

## A MAJORITY OF ONE

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THE AUTHOR'S EDITION of *Progress and Poverty* sold well enough at three dollars a copy to pay for the plates. Now that he had these, Henry George approached D. Appleton & Co. again and they agreed to bring the book out at once in a commercial edition.

It was not until the new year (1880), however, that the edition issued from the press. The sale of the book, at two dollars a copy, was slow. George wrote jocularly to a friend, "If the professed economists will only refute the truths I have tried to make clear, their acceptance will come so much the sooner."<sup>1</sup>

But the first disinterest and apathy of the reading public meant lean days for George. He had to give up his job as inspector of gas meters to an appointee of the recently elected Republican governor.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his faith in his book and in himself did not falter. Later John Russell Young, who had been managing editor of the *New York Tribune* at the time of George's trip East in quest of the Associated Press franchise, wrote that "I never see *Progress and Poverty* without recalling and honoring the courage of the author. George never for a moment—even when under the grinding heel of bitter conditions—doubted the truth of his mission to mankind and its ultimate success."<sup>3</sup>

Copies of the author's edition had been sent to notable figures in the United States and abroad. Herbert Spencer made no acknowledgement but William E. Gladstone and the Duke of Argyll sent brief notes of thanks. Sir George Grey wrote enthusiastically from New Zealand. Joseph Chamberlain sent a gracious letter in which he said, "It appears to me a very interesting study of a most important subject." This diplomat added cautiously, "At the same time I must not be supposed to agree

with all your conclusions.”<sup>4</sup> Flattering word came from one scholar, Dr. Montague R. Levenson, an Englishman who was living in San Francisco. He was so much impressed by George’s doctrines that he withdrew his own published primer of political economy, declaring that not another copy should be sold until it was rewritten.

The Appleton edition carried *Progress and Poverty* farther afield. However, the publishers had not thought it necessary to bother about foreign copyrights.\* This was caused, no doubt, by the failure of their London agent to get a single British firm to handle it. “Unless the author could pay all the expenses no one would take the book,” he wrote.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one of the English publishers had stated that even if the plates were sent to him free of cost he would not print it. Appleton reported to George, “The only plan remaining is to send copies to our own agency, advertise them and thus introduce the book to the English people. English publishers generally would not look with much favor on your book as it overthrows old notions and views of political economy.”<sup>6</sup>

So little faith had the American publishers that they told George they saw no advantage in putting “rights of translation reserved” in their edition. However, others placed a higher value on the work. A request soon came for the privilege of bringing it out in German. The first translation, made by C. D. F. von Gütschow of San Francisco, was followed by two others. All three were eventually circulated in Germany, where the existing land reform movement promptly assimilated George’s theory.

That the author had periods of doubt about the immediate influence of *Progress and Poverty* appears in a letter to Charles Nordhoff, one of the chief editorial writers of the *New York Herald* whom he had met early in the 1870’s in San Francisco:

I wanted so much to see it published [he wrote] that comparatively I do not care about its future fate. At least I do not fret and worry. My work is done; the rest is not my business. And my faith in it, or rather in the truth which I believe it embodies, is so profound that I do not think anything that could be said of it could either flatter or abash me.

\* This circumstance makes it practically impossible to compute the exact circulation of the work.—Editor

I appreciate the difficulty of reaching those most deeply concerned in any social reform, and the difficulty of holding them, even when you have reached them—of preventing ideas which you got in, from taking most distorted forms. It is the general fact that those who suffer most are least able to help themselves. It is certain efforts for amelioration of the condition of the lowest class have come from above, not below. The most terrible thing about unjust social enactments is not the physical suffering they cause, but the mental and moral degradation they produce. It is this that gives the demagogue his advantage and enables tyranny to turn the rabble against their best friends.<sup>7</sup>

But at last important notice was beginning to be taken of the book. The first criticism to arrive from Europe was in the Parisian *Revue Scientifique* and was signed by Emile de Laveleye. "The chapter on the Decline of Civilization," wrote the Belgian economist, "is worthy of being added to De Tocqueville's immortal work."<sup>8</sup> A month later a review covering the larger part of a page appeared in the *New York Sun*. Other reviews appeared in important papers and magazines and there were demands for a paper-covered, cheaper edition of the book. An enthusiastic letter from a young man named A. J. Steers, in the Appleton Company, brought a grateful reply from George, in which he said, "Many a man does his work and in his life sees no result. And no matter how much of a success the book may become in my lifetime, I do not think I shall be proud of it, as men are proud of writing a successful novel or history. The feeling is one of deep gratitude that it has been permitted me to do something. . . . But it is not the result so much as the effort to do what we can, with which we are concerned."<sup>9</sup>

George was straining to pay his debt for the printing and at the same time to support his family. He wrote John Swinton that "the book has done better than in this time I would have reasonably hoped. Appletons have already published their second edition and contemplate a third, and of the obligation which I assumed in bringing it out, I have already paid all but about \$120."<sup>10</sup>

Several articles written by George had been published in the *Popular Science Monthly* but they brought in little revenue. A contract he had hoped to make with a lecture bureau fell

through. Once again he considered going East, and he wrote facetiously to a friend that "if they would reduce the fare a little further—say to \$10.00—I would go myself."<sup>11</sup> It seemed like an answer to a prayer when John Russell Young sent word that there was a chance for a writing position on the *New York Herald*. Since Young had voluntarily advanced the money for the trip, George availed himself of this opportunity and left for the East.

"I came third class after all," he wrote Taylor, "and Young thought there was something to be made by writing up the emigrant trip. I am enjoying it and am full of hope. The spell is broken and I have taken a new start."<sup>12</sup> When he arrived in New York, however, he found that the position on the *Herald* which Young and Charles Nordhoff had tried to obtain for him was not available and that no other definite work could be obtained.

Hoping to further the cause of free trade, he entered into the Hancock-Garfield presidential fight. The Democratic campaign committee had sent for him and asked him to talk to working men on the tariff question. Agreeing to this, he made a straight free trade speech which was a success with the audience but so distressed the "tariff reformers" controlling party policy that they cancelled his other speaking dates.

In Brooklyn there was a group of fearless young Democrats—Charles O'Connor Hennessy among them—who were fighting the party machine. They invited George to speak at one of their rallies in Jefferson Hall. There he was at liberty to make an unqualified plea for free trade. Sure of his subject, he spoke forcefully and powerfully. The speech made many admirers and friends, one of them being Andrew McLean, managing editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*.

Pressed for money, George nevertheless determined to remain in New York in the hope that he could find work. When a magazine article, previously accepted, was returned for changes which the editor wanted but which made it unpub-lishable, George wrote Taylor, "These little stumbles are only to be expected but when a fellow carries the weight I am carrying, every little stumble hurts and it is very hard to recover spirit and elasticity."<sup>13</sup>

The George family was still in San Francisco; Henry, Jr. had a job in a printing office and Mrs. George had taken in board-

ers.\* Henry wrote to Annie on their wedding anniversary, December 2, 1880:

We have been married nineteen years. Yes, more than half of your life has been that of a married woman, and I have been your husband for very near the half of mine, and that by far the most active part. And here we are with the whole continent between us, and about as poor as when we started. Well that won't be long, my darling. But this little separation amounts to nothing except to make us feel, as we may have felt before, the value of each other. I think I love you more truly and more deeply than I did when, nineteen years ago, you trusted yourself to me. I know that I have never regretted and I know that you have not. For I know I have your love and you have mine.<sup>14</sup>

Although the book was slowly attracting readers, the royalties were meager. Sending brave letters to his wife and wearing a brave front for the world, he showed occasional glimpses of the real state of his affairs only to Taylor during the winter of 1880-81. "I have been trying to hold on as long as I could in hopes of a chance of some kind. Don't think me a Micawber," he wrote to his friend. "I shall go to work if I have to go to the case."<sup>15</sup>

But at last an opening came. Abram S. Hewitt, a wealthy manufacturer and a member of Congress from New York City who had expressed an interest in *Progress and Poverty*, engaged its author to do some research on a congressional report which Hewitt had to make. George, who through stress of circumstance was now forced to break his resolution never to sell the product of his pen unsigned, wrote confidentially to Taylor:

I don't think I will get back for manifestly this is the best place for me unless I have something sure there. I say no more on the indications than in the actualities. I have taken the job from Hewitt to get up a report on labor investigation to be presented to the next Congress. He agrees to give me \$50.00 a week for three hours' work a day. I have done about three weeks' work so far, and I don't know how long it will last. But there is some magazine work I have in mind and there is newspaper work to fall back on, to say nothing

\* Henry George's family now consisted of his wife and four children—Henry, Jr., Richard, Jane Teresa, and the author, Anna Angela, born October 2, 1877, in San Francisco in what she said was the first brick house erected there.—Agnes de Mille

of lecturing. I have only delivered one lecture yet, receiving \$50.00 for it, but will have more if I want to do it.<sup>16</sup>

After telling Taylor that he had received copies of part of the German translation of *Progress and Poverty*, which was to be completed and out in a few weeks' time, he chronicled some of his personal experiences:

Last night I dined with Dana of *The Sun*, the company consisting of his family, Hazeltine, the reviewer, John Swinton and myself. He lives in magnificent style. I have plenty of chance to go into company, but have hitherto kept out of it for until last week had only my old clothes, and last night felt rather out of place, when seated on the right of the hostess, yet the only man in the room in a business suit. However!

My wife thinks she can get along cheaper at boarding than keeping house, and so I have told her to sell out. . . . So life goes. My pleasant little home—that I was so comfortable in—is gone, and I am afloat at 42, poorer than at 21. I do not complain; but there is some bitterness in it.<sup>17</sup>

Early in March, 1881, he reported to Taylor that the business between him and Hewitt was terminated. He had read the matter he had prepared to Hewitt, who was exceedingly pleased with it and had given George one hundred dollars. This was far below the price they had agreed upon but George did not demur. When Hewitt indicated that he wanted some further work done on the investigation, George explained that he would have to charge another one hundred dollars. Whereupon Hewitt decided it was costing too much and he would have to stop.

George needed the money badly. But he did not confide in Hewitt. He said that he was relieved; that he knew he had been doing the work too cheaply; that he had done the job because he had undertaken to do it. There the matter ended.

The one hundred dollars, however, was a help. George was able to buy the suit of clothes he needed so badly and to send money home. But to clear up all the matters that worried him, such as a loan Taylor had made to him some time previously, he wrote his friend, "I found if I sent you \$20.00 it would leave me only \$5.00, and kept it to help out on this week's board. (It is in just such times as this when one is feeling for foothold

that the terrible weight of family comes in.) . . . There is no one here I can talk to as I can to you, especially when I feel blue and down. What weight I have carried no one knows. The worst of it is the terrible mental strain, the waste of energy and time and opportunity it involves. But it is only temporary. If I can keep my strength. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

A paper edition of *Progress and Poverty* was to be printed and a preface had to be written. He wrote and rewrote it. Finally discarding what he had done, he ended up with a simple summary of the book. That summary was used in this and all subsequent editions. Worry made it difficult to think and write, and as late as March 14, he explained to Taylor, "I know what is wanted—rest and freedom from anxiety. But that is what I can't get. I see a great work ahead of me—it opens larger and larger, but sometimes I fear that I can't hold out. God knows that I try my best."<sup>19</sup>

But at the end of December the sale of *Progress and Poverty* began to pick up. Every copy of the previous editions and one thousand of the cheap edition had gone and orders and inquiries were piling in on D. Appleton and Co. The German notices were good. And the book was being discussed critically at colleges in this country.

It was reported to the author that Leland Stanford had read the book and had told James McClatchy that he had become "a disciple of Henry George."<sup>20</sup> However, so far as George was able to determine, the report was false. But Michael Davitt, the Irish nationalist, openly pledged the Land League to push *Progress and Poverty* in Great Britain. Of a sudden, its author was attracting attention.

George received fifty dollars from *Appleton's Journal* for an article<sup>21</sup> and orders for an encyclopedia article as well as one for the *North American Review*.<sup>22</sup> The money pressure was lessening a little. By May 12, he was able to pay back the twenty dollar loan from Taylor. He wrote to his friend in San Francisco:

You do not know and I cannot readily tell you how much this little accommodation has been to me. It is not so much the want of money as the mental effect it produces—the morbid condition. The man who does not understand that, does not know how it is possible for people to commit suicide. This thing has weighed on me very much. Could I have felt free and been relieved of the terrible anxiety, I could have, in the same time, accomplished many times as

much. But yet it has seemed as though a Providence helped me through.

When I drew on you for this \$20.00 it seemed my darkest hour. I was weak and weary in mind and body.<sup>23</sup>

By the end of May something of the old lightness had returned. "Why do you allow the papers there to abuse me without sending me a copy?" he wrote Taylor. "To be abused and not to know of it is almost as bad as not to be abused at all."<sup>24</sup>

John Russell Young was the only one of George's intimate friends who never became converted to his philosophy. But a deep love linked them and they were almost daily companions during those long months of worry and struggle. Young later wrote:

It was a daring experiment—this unknown gentleman, with no aid but his own high spirit, nothing in his carpet-bag but one book of gospel, coming at 42 to make his way to the heart of mighty Babylon. The more I studied George under heavy conditions, the more I admired him. His ability and courage, his honesty, independence and intellectual power were those of a leader of men.

We took walks on the Battery, whither we went under the flush of strenuous midnight work, the great city at peace and no companions this side of the stars; strolls in the Park, in Westchester and the suburbs of Brooklyn—the brave, intrepid soul wrapped up in his book and smiling upon fate. . . . It was the courage which, as has been written, makes one a majority.<sup>25</sup>