

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LATE JAMES McCLATCHY

(The following is part of an extended biographical sketch of the late James McClatchy, founder of The Bee, appearing in the Irish World of February 18, 1905, from the pen of William Halley. The author is the father of William Halley, a well-known printer, of Sacramento.)

HENRY GEORGE HAD many California friends, and the writer of this was one of them. The printer especially were devoted to him. I was introduced to him one day by "one of the craft" on Montgomery Street, San Francisco. He was a tall, straight, intelligent man named Frank Mahon, who came from New Orleans, and who thought all the world of George. "A column of Henry George's paragraphs in the Post," he would say, "is worth more than all the editorials in all the other San Francisco daily papers put together."

It was shortly after Mr. George had commenced the publication of his penny Post, in 1872. That was a peculiar newspaper venture. There were no pennies in circulation then in California, and there may not be now. George imported a barrel of them from the Philadelphia Mint to make change, and San Francisco enjoyed two novelties at one time—pennies and penny Posts.

I was publishing a weekly paper at the time "across the bay," and was there joined some time after by Arthur McEwen, now a well known writer on the New York press, who served his editorial apprenticeship with me. He, too, soon became an ardent admirer of the printer-philosopher and was with him at his death-bed solemnities.

But the man I have special reference to in this article has been dead many years. He was a California newspaper man and pioneer, and his name was James McClatchy. At the time of my acquaintance with him he was part proprietor and chief editor of the Sacramento Daily Bee, a Republican evening paper. He was Mr. George's friend par excellence, although the one was a Democrat and the other a Republican in National politics. He, more than any one else, befriended George when unknown in San Francisco and instilled in his mind those peculiar radical ideas that the father of the single tax developed later on the land question. The same views were taught later in the State University by Dr. Ezra S. Carr, professor of agriculture and English, the title of his lecture on this subject being "Land and Man." Of course, Dr. Carr was also a great friend of Mr. George.

James McClatchy was a man among men. He was a shaft of partially polished granite. He possessed native vigor of intellect and was sincere in his dealings with men. He had been schooled in adversity and self-reliance. It would be better if the State owned



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and had learned the ways of the world. When George and McClatchy met the land question was a burning one in California. The native Californians by a trick of law had been deprived of nearly all their Spanish and Mexican holdings, although guaranteed them by treaty. Land robbery was a matter of common occurrence; no one was safe in his possessions, and land grabbing and perjury ran riot together throughout the State. Violence and frequent murders were some of the consequences. Even the city

the land altogether and that the occupants of it should be tenants of the State, that common ownership would, in short, better subvert every honest interest, and that no one should monopolize that which the Creator intended should be the common heritage of all.

A gentleman named Noah Brooks, of New York, some years ago, in an article in the Century Magazine, put forward a claim of being a benefactor to Henry George shortly after his

appearance in San Francisco. I wondered at the article when I read it. I knew that Mr. McClatchy had performed the selfsame service for Mr. George that Mr. Brooks claimed in that article. It was that he "discovered" him and promoted him from "the case" to a desk in the editorial room of the Daily Times newspaper, of which Mr. Brooks was for a short time managing editor. There is no doubt but what Mr. McClatchy was editor-in-chief of that paper at the time in question and did exactly what Mr. Brooks claimed to have done himself. In a letter from Henry George, Jr., to one of Mr. McClatchy's sons at Sacramento that matter was satisfactorily settled. It was as follows:

"I have my father's own story that he got on the San Francisco Times through your father, and I have copies of the first editorials he wrote while your father was still editor there. Doubtless you have seen Noah Brooks' article on my father in the Century Magazine, relating to the Times period. He did not know the beginning of that story, but I shall tell it."

No doubt the matter has been fully cleared up by Mr. George, Jr., in the published biography.

It was James McClatchy that prevailed upon Mr. George to write his wonderful masterpiece, "Progress and Poverty," twenty-six years ago. I should state here before going any further that Mr. George continued the publication of the Post only a few years and disposed of his interest in it to Senator Jones, of Nevada, who had at that time "money to burn" and was lavishing it on various enterprises. He enlarged it and raised the price.

The writer was in Sacramento in the Winter of 1877, when Mr. George appeared there with his State Commission from Governor Irwin as inspector of gas meters. I frequently met Mr. McClatchy and Mr. George, sometimes together, in the editorial room of The Bee. In 1878 I had a morning paper there myself and lent my friend the use of it to advance his views, and helped him to hold meetings.

One day George dropped into The Bee office and he and McClatchy held a conference of more than usual length on their favorite subject. It was a climax to their frequent and

earnest discussions on the land question and when something of more than usual irritability had happened in the State.

McClatchy had indulged in a burst of eloquent passion when George exclaimed, admiringly:

"Mac, why don't you write a book on the subject? By heavens, it would make a revolution and create a revolution in political economy." To which McClatchy, half sadly, half regretfully, answered:

"No, George, I am getting too old; I can't work as I used to. Were I twenty years younger I would go at it with a vim; and it takes all my strength now to work as I have to work on The Bee. You are comparatively young; you are vigorous, nery, strong and full of life. Besides, you know, George, you have now but little work to do, and your brother (he was there with him) can do that little for you. Now, let you take up those reform ideas and weave them into a book. There is no man living who can do it better than you can."

To this proposition George at first dissented most vigorously, saying there was no man anywhere so well fitted for the task as McClatchy himself.

At last, however, George was prevailed upon by his friends to begin the great work, and he did it modestly at first, with a doubt as to his own ability to perform so great a task with the means at his command. But further that Mr. George continued gathered his materials, marshaled his authorities and laid down his lines of argument. The high thought, the wonderful Pacific Coast atmosphere, his love for humanity helped him; but never was man more inspired for the performance of a great achievement! Chapter by chapter "Progress and Poverty" was unfolded and submitted to the admiring scrutiny of James McClatchy. At last it was completed, and in one year's time was submitted to the criticism and judgment of the world. Perhaps no work of its kind was ever before produced in so short a time or flashed into favor so quickly. The story of how it was written, printed and published is now an old one, but ever interesting; and the writer is pleased to remember that the first copy of it to reach the State of Illinois was received by himself with the author's inscription.

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