

YOUNG GEORGE

HENRY GEORGE was born in Philadelphia in 1839. In that year, as today, Philadelphia was the third largest city in the United States, yielding then only to New York and to Baltimore in population. Only thirty-nine years before, it had conceded its place as capital to the new city of Washington on the banks of the Potomac.

A compact settlement, built on the banks of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers, Philadelphia had ready access to the ocean and its port abounded in shipping from all parts of the world. In the year of Henry George's birth, Philadelphia boasted the United States Mint, the United States Navy Yard, and the United States Marine Hospital, as well as the first and most extensively used library (founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731) in the Western Hemisphere. Philadelphia had art galleries and museums, three big theaters, an abundance of churches, and the New Alms House which was "the most perfect of its kind in the country."¹

The architecture of the town was marked with the Quaker severity of William Penn and the houses where some 258,000 Philadelphians lived were, for the most part, monotonous red brick, with low white marble front steps. They bordered brick sidewalks on narrow cobblestone streets, lined with trees. In one of these regulation Philadelphia houses—smaller than the two flanking it—on Tenth Street south of Pine,² lived a publisher of church and Sunday School books, Richard Samuel Henry George, with his wife and tiny daughter and his sister-in-law, Mary Vallance.

The George home was comfortable though small. It was pleasantly furnished according to the style of the time in mahogany upholstered in fashionable black horsehair. On the walls hung family portraits, a few engravings and needlework

pictures of scenes from Shakespeare. The large, heavily-bound family Bible, standing on a pedestal table, occupied a prominent place in the parlor. It was a typical middle-class home of the early and middle 1800's.

Into this setting on the second day of September, 1839, arrived a boy—strong, husky, and blue-eyed—who in due course was taken to St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church,³ by his father, a vestryman, and there baptized "Henry."

Henry George's father, the son of a sea captain, was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After one sea voyage, however, he had settled in Philadelphia. There he took a clerical post in the Customs House. He had married Miss Louisa Lewis, who bore him two sons. But wife and children had died, leaving him with a young adopted daughter whom he placed in a small private school conducted by Catherine and Mary Vallance.

John Vallance, the father of these two young schoolmistresses,⁴ was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and had been brought to Philadelphia as an infant. There he later married Margaret Pratt, granddaughter of the goldsmith Henry Pratt,⁵ who was a friend of Benjamin Franklin and a member of his *Junta*. Margaret Pratt's uncle, Matthew Pratt, the painter,⁶ had made Franklin's first portrait. John Vallance, well known as an engraver of portraits and encyclopedia plates, was one of the founders of the Association of Artists in America.⁷ When he died in 1823 two of his daughters turned to teaching. It was in their school that Richard S. H. George wooed and won Catherine Pratt Vallance.

Caroline Latimer George was the first child of this marriage; she was followed by Henry, Jane Vallance, and Catherine Pratt George. As the family grew (there were ten children, eight of whom lived) with the addition of Thomas Latimer, John Vallance, Chloe Pratt, and Morris Reid George, they moved from the small house on Tenth Street to a larger one at Third and Queen. Aunt Mary Vallance—"one of those sweet and patient souls who, in narrow circles, live radiant lives"⁸—continued to make her home with them and acted as the children's second mother.

Before he met Catherine Vallance, Mr. George had left the Customs House and had gone into the business of publishing books for the Protestant Episcopal church. For a time he maintained a bookstore at Fifth and Chestnut Streets. He was a

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progressive man, even to the extent of having illuminating gas installed in his house although friends and neighbors feared it meant inviting sudden death.

Richard S. H. George was a Democrat in politics, in which he took a lively interest as a spectator. Conservative in religion, he began each day with a reading of the Bible to his family. The Sabbath was dedicated to austere devotion, and the family attended service morning, afternoon, and frequently evening. Through the Philadelphia streets, the quiet broken by the intermittent beat of horses' hoofs on the cobblestones, the red-headed, blue-eyed Georges marched along the narrow brick pavements, Henry leading with Jane or Caroline; then the other brothers and sisters who were big enough to walk, followed by the adult members. The boys were clad in long trousers and pea jackets with broad white collars; the girls in wide skirts and pantalettes that reached down to their ankles; Mrs. George and Miss Vallance in close-fitting bonnets and with long, dark shawls draped over their voluminous hoops. All carried prayer books.⁹

Trim, neat, decorous, they walked two by two. This formality had proved its uses on occasion. One Sunday John Vallance, wearing the white trousers that had been made from a pair belonging to his Uncle Thomas Latimer, eluded his watchful older sisters. Just before starting time, he slid down a neighbor's cellar door wet with a fresh coat of green paint. Since nothing but tragic illness or sudden death could keep the George family from church, an accident like this called only for re-forming of ranks. On that Sunday, John Vallance hid in the cellar while the children marched to church in closer formation.¹⁰

Life for the Georges was pleasant and simple. All the children who were big enough helped with the housework even though the family kept a "hired girl." They depended on themselves for their amusements. As strict church members, cards, dancing, and theater-going were denied them. They lacked the luxury of a family piano and knew little of music, but there was much reading and discussion of books—history, travel, and poetry.

In a family of eight children there was always something to do together. In winter they went sledding and skating. In the summer they paid occasional visits to "Lemon Hill" and its tropical garden belonging to Henry Pratt, Grandmother Vallance's cousin.¹¹ One or the other of the rivers afforded boating, and, in

hot weather, swimming. (The elder George once saved Henry from drowning; once Henry himself rescued his brother Tom.) But the best times for Henry were the trips to the docks where Mr. George instructed his eldest son in the lore of the sea as it had been taught him by his father, Captain Richard George.

Henry loved to revive his father's memories of older days. Mr. George would begin:

"Your grandfather Captain Richard George was born in Yorkshire, England. He came young to this country and married Mary Reid of Philadelphia (the Reids had been here for several generations). He had two ships.

"I cannot remember dates but I do remember Aaron Burr. There was such a fuss about him during his arrest that I used to go to Market and Twelfth or Thirteenth Streets almost every day to see the soldiers keeping guard, pacing the pavement. Although I was a mere brat of a boy, I took a notion that if I could not see Burr I would sit in his carriage.

"There was a good, kind old gentleman named Barkley who had been one of our most wealthy merchants but 'ruined by the times.' Burr used often to visit him—so I watched and one day he drove up to Mr. Barkley's door and I saw him pass in. I approached the coachman and asked if I could take a seat for a few moments. To my surprise he consented; he opened the door and I entered and sat there about ten minutes. I thought it a great triumph. So much for my determined curiosity. I used to brag about it to the boys and got many a bloody nose."

The boy was fascinated by his father's experiences:

"Although times were hard, I didn't feel them. I had a pleasant, happy home, let me tell you. We had four 'prentice boys and two girls in the kitchen, all in good tune and happy.

"One time father arrived at Almond Street wharf from France, where he'd gone with a flag of truce, carrying out passengers and bringing back a lot, including General Jean Victor Moreau, the Republican French general who was exiled because of Napoleon's jealousy. I took on board lots of provisions for them. It was hard work—the crowd was so dense. Going so often to the ship, I found I was as much noticed as the General himself. The boys crowded me hard and one fight I had built me right up, and afterwards I was A. No. 1 among the boys and cock of the walk. I went on the principle of '*Do nothing you are ashamed of and let no living man impose on you.*'"¹²

Henry learned his three R's from his mother and Aunt Mary

Vallance but his years of actual schooling were spent at a small private institution conducted by Mrs. Graham and at Mount Vernon Grammar before he went to the Episcopal Academy. At the Academy he had for fellow students a fine group of lads,¹³ among them Bishop Alonzo Potter's two sons, Henry Codman, who later was to become bishop of New York, and Eliphalet Nott, who became president of Union College. Two other close friends were the sons of the Rector of St. Paul's—Heber¹⁴ and Wilberforce Newton,¹⁵ with whom Henry George often played. It was great fun, for the Newtons frequently had missionaries visit them, missionaries who brought pets, "monkeys and other beasts of the tropical clime." Then, too, the Newtons lived conveniently close to the Sunday School, and Sunday School banners could be used in the children's games. The banner with the picture of St. Paul preaching at Ephesus repeatedly figured in the game of "firemen's parade," Henry of course as leader, bearing it proudly aloft.

Because his father was a publisher of church books, young Henry George was carried through the Episcopal Academy on a reduced tuition. But when the book publishing business became unremunerative and Richard S. H. George had to return to his old job at the Customs House, the boy believed himself no longer entitled to the special tuitional reduction and begged to be taken out of school. He was so earnest about it that his father let him leave the Academy and put him under the celebrated tutor Henry T. Lauderbach, from whom the boy received sound training in methodical study. Thus, when he entered high school at the age of thirteen, he was able to make extraordinary progress.¹⁶

Regular attendance at church and daily reading of the Bible gave young Henry an excellent grounding in the Scriptures. But it was his mother's passion for quoting poetry and his conversations with sailors on the docks and the stories brought by missionaries to his father's house which did most to stimulate the boy's already active imagination. This education was supplemented by books constantly borrowed from the public library, though some of them—novels, for instance—had to be smuggled up to his little room and devoured in secret. But the greatest educational influence was the Franklin Institute.¹⁷

The prospectus of that organization read: "Without going into the history and internal arrangement of the Institute, it will be sufficient for us to say that it affords to any respectable per-

son, who chooses to become a member, the privilege of hearing, with his family and apprentices, for a very moderate fee, excellent courses of lectures on natural history, philosophy, chemistry and other scientific and literary subjects." Through his Uncle Thomas Latimer, who was a member of the Institute, Henry had the privilege of hearing the "excellent courses of lectures."

The Customs House job paid Mr. George only eight hundred dollars a year—scant money, even in 1852, for a man with a family.¹⁸ And Henry, sensitive to the family's straitened finances, felt that as the oldest son he should at least earn his own keep. He loved school but after five months he persuaded his parents to let him leave and go to work. He was not yet fourteen.

Henry George scoured Philadelphia for a job. At length he found one—wrapping packages and running errands for a china and glass shop. It was a trying occupation for a boy. Although for years there had been strong public sentiment for a ten-hour day, it had not yet come into effect. The hours were long; the pay was short—only two dollars a week. The job gave Henry no time for trips to the wharves unless he could manage a detour that way while on one of his errands. The love of the sea was strong within him. He managed to find time to observe the weather regularly and to keep a diary with notations of winds and temperatures.¹⁹ At night he made model brigs, but he had small chance to sail them; during the daylight hours he was working, and of course one didn't sail toy boats on Sunday. Altogether the new job in the china shop was not very satisfactory. As soon as he could manage to leave, the boy took a new position as clerk in the office of a marine adjuster.

This was less fatiguing. Moreover, the atmosphere of the shipping business was pleasant. But the work soon became dull and the lad grew increasingly anxious to get out of this constricted life into the great world of his dreams.

Henry George's father was a wise and observant man. He noticed his son's restlessness and became apprehensive lest the lad be tempted to run away from home. So, putting aside his own parental fears and yearnings, he decided to place the boy in the charge of a young friend, Captain Sam Miller of the ship *Hindoo*,²⁰ and send him on a cruise. He hoped to cure Henry, once and for all, of his desire for a life at sea.