

GEORGIST PROGRESS

HENRY GEORGE'S doctrines meanwhile were reaching a widening audience. Tom L. Johnson, who was representing his Ohio district in the House of Representatives, conceived the idea of reading *Protection or Free Trade* into the *Congressional Record*.

The book had already enjoyed a large circulation, first by a newspaper syndicate, then in regular book form, and later in a cheap paper edition of 200,000 copies issued through the extraordinary efforts of William Justus Atkinson and John G. Carlisle, son of the Senator from Kentucky. It was (and still is) the custom in Congress for members to have their own remarks or remarks which they had inserted reprinted, paying for the printing but using their franking privilege to send such matter free through the mails. Tom Johnson rallied some of his colleagues, Jerry Simpson of Kansas, William J. Stone of Kentucky, Joseph E. Washington of Tennessee, John W. Fithian of Illinois, and Thomas Bowman of Iowa. The six congressmen divided *Protection or Free Trade* into six parts and read it into the *Record* as "remarks" during the tariff debate, which was then in progress.¹

The six sections of the book were then reassembled and brought out in an edition so large that its unit cost was only about five-eighths of a cent a copy. It retailed at one cent.

Needless to say, the whole affair annoyed the high-tariff Republicans in the House. In retaliation they inserted in the *Record* a book by George Gunton which defended monopolies. When the Republicans attacked the Democrats for putting over "St. George," as the edition of *Protection or Free Trade* was called in the House, even those Democrats who had not been out-and-out free traders struck back in defense. The matter was discussed in the press and in clubs all over the country. Tom

Johnson sent 200,000 copies of the book back to Ohio; the Democratic National Committee distributed 70,000 copies in Indiana, and the Reform Club of New York circulated 100,000 copies in the Northwest.

Altogether, 1,200,000 copies of the one-cent, "St. George," edition of *Protection or Free Trade* were distributed, as well as 200,000 copies of a two-cent edition. It is safe to estimate that almost 2,000,000 copies of the book in English and foreign languages were circulated in the first eight years after its original publication. No other work in economics, save only *Progress and Poverty*, has such a record.

There followed for George the hard-fought Cleveland campaign of 1892 and the bitter disappointment when the newly re-elected President subordinated the tariff question to the money question. But when the tariff did come up in Congress, George was present in the gallery to hear Tom L. Johnson, manufacturer of steel rails, urge that his own product be put on the free list. Indeed, Johnson made a strong plea to abolish the tariff in its entirety.

During the House debate a member noticed George in the gallery and pointed with derision to "the master" listening to his "pupil" (Johnson) on the floor. Probably to the surprise of this member, a group of independent Democrats promptly left their seats and climbed the stairs to shake hands with the small, tawny-bearded man who had been sitting there quietly. In spite of Johnson's impassioned plea the duty on steel rails was not lowered.

Disappointed as George was over Cleveland's attitude on the tariff, he was even more chagrined when the President set aside the state authority of Governor John Peter Altgeld of Illinois and sent Federal troops to quell the Chicago railroad strike. None of the New York newspapers criticized Cleveland, but some 10,000 men gathered in and about Cooper Union at a protest mass meeting.² Among the speakers were the Reverend Thomas A. Ducey, of St. Leo's Catholic Church; Charles Frederick Adams, the attorney; James A. Herne, the actor; and Henry George. Priest, lawyer, actor, and economist raised their voices loud in protest at what they considered a gross injustice. George said, in part:

The action of Grover Cleveland in throwing the standing army, without call from local authority, into the struggle between the

railroads and their workmen, was in violation of the fundamental principles of our Government and dangerous to the Republic. . . . I yield to nobody in my respect for law and order and my hatred of disorder; but there is something more important even than law and order, and that is the principle of liberty. I yield to nobody in my respect for the rights of property; yet I would rather see every locomotive in the land ditched, every car and every depot burned and every rail torn up, than to have them preserved by means of a Federal standing army. That is the order that reigned in Warsaw. That is the order in the keeping of which every democratic republic before ours has fallen. I love the American Republic better than I love such order.³

Cleveland aroused George to biting criticism a third time when the President, in a message to Congress, threatened war with England in the Venezuelan boundary dispute. The mere suggestion of war between these two great English-speaking nations made George writhe. He spoke in vigorous denunciation of the President's message at a mass meeting in Cooper Union.

News from other parts of the world was more cheering. The cause of the Single Tax was gaining in Australia and New Zealand, and in the British House of Commons James Stuart came within twenty-seven votes of winning a motion which read: "In the opinion of this House, the free-holders and owners of ground values in the metropolis ought to contribute directly a substantial share of local taxation."⁴ Also in England, the Land Restoration League under the management of the indefatigable Frederick Verinder had been conducting an educational campaign, traveling in big vans from town to town.

At home, in Congress, Representative James G. Maguire and Tom Johnson had introduced (in 1894) a Single Tax amendment to the income tax bill. For the first time the Georgist fiscal reform was debated on Capitol Hill. It got only six votes—three more than expected—but the "sympathy is such among radical Democrats," wrote George, "that the House cheered when the six men stood up."⁵

Nearly a year later a meeting was held in Cooper Union to discuss the report of the Tenement House Commission. George was present. According to the *New York Herald*, "in one of the most forcible addresses he had delivered in the city in years. . . . [he] threw what proved to be a bomb." Perhaps—to quote from George's remarks on that occasion—this was the "bomb":

Of the 21 recommendations in the report, some are good and some are bad. . . . Some are indifferent but all are alike in that they go nowhere toward the settlement of the question the committee has brought up. . . . You can turn the East Side with its tenements into the most beautiful part of the city and the results will be that our millionaires will soon be living there. . . . You want to tear down those tenements and let no one live there unless he has 600 feet of cubic air. Where are the people turned out from those houses to go? Into the streets, into the police stations, that this very night are crowded, or into the almshouses? It seems to me that when we talk of quackery, the greatest quack of all is he who tells you to go slow; is the quack who would substitute charity for justice; is the quack who tells you that in instituting reform no one need be hurt.

"As Mr. George took his seat," reported the *Herald*, "the audience rose at him and cheered him for some minutes."⁶

Doubtless it seemed strange to many at this meeting that Henry George, who had dedicated himself to improving the condition of the poor, should denounce proposals for tenement house reform and vehemently oppose the plan to use public money to *buy* condemned tenements and build better ones. He had made it so clear that taxing land according to its value would make it too expensive to use it for slums and that un-taxing "improvements" would automatically produce good buildings instead of human rookeries. He had proved definitely that these were the quickest, the most just, and the most fundamental means of slum clearance, so it was now difficult for him to be patient.

"Those inviting him [George had been invited to speak by the Social Reform Club] knew what he stood for: that he had a contempt for trying to head off the real, radical reform by milk-and-water methods," recalls Whidden Graham, one of the sponsors of the Cooper Union meeting. "They knew that living conditions would not be substantially improved so long as the existing system of land holding and taxation was maintained. Yet they invited him to speak, and he spoke truths that threw them into consternation."

In the early summer of 1896, a group of enthusiastic Single Taxers from Philadelphia, and Richard George and Bolton Hall from New York, decided to "invade" the state of Delaware and introduce their reform in practical affairs through a speaking campaign. They promptly ran afoul of one of Delaware's "blue

laws"—the one against public speaking. Frank Stephens was arrested after delivering a brilliant oration. The zealots saw in this incident a chance for publicity which might attract sympathy to their cause. Accordingly, they planned to be arrested one after another, and wired an invitation to Henry George: "Do you wish to personally test the law? Sentence for 30 days certain."

George's answer and reaction may have been surprising, but they were characteristic of his stand on such matters. He replied:

I do not shirk unpleasantness in the discharge of duty but I do not want to put myself, or have the Single Tax put in a false position, and it seems to me that the committee is taking a false position. The point where issue is being joined does not involve the right of free speech, but the right to disregard local ordinances and the action of local authorities, as to the use of streets. It is doubtless true that the authorities are moved by a spirit opposed to the Single Tax; but so far as they have *acted*, their right to act does not seem to be questionable.

Our work in the Single Tax is to arouse the intellect and conscience of men. This cannot be done by irritating prejudice, still less by arousing adversely a proper state respect. . . . I admire the zeal of these men, but not their discretion; and I fear to trust great matters to zeal untempered by discretion.⁷

The "Delaware Campaign"—as such—gradually petered out.

In the spring of 1895, Mr. and Mrs. George gave up the 19th Street House and went alone into the peace of Merriewold woods. This sylvan retreat was one of the sweetest of their experiences. Mrs. George did all the cooking (she knew how to concoct other things than black fruitcake now) and the housework. George did literally hew the wood and draw the water.

When the autumn came the family went to live at Fort Hamilton in one of the oldest houses in New York State. It was the Stanton Cottage, overlooking the Narrows and opposite Fort Wadsworth. Across the road was the home of Tom Johnson's father, Col. Albert W. Johnson.

Here "Tom L." came often to rest. The cares of the steel magnate-congressman were laid aside while he played like a boy. When the tide was high he joined the swimmers at the Johnson pier, and in twenty feet of water would gleefully float

about on a huge, submerged cork-filled ring so that only his rosy face, with its permanent smile, could be seen. In the evenings he danced in spite of his great weight—with extraordinary lightness, Mrs. George testified. And his fabulous store of sleight-of-hand tricks amused adults as well as Fort Hamilton's considerable population of children.

George never indulged in what he considered—with perfect tolerance—aquatic "stunts." Because his father had become deafened in diving, he never took the risk or permitted his children to do so. He swam with a firm, steady breast stroke. Frequently he could be seen in the shallow water teaching some youngster to swim.

Indeed, George was devoted to children. At one of the Cooper Union meetings a child began to cry during his speech. "Put it out," called someone in the audience. "Take it home where it belongs," shouted another. Henry George paused for a moment and then said, "Let the baby stay. And let him cry if he wants to; all babies have to cry sometimes." He then proceeded to speak above the obligato of wailing. After the meeting, he took the offender in his arms.

The panorama from the George home at Fort Hamilton was a never-ending delight: Sandy Hook, a dim line on the horizon to the south; the sweep of the great lower bay; the grey masonry and grassed breastworks of Fort Wadsworth; the stretch of low Staten Island hills; the dimly silhouetted buildings of Manhattan massed to the north; the dome of ever-changing sky; the circling gulls. But to the man who still remembered how to box the compass and how to spot the rigging of any ship afloat, the parade of boats of varying types and sizes, of yachts and yawls, of ocean greyhounds, tramp steamers, pleasure sloops or tug-escorted scows—all this was the greatest joy in view.

Henry George's book-lined study on the top floor looked south and west and was flooded with light, since he would have no curtains on the windows and kept the shades up. The customary couch was present. A huge wicker clothes hamper served as a waste basket, and it was infrequently emptied in case he might wish to retrieve some paper he had discarded. Magazines, papers, and books were strewn about the great flat top desk and on tables of varying dimensions in what, to the uninitiated, seemed utmost confusion. But of course George knew where everything was, for his memory had catalogued its whereabouts even as he had distributed each paper and magazine.

A poor business man when it came to his own affairs, George was nevertheless able to give clear practical advice to others—he who had been called a “dreamer!”

“I have consulted him repeatedly,” Arthur McEwen reported a financier as having said, “and never found his judgment unsound. When I have placed a business problem of many factors before him, he has given his mind to it with the same ability to detect the seeming and get at the real that he shows in resolving into plainness the complexities of political economy. Voltaire went to the Bourse and made a fortune to prove that a man of genius was as clever as common men on their own ground, and George could have done the same, but, like Agassiz, he has had no time to make money.”

George had happened to visit Arthur J. Moxham, president of the Johnson Steel Rail Company, in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, during the financial panic of 1893 when the very existence of the company was in jeopardy. Although the company was receiving large orders, payment was slow. George suggested this solution:

The bonds of the street railway companies ordering rails from the Johnson company should be taken in lieu of money for payment, and certificates should be issued against these bonds and be given in payment to the Johnson company's employees.

Moxham, who was a highly regarded man in the community—having been chosen dictator with powers of life and death during the Johnstown flood⁸—was able to put this plan into effect with the cooperation of his workmen and the townspeople with whom they traded. The company was saved from failure.⁹

This business stroke convinced George more firmly than ever that the United States should issue a paper currency, based upon its credit and interchangeable with its bonds, and so diminish its currency difficulties. He stood clear in his understanding of the money question, although to the dismay and grief of some of his dearest friends and staunchest supporters he placed himself behind Bryan in his 1896 Presidential campaign against McKinley, the arch-protectionist. “Bryan certainly did not represent my views,” George said in a letter to his ever faithful correspondent, Dr. Taylor, “but I had to take the best offered, and he came nearest it.”¹⁰

George studied both candidates and their platforms carefully. He went to both Democratic and Republican conventions and wrote articles all through the campaign for the *New York*

Journal. The free silver plank in the Democratic platform mattered little to him compared to the menace of McKinley's high protective tariff. On the day before the election he wrote in the *Journal*:

Gold and silver are merely the banners under which the rival contestants in this election have ranged themselves. The banks are not really concerned about their legitimate business under any currency. They are struggling for the power of profiting by the issuance of paper money, a function properly and constitutionally belonging to the nation. The railroads are not really concerned about the "fifty-cent dollar," either for themselves or for their employees. They are concerned about their power of running the government and making and administering the laws. The trusts and pools and rings are not really concerned with any reduction in the wages of their workmen, but for their own power of robbing the people. The larger business interests have frightened each other, as children do when one says, "Ghost!" Let them frighten no thinking man.¹¹

But George's cause lost again. McKinley was elected. "This result makes our fight the harder," he said. And he who had been so buoyant began to show signs of discouragement and weariness—a sort of world sorrow.

Leo Tolstoy¹² had become an enthusiastic follower of the economics of George, although it was not until several years later that he expressed his enthusiasm in fiction form in his novel—*Resurrection*. The messages of the economist and the novelist were the same—the brotherhood of man, although their methods of preachment were different. They were so much in sympathy, George felt, that he resolved to visit the great Russian on his next trip to Europe. In the meantime they exchanged letters. Tolstoy wrote on April 8, 1896:

The reception of your letter gave me a great joy for it is a long time that I know you and love you. Though the paths we go by are different, I do not think that we differ in the foundation of our thoughts.

I was very glad to see you mention twice in your letter the life to come.

There is nothing that widens so much the horizon, that gives such firm support or such a clear view of things as the consciousness that although it is but in this life that we have the possibility and the

duty to act; nevertheless this is not the whole of life but that bit of it only which is open to our understanding.

I shall wait with great impatience for the appearance of your new book which will contain the so much needed criticism of the orthodox political economy. The reading of every one of your books makes clear to me more and more the truth and practicability of your system. Still more do I rejoice at the thought that I may possibly see you.

Tolstoy had touched upon one of George's convictions. Henry George very definitely believed in a life after death. Yet his religious attitudes were not fixed in any pattern. Having for his personal friends clergymen of many Christian as well as non-Christian denominations, he nevertheless had little liking for dogmatic forms.

To him the label made no matter; one could live and preach the message of "not I but thou" outside the church as well as in it. "Although I do not sympathize with any of these orders from St. Anthony down," as he had written to his sister-in-law back in the days when he first knew her, "I am glad your lot is among the Sisters of Charity, for they do not run away from human nature, they seem to ennoble it."¹³

Twenty-five years later he wrote her, "Though you and I do not think alike on all the little details, my faith is as firm as yours that there is another life beyond this and I can think of growing old and passing away without repining or wishing to change the order of the Creator."¹⁴

Loving liberty, he left his children to make their own choice of religious expression, and for himself chose no creed on which to hang his belief. He worshipped in any church, or, as was more often the case, in none.

Also, he had no feeling for hard and fast nationalism any more than he had for religious antagonism. "I am not concerned with anyone's religious belief," he wrote at the end of *A Perplexed Philosopher*. "But I would have men think for themselves. . . . There are things which it is given to all possessing reason to know, if they will but use that reason. And some things it may be there are that—as was said by One whom the learning of the time sneered at, and the high priests persecuted, and polite society, speaking through the voice of those who know not what they did, crucified—are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes."¹⁵