

## 1839-1855

A man's world contains the world he knew as a boy, and when things are right the legacy is strength-giving, a resource for life. Surely it was good fortune that Henry George was born and brought up in Philadelphia, during the age we name for Andrew Jackson. 'Drawing my first breath almost within the shadow of Independence Hall,' he said to the San Francisco audience which heard his first notable oration, 'the cherished traditions of the Republic entwine themselves with my earliest recollections, and her flag symbolizes to me all that I hold dear on earth.'

It is hard to think that he could have had a more appropriate heritage. Had he been blessed to be born to the inspired circle of the village of Concord, and had he learned the ideas of freedom walking beside Ralph Waldo Emerson and listening to town-meeting debate and Unitarian sermon, he would, we may think, have reached the heights younger than he did, and commenced earlier his career of writing and speaking. A latter-day Transcendentalist he might well have become, for he had that kind of sympathy and impulse; and in the Concord group he would have wanted Henry Thoreau for mentor and friend. Rephrasing American principles under these auspices, though, if environment suggests anything, he would have said more about religion than he did, and less about the social condition of man, less about land and population and trade, according to his best gifts.

Better for George's first growth, it is reasonable to think, than even the community of the Transcendentalists could have been, was the bustling city where the great Declaration and the federal Constitution were written. In Philadelphia an idealist's mind turns naturally to events of state and society; remembrance of things past attaches uniquely to the birth of the Republic and connects with the rise of common people. Philadelphia recalls Benjamin Franklin; it suggests Quaker inspiration and civic growth; it brings to mind congresses and conventions, Jefferson's ideas and Washington's strength, occasions of battle and victory, and the historic

statement of great principles. Philadelphia's buildings, especially the very greatest, have a meaning for Americans that monuments elsewhere can in no way rival. 'I've seen the shackled slave under the shadow of Independence Hall carried by federal arms back to his master,' Henry George told a Philadelphia audience thirty- six years after he had left the city.

Above all the place of his origin gave George as birthright the right to speak for the people of the world's great cities. Philosopher of the land though he became, he was always a city man. The burden of the present history is to tell how he executed that spokes- manship, first in San Francisco and much in New York and London and Glasgow, but also around the world — in Sacramento, Dublin, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool, Paris, Melbourne, Cleveland, Chicago, and Minneapolis, and in perhaps a hundred other cities.

Life began for Henry George on 2 September 1839, in a brick row house on Tenth Street near Pine. This was close to mid-city then, as it is today. But what is now a blighted area was a century ago a good and convenient place to live. The distances of everyday life had to be walking distances; and the Tenth Street house was six blocks from Market Street, and about a mile from St. Paul's Church. Somewhat nearer, nine blocks from home to be exact, the old statehouse known and loved as Independence Hall stood in matchless dignity. During Henry's boyhood it was still as tall or taller than the near-by buildings, and of course gave Philadelphia its architectural climax. The Customs House, where Henry's father worked many years, itself a classic in marble of Greek revival architecture, occupied an adjoining square. The fascinating waterfront of the nation's second largest city — also second commercial and financial center — lay ten blocks from home, straight down Pine, or Spruce, or Lombard.

Though born the oldest son, Henry never knew an uncrowded household. At the time of his birth the family numbered six. Besides the parents and year-old sister Caroline, there was an older sister perhaps in her teens, Harriet, whom his father had adopted during his earlier marriage. Then there was Mrs. George's sister Mary Vallance, an arthritic, who was to be the beloved Aunt Mary of thirty years of raising the George children, and who seemed to Henry the very embodiment of sacrificial love. During the

1840s and '50s there came eight children more. A year after Henry, Jane, a lively girl and in time a great student, always his favorite sister; then four other girls, two of whom died in infancy, and three boys. The boys were too much younger than Henry for companionship, though family legend has it that they worshipped him, and that five-year-old Morris cried the most bitterly of anyone when he sailed away to California. During childhood and youth it was the three girls nearest his age with whom he shared most fully. But he never lost track of any of the family, and in due course the middle brother, John Vallance, became an associate, and in later life Caroline came to live in his household.

Back of the growing family known genealogical lines were short, but even so we may guess that they were more than average length for that time and place. Henry's two grandfathers had come as immigrants of the later eighteenth century, and both had married and succeeded in the city. His father's father had been born a Yorkshireman and trained a seaman under British colors. In America he became a shipmaster and in a small way a shipowner. Married here to Mary Reid, and the father of three children, of whom Richard Samuel Henry George, our Henry's father, was youngest, Captain George had lived well, according to his prosperity. In the long reminiscence of Richard George, his home had been a bustling happy place, supplied to overflowing with good things to eat and enjoy, and amply tended by servants. Regrettably this backlog of family fortune had disappeared before Henry George's day. His father's brother, Duncan George, a businessman— whose son James preceded Henry to California — is the only relative on the paternal side who at all entered Henry's young life in Philadelphia.

On the maternal side, Henry's grandfather John Vallance had been brought as an infant from Glasgow to America. Trained as an engraver, Mr. Vallance achieved some prominence in his craft; and, to the advantage of the family which concerns us, he married Margaret Pratt. This grandmother of Henry George supplied the one quarter-section of his family which connected him deeply with Philadelphia history. She was a great-granddaughter of a member of Benjamin Franklin's Junto, which had been made up of men of mind and enterprise; and she was related to many businessmen and artist-craftsmen of the city.

Unfortunately Margaret Pratt Vallance was widowed at forty and died a decade before her daughter, Henry's mother, had married and settled. But her children and their families, two or three of them in Philadelphia, surrounded the Richard Georges. We shall hear especially of the Latimers — Aunt Rebecca Vallance Latimer, Uncle Thomas, and Cousin George. So, though Henry and his sisters and brothers never had grandparents to know and visit, they had plenty of relatives close at hand, who made life lively and sufficient in the city. None of the kin seems to have been at all wealthy. The one legacy of money mentioned in the family came to the sisters Catharine George and Mary Vallance in 1858, and probably amounted to little. Yet as Henry's luck in his teens will indicate, the Vallance connections had not infrequently a favor to bestow, to ease the strains of a family's struggle.

Before marriage, 19 April 1837, both Richard George and Catharine Vallance — he thirty-eight, she twenty-six — had been earning a living in small businesses of education. Indeed it was by reason of the school which she and her sister ran that Miss Catharine became acquainted with her husband. After the death of the first Mrs. George, the widower placed Harriet under the care of the Misses Vallance. This connection overlapped another. During the 1830s and most of the '40s Richard George earned a living by publishing Sunday school and other books for the Episcopal Church; and for a while he had as partner Thomas Latimer, a brother-in-law of the teachers. These relationships indicate that things economic were essentially equal between the life partners; and they explain how fortune provided beforehand a school-teacher mother and a school-teacher maiden aunt for the conscientious training of the children. And, in a broader view, Richard and Catharine George, humble people by temperament both of them, derived from that creative, working and small-owning element in Philadelphia society, which Professor Briden-baugh now tells us was one of the earliest growing beds of social democracy in American city life.

The kind of living that the devoted father of the family could make for wife, sister-in-law, and nine children has been variously estimated by students of Henry George, but always with emphasis on poverty and insecurity, and with some implication that hard times during childhood embittered the mind of the future social critic and reformer. And indeed the solemn picture can be darkly drawn: the man who denied Ricardo suffered

as a child from pressure of population in the family; the economist who offered to cure depressions was brought up in a household pressed by the crisis of the late '30s and early '40s; and as a teen-ager he was thrust from his parents' home by the hard times of 1857.

But these unshaded lines sketch too impressionistically from the surface, and the picture requires lightening. Before 1831 Mr. George had been a clerk in the Customs House. Then he turned to publishing. Although there is no record of the business's income, there is of its activities: Mr. George's firm operated a bookstore, and for some time it had the depository of the General Episcopal Sunday School Union, the Bible and Prayer Book Society, and the Tract Society. Church publishing was a going business in America's most enthusiastic age for missions and Sunday schools. Episcopalianism was growing, notably so in the middle states, and Mr. George was as active as a layman could be. His business weathered the depression of 1837 and after—the period of his marriage and the birth of several children. Only in 1848, when general economic conditions had improved, did he give up the firm and return to work in the Customs House. At that time large publishers were invading church publishing. Whether or not Mr. George was driven completely to the wall, all the arguments of common sense must have been on the side of a salaried job.

But abandoning one's own enterprise is hard, and the point of change fixed the memory of poverty in the family mind. The father now became an ascertaining clerk; and, with seven or eight dependents, his government salary was \$800 a year. Yet this austere statistic requires both understanding and revision. Besides his office duties, Mr. George took on extra work at Parkinson's, the finest restaurant in the city, probably doing some bookkeeping.

From this source he made about \$250, more than enough for a year's house rent. Also by the '50s his salary had risen to about \$1100. Though it is true that the depression of 1857 caused him many anxieties, this was not until after Henry had left home; and then apparently Mr. George's only immediate deprivation was his side earnings, a loss he felt he could bear. In 1859 a government economy measure withheld one month's salary at the Customs House. The real risks of his job were political, and they did not materialize for him, as a Democrat, until 1861. Altogether his ordinary income of \$1300 or \$1400 during the '50s, when Henry was of an age to

worry about such matters, compares very favorably with the incomes of clergymen and teachers at the time. The whole period of Henry George's childhood and youth was happily one of prevailingly low prices and rising standards of living; and Mr. George seems to have made a fair living. At darkest estimate it was genteel deprivation, not want or catastrophe, that pressed upon the George family during Henry's childhood years.

This impression is confirmed by the way in which the family lived. Their first home, the house on Tenth Street, they equipped attractively and well. The Georges had their share of good furniture, mahogany upholstered with mohair; and on the walls, beside needlework and engravings, they hung family portraits in oil appropriate to Vallance family history. Apparently they suffered some loss of situation when the size of the family compelled them to move, during the '40s, to a larger house of the same type on South Third Street, three doors north of Queen. This placed the family farther from Market Street than before, but about the same distance from the Customs House and Independence Hall, and only half a mile from church; and it brought the boy within three blocks of the water. The house was in the Southwark District, and likely most of the residents were working people; at any rate there were riots in the neighborhood on the tail of the 1837 depression. But rioting has no part in the George record; and this home was the one to which the cousins flocked, and to which, a quarter-century later when he was beginning to see the ugliness of slums, Henry George was happy to visit from California, and to send his young wife and babies for a long stay. Mr. George rented the Third Street house, gaslit and stove-heated, for \$200 a year.

Letters to Henry written after he had left home in his teens tell us most of what we know about how life was lived in the place where he grew up. Of course the house was congested. With eight to a dozen people under the one roof, Henry and later his brothers chose to sleep in the attic and have a private headquarters where boys could read and talk. The other possibility, preferred but not commanded by the mother, was to sleep on a sofa downstairs, where temperatures were less extreme. Although Mrs. George had hired help at least part of the time, everyone had to share in the housework. A letter to Henry described mother, aunt, and one sister doing the family ironing. An evening caller discovered a full circle of Georges: the father reading the newspaper in a big rocking chair, the mother with a

magazine, Aunt Mary and Caroline sewing, Jane writing, Tom painting pictures, and the smallest brother happy with a birthday present of candy and a quarter-peck of apples. These must have been familiar scenes, full of nostalgia for Henry.

The family's pleasures were pretty seasonal. Puritanical though they were, their Christmases combined festivity with worship: excitement, surprises, toys, guests, and turkey made the order of the day. They celebrated the Fourth of July with the enthusiasm and noise and fireworks which were habitual and appropriate in Philadelphia. Back of the house they kept a garden heavily planted; at fifteen Henry had certain rosebushes all his own. Some summers members of the family went to the country for a vacation, either to visit relatives in the Wyoming valley of northern Pennsylvania or to rest at a hotel. The family's standards Mrs. George once summed up with authority: 'neither poverty nor riches that is the happy medium. If only we can live comfortable and make both ends meet that is all I ask for. I hope that we will all possess the true riches, have an inheritance beyond the skies. This alone will bring true happiness.' By other standards the family lacked many things: travel to distant places, higher education, large expenditures or possessions of any kind. But within the family's natural orbit, Mr. George's dollars somehow afforded a medium way of life and supported a loyal and happy family.

Looking backward we may reasonably associate much of the goodness of their life together with the domestic capacities of the mother and aunt, and with the steady habits of the father. Yet if asked the older Georges would have attributed the family's soli-

darity not to themselves but to their Heavenly Father's guiding hand. The family Bible on a pedestal table made a shrine at home, and there they all repaired for morning and evening prayers. Even a skeptical friend of Henry's later teens said that Richard George's family worship affected him deeply; and probably three out of four of the letters written to Henry in California contained passages which tell us that questions of salvation, worship, and Christian behavior were the ideas of greatest concern to the family. Caroline and Jane were as anxious for Henry's spiritual well-being as were his parents.

The historic well where they refreshed their faith was St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church, one of the most influential churches in

Philadelphia. Only a few blocks from Independence Hall — roughly halfway between it and the Third Street house — St. Paul's occupied a handsome brick and plaster building, which had been built before the Revolution in the great period of Philadelphia brick architecture. Splendid iron gates at the street and a gold and white interior stated the principles of eighteenth-century taste and simplification within the Church of England. Henry's church attendance made an impression on Ignatius Horstmann, a contemporary who became a Roman Catholic bishop. He remembers the boy as, 'every Sunday, walking between his two older sisters, followed by his father and mother, all of them so neat, and trim and reserved.'

A family could hardly have found more ways to become closely attached to a city church than the ways that connected the Georges with this one. Mrs. George's mother was buried in the crowded church lot; her father and two brothers-in-law served as vestrymen; and her nephew George Latimer was called to the ministry there. But no member of the Vallance family served St. Paul's longer than did Mr. George himself. While he was still in publishing, he taught the infant school. Thus Henry's familiarity with the Bible ran back to church and home in his earliest days, but to the same teacher in the two places. Beginning in 1852, Mr. George served a seventeen-year term as vestryman, a term which included those of his brothers-in-law and also that of Jay Cooke, the famous banker (and Sunday school worker) who is said to have improved his contacts by moving from the Methodist to the Episcopal Church.

The Georges' absorption in St. Paul's meant more than Bible and church and conscience in Henry's upbringing. Then as now these three could be lightly taken in a mild blend, in an Episcopal or other church. At St. Paul's the blend was heady. The age of Jackson and Emerson was the age also of the fullest flow in American history of the spirit of evangelism. Some of the flamboyant achievements of religion, more often on the frontier than not — the Mormons, the Finney revivals in New York and Ohio, the camp meetings — have unduly obscured evangelism in the cities, and in the more conservative churches. St. Paul's, appropriate to the name, illustrates the story of this little known side of the movement.

To sense the power of it, a word about Episcopal Church history is required. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the American Episcopalians, like the Church of England people, divided into High



Church and Low Church inclinations. In this country High Church meant a maximum persistence of Anglican traditions and ceremonies, near to the Catholic order; and Low Church meant considerable assimilation of the less formal habits of Methodists and other evangelicals. The whole history of St. Paul's placed it in a position of Low Church leadership. The first minister of the parish had led a sort of come-outer movement from Christ Church, the oldest and in the end the most famous and aristocratic High Church parish in the city. On the eve of the Revolution St. Paul's got into 'continuous difficulty' with the Bishop of London, who had general discipline over all the Church of England parishes in America. Symbolically as well as physically, St. Paul's stood near Independence Hall.

This momentum carried forward into Henry George's day and life. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century St. Paul's became the largest parish in the state; new parishes of the Low Church kind proliferated from it in the Philadelphia area; and, under the rectorship of a man inspired by John Wesley, the early Sunday school developed. Yet the climax of evangelicalism and Americanization in the parish waited for the rector of the Georges' own time. This was Dr. Richard Newton, English-born American-trained member of a family of clergymen, his sons better remembered than himself. Dr. Newton conducted the services with 'almost rural simplicity'; there was no bowing during the recitation of the creed, and there was much attention to Sunday school work

and strong support for foreign missions, especially one in Liberia about which Henry heard a great deal. Year after year he preached a popular series of sermons on personalities of the Bible — and just possibly Henry George's address on Moses, given on three continents during the last two decades of the century, was in some degree an echo of his pastor's voice. Any radicalism that Dr. Newton may have entertained seems to have concentrated on church polity, where he took and debated very advanced grounds for an Episcopalian. Like his church generally, he took no prominent role in the slavery controversy; apparently he acquiesced in the institution and did no more for the Negro than sending assistance to Liberia. How well the elder Georges loved his emphasis on the saving of individual souls, and loved the preacher they made perfectly clear in letters to Henry during his first year in California. During the extensive revivals of 1858, St.

Paul's was holding daily services, they reported joyfully, and unbelievers in numbers were falling to their knees.

It is impossible to look forward to any period of Henry's adult life, least of all to the twenty years after *Progress and Poverty*, and not believe that a main line of evangelical feeling runs continuously from the spirit of St. Paul's to the spirit of his effort of the '80s and '90s for a transforming social change. We shall discover no more persuasive evidence of this continuity than his natural and easy renewal with Heber Newton, Dr. Newton's son, in New York City, after they had both become prominent men. As children they had played together at the rectory, and had gone to school together; then in the '50s they had separated into different courses of life which kept them apart for three decades. Yet, when they met, they converged in common effort. Heber Newton as minister had moved in the logic which by that time was carrying a segment of Episcopalianism, and Protestantism generally, from his father's evangelical emphasis on the saving of souls to the new emphasis on bringing into being the Kingdom of God on earth. In the long run the two men, Henry George and Heber Newton, drew on a common source of energy and moved in a common direction.

In the shorter view, though, scraps of evidence tell us that Henry as a youngster bucked the current of piety at home. He was never confirmed at St. Paul's, and after he left home his parents had a couple of years of worry about his spiritual condition. Perhaps

there is a flash of antagonism in a story from catechism class, when he was seven or eight. Dr. Newton asked the boys why the grocery-man keeps netting over dried peaches. 'To keep the flies out,' sallied young Henry. Yes, to prevent stealing, the minister replied, his own face reddening. And shortly after arriving in California, still in his teens, Henry begrudged his admiration for Dr. Newton: 'I like him better than any other minister I have ever heard,' he told his sister, with some ambivalence. By that time Henry George was capable of thinking ill of a man who acquiesced in slavery. Perhaps only by reason of a streak of aversion for an intense man, or of a youngster's feeling that he had been overdosed with religion, Henry at home had some reservation about St. Paul's, and never reached full commitment of faith under its auspices.

Yet he was not to delay long in making a Christian commitment. And as for his loyalty to the church in which he was reared, he made an almost unconscious declaration in California. Editorializing during his thirties — at a stage when he was altogether concerned with public affairs and the least concerned with religion of any period of his life — his eye was caught and irritated by a comment on Episcopalian worship in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Contrary to that paper, he declared in his own columns, American Episcopalianism had not always been highly ritualistic; the services of the church were often even plainer than those of Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists. Let us hope, he said, that the Episcopal Church may ever go its way, ‘meeting the child with words of promise, and soothing the mourner at the grave, and daily expressing in its liturgy the needs and aspirations of the human heart.’

The story of Henry George in school, though it is very short, gives the first line of individual record along which to follow his boyhood growth. After learning the R’s at home under the school teachers of the family, he was sent at about six to a private school in the Third Street vicinity, run by a Mrs. Graham. He remained three years. Then he transferred for a short term in the Mount Vernon School, a public grammar school in the rapidly growing and recently reformed Philadelphia system.

At the age of nine he changed to the Episcopal Academy of Philadelphia, which next to the older Friends’ schools was as historic as any in the city. It was housed in a handsome eighteenth-

century building, and it represented the social and intellectual character of Episcopalianism generally. In the years just preceding Henry’s attendance, the curriculum had been reformed under the leadership of Bishop Alonzo Potter as chairman of the board. Modern languages, penmanship, drawing, and ‘graphics’ were offered the younger boys; a Divinity Department taught Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to the older students; and there was instruction in science as well. Unfortunately we have no way of following Henry’s course in this curriculum, three years and a half from February 1849 to June 1852, and no knowledge of the grades he made. Most likely his studies were all elementary, possibly with some beginning work (if so, all he ever had) in foreign languages.

For no plain reason the boy did not do well at the Academy and became so unhappy that he asked to be withdrawn. The family remembers

that he was uneasy because his father paid only a reduced tuition fee, the same as for sons of Episcopal ministers. But the full fee was only \$60 a year, and there were many free scholars. Possibly Henry used the fee question to cover some resistance to school piety, or to the Divinity Department looming ahead; or not unlikely at age thirteen he felt self-conscious at the Academy, coming from the Southwark District and being associated with sons of the city's mansions. Whatever the reason, his withdrawing asserts for the first time a disinclination, which became lifelong, for education that was not vocational, or practical in some immediate way. Knowledge as tradition and cultivation, though in time he was to become a reader of poetry and the literature of ideas, never at any stage of his development appealed to Henry George.

After Henry left the academy, Mr. George placed him under a coach, a Mr. Henry Lauderbach, to prepare him for the public high school. This led to a half-year of good study. The pupil enjoyed the teacher; and the teacher found the boy apt and well equipped in basic knowledge. Much later Henry George looked back on this interval as the most effective part of his education, and in due course he tried to arrange to have his own son study under the same man.

The last stage of his formal education proved very brief. On 5 February 1853, at thirteen and a half, he entered Philadelphia's new and excellent high school. His average score in the entrance examinations was 67, which placed him in the middle of the group of 115 boys admitted at the same time. Unfortunately the school records, which are so precise at the point of entering, become as silent as those of the Episcopal Academy about the quality of work he did. From the curriculum of the period, a present official of the school thinks that Henry must have studied the history of England, English composition, Latin grammar, bookkeeping, natural philosophy, phonography (stenography, correspondence style), and penmanship and drawing. But whatever he took, Henry did not sustain the diet. On 20 June, after only four and a half months, still less than fourteen years old, he quit school for good. His next full-time studies would not come until a quarter-century had passed, and he settled down to *Progress and Poverty*.

Amplly, perhaps more amplly than any other American city at the time, Philadelphia offered a boy chances for self-education, outside school doors.

A century after Benjamin Franklin, the city's good libraries, the American Philosophical Society, and the Franklin Institute sustained the effort to achieve a people's culture which the great civic benefactor had been proud to start. Henry was a reading boy. The very last thing he did before going to sea in 1855 was to get a friend to return a book, and to arrange his withdrawing from the Apprentices Library. Like his mother he loved the romantic novels and poetry of the time, and both he and Jane read them avidly. Yet in this category of literature we have an instance of his boy's taste straying beyond the orbit of the family: he had to smuggle the *Scottish Chiefs* to his bedroom for secret reading.

By the time he reached his middle teens he was reading at least a little history and contemporary thought. A diary which is dated 1855 but which includes entries from the next few years contains notes on Emerson's new essays, the now famous *Representative Men*. Under a heading for English history, Henry listed dynasties and sovereigns: and, under American history, events from 1487 to 1777, and the presidents and vice-presidents from Washington to Pierre. Also in the diary, it would seem with a mind that was noticing affairs in Europe, he jotted down the areas and populations of Great Britain, France, Austria, and the principal Italian states. At the time when he was keeping these notes Henry belonged to a literary club, so styled, by the name of the Lawrence Society. Even in the midst of none too literary proceedings, Henry and his contemporaries wagged their tongues about Aristophanes and Byron,

and had their say about public affairs. The sum of scattered indications is that by sixteen Henry George had read a fair amount and perhaps a great deal, and that much of what he read came from outside the domain of his family's dominant, evangelical and Biblical, thought.

Much the same applies to the other varieties of his young experience in Philadelphia. Dancing and cards were forbidden in the family, and the theater also; but with the aid of Barnum, who disguised plays for the Philadelphia pious by announcing lecture- performances, Henry had a share of fun. He went also to the Franklin Institute, where his uncle Thomas Latimer was a member and able to get him in. The diary of 1855 shows that in the early months of that year he attended lectures on science three times a week, and enjoyed most the lectures on climatology and organic chemistry.

Thus the legacy Benjamin Franklin left to the people of Philadelphia became in some way the boy's own.

A good heritage and culture were Henry George's during his childhood, not glittering and not overrich, yet more historic, more deeply informed by principle and tradition, and more varied and ample than first statements about family income, and austerity, and his own schooling would naturally suggest.