

## 'NINETY-SEVEN

**R**ICHARD GEORGE, the family's second son, had developed into a sculptor of ability. Early in 1897, he modeled a head of his father which proved to be the best likeness ever made of the economist—better, even, than the busts done by John Scott Hartley (son-in-law of George Inness) or Carl Roel-Smith, the Dane.<sup>1</sup>

Because he was a restless man, Henry George proved to be a difficult sitter. Fortunately, however, the position of a subject is not as trying for a sculptor as for a painter, and Richard George had an easier time of it than George deForest Brush who, at the behest of August Lewis, had painted a portrait of Henry George. During those sittings Lewis had read Schopenhauer aloud to hold the interest of the model; but the German philosopher's work usually made George either sleepy or angry—neither mood being what the artist desired to set on canvas. The picture was therefore long in the making.

Physicians had warned George's family that although there was nothing organically wrong with him, he was far from strong. They had detected a failing of his usually high spirits and a waning of his vigor. Every effort was made to keep him cheerful and interested in what was going on about him. During the sessions of sitting for the bust, some member of the family almost invariably read aloud to him from Defoe, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Macaulay, Jefferson, or the Scriptures.

One day, when the one son was working on the bust and the other was reading aloud, the father said, musingly, "When I am dead you boys will have this bust to carry in my funeral possession, as was the custom with the Romans."<sup>2</sup>

His mind was occupied with the thought of death, more so perhaps because an apparent bilious attack had left him for long weeks devoid of his old strength. A physical weariness seemed

to be overtaking him. Arthur McEwen described him in this period:

Under five and a half feet and of less weight and smaller girth than many a boy of sixteen . . . the fine head, the greying-reddish beard, the blue eyes looking absently out from under the thicket of brows and through large spectacles, the soft hat set on any way—when these have appeared at the door of the editorial room to inquire for a friend or bring an article, the stranger-journalist, unaware of the visitor's identity, has mistaken him for a colporteur, a retired schoolmaster, an unrecognized, or anything meek or unworldly. . . . It is proof of his quality that fame has made him simpler.

Although nearly fifty-eight, Henry George had enjoyed little rest or relaxation in a life crowded with adventure and toil. Not only had he borne more personal worry than comes to most men but he had launched a world movement which had survived very largely because of his own unswerving faith and indomitable will. Almost, it seemed, his work was done.

Once he told Mrs. George that he was confident the "great advancement of our ideas" would be disclosed more after his death than during his life. "Neither of us can tell," he said, pacing the floor vigorously after springing from his couch, "which of us will die first. But I shall be greatly disappointed if you precede me, for I have set my heart on having you hear what men will say of me and our cause when I am gone."<sup>3</sup>

Next to the Stanton Cottage was a plot of land which Tom Johnson had given him. With money left him for personal use in the will of Silas M. Burroughs, of Burroughs, Welcome & Company, who had died but a short time before, George began building his own home. "The money," he wrote Mrs. Burroughs, "enables me to put my wife for the first time in a house of her own and gives her a security preferable to life insurance."

Work on the house absorbed his whole interest, and this gratified his family and friends who sought to keep him away from his desk as much as possible. The house grew rapidly—the house with its wide, hospitable hall, George's own study on the top floor, and "Jen's room" that was to be always waiting for a visit from the beloved daughter who, married, now lived in Baltimore.

But one night, before Jen's room in the new house was finished, and while she and her seven-months-old son were

visiting the Georges in the old house, death came suddenly and with faint warning to Jennie George.\* The blow was a crushing one for the adoring father. But he concealed the pain of it and gave his strength to comforting others. As dawn came on the early May day of Jennie's death, he sat alone with his broken-hearted Harry. Between Harry and Jen there had been such a bond as existed between Henry George and his own sister Jennie.

The funeral took place in the sun-flooded, flower-decked house where Father McGlynn, who had performed Jennie's wedding ceremony only two years before, now read the last rites. Henry George himself stood at the door and greeted the many friends who came. The death of this beloved daughter was a test of his philosophy and his faith. With characteristic courage he wrote to his cousin, George Latimer, "We are not of those who sorrow without hope. . . . What is left of life will be solemn, but I trust better and it may be—sweeter."<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime the generosity of August Lewis and Tom L. Johnson had freed him from the strain of having to lecture for pay and write magazine articles. With all the persistence which his waning strength permitted, he set about to finish *The Science of Political Economy*.

"It would be a fit title for my last work," he wrote a friend.<sup>5</sup> And in a lighter mood, "The book still swells and I will be lucky if I get through this year. But Adam Smith took twelve years to write *The Wealth of Nations* and the subject has been greatly bedeviled since then."<sup>6</sup> He had doubts that he might be able to finish the work and he feared also that it might not be up to his standard.

To prevent a loss such as he had sustained with *Protection or Free Trade*, this manuscript was set up by linotype. A copy was sent to Dr. Taylor for "criticism." On receipt of that criticism he wrote to his friend in San Francisco, "You may understand now how much I have treasured what you said of that first volume—that it showed there was no loss of power from *Progress and Poverty*. That is what I wanted to hear."<sup>7</sup>

He had also hoped sometime to write an autobiography, not through any sense of vanity but rather because he wanted to throw light and understanding on certain essential facts of his own career. But there had been no time for such a book, just as

\* She died of a sudden heart attack—Editor.

there had been no time for the book on Immortality, or the "Primer," or the notes on Robinson Crusoe.

Into the manuscript of the new work, however, he slipped autobiographical references. He talked of his past and of his experiences to family and friends, and he let his friend Ralph Meeker bring a stenographer and take long notes. As though he felt compelled to leave a record of the history of *Progress and Poverty*, he wrote Chapter VIII, Book Two, ahead of the chapters leading up to it. His son Richard, who copied these nine and a half pages, was the only one who saw this portion of the book until after the author's death. He wrote the dedication to "August Lewis and Tom L. Johnson who of their own motion and without suggestion or thought of mine, have helped me to the leisure needed to write it, I affectionately dedicate what in this sense is their work."

As was afterward revealed, he was quietly "setting his house in order." But there was nothing gloomy about his manner during this time. Put to the test, now that he believed he was facing death, he seemed to live what he had preached—free from fear, and with "grace and guidance and strength to the end." He was cheerful, he maintained his interest in world affairs, and he saw many friends, old and new, including the young lawyer Samuel Seabury. Gently teasing the youngsters and swimming sometimes with a crowd of merrymakers from the Johnson dock, outwardly he maintained much of the routine which he had established at Fort Hamilton. But those who knew him best detected a growing detachment and a weariness that was not merely of the body.

During that summer of 1897, there were frequent reports that Henry George would be asked to run for mayor of what was now Greater New York, on an independent ticket. When the rumor reached Dr. James E. Kelly, his personal physician whom he had known first in Ireland, Kelly hastened to warn George that his physical condition would not permit the strain of another political campaign. Dr. John H. Girdner corroborated Dr. Kelly's statement. And Dr. M. R. Levenson, an old friend of San Francisco days, recalled a conversation he had with George.

I, as well as many others, endeavored to dissuade him from accepting the nomination as likely to injure his health. Speaking on the subject one day, he asked me what was likely to be the result. Seeing that he wished to know, I said: "It may be fatal." "Do you

mean," he said, "that it may kill me?" I answered, "Yes." "Well," said he, "I've got to die, and what can be better than to die fighting for the people. Besides, this will do more for the cause of their emancipation than anything I'm likely to be able to do during the rest of my life."

I dreaded lest any moment his body may collapse.

Dr. Walter Mendelson, brother-in-law of August Lewis, wrote to Henry George:

... I take the liberty of a friend, who is at the same time a doctor, of warning you most earnestly not to accept the nomination. Knowing your physical condition as I do I feel quite certain that both Dr. Kelly and Dr. [Frederick] Peterson will agree with me, when I say that the bodily fatigues and nervous strains which a political campaign would involve might—nay, in all probability, would—be accompanied by the greatest dangers, not to your health alone, but to your life. ... It is not flattery, I am sure, to tell you that you have better work to do than to be Mayor even of Greater New York. ... I believe you ready to make any sacrifice for that which you think right. But I urge you to save yourself for the sake of others. ... There have been thousands of mayors of cities, but so far but one *Progress and Poverty*. ...<sup>8</sup>

The response was brief: "I thank you for your friendly counsel. I shall take it, unless as I can see it duty calls. In that case I must obey."<sup>9</sup>

The pressure from radical Democrats to have George accept the nomination increased steadily. Pressure from intimate friends to refuse it mounted proportionately. George leaned toward acceptance. Failing to convince him that poor health was an insurmountable barrier, his friends tried to dissuade him on the ground that machine politics would thwart an honest administration of the city's affairs and that he might better serve his cause by writing about it. He answered that although this might well be true, he believed that democratic government required the choice of men not necessarily the best equipped for office but men who first of all typified the popular sentiment. If he were elected he might not be the ideal executive but he would represent the principles of those who elected him.

The Democratic party, under the thumb of Tammany Hall, chose Judge Robert Van Wyck as candidate for mayor. Seth Low, twice mayor of Brooklyn (which had now been absorbed in

Greater New York) and at this time president of Columbia University, was nominated by the independent Republicans in protest against the "regulars" who had chosen General Benjamin F. Tracy, a prominent attorney and Secretary of the Navy in the cabinet of President Harrison.

The pressure grew as George was importuned to enter the contest against the Republican and Democratic machines and uphold the principles of Jeffersonian democracy. He called a meeting of about thirty of his friends at the New York office of the Johnson Company in October. All of them knew that he did not desire political place. They knew that he preferred his private study to an office in City Hall. Did they know that now he was probably measuring his own waning strength? Had he time to finish his book? Or only time to make one more appeal to the people—the people who would listen to that appeal if he made it himself, but who would not accept a deputy?

At any rate, one by one he heard his friends' advice for and against accepting the nomination. He quickly silenced every reference to his physical condition. When they had all spoken, he made a summary of their opinions. Everyone, he concluded, had admitted that his candidacy would mean publicity for the Single Tax cause. It would bring before the voters the very ideals for which this group stood. Plainly, therefore, it was his duty to accept the nomination.

"Not a man there who did not feel at the beginning perfectly competent to guide Mr. George," said Arthur McEwen, "and at the end there was not a man there who mentally did not stand hat in hand before his superior practical sense. . . . In the presence of simplicity and unselfishness the wisdom of the shrewd became as foolishness to them. . . . The 30 who had met divided in opinion went away as one, and that one on fire with devotion to Henry George and lifted to his plane for the hour."

Henry George attached one condition to his acceptance—his wife must be consulted. Certainly, however, the decision had been reached in his own mind. His old vitality reappeared and he left the meeting whistling—passing and, quite unconsciously, almost bumping into Richard Croker, "boss" of Tammany, with whom he would soon be in mortal conflict.

Arriving home at Fort Hamilton, he told Mrs. George of the conference with his friends. Then he reminded her of what she had said in Dublin to Michael Davitt at the time of the Phoenix

Park murders—that Davitt should go to his people even though it cost him his life.

“I told you then,” said Henry George, “that I might some day ask you to remember those words. I ask you now.”

Annie George’s answer was brief. “You should do your duty at whatever cost,” she replied quietly.