

## ‘IF NEED BE, DIE FOR IT’

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*The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of truth.<sup>1</sup>*

—Progress and Poverty

**H**ENRY GEORGE died in the arms of his life partner, his first-born and namesake beside him, his beloved friends close by, his army of devoted followers at hand, his work done, his life crowned.

A glorious death!

But in that hotel room in New York in that grey dawn, they could not see the glory of it. It was the men who broke; it was the woman who gave them courage.

By the time Frank Stephens, the courier of this shocking event, had reached Fort Hamilton with the message and Richard George and his sister had hastened back to the Union Square Hotel, the cry of “Extra! Extra!” was already ringing in the ears of early risers.

“Henry George is dead!” was the cry that went up and down the city’s streets.

The effect of his death on his followers is poignantly described by James R. Brown, the chairman of the campaign speakers committee. “. . . in the morning, when on my way back to headquarters, I reached the newsstand at the corner of our block, I picked up an early paper with a full front page announcement of this great man’s death. It staggered me, and I took counsel with hope, that it could not be, that it was perhaps a mistake. I climbed the elevated railway stairs slowly and painfully; took a train, and, still refusing to believe although the crowd in the car all accepted the announcement of the death as

a fact and were almost to a man visibly affected by the sad news, I got out of the train at Fourteenth Street and walked west toward Fourth Avenue.

"When directly in front of Tammany Hall I met Richard Croker in a group of his political henchmen. They were laughing and joking and making merry over something. Again I thought, Henry George cannot be dead; these men would at least be serious and thoughtful if he were. In a minute or two I had turned the corner of Fourth Avenue and entered the Union Square Hotel. . . .

"Everywhere in the building men and women were weeping their hearts out. As I went up the stairs I passed Edward McHugh, seated about one-third of the way up, convulsed with sobs; two or three men just above him were in like condition of grief; and at the top, poor Tom L. Johnson walked through the corridor, tears streaming down his face."

The general public was almost equally moved.

"Since the stirring times of the Civil War," said the *New York Sun*, "few announcements have been more startling to New York than that of the sudden death of Henry George, candidate of the Democracy of Thomas Jefferson for Mayor of Greater New York." The press of the world, friendly to his doctrines or antagonistic to them, now united in speaking of his uprightness, his integrity of purpose. "Today the earth loses an honest man" . . . "A tribune of the people, poor for their sake, when he might have been rich by mere compromising" . . . "Fearless, honest, unsullied, uncompromising Henry George."

The *New York Journal* said in an editorial:

There was nothing of the pompous consciousness of greatness about Henry George. His mind was of such pellucid clearness that no false modesty could obscure it. But while he felt a serene confidence that he had possession of a truth of vast importance to mankind, that consciousness never betrayed him into the faintest touch of vanity. He retained throughout a simplicity, a modest, almost diffident bearing and an approachability that knew no distinction of persons. . . . He was undoubtedly the most popular economic writer that ever lived. New York mourns her great citizen.<sup>2</sup>

In its obituary editorial the *New York Times* declared:

Profoundly tragic as is the death of Henry George at this moment, it can truly be said that his life closed in the noblest services

to his ideals, fitly rounding a career that from the start has been singularly worthy. . . . Whatever we may think of the theory he worked out, no one can dispute its benevolent spirit. . . . He was the most unselfish of men. He coveted neither wealth nor the leisure so dear to the thinker. Ambition in the ordinary sense did not move him and though he dearly loved the sympathy of his fellow-men the usual rewards of popularity left him indifferent. His courage, moral and intellectual, was unwavering, unquestioning, prompt and steadfast.

One of the candidates was out of the race for the mayoralty. But Henry George's supporters, wishing his name to remain on the ballot, urged that his son, Henry George, Jr., carry on by allowing his own name to appear on the ticket.

The *New York Sun* reported: "Young Mr. George was informed of his nomination by Tom Johnson, in the corridor of the [Union Square] hotel. Mr. Johnson was so full of emotion that he could hardly speak. He took hold of Mr. George by the two shoulders and blurted out: 'They have nominated you for your father's place.'

"Young George had not expected it, and he turned pale at the announcement. For a moment or two he was silent, then he said:

"I will accept the nomination and I promise if elected to carry out all the promises my father made. I stand for the principles for which he stood. I pledge myself to carry them out."

The vote which the son received on election day was only a tribute of loving sentiment. To George's party and followers it seemed in no way an indication of the number of votes which his father would have received.

This campaign of the son was, of course, only a nominal one. Indeed, issues in the election were almost forgotten in the sorrow, and with the sorrow a dedication, which filled the thoughts of the economist's friends. Grief-stricken visitors poured into the Jeffersonian Democracy headquarters. Mrs. George received many of them, perfectly poised and tearless. It was not until four months later that she was able to write of her husband's last campaign to the faithful Edward Robeson Taylor in San Francisco:

In the face of such a loss I can only say that for him I have nothing to wish—the end was a fitting one to life—a glorious one. Oh, Doctor,

you should have been here to see "politics" as they were conducted in the Union Square Hotel for those three weeks. It was a beautiful experience to see him surrounded by his friends and neighbors, all ready to sacrifice anything for principles laid down by their beloved leader.

He grew Christ-like within the last year (everyone spoke of it) and like the Master he lashed the wrongdoers when he got before an audience—and what audiences he had, marvelous in size and earnestness! Strength seemed given to him. Even the last night his speeches, though short, were clear, connected and strong.

He had felt as if his work was ended, so it is best that it should have closed in this way, painlessly and quickly. I try to find comfort and do, in the fact that I was useful to him. But he was my companion and teacher for thirty-six years and I wonder how to live without him.<sup>3</sup>

Early Sunday morning his body was borne from the Union Square Hotel by the two sons and the daughter and several of the close friends. They drove through the deserted streets of the still sleeping city as the rising sun gilded the tops of the grey buildings.

Into the great building on Lexington Avenue at 44th Street, the Grand Central Palace, they carried their dead, banking about him the flowers that came from countless friends. They placed beside him the elaborate offerings sent by his three Mayoralty opponents. And closer still they laid the roses that had come from Carney.

Unknown to the family, someone had brought from the Fort Hamilton home the newly cast bronze bust of Henry George made by his son Richard. This was placed close to the coffin. (He had prophesied: "When I am dead you will have this bust to carry in the funeral procession.")

From seven o'clock in the morning till two in the afternoon, when the doors were closed in preparation for the funeral service, thousands of persons moved past the bier in double lines to pay tribute to the man who had said, "I am for men." In the first hour there were fifteen hundred; in the next, from eight to nine, four thousand; the numbers growing hourly, until in the seventh hour there were nine thousand. When the doors closed, police estimated that as many as ten thousand more were gathered in the street seeking admission.

In the afternoon the funeral services were held in the

thronged building. The Reverend Heber Newton, the life-long friend, read the beautiful Episcopal service and offered a prayer. Dr. Lyman Abbott spoke, followed by Rabbi Gustav Gottheil.

When Father McGlynn spoke it was with a depth of feeling and sincerity which electrified the throng of seven thousand gathered before the simple, low, black-draped bier. After a few sentences the priest and friend said of George, "He was not merely a philosopher and sage; he was a seer, a forerunner, a prophet; a teacher sent from God. And we can say of him as the Scriptures say: 'There was a man sent of God whose name was John.' And I believe I mock not those Scriptures when I say: 'There was a man sent from God whose name was Henry George!'"

At these words the slowly gathering tension in the vast auditorium suddenly broke. A thunder of applause burst forth. At first it seemed a desecration, in that place which had become a church. Father McGlynn waited a moment, and then went on:

He had a lion's heart, the heart of a hero. . . . It was that loving heart of his that grieved over the sin and misery that he saw. . . . In the concluding chapters of that immortal work of his he makes a confession and a profession, and says that the faith that was dead in him revived. . . . That book is not merely political philosophy. It is a poem; it is a prophecy; it is a prayer. . . . When the names of the mayors of New York and the presidents of the United States will be but little more than catalogues of names or called to memory only by an allusion in history, in a niche in one of the walls of the hall or that parliament of nations, there shall be found honored, loved and revered the name of Henry George.

Applause had punctured the remainder of Father McGlynn's funeral address and it burst out anew at his conclusion. It came again as Judge John Sherwin Crosby, the last speaker, alluded to the bitter criticism which George had endured because "he threatened established institutions." "Threatened?" asked the speaker, who was then unknown to most of the crowd. "He has not only threatened them; he has shaken them to their foundations. Threatened your institutions, has he? To whom have you built statues in your cities but to men who threatened your institutions? Your Garrisons and Phillipses, your Lincolns, Sumners and Sewards, all threatened institutions defended in their time by pulpit and press. Yes, Henry George has threatened

established institutions, and they are now tottering to their fall, because not founded on the eternal rock of justice, but built upon the shifting sands of expediency."

The applause at a funeral service had shocked many of George's intimate friends, especially the clergymen. And yet, before the end, it became infectious, and most of the crowd joined. The Reverend Heber Newton said later to Alice Thacher Post, "When the applause first broke out, I was amazed and shocked. When it was repeated, I felt righteously indignant. But as it was again and again renewed, and I myself felt the thrill of the Christian sentiments it so unconventionally approved, the gratifying thought came to me that this was not a funeral, but a resurrection."

The services concluded, the coffin was placed on a high draped catafalque, drawn by sixteen horses shrouded in black nets. It was escorted by hundreds on foot through the canyons of the city in the gathering dusk. A single band played Chopin's "Funeral March" and the "Marseillaise," moving at the head of the column. From the window of a great house on Madison Avenue someone dropped a white rose which clung to the casket as it passed.

"I am for men," Henry George had said. And now, despite the soft rain that was falling, an unbroken line of people stood—sometimes five deep—uncovered, silent, sorrowful, along the way of march. The procession passed through City Hall Park, close to the steps of the beautiful old building where this man might have governed. It was dark and empty. No sound came from it save the deep-toned tolling of the bell. To the slow rhythm of the dirge the cortege moved across the Brooklyn Bridge. There all other traffic had been stopped; the span was deserted and silent except for the muffled sounds of wheels and tramping feet.

The two great cities stretched vague and mysterious in the Sunday calm. In the grey hush, boats passed dimly on the leaden colored waters beneath. Across they went, the followers with their leader, to Brooklyn—newly made part of Greater New York—and to Borough Hall. There, every window alight and with bells tolling, they lifted his coffin from the catafalque and delivered it to his family.

And now, no longer the public servant, Henry George became again just the beloved friend, the husband, the father, and those closest to him took their dead home for one last night.

"He lived nobly, he died grandly, and those who knew him best loved him the most. What more could be said of any man?" wrote Dr. Taylor.<sup>4</sup>

Next day in the morning sunshine, after services conducted by the two Episcopal ministers, John W. Kramer and George Latimer, and the Catholic Edward McGlynn, they laid his tired body to rest on the hillside in Greenwood, near the beloved daughter Jennie—out under the broad sky and looking toward the far ocean.

On the edge of the crowd stood Carney, the faithful servant, too.

"In all the years I lived in his house," she said to the girl at her side, "he was as kind to me as me own father. Glory be to God! He was a lovely man! Everythin' he used to do was nice and pleasant. He was the innocentest man that ever I knew!"

And long later came another eulogy—a quiet, time-tested judgment from Father Dawson of Dublin:

"He was one of the really great—pure of heart, loving his fellow-men—a citizen of the world!"