

## HENRY GEORGE—CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

Every argument in Henry George's books appeals to cold reason and common observation, but the warmth of humanity everywhere shines through. Most of those who read his books with understanding are likely to ask, who was this author who appeals so powerfully to my reason and my sympathies? To pursue such an enquiry does not—as in the case of some authors—lead to disappointment. Opponents often misrepresented his views but they all seem to have realised that any attempt to question his character would only have reflected on themselves. His latest biography, by his youngest daughter, is a graphic and absorbing account of a life the example of which can never lose its value so long as there are men and women who, "feel the possibility of a higher social state and would strive for its attainment"—and who at the same time feel the moral obligation of making their thoughts quite clear on the subject.

*Henry George, Citizen of the World*, by Anna George de Mille, has been edited by Don. C. Shoemaker, himself a distant relative, and published (\$3.50) in an excellent form by the University of North Carolina Press. One regrets the author did not live to see this worthy presentation of the result of her labours, but from the Introduction we learn that the final form of the book must have been nearly complete before her death last year. The Introduction, by her daughter, Agnes de Mille, is a tribute to the author herself, as well as a setting to the biography of her father. The wealth of illustrations, from photographs, cartoons, posters—even a Du Maurier drawing from "Punch"—enhances an already lively narrative. There have been several biographies of Henry George, indeed the drama of his life lends itself eminently to biography, but this latest work, we think, brings his character and associations more vividly and intimately before the reader than any of its predecessors. Biographies by relatives are apt to become eulogies. Anna George undoubtedly loved her father, admired his genius and shared his convictions. She was twenty when he died and fifty years afterwards made the completion of this biography her crowning task. Yet she contrives in a remarkable degree, to leave the praise to record itself or appear in the testimony of others. If these are often relatives or close friends it shows only that, despite the hosts of admiring adherents to his views, it was after all those who knew George best who valued him highest.

As a story alone this book amuses, excites, sometimes moves us profoundly, and always captures our interest. We identify ourselves with three generations of a family united in affection far beyond the ordinary, and faced with the difficulties and joys which came to folk like ourselves during the last seventy years of the nineteenth century. A mishap to a doll or the price of a sewing machine sometimes looms as large as a war or a political crisis—just as in real life.

Henry George lived from 1839 to 1897, almost coinciding with the reign of Queen Victoria. When he stepped off his full-rigged ship in Calcutta the Mutiny was only simmering; when the *Shubrick*, of 371 tons, "a sidewheeler with two masts," after its adventurous passage through the Straits of Magellan, churned its way through the Golden Gate three years had still to elapse before the firing on Fort Sumpter let loose the Civil War.

George's life story thus spans a great period of history and it introduces us to many famous personalities, British

as well as American. The English reader is likely to be attracted especially to the factual account of a background which might have been that of Emerson or Thoreau, and he becomes acquainted with the real California of Bret Harte. He meets Mark Twain in an episode which might have been taken directly from one of that great-hearted humourist's books.

In California instead of gold George was to find enduring poverty. He was destined also, at twenty-one, to find a bride of seventeen such as no gold can buy and, twenty years afterwards, gradually drifting into his true vocation, he was to write a masterpiece that shook the world, which has taken its place among the classics of literature, and given the impetus to a movement which has survived even the intellectual and moral collapse attending two world wars. As happens so often, the masterpiece which enriched the world grew from the bitter experiences of its creator. But the bitterness never entered his spirit; it cleared his vision.

It is idle to contend that any philosopher's ideas can be formed independent of his environment. The question is, how far does his environment encourage an unbiassed, universal outlook? Anna George's account of her father's childhood in Philadelphia and early struggles at sea and in California opens a chapter of great value in assessing the influences which helped to direct George's mental tendencies and form his social and economic conceptions. Few philosophers and, especially, economists could have enjoyed better influences for independent truth-seeking. Without regular schooling his mind remained fresh and open to unorthodox ideas. In a home atmosphere of Bible Christianity he formed the habit of testing all propositions by the standard of right and wrong, not expediency; and familiarity with Bible English laid the foundations of a prose style as remarkable for clarity as for its capacity to express exalted feeling—a style which denied him the opportunity of seeking refuge in esoteric language from the criticism of common sense. And personal circumstances never allowed him to forget that constant anxiety about their immediate needs is the ever-present background to the thoughts and actions of the masses in the civilised world.

The conditions in the early West gave George an almost unique advantage of opportunity over other economists. Although Turgot long ago pointed out that economic law can be best observed in primitive not advanced society modern economists constantly assume the difference is of kind not degree and thus fail to distinguish between the effects of man-made law and natural law. In early California, as Anna George shows, her father found primitive conditions and modern progress side by side. Moreover time had not yet clothed legal privilege with an air of natural inevitability. Law-makers such as Senator "Boss" Tweed scarcely deigned to throw the veil of hypocrisy over their bribery and intimidation. When such people crudely flaunted their wealth it was not so easy for economists' statistics to convince the people that the incidence of poverty and wealth was natural. As Congress granted millions of acres of land to small corporations of traders calling themselves railway companies, and trade depression descended like a blight, the sequence of cause and effect easily suggests itself to an enquiring mind not satisfied with the usual explanations. Under these conditions the germ of *Progress and Poverty* was conceived.

By a fortunate coincidence George's hard training as an artisan printer enabled him to produce the first edition of a book no publisher would entertain. Publishers, thinking, no doubt, in terms of purchase by "intellectuals" were correct in assuming such a rejection of established ideas would not find purchasers; but George appealed to all men and the sale of his own edition showed non-specialists were willing to listen. How the influence of *Poverty and Progress* spread in America and Europe is well told by Anna George. It would have been an advantage, however, to mention, as George himself described in *The Science of Political Economy*, how the success of an unorthodox economist in demonstrating that political economy *could* answer social questions induced the professionals to seek refuge in "economics," which is not calculated to give a categorical answer to anything.

The coincidence of *Progress and Poverty* with the Irish Land League's struggle was fortunate for the extension of George's ideas and the exercise of his growing powers of oratory. English readers of the biography will not be ill-pleased to learn how George was received in Ireland and England. Sir Otto Trevelyan, Irish Secretary and Macaulay's nephew, was probably the person most mortified when George was taken in the "hoodlum wagon" to the "lock-up." The polite magistrate and police officers even accepted copies of his *Irish Land Question*. Although he was howled down at Oxford, Cambridge listened with courtesy; although Socialists like Hyndman, equally with anti-Socialists like Spencer, opposed his contentions he found sympathy with Chamberlain, Trevelyan, Herbert Gladstone, Labouchere, Bryce, Cardinal Manning and other prominent figures. It would be an exaggeration to say all these supported the taxation of land values, but they appear to have been sufficiently impressed by George's personality to have been likely to do so. Two of his most interesting meetings were with Mary Gladstone, daughter of the Prime Minister, and Helen Taylor, the gifted step-daughter of Stuart Mill. Both had read *Progress and Poverty* and become convinced. Helen Taylor, with whom the Georges stayed, and who proved a staunch supporter, declared that if her step-father had lived he also would have agreed. Readers of Mill's *Autobiography* will easily understand the grounds of her belief.

In the nature of things the immediate effect of *Progress and Poverty* could not endure. As early as 1884, Anna George records, "his real adherents were being sifted out of the mass who had flocked to him, not because they understood his message but because he was in vogue." Perhaps he was really understood almost as much in Great Britain and Australia as in America; and in New Zealand Sir George Grey, in attempted legislation, had virtually anticipated the proposal of taxing land value. George's message, like his sympathy, was universal. His journey in 1890 to Australia—calling for a few hours at Auckland to meet Grey—was a triumphal progress. His biographer might with advantage have made some reference to legislative achievement in Australasia. If later progress has not been so rapid it is possible George himself had some premonition of the influences which might weaken the spirit of reform. In an interesting letter,\* dated May 21st, 1890, to Sir George Grey, he says of the Australasian colonies, "There is much in their institutions

that interests and much that . . . perplexes me—their centralisation, their proneness to State administration and their fixed civil service." Did he foresee the paralysing atmosphere of the "Welfare State"? "When we talk of quackery," he said in a speech in 1895, "the greatest quack of all is he who tells you to go slow; the quack who tells you that in instituting reform no one need be hurt." In his last mayoral campaign he said of one of his opponents, "He would help the people, I would help the people help themselves."

The story of George's last great campaign, deliberately and quietly undertaken although he knew the hand of death was upon him, is as dignified as it is moving and dramatic. We are left with the picture of a genius endowed to an eminent degree with the qualities we both love and admire, one who devoted his talents always to fulfilling the most difficult duty in all social life: that of the supremely good citizen—and his city was the whole world.

### THE SCHUMAN PLAN

In a letter to the "*Manchester Guardian*," published June 9, Mr. STEPHEN MARTIN wrote:

To those who believe that prosperity, progress and peace can only be secured by measures which ensure the greatest possible degree of economic and political liberty for the individual, the Schuman coal and steel plan presents the greatest challenge yet put up by the prophets of authoritarian economic planning.

The statement that the setting up of an international authority for the integration of the coal and steel resources of the European countries is a step towards free trade is completely erroneous and fallacious. Of course, import restrictions would be abolished between the participating countries, but this certainly does not mean that the supreme authority would relinquish its regulation of distribution, exchange, and production. Control of prices and capital investment, quantitative regulation of supplies, and the arbitrary planning of production are a negation of Free Trade and in direct conflict with the principles of the free market.

If further evidence is required, it is provided by the inability of the British Government to reach agreement with the French on the basis of preliminary discussions. There is no need to fear the loss of national sovereignty if the plan does not affect our trading and producing ability.

High protection governed by strategical considerations is the true background of the plan. Only if men are free to produce and to exchange the products of their labour, without let or hindrance, can international concord and abundance be assured.

Finally, let me remind Mr. Acheson of the words of an earlier holder of his office, Mr. Francis B. Sayre: "If goods and food do not cross frontiers, armies and guns will," and this applies wherever the frontiers are.

THE FALLING POUND. Notice the difference, when considering the purchasing power of wages and salaries or, indeed, of any income, within the last five years. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, H. of C., May 16, said the purchasing power of the pound in March, 1950, was 16s. 1d. as compared with 20s. in 1945.

THESE DAYS. Workers at a Dartford (Kent) munitions factory refused to sign a petition calling for the outlawing of weapons of mass destruction because they feared they might do themselves out of a job.—*News Chronicle*, May 20.

\* For copy of this and other letters in the Grey-George correspondence LAND & LIBERTY is indebted to Mr. G. M. Fowlds and Mr. Robert Clancy.