, helpless, and virtually hopeless. Among an incredible variety of other things, Alfred Russel Wallace, Britain's brilliant scientist and biologist who is best noted for arriving independently at substantially the same conclusions on evolution and natural selection as Darwin, was working on the land problem. So, continuing in the footsteps of his famous father, was John Stuart Mill. Herbert Spencer was also, and Hyndman, who was to become one of Britain's leading socialists. Gladstone was working on it, and so too was Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, and although they did not yet know it, these two upright gentlemen were already working toward a "deal."

The question disturbing George and his contemporaries, then, was far from a new one, and the essential features of George's "solution" were not entirely new either. He had had a long line of precursors.

In his lecture "Moses," for example, George traces his basic ideas at least as far back as that ancient gentleman. In his speeches and writings he frequently cited the French Physiocrats, Jefferson, Mill, Spencer, and others. Hyndman, in 1882, showed George Thomas Spence's lecture of 1775 on "The Real Rights of Man," and according to George, Junior, George was delighted to find in it marked resemblances to his own theories.⁴

As a result of some spadework of his own, Alfred Russel Wallace credited a physician named Robert Dick with anticipating, in a London publication titled *On the Evils, Impolicy, and Anomaly of Individuals Being Landlords and Nations Tenants*, not only the main theses of

³ See unidentified obituary of McClatchy in Henry George Scrapbooks, Vol. 10, p. 4, in Henry George Collection, New York (City) Public Library. Subsequent references to items in the collection will be identified by HGC. See also Anna George DeMille, *Henry George: Citizen of the World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), p. 78, and Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

⁴ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 368.

George, but of Marx as well.⁵ While George was overseas in 1889, a discharged employee of his paper, the *Standard*, J. W. Sullivan, in a moment of acrimony, published an accusation that George had plagiarized his entire philosophy from Patrick Edward Dove's *Theory of Human Progression*. And in the very wake of that a "letter to the editor" writer raised the question of whether George had not lifted all of his ideas from the writings of one Bronterre O'Brien through a Mr. John Day, who was known to have taken them with him upon emigrating from London to America and to have been in close contact with George in California during the "incubation" period of his theories.⁶

George, however, cleared himself of all such charges rather easily in his own time, and latter-day scholars are in agreement that with the exception of the sources he recognized and cited in his writings and speeches, his system was the product of his own thinking.⁷ In any event, he undoubtedly had a long line of forerunners, obscure and renowned. The obscure, however, were so obscure that George and most other men had never heard of their proposals, and the renowned were renowned for other things. Birnie summarizes George's role in this way:

He was the first to popularize the notion that the land was the source of our social evils. In the writings of his predecessors this idea was expressed but it was buried beneath masses of tedious verbiage. George placed it in the clear light of day and revealed its significance to the world.⁸

George's system was manifested partially in his earlier writings and in

⁵ Alfred Russel Wallace. *My Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1905), p. 259.

⁶ Unidentified newspaper clipping from "Correspondence" in *The Commonwealth*, HGC, George Scrapbooks, Vol. 6, p. 22.

⁷ See Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 520; Albert Jay Nock, *Henry George: An Essay* (New York: Wm. Morrow and Co., 1939), p. 104; Arthur Birnie, *Single Tax George* (London, New York, etc.: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1939), pp. 57-8. See also George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 520, and for a statement from Day that aims to clear George of the O'Brien charge, p. 230.

⁸ Birnie, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Lists of forerunners appear in most of the general works and the biographies. They vary somewhat, but one could get a reasonably complete list, if he desired, by collating them. Nock, for example, mentions William Penn and Peter Stuyvesant and stresses the place of Thomas Paine and the remarkable coincidence between George's "final proposals" and those of an obscure Wisconsin tailor, Edwin Burgess, somewhat earlier (p. 104). George R. Geiger, in *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: MacMillan, 1933), devotes an entire chapter, Chapter IV, to "Background and Originality," and refers to the proposal of Robert Fleming Gourlay, a Scotsman emigrated to Canada in 1817, as a "startling anticipation" (p. 43, n. 32). In *The Single Tax Yearbook*, edited by Joseph Dana Miller (New York: 1917), there is an article by Samuel Millikin, "Forerunners of Henry George," and a listing of some of the more significant predecessors and some interpretation of their relationships can be found under "The Single Tax" in *Great Debates in American History*, Vol. 10, p. 75.

finished form in *Progress and Poverty*, and it emerged in his speaking in just about the same way and at just about the same time. Starting probably with his first significant public speaking in the Tilden-Hayes campaign of 1876, his "Land League" type speeches began to develop. They continued through the next twenty-one years in what can conveniently be considered as five phases, although the "Land Leagues" themselves had come, blossomed, and waned by the end of the second one: the first West Coast, or "training," phase; the "polishing" phase, mainly in Ireland, Scotland, and England; the second American phase that included George's first two personal campaigns for political office; the Australian phase that probably represented the apex, perhaps a slightly belated apex, of his personal popularity and success; and the final American phase or denouement.

The first, the "training" phase, is of special interest for a number of reasons. Although George very soon learned to speak completely extemporaneously and adopted that mode almost exclusively, his earlier speeches were all prepared in manuscript form, written out in longhand, and read directly from the manuscripts, and the manuscripts have been preserved. We can feel reasonably certain, then, that what we have as texts for those speeches and what he actually said corresponded very closely. Although relatively few in number as compared with those of other, later stages of his career, his speeches in this phase provide a good example of each of the main forms that his message took thereafter and of each of the significant patterns that he used over and over again throughout the rest of his speaking career. We find in the Tilden campaign sequence in microcosm the exact pattern that he followed in macrocosm in his "full" career. And although there is substantial evidence that he became considerably better with more experience later on, there is also considerable evidence that, in spite of the fact that he read from manuscript, he was significantly better than average as a speaker right from the start.

II

Dashaway Hall and the Stumping of California

THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN SPEECH is generally and universally recognized as the poorest and lowest form of public address, and rightly so. Many, many speakers simply reshuffle the old clichés of the "all things to all men" speech and let it go at that. But not so with Henry George in his Dashaway Hall speech of August fifteenth to kick off the Democratic

presidential campaign of 1876 in San Francisco. Entries in his diary show that he worked hard and carefully over a period of weeks in its preparation.⁹ His daughter and biographer, Anna Angela deMille, correctly observes that "the speech was not a political harangue, but a carefully prepared study of economic conditions."¹⁰ Barker labels "The Question Before the People" as a "writer's speech" and says that "in a 12,000 word address . . . George proceeded a hard way."¹¹ It is quite apparent that the matter was somewhat more impressive than the manner of delivery. Mrs. deMille says he "read his manuscript slowly and deliberately," and George, Junior, reports that "he stood beside the reading desk on which he had his manuscript spread and read by glances, and spoke slowly and distinctly."¹² As to the quality and nature of the job, George, Junior, quotes ex-District Attorney Thomas P. Ryan:

If we rate his speech . . . by the standard of eloquence of the great French orator, Bishop Dupanloup—a thorough knowledge of one's subject—he was indeed eloquent. That the address was extraordinarily able and convincing was the universal opinion of those who heard it. . . . At its conclusion, Mr. James G. Maguire, since so distinguished as an upright judge and Member of Congress, arose and said it was the ablest political address to which he had ever listened, and moved that it be printed for distribution as a campaign document, which was done.¹³ Barker observes further that:

. . . his prepared address caught on . . . [and] the Democratic State Committee asked him to stump the state. . . . There is every indication that he loosened up and performed with flare and effect . . . [and] at campaign's end George received the compliment of being invited to give the principal address at the closing Democratic rally in San Francisco, at Platt's Hall.¹⁴

George's diaries show that in addition to the Dashaway "keynote" he made at least seventeen other speeches throughout California between September 30 and November 6.¹⁵ Geiger reports that "his success in

⁹ HGC, Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

¹⁰ DeMille, p. 74.

¹¹ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 236. It is of some interest to contrast Barker's comment on George's speaking style here with Birnie's on George's writing style in *Progress and Poverty*: "George, it is true, carried into his writing some of the tricks and artifices of the public speaker. Like Burke, he was an orator with a pen in his hand" (Birnie, *op. cit.*, p. 68). The original manuscript of the speech is in HGC.

¹² DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 74; George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 266.

¹³ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 268.

¹⁴ Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-7.

¹⁵ HGC. In "The Speaking Career of Henry George," unpublished dissertation (Northwestern, 1952), Albert Jefferson Croft estimates George's significant speeches in

the campaign was immediate," and that "he soon became known as one of the best political speakers on the coast."¹⁶ George himself felt that he had come a long way in the campaign. In a letter to his mother he wrote.:

I did my best, for my heart was in it . . . [and] what I accomplished was very gratifying. . . . I have always felt that I possessed the requisites for a first-class speaker, and that I would make one if I could get the practice; and I started into this campaign with the deliberate purpose of breaking myself in. It was like jumping overboard to learn to swim. But I succeeded. I think no man in the state made as much reputation as I have made. From not being known as a speaker I have come to the front. I wanted to do this, not as a matter of vanity or for the mere pleasure of the thing; but to increase my power and usefulness.¹⁷

The text of the Dashaway Hall speech reveals that George was already using as the nucleus of his appeal a good many of the ideas that would constitute the "core" of his message throughout the rest of his speaking career. Thus his month and a half, self-imposed, intensive training program in the political campaign of '76 served an important function in helping him to set and improve the oral presentation of those ideas that would hold a central position in his Land League speaking later on.

III

The University of California Lecture

THERE WAS TALK in 1877 (though George himself seems to have been responsible for little if any of it) of creating a chair of political economy at the University of California and of appointing George as its first occupant. Whether that was the ultimate aim or not, he was invited to present a lecture there on March 9, and he did. He apparently considered it an opportunity of high importance, for Mrs. deMille reports that he "took much care in the preparation," and an examination of the text substantiates that judgment.¹⁸ That substance still outweighed presenta-

the California period at ten. Viewed in their role of training for subsequent activity, however, the eighteen speeches in the political campaign take on added significance.

¹⁶ Geiger, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Quoted in George, Jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 270-1.

¹⁸ DeMille, p. 75. The text is quite readily attainable. It is probably most easily found in *The Complete Works of Henry George*, Vol. VII (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1911), which is available in most libraries. It appeared in the March 1880 issue of *Popular Science Monthly*. A personal copy in pamphlet form can be had for 5¢ by writing the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 50 E. 69th St., New York 21, N. Y. Its title is "The Study of Political Economy."

tation is apparent. George, Jr., reports that his father "read from his manuscript and occupied about three quarters of an hour—probably three quarters of an hour of astonishment for regents and faculty."¹⁹ A number of the things George said on that occasion were not the kind out of which faculty and administration support would be likely to grow. They were, however, and still are, the kind that show a broad and deep thinker thinking broadly and deeply and reporting the results with integrity to his own beliefs and without regard for the effect upon support from the people who would have to provide the support in order to make his campaign a "winning" one. Geiger observes:

If a professorship were really George's aim, then he undoubtedly made a deliberate sacrifice of his ambitions in this address, for he could not possibly have been unconscious of its effects. He was always willing, however, to sacrifice everything but his convictions.²⁰

This particular facet of George's character (*ethos*) is worthy of particular notice, for it was demonstrated again and again throughout his career. As a potential nominee for the California Constitutional Convention that he was at least in part instrumental in bringing about in 1878, he first turned down a proffered offer from the dominant Workingmen's Party: he flatly refused to agree to their stipulation that their delegates follow the party's line. Nor could he see anywhere near eye to eye with the other major faction, the conservative opposition bloc made up of a coalition of Republicans and Democrats. Eventually he did become a nominee of a Democratic Nominating Convention that represented but a weak element to begin with. Even then he proceeded to take a strong stand against one of their planks. Barker sums up the outcome:

The short story of George's candidacy for the constitutional convention, then, adds definition to the longer story of his having made himself a solitary, a cynic about present politics, an idealist for the principles he would not compromise. The story's end discovers the voters letting him retain his solitude.²¹

¹⁹ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 275.

²⁰ Geiger, *op. cit.*, p. 48, n. 35.

²¹ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 252. This statement could be applied equally well to his candidacy for Secretary of State for New York in 1887. It would not apply, however, to his campaigns for Mayor of New York in 1886 and 1897. In the last he was making a very strong run when his sudden death just before Election Day ended the campaign. For the first there still seems to be a rather strong possibility that he actually drew the largest number of votes but was "counted out." See Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 480 ff.; DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 152; George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 480.

Shortly after removing to the East a little later, when again badly in need of money, he lost out on another potentially lucrative political stump-tour in the Hancock-Garfield contest, similar to the earlier Tilden tour in California. In the very first of what was supposed to be a series, his clearly stated, honestly held belief in "free trade" went counter to the "protection" stand indicated by local popular sentiment and the Democratic "party line" at the time, and he was invited by the sponsoring organization not to make any more speeches in its behalf.²² In 1886 he reportedly could have "traded" his candidacy for Mayor of New York for a Tammany-guaranteed and supported seat in the United States House of Representatives if he had been willing to sacrifice principle for personal advantage and advancement, but he refused.²³ His stand in the University of California lecture seems to be consistent with the man.

In the speech George laid down for the edification of the students—and perhaps the trepidation of the faculty and regents—the basic tenets of his position on political economy. He told them that the professional economists and professors of economics had bogged down in unproductive verbal hairsplitting and unnecessary and uncalled-for complexity and ramification. He charged them with inhumanity, implying even possible skulduggery, in interpreting currently popular "economic laws" in such a way as to defend the wealthy and powerful in their vested interests and to brush callously aside the plight of the unemployed man and his hungry family as none of their concern unless and until *laissez-faire* should swing the pendulum the other way and ease the situation automatically. He held that the real "laws of economics" were not remote and apart from human beings and their health and financial as well as social welfare, but were closely connected with them, and that a simple, comprehensible, and just science of political economy could be derived directly from a limited number of self-evident "laws of nature." He assured the students that the study need not be feared, or boring, or complex, and that they were all qualified to deal with the problems if they could "think for themselves." He also pointed out that inasmuch as matters of the production and distribution of wealth involve about nine tenths of all human effort and human thought, and directly and personally concern 100 per cent of humanity, as human beings they should busy themselves with those matters at once.

²² George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 336; DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 327; Nock, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²³ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 463; DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 143; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 463-4; Birnie, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

He did strike lightly against the principle of "protectionism" and assured the students that they need not take anyone else's word on that matter either, that a little deep thought about it on their own part would expose its fallacies and just as surely reveal the natural laws that point to absolute "free trade" as the far better policy. For the most part, however, George did not go into the details of his own solution. In a sense he put down the foundation, the broad outline upon which his system would be constructed. He posed some of the puzzling questions, presented the guidelines for their solution, but left the working out of the answers to the students themselves until such time as they might hear him again or perhaps read *Progress and Poverty*, which at the time was not even yet started. George felt that the lecture had been well received by the students but with distinct coolness by the regents and faculty, and he was probably right.²⁴ Perhaps the students were flattered by the thought that George thought them capable of thinking things out for themselves. Perhaps some of the regents and faculty members took umbrage at George's humorous inveighing against the university man who merely goes through the "educational machine" without thinking and comes out "a monkey with a microscope" or a "mule packing a library." He was not invited to speak again, and it is perhaps just as well. As Barker puts it in his book:

The rest of this biography would be much shorter had Henry George been fixed on the Pacific coast by being seated in a chair of political economy.²⁵

IV

The Fourth of July Oration—1877

IF THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN SPEECH is, in general, the lowest and poorest form of public address, probably next to it, and perhaps even less "memorable," is the patriotic commemorative oration. But George's speech for the Independence Day celebration at the California Theater, San Francisco, in 1877 far exceeds expectations. It, too, was very thoroughly prepared. George, Jr., tells us that when 'toward the middle

²⁴ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 280; DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 76; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

²⁵ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 243. Summaries of this and the other speeches covered in this study can be found in all of the general works cited in the footnotes thus far, as well as in Charles W. Lomas' article, "Kearney and George: The Demagogue and the Prophet," in *Speech Monographs* of March 1961. The most concise are in deMille, the most enthusiastic in Geiger, the most objective probably in Barker, Lomas, and the Croft dissertation. Because they come from a source very closely associated with the "fountainhead" at the time of their preparation and presentation, the analyses in George, Jr., are probably of special value.

of June" George was notified that he had been chosen "orator of the day" for that year, he "had been expecting this; had, in fact, begun work on his oration."²⁶ His daughter refers to the lecture, "The American Republic: Its Dangers and Possibilities," as a "long and scholarly address," and Barker estimates that it "must have required sixty or seventy minutes to deliver, and perhaps more."²⁷ An unidentified newspaper reporter who heard the speech put the matter this way:

Fourth of July orations are usually too long . . . but the oration of Mr. George was good throughout and full of food for thought. It was not turgid panegyric of the greatness and grandeur of the nation, . . . but after giving due consideration to the glories of the past, it indulged in some reflections upon the lessons of the present and the tendencies of the existent conditions of the Republic.²⁸

Latter-day critics correctly note that for modern ears George's "rhetoric" does tend to seem a bit turgid and his "style" ornate.²⁹ It is well, however, to keep in mind that at the time of presentation those were not at all unusual characteristics of the speaking of even the "best" speakers, and particularly in "commemorative addresses." Our unidentified contemporary reviewer noted George's relative weakness in delivery but, in comparative evaluation, still gave him very favorable treatment. He remarked that the East did not fare nearly as well oratorically as California on that Fourth of July:

California was happy in the possession of three great orators, Senator Newton Booth, Col. Ingersoll, and Mr. Henry George. The latter may not be an "orator" in the sense that either of the others is, but in the matter of literary expression, and in the quality of his thought upon public questions, we regard him as at least their peer. Mr. George's matter is better than his style of delivery, and the effect of several of the most striking passages . . . was impaired, if not lost upon the audience, owing to a want of that skill in oratory which enables Ingersoll to make a telling point very often when he enunciates the merest platitudes.³⁰

Probably the best stated interpretation of the role and nature of the

²⁶ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 283.

²⁷ DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 240. The complete text can be found in Volume VII of *The Complete Works of Henry George*. The last part, under the title, *The Ode to Liberty*, has appeared in a number of anthologies and can be obtained most easily in pamphlet form from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. In this writer's opinion it is far better, especially in view of the present state of political and social affairs, to get and read the whole speech.

²⁸ Unidentified newspaper clipping in HGC, Scrapbooks, Vol. 6, p. 48. George, Jr., apparently quoting from this on page 288 of his book, identifies it as from the *Examiner*.

²⁹ Nock, *op. cit.*, p. 112; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 238; Lomas, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁰ HGC, Scrapbooks, Vol. 6, p. 48.

oration and its relation to the lecture at the University of California is the one given by George, Jr. The son says that the oration, like the lecture,

showed the broad sweep that Mr. George's mind was taking . . . his mind now enveloped the world. Not the progress of California, but human progress, . . . not particulars, but generals, not a question of policy, but the enunciation of the eternal law of "each for all and all for each."

And as the lecture was the exordium, the . . . speech became the peroration. One pointed to the simplicity of the natural order, the other to the necessity of following it. One turned to the fundamentals of the science relating to the social conditions under which civilized men should get their daily bread; the other sounded the war clarions and gave the battle cry of "liberty and equality." One came from the solitary—the man of the closet; the other from the man of the practical world of struggle. . . . Each was the complement of the other—the two primary elements in "Progress and Poverty"—the reflections of the thinker who hands down the law; the call of the leader who marshals the hosts.³¹

V

Land Reform League of California Lectures

BY THE TIME that George made his official debut as a speaker "in the Land League movements," then, with "Why Work Is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labor Restless," he had already expounded in a general and not yet fully refined form most of the essential elements that would ultimately make up his message. Significantly, in each case the background situation and conditions were entirely different. While the message was being refined, clarified, and perfected in substance, it was being molded and adapted to a number of key types of situations and audiences.

Up to this point George had been primarily an amateur. On this night he was about to launch himself as a professional lecturer. Unlike the highly partisan exuberant audiences at the political campaign rally speeches; unlike the captive audience of students, faculty, and regents at the academic lecture; and unlike the general holiday audience of the Fourth of July oration, this was to be a paying audience who would be present because they wanted to hear what George would have to say in turbulent times. It was to be a crucial test. His son reports:

By eight o'clock that night the lecturer was seized by "stage fright"; though for that matter he never in the rest of his life . . . was free from

³¹ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 282.

high nervous tension before speaking. There was reason enough that night for nervousness. He told no one, yet he was about to prove the ends for which he had desired to be a speaker. As the book on which he was at work was to contain his written message to the world, so now he intended to commence with this lecture the spoken word—to set forth his perceptions, thoughts, convictions, philosophy; to proclaim the equal rights of all men to the land as one potent means of ridding civilisation of involuntary poverty.³²

There were added reasons for tension in the extrinsic situation: work *was* scarce, wages *were* low, and labor was *indeed* restless, as evidenced by the rapid spread of "Kearneyism" in San Francisco and, as is usual in such circumstances, strong extreme reaction from the "conservative" side. Barker explains:

In political essence, Henry George and the Land Reform League . . . were making that most difficult of all democratic efforts: they were making the appeal to reason and dispassion to men already inflamed. The nature of the effort put enormous strain on George's powers as a speaker, and . . . he was a little overwhelmed by the task. . . . According to a witness "he kept his eyes on the paper and seemed to be so nervous he was almost frightened."³³

Immediate results were disappointing. In the first place, George faced only a small audience, an unusual experience for him.³⁴ It did little if anything to alleviate his chronic struggle to get out of debt, for "the expense very nearly equalled the receipts," and it did not create much of a stir as "the city papers dismissed it with a few words."³⁵ On the other hand, "some of the state papers noticed it favourably."³⁶ He repeated it in San Francisco, and "he delivered it in Sacramento and several . . . other cities under the short title of 'The Coming Struggle.' But he nowhere attracted large or even moderate-sized audiences."³⁷

³² George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 295.

³³ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

³⁴ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 248; George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 295; DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

³⁵ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 295.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Lomas, p. 56, n. 20, elaborates: "Among San Francisco papers only *Alta California* paid much attention to George's lecture, headlining it BALD AGRARIANISM. HENRY GEORGE PREACHES COMMUNISM IN METROPOLITAN TEMPLE. In Sacramento, the *Record-Union*, although it was the organ of the Central Pacific Railroad, was not similarly alarmed, but praised the speech as able, carefully prepared, evidencing close study, and presented in simple and forcible language. *Alta California*, March 27, 1878. *Record-Union*, April 12, 1878."

³⁷ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 296. See also Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 248. Croft, on p. 532 adds "Hamlet" to the "other California cities." George's diaries are of no help in trying to find out how many other cities heard the lecture or what cities they were. George was a sporadic diary keeper.

Long-run results were somewhat more favorable. Barker notes:

. . . the address did catch on, and one of Henry George's hardest years, 1878, does mark his first success—dimly prophetic of the decade of the 1880s—in using the spoken word to render his ideas into general currency. . . . Five months after first delivery, the *Argonaut* in two issues reprinted the essential argument. And, up to the present time, followers of Henry George still distribute copies as a concise introduction to his economic thought.³⁸

George himself thought he saw significant progress in a shorter time. Only about two months after first delivering the lecture in a letter to a friend he wrote that it 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 problems of our time. . . . The seed that I have for years been sowing is springing up on every hand. I have made to principle, sacrifices that were very bitter, but in my own time, I can see what at first I never expected to see, the result of my work. Where I stood alone, thousands now stand with me. The leaven is at work. And there can be but one result. But the struggle will be long and fierce. It is now only opening.³⁹

VI

Moses

FOR A PROTESTANT GENTLEMAN to elect to talk to a group of young Hebrew intellectuals about "Moses" at any time would take a considerable amount of courage. George not only had the courage but took the initiative and made of the speech what "is believed by many to have been the most polished and fervent talk he ever delivered."⁴⁰ According to his daughter's report, "the audience was deeply moved. Some of George's friends who heard the address considered it to be the finest he ever gave. One, Dr. Taylor, was thrilled."⁴¹

Barker feels that this was the first speech in which George struck "such an appealing eloquence as promised a successful future on the rostrum."⁴²

³⁸ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 248. Croft labels this speech "the first full statement of his socio-economic ideas before a public audience," and notes its close similarity to the overall organization and analysis in *Progress and Poverty* (p. 58).

³⁹ Quoted in DeMille, *op. cit.*, 79-80, from a letter of June 2, 1878, in *HGC*.

⁴⁰ Geiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴¹ DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Dr. Taylor is noteworthy in his own right. He had previously been secretary to Governor Haight of California. At the time he was Haight's partner in law in San Francisco. He was not only a lawyer but also an M.D. and had, in his earlier years, filled about as wide a variety of jobs as George himself.

⁴² Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

Elsewhere he states:

Combining in one speech the qualities of sermon and oration, George hit at last a vein of emotion that could lift men's hearts. In due time . . . it would become a favorite address. We shall find Henry George giving it again and again . . . especially . . . Sundays, and particularly acceptable in Scotland and England.⁴³

It seems somewhat strange that although George very shortly afterward abandoned the "manuscript" mode of delivery in favor of the extemporaneous, and thereby improved tremendously in effectiveness, he apparently continued throughout his lifetime to read this, probably the most popular and most requested speech that he ever presented. In commenting on George's method somewhat later, his son reports:

He did not memorise, nor, except in the single lecture on Moses, did he read. He sometimes used a skeleton of heads, but his common practice was to speak without written notes of any kind.⁴⁴

We find deMille, in describing a tour in 1890 at the peak of George's effectiveness as a speaker: "Always the speeches were different, new, extemporaneous—save for the ever-popular written lecture, 'Moses.'"⁴⁵ Once he hit his stride he *always* extemporized everything else, but "Moses" he always read.

In the lecture George described Moses as one of the world's truly great leaders: a leader not only in recognizing for the first time the "Creator's" intentions with regard to land, and in establishing a policy that would effectively prevent land monopoly, but also a unique religious leader who, contrary to the usual method of placing all emphasis upon a promise of justice and equity in some future life in another world, tried to make poverty and want nonexistent *here on earth*. George reaffirmed the God of Moses as:

. . . a God of the living as well as of the dead; a God whose inimitable decrees will, in his life, give happiness to the people that hold them and bring misery among people that forget them.⁴⁶

This became, of course, the very essence of the "new crusade" started by George, the "new abolitionist," whose avowed goal was the total abolition

⁴³ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

⁴⁴ George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁴⁵ DeMille, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

of involuntary poverty from this earth. It is reflected in the brass plaque in San Francisco that memorializes his work:

Here in 1878-1879
Henry George
"The Prophet of San Francisco"
wrote
Progress and Poverty
Expounding Natural Laws
that, breached,
cause poverty
but, obeyed, assure us all
Peace, Progress, and Plenty⁴⁷

George forever thereafter held that what had been, was, and still is bringing "misery" upon us is the "forgetting" of two of those "inimitable decrees" of the Creator:

1. that all men have equal rights to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by nature, and
2. that each man has an exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labor.⁴⁸

George rested his entire system upon these two "natural laws" which he believed were "self-evident" principles of the Creator. They were implicit in "Moses" as in all the rest of his speeches.⁴⁹

With the lecture "Moses" George not only rounded out the basic forms that his message would thereafter take but discovered what was probably to become his most effective combination—the land-reform speech with the religious point of focus. He then retired, for a time, from the platform, completed his book, and was not heard from again as a significant speaker until after he had left California and removed to the east coast.

VII

Summary and Conclusions

ALTHOUGH GEORGE, AT AGE THIRTY-NINE, was still somewhat of a tyro at public speaking, at the end of the relatively brief west-coast "training

⁴⁷ Miriam Allen deFord, *They Were San Franciscans* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1941), photograph opposite p. 129.

⁴⁸ Louis F. Post, *The Prophet of San Francisco* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930), p. 293. Post, a disciple of George, also gained considerable pre-eminence. He became a member of Woodrow Wilson's official family. Lomas points out that not only did the official family also include Joseph Tumulty, Brand Whitlock, and Col. Edward House, but two members of the cabinet, Newton Baker and Franklin Lane, who were also Georgists. (Lomas, *op. cit.*, p. 58, n. 30.)

⁴⁹ The full text can be found in Vol. VIII of *The Complete Works of Henry George*. It can also be obtained in pamphlet form from the Schalkenbach Foundation.

phase" of his speaking in the Land League Movements his accomplishments and progress were substantial and significant. A little later, after extensive practice on the platforms of Ireland, Scotland, and England, he was to become infinitely better, especially in delivery, the effective use of humor, audience contact and adaptation, and persuasiveness; yet, even with all of the hazards and encumbrances of the manuscript mode of presentation, he was already well above the average of the day as a public speaker.

In the five-week political campaign series of 1876, after starting out with a very carefully worked-out manuscript speech, he quickly made the transition over into the extemporaneous mode as the basic materials became so thoroughly familiar as to be always instantly at hand. In his longer, broader, and much more significant land-reform career, he followed in grand scale exactly the same pattern that is here seen in small scale.

Each of the four major California speeches, while concerned with the same basic message, differed from each of the others in a number of ways, particularly in the nature of the audiences and the occasions. Each was carefully studied and worked out in detailed manuscript form prior to delivery and was then read to the audience. Each was to be repeated in identical or modified form many times over the next twenty years. That the substance—the "what he had to say" (*inventio*, in the five ancient canons of rhetoric)—the organization (*dispositio*), and the style (*elocutio*) were solid is borne out not only by the expressed opinions of his contemporaries and of later scholars but by an inspection of the texts themselves. There is not one of the four that is not well worth a careful reading today. Where George still needed strengthening—in the areas of delivery (*pronuntiatio*) and note-free, manuscript-free, direct communication with his audiences (*memoria*)—he was also to develop a high degree of skill a little bit later on.

Before leaving California, then, George had discovered, and if he had not perfected, had at least developed to a considerable extent, three basic types of speeches that he would rely upon quite heavily thereafter: the first mainly "economic" in nature; the second of the "patriotic" variety, and the third with a "religious" theme and focus. He used the first quite frequently both at home and abroad in a variety of situations, most notably perhaps at "free trade" meetings either in free-trade areas or, paradoxically, in strongholds of protectionism. He also used it in political campaigns when "tariff reform" or "tax reform" were at issue.

The patriotic type was naturally better adapted to the United States than overseas and naturally received more extensive use at home. It was to be seen, and heard, on a wide variety of patriotic and historical occasions. It occasionally occurred as a political speech in high-plane campaigning. It formed the nucleus of protest speeches against restrictive actions or planned actions or legislation on the part of local, state, or national government. The third, the religious variety, had very heavy use at home and abroad, on Sundays, holidays, and all sorts of days during the week in all climes and situations. The three categories, of course, overlap. No "economic" speech was without strong religious overtones; no "sermon" without substantial economic freight, and no "patriotic" speech without significant amounts of both, and they all bore closely and directly upon the land question.

It is understandable that George did not yet feel secure enough to try the completely extemporaneous mode. After all, at the time of delivery of the last speech he was only about one third of the way through the writing of *Progress and Poverty*. Still the main framework for his speaking career appears to have been already set.

It is of some interest to note that of all the speeches George made during this, the training phase, the least successful from the standpoint of sizes of audiences faced, attention attracted, and favorable reactions elicited were the ones under the sponsorship of the Land Reform League of California. George was apparently ready for the Land Leagues before the Land Leagues were quite ready for George. It would seem almost as if he set about specifically and systematically readying himself in California for a coming movement that no one yet knew was on the horizon, for one that would break, when it did, not in California, but far away over in Ireland, and that he was ready two or three years ahead of time.

Whether George and his book "triggered" the movement, or the onrushing momentum of the forces that resulted in the movement set off George, or this was one of those occasions upon which the times and the man appear simultaneously, it is, of course, impossible to say. But in just a little while, after George completed his preparation stage and put his oratorical materials aside for a while, the Land League Movements were about to break with heavy impact. When they did, George would be ready to speak out.

Temple University