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# Henry George: The Australian Tour\*

By ANNA GEORGE DE MILLE

AFTER HIS RETURN from Europe, Henry George, remained in New York for only a few months. He had been receiving invitations for a long time, urging that he visit Australia. In January, 1890,<sup>1</sup> he started for the distant continent. Taking his wife, he called this trip their belated honeymoon.

For the journey around the world, Mrs. George made the arrangements. Her husband arrived from *The Standard* office about an hour before train time for his own preparations. He packed not one article of wearing apparel, gathering together only books and papers. He collected many more than his valise had room for; indeed, one by one he commandeered every piece of unused hand baggage in the house. A four-wheeler had been engaged and the two daughters were to have the thrill of driving in a carriage with their parents to the station. But, alas, the tearful farewells had to be said on the sidewalk. For after Mr. and Mrs. George and their voluminous luggage were packed into the carriage, there was room for nothing more. The typewriter had to be pushed through the cab window to the owner's lap.

The travelers stopped in St. Louis for a few hours' visit with Sister Teresa Fox, Mrs. George's sister, at the Convent of St. Vincent de Paul, and to attend a large dinner given in their honor. They stopped also for meetings in Kansas City and Denver and for two in Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup>

Henry George used to say that when he took his wife on trips with him she paid her travelling expenses in the clothes or tickets she saved him from losing. Almost never did he return from a lecture with the handkerchiefs, collars or cuffs he had started with and sometimes he had lost or exchanged umbrellas, shoes, hats, shirts or even overcoats. During one of his tours he had written his wife:

I have done pretty well in some respects on this trip. I wore the swallow-tail always except in Kansas City, where I had to go straight from the train. And I flattered myself I had lost nothing until tonight, when I

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<sup>1</sup> They left on Jan. 22, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> The meetings were as follows: St. Louis, Jan. 25; Kansas City, Jan. 26; Denver, Jan. 27; Los Angeles, Feb. 1 and 2. See *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 5, Jan. 29, 1890.

found I had left my nice new dress boots somewhere. . . . I find it very convenient to have plenty of clothes.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his wife's watchful eye, there were lapses even on this trip, for she wrote from St. Louis to her sons: "Your father, this far on the journey, has exchanged his own for other people's hats only five times!"<sup>4</sup>

The return of the Georges to California was a triumph. They were met by Dr. Taylor and a group of old San Francisco friends<sup>5</sup> who escorted them into the city they loved so well. "Henry George," *The San Francisco Examiner* reported, "fifty years of age and no taller than the first Napoleon . . . has always been fearless and in becoming an agitator has never ceased to be a gentleman. San Francisco recognizes and appreciates that merit." Their stay there, lasting from Monday night to Saturday, when their steamer sailed, was crowded with delightful experiences.

From the same stage in Metropolitan Hall, where twelve years previously, to an almost empty house, the "gas measurer" had made his first plea for the cause he still served, the world citizen now faced a capacity audience that had paid to hear him.<sup>6</sup> "But ye gods, what a transformation!" recalls Mrs. George's cousin, William Cleveland McCloskey:

From the merest tyro at public speaking to a finished, polished orator! That night was a memorable one in Henry George's career. The hall was packed to the dome and there was an overflow meeting outside. There were over a hundred prominent citizens on the stage, and as he advanced to the center after being introduced, I shall never forget the demonstration. For some minutes it was pandemonium and he was visibly affected. He was home again among his friends.

For two hours he held his audience spellbound, and at the conclusion the people swarmed upon the stage and showered him with praise and congratulations. There was a marked change in the man. He was absolutely master of himself. Without notes and with the air and assurance of a finished orator, his voice full, round and resonant, he might well have compared with the greatest orators of the day.<sup>7</sup>

And in that scholarly address, given with the fire that can only come with extemporaneous delivery backed by deep knowledge of the subject, Henry George showed something of his dedication and of his humility:

When after growing up here, I went across the continent, before the

<sup>3</sup> Plankerton House, Milwaukee, April 7, 1887. (In the private collection of the writer.) See Henry George Jr., "The Life of Henry George," New York, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, p. 509n.

<sup>4</sup> Jan. 25, 1890. In the Henry George Collection of the New York Public Library (hereafter abbreviated as HGC). See Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 523.

<sup>5</sup> Monday, Feb. 3, 1890.

<sup>6</sup> Feb. 4, 1890.

<sup>7</sup> In a letter to the writer, from San Francisco, dated May 14, 1927.

railway was completed, and in the streets of New York for the first time realized the contrasts of wealth and want that are to be found in a great city; saw those sights that, to the man who comes from the West, affright and appall, the problem grew upon me. I said to myself there must be some reason for this and I will not rest until I have found the one and discovered the other. At last it came clear as the stars of a bright midnight. I saw what was the cause; I saw what was the cure. I saw nothing that was new. Truth is never new. . . . I have done no more to any man than point out God's stars; every man will see them who will look.<sup>8</sup>

So many were unable to attend this meeting that a second one, free for workmen, was held in the same hall a few nights later. Henry George also delivered two other addresses, one in Oakland and one before a group of clergymen at the San Francisco Y.M.C.A. Old friends tendered him a banquet. They found him unspoiled by the world honors that had been bestowed on him—to them he was still “light hearted,” still “little Harry George.” Before sailing he sent a note to August Lewis in New York:

I have hardly averaged three hours sleep since reaching here, and even then have not been able to see but a small number of the old friends that have come to greet us.<sup>9</sup>

Bidding farewell to the crowds who went to the wharf to see them off, the Georges embarked for Sydney on the steamship *Mariposa*. During their twenty-four-hour stop at Honolulu they were given a dinner by officers from the United States warships stationed there—most of their hosts were avowed believers in the Georgist philosophy. Indeed, the books of Henry George were rather popular with Navy men who seemed, even in those days, to have time for serious reading. One officer, William Sims, afterward an admiral, had been a guest in the George home on East 19th Street in New York. Mr. Sims had written his father that he considered “Progress and Poverty” to be “a truly wonderful book” which “points to a future that surpasses all imagination. . . . I don’t think any unprejudiced man can read it carefully without being convinced of its truth.”<sup>10</sup>

The *Mariposa* carried the Georges to Auckland, New Zealand, where at six o’clock in the morning of March 15, 1890, they were met by a group of Single Taxers. They drove first to the residence of Sir George Grey

<sup>8</sup> See *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 9, Feb. 26, 1890. Afterwards published under the title, “Justice the Object, Taxation the Means” in the Memorial Edition of Henry George’s writings, New York, Doubleday and McClure Co., 1901, Vol. XI, now kept in print by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York, and the Henry George Foundation, London, in a pamphlet edition.

<sup>9</sup> San Francisco, Feb. 7, 1890, HGC.

<sup>10</sup> Elting E. Morison, “Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy,” Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1942, p. 28.

who had once played the role of dictator and had been four times governor of important colonies. An anticipator of George's doctrines, he had been one of the first to read and acclaim "Progress and Poverty." In a letter to *The Standard*, George wrote enthusiastically of this "soldier, scholar, statesman, who, unsoured by disappointments and undaunted by defeats, retains in the evening of life all the faith and hope that are commonly associated with youth."

Ten years ago [continues the account] Sir George, then premier of this colony, introduced the thin edge of the Single Tax wedge by carrying a measure for the imposition of a direct tax on the value of the land irrespective of improvements but the great land owners quickly rallied; he was defeated. . . . I hope to return to New Zealand if only for the purpose of seeing him again.<sup>11</sup>

During the few hours' stay in Auckland a meeting was held in one of the hotels where members of the New Zealand Anti-Poverty Society presented the American economist with a beautifully illuminated address. Sir George Grey, himself a large landowner, made a speech in which he again proclaimed his belief in the truth and power of "Progress and Poverty." The two men had much to say on this, the only occasion of their meeting. They conversed until the last moment on the wharf, the considerate captain of the *Mariposa* delaying the sailing as long as he could to accommodate him.

Their arrival in Australia had a deep significance for both of the Americans. For Mrs. George it was a return to her native country which she had not seen since she was five years old. For Henry George it was a visit to the land of enlightenment. This great Pacific island had held particular interest for him ever since, as a lad of fifteen, he had sailed to Melbourne. But it was not until after his own awakening to economic and political injustices that he looked with hope towards this country where the secret ballot had originated, where railroads and telegraph systems were publicly owned, and where savings banks and parcel post were part of the postal service.

Their reception in Sydney was enthusiastic. George had to make a brief speech from his carriage to a huge crowd in front of the Town Hall, and then another and longer one inside, where he was officially welcomed by Mayor Sydney Burdekin and by city and colonial dignitaries. He told how he had fought to have the Australian system of voting introduced into the United States, and reported that ten states had adopted the method

<sup>11</sup> Vol. VII, No. 17, April 23, 1890. Quoted in part by Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 528.

and that the others were sure to follow. "He delivered such an address," wrote John Farrell, "as had never before been heard in Sydney and received such a hearing as had seldom been accorded to a public speaker."<sup>12</sup>

A bewildering succession of meetings followed, interspersed with receptions, luncheons, dinners and interviews that continued until the day of their departure from Australia, three and a half months later. Reported John Farrell:

Taken altogether, we expected nothing like the success which has attended his presence here, and we did not expect to find Mr. George such a powerful and moving speaker. He has the rugged earnestness and plain honesty that most impress an audience, together with a splendid voice which he knows how to use.<sup>13</sup>

The Sydney papers gave him extensive space. *The Herald* recorded:

He described himself as a man standing where the shadows of life grow longer and deeper, and as it was his aim he commended it to his hearers to make it theirs also, so to devote their powers that the pressure upon the very poor might be lessened and the great gulf between class and class filled, that the satisfactions of those legitimate wants common to all mankind made more easy, and that every child brought into the world be given a chance to share the best life of the race. "Look forward," he cried, "to the time when social pressure shall not force these children of whom Christ said it would be better that a millstone were hanged about a man's neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should offend one of them, into lives where purity is a miracle. When there shall not be any necessity for men to cringe and beg to be allowed to subsist, and when he that will not work shall be left with a good conscience to starve. Look to it, you in this fair young land, to lay so true the foundations of your state that in generations to come all men shall have equal scope to work and live. As your opportunities are greater, so is your responsibility."<sup>14</sup>

*The Herald* reporter commented:

The reader will find in *The Herald* the very words of Mr. George, but the very words do not tell what the lecturer said. You must add the magnetic quality of personality. Imagine, then, for two hours this man walking to and fro in his narrow slip of platform—twelve feet, say, by three—and speaking entirely without manuscript, note or other accessory—speaking, too, in a slow, almost solemn voice, and dealing with phrases of what Carlyle named "the dismal science." For a man under these circumstances to keep the eager, strained attention of a packed hall, including men of every shade of politics, is an intellectual feat.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 17, April 23, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 18, April 30, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Australian Star*, a protectionist paper, did not, however, see Henry George in a happy light. Wrote their reporter:

Let a man have an attractive literary style, or a magnetic tongue, and he can convince multitudes that any absurdity he chooses to teach represents an absolute truth. But as a rule the deluded creatures find out in a short time that they made a mistake. Most of Henry George's American disciples have forsaken him.<sup>16</sup>

The newspaper men expressed surprise that this American reformer, who had been so loudly heralded, should be so simple and genial in his manner, so democratic and free from egotism. His passionate eloquence, his ability to stir an audience to laughter, or tears, or deep thought, justified the reputation that had preceded his arrival, but his versatility of expression, his wealth of illustration and his quickness of perception were unexpected. One of these observers commented:

Out of thirteen different orations in no case was there any repetition of words or phrases, although in each case the central truth was portrayed with the utmost clearness.<sup>17</sup>

The campaign in Sydney was repeated in the smaller towns of New South Wales before the Georges visited the other colonies. And everywhere there were receptions by mayors and other high officials, brass bands, torchlight processions, illuminated addresses. And, for Mrs. George, beautiful bouquets tied with ribbons, gold-lettered "Welcome Australia's Daughter."

There were gifts other than flowers and illuminated addresses. The Americans learned early in their visit that they must not admire anything in a host's house else they would find it in their hotel room when they returned there. Among the many presents they received were an emu skin made into a rug; an emu egg exquisitely mounted in silver and onyx, and two stuffed specimens of the rare and almost extinct platypus.

George made many friends all over the Commonwealth. He loved the intelligence and enthusiasm of the huge audiences and the democracy of the people. But he hated the fuss made over himself. Sometimes the train on which he and his wife were travelling would stop at a place and time not stated in the schedule, in order that the dignitaries of a small town might come aboard to deliver a eulogy to Henry George. In that event he had to accept the distinctions conferred on him. But if he had an inkling beforehand that there was to be a "reception" on their arrival at a

<sup>16</sup> *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 19, May 7, 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Cotton in *The [Australian] Standard*. See Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 532.

town, he would, if possible, as the train entered the depot, escape out of the back of the railway carriage, leaving the receiving of honors to his embarrassed wife. However, he usually got caught—sometimes in the station itself, in the act of sneaking towards his hotel—and was always led by enthusiastic admirers to the ordeal of the official welcome.

Victoria was a stronghold of protection, and his friends predicted that Henry George would have a poor welcome there. Indeed some of them were so alarmed that they feared he might be stoned if he brought up the subject of free trade in that province. They pleaded with his wife to influence him to avoid discussion of the tariff question. Not long after her marriage, Mrs. George had written to her husband: "I would not give your independent spirit for all the money in California."<sup>18</sup> Small wonder now that she explained to Australian friends that even if she had wished to divert him from what he considered his duty—which she did not wish to do—she could not.

His first lecture in Melbourne was given in the town hall and was chiefly an exposition of the Single Tax. But he did no pussyfooting on the tariff question. He came out fearlessly for what he believed in: "I am a free trader—a free trader absolutely," he proclaimed. "I should abolish all revenue tariffs. I should make trade absolutely free between Victoria and all other countries."<sup>19</sup> He went on to state that he also believed in freedom in production and showed how a shift in the basis of taxation would make for a changed economic order.

Instead of being stoned for his attack on protection, he met with deafening applause. The meeting ended with three cheers, and hundreds lingered to give their names for the formation of a Free Trade League! Said the *Melbourne Evening Standard*:

No one will question the manliness of Mr. Henry George in boldly facing a Melbourne audience and attacking their favorite doctrine of protection not only with the arms of logic, but of withering scorn; and the fact that he not only carried with him the forbearance, but continuous and enthusiastic applause of an immense audience, is more than anything a testimony to the public admiration of genuine pluck.<sup>20</sup>

After two successive meetings to increasingly larger audiences in the same hall, a debate with Mr. W. Trenwith on "Free Trade versus Protection" in the Exhibition Building drew an audience of three thousand. According to *The Melbourne Telegraph*: "The debate really cannot be con-

<sup>18</sup> Philadelphia, Nov. 24, 1868. In the private collection of the writer.

<sup>19</sup> See Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 535.

<sup>20</sup> *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 22, May 28, 1890.



sidered seriously. Trenwith never rose to George's height. In plain English, the local man was utterly lost."<sup>21</sup> The consensus seemed to be that George's visit to Australia was "an event of more than ordinary significance."<sup>22</sup>

The formal close of the Australian tour took place in Sydney. At a huge meeting in Protestant Hall,<sup>23</sup> where George spoke on "The Fallacy of Protection," the chairman, G. H. Reid, M.P., said:

You need not be told that the man whose rare eloquence and deep sympathy will soon entrance your attention has a perfect horror of flattery. Indeed, so sensitive is our friend that I believe, while he would face the heaviest broadside of his opponents with a smile, he would run away, if he could, from the compliments of a friend. Still, I don't think we should allow him to make his farewell address without the assurance that his name, famous in so many lands, has now become in Australia a household word. . . . He has thrice earned it. He has earned it as a thinker, he has earned it as a writer and he has earned it as an orator.<sup>24</sup>

Mayor Burdekin gave a dinner to the American guest, at which the members of the New South Wales Ministry were present. On the last day a reception was held in Temperance Hall, and a huge handsomely bound album containing photographs of Australian friends was presented to Mrs. George—the gentlemen of the committee addressing their speeches directly to her. Always shy, she looked to her husband for help. But his face was wrinkled with merriment over her consternation. He winked at her, dropped his handkerchief on the floor, and, as he stooped to pick it up managed to say, *sotto voce*: "how do *you* like it?"<sup>25</sup>

George had received written and cabled invitations from Sir George Grey to revisit New Zealand, and from the Premier and Attorney-General of Tasmania to go there, but after three months and a half of hard travelling across the great distances of the island continent, and daily lecturing (frequently he had spoken twice a day), he was too tired to prolong his tour.

He delivered lectures in Melbourne and Adelaide, South Australia, and then, saying a reluctant good-bye to the country that had given them such precious friendships and such inspiration, the Americans sailed toward home.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> May 31, 1890.

<sup>24</sup> *The Standard*, Vol. VIII, No. 5, July 30, 1890. Cf. Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 537.

<sup>25</sup> See Henry George Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 537.

<sup>26</sup> They sailed from Melbourne on June 10, 1890.

The S.S. *Valetta* carried them across the Indian Ocean, through the Red Sea and the Mediterranean to Brindisi, where they disembarked. Their tour through Italy was brief and hurried and made at the worst time of the year—in the hot summer—but they were thrilled by the beauty and the historical interest of the country. From Italy they went through Switzerland and France to Great Britain, where they remained for only a few days.

George made one speech in Glasgow and another in London. Together with the Rev. J. O. S. Huntington of New York he called upon General and Mrs. William Booth of the Salvation Army. Catherine Booth had written to him three years previously: "I believe you have found the true solution of our social difficulties so far as any temporal solution can avail."<sup>27</sup> Now, to his joy, he learned that she, who took a most important part in the direction and management of the huge organization, was planning to introduce economic reform propaganda into their program, with the hope of improving the material conditions of the poor and oppressed while working for their spiritual salvation. But alas, before her plans were definitely set, Mrs. Booth became ill and died. And lacking her understanding and the courage so needed in a fight for fundamental economic reform, the Salvation Army continued in its old course, working for social service palliatives.

The sixth visit to Great Britain, short though it was, was encouraging although men in high places, George felt, were still misinterpreting the American economist. Asked *The London Democrat*:

What on earth could Mr. Gladstone have meant by his reference to Mr. George in his speech at Lowestoft? Speaking of the agricultural laborers, he confessed that "There is much to be done for them, not according to the ideas of visionary politicians, who seem, some of them, to think that under the guidance of Mr. George or somebody else, the land of the country can be taken and redistributed, and be divided among the population. These, Gentlemen, are not real and important political discussions. . . ."<sup>28</sup>

Mary Gladstone, one of George's keenest disciples,<sup>29</sup> evidently was not at Lowestoft to instruct her famous father. "It is a thousand pities," *The Democrat* concluded, "that some one does not persuade Mr. Gladstone to read 'Progress and Poverty.'"<sup>30</sup>

*New York*

<sup>27</sup> See AM. JOUR. ECON. & SOCIO., Vol. 5, No. 3 (April, 1946), p. 403.

<sup>28</sup> Undated quotation in *The Standard*, Vol. VII, No. 26, June 25, 1890.

<sup>29</sup> See "Henry George: The English Land Reform Campaign," AM. JOUR. ECON. & SOCIO., Vol. 4, No. 3 (April, 1945), pp. 402-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Loc. cit.*