

A HISTORIC CORRESPONDENCE

Through the courtesy of Mr. G. M. Fowlds, of Auckland, we have received copies of letters exchanged between Henry George and Sir George Grey between the dates of January, 1880, and June, 1892. These copies were taken by Mr. Fowlds from the originals preserved in the Auckland public library and he has included relevant extracts from the *Auckland Star's* report of Henry George's brief visit to Auckland, March 1, 1890. This correspondence began with Grey's appreciation of *Progress and Poverty* and was renewed on the occasion of George's lecturing tour of Australia ten years afterwards.

The Sir George Grey of these letters must not be confused with his namesake, nephew of the second Earl Grey, who was Colonial Secretary for short periods in 1834 and 1854. George Grey, the Colonial Administrator, was born in Lisbon in 1812, eight days after his father, Colonel of the 30th Foot, had been killed at the storming of Badajoz. After a successful career at Sandhurst he spent some years as a subaltern in Ireland and later, as a young captain, volunteered to explore Western Australia.

Captain Grey's expeditions, 1837-1839, although adding comparatively little to geography, revealed him as a man of ability and when in 1841 the attempt at colonising South Australia had virtually failed he was appointed Governor. Thus began a very successful colonial service career which concluded in 1867. The New Zealand settler in 1875 persuaded him to leave his scholarly leisure and enter the House of Representatives in order to resist the centralising policy then going forward. In this he failed, but the radical liberals who succeeded to power two years afterwards selected him as their leader and he became Prime Minister in 1877. Thus in 1879 he was able to pass a preliminary measure towards that policy which his previous experience, observation and analysis all led him to believe the necessary basis of a just order of society. This was a Land Tax providing for the collection of ½d. in the £ on the undeveloped site value of land. Unfortunately, it coincided with a period of commercial depression and a Conservative government succeeding to power rescinded the tax the following year.

It was at this juncture that Grey read the newly-published *Progress and Poverty*, advocating exactly the policy he was endeavouring to introduce. On January 27, 1880, writing to the author he said: "I regard it as one of the ablest works on the great questions of the time which has come under my notice . . . It has cheered me much to find that there is so able a man working in California upon subjects on which I believe *the whole future of mankind now mainly rests.*" "Your position and large opportunities for observation lead me to attach peculiar value to your opinions and I would like to know how far they accord with my own," George replied, while awaiting copies of Grey's speeches. "We see things alike simply because they are there to see," remarks George in his next letter, after reading the speeches.

George's travels to Europe apparently interrupted the correspondence at this point although, no doubt, several letters were not preserved. At the end of February, 1890, on its way to Sydney, the s.s. *Mariposa*, on which George and his wife were passengers, called at Auckland and a public reception was given by Auckland reformers to "the foremost leader in the great cause of land reform,

upon which, as we believe, the social amelioration of civilised humanity in great measure depends." The Rev. H. H. Gulliver, who presented the address, referred to Sir George Grey as an "uncrowned king" among New Zealanders. Grey said that George "had been his companion for years in working out this great question." On their return to the docks the two men became so absorbed in deep and earnest exchange of thought that the captain of the *Mariposa* delayed departure for two hours.

George was unable, as he had hoped, to return again to New Zealand. Writing from Melbourne on May 21, 1890, he says, "However, I am glad that I have at least met you. I never met a man whom I wanted so much to know. Our external standpoints have been so different in many respects, so opposite, and your experience so rich and varied where mine has been deficient as to make that which we know in common, intensely attractive. And now that I have seen your face and grasped your hand, and heard how those among whom you have lived speak of you, I feel for you that affectionate admiration with which the younger man looks up to the older man with whose views and aims and struggles he sympathises. We are really 'living in eternity.' It may be that we shall meet again in this world, but, if not, there must be some where, place and time, where good men shall know each other. And for the present it will be a good deal to me, at least, to have met you here . . .

"What a tremendous fight it is we have entered upon, with all the forces of conservatism and socialism against us. But I have a perfect confidence in the result—whether that comes quicker or slower . . .

"I am sorry I could not have made this trip through these colonies more one of observation than speaking; of taking in rather than of giving out. There is much in their institutions that interests and much that to a certain extent perplexes me—their centralisation, their proneness to State administration and their fixed Civil Service. It is hard to form an opinion by enquiring of men who are used to one set of institutions and have hardly thought of any other . . . The permanent Civil Service seems to have undoubted good features, but as to how far the tendency is to harden into a bureaucracy I cannot clearly tell. (Ideals of federation) seemed to me rather the formation of one big colony than true federation."

Since 1891 there has operated in New Zealand a Dominion Land Tax by which a small uniform rate of tax has been levied on the value of land, and since 1896 local authorities have been given power to levy a rate on land values, provided a poll of ratepayers so decides.

Sir George Grey returned to England in 1894 and died in London September, 1898, almost a year after Henry George. In addition to the library of 12,000 volumes he presented to Auckland Sir George Grey gave another munificent collection to Cape Town where his statue now stands opposite the library. A portrait of him, at an advanced age, can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

F. D. P.

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