

Henry George

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It was in 1887. I was fourteen—an age at which, normally, the heavenly maiden, Maya, organizes her fashion-show of Ideals and Illusions in the souls of youngsters. I was selling cigars in a store at the corner of Seventh and Market streets in Philadelphia. The show—cases, loaded with their precious treasures of two-fers and Pittsburgh stogies, were so high and I was so small that I had to use a stool to get a good look at a customer. Thus I waited on hundreds of Quaker City nickel-squanderers.

A word or two about the morning news, the weather, a near-smutty anecdote between geysers of Battle-Ax juice or oracular puffs from their Lancaster filler and Connecticut wrapper, and they were gone. I could feel cocoons and embryos of ideas pullulating in my skull. I awaited a fertilizing word from one of the customers, but they were all as cut-and-dried and predestined to eternal stupidity as a Philadelphia councilman.

However, as Swedenborg says, “the attractions are proportioned to the destinies.” He who devoutly desires Glad Tidings—even though he he impounded in a Philadelphia cigar store—shall receive Glad Tidings. So one day they loomed through the door with a sea-rolling gait, wearing White duck trousers that flapped like a pair of awnings, a turned-down proletarian collar with a parson’s white tie and a dirty-white sombrero which shaded a fat, angelic, smooth-shaven face, starred with two large blue eyes in which swam Mirage. He seemed somewhere in his fifties. I stood on my stool to wait on him, the look-out in my brain whispering, “This fellow is different—he has Tidings!” In a deep, prophetic voice, which belied his childish face, he asked for “the best three-for-five cigars you have.” I noticed that under his arm he carried in the manner of street newsboys about a score of papers called the *Standard*. My curiosity all aflame, I asked him about the *Standard*. It was a summons to his vasty deep. He laid the papers down very carefully, as if they were a serialized Torah, tucked the best three—for-five in his coat pocket, beamed over the case right into my face—ah! the Master and the Young Seeker!—and began:

“Young man, the *Standard* is the organ of the greatest economic movement that the world has ever known, the paper of Henry George, who—”

And then, raptly, ardently, oracularly, he went on for ten minutes, expounding to me the gospel of the Single Tax and the messiahship of Henry George—he the Ancient Mariner of a fixed idea and I the arrested Bridegroom of his tale.

Although Henry George had run the year before for mayor of New York, he was still only a name to me. Beside, the year before I had been pre-puberty and mentally closed, hence a dyed-in-the-carpet Republican, with the Philadelphia *Press* as the Way, the Truth and the Life. All I knew of Henry George was that, according to the *Press*, he was a nihilist, an anarchist, a socialist, a confiscator, an enemy of the Flag, a man compared to whom a Philadelphia Democrat was almost a human being. Yet here was a man who looked to me as harmless as a tenor, and he was telling me that Henry George was the greatest man who had appeared in the world “since Our Lord.” ...

Suddenly I remembered that when I was eleven or twelve years old I had heard a street fiddler whom we used to call Crazy Joe say precisely the same thing about a poet who lived over the river in Camden. But Pop Ziegler, our neighborhood saloon-keeper, before whose place Joe used to play, assured his customers that Joe was, for all that, quite harmless... Yet such are the sudden antics of pubescent idealism—the blessed state that I now found myself in—that I was quite prepared for the enormous heresy that the only sane people were the crazy ones.

My new angel-faced friend lived by peddling the *Standard* and preaching the doctrines of Henry George in the towns and villages of the East and Middle West. He had been in jail—“occasionally martyred for the cause,” he called it—many times. He thus grew to enormous propor-

tions in my newly-hatched Seeking. He left no stone unturned to convert me, which was easy. He discovered my lunch hour and laid for me. We walked up and down Market and Seventh streets eating apples—Yogi and his little Kim—, he syringing me full of Single-Tax redemption, denouncing the rich and hoisting Henry George higher and higher in the empyrean; I toddling along under the great sombrero, catching the pearls from this Oyster of Truth with wide-open brain, mouth and ears. Like Mother Church, he had caught me young. I never knew him to sell a *Standard*. He never seemed to want to sell one as long as he could talk.

The manager of the cigar store was Smitty, an old Englishman of military carriage who looked like Lawrence d'Orsay in "The Earl of Pawtucket." Smitty and my new friend—whose name I never knew, but whom I called "George," at the sound of which he blew out like a balloon—were instantaneous enemies. It was said that Smitty had been at Balaklava, which, when I informed George of it, caused him to say loudly in the hero's hearing, "There'll be no Balaklavas when the people own the land!" Smitty's only answer was to spit on the floor and tousle his deciduous mustachios. He could not afford to argue with a daily three-for-five customer.

The Hobo of the Ideal disappeared from my life as apocalyptically as he had come. He stood with me in front of the window of the *Press*, pointed to a bulletin saying that the Chicago anarchists had been hanged, and whispered to me, "The time has come! " Solemnly ordering me to save up enough pocket-money to buy a second-hand copy of "Progress and Poverty," he shook my hand grandly, and I never saw him again.

Ten years afterward I hurried to New York to walk, at nightfall, from the Grand Central Palace to Brooklyn Bridge behind the body of Henry George, to the continuous strains of Chopin's "Funeral March" and "La Marseillaise." The sidewalks were packed with men and women weeping over the death of the American Karl Marx. Where was "George"—he who had injected into my head my first heroic illusion and given me my first baptism in the water of the Dead Sea of political economy? Henry George, my "George," and all such fellows—all were buffoons of the Absolute, not untouched by the grace of the sublime and the pathos of futility.

II

The American—and by American I mean him of Anglo-Saxon«Puritan stock—is a theocratic. He is a mystic, an absolutist. He believes himself the Superior Man just as inexorably as the orthodox Jew believes he is of the Chosen People. The Anglo-Saxon-Puritan is *Iipse Dixit*; he is *Ex Cathedra*. Conquest and dominance have fixed his mind in dogmatic, narrow, inelastic molds. Always the conqueror, he believes himself to be of divine origin, and so his religious, moral, social and economic concepts are absolute, world-redemptive. He produces order, but not a high degree of civilization. He can never become wholly civilized because he is without humor or skepticism.

His democracy is only a veiled theocracy. He believes that the doctrine of majority rule is of divine origin. He makes war to force it on those who will have none of it. His country is God's country. His two major home-made religions—Mormonism and Christian Science—are founded on revelations. They are absolutes. His dollar-worship, his materialism, has the fervor of this absolutism. Methodism, Baptism are absolutes. His manners and morals are absolutes. Good and evil, virtue and vice are absolutes. This is true and good from all eternity; that is false and had from all eternity. He is incapable of the European point of view or any point of view except his own. Every variant, every new idea, is subversive of the race, the species itself, in the eye of the Anglo-Saxon—Puritan. When he becomes a radical, a liberal, an atheist he is still absolute in his radicalism, his liberalism, his atheism. The plexus of beliefs may change; his sensibility remains dogmatic, intolerant, propagandist. The mold is never broken, no matter what new liquids are poured into it.

Every great American (and all real Americans who achieve fame are necessarily *great*), from Washington to Hoover, is a blood-relative of *Ecce Homo*. If no one will salute him as such, he salutes himself, as Walt Whitman did. He could not conceivably say, "Well, maybe you're right after all." His answer is always—it is congenital, pre-natal; he cannot help it—: "By God! you ought to be hanged for those ideas! You ought to be deported!" The fury and gusto which go into the living of life in other races—notably the Latin and the Slavic—in the Anglo-Saxon-Puritan go into "converting" the world, punishing "crimes against public morals," "uplifting" the masses, and suppressing all spontaneous life. Even Anglo-Saxon—Puritan multi-millionaires, when they grow old, make of their philanthropies a mystical rite; they "hold their moneys in trust," as God put the coal mines of Pennsylvania into the keeping of George Baer. In a word, the Anglo-Saxon-Puritan soul is messianic—even when it is shooting down defenseless natives at Amritsar or murdering recalcitrant Nicaraguans.

Out of the very belly of this messianic absolutism popped Henry George in 1839, in the Protestant Rome of absolutism in politics, morals and religion—Philadelphia. He was of English, Welsh, Scottish blood. Superimpose on this hyperboreal combination a family life which radiated from St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Low Church); a mother fanatically religious, whose main activities were given over to redeeming Philadelphia and the heathen over-seas; a devout father who published Church books, and Sundays given over to the most austere devotions—and you have the sources

of the man. Even on week-days young Henry had to read “Scottish Chiefs” surreptitiously, for his mother thought it was “irreligious.”

With this inheritance, this family environment and a city in which everything was as precise and invariable as the steady growth of its Sunday speak-easies and cemeteries, the mind of Henry George could not be otherwise than mathematical, unimaginative, absolute, messianic. He will, later on, broaden, develop; but he will always be the fanatic, the man With a fixed idea, a mental monorail. The psychological root and bark of his environment will always remain the same. The complexion of hereditary dogmas will change, but the meld of cocksure dogmatism will remain. Religious sensibility will color all he says and does. The hard-and-fast theology of his ancestors, of his parents, of his upbringing, will reappear as the Single Tax. The conception of Original Sin will transform itself into the sin of private ownership in land. Hell—fire will become Poverty. Heaven will become Progress. The Citadels of Sin to be destroyed will be custom-houses and tax-offices. As in the cases of Tolstoy, Karl Marx, Lenin, Bernard Shaw and other religio-economic crackpots—who merely preach the old theological slave—morality of envy under the mask of the modernist sensibility, with murder and hellfire still burning fiercely in their eyes—George will devise a scheme whereby the poor shall inherit the earth and Lazarus shall have the wealth of Dives.

It is all very logical, this Single Tax scheme of redemption—as logical as the predestination of Calvin or the fatality of Jonathan Edwards. The mistake that all such crackpots make is in believing that logic and truth are identical: the fact is that logic is merely a mental deduction made from a temperamental prejudice or an illusion called a premiss, which anyone is free to invent. Henry George had his premiss chosen for him by his Anglo-Scotch-Welsh ancestors. He assumed that God gave to man equal rights in earth, air and light. Assumption, first of all, that God exists; secondly, that He knows of the existence of men; thirdly, that He has given something to them; fourthly (implied assumption derived from Christian ethics), that He loves only the poor and the disinherited. Granting the assumptions of Joseph Smith and Mrs. Eddy, their religions are just as sound. As I shall show later, this whole fantastic matter was “revealed” to George. He, too, produced his Bible, “Progress and Poverty.” Also he had those other characteristics of the founders of Utopias—honesty, sincerity, fearlessness. There was nothing of the mountebank about him. He was as true to form as his mother, who did so much to redeem Philadelphia from sin.

III

At 16 young George felt a stirrin' of the bones in his domestic sepulchre. He got the sea in his brain and shipped for 36 a month to India and Australia. He kept a journal, which reveals a mind totally destitute of imagination, poetry, or, indeed, thought of any kind. It is nothing but a ship's log. Returning to Philadelphia, he took up typesetting at 52 a week. (Philadelphia in those days, as always, paid the highest wages.) The first break with his parents came at this time over the question of slavery. They upheld the institution on the ground that it was sound Scripture, and for the added Scotch reason that it would cost too much to destroy it. Henry was for redeeming the Negro. He burst other buttons about this time. The sea had taught him tricks; he boxed, fenced, drank red-eye, and joined a literary society where they read Byron and frisked the girls. He made out a rather remarkable analysis of himself based on his cranial bumps. He admitted self«esteem, destructiveness, a minimum of mirth, combativeness, and a "large individuality." When home irked again, in 1858, when he was nineteen, he took ship once more, this time for California. A letter awaited him there from his mother. See what he fled in Eternal Philadelphia:

There is nothing stirring or startling in this great city. Religion seems to be the all-engrossing subject. Christians are looking for great results from this outpouring of the spirit. Look to Jesus, my dear child!

But young George had no intention of looking to Jesus. His eye was on the Golden Calf. Gold, in fact, was Jesus out there. He caught the fever and headed for the Frazer river, where there was a strike. Here he made his first prophetic economic observation: "The condition of those who have to work for their living must become not better, but worse." All historic facts would have told him this was not true, but what are facts to a budding messiah? Back to San Francisco, broke. He peddles clothes-wringers, becomes a weigher in a rice-mill, tramps it, grows Walt Whitmans and becomes more and more unbuttoned in his dress. Ticket-taker for a fellow named Sam Clemens, who came to Sacramento to lecture. Married, begat children, and often went to work without breakfast.

The ills of Lazarus were full upon him. He relieved himself by doing his first bit of Writing, "On the Profitable Employment of Time." In this essay I once more verify my belief that all religious, philosophical and economic theories are the product of some defect or need in some individual—in the last analysis, always a physical need or defect. "I am constantly longing for wealth," he says. "... It is my principal object in life to obtain wealth." That is the whole burden of the essay. We shall see how the growing maggot of poverty and privation developed into a colossal Chimera. Empty bellies produce Utopian-thievish dreams.

His bump of destructiveness, which he admitted as a boy, together with the natural instinct of those who are penniless to smash anything or everything at hand, went into action when Lincoln was assassinated. George led a gang to clean out the Democratic *News-Letter*, but when he got there he found that his friend, I. Trump, and his Republican yannigans, in full-blown patriotic-homicidal ecstasy, had done the business. There is only a toy-bridge length between venom and

sentiment, so Henry, finding no building for good patriotic hands to loot, hurried home and wrote an article, in glowing sweat and fervor, on Lincoln. He sent it to the *Alta Californian*, and it got for him the job of editorial writer. I pick the most beautiful sky-rocket out of this basket of fireworks:

And when on plains and uplands, where now the elephant and spring-bok roam,
farms shall be tilled and homes arise; and on great lakes and rivers, now the haunts of
the hippopotamus, a thousand paddles shall beat, the mothers of nations yet unborn
shall teach their children to call him [Lincoln] blessed!

At this phase in his evolution he suddenly felt a call to defend the Monroe Doctrine, and so joined a gang to get Maximilian out of Mexico and help Juarez. They were all nabbed for technical piracy. His next adventure was purely intellectual—he listened to a lecturer expound the beauties of the protective tariff and immediately became a free trader. The area of quixotic absolutism begins to spread. He next attacked the Associated Press and Western Union monopoly in California because the paper on which he worked could not get adequate service. This brought him to New York, another convert, ultimately, from the corrupt simplicity of Philadelphia to the flagitious complexity of the super-Bagdad. Here, at the age of thirty, at about the same age that Walt Whitman received his well-known illumination, he got the first flash of his yet unknown Mission. He recorded some years later the following significant experience in New York:

Once in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a Vision, a Call—give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow.

Symptomatic of the best-attested Pauline conversion-phenomena! This vow was nothing more or less than to do away with poverty; it was the startling contrast between the poor and the rich in the Big Town that caused the concussive flash. He asked himself, among other things, why everything in the universe was governed by law—and Society was not. Here again we see his fundamental defect, his inability to face and affirm the existence of facts that did not square with his growing sentimental absolutism. Nature and Nature's God and all "natural laws" are benevolent (Rousseau ga-ga). Only man in society is evil (more Rousseau ga-ga).

George could not face the fact—his theological ancestry forbade it—that poverty, evil, vice and crime, like everything else in the universe, are evolved according to inexorable natural laws. The moralist-sentimentalist-absolutist of his type will never admit, *must* never admit, that all society, no matter how highly organized, is only, and will always be, a thinly veiled cannibalism, and that his own absolutism, his own doctrine of pity and redemption, like Marx's, Shaw's and Lenin's, are expressions of that cannibalistic law with only an extra veil or two to cover them. Whatever is, is Moloch! George would have shaken his fist in my face at this, with "That's a horrible, a hideous thought, young man!" My answer might have been, "Confer with your special Yahweh about the matter. Personally, I am not in the councils of the Omnipotent and I do not know why these things should be. But so they are, absolutist and sentimental blueprint Utopian crack pots to the contrary notwithstanding."

IV

Although now a free-trader, an under-dog liberator, a Jeffersonian Democrat and an ismist of the finest carat, he also became, on his return to California, an anti-Chinese propagandist. Maybe he still had some Philadelphia inhibitions to overcome. Or because his humanism had gone smack up against political aspirations? I hate to look for dirty common-sense motives in the soul of a World-Weeper, but here it was: Henry George was for hurling to the ground all tariff walls, but was hat for building a wall so high against the Orient that no Chinaman or Jap could ever hope to participate in our then few blessings on the coast. However, he salved his conscience by getting an anti-telegraph monopoly bill through the Legislature. Unluckily, he did not know how to hold a job. Great revelations, it seems, come only to the jobless, as we know from the New Testament—and the following:

He took to horseback riding, and it was while galloping over the rough California roads that the Sphinx—as his son puts it in his biography of his father—had the Great Riddle jolted out of her, and finally picked Henry as the repository of the Secret. Here is the Annunciation:

Absorbed in my own thoughts, I had driven the horse into the hills until he panted. Stopping for breath, I asked a passing teamster, for want of something better to say, what land was worth there... He said, "I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land at a thousand dollars an acre." Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty With increasing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since.

It is curious the part that humble animals play in the life of Inspired Men. Mahomet straddled a mule, another One rode an ass at a critical moment in His life, and there was, of course, Balaam's vocable burro... Here was the Single Tax dogma at last!—born on a panting Rozinante in the California hills, a magnificent bladder-doll of a theory to be presented to his Dulcinea del Toboso, the transfigured wench of the House of Lazarus. Our hero's subconscious absolutism had broken through all dikes at last, and now swallowed up in his consciousness everything else. From this moment onward the mystical syllable Om became Land. Another Paraclete had been born.

He made his first onset against the California landsharks, Stanford, Crocker, Huntington and the Central Pacific Railway, in a paper of which he was the editor in Sacramento. Naturally, they bought the paper (O Moloch!), and he had to quit. He then tried to get into the Legislature. Licked to a tatter. In 1871 he was riding a mustang—pony (always the prophetic Balaam motive!) around San Francisco, blue-eyed, seedy of dress, with a sandy, messianic heard, lost in the absolute realms of Land. On March 26, 1871 (all his biographers insist on the Date), he sat down at his desk, and the Sphinx unriddled another wad of herself: "Our Land and Land Policy, National and State." All the facts fitted his theories—naturally. All about "wages and interest," "the law of rent," and so

on; if you know your Adam Smith, Ricardo and John Stuart Mill, you know the jargon. In this work, as in all his work, I find everything stated and re-stated except one simple fact: that might is right.

He found time to turn up at the Baltimore convention as a Greeley man. He was now the editor of the San Francisco *Post*, wherein he rode full-tilt against all “evils.” In the manner of Socrates he used to stop stock-still on the crowded streets and remain thus for some time in profound meditation. No Xantippe, however, disturbed him, for every monomaniac achieves Nirvana. He renounced all churches and creeds—except of course his own, which behind his doctrine of Land was, consciously or unconsciously, that of Auguste Comte, who proclaimed the Religion of Humanity, which merely means throwing the current Pepe out of the Vatican and putting Lazarus in his chair. But he was still, and always, intensely sociable, even participating in High links at the Bohemian Club (pre-Sterling).

Now, however, like all Great Founders, he had his weeks in Gethsemane. His Sphinx battled in his soul with boodle-needs. He gambled in Nevada mining stocks. He got the gold-fever again in 1875. He lost all in both ventures. These Temptations in the Desert having been undergone, he took a State job as inspector of gas meters. It is somewhat pathetic, this phase, for between Sphinx-unriddlings he had to test the registry of meters by forcing a measured quantity of air through them in place of gas, fastening a brass sea; on all that met the lawful requirement. He got a fee for every meter so tested and scaled. He then tried for the chair of political economy at the University of California, but his Sphinx was then bellowing “Land!” so loudly that the earth-bound interests that controlled the university sent him to the right-about.

The Greater Date—September 18, 1877—had now arrived: he began “Progress and Poverty.” Would this book ever have seen the light if he had got rich in his mining speculations or staked off a gold field or two? Another mean, dirty question, I admit, but I recall that he had announced that “it is my principal object in life to obtain wealth.” His Sphinx, however, knew him far better than he knew himself. It is mum before Mammon; or maybe Mammon dines on Sphinxes. “Progress and Poverty,” like all great Births, occurred amid terrible portents: strikes, panics, mutinies among the unemployed, Committees of Public Safety, and the bar-sinister of illegitimacy on the ’scutcheon of Rutherford B. Hayes. The Land Reform League of California was formed for “the abolition of land monopoly:” the first attempt at propaganda for Henry Georgeism. He finished “Progress and Poverty” in 1879, and it is recorded that he sat down with the family with a far-off look in his eye, ate up all the tomatoes on the table, and then demanded why they did not give him any tomatoes. It is well these things should be recorded. Also, that he had to pawn his watch to buy the tomatoes! He sent “Progress and Poverty” to the Appletons, the publishers of Herbert Spencer, who rejected it on the ground that it was too “aggressive.” They finally took it, however, after he had begun to set it up himself. He sent the first copy to his father with this messianic message:

It is with a deep feeling of gratitude to Our Father in Heaven that I send you a printed copy of the book.

Any American Reformer, Founder, Uplifter, New Thoughter might have written that. They are all Chosen.

V

George came to New York definitively in 1880. He was broke, as usual. The book went slowly, but it made converts of Henry Ward Beecher, Heber Newton, Poultney Bigelow, Charles A. Dana and John Russell Young. Young wrote to the author: “The truth—to he accepted in a sense of worship, *a dogma of political infallibility.*” George replied: “I do not see that a musket need be fired. But if necessary, war be it then! *There was never a holier cause. No, never a holier cause.*” The italics are mine. The Scotch—Puritan Torquemada in George’s blood began to said smoke. For God, the Land and the Poor! Onward, Christian bayonets! But the Prophet had to have a job. So he ghosted for Abram S. Hewitt, then a rich member of Congress, at 350 a week, writing official reports that appeared over the latter’s name. “The first thing I shall do,” he said, “is to get a suit of clothes.” The presidential contest was then on between Gar. field and General Hancock. George was for Hancock, who was beaten because he was a Federal commander without whiskers and because he told the truth when he declared that “the tariff is a local issue.”

Ireland at this time was bleeding again over the land question, although Ingersoll had expressed told the Irish that the make that was strangling their country had not crawled from London but from the Vatican. George sailed to “free Ireland.” In London he met Herbert Spencer, who told him that the Land Leaguers ought to pay their rent. George recalled to him that he had said in “Social Statics,” “Equity does not permit property in land.” But Spencer had survived his early fiddle-faddle and had chopped up his adolescent absolutism into utilitarian hits. George denounced him as a renegade in a book he later wrote called “A Perplexed Philosopher.” Spencer ignored him, kept developing, and finally announced that, “strictly speaking we do not know anything.” He was on the way to Cosmic Humor—when he died—something George would never have forgiven. Spencer had also said that if the had belonged to everybody, then by exactly the same reasoning “so does every- thing I’ve got on, including my watch” (which had been presented to him by his American admirers).

Meanwhile, there was Dr. Edward McGlynn, of St. Stephen’s Catholic Church in New York, who had come out for “Progress and Poverty” in a fiery speech, thereby nearly splitting the Church in half. As a Christian he had made a fatal mistake—he had gone Lazarus one hundred per cent. The Prefect of the Propaganda in Rome wrote to Cardinal McCloskey ordering the suppression of “the priest McGlynn” for making speeches “opposed to the teachings of the Catholic Church.” (“The meek shall inherit the earth.” Bah! said the Pope.) McGlynn was finally excommunicated because he would not go to Rome to recant. He made such inroads With his Fiery Crusade for George, however, that Cardinal Satelli restored him in 1892. McGlynn dictated the terms and got a clean bill of health from the Catholic University at Washington. George dubbed him Galileo McGlynn. During this famous light, which brought the Church to its knees, burial in consecrated ground was refused to anyone who had any connection with McGlynn or his Anti-Poverty Society. When two Ordained Absolutes get to scrapping—!

George came back to America from Ireland famous, with “Progress and Poverty” going strong, but he had no sooner got home than he was called to England to lecture. He was now almost as

famous over there as Gladstone. He got in as another Absolute, Karl Marx, passed away in London. It was just as well, for these rival Utopians would never have got along together, although their tears both fell into Lazarus' pot. Tremendous meeting in St. James' Hall. Labouchere (Labby) presided. He emitted this epigram: "Four Georges have muddled England. Now comes George the Fifth!" The progress through England had a Peter—the-Hermit smell. And there was world publicity. Where was Bernard Shaw? Biting his nails in a vegetarian dump and mumbling, "My racket will beat yours, Henry"?

Came 1886. George was nominated for mayor of New York by the Trade and Labor Conference. Against him was Abram S. Hewitt, Tammany, and Theodore Roosevelt, Republican. George exposed Hewitt as the recipient of his unholy ghosting. Hewitt came back with the charge that he had to fire him for ramming land-reform stuff in everything he wrote. The whole campaign turned on the land question and attracted universal attention. The most beautifully gilded Star of Hope between 1776 and the advent of Bryan appeared in the American firmament. George's fixed idea that the Single Tax was the long-lost Aladdin's Lamp had now reached its apogee. Everything under the sun went into that furnace in his skull. He called for the instant abolition of customs houses and all taxes save the land tax, the abolition of saloons, brothels, almshouses, Tammany, poverty, and all sumptuary laws, and the confiscation of land—out of the débris of which he saw himself stepping as Grand Concert Master of an Eisteddfod of Human Happiness which should last forever and forever, for he believed in the immortality of the soul.

There is very little doubt that he was elected. This was before the Australian ballot, when Tammany gorged the ballot-boxes while you waited. The Hall, however, as a sap to the labor vote, allowed him to run a good second and made Teddy a rank third.

George then founded the *Standard*, and ran for Secretary of State of New York in the Fall of 1887. He was licked again, his vote in New York City being cut in half. But there was some compensation in the conversion to the cause of Tom Johnson of Cleveland, millionaire steel manufacturer and street-railway magnate. Tom announced that he was now convinced that all his wealth had been stolen. He posed as Dives waiting for Lazarus to relieve him of it—legally, of course, be added (the sly rascal!). Then came the Anti-Poverty Society, which was organized at Chickering Hall with McGlynn as president and George as vice-president. Here the Lord's Prayer was cheered to the echo. (Note always the evangelical, truly American root of this movement.)

Before the *Standard* blew up in 1892 George had a tilt with Thomas Henry Huxley. Huxley published an essay in 1890 denying the doctrine of "natural rights" in land or anything else. George called Huxley Professor Bullhead. This is what, I believe, psychologists call the unconscious auto-descriptive retort. Strangely, though, George liked Schopenhauer. He had no notion of art. The magic deviltries of a Liszt, the frozen lyricisms of a Rodin, and the fairy-worlds of a Keats were beyond him. He adored Falstaff, probably because he was unlanded, and hated Coriolanus, probably because he belonged to the landed gentry. At this time also he wrote a most curious article for a magazine entitled "To Destroy the Rum Power." Nothing illustrates better than this article the grotesque logic of the absolutist mind. He opposed Prohibition and high license and advocated the lifting of all taxes whatsoever on drink. No taxes, he argued, would make rum purer. "Drug store whiskey is reputed worse than saloon whiskey, and the worst whiskey of all is Prohibition whiskey." All restrictions make drink; more deadly. "As for the saloon, the license system makes it more gorgeous and enticing, while Prohibition drives it into lower and lower forms." If all taxes, therefore, on the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors were abolished everybody would want to go into the liquor-selling business. Competition would thus destroy it (!). "If everybody

were free to sell liquor we would all have to go out of business.” (Would we, though!) “The cheaper and easier a thing is to get the quicker it will fall into disuse.” (But does not thirst spring eternal in the human gullet?) And he winds up:

Intemperance today springs mainly from that unjust distribution of wealth which gives to some less and to others more than they have fairly earned... It is the vice of those who are starved and those who are gorged... Free trade in everything would abolish intemperance.

The clear old *gobe-mouches!*

In 1897, his health failing, he ran for mayor again, conducting a terrific four cornered fight, with his fanaticism distended to the bursting point, against Judge Robert Van Wyck, Benjamin F. Tracy and Seth Low. He called himself the party of Thomas Jefferson—“what I stand for is the rights of all men.” It may have been so, but, as Huxley annoyingly asked, What are those rights? There are none except to grab, to have and to hold. He collapsed before the campaign was over and died. Thus ended the life of an admirable man, the last forlorn tatter of doctrinaire Individualism, a buffoon of the Absolute.

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Benjamin De Casseres
Henry George
1931

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