

LAST STAND

HENRY GEORGE accepted the nomination of "The Party of Thomas Jefferson" on the night of October 5 at an overflow meeting in Cooper Union.

The new party was a combination of several independent political groups, mostly Democratic, and its name had been suggested by George himself. Mrs. George had tickets for herself and her daughter entitling them to sit on the crowded platform. But it was only by using her name that they were able to enter the hall—pushed in through the mob by enthusiastic policemen who led them to places on the stage.

The girl knew nothing of the fears which George's doctors had expressed. She did not know the weight on her mother's heart. But in her own heart there grew a nameless fear when she saw her father (who had nearly fainted on the way to the meeting) advance to the speaker's stand. Now he stood before that sea of faces, his own face ashen, his once strong body now so frail. He stood there—looking as though he must drop, while the huge audience thundered applause and cheers.

("Dear God," prayed the girl, "support him. Do not let him fail. Give him strength.")

At last the tumult ceased. Presently he spoke, his voice small, weak, almost inaudible, difficult to recognize as the voice of Henry George, the "orator," the "prodigy of platform eloquence." The girl muttered her prayer again.

Gradually a change came in the short, slight, weary man on the platform. He braced his shoulders, threw back his head in the old way, and almost in the old voice with almost the old ring, spoke staunchly:

I hold with Thomas Jefferson that no man can ignore the will of those with whom he stands when they have asked him to come to the front and represent a principle.

The office for which you name me gives me no power to carry out in full my views, but I can represent those who think with men who think that all men are created free and equal. . . . To make the fight is honor, whether it be for success or failure. To do the deed is its own reward. . . .

I believe, I have always believed, that . . . there was a power, the power that Jefferson invoked in 1800, that would cast aside like chaff all that encumbered and held it down; that unto the common people, the honest democracy, would come a power that would revivify, not merely this imperial city, not merely the state, not merely the country, but the world.

No greater honor can be given to any man than to stand for all that. No greater service can he render to his day and generation than to lay at its feet whatever he has. I would not refuse it if I died for it.

What counts a few years? What can a man do better or nobler than something for his country, for his nation, for his age?

Gentlemen, fellow Democrats, I accept your nomination without wavering or turning, whether those who stand with me be few or many. From henceforward I am your candidate for the Mayoralty of Greater New York.

After the meeting was over, mother and daughter tried in vain to get through the crowd that swarmed about Henry George and shut him off from them. They made their way at last to the street, but he was far ahead in the crowd, flanked by Tom Johnson and his brother Albert, borne along in a mass of excited, cheering men, who chanted as they marched:

George! George! Hen-ry George!
George! George! Hen-ry George!

The next morning Mrs. George asked her daughter, "Whatever were you doing last night while your father was making his speech? He says he could hardly think of what he wanted to say because he was so conscious of your eyes, staring at him."

Even to her mother, the daughter felt too shy to say that she had been praying. And so she replied, questioningly, "How could he have seen me across that jam of people? I wasn't doing anything—just sitting there beside you."

The new party chose the Union Square Hotel as headquarters because of its central location. Mr. and Mrs. George took rooms there, which the newspapers dutifully described in their ac-

counts of the campaign, in order to avoid the hour-and-a-half trip between the city and Fort Hamilton.

"Mr. George is now in his fifty-ninth year [he had just passed his fifty-eighth anniversary, on September 2]," wrote Arthur McEwen, "and those whose personal contact with him has been recent are most struck by his gentleness, and next by the abstraction of his manner. On his social side he is the least self-assertive of men now. 'As a neighbor, a friend, and the head of a family,' said one who is near him, 'Henry George is the justest, the most considerate, the sweetest, and most lovable of men!' For some years he has been living in retirement, giving the leisure and the matured thought of his ripened life to the composition of an elaborate work on his *Science of Political Economy*. It is to be his *magnum opus*. It shows no decline in power, but there is in it what there is in George himself—a milder tone. He had sat in his evening to tell before night came all he thought of the world in which he found himself—to face its problems and offer his solutions. His absorption in this vast task was complete until the call to the Mayoralty contest came. Then he woke up as a pasturing war-horse might at the bugle's blast, and he is the old Henry George again as I knew him in San Francisco when he was in his thirties."

Three weeks of intensive work followed, for this four-cornered fight for mayor of New York was one of the fiercest ever waged. They were weeks of excitement and boundless enthusiasm for the Jeffersonian Democrats, whose attack on Tammany was fearless and merciless. Campaign funds, however, were meager. The largest contributions came from August Lewis, Tom Johnson, and John R. Waters. Small contributions made up the rest—and greater part—of the fund. George put some of the money from the Burroughs bequest into the campaign against the advice of his friends. Willis J. Abbot, author of several histories and later editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, was chairman of the campaign committee. August Lewis served as treasurer. The committee was composed of men seasoned in politics. Arthur McEwen wrote:

Men laugh at themselves for his power over them. They go to him to advise, to expostulate, to argue, and come from him wroth with their own past littleness. For they find in him not only the capacity to think largely and clearly, but utter honesty in speaking his thought. He appalls the strategists who enlist under him. One

of these politically experienced said "Every move we have made in politics against George's advice we have been wrong, and every time we have followed his advice we have come out right. We all think we know more about the ins and outs of the game than he does, but he has a sort of instinct that guides him straight." "Perhaps," suggested another, "it's because of the old fact that a man placed high can see further than the man down below him. Isn't it just possible that a large mind can think better about anything than a small one can?"

Among George's intimate friends, Louis F. Post was forced by his work to remain in Ohio. But Tom Johnson, Frank Stephens, and Dr. S. Solis-Cohen of Philadelphia and James G. Maguire of San Francisco were among those who came to New York to help in the fight.

Among the New Yorkers, Frederick C. Leubuscher, Lawson Purdy, Samuel Seabury, Oscar Geiger, Charles O'Connor Hennessy, Joseph Dana Miller, and Hamlin Garland were active in George's behalf. The tenderness, the devotion of the many men of varying backgrounds and interests who put aside their personal affairs and rallied to Henry George, was a thing so beautiful to Mrs. George that she could never speak of it without a quaver in her voice.

The candidate was happy and cheerful in his fight. But he had little of the old enthusiasm. The committee saved him as best it could but on some days he insisted upon making as many as five speeches. In fact, he seemed to thrive under the pressure of the fight—to be keener, stronger, than he had been for months.

Each noonday during the campaign he went to lunch with the Lewises at their charming home on East Sixteenth Street. After lunch, usually, he rested. Late one night he stole off with a friend to view the heart-breaking sight of the long line of poor but decent-looking men waiting in front of Fleishman's Bakery at Broadway and Eleventh Street for their midnight handout of stale bread. He left no record of this event. Anyway, what was there to be said that he had not iterated and reiterated all down his life? A companion said that suffering was written on his face as he walked away in silence.

The Thursday night before the Tuesday election embraced a hectic schedule. With Father Thomas Ducey as the main figure at the big Jeffersonian Democrat rally at Cooper Union, Henry

George had started out to speak at five meetings. His wife was always with him, at his request, and of late his brother Val had been going along as a sort of self-appointed bodyguard. On this night Samuel Seabury and Lawson Purdy traveled ahead to hold the meetings for the candidate. The first appearance was at Whitestone, Long Island.

This was the night of his death. The *New York Journal* reported the next day:

... The figure of Mr. George on his last night on earth was one of remarkable pathos. The crowd at Whitestone noticed it and did not know what to make of it. The people seemed afraid to make a noise. They did not know what it was, this indefinable something in Mr. George's manner and voice.

His manner can best be conveyed by imagining a martyr, racked with wounds for conscience's sake, speaking to the people, while his soul was far away looking on other scenes. To one who never saw Mr. George, and upon whom this air had not grown gradually, the effect was startling, for he seemed more like a racked and wounded saint than a man stumping for political office.

The second speech was at College Point. To the large audience composed for the most part of working men, he was introduced as "the great friend of labor and democracy." George at once disclaimed any special or exclusive friendship for labor. He said, "Labor does not want special privileges. I have never advocated nor asked for special rights or sympathy for working men! What I stand for is the equal rights of all men!"

From College Point the party went to Flushing. Daniel Carter Beard presided over the meeting. The *Sun* reported that Beard and Mrs. George, alarmed at George's now obvious fatigue, urged him to return home without speaking. But he was adamant. "I shall speak!" he said. "These people have come because I promised to speak to them. So long as I can speak I shall speak!"

Beard introduced George, and as he related, "Mr. George took a few steps, faced the side of the stage, looked upward for a moment, and raising his right hand as if addressing someone overhead, said: 'Time and tide wait for no man.' His arm fell to his side, his head fell forward, the chin on the breast, and he stood as if lost in thought. Presently he roused, turned to the

audience, and said: 'I have only time to come, take a look at you, and go away.'

In his brief speech he touched on the various candidates: "I shall not attempt to dictate to you. I do entertain the hope, however, that you will rebuke the one-man power by not voting for the candidate of the bosses. I am not with Low. He is a Republican and is fighting the machine, which is all very good as far as it goes. But he is an aristocratic reformer; I am a democratic reformer. He would help the people; I would help the people help themselves."

After the meeting in Flushing the party sped to the Central Opera House in Manhattan. On that frantic last night they seemed to be racing against time. It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mr. and Mrs. George and Val George reached the auditorium. Most of the audience had left the hall, believing that George was not coming. But now the crowd surged back.

As Henry George walked to the platform, someone cried out, "Hail, Henry George, friend of the laboring man!"

"I am for *men!*" he corrected.

George was so weak and so weary from his exertions that his brother almost lifted him up the stairs of the hall. His speech was short. But unlike the other speeches that night it was disconnected and rambling. With agony of heart, his wife and brother noted the difference. Outside again, and in the fresh air, he seemed to revive. However, it was too late for the fifth speech, and the party drove back to the Union Square Hotel.

Six friends who were lingering about headquarters joined them in the dining room for a light supper. Lawson Purdy, who was present, drew a diagram of the table and the seating arrangements on a letterhead of the campaign committee. In addition to the Georges and Purdy, who is the sole survivor of the campaign committee, there were present: Dr. John H. Gardner, Willis J. Abbot, Charles F. Adams, Arthur McEwen, Dr. R. S. Law, and Jerome O'Neill. "There was friendly talk," he recalls, "and the party broke up at one A.M."

Some of his dinner companions remarked that George looked tired and that he seemed to have an unhealthy pallor, but he did not act as though ill and appeared to enjoy his after-dinner cigar.

Before going to bed he complained of indigestion. Toward morning, Mrs. George awoke and became conscious at once that he had left the room. She called out and he answered that he

was all right. But he did not return. She arose and found him in the sitting room of their suite.

"He was standing," so his son, Henry, Jr., wrote, "one hand on a chair, as if to support himself. His face was white; his body rigid like a statue; his shoulders thrown back, his head up, his eyes wide open and penetrating, as if they saw something; and one word came—'Yes'—many times repeated, at first with quiet emphasis, then with the vigor of his heart's force, sinking to softness as Mrs. George gently drew him back to his couch. He moved mechanically and awkwardly, as though his mind was intensely engaged, and little conscious of things about him."¹

Mrs. George called her son Henry. Someone ran for August Lewis, while Frank Stephens rushed for Dr. Kelly and then to the Waldorf Hotel for Tom Johnson.

When Johnson saw Stephens in his room at that time of night, he knew his errand without being told. "My God!" he murmured in a grief-drowned voice, "My God!" and writhed, says Stephens, "as one writhes who has been pierced by a sword."²

In spite of all his skill, in spite of all his knowledge of the human body, Dr. Kelly could do nothing to raise his stricken friend from unconsciousness. The cord had parted. Dr. Kelly tried to comfort Mrs. George, but overcome by his own helplessness, this often cynical but always tender-hearted Irishman threw himself face downward on the floor and wept.

Henry George was dead.