1876-1879

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Twice before he had the *Post*, George did pieces of writing by which he intended to raise himself into public prominence and leadership. Yet, though both the New York *Tribune* letter on Chinese immigration and *Our Land and Land Policy* retain significance today, neither one so much as made an assemblyman of Henry George in the state elections. His immediate thought, in 1871, that he would try a greater manifesto sometime, was for the next few years crowded out of the realm of practical possibilities by the demands of running a newspaper.

But intimations along the way tell us that no stage of pressure of work or of the enjoyment of success ever quite banished from his mind the urge to do a bigger, more developed and philosophical, presentation of the ideas in *Our Land and Land Policy*. If Hubert Howe Bancroft, ally of the California regionalists could bring off a monumental work of knowledge and thought, and publish it in San Francisco, Henry George could do the same. So George's own appreciation of Bancroft seems to read. Certainly he was determined to communicate his dedication, and his program, to people whom the San Francisco *Post* could never reach.

It is one thing to plan a noble book, and to envisage fondly, but at a comfortable distance in the working future, the ideas it will develop. It is altogether a different thing, many an author has found, to abandon accustomed routines and sources of income, to find the necessary books, to isolate one's self, to face the blank pages, and chapter by chapter to fill them with the symbols of persuasive thought. In this case more than a year and a half went by, after George lost the *Post*, before he concentrated heavily, and about two years and a half before he concentrated exclusively, on undertaking the full austerities of authorship. Though, within all the circumstances we know, it is easiest to think that he considered himself committed, from the moment when Senator Jones let him down, to go

ahead early with the major effort, we have no absolute evidence on the point. Doing several other things briefly, he was perhaps trying alternatives to composition, or was making up his mind. But it seems more likely that he was fortifying himself for the task.

In the spring of 1876 he wrote his father that he was going to try a new method of self-expression. He had done enough writing for the moment, he said, and enjoyed a good reputation for what he had done. He would not return to journalism for some little while. 'Now I propose to see if I cannot do a little speaking.' He intended to focus his intellectual energies. 'Now I want to concentrate, get fixed easily as to money, and study and think, and then when I get ready I will come prominently before the public again in some way or other.' Half a year after leaving the *Post* he was already reading law, and he hoped to be admitted to the bar sometime, though he might never practice.

In the season of finding himself, his family seemed especially dear. Annie and he were now more than ever lovers, he said in the letter just quoted, and together they took infinite pride in the three children. Little Jane was turning out the brightest of the lot; the boys they believed to have the makings of 'noted men'; all had bank accounts in their own names. 'God has been too good ... There has never been a point in my life when I have been so happy.' To Annie herself, Henry wrote a letter about Abelard and Hloise. Abelard's way was the way he loved her, he confessed, with passion blended with a wish to lead his darling into knowledge of truth.

Even the money side seemed smooth. To Philadelphia the somewhat vague word went that he 'was doing very well,' paying his debts and promising himself never to go into the red again. 'I have never, though, been an improvident or reckless man. I have always had some main object in view and have always worked my way steadily nearer and nearer to it. Money has never been my main object — but position which was to me capital.'

Certainly he now discovered a very satisfactory way to pay his bills. On losing the *Post*, he had immediately gone up the river to Sacramento, his old recourse; and doubtless that was the occasion of making the arrangements. The new Democratic governor whom the Post had helped elect, William S. Irwin, at once appointed him state inspector of gas meters.

'The appointment was more than anything else a tribute to intellect,' testifies the governor's private secretary, recollecting his own astonishment. He himself, as secretary of the state Board of Equalization, had known George as investigator and thinker, and had admired him; but he was nonplused when his 'cold, unimpassioned' chief expressed enormous admiration for the ex-editor's 'elegant and brilliant style,' and gave him a plum. Perhaps the fact that, early in election year, the *Post* had commended a British act which required food to be sold as represented and water and gas to be tested for purity and quality, diminishes a little the mystery of George's appointment. A critic of monopolies was now set up to check the performance of a natural monopoly which, according to his ideas, should be publicly not privately owned.

Henry George himself tagged the inspectorship a sinecure intended to give him leisure for study and writing. But this was the long view taken many years after the event. At least at first there were arrangements to be made, duties to be learned, jobs to be deputized; and for a little while the new office holder worked hard, politically and otherwise. After taking charge, 15 January, and setting up an office at 531 Mission Street, San Francisco, he went back to the state capital to see the knots tied. If we can trust the impressions of a woman friend who sat in the Senate gallery on the crucial day, all went smoothly. 'To his appointment there was not a dissenting vote, and more than one senator spoke of the choice of the governor in terms of warm approval. After the adjournment of the Senate I heard Henry George thank those men, and his voice trembled with feeling, and his small hand shook as he held it out to receive the warm grip of men then so prominent.'

But George was not simply the honored man of thought, and soon his own letters reveal a very human mixture of motives. In one of these he begged a friend, an assemblyman from San Francisco, to support a bill which would plug holes in the meter- inspection law; in another, to his Annie, he confided distress when a Mr. Donohoe, calling him a scoundrel, said that he was lobbying to make his job worth a hundred thousand a year. 'I am sorry I attempted the grab, as if I have to go back I will have the name without the game.'

Yet even on the unimproved original terms the new job pleased and intrigued him. The California *Political Code,* which was excerpted at length in small print on the margins of his new office stationery, set forth his duties. On request the state inspector was to test any gas meter any time; if he found it correct he was to seal it with an official seal; if not correct, he was to require the company to make it so, and then seal it on first satisfactory test. As the law required the gas companies to have all new meters inspected and set a fee of $2.50 for the job, it would seem that George had a very good thing. 'My office is in truth about the best in the gift of the Governor,' he wrote his mother. He was bonded for $5000 and had the right to appoint and act through deputies.

During the first year he gave considerable attention to the job. This meant learning the operation of the testing devices as well as the operation of the law, and gathering from far and near what information he could about the most successful mechanisms and procedures. His brother Val often traveled with him and, it seems, very largely took over the mechanical operations George himself might have given much time to.

Of course the money was the first delight. He made $52.50 one early day in the field and wrote Annie that surely he would average out $500 a month for the first year. Pleasant ideas burgeoned with the spontaneity of the spring: he would learn to dance, as much for his own sake as his wife's; they would take a little vacation together; the family would visit Philadelphia and see the Centennial Exposition; they would buy the little house they wanted, even if they did have to pay by installments.

Not one of these dreams came true. Even so they represent a short intense period of relaxation between two big efforts. We catch him breaking his rule against writing only once during this time. In a long letter to the editor of the *Bee*, later printed as an eleven-pagepamphlet, George made an interesting case for personal journalism. A state senator had introduced a bill which would have required newspaper articles to be signed. Entirely correct, reasoned Henry George: in present American practice the editorial 'we' signifies not the thinking writers but the interests of the proprietors. Moral questions aside, proprietary journalism lessens the energy of the journalist and deprives him of kudos. Everybody knew Starr King, wrote George, but nobody knew Henry Watson, his old boss, the editor of the Sacramento Union, who had been just as great a wartime patriot. George

listened to debate on the bill from the Senate gallery, where it passed; and he regretted its failure in the Assembly.

But even this mild degree of personal participation in affairs was unusual for about a year. Next to the job, Henry George's studies took right of way, though not too strenuously at first. 'I am converting the august position I hold into a sort of state Perambulator,' he wrote the new dear friend, Dr. Edward Taylor, who had recommended books. 'What I read now is on the wing.' He had bought Oliver Wendell Holmes' new edition of Kent's *Commentaries*, and Austin's *Lectures* on sovereignty, also a recent work. From an inspection stop in Marysville, where Val was able to do the work, George reported to his wife on what may have been a representative free day. He went to his hotel room 'and took a tussle with Kent ... I was making fine progress until all of a sudden he threw me ... I feel encouraged by my progress in law, and really interested, though it does put me to sleep, and I think I can in a year make as much progress as ordinary students do in three or four.'

Release from pressure and being away from home afforded rare opportunities to notice little things, and to write of whatever came to mind. There was time to be amused while he and Val were driving a two-horse buggy on an inspection trip inland, in the direction of Grass Valley. They arranged to spend the night at a farmhouse, where they heard the farmer say that his bedbugs were as bad as anyone's — and only after an interval did they understand that they were being ribbed. This part of the state George thought specially beautiful, and he loved the 'piney odor.' But the bay-region towns appealed, too, especially Napa and San Jose. He wrote his mother about the charm of the little wooden Episcopal church, and the 'perfect garden' that was San Jose in May.

To Annie he had intimate things to say, often. After listening to a debate in Sacramento he wrote her sadly, for instance, that one divorce was now being granted for every three marriages in the city where they lived. 'If ever I had any leanings toward the modern doctrine in this matter I have entirely got over it.' And, a few letters later, he tried to balance in words the 'pride and pleasure in feeling that I am really your "lord and master"' against the joy of acknowledging that, 'if my darling is mine I am also hers.' He missed her dreadfully, he wrote. 'How much delight there is in our love. From the time I first saw you and was captivated by that

something in face and voice and manner, which I never could explain in words, it has gone on increasing and increasing ... And this love is the great thing with me. All outside ups and downs are trivial compared with that.'

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The national event of November 1876 as naturally turned George toward his plan to develop himself as speaker as it drew him away from his aloofness to political affairs. Before the nomination of Tilden, he preferred the Democratic candidate Senator Allen Thurman of Ohio, a strict-constructionist 'Old Roman' of Virginia birth. Very different from his role four years earlier, George went as delegate to no Democratic conventions this time. 'I think as a general rule that state conventions are good things to keep out of,' he wrote his father. When the national party nominated for president the prosecutor of the Tweed ring, a lawyer who had made a fortune in the service of railroad and mining interests, Henry George was willing, but understandably he lacked enthusiasm.

He had to do some hard thinking, accordingly, when the Tilden and Hendricks Central Club of San Francisco, an organization of young men of advanced opinions, invited him to make 'the keynote of the canvass of California' in a great meeting to be held in Dashaway Hall. It was an invitation not to be turned down: his first formal speech before a large audience, and a chance to shape a little the ideas of resurgent Democracy — even though the party had already chosen a Wall Street candidate.

George proceeded a hard way. In a 12,000-word address he stated a persistent issue of American politics, in the perspective he had taken on the editorial page of the *Post*. 'The question involved in this election is not as between two men; it is not as between two parties. It is between two great policies of government, and your vote, or even your refusal to vote, must be its answer. Between the policy of Alexander Hamilton and the policy of Thomas Jefferson you are called on to decide. You have tried the one ... Will you continue it, or will you try the other?' Back of Hamiltonianism and Jeffersonianism George pictured the eternities of 'Have' and 'Want'; and, in the same rough-hewn way, he identified the great political divisions of history — from 'the Right and Left of the French Assembly, the Cavalier and Roundhead of the England of Charles I' to present-day party alignments.

One passage through which passion still glows denied that the Civil War should be blamed for the country's present moral predicament. 'Many things the war may teach us, but not to distrust the manly qualities of our people. Many are the lessons we may read in its million graves, but not the lesson that the virtues of our blood have run out ... The object of telling you that these things are due to the war is to induce you to quietly rest in the belief that they will remedy themselves in time ... No; it is not the war that is responsible for all this ... Our public service is corrupt because the natural result of our laws has been to engender corruption; our industry [particularly our shipping] is oppressed because our laws have prevented its natural development; the masses are becoming poorer and the few richer, because the whole tendency of our system of finance and taxation is to make $100,000 more profitable in the hands of one man than in the hands of a hundred.'

It was a writer's speech, and George was to need a long time to learn not to take too many risks of chilling his audience with perspective and morality. And another episode of about this time tells us that as a speaker he had other frailties to conquer. Called to the platform from a seat on the floor by the audience at a Democratic rally, he held back at first, then ran across the rostrum, hat in hand, and said what came to mind — without good voice control, and with awkward stance and gesture.

Yet his prepared address caught on. The original audience had ordered it printed and circulated, 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. He was able to simplify his ideas for delivery from the wayside platform. A newspaper from San Luis Obispo etches him at an outdoor meeting, one October evening in that town. The speaker stood on a hotel balcony; in near foreground listened a sizable crowd, many ladies present; and the background was marked with bonfires. Lights and flags were everywhere.

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. It would be interesting to know whether he understood the irony, that evening, that the party official who introduced him, a medical doctor, was a member of the Wilson-Shorb family of enormous landed

estate in what is now the Pasadena-San Marino area. And finally, when the vote was in, though distressed about the result, he wrote his mother with a sound of personal triumph: 'I have shown that I could make myself felt without a newspaper. 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 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 such a reputation as I have made ... 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 ... And so it will — whether I go into politics, into the law, or into the newspaper business again. I do not intend to rest here, but to go ahead step by step.'

The Democrats had given George his first experience as a speaker, and the next speech has the look of the San Francisco party wanting to take advantage of his powers. Whatever the story behind the event, six months after the Hayes-Tilden campaign appropriate officials invited George to be orator of the day for the Fourth of July celebration in the city. The year before, Horatio Stebbins had been orator for the national centennial, and the magnificent celebration had included a parade which brought 200,000 people to the streets. This year there was less to expect, for the depression was closing in, and a one-hundred-first birthday is less exciting than a one-hundredth. Still and again, the honor of being orator was immense and cherished; the Fourth was the glorious day; and then as now San Francisco was a brilliant place for a civic celebration.

According to the *Alta*, 'myriads of small flags were thrown acrossthe principal streets,' thousands turned out on the evening of July third, and the next morning everyone was up early for the ten o'clock parade. Color marched as well as fluttered. A brigadier general stood in the reviewing stand. Among the military, besides the regulars from the Presidio, appeared the City Guard and certain independent companies, the most visible of all the Franco- Americans of the Lafayette Guard and the troop of Zouaves. These last two escorted the civilian dignitaries. Henry George was present, in morning dress, seated in a barouche. He kept company that day with the mayor, the president of the day, the poet of the day, the chief-justice of the state, an ex-senator of the United States, and an ex-governor. French and Russian naval officers from vessels in the harbor also rode in open

carriages. The Sons of the Emerald and the Knights of Pythias and the like followed on foot.

The California Theater, the place of the main event, was decorated in keeping. Outside a huge transparency of George Washington and inside a magnificent state seal were made the centers of the festooning. Three thousand people jam-packed the auditorium, and an orchestra played at intervals. No occasion could have been more to the speaker's inclination at the time and he spoke of his childhood love for Independence Hall, the words with which this book opens.

Though the oration is as much too long for a twentieth-century reader as hints suggest that it was for the afternoon crowd in the theater, and though the periods of the speech were rounded off in the rococo of the Victorian age, its structure and its ideas do command attention, the more so because they indicate Henry George's near future as both speaker and writer. Whether or not he so intended, the address took the same broad form as the great syllogism of politics set forth in the Declaration of Independence. In 1776 Jefferson and his colleagues had made the natural rights of man their major premise. In the oration, George began with human liberty — so had preacher Stebbins the year before. 'It is meet that on this day the flags of all nations should mingle above our processions ... In keeping this day to liberty, we honour all her sacred days ... From every land have been gathered the gleams of light that unite in her beacon fire.' At Philadelphia the fathers had put down as second premise George Ill's violation of their rights: he had taxed unjustly, denied fair trial, and had done many wrongs, contrary to contract. In San Francisco the orator of the day likewise spelled out abuses. For the first time, perhaps, he made analogy between the condition of California and the land enclosures famous in the history of British anguish. 'We have repeated *the* sin of the sin-swollen Henry VIII.' Technological progress, said the speaker, had been unfavorable to workers so far: 'The tendency of all modern machinery is to give capital an overpowering advantage, and make labour helpless.' And finally: 'Land monopolized; water monopolized; a race of cheap workers crowding in, whose effect on our own labouring classes is precisely that of slavery; all the avenues of trade under one control, all wealth and power tending more and more to concentrate in a few hands.'

The Declaration comes to a climax with the assertion that when a tyrant abuses the natural rights of his subjects, his true authority is dissolved by the wrongdoing. The patriots of 1776 believed that they were merely taking what belonged to them. Henry George asserted that modern America had inherited this morality, rather possessed it of inherent right, as all men do; and now, in Darwin's day, he confirmed natural rights with the powerful idea of political growth. The more because evolution never became a favorite conception with him — he certainly cannot be connected with the young American pragmatists who were about this time beginning to build heavily on Darwin — it is striking that he now used evolutionary- and pragmatic-sounding argument. 'For life is growth, and growth is change, and political progress consists in getting rid of institutions we have outgrown.'

Through these channels of reason George arrived at his conclusion: the American revolution must be completed in economic life. 'The assertion of the equal rights of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is the assertion of the right of each to the fullest freest exercise of all his faculties, limited only by the equal right of every other. It includes freedom of person and security of earnings, freedom of trade and capital, freedom of conscience and speech and the press. It is the declaration of the same equal rights of all human beings to the enjoyment of the bounty of the Creator — to light and to air, to water and to land. It asserts these rights as inalienable — as the direct grant of the Creator to each human being, of which he can be rightfully deprived neither by kings nor congresses, neither by parchments nor prescriptions —neither by the compacts of past generations nor by majority votes.'

'The American Republic' — for so George entitled his address must have required sixty or seventy minutes to deliver, and perhaps more. Its fancy dress suited the occasion, and so did its mood of patriotism. But its weighty argument made no compromise with the ceremonial state of mind, or with the festival spirit; and for that George paid a price. One newspaper observed that the gas measurer 'kindly spoke for several hours on the Goddess of Liberty and other school-reader topics.' Likely a representative reaction was the one printed in San Francisco's new weekly, the *Argonaut*, on 7 July: 'His oration was an able one and eloquent. His peculiar views

upon labor and land tenure are greatly in advance of the opinions of that intelligent and not unselfish portion of our community, and do not work.' Even the *Examiner* groped to find congratulatory phrases.

Wry comments at this point accurately suggest the serious problems Henry George had to solve if he was going to become more than a campaign speaker. Merely stating what listeners want to hear, and doing it better than they themselves do, would not suffice for George's larger intention. Nor was his handicap simply that of being heterodox. As an economist in the making, an economic proposer always, he had still to train himself to speak familiarly and interestingly in the elucidation of fairly complicated ideas. One might exaggerate to say that his problem was unique; America for a century had had its more than generous share of elucidators of principle and spokesmen for social reconstruction. The age of Jackson had been rich in them. But to combine in public oratory any such amount of abstract economic reasoning as George did was unusual, and perhaps unprecedented in our national history.

Earlier in 1877 he had tried his skill, just once, at lecturing on economics. The invitation had come from the University of California, where John Le Conte, physicist and brother of the famous geologist, had succeeded Gilman as president. Professors of economics had not yet become standard personnel in American universities, and there was none at Berkeley. Something of the lack was made up by an occasional guest lecturer; George was preceded by half a year by Caspar T. Hopkins, his old opponent in debate about immigration policy, who about this time founded a Social Science Association in the region. When his own invitation came, George understood that a chair of economics was about to be set up, and that he was mentioned for the place. Perhaps also some appeasement was intended to remove irritations remaining from the battle with President Gilman. On this occasion Henry told Annie George that he wished for no title in the world, unless it was that of 'Professor.'

Perspective on George's own lecture is gained by noticing that Mr. Hopkins had chosen to speak on 'The Relations of Commercial Speculation to Legitimate Business.' Rarely has the Protestant ethic of dedication to work been more tightly joined to the spirit of capitalism than by this son of a bishop. 'Build a railroad or write a book,' he admonished the young

people, selecting two activities he himself had tried; avoid 'stock-gambling' and 'note-shaving' as no more worth while than games of chance. Since right thinking according to this lecturer amounted so largely to accepting the standards of business and property, it seems not unreasonable that in his turn George chose to speak for labor.

But by no means exclusively so. A title could hardly have been more neutral than the one at the top of his manuscript, 'The Study of Political Economy.' And, whether or not there really was a professorship hanging in the balance, the lecturer proceeded as formally as if there were. He crossed the bay with his good friend Assemblyman James V. Coffey. President Le Conte entertained them with other distinguished guests at lunch, and then introduced the lecturer. The audience included members of the faculty and students, perhaps forty of whom were women.

With *Progress and Poverty* still two years in the future, it would have required an informed listener indeed to sense the full meaning of the discontent George voiced, that afternoon, against economic ideas all but universally accepted in the Anglo-American world. Present readers may recall that he had once put second thoughts about John Stuart Mill, far less admiring than first thoughts, into an editorial. Now he spoke still more sharply. He said that political economy must be viewed as a laggard study, and that it had made 'no substantial improvement' since Ricardo. (Americans had not yet learned of William Jevons.) In the larger history of economic thought, this Berkeley address may be put down as one of many signposts that classical economics was failing to meet needs which were becoming urgent during the 1870s. On the American side, the Carey school of economics, and, overseas, Karl Marx's writing *Das Kapital* are among the plainest indications that theory was changing; but such ideas had little standing in university classrooms.

The main trouble with economics, specified George, lay in the fact that theory fell short of the natural usefulness of the subject. For 'the science which investigates the laws of production and the distribution of wealth concerns itself with matters which among us occupy more than nine-tenths of human effort and perhaps nine- tenths of human thought.' More than that, the study of economics goes far to explain the rise and fall of nations, and even 'the mental and moral as well as the physical states of humanity.'

(A number of remarks indicate that during the early authorship of *Progress and Poverty* George was more nearly an economic determinist than before or after.) What a study, what a tool for the welfare of state and nation, mused George, political economy ought to become.

He assured the students that it was not a dismal science at all, but truly a 'simple and beneficent study' available to everyone. The old writers had indeed gone in for needless hair-splitting; they had neglected the most important of all economic questions, the recurrent phenomenon of depression. Worst of all, economics had arrayed its *laisser faire* ideas against improvement and reforms in behalf of the working classes.

All this could be changed, and must be. Though economics demands 'the habit of careful thought,' it is perfectly available to those who need it most. Let working men study, demanded George, and be deluded no longer, either by too much *laisser faire* or by 'the absurdities of protection and the crazy theories usually designated by the name of socialism.' The lecturer concluded where the author of *Progress and Poverty* would conclude, with a plea that economic truths be studied and laid to heart as continuous with the other truths of human life. 'You will see that the true law of social life is the law of love, the law of liberty, the law of each for all and all for each: that the golden rule of morals is also the golden rule of the science of wealth; that the highest expressions of religious truth include the widest generalizations of political economy.'

George had given a splendid lecture, and one which three years later his publishers did well to have printed in *Popular Science Monthly*, as a kind of advertisement for *Progress and Poverty*. He had ranged a broad field, yet kept focus and direction; he had been critical without limit, yet also idealistic. The address must have been much better geared to his audience than the Fourth of July oration. It is easy to credit the lecturer's own two-way impression 'that his utterances had been well received by the students, but by the authorities with a polite and dignified quietness that made him think that he might not be invited to lecture again.' After the event his connection at Berkeley tapered down to continuing social visits with President Le Conte and his brother. 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.

From the historical angle of vision which seeks out the gathering ideas of *Progress and Poverty*, the two addresses of this year become luminously important. Henry George, Jr., applies to them a figure of speech from oratory, which confirms a reader's impression that the ideas of the two ought to be read consecutively. The university lecture he calls an 'exordium,' proposing a change in economic thinking, and the Fourth of July speech a 'peroration,' demanding practical measures. It may be seen too, that, though neither address specified as concretely as the *Post* had done just what practical measures George recommended, the two together prefigured, in a rough sketch more natural in the form of lectures than in that of editorials, the total pattern of the coming book.

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But this makes George's advancing work as author seem easier, and his total course seem plainer, than they really were. The summer of 1877 he did spend in the way a writer likes to do. He took his family across the Golden Gate to Sausalito, a lovely place between sea and mountains, where he studied and loafed. By fall he was writing hard on the analyses of economic ideas which are an essential part of *Progress and Poverty.* For nine months after the Fourth of July address he made no more public speeches; and one may guess whether this was altogether a matter of his wishing to drop out of circulation, or whether, as he had twice spoken his radicalism beyond the welcome of his hearers, he may have received no more invitations.

But in the latter part of 1877 occurred the famous Sand Lot riots in San Francisco, the most shocking phase of the labor in-surgency led by Dennis Kearney. Events occurred to make a prophet of Henry George. Ten years earlier, in the 'What the Railroad Will Bring Us' article in the *Overland*, he had predicted labor's degradation in California, and a rising of Huns within the cities, fighting to have a share of the wealth of the community. Now the riots outdid the prediction; and almost at once the organized working men of Kearney's new political party sought George's interest and help. His old friend, Assemblyman Days, approached him in their behalf; and, in August, only a month after violence broke out, he was offered a nomination for the state Senate by the People's Reform and anti-Chinese Legislative Convention.

George refused to go along. He detested Kearney as a labor boss and a demagogue and a misleader of the working people. His duty as the first secretary of the board of San Francisco's new public library was, over and above the meter inspectorship, the only public business George did during that fall and winter. He continued with his study and his writing.

Before long, nevertheless, events drew him into affairs. The clamor in San Francisco, the threats of outbreak and the pressures of vigilantism, seems in large degree to explain the gathering, early in 1878, of the earnest men who set up the first organization in the world to advance the social ideas of Henry George.

Among the leaders were two good friends: James Maguire, recently George's colleague in the Tilden campaign, a future judge and congressman; and John M. Days, the same who had recently tried to connect George with Kearneyism and who in 1872 had been midwife to his formal declarations against private property in land. There were also John Swett, school superintendent for years, at the moment a high-school principal, and John Vallance George. Altogether a group of twenty or thirty came together on Sunday afternoons to talk seriously. As in later days in the New York history of Henry George organizations, serious, religious-minded lawyers were the most prominent members.

The group seems to have been in the first instance a study and discussion group exclusively. They read and debated, we are told, 'the economic parts of *Our Land and Land Policy*,' which of course comprised the only presentation in book form, so far, of Henry George's theory. Doubtless the questions and answers helped clear the mind of the working author. But only a short time passed before the members wanted more than just talk among themselves; and one meeting, when about thirty were convened in one of the city courtrooms, decided to set up a formal organization. They elected an Irish-born lawyer to be president; and one Patrick J. Murphy, a newspaperman trained on the *Post*, became secretary. Thus was born the Land Reform League of California, the first of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of its kind the world around.

Organization meant an appeal to the troubled public, and a meeting; and, for Henry George, having a following meant the obligations of leadership and a return to public speaking. He was obliged to put

manuscript aside to prepare a keynote address. There was no need, this time, to diagnose without prescription, as in Berkeley. If there was ever an occasion to come to the heart of the matter, this was the time. The title George chose, 'Why Work Is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labor Restless,' expressed his sense of the situation; and naturally he incorporated the more concrete and practical notions he was distilling into *Progress and Poverty.*

Where he had blamed the great economists for refusing to go, he himself now ventured. 'Why Work Is Scarce' anticipated in detail the chapter on 'The primary cause of recurring paroxysms of industrial depression,' in the coming book; and it set the pattern of analysis he was to hold for life and to apply in the depression of the 1890s, with very little change. He began with the proposition that the time had come for economists to look for general and underlying causes of economic upset. He phrased as current history very nearly the same thought he had phrased as prophecy before the railroad had been finished: 'Under our very eyes, a highly civilized community has risen on virgin soil. From a social condition that was nearer equality than anywhere else existed, we have seen the rich and the poor separate.' What common cause explains, he wanted to know, the tragic conditions in new California, in the industrial East, in old Britain — in the whole Western capitalistic world?

The speaker worked toward his solution, 'The Great Cause' of depression and poverty, through a series of negations. Anyone's talk about an imbalance between supply and demand for labor, or an oversupply or underconsumption of goods, he dismissed as high- sounding cant. (The 'disequilibrium' known to present-day economists was not his problem.) Nature provides two hands for every mouth, he noticed; and on a desert island a man can provide for his own. *Robinson Crusoe* had become favorite reading with George, and he used it effectively. Reverting to his old observation that the greatest wealth, the highest technology, and the largest populations appear together in the same areas of the modern world, he argued that in the correct relation those factors should produce the highest standards of living in history. George refused on the platform, as at other times since 1872, to blame different results on any inherent struggle between capital and labor. Those two together 'represent the human elements in production'; the only other element is the world's God-given

fertility, the annual cycle of the seasons, the universal burgeoning of life. 'There is no conflict between capital and labor — and that there is popularly supposed to be arises from a want of exactness in the use of words.'

George managed eloquence of argument — but we cannot imagine surprise for any listener — as he asserted at climax that 'The Great Cause' of depression was monopoly. Mainly, not exclusively, land monopoly, he said: resource monopoly, without mention of industrial monopoly, is what he chose to stress, in this oratorical simplification of his ideas. 'All history shows that the fact which ultimately determines the social, the political, and consequently the intellectual and moral condition of a people, is the tenure of the land ... Truly the earth is our mother.' He pleaded, as in the Post, that the only correct policy was to reassert the natural right of the people of California to the land of California, to reapply to the land and water, in even more positive form, 'the equitable doctrine that in earlier days we applied to the land ... the doctrine that no one can hold more than he can reasonably use, and for no longer time than he does use it ... This is called agrarianism. Do not be frightened at the word ... It does not mean warfare against society ... Agrarianism is the true conservatism.' Late in the lecture, answering a question, he spoke of confiscating land values: 'Nay, the confiscation is in the present system.'

On a rostrum, economic diagnosis, akin to accusation, comes easy, but the doctor's prescription is hard to deliver. Once again George thought and spoke in three's, but this time he made his program more consolidated than in the *Post*. First, he said, addressing himself to California's old problem of security, let any occupant's peaceable *bona fide* use of a parcel of land for a year or longer be under-stood as 'conclusive evidence' of ownership. Second, he wanted all taxes abolished save land taxation, of course the buildings and other improvements not counted. This simplified to one point the three-pronged tax program of the *Post*. Third and last, George recommended a summary process under which any land not in use could be condemned and assigned to any citizen who wished to use it and would pay the assessment.

In this address, as always in the future, George's analysis of depression came up with institutional and moral failure. That is, he believed that job opportunities were withheld and poverty induced by reason of wrong-

headed policies and exploitative institutions, rather than because of mechanical flaws in the operation of capitalism. Actually he was ahead of his time and with the future in making the general proposition that depressions are a natural product of the going system and should be anticipated. But also he was different from the future main line of business-cycle analysts who would find depressions inherent in the frictions of *economic* operations narrowly regarded. ‘Why Work Is Scarce’ should be read, George wrote John Swinton, ‘as 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. Of course the exigencies of a popular lecture prevent the exhibition of truth in its full form, but the truth is there which can be worked out by anyone who will catch it ... The seed that I have for years been sowing is springing up on every hand ... I can see what 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.’

Besides making the advance he mentioned to Swinton, that of connecting his economic analysis with a political program, George’s ‘Why Work Is Scarce’ address marks a step also in his shifting from mainly regional to more generalized habits of social thought. To be sure he said many things that only Californians would have understood. His observations about land titles, for instance, sound like a page from the debates of 1867; and one fellow journalist, E. A. Waite, who held a friendly judgment about the speaker — ‘Henry George writes a very vigorous article ... has some motive about him’ — complained at this point that George had borrowed

without due acknowledgment ideas he himself had put in a San Francisco magazine article. On the other hand, George was compelled by his distaste for Kearney to separate himself from California’s race antagonism. Though the anti-Chinese issue was still as accessible to him as it had been in 1868 and thereafter, he touched it now only in a way to be different from Kearney; and the moral contrast between the famous California radicals may be measured by George’s refusal to join in the clamor that the Chinese must go.

In political essence, Henry George and the Land Reform League of California were making that most difficult of all democratic efforts: they were making the appeal of reason and dispassion to men already inflamed. The nature of the effort put enormous strain on George's powers as a speaker, and a story, from the day of his first delivering 'Why Work Is Scarce,' indicates that he was a little overwhelmed by the task. He went with Mrs. George to the hall to rehearse, and he met a clergyman there. When this experienced speaker told him that his speech would go over the heads of a working-class audience, George took offense. But that evening there was a very small turnout, and he was upset. According to a witness 'he kept his eyes on the paper and seemed to be so nervous he was almost frightened.'

Nevertheless 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. He repeated 'Why Wages Are Low' in San Francisco; and, under title of 'The Coming Struggle,' he gave it again in Sacramento and received a fair notice in the *Record-Union*. 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.

Not until his next speech, however, the fourth and last one of the series between the campaign addresses of 1876 and his completing *Progress and Poverty*, did George strike just such an appealing vein of eloquence as promised a successful future on the rostrum. In June 1878, though he was at the one-third-of-the-way stage of drafting his book, George accepted the invitation of the new Young Men's Hebrew Association in San Francisco to deliver a prominent address. By announcing the title, 'Moses or Leader of the Exodus,' he chose to jolt a little his hosts' expectations, for they were a liberal group and wanted to hear George on a public issue. We may suppose that in writing the speech he drew on childhood accumulations of Bible knowledge, and we may be sure that he read freshly, too, from Exodus and Leviticus.

The appeal he made lay in his rendering into the language of tradition and emotion his own enlarging social thought. 'Everywhere in the Mosaic

institutions is the land treated as the gift of the Creator to his common creatures, which no one has the right to monopolize. 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" ... [Moses] not only provided for the fair division of the land among the people, and for making it fallow and common every seventh year, but by the institution of the jubilee he provided for a redistribution of the land every fifty years, and made monopoly impossible.'

George made the quality of leadership the main theme of the address. His mind had sprung to that problem when Lincoln died; today a reader of 'Moses' will hardly need the suggestion of his daughter to understand that George's 'enthusiasm for the Biblical leader arose from a feeling of kinship with him.' Unobliged in this speech to compress much economic and political argument, George let his mind rove freely in areas of morality and the interpretation of human events. He had a word for any enthusiastic materialists in the audience who might be inclined to think of 'the prominent characters of history as resultants rather than as initiatory forces ... It is true that "institutions make men," but it is also true that in the beginnings "men make institutions."' The new Bible criticism, he said, while placing Moses the lawgiver later in time than the prophets, was also recognizing him as at 'the beginning of that growth which flowed after centuries in the humanities of Jewish law, and in the sublime conception of one God, universal and eternal, the Almighty Father.' George estimated the character of Moses from the work he did. 'Habits of thought are even more tyrannous than habits of the body. Hebrew freedom must be seen as reaction against Egyptian tyranny.'

In lines of thought which run strikingly in the same direction as certain ideas of Reinhold Niebuhr's modern commentary, George praised the Jews for their religious practicality, for having 'sternly repressed' any too abstract 'tendency to take the type for the reality,' and for refusing to make too much of the comforting idea of immortality. After their sojourn in Egypt — for which the members of the Y.M.H.A. were free to substitute 'California' — the Jews who followed Moses had found power to assert 'a God of the living as well as of the dead; a God whose inimitable decrees

will, in this life, give happiness to the people that hold them and bring misery among the people that forget them.'

With an intensity that moved his audience, George built up the proposition that the concern of Moses — and of Puritan and Covenanter — had been to lay the foundation of a social state in which deep poverty and degrading want should be unknown. George's final word praised Moses' calling — and obliquely his own. 'Of something more real than matter; of something higher than the stars; of a light which will endure when suns are dead and dark; of a purpose of which the physical universe is but a passing phase, such lives tell.'

So 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, six years or so, 'Moses' would become a favorite address. We shall find Henry George giving it again and again, a kind of sustaining piece, especially good for Sundays, and particularly acceptable in Scotland and England, where Bible formulas had more appeal than formulas from America's Declaration of 1776.

But this was not for California in 1878 and 1879. Dr. Taylor, whose literary assistance to Henry George was deepening their friendship, urged no more speeches now. Perhaps he saw that without the finished book George's power would soon run down; and perhaps George himself needed little persuasion. But the inner circle of the Land Reform League must have felt enormous regret that, during California's deepest crisis and her period of constitution making, Henry George lived in retirement, that he was not personally on the political front, as powerful as in 1873 or more so, constructing institutions or policies out of the ideas he had now matured.

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Yet George did make one more try for practical influence. In March 1878, a short time before the legislature passed the act which made the constitutional convention possible, he wrote Assemblyman Coffey how anxious he was for the convention to be called at once. The ex-editor of the *Post* could not have thought otherwise; and, book or no book, he was only being true to old principles when, a month later, he brought out a broadside 'To the Voters of San Francisco.' In that way he announced candidacy for the convention.

Though he built his platform in somewhat more specific terms than the Fourth of July oration, as a whole he made his manifesto general, more like that speech than like the heavy argument in 'Why Work Is Scarce.' On taxation he declared simply for shifting the burden 'from those who have little to those who have much, from those who produce wealth to those who merely appropriate it, so that the monopoly of land and water may be destroyed ... and an end put to the shameful state of things which compels men to beg who are willing to work.' Appropriately in political more than in economic language, he favored a 'dignified' resistance to Chinese immigration, and the designing of a 'symmetrical and responsible' government for San Francisco. Broadly he declared himself for the philosophy of the Declaration and for loyalty to the 'Republicanism of Jefferson and the Democracy of Jackson.'

Yet, having stepped forward, a man of principle for the constitutional convention, George soon decided that he did not really care whether he was elected or not. Mainly, not entirely, the candidates for seats lined up either for the Workingmen's party, or against it, the conservative opposition fusing Democrats and Republicans into a big 'Nonpartisan' bloc. George could not go with the fusion. And when the Workingmen offered him a nomination he made issue with the stipulation they required, that their nominees pledge themselves to follow the party line in every respect, and even agree beforehand to resign, should occasion arise and party 'constituents' so demand. Nettled by this, George went before the appropriate meeting and answered with a resounding 'No.' Reporting to John Swinton in New York, he said that if elected he was sure to be flanked by monopoly on two sides, and the success or failure of his candidacy would mean very little.

The nomination he did accept came from a Democratic Nominating Convention, an element not absorbed in the state's polarization of politics. But even here George entered an exception. He told the convention that a certain clause of their platform, which favored a long period for redeeming real estate taken by the state for delinquent taxes, would not help homesteaders and would favor land withholders. He would not pledge that plank. 'Upon the land grabbers who have carved up the soil of California into baronial estates, I wish to bring to bear the power of taxation with remorseless vigor.'

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. Henry George, Jr., has it that the whole Democratic ticket was beaten at the polls,' which is literally true of San Francisco. The Workingmen's party captured the entire delegation from the city; and from the state as a whole, 81 Nonpartisans, 51 Workingmen, 11 Republicans, 7 Democrats, and 2 independents were chosen. The morning after the election Assemblyman Coffey, who also ran, put a card on the gas-meter inspector's door: 'Accept congratulations on leading the Democratic Party to the Devil.' George had received more votes than any other Democratic nominee in the city.

So, while others wrote a new fundamental law for the state, Henry George worked on his manuscript. For two and a half years his activities had been narrowing; now, for the third and fourth quarters of 1878 and the first of 1879, the exact period of the convention, he concentrated completely. Apparently with embarrassingly little to distract him at the inspector's office, and with not a single speech to write, and no editorials, he forged ahead to his conclusion.

George worked mainly at home, in surroundings he would remember with nostalgia during New York years. After the lovely summer in Sausalito, where he had warmed up for the task, the family moved to the Rincon Hill district of San Francisco, not far from his office on Mission Street and near the bay. They took a house on Second Street, late in 1877, and then moved to one on First Street near Harrison, remembered as the place where *Progress and Poverty* was written. The houses were shabby and, in the President Lincoln style, already a bit old-fashioned: a visitor remembers scrollwork decoration on Henry George's gables. But there was comfort enough; and the large second-floor workroom in the First Street house, the three windows of which commanded San Francisco Bay and the hills surrounding, gave resource and joy to the writer.

Within doors the caller just cited, a bibliophile come to see George's library, gives us a glimpse of such domestic turmoil as many a writer at the age of forty has had to live with. There were four children now, from Henry,

Jr., at sixteen, down to Annie Angela, the baby named for her mother and the Feast of Angels, the day of her birth in 1877. The visitor found nothing special among the library's 300 books, except the owner. Working in a saffron-colored dressing gown, George babbled with comment, criticism, and appreciation of the books around him. General dishevelment far from obscured the sweet good-feeling in the household.

For the time being a kind of puritan Bohemian, Henry George took to his sofa for reading. He wrote whenever he could, frequently at night when sleep refused to come. When he could not work he took his troubles to the bay, where wind and water relaxed him. He kept notebooks, he rough-drafted, he rewrote and revised. Under the slogan, 'Hard writing makes easy reading,' he took the most time for the analytical passages. More than would seem possible, he used the inexperienced help of his wife and oldest child. Mrs. George checked the manuscript, and Henry, who had finished school now and was studying shorthand on the side, acted as amanuensis. But the final manuscript copy of *Progress and Poverty*, now deposited in the Library of Congress, is every line done in Henry George's own hand, very neat and clear and with few emendations, a huge piece of painstaking. Nerves must have been tight sometimes in the home which produced the book, but the children record a good and happy time during the months of composition.

No isolation is quite complete, and even during this interval George depended on his friends, most especially Edward Taylor. Their acquaintanceship dated from George's days on the Sacra-mento *Reporter*, when Dr. Taylor had been Governor Haight's secretary. He was a man with connections. Presently he was practising law, a member of the ex-governor's firm in San Francisco. He had some family tie with Leland Stanford; and a few years later it was he who transmitted to the author of *Progress and Poverty* the not quite incredible story that the railroad president had read the book and said that he had become 'a disciple of Henry George.' While Progress and Poverty was in process, Dr. Taylor extended the hospitality of his firm's law library, and George did a great deal of work there.

Dr. Taylor did much more. With a quick appreciation of the size of George's task, he urged the writer to think big. From a mind that knew and treasured literature and suffered because his own poetry seemed not equal

to the cry within, he helped George with leads and ideas. His one certified specific contribution to *Progress and Poverty* is the stirring poem of exhortation at the opening of Book viii, wherein George sets forth his alternative proposals for doing away with private property in land. Dr. Taylor asks:

Shall we in the presence of this previous wrong,
In this supremest moment of all time,
Stand trembling, cowering, when with one bold stroke
These groaning millions might be ever free?

In the first edition of *Progress and Poverty* the poem was made anonymous, apparently at the author's request; later George insisted on entering a credit line. To suggest what other passages in *Progress and Poverty* may be due to Dr. Taylor would be guesswork. Yet any reader of *all* Henry George's works who senses how much richer than the others this book is, in quoted passages of poetry and prose, is likely to credit this intellectual friend with a considerable contribution. George's lifetime gratitude to him accords better with such a debt than with a minor one.

In San Francisco George had the benefit also of expert help from one or two other associates, of whom John Swett, the principal of the Girls' High School, is least anonymous. Mr. Swett may have been the member of the Land Reform League who sometimes brought John Muir to the meetings: at any rate the two were friends, and the great naturalist and conservationist knew and was much stirred by Henry George at this period. At the stage of proof-reading Mr. Swett combed over *Progress and Poverty* for errors in expression and grammar — needlessly, he says. Not completely convinced by George's ideas, this friend understood the book as a product of the time and place. 'It really seemed as if the foundations of society were breaking up. A part of George's book took its tone from these hard times.' Another member of the league remembers talking with George about how it had taken Herbert Spencer twenty-five years to get a respectable hearing, and recalls George agreeing that *Progress and Poverty* had better be directed to influencing the twentieth century.

Outside San Francisco lay a personal debt perhaps not much smaller than the one to Dr. Taylor. This is the debt to James McClatchy, which, being of dateless origin in the past, is hard to evaluate. According to a story more than twice told, the editor of the Bee deserves credit for first

suggesting that George write the big book. This claim depends on a remembered conversation: on the story that George once told McClatchy that *he* ought to state his philosophy about land in a book; and that McClatchy replied, no, he was too old, but George should do it. If this advice was given early enough, say just following *Our Land and Land Policy* in 1871, then McClatchy is probably due the credit that the *Bee* later claimed for him. If the conversation took place much later than 1871 —a question not to be determined — then the story implies more dependence on McClatchy than can have been true and indicates good will between the two but nothing more than this. Whatever the fact of the suggestion, George sent chapters of *Progress and Poverty* to the old editor for comment and revision, and had his help that way.

According to recent standards of biographical procedure, there should now be some description and exposition of George's library, some analysis of the books he is known to have worked with, as determinants or conditioners of *Progress and Poverty* in gestation. Unfortunately George's own collection of books was dispersed and we have no list of it. His son says that he had about 600 volumes, twice as many as the estimate cited above; and we know that, in addition to it and the Taylor library, he drew on the State Library in Sacramento and used four libraries in San Francisco — the Odd Fellows, the Mercantile, the Mechanics, and the Free. (What Cheer House is not mentioned at this time.) Lacking much evidence about George's borrowings, the reader is referred back to chapters III and VIII, especially, for some account of his earlier reading, and forward to chapter x, where he will find a little detective work on what George read while he was composing, based on evidence within *Progress and Poverty* itself.

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We have seen how George was affected by the rise of the Kearney movement. Yet the influences on him were pretty negative at that stage. He refused to go with the party; he made some effort to launch a rival reform; he blamed Kearneyism as much as anything for his having been defeated for the constitutional convention; he retired from affairs.

But during the early months of 1879, when *Progress and Poverty* was finished and the new constitution was submitted for ratification, George undertook a more active role. For this reason the political background now

requires a little further sketching in. By 1879, emotions had been thoroughly aroused, anti-labor defenses had been marshaled, and what a recent scholar calls California's 'Big Red Scare' had seized the state.

Readers of a generation more familiar than Henry George's was with the phenomenon we call fascism will not need long explanations. Behind California's tensions were the national and international conditions of a prolonged depression. The railroad strikes of 1877, originating many miles away, had been the event that set off the riots. On the Pacific coast itself, a serious drought aggravated economic hardship. Laboring men knew that there had been a huge immigration of Chinese in 1876, about 22,000 of them; and the news-reading world soon learned that Kearney's followers were dramatizing their poverty, with an effectiveness hardly possible elsewhere in the world, by assembling very near the recently built palaces of railroad kings and silver princes on Nob Hill.

While Henry George's energies drained off in the Land Reform League, Dennis Kearney's organization succeeded in drawing together trade-union elements and locals of the national Workingmen's party, and it became a large and potent thing. Not only in the San Francisco Bay area, but throughout the state, clubs were formed and an impressive number of local elections won. Not since Jackson's day, nor in that day, had the country seen anything quite

comparable: a working-men's party overwhelming an election in a major city, and threatening to take control of city and state.

Hence the red scare. Largely thanks to the new biography of John S. Hittell by Professor Claude W. Petty, it is possible to visualize how the psychology of fear transformed conservatives into suppressors. Hittell's employer, Frederick MacCrellish, proprietor of the *Alta California*, joined the vigilantes in 1877, at the moment of organization. And the old editorial writer, the man whose ideas had been George's departing point for dissent and difference during the '60s, became a regular red-baiter. One can imagine Henry George's feeling about Hittell's editorials, say the following propositions: 'Reform is a word familiar to every political villain ... Civilization and intelligence are most active where individuals have been enabled to accumulate great wealth ... Equality is not enviable when it is the dead level of intellectual and industrial stagnation.'

Hittell attached the name of 'Kearneyism' to every brand of California protest, and completed the smear by tagging, in the title phrase of one of his editorials, 'Kearneyism Another Name for Communists.' The irresponsibility of the *Alta's* procedure becomes clearest in the case of the Grangers, who were more conservative in California than in their principal locations in the Middle West. Three years earlier, ahead of the strikes and the sharpest crisis, exprofessor Carr had found time to bring out his Patrons of Husbandry on the Pacific Coast, more a manifesto than a history. He acknowledged some debt to Henry George. He made his most theoretical chapter a rendering of the ideas of John Hiram Lathrop, midwestern agrarian, son of Yale, and president, successively, of the universities of Missouri, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Yet the Granger movement too, the farmers' baby, the *Alta* would have thrown out with the radical bath.

A part of the price paid by the state was, naturally, the stifling of moderate and liberal opinion. As a kind of control point, for observing the ineffectiveness of Henry George's voice in state affairs, we have the effort of a new weekly newspaper, *Hall's Land Journal*, to represent, in a more progressive variation, the middle- of-the-road conservatism that Caspar T. Hopkins had expressed a decade earlier. (President Hopkins at this time was cultivating the California Social Science Association, but would return to the

printed discussion of state affairs in the *Overland*, in the early '80s.) The new journal was edited by Charles Victor Hall, who had recently been a student in the state university and would presently become a wealthy promoter. Engagingly the editor applauded Henry George's Fourth of July address, and quarreled with the low-interest and low-wages policy of the *Alta*, while he also printed more conservative editorials. The paper did not last; and its significance in the Henry George story is that its young editor produced a lonely flash of the Greeley-like, or McClatchy-like, spirit which we have caught earlier in San Francisco journalism. But that spirit is conspicuous by its infrequency during the 'Big Red Scare'; and it never had been present in the now dominant *Alta California* and the Fitch-Pickering-Simonton newspapers.

In the face of this kind of situation, Henry George decided to launch a new newspaper. The immediate occasion was the adjournment of the

constitutional convention in Sacramento, in March 1879, and the impending contest over ratifying the new instrument. George was free to act because his book was written; and he was the readier to do so because his gas-meter job was about to terminate. Where he found the funds for even a very small paper is not clear; it is perfectly plain that he needed a job once more.

For the first time George's political goal coincided with those of the majority of San Francisco newspapers. In the city, only the *Chronicle*, among the established journals, wanted the new constitution ratified. The common reason, not George's reason, for opposing it was that the new frame of government was radical and would discourage businessmen. 'No one in this country can be induced to invest a dollar in any California enterprise until this communistic constitution is broken down by the common sense of the people,' wrote an ex-Californian, E. F. Beale, from the nation's capital. But on his side, Henry George believed that the constitution was too conservative, and that it should be defeated on that account. Not fearing the Kearneyites as upsetters of the social order, but rather as being politically ignorant and corrupt, George had a distaste, equal to that of the *Alta California*, for thelabor party's growing force. Dennis Kearney took the stump for ratification; and we may glance forward to see that at fall elections hisparty would actually achieve its maximum strength — it would elect six Supreme Court judges to a bench of seven, and seat sizable minor-ities, eleven senators and sixteen assemblymen, in the two houses of the legislature. Kearney's power was a part of the challenge that brought George back into state affairs.

But the heart of the matter was the constitution itself. The plainest thing about it was its extreme length; in this respect it differed utterly from the principles of simplicity and flexibility advanced by George in the *Post*. Concerning real-estate taxation, it contained a procedural requirement, Article xiii, Section 2, which has pleased twentieth-century single-taxers, indeed, because it prescribed an arrangement they have had to fight for elsewhere, for instance in New York and recently in Pennsylvania. 'Land and improvements thereon shall be separately assessed ... [and] land, of the same quality and similarly situated shall be assessed at equal value.' But this did not make Henry George a friend for the constitution. To him another provision about land, Article XVII, Section 2, was the crucial thing: 'The holding of large tracts of land, uncultivated and unimproved, by

individuals or corporations is against the public interest and should be discouraged by all means not inconsistent with the rights of private property.' '*Not inconsistent with the rights of private property*' — this clause, conservatively interpreted, could protect the speculator and withholder against the policies George desired, even more effectively than the equality-of-taxation clause in the constitution of 1849.

On 5 April, Henry George's new paper, a weekly, *The State*, began to appear. Perhaps Sir William Jones' poem, 'The State,' suggested the name. George seems to have loved this poem, for he had inserted it in his very first printed piece, in the *Journal of Labor and Workmen*, fourteen years earlier; and now he printed it again, on the front page of the first issue. A few lines are worth quoting, for they will help capture George's own mood:

What Constitutes a State?
Not high raised battlement or labored mound,
Thick wall or moated gate;
Not cities proud with spires and turrets crowned ...
No: — Men, high-minded men
With powers as far above dull brutes endured
In forest brake or den
As heart excel cold rocks and brambles rude ...
These constitute a State;
And sovereign Law, that State's collected will ...
Sits empress, crowning good, suppressing ill.

George's editorial 'Salutatory,' hard by the poem, announced 'a Democratic paper' but denied that the *State* started with any backers, partisan or financial. 'It will not shrink from supporting the right because it is unpopular, nor cringe to wrong because it is strong.' The editor sounded as though he meant to stay in business, whether or not the constitution was ratified. Though 'not as big or as good a paper as many would want to see ... it is as good and as big as I can now make it. If it succeeds it will grow.' George promised to proceed according to the lessons he had learned on the Post and had tried to preach. He would run signed articles. He would not regret the lack of outside funds: $200,000 not earned in journalism would spoil the independence of the *State*, he said. This first issue won a flicker of recognition from his old critic, the Colusa *Sun*: 'We have been growing

stupid of late,' that paper admitted, from lack of fire and originality in the California press.

While the *Alta* called the *State* communistic, George swung into editorial sympathy with the Sacramento *Bee*. McClatchy's paper, which had accused the convention at mid-session of being managed by land and water monopolies, said on 29 April that, 'Land reform will be set back fifteen to twenty years if this new instrument shall be adopted, and water monopoly by it is protected and perpetuated.' In his second issue George attacked the clause in the constitution about private property in land, which is quoted above. Nine months later, in the Bee of 24 December, he said even more forcefully that that clause could be read by judges to render unconstitutional any future legislation intended to appropriate economic rent.

There is no need to comb the editorials of the *State*, as we did the Post, for ideas which often reformulated the convictions of the earlier paper, or which drew on the arsenal of the unpublished book manuscript. Amply and strongly against ratification, George argued the merits of having a short constitution and a short ballot, as in the interest of working men most particularly. At points of greatest difference from Kearney, he ran a series on the economics of the working class, and he took a more moderate attitude than ever before toward the Chinese — this last in perfect contrast with

the exclusions in Article xix of the new constitution. He exposed a fresh instance of civic corruption.

Most of this poured out in the five issues of the weekly that preceded the ratification vote. It is fair to suppose that San Francisco's majority of about 1600 against the constitution, in a vote of some 38,000, owed something to George's radical opposition. And we may suppose also that, although George continued some six weeks longer, his quitting the State in June was in part due to his general discouragement about politics under the new frame of government. Though his children say that the little paper was breaking even, and that he dropped it in order to give full attention to publishing Progress and Poverty, we have his own more complicated story in a letter which is really a testament, dated 6 May, the day before the ratification.

Writing to John Swinton, he pretty much summed up the issue of a dozen years of trying to influence California. The fight against the constitution, he said, had been '*very, very* lonely'; and now he was pained to discover 'that we differ, when we ought to be together, and that you who ought to applaud it, regret my course.' The newspapers which Swinton had been reading in New York, George said — the *Bulletin,* the *Alta*, the *Argonaut*, and the *News Letter* in opposition, and the Chronicle in behalf of the constitution would naturally make it seem 'that here is a closely drawn struggle between the monopolysing [sic] classes on the one part, and popular right on the other. But it is not so.'

George admitted nothing except coincidence in common between himself and the 'capitalists who are fighting this constitution . . . They fear and dislike me. They look on me, as the man who is the head of the anti-constitution committee expressed it — as a man more dangerous in the long run than a hundred Kearneys ... I make no friends with them; but on the other hand I am losing the confidence of the men who ought to be my friends. If I were a demagogue all I would have to do would be to go in and shout, and I could be popular with the only men I can be popular with. But I would be false to my firmest convictions.'

Contrary to the charges of the red-baiters, George denied the least 'glimpse or gleam of communism or socialism' in the document. 'Vacquerel, the only real communist in the convention, is fighting it; the real and thoughtful socialists ... are opposing it; men like Chas. A. Sumner [the old friend on Nugent's *Herald*], Jim Lane, and others who have fought the railroad monopoly inch by inch, are opposing it. Men like John M. Days, John A. Collins, who have steadily fought land monopoly are opposing it. I do not know a single man who believes] as I do that land is not rightfully private property who is supporting this new Constitution. But men like these have no voice that you hear.'

As for the winners, George emphasized that the great strength of the new constitution belonged to the Grangers, 'a class which as you know is the one least likely to accept radical ideas. It is warmly supported by men who hold five, twenty, fifty thousand acres of land.' George spoke of the Grangers in almost the same way as liberals speak of the Associated Farmers in California today, and for his eastern reader he carefully

differentiated them from the discontented farmers of the Middle West — 'for we have not in California in any considerable proportion that class of small farmers who settled the West side by side in quarter sections.' Politically and for the moment only, George agreed that the Kearneyites stood with the Grangers. But, he went on, 'The so called workingmen in the convention did not make a single point — in fact they had no intelligent idea of what a constitution should be or what would benefit the working classes; they simply fell in with the Grangers because by this combination they thought to make a party which would carry the next election and give them the offices. That is their highest idea.'

Beside the working men, among those who said yes to the Grangers' constitution, George placed 'the great railroad monopoly,' which also expected to have its own way. 'They made the Commission section,' he told Swinton, with reference to a board of railroad commissioners to whom the constitution assigned broad but toothless powers to supervise the railroads of the state. In the State he had been even more specific: 'Astute lobbyists and manipulators are kept in the constant pay of the Central Pacific Railroad, which has organized corruption into a perfect system,' and which succeeded in placing friends of monopoly in the convention.

A more unrelieved picture of the politics of self-interest and jobbery than George's would be hard to turn up. 'The constitution is repugnant to the business classes on account of its scheme of taxation; to the corporations on account of the d—d fool clauses regarding corporations; and to all the more intelligent classes because of its want of coherency, precision, and every quality which should be shown in a Constitution; to me and men like me it is chiefly repugnant because giving no real reform it will if adopted but block the way to reform ... The very rich class have nothing whatever to fear from it. Though they have to a great extent got themselves worked up by the shadow of that bugbear which they call "communism." The men who have most to fear are men who want reform which will go to the very foundation of the social structure, and who have an intelligent idea of what they want.'

For George personally, all this amounted to more than a mood of discouragement and defeat, and more even than a sense of being at the moment displaced in a community where he had risen high and gone down.

It represented his permanent judgment of affairs in California, and the fear which was deepening within him for the safety of the republic as a whole. A year later, when Professor Youmans invited an account of Kearneyism, done in the spirit of scientific inquiry, George generalized. ‘Given universal suffrage, a vague blind bitter feeling of discontent on the one side and of practical political impotence, producing indifference and recklessness on the part of the great mass of voters — and any incident may start a series of the most dangerous actions and reactions.’ In a still later comment he noted that the railroad had been the real winner that, though Californians had voted ‘against the railroad time and again, or rather imagined they did,’ the great corporation, ‘of whose domain California, with an area greater than twice that of Great Britain, is but one of the provinces, absolutely dominates the State.’ This would in fact be a valid estimate for the coming three decades of California politics.

To the younger Henry George, in days on the *Post* and the *Reporter,* the railroad monopoly had seemed dangerous but not overwhelming. It might have appeared tyrannous, or Machiavellian, on many occasions, but the leadership had seemed admirable on others; and the system had proved almost benevolent to the American Press Association. Likewise only short years before 1879 the land monopoly had seemed not impossible to break, and the water monopoly had appeared to be subject to the democratic process. But now all the monopolies had entrenched themselves, and at the age of forty George saw no hope of change.

At this point, friends far and near told George that he had better leave California. John Swett said so. John Russell Young, who presently came to San Francisco with General Grant on the expresident’s round-the-world tour, sensed that his old friend was deeply troubled. Though in intimate conversations George would spell out few of his perplexities, Young testifies, he seemed to be ‘swimming in heavy seas ... He spoke as a stranger with his abiding place in a strange land.’ He appeared to be a square peg in a round hole: ‘San Francisco did not appreciate him.’ The visitor helped make the decision that the author of *Progress and Poverty* go to New York for a fresh start.

In November 1876, when Samuel J. Tilden missed clear-cut victory at the polls, and the California Democrats were routed, Henry George had

written his mother that political defeat was as good as victory for such as he. ‘In fact, I think better, as a man of my mind has a better chance of coming forward more rapidly in a minority than in a majority party. However, about all such things, I am disposed to think that whatever happens is for the best. Talent and energy can nearly always convert defeats into victories.’

In 1879 George was reduced close to being a one-man minority with a program, in California. But *Progress and Poverty* he now addressed to the world, and he had uncommon faith in the rightness of his thought.