

HENRY GEORGE was born in the city of Philadelphia on the second day of September, 1839. By that time Philadelphia had succeeded in staggering out from under the weight of its prestige as the erstwhile national capital, and had settled back into the workaday routine of an industrial and mercantile town. It seems to have been America's nearest approach to a model city, for visiting foreigners, even captious Britons who landed with their tongues in their cheeks and chips on their shoulders, spoke well of it. Michel Chevalier, the eminent French economist and Saint-Simonian, by far the most competent observer who ever visited our shores, said it was "perhaps the most enlightened and refined city in the United States." As a rule, foreigners were mostly impressed by its external good order, its quietness, and the general air of austerity pervading its social life. Some bore witness to its minor amenities; for instance, the British consul T. C. Grattan, who arrived in 1839, left record of

Philadelphia as the only place in America where he could find fresh butter. Dickens, who came three years later, was less praiseful than the rest. He was frankly bored by Philadelphia's checkerboard layout and the straightness of the streets, all of which he seems to have ascribed to Quaker influence, for he says that when he walked about the town he felt he should be wearing Quaker garb and a broadbrimmed hat. Apparently he found little in Philadelphia that really interested him, except the practice of hiving up malefactors in solitary confinement. He regarded this as barbarous, and sermonized against it with all the vigour of his youthful pulpiteering; he was then thirty years old, and the adventures of Mr. Pickwick in the Fleet had already brought him before the English-speaking public as a mighty propagandist for prison reform.

The Englishry who came to look the city over were of the middle class, which had by that time begun to set the tone of British political and social life; and Philadelphia being one of the most Pecksniffian of American cities, they took its drabness and dulness as necessarily incidental to a properly regulated society; while for the same reason, on the other hand, its

angular moralities and pretentious proprieties matched their own and were congenial to them. In the domesticity of Philadelphia they caught the distinct reflection of the precisianism which so distressed little Copperfield; in its schools they rubbed elbows with the guiding genius of Mr. Creakle, and found themselves at once in the familiar atmosphere of Salem House, with its strange unwholesome smell like "sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books." In Philadelphia's dominant views of life and demands on life they recognized those of Mr. Murdstone by the more serious side, and by the lighter side those of Mr. Quinion: the great 'figure of Poor Richard himself must have appeared to their eyes as a sort of improved and glorified Murdstone.

Hence not unnaturally the British middle-class spirit felt itself more at home in Philadelphia than in New York or Boston; much more than in the Southern and mid-Western cities. Philadelphia also strongly recommended itself to them by its dominant type of churchmanship, which was an evangelical Protestantism so uncompromising, so truculent and so aggressive as to seem well-nigh made to order on specifications drawn up by British Nonconformity.

It was the type prevailing in the North of Ireland, in Scotland, and in Britain's northern colonies; the type characterized by Edmund Burke as "the dissidence of Dissent, and the protestantism of the Protestant religion." Between this and the severe forthrightness of Quakerism on the one hand, and that of Low Church Episcopalianism on the other, there was a fair *modus vivendi* based on mutual respect, if on no more formal ground of agreement; and in their virulent antipathy to the Scarlet Woman on the Seven Hills they found at least one common motive of endeavour.

The servigeros Mrs. Trollope, mother of the great novelist, despite her dislike of almost everything American, looked on the civilization of Philadelphia with Miss Jane Murdstone's eyes, and found it not wholly objectionable. She managed to draw up a fairly restrained and accurate description of a specimen day in the domestic life of what she called "a Philadelphia lady of the first class." The picture is instructive chiefly—in fact, wholly—not for what it portrays, but for what it suggests without portrayal; that is to say, for its exhibit of the precise and horrifying correspondence of Philadelphia's representative social life with that of the sound Brit-

ish Philistinism of Birmingham and Manchester. In her main interests, the Philadelphia lady is Mrs. Jellyby, with all Mrs. Jellyby's sincerity—for Mrs. Jellyby was sincere in her efforts to spread the Light upon those who sat in the darkness of Borrioboolagha—but without Mrs. Jellyby's dishevelment; that is to say, without her poverty. Dickens, like the good artist he was, knew he must make Mrs. Jellyby poor, for if she had been well-to-do she could hardly have served his purpose as a horrible example of draggled-tailed pietism. The Philadelphia lady's day is the day of a well-to-do British Philistiness; a day of tea-meetings, lectures, conscientious but more or less perfunctory superintendence of her household, attending the Dorcas Society, and hearing missionaries speak. While the ladies of the Dorcas Society are sewing for the heathen, Mrs. Trollope says:

Their talk is of priests and of missions; of the profits of their last sale, of their hopes from the next; of the doubt whether young Mr. This or young Mr. That should receive the fruits of it to fit him out for Liberia; of the very ugly bonnet seen at church on Sabbath morning, of the very handsome preacher who performed on Sabbath

afternoon, and of the very large collection made on Sabbath evening.

So far Mrs. Trollope speaks with no undue exaggeration, and with a reasonable respect for the lady and for her occupations, however misguided and ineffectual they might appear, for lady and occupations alike are essentially those of the British Nonconformist middle class. She then goes on to say that after some hours with the Dorcas Society, the lady goes home, looks over the preparations for dinner, and sits down in the parlour to await her husband.

He comes, shakes hands with her, spits, and dines. The conversation is not much, and ten minutes suffices for the dinner; fruit and toddy, the newspaper and the workbag succeed. In the evening the gentleman, being a savant, goes to the Wister Society, and afterwards plays a snug rubber at a neighbour's. The lady receives at tea a young missionary and three members of the Dorcas Society; and so ends her day.

What a day! one says at once. What an existence! The husband has somewhat the air of having been lugged in by the ears as an embellishment; yet as one recalls the figure of Mr. Gradgrind, "a kind of cannon loaded to the

muzzle with facts," one thinks that here too, probably, Mrs. Trollope may have exaggerated but little, and that the parallel with the sound British middle-class ideal of domesticity still holds. Mr. Gradgrind, Mr. Plugson of Under-shot, Mr. Dombey, Mr. Bottles, in all likelihood would not have spit, for tobacco-chewing never took any great hold on England; but in other respects any of them might have sat for the sketch of the Philadelphia lady's husband. The thing to be observed, however, is that in her "portrait of a lady" Mrs. Trollope lays her finger on the one characteristic mark of American social life which impresses a civilized observer as most appalling, and does it as unconsciously, or at most half-consciously, as her gifted son brings out the identical mark of social life in Barchester—its overpowering dullness, its hideousness, its consummate ennui.

II

The same mark is quite as unconsciously brought out in the youthful correspondence of Henry George, and in a sort of diary which he kept for a short time at the age of fourteen or so. The chief value of these documents is in

their testimony to the kind of civilization that Murdstone and Quinion had built up, and the institutions which they had devised to promote and exalt the ideals of that civilization and effectively to discourage any other; above all, effectively to suffocate such possible wayward hankerings after any other as the youthful Philadelphian, in his boredom, might sometimes feel. These institutions were founded on Murdstone's great dictum that "to the young this is a world for action; not for moping and droning in," the dictum so capably sugar-coated by Longfellow, who might quite reasonably take title as Mr. Murdstone's American poet-laureate by brevet. The purpose of political institutions was to help business; the Constitutional Convention of 1787, under Murdstone's personal direction, had settled that very commendably. On full-dress occasions, say, once a year on Independence Day, Murdstone was willing to listen to the archaic doctrine of the Declaration of Independence, that "to secure these rights governments are instituted among men," but he did it in the same spirit of vacuous formalism with which on Sundays he listened to the outpourings of the Rev. Josiah Jupp on some point of theological paradox. He likewise made

no great difficulties about the proposal to tack on a Bill of Rights to the tail-end of the Constitution, but again he did so on the understanding, more or less explicit, that in any exigent circumstances it should not "count"; and the Judiciary Act of 1789 would see to that. The logic of his position was simple and rigorous. Whatever is good for business is good for society, and government is instituted for the good of society; therefore the government should help business. It is rather a rough-and-ready type of syllogism, perhaps, and one might cavil a little at its major premise; but Mr. Murdstone was a practical man and had no patience with logic-chopping.

The basic principle of human conduct which animated Mr. Murdstone's civilization was well formulated for Henry George's benefit by an anonymous person whom George described thirty years later as "a gentleman who wanted me to go into business as a boy in a store." George says, "I had nothing, no particular facility, yet I remember his saying to me, 'If you are honest, if you are steady, if you are industrious, you can certainly look forward to being able to retire at forty with comfort for the rest of your days.'" This fine precept, with its sure

forecast of reward, might be called Mr. Murdstone's Golden Rule. It brings to mind once more the forlorn figure of Poor Richard as he entered Philadelphia afoot, friendless and resourceless, with—what was it?—one forgets; was it a loaf of bread under one arm and a shirt wrapped up in brown paper under the other, and his clothes out at elbows?—something of the sort, anyway. Yet as he went on diligently striving by the light of Mr. Murdstone's Golden Rule, see what he became; see with what orderly steps he kept moving from one pitch of distinction and usefulness to a higher, until Europe and America came finally to know and praise him as the typical American, the official American exponent, one might say, of the Murdstonian philosophy of life.

With such an example before its eyes, Philadelphia provided opportunities for its young men to go on perfecting themselves in this philosophy after they had passed through their preparatory course of Salem House and Mr. Creakle. These opportunities were chiefly vocational, as was to be expected; they contemplated the material and practical, from the point of view of one who wishes to get on in the world; indeed, from the days of Rittenhouse

and Rush, Philadelphia has always been strong for turning the natural sciences to practical account. The Franklin Institute, for instance, which maintained lectureships giving a semi-popular treatment of such subjects—and perhaps still does—was incorporated in 1824 “for the promotion and encouragement of manufactures and the mechanic and useful arts,” and the general run of such enterprises tended in that direction. On the other hand, opportunities for progress in the liberal arts, in the study of literature, philosophy and history, for example, were harder for a youth to come by. The discipline of Salem House and Mr. Creakle had not prepared him for anything of the kind, and what impulse he had towards it must needs be largely self-sprung; moreover, the Murdstonian philosophy made but little place in human life for any such pursuit and was inclined to disparage it as tending to take one’s mind off the really serious purposes of existence. Hence if a lad turned to reading, he did it on his own, taking more or less indiscriminately what he could get, with no very clear purpose to guide him. His choice of reading, too, was arbitrarily limited, for the Rev. Josiah Jupp, in collusion with Murdstone, had set up an *index expur-*

gatorius as stringent as the Vatican's, and far less liberal. Religious books, provided they were sound in the Protestant faith and Protestant ethics, were free to young and old alike; even religious romance and poetry were free. So were scientific works, save such as might breed doubt of the Mosaic cosmogony, the Biblical miracles, special creation, the Noachian deluge, the episode of Babel, and Archbishop Ussher's chronology. So were many books of travel, especially those which dealt with the work of scientific expeditions, the experience of missionaries, and researches in the Holy Land. A carefully bowdlerized version of Franklin's *Autobiography*, and innumerable vulgarizations of the Murdstonian philosophy which were essentially like it, were of course regarded as the ideal guide of youth. Secular works which dealt with the romance, poetry and beauty of life, however, were pretty strictly kept away from youthful eyes. For this reason the type of reading most likely to interest the young had to be got at surreptitiously, when got at at all. Henry George left record that even the innocuous *Scottish Chiefs* was disallowed, and he had to do his reading of it on the sly; and that when he went to sea at the age of sixteen, for a voyage

of eleven months as a foremast-boy, the stock of literature furnished him by his family consisted of a Bible and a copy of *James's Anxious Inquirer*.

Dramatic literature lay under the general obloquy resting upon stage-plays as a heritage from the times when actors were officially listed as rogues and vagabonds. Even Shakespeare was gone at with long teeth. The man who so aroused the wrath of Mrs. Trollope by asserting that "Shakespeare, madame, is obscene; and, thank God, we are sufficiently advanced to have found it out," was not a Philadelphian—he hailed from Cincinnati—but he was unmistakably in Philadelphia's best tradition. Most of us who as yet have both our feet well outside the grave can remember the expurgated editions of Shakespeare got up for the use of the young; perhaps they still exist. George says that in his boyhood there were several theatres in Philadelphia—in fact, the Walnut Street Theatre is supposed to be the oldest in the country; it was built in 1808—but they were patronized only by the scandalous and ungodly. In this connexion he tells a story which illustrates a curious and naïve tenet of the Murdstonian philosophy; which is, that you can change the

character of a thing by changing its name. Observers have often remarked that belief in this miracle, giving, as it does, to Anglo-American institutions their peculiar character of slipperiness and obliquity, must be put down as the first article of Anglo-American faith. George says that an enterprising man named Barnum went to Philadelphia, and saw that if he could set up a theatre that the godly would go to, it would pay extremely well. So he set up one, but he did not call it a theatre. He called it a lecture-room, and in that lecture-room he gave theatrical representations, six nights a week and two matinees, to crowded houses.

III

Thus when all comes to all, one is well prepared to find that the available records of George's boyhood reveal an extremely straitened intellectual and cultural and social existence. His diary discloses no serious activity more interesting or improving than a pretty steady attendance on Sunday-school, church, the Franklin Institute lectures, and seeing a "panorama of Europe." George seems, perhaps naturally, to have been for most of his time in

a state of very imperfect correspondence with his environment. He had but little schooling; Salem House and Mr. Creakle were quite too much for him, apparently. He tried his hand at the primary and grammar grades in four different schools, but did little in any, and finally reaching the secondary grade, he did no better; he gave up at the end of five months, with the record, as he himself put it in later life, of having been "for the most part idle, and wasted time." He never tried again; this was the end of his formal education.

A contemporary recalls George "going to church every Sunday, walking between his two older sisters, followed by his father and mother; all of them so neat, trim and reserved." The picture rather reminds one of David Copperfield's account of "the tremendous visages with which we used to go to church"; Mr. and Miss Murdstone and David's mother in decorous procession, with David disconsolately bringing up the rear. Yet of all the influences which were brought to bear upon George's early education, strange to say, the most valuable and most fruitful in its indirect effects was the one that was exercised at large by the Rev. Josiah Jupp. What with the allopathic dosage of church,

Sunday-school and family prayer, morning and evening, a child got some considerable acquaintance with the King James Version and the Book of Common Prayer; that is to say, some acquaintance with the very best English usage. Even the most inattentive and refractory child could hardly hope to escape this; and a child who was moderately intelligent and bid-dable was unconsciously in a way to let the acquaintance run on into a profitable familiarity. By this indirect method of pure hearsay, George learned to use the English language as it should be used. When he was forty years old, he came suddenly before the English-speaking world as the possessor of a superb English prose style, a distinguished master of English idiom, and there is no way to account for this proficiency save by reference to that one invaluable experience of his childhood. One of George's expositors has cited certain letters written to his sister from California when he was in his twentieth year, as "giving some idea of the crudeness of his own writing at the time." One hardly knows what to say to this. Of course one may not be sure that this critic's standards of style are the ones generally accepted, but if they are the same, or anywhere near the same, his choice

of examples is most unfortunate. Here, for instance, is a line or two from the first one which he chooses to illustrate his point:

What a time we live in, when great events follow one another so quickly that we have not space for wonder! We are driving at a killing pace somewhere—Emerson says to heaven, and Carlyle says to the other place, but however much they differ, go we surely do.

If this be crude writing, one can only say that there is a bad outlook ahead for the swift, straightforward, correct, forceful monosyllabic idiom of New Testament narrative, which we who were brought up in the times of ignorance were fain to regard as pretty good. *A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me; and he divided unto them his living.* In fact, one can hardly help thinking that this critic might have done well to apply the yardstick of New Testament narrative to the kind of English that George wrote at the age of twenty, or indeed at seventeen, and then apply it to the kind of English that he himself writes. Here, for example, is a bit of narrative written by George at seventeen, on shipboard, which even R. H. Dana might have

found quite acceptable, one thinks, in point of style:

The wind, which had been strong from aft the day before, during the middle watch died away, and was succeeded by a calm until 8 A.M., when a stiff breeze from the south sprang up, accompanied by showers of rain. At 12 M. all hands were called to reef. While reefing the foretopsail, the parrel of the yard gave way, causing a great deal of trouble, and keeping all hands from dinner. . . . The rest of the day was rainy, with wind constantly varying, keeping us hauling on the braces. Thus closed the most miserable Fourth of July that I have ever yet spent.

But however crude or however finished George's early style may be adjudged by what Aristotle calls "the determination of the judicious," its correspondence with his later style is reasonably evident. Both his early and later styles, moreover, carry unmistakably the suggestion of being based on a pretty sound acquaintance with the idiom of the Authorized Version and the Book of Common Prayer—the suggestion which a person of even a moderate literary experience can always detect in the work of any writer who has undergone that

salutary discipline. Moreover, and finally, there is no known source from which George could have derived his style, be it early or late, crude or finished, good or bad, except the kind of English that prevailed around him in his early years in Philadelphia. Murdstone must be given credit, it seems, for having no prejudice against classical idiomatic English; in fact, it is clear that he and the Rev. Josiah Jupp conspired, perhaps unconsciously, to institutionalize classical English and invest it with very powerful recommendations. Its force, rhythm and cadence were intimately associated with the expression of religious hopes, beliefs and aspirations; it was the spiritual vernacular. Its use marked the way of temporary escape sought by uncounted thousands whom the tedium and hideousness of the Murdstonian civilization had oppressed beyond unaided endurance, and over whose heads the sky was of iron and brass. The régime of Murdstone had little enough to give Henry George, but this one great though unconsidered gift it gave him; it gave him a competent use of his native language in all its purity, its abounding richness and its imposing nobleness.

The lighter side of life in the Murdstonian

civilization, what there was of it, was directed and regulated by Murdstone's factotum, Mr. Quinion. Murdstone did not concern himself with it, save to restrict and limit it wherever he could, and afterwards think no more about it. Within the limits thus set by the demands of life's serious side, Quinion's policy was the liberal one of letting the youthful spirit entertain itself by whatever means it might be able to turn up. These means were perforce few and simple, and up to the period of adolescence, at any rate, they were fairly reputable. George's diary mentions skating, sleigh-riding with an uncle, building a toy ship, hobnobbing with relatives and with one or two of his sisters' girl-cronies. A contemporary says that the wharves were a favourite ground for gang-play; and a letter from George's mother written after he had departed on a second long sea-voyage, shows that mixed parties of boys and girls amused themselves with parlour-games and kissing forfeits. She wrote:

You have just passed your nineteenth birthday. Did you think of it, or were you too busy? If you had been home we would have had a jollification. What a kissing-time there would have been, play-

ing Copenhagen, and so forth. Hen, kissing is quite out of fashion since you left; no kissing-parties at all, I believe.

At nineteen, or even considerably earlier, the youthful spirit was indeed pretty well graduated out of kissing-parties and had gone in for an order of diversions winked at by Mr. Quinion as more consistent with maturity, and not to be too strictly reprehended, provided they were judiciously indulged in. One might perhaps put it more frankly that they were the only diversions which Quinion understood; his conception of life's resources on the lighter side was as narrow as Murdstone's conception of its resources on the more serious side. We all remember Mr. Quinion's rough joviality, his badinage, his end-to-end consumption of cigars, and the aura of beer and gin that always hung about him; and we meet his spirit at once in a letter which one of George's companions wrote in 1863, reminiscent of their early days together as members of the "Lawrence Literary Society."

Can you or I forget the gay, refreshing and kindred spirits that formed that association . . . its sympathy with ghost-stories, boxing-gloves, fencing-foils and deviltry . . . its test of merit and

standard of membership, to drink red-eye, sing good songs and smoke lots of cigars.

George's own diary, in his eighteenth year, describes an evening spent in exercises quite to Quinion's taste; a round of cigar-shops and gin-mills with one pal and another; punch-drinking and impromptu speech-making; staging a boxing-match on a street-corner; and a return home "about daybreak." In 1858, too, after George had gone to seek his fortune in California, one of his friends wrote him regretfully:

I would have given anything to have you there this evening, my dear fellow, for we are going to kick hell up again tonight. We have got plenty of the very best imported brandy and port wine, for we have a first-rate fellow in our room who is in a wholesale drug house on Market Street, and he brings all the liquors home with him, so that they don't cost us anything, and his employers are very willing that he should have them in his room for the purpose, as they suppose, of trying experiments, though they little imagine what kind of experiments they are used for.

While it is true that no one in George's early entourage discerned in him the promise of one of the few really first-class minds of his time, or

of any time, the fact is not remarkable, for at that stage of development such a promise is seldom clear enough, even under the most favourable circumstances, to be easily discerned. The thing to be remarked is that if it had been discerned, no one knew what to do about it. The discipline of Salem House and Mr. Creakle, while perhaps excellent in its way, was not designed to meet the requirements of a first-class mind. The Murdstonian civilization could do nothing with a first-class mind save to train it in some way leading to the service of the Murdstonian philosophy; perhaps in the law, in the church, in medicine, but of course by all means preferably, in business. In the nature of things, Murdstone could not contemplate any kind of training that from the beginning was not narrowly vocational, because "to the young this is a world for action, not for moping and droning in"; and the formative exercises appropriate to a first-class mind which has no turn at all for action but only a pronounced turn for thinking, are wholly inconsistent with that view of the world; and since Murdstone held to that view and would admit no other, he was unable to devise such exercises or to apply them.

Thus Henry George grew up to manhood

knowing no language or literature but his own, and his own only at haphazard; knowing human history only by what little of it he could pick up from variously qualified sources. He had none of the well-rounded cultural experience which bears in due measure and proportion upon all five of humanity's fundamental instincts; the instinct of expansion, the instinct of intellect and knowledge, of religion and morals, of beauty and poetry, of social life and manners. A contemporary remarked that George's mind "was a flower of slow growth; at thirty-seven he was just reaching mental manhood." In some respects, indeed, he never reached it, and obviously could not have reached it even measurably at a normal age, because the cultural experience which his type of mind required was wholly lacking. His cultural environment was the civilization of Murdstone and Quinion; it was marked by a monstrously over-developed sense of expansion, a defective sense of intellect, a defective sense of religion and morals, a stunted sense of beauty, a stunted sense of social life and manners; and for a mind eminently philosophical, the continuous experience of such an environment is to the last degree debilitating and retarding.