

A Sign: "To Let"

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THE place where George Washington was born is now just a part of a green Virginia meadow; the believed birthplace of Abraham Lincoln is little different from a sty of logs; but Time, instead of leaving Henry George's birthplace behind, has dragged it along in the procession. The once decent flat front now bears the excrescence of a sheet-iron bow window at the second story; the old sloping tin roof is now a mansard of erect, ruddy tiles; a narrow dormer has been widened, and there is a cumbersome cornice. This mixture of old and new is present in the neighborhood

of the house. Nearby are antique shops crowded with glass-knobbed sideboards, and draped in remote corners with cobwebs, while almost next door is one of a chain of vermilion-fronted grocery stores. This little home is therefore very much a part of advancing life. The spots hallowed to Washington and Lincoln are separate to themselves. Yet how compactly this Philadelphia dwelling shoulders in among its fellows, wall to wall, chimney rising with chimney. There is a continuing fraternity here.

It is an average house, not big, not tiny. It

has no striking quality. Here might have been born so easily, in an average family, a merely average child. There is an exaltation in its very commonness. It carries a hope for all of us. The house seems to bear cheerfully with the alterations put upon it by a latter day careless of its past.

Admission to the narrow hall, a turn about the little parlor and dining room adjacent, and a glance up the crooked stairs had to satisfy my conjectures as to the interior. I could think of a crawling child passing over those worn door-treads and finding them real obstacles; I could touch the knobs and fancy the reachings of the age of three.

Outside, I could not take my eyes from the shallowed steps, nor get away from the picture of a small form sitting there, watching, with a child's wide eyes, the stream of people as they plodded or sauntered past. And I remembered that in all his after life, with more knowing view, this child was to look into a city street, and in the press and swirl and crazy hurrying of men and women and boys and girls pattern a different scene of a time when all would walk with lifted heads and steps assured.

I thought how, on that day in autumn when a child was born in the home of a modest bookseller, a neighbor's wife perhaps came over to speak to the mother, to bring a knitted cap, or a flannel shawl, and to bend smilingly over the new baby. This must have been a grateful recognition. And then my mind went forward from this house through the succession of mean houses in which in after years Henry George was host to poor friends and rich ideas, and

rested upon those sad completing hours in a high hall in a greater city, when a hundred thousand friends he never knew came to look the last time into his face. If few rejoiced when he was born, how many wept when he was dead! The birthcry that was compassed by the crowding walls before me rang to the Antipodes. This little brown chrysalis, still hanging to the limb, nurtured and let forth a winged spirit that flew above every tree.

Despite its new trappings, the old house shows its wrinkles. Yet there is a composure in its aspect and a glad satisfaction, as though it were conscious of the hope it has given to the world. What need, if youth looks into a mother's eyes, to have youth look from them?

Nearby is Independence Hall, and as I thought of its ringing bell and the pride with which we cherish it, I wondered if here before me were not another Independence Hall, from which was proclaimed not only the sound but the challenge for the very truth of freedom—that not just the right to suffrage but the right to daily bread shall claim men's devotion.

In the halls of one building hang portraits of the Fathers who made for our political liberty. About the other is nothing to declare that here was born one who struck out for a completer justice.

In a photograph of the birthplace of Henry George, before visiting the house, I thought I could discern a tablet on the wall. But when I finally reached the spot I found a sign: "To Let."

But maybe this is a better reminder to the world than any engraving in bronze.