

## FRIENDS AT HOME

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THE TRAVELLERS reached home September 1, 1890. On the day they landed, Henry George plunged into the work and excitement of the first national Single Tax Conference. Delegates came from all over the United States for the sessions which were held in Cooper Union. During the two days of meetings, George wrote the platform, made speeches, and subjected himself to the constant strain of public and private interviews.

A lecture trip to New England followed the conference; then another, longer trip through the Southwest as far as Texas. Always the speeches were different, new, extemporaneous—save for the ever-popular written lecture, "Moses." At the same time George wrote editorials for *The Standard* and concerned himself with its financial condition. He worked early and late—under what pressure can only be imagined.

Finally, one day early in December, the break came which his friends had feared.

"It hurts here," said Henry George, putting his hand to his head.

"You must have a headache," said Mrs. George.

"So this is what you've meant all these years, when you talked of having a headache!" he exclaimed. It was actually his first experience of that kind.

But it was serious. Shortly afterwards he was stricken with aphasia. Dr. James E. Kelly, who was sailing for Europe, gave the case to Dr. Frederick Peterson, a brain specialist. He in turn consulted Dr. Allen Starr and Dr. Walter Mendelson.<sup>1</sup> The three physicians examined the patient and expressed astonishment at his physical condition. "His body is as remarkable as his mind," they concluded.

The trouble now was overwork. Nerve strain had resulted in

a slight hemorrhage in the part of the brain in which the center of speech is located. His mind was clear, yet sometimes in speaking he would use the wrong word or interject an alien word. The aphasia lasted only three days but it was impossible to keep the patient in bed for any length of time and most difficult to keep him from his desk. He even slipped out of the house one sunny morning and walked up and down the sidewalk when Mrs. George, his nurse, was off guard.

For Henry George simply did not know how to be ill. His mind was busy but he was denied the opportunity to supply it with daily papers or books. He needed the release which fiction brings but it rarely held his interest. On several occasions he let his youngest daughter read him stories he had given Henry George, Jr., when he was a small lad and which he himself had, at that time, "like a goose, spent the night re-reading."<sup>2</sup> These were *The Arabian Nights*. He frequently said that memories of the old days before the mast came back to him—of the Orient as he had seen it in his youth.

A down the Tigris I was borne  
By Baghdad's shrines of fretted gold,  
High-walled gardens green and old<sup>3</sup>

he would quote. But it was to the Bible and to Shakespeare that he most frequently turned.

His friends were more devoted than ever. John Russell Young was among those who called every day. August Lewis and Tom L. Johnson were constant in their attentions. It was Lewis and Johnson who joined in a plan financing the Georges for a trip to Bermuda, where they went as soon as the convalescent was strong enough for the trip. Mr. and Mrs. Simon Mendelson (parents-in-law of Lewis) accompanied them.

It was difficult to make the sick man relax but Mendelson succeeded when he read Shakespeare aloud. One day Mrs. George was able to write home happily, "We went yesterday to St. George, starting at 9 in the morning and not returning till nearly 7. Your father drove us all the way and wound up last night playing euchre with us!"

But keeping him from work became increasingly difficult—until the unexpected arrival of a young admirer, W. E. Hicks.

In a rash moment, some time before, George had consented half-seriously to let Hicks teach him to ride a bicycle, provided that they could find time for the lessons. There had never been

time in New York. But now Hicks appeared in Bermuda, trundling a bicycle down the gangplank of the boat from New York.

Henry George kept his rash promise. Along the white shell roads of the island he wobbled, strings binding his trousers tight to his ankles, his hat squashed down on his head, his face rosy with exertion, his blue eyes flashing—and Hicks running and panting beside him, steadying the machine.

By the time he returned to New York, George had become a confirmed cyclist. He talked it to everybody. He made his whole family learn to ride. (Mrs. George, however, gave up after a bad fall—caused, she said, by a lamp post's running into her. But her husband kept at the sport.) George and some or all four of his children—the girls dressed in the smart bloomer bicycle suits of the period—would start from their home on 19th Street and frequently ride to Grant's Tomb, collecting bicycling friends en route.

George passed on the bicycle fever to August Lewis, Louis F. Post, and others. One day Tom Johnson, who was now a member of Congress, came to call on George just as the economist was leaving to see Post through his last lesson and go with him for his first out-of-door venture. Johnson went along to the bicycle school,<sup>4</sup> where he watched Post circle the big room repeatedly and go through all the exercises of mounting, dismounting, and reversing.

"Let me see if I can't do that," said the portly congressman. The attendants could not find a teaching belt big enough to fit him, but finally they buckled two together, strapped them around Johnson, and hoisted him to the saddle. The strongest teacher was delegated to the job of running beside the heavy pupil and holding him on the machine. The man ran part way around the room, and then said suddenly, "Hey, you, go 'long! You know how to ride!" Johnson did, instinctively. It enchanted him so much that he decided to skip his business appointments. Accordingly, when George and Post bicycled to Central Park, Johnson followed in the coupe in which he always traveled about New York. Coming to a sequestered place, he poked his head out of the window and begged to be allowed to ride. George obligingly lent his wheel to the neophyte and Messrs. Johnson and Post followed each other around the circle in neat order. That grew tame and Johnson suggested that they reverse. Somehow there was a miscalculation and suddenly a collision. There was nothing left to do but to perch the wrecked machines

on the roof, pack themselves in the coupe that was none too roomy even for Tom Johnson, and ride off hilariously to the repair shop.

It was not long after this that Henry George, Jr., writing to his father from Washington, sandwiched in between a detailed account of his impression of Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* and word of doings in the Senate, the report that "Johnson makes the pedal mount from both sides now!"<sup>5</sup>

As this recreation continued it was the task of the youngest child\* to keep her father's bicycle clean. One afternoon he wandered into the basement to find her at her labor. "What's happening?" he inquired in dismay at the sight of his dismembered machine.

"Oh, I took the hind wheel off and found a lot of filthy, greasy little shot," she answered. Not knowing that a bicycle was a "ballbarian," as the family afterward jokingly called it, she continued blithely, "I've lost quite a few of them but the others I've cleaned and put back."

Here if ever, was a temptation to the father to show deep annoyance. Instead, he set about recovering as many as he could of the lost "shot." But the bicycle had to go to the repair shop again.

Admirers often showered gifts on George. One morning two young girls appeared at his home with a beautiful down pillow. One side was pale pink and the other was baby blue satin, on which had been embroidered by skillful Chinese fingers a stately white stork with red legs. It was a work of art, certainly, but it was out of place on the brown rep couch in the book-strewn, paper-cluttered study.

Several years before, George had been given a boat by a friend who knew that he never really relaxed save when on the water. The tiny craft was kept at a small dock on the East River close to the George home, which was then on Pleasant Avenue (another name for Avenue A) near Nineteenth Street. The boat could be used for sailing or rowing, and if the breeze and river traffic were favorable, the economist (who sometimes still used his diary as a sea log with such notations as "East wind and Smooth sea") would hoist the white canvas and take the helm.<sup>6</sup> Usually one or more of his sons went with him, and often his

\* The author usually referred to herself as "The Child," and this was her name in the household.—Editor

daughters. They would weave up the river through the big and little craft, on gala occasions going as far as High Bridge. If they were becalmed, "Captain" George, seated at the stern and quietly puffing on his cigar, would use a trick he learned as a youngster, taking one oar and propelling and steering the boat by sculling. Although he loved these hours on the water, he took time to relax in this manner far too infrequently. The boat was given up.

One day he came home with a gift brought to him from Paraguay,<sup>7</sup> a small covered basket, from which there came weird noises. After the assembled family had guessed the contents correctly, George opened the basket and a beautiful little Capuchin monkey jumped to his shoulder. The monkey was a lady and her name was Cleopatra, and they should not have referred to her as "him"—only they always did. Cleopatra loved his master even as that other little monkey, back in the days before the mast, had loved him. The animal had, among other accomplishments, an uncanny way of sensing when the master was arriving home, either from *The Standard* office or from a lecture tour. Long minutes before the key was heard in the latch, Cleo was waiting in the front hall. Leaping to his master's shoulder, one paw grasping the tawny beard and the other holding an ear lobe, the monkey would ride about chattering all the "gossip" of the household.

The Georges were "at home" informally on Sunday evenings. A dozen or twenty friends usually were expected, but sometimes as many as forty guests arrived. And then the celebrated George chocolate would emerge for distribution distinctly pale in color, the whipped cream as sparse as soapsuds on a small boy's wash-rag. The most intimate of the guests were secretly requested to show a dislike for macaroons, which usually were in short supply.

On one of these very crowded occasions, Mrs. George asked one of Jennie's beaux to find Cleo and put him to bed—Mrs. George remembering that in a moment of misplaced enthusiasm the monkey had bitten a chunk out of a perfectly good little niece, Alice George. To humor the animal, who objected raucously at being penned up by a stranger, the young guest parted with his best lead pencil. After that all was peace and quiet in the George basement for the remainder of the night. But next morning, in the crate bed, splinters of wood were all that could be found of what had once been a lead pencil, while

a very sick little monkey lay snuggled on a cushion near the sitting-room fire. The household was plunged in sorrow two days later when Cleo died. "We'll never have another pet," the master decided. "It hurts too much when they go." And they did not, for a few months—that is, if one did not count the cats.

Another gift was a bequest of approximately \$10,000 which was left to George for the dissemination of his books by a man of whom he had never heard before—George Hutchins, a farmer of Ancora, New Jersey. Gratefully accepting the money, the author was preparing to use it for the purpose intended when he learned that Hutchins' widow had not been properly provided for. This was in 1886. George thereupon endeavored to return the money legally to the woman, but the collateral heirs stepped in, contesting on the ground that George's philosophy was "confiscation," and tried to break the will in order to get two-thirds of the estate for themselves. He was compelled to fight the action, which he eventually won, but the legal controversy was long, drawn-out, and yielded no one anything. The widow in fact was reduced to public charity.

Later, learning from a newspaper that "the woman whose husband had left \$30,000 to Henry George was in an almshouse,"<sup>8</sup> he sent to Mrs. Hutchins money out of his own pocket from time to time. When she died in 1892, it was he who paid for the funeral.

The author of *Progress and Poverty* had visitors from all over the world. Some of them had amusing, even eccentric, ways. One was an erudite Englishwoman who wore long black trousers under her decorous skirts and bundled herself in an astounding number of coats, shawls, scarves, and furs. One correspondent sent him postcards on which he wrote in miniature script enough to cover, with normal handwriting, several sheets of notepaper. Most of those who sought him because of his writings and lectures were interested in economics. But there were others, usually artists, who might not be expected to have much interest in the "dismal science." Such a one was George Inness, the painter. Dr. Taylor wrote George, "George Inness is here on a visit and I have had some talk with him about you. He says you are the clearest thinker of the age on politico-economic subjects, and that you are logical while all the rest are illogical and muddled."<sup>9</sup>

Of course there was his old friend, Mark Twain, and the artist, Daniel Carter Beard, subsequently of Boy Scout fame, who

drew the brilliant illustrations for *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Beard wrote in his autobiography: "I knew Henry George intimately. We would discuss things, principles and people as friends may, but all the time I was talking or listening to him I felt that I should be standing hat in hand, because I realized that back of the little man was an invisible something, big and great—bigger and greater than the generation in which he lived understood, or even George himself realized. It was the soul of the man himself."<sup>10</sup>

In the old days of the San Francisco Bohemian Club, Harry Edwards, the actor, had been a dear friend. And now in the East there was James A. Herne, who had become so enthusiastic an advocate of *Progress and Poverty* that he used to collect his company, when on tour, and read aloud to them passages from the book. He was a finished actor and a brilliant playwright. Henry George, who went rarely to the theater—save to see Shakespeare or to Tony Pastor's Variety Show to which Tom Johnson sometimes enticed him for relaxation—used to go delightedly to see Herne's plays. Occasionally he sat in the wings through a whole act of *Shore Acres*. After first seeing this play he wrote the author, "You have done what you ought to do—made a play pure and noble that people will come to hear. You have taken the strength of realism and added to it the strength that comes from the wider truth that realism fails to see; and in the simple portrayal of homely life, touched a universal chord. . . . In the solemnity of the wonderfully suggestive close, the veil that separates us from heaven seems to grow thin, and things not seen to be felt. . . . I did not feel like talking when I left the theater; but I wanted to grasp your hand."<sup>11</sup>

Franklin Garland, for years a member of Herne's company, used to go often to the house on East 19th Street. His brother Hamlin Garland, also friend and follower of George, frequently contributed poems, articles and short stories to *The Standard*, and went about to Single Tax groups in various cities where he read aloud his story, "Under the Lion's Paw."<sup>12</sup>

Henry C. de Mille, who had made an enviable place for himself in the front rank of American playwrights, was also numbered among George's friends.\* Although their meetings had been brief and infrequent, through letters a deep spiritual

\* His elder son, William Churchill de Mille, married the author, Anna Angela George. Both his sons William and Cecil were her playmates.—Editor.

understanding had grown up between them. De Mille had written:

It seems to me that, as Paul says, "in these latter times also God has spoken to us."

I was struck by the title of the Duke of Argyll's essay—"The Prophet of San Francisco." How unconsciously one's enemies speak the truth sometimes. . . .

I believe that a prophet has spoken; that a man inspired with the truth of God's Kingdom wrote the words of *Progress and Poverty*. I tell you because I know the value of a word of cheer to the toilers in the cause of light, that another has started to raise his feeble torch to illumine the way. . . . If I can make the dramatic sermon approach near the dignity, clearness and grandeur of the text book, I shall feel that I have truly done God's work.<sup>13</sup>

To which Henry George replied:

I speak what I know, and what many others will testify to, when I say that you will never regret having thrown yourself into the good cause. It will make life higher and happier and the thought of death easier. And now the time has come when every effort shows its result. You have power to reach those whom I cannot, and may pass the torch to those who will carry it further than you can reach. I am glad of your coming. We have needed you, for the field is ripe, and from the bottom of my heart I wish you, God speed!

De Mille had intended to impart his friend's philosophy to the theater in a play. But a few months later that rare and gifted gentleman, who was not yet forty, died. And the dreamed-of play was never written.

Among the women friends were Helen Taylor, constant as ever; Frances M. Milne, the California poet; Mrs. Francis George Shaw and her brilliant daughter, Josephine Shaw Lowell; Catherine Helen Spence, "the grand old woman of South Australia" and champion of the cause of proportional representation; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the suffrage pioneer with whom George used to exchange funny stories; and his own sister-in-law, Sister Teresa Fox, whose deep spirituality and understanding of world movements made her a never-ending inspiration.

But closest of all was Annie George, whom he consulted in all his affairs. He trusted her instinct above his own judgment and counted her his wisest critic. Always after a speech, no matter



what the adulation of the crowd, he would ask when they were alone, "Well, Annie, how did it go tonight?" And she would give him her frank opinion, telling him if he had failed to make a point clear, recommending always that he make his talks too short rather than too long.

Dr. Taylor wrote of them, "Surely, never were man and woman closer to each other in affection and sympathy than were Mr. and Mrs. George—companions ever until death stepped in between them—companions, too, of the noble sort that breasted together not only their sufferings, but the sufferings of the world around them."<sup>14</sup>