

# CAREER OF HENRY GEORGE

## His Early Struggles and His Gradual Development as a Philosopher and Leader.

### WIDE AND VARIED EXPERIENCE

**Phenomenal Success of His Most Famous Book, "Progress and Poverty"—A More Exhaustive Work on Political Economy Interrupted by the Campaign.**

Henry George came of old Pennsylvania stock and was born in Philadelphia on Sept. 2, 1839. His father, R. S. H. George, was a publisher of Protestant Episcopal Church books, and Henry's early associations were with clergymen and members of that particular denomination. He was the oldest of eight children, and when but little more than an infant he began his studies in a private school. Subsequently he attended the public schools in Philadelphia until he was thirteen years old. It was in one of these that Henry George and the Rev. R. Heber Newton were classmates. Young George was graduated at the Philadelphia High School at the head of his class, and immediately set about earning his own living.

For nearly a year after leaving school Henry George worked as office boy in a crockery importing house. That occupation was too tame for a boy of his restless disposition, and having inherited a taste for travel and adventure from his grandfather, who was a sea Captain, he made up his mind to go to sea. Before he was fifteen years old he came to New York in search of an opportunity to ship as a cabin boy for a long voyage. He did not have to look far, and within a few weeks he was on his way to London aboard the ship Hindoo. From London he went to Melbourne, thence to Calcutta, and then back to New York, the entire trip taking about fourteen months. For awhile the young man was content to stay on shore and learn the printing trade. Within a year he tired of that, however, and shipped again as an ordinary seaman. This time he sailed on a coasting vessel and was well pleased with his voyage. In after years he was wont to revert to that experience with much satisfaction. The fact that the Captain complimented him and voluntarily paid him the wages of an able seaman, he said, was the first encouragement he received as a wage-earner. He surprised the Captain by steering the schooner safely through a very turbulent sea.

#### He Goes to California.

When about twenty years of age Henry George started for California, working his way around Cape Horn as a sailor before the mast. He went directly to the Frazer River region, but before he reached the mines the gold excitement, which had lured many in that direction, had subsided. Making his way to Victoria, in British Columbia, he took passage for San Francisco in the steerage of a small vessel. In the last-named city he maintained himself by doing odd jobs, working at one time in a rice mill. After a few months of fruitless effort to get permanent employment he went to Sacramento and there obtained work as a compositor in the office of a weekly newspaper. In speaking of this period of his life Mr. George used to tell of going hungry through the streets of Sacramento and of being obliged occasionally to sleep in a stable.

"I was one of three young men who tried to start an evening paper in Sacramento," said Mr. George "and I lost everything I had, even to my clothing. I went very near to the starvation limit then, and for a time I had no shoes to wear." After holding out as long as possible, George abandoned the little evening paper and returned to the case as a compositor in the composing rooms of the established newspapers. Soon he drifted back to San Francisco, but not, however, before he had married the girl of his choice, whom he met in Sacramento. Henry George was at that time an Episcopalian, and the young woman, who was of Australian birth, was a devout Catholic. Mr. George was twenty-two years of age and the girl eighteen when they were married. Both were penniless, and the bridegroom, as he subsequently confessed, had to "stand before the parson" in a borrowed suit of clothes. In consequence of a quarrel between Henry George and the bride's uncle it was a runaway marriage, and the ceremony was performed in a hurry by a Methodist clergyman. Some time afterward, out of deference to Mrs. George's wishes, the marriage was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic rite in Sacramento.

The first occupation that was available to young George after his marriage was that of setting type in the office of The San Francisco Bulletin. For several years thereafter the subject of this sketch continued to work as a printer, with varying success, in San Francisco and Sacramento. It was with proud satisfaction that both Mr. and Mrs. George used to say of those days: "For awhile our family had to live on 50 cents a day, but we never ran in debt."

The attempt to establish Maximilian on a throne in Spain stirred a feeling of indignation in the breast of the hard-working young printer, and there being among his associates several young men who sympathized with the Mexicans in their struggle for liberty, George undertook to organize an expedition to go to Mexico and fight against Maximilian. He was to be the First Lieutenant in one of the companies. The Colonel commanding the expedition was Hungerford, whose daughter afterward became Mrs. John W. Mackay. This little expedition got all ready to start on an old sailing vessel on which they had loaded 10,000 condemned American rifles and some other equipments. A United States revenue cutter appeared on the scene and nipped the expedition in the bud.

#### His Writings Attract Attention.

It was while working at his case in San Francisco that Henry George began to write for publication. He wrote several articles on public questions and sent them anonymously to divers newspapers. They were published and attracted attention and comment. Dr. Gunn, the editor of The San Francisco Times, was so impressed by the style and quality of the letters that he organized a search for the author. It was Henry George's custom to mail his letters in a Post Office box on a certain corner. By watching the letter boxes Dr. Gunn soon discovered the writer and surprised him by offering him a place on The Times's editorial staff. George accepted the offer, and after awhile became the managing editor of the paper. An article written by George on the effect of the death of Abraham Lincoln gave him an immediate local celebrity as a writer. In politics Mr. George was an ardent Republican at that time, and he also was a radical protectionist. His tariff views were changed in one night, however. He went with a friend to the meeting of a debating club in Sacramento. There a strong statement of the protectionist side of the question was made by a young man named William H. Mills. In telling of this incident recently Mr. George said: "I was a protectionist when Mr. Mills began, but when he got through I was a free trader. I have been an absolute free trader ever since."

Mr. George was induced to leave The San Francisco Times to become the managing editor of The San Francisco Chronicle. He did not find the associations in The Chronicle office agreeable, and remained there only three weeks. About that time he was asked to make a trip to New York for the purpose of securing The Associated Press dispatches for The San Francisco Herald. He made the journey by pony express, and reached New York only to be disappointed. He was rebuffed by both The Associated Press and the Western Union Company. His experiences, however, set him to thinking about the relation between capital and labor, and he began to form and express some radical ideas concerning wealth and poverty. Mr. George made the acquaintance of John Russell Young, then managing editor of The New York Tribune, and wrote for him an article in opposition to the free entrance of the Chinese into this country. This article was widely copied and commented upon by other newspapers, and it led to a personal acquaintance between Mr. George and John Stuart Mill, whose theory of political economy had a great charm for the younger writer. Mr. George went back to California in 1869, and resumed his newspaper work.

#### Evolves "Progress and Poverty."

His brief observations in New York and other Eastern cities had instilled into Henry George's mind some vaguely defined ideas about the growth of poverty and its cause.

He thought the subject over for two or three years after his return to the Pacific coast. It was while he was editing a newspaper in Oakland that the groundwork of the theory expounded in his "Progress and Poverty" came to him. The idea took its first form from a sudden realization on the part of the enthusiastic thinker that with the growth of population comes an increase in land values, and the men who work the land must pay more for the privilege of working it as it grows in value. In 1871 Mr. George wrote a pamphlet entitled, "Our Land and Land Policy, National and State," in which he set forth the idea that the value of the land belongs to the whole community and that all revenues should be raised by taxes upon it. In 1872 Mr. George and two other printers started The San Francisco Evening Post, which was a success. Mr. George sold out his interest to advantage, but a few months afterward was induced to return to the concern. Then complications of a political and financial character arose, and he lost all that he had invested in the paper.

A convenient commission from the Governor of California at this juncture gave Mr. George the opportunity that he had long desired to do some careful literary work. As Inspector of Gas Meters in San Francisco he was provided with a sufficient income to relieve him from worry, and his duties were not so exacting but that he had plenty of time for reading and writing. The manuscript of his book, "Progress and Poverty," was finished about August, 1879, and was sent East to be published. At first no publisher would touch it, and it was not until after a former partner of Mr. George, who owned a small printing office, had printed a few copies, that a responsible publisher agreed to take hold of it. The work was published in New York in 1880, and in that year Mr. George brought his family to this city, which has ever since been his home. He went to Europe in 1881, and remained abroad for some time, writing letters from Ireland and England to The Irish World, in this city. In 1881 an English edition of "Progress and Poverty" was issued, and met with a cordial welcome. A six-penny edition subsequently published had an extraordinary sale. Mr. George became a noted man both at home and abroad, and articles and lectures by him on his land theory were in constant demand.

In 1884 Mr. George wrote "Protection or Free Trade." His first manuscript was lost, and he had to write it all over again. Others of his works which attained a quick popularity were "The Irish Land Question," published in 1881, and "Social Problems," published in 1883. All of his important works have been translated into German and French.

#### His First Run for Mayor.

A committee representing various labor organizations in New York City called upon Henry George at his little publishing office in Union Square in the Fall of 1886 and asked him if he would accept a nomination for Mayor of New York. Although taken by surprise, Mr. George, after some deliberation, gave an affirmative answer, and a spirited campaign was begun under his own direction. Abram S. Hewitt was the Democratic candidate and Theodore Roosevelt was the Republican candidate. A convention of delegates from labor organizations was held in Clarendon Hall on Sept. 21, 1886, and Mr. George was formally placed in nomination for Mayor. Large ratification meetings were held subsequently in Chickering Hall and Cooper Union.

The platform on which Henry George made his first canvass for Mayor contained the following declarations: "The requirement of a property qualification for trial jurors should be abolished; the procedure of our courts should be so simplified and reformed that the rich should have no advantage over the poor; that the officious intermeddling of the police with peaceful assemblages should be stopped; that the laws for the safety and sanitary inspection of buildings should be enforced; that in public work the direct employment of labor should be preferred to the system which gives the contractors opportunity to defraud the city while grinding their workmen, and that in public employment equal pay should be accorded equal work without distinction of sex. All taxes on buildings and improvements should be abolished, so that no fine shall be put upon the employment of labor in increasing living accommodations; and that taxes should be levied on land irrespective of improvements, so that those who are now holding land vacant should be compelled either to build on it themselves or give up the land to those who will."

The much-discussed "unearned increment" feature of Mr. George's land theory received the following exposition in his Mayoralty platform of 1886:

"We declare, furthermore, that the enormous value which the presence of a million and a half of people gives to the land of this city belongs properly to the whole community; that it should not go to the enrichment of individuals and corporations, but should be taken in taxation and applied to the improvement and beautifying of the city, to the promotion of the health, comfort, education, and recreation of its people, and to the providing of means of transportation commensurate with the needs of a great metropolis."

The result of the election was a surprise to those who had opposed George's election. He developed a strength that had not been counted on. The vote stood: Mr. Hewitt, 90,552; Mr. George, 68,100, and Mr. Roosevelt, 60,435. Although Mr. George held the belief that he was the victim of an unfair count he calmly resumed his literary labors after the election, and had since lived a quiet but industrious life. He had the satisfaction of seeing his "Progress and Poverty" translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese.

#### His Most Elaborate Work Interrupted

At the time that he accepted the recent nomination as Mayor of Greater New York Mr. George was engaged on what he intended should be his greatest and most exhaustive work, on "The Science of Political Economy." Besides the works already mentioned, Mr. George wrote and published "The Condition of Labor," "An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII.," and "A Perplexed Philosopher," which is an exposition of Mr. Herbert Spencer's contradiction of his early tenets in his later works.

Mr. George was a man of amiable traits and very domestic in his tastes and habits. The home which has just been made desolate by his sudden demise was a most attractive one, situated at Fort Hamilton. There the philosopher lived in serene contentment with his wife and children. Physically Mr. George was not a large man, being only 5 feet 6 inches in height. His head and features were out of the common, however. Mr. George had many strong friends among persons who did not agree with all of his social and economic theories. He was especially strong in the affections of the laboring men. In the last Presidential election Mr. George was a warm supporter of William J. Bryan. He declared during the present campaign, however, that he cared nothing for the "free-silver" issue, and that greenbacks were the kind of money which he favored.

Henry George was arrested twice in Ireland in 1882 because of his freedom of speech in addressing public meetings. On one of these occasions he resented his arrest and wrote to President Arthur reciting the circumstances and demanding protection as an American citizen. His case became the subject of some State correspondence between London and Washington, and as a result Mr. George received an apology from the British Government.

#### For Mayor of Greater New York.

Henry George was nominated for Mayor of Greater New York by several organizations in the latter part of September and the first of October. Among these organizations are the United Democracy, the Home Rule Democracy, the Democratic Alliance, the Progressive Democratic League, the Loyal Democratic League, and the Young Democracy. All of the George supporters came together in a mass meeting at Cooper Union on the evening of Oct. 2 under the general title of the "Democracy of Thomas Jefferson." It was at that mass meeting that the nomination for Mayor was formally accepted by Mr. George. The platform adopted by the Jeffersonian Democracy contains the following declarations:

"We claim the right to judge for ourselves what real Democracy is, and we take our instructions from our hearts and our consciences, and not from the servants of franchise grabbers or the attorneys of tax dodgers.

"We believe in government by the people and not by the traction, telephone, and gas companies.

"We denounce legislation by the courts, government by injunction, and the shooting of unoffending laborers by Deputy Sheriffs and hired men."

In Cooper Union on the evening of Tuesday, Oct. 5, Henry George said, among other things:

"I am a Democrat in the Jeffersonian sense because I believe in the principles and stand for the philosophy of Thomas Jefferson."

"It was not until it was shown to me that unless I took this nomination only Mr. Croker's representative must appeal to the Democratic voters of the Greater New York that I consented to stand."

"I believe that I will be elected. I have always believed that the Democrats, led by the principle which Jefferson invoked—and which has been cast aside like chaff—and all men are created equal—will revivify this imperial city, the world."