

IN going to the coast, George had a second string to his bow; in case he did not find his everlasting fortune waiting for him in California, he thought of pushing on to Oregon, to work at printing. A family of neighbours, a widow and two daughters, had lately moved there from Philadelphia on account of a relative who had been appointed governor of Oregon Territory. George had corresponded with them, asking how things were in the printing business out there, and had got an encouraging reply. The governor said he should come, and "thinks you may do well" at printing, but would make further inquiries, and let him know definitely how his chances stood. The widow, a Mrs. Curry, with whom George did most of his corresponding, wrote that "everything pays well here," citing a chore-boy's wages of twenty dollars a month, and a ploughman's pay of twenty-five dollars for three days' ploughing. She said nothing about current prices, so George did not know whether such wages were

really high or only apparently high; nor did he ask. At that time the difference between real wages and apparent wages was an obscure matter to most people, and doubtless neither George nor his correspondents had ever thought of it.

This prospect fizzled out. George took Mrs. Curry's representations on trust; he wrote her that "your statement of the prospects that I may anticipate in Oregon has decided me. I *will* go out as soon as possible." It was with this understanding that he made his way to San Francisco on the *Shubrick*, expecting to find there a letter from Mrs. Curry with further information about possible opportunities. He was disappointed; no letter awaited him, and when one came some days later, it contained no information; it was non-committal. George wrote at once a very dignified and rather pathetic missive, saying as delicately as possible that his mind was not fully made up as to what he should do, and he would be grateful for her advice. "Please write to me as soon as possible. If you still think I can do well in Oregon, I will go up as soon as I can procure my discharge from the ship." He reminded her gently that "the old Oregon fever has not entirely died, as

you may judge from the fact that I write from San Francisco. I have worked hard and long to get here, and have at last succeeded." After a lapse of some five weeks, he got in reply the simple and sufficient statement, redolent of all his experience of life so far, that "as for this place, business is dull"; and that was the end of his attempts on Oregon. Later on he wrote his mother in all good humour that "letters from the Currys are getting more and more like angel's visits."

In San Francisco also, business was dull. An old pathologist, lecturing to medical students on the effect of stimulants upon the system, used to say impressively, "After stimulation, gentlemen—never forget it, never lose sight of it for a moment—after stimulation, paralysis." This sequence appears to prevail in industry as invariably as in physiology. In 1849, cooks in the restaurants of San Francisco were getting \$500 a month, and there was not nearly enough of them to go around; not enough cooks, not enough restaurants, not enough of any kind of labour, shops, commodities, professional services of all sorts—not enough of anything to satisfy the existing economic demand, even at highwayman's prices. Nine years later, in 1858,

in the month after George's arrival, news came that gold had been struck in British Columbia, just across the boundary, near the mouth of the Fraser; and instantly it seemed that the whole floating population of Northern California was on its way up there, taking the excess economic demand along with them. There was little doing then in San Francisco for anyone, and wages fell abruptly; labour was again in a buyer's market. George could find nothing, so he joined the rush, working his way as a sailor on a schooner bound for Victoria.

He had a cousin in San Francisco, another emigrant Philadelphian named James George, a book-keeper in a store, who thought he saw a chance to make his fortune by selling miner's supplies in Victoria. It seemed reasonable, for thousands of miners had camped there, waiting for the river-freshets to subside and uncover the diggings a hundred miles up-stream. James George went into partnership with a fruiterer in San Francisco who apparently had enough capital to swing the venture, and set up the store in Victoria, in a one-storey wooden shack; he arranged with his cousin Henry to tend the store for him during the interim of waiting for the floods to go down; and in case Henry failed

to make a strike at the gold-diggings, he would give him a steady job at clerking.

This prospect also fizzled out; there was no gold to be found, worth speaking of. The camp broke up, the miners dispersed themselves, and the store went flat. Henry George had a hard life during the period of expectant waiting. He lived in a sort of attic over the store, part of the time in the store itself; doing his own cooking, what there was of it, and as he wrote his sister Jennie, "I slept rolled up in my blanket on the counter or on a pile of flour, and afterwards I had a straw mattress on some boards. The only difference between my sleeping and waking costumes was that during the day I wore both boots and cap, and at night dispensed with them."

This experience appears to have inoculated George against another run of gold-fever; he was through with mining; his only subsequent ventures in the mine-fields were purely speculative; they were also profitless and brief. He went back from Victoria to San Francisco, having borrowed enough money for a steerage-passage down. A friend gave him a coat; he had none. He reached San Francisco quite resolved, as often before, that in case nothing turned up

for him ashore he would go back to following the sea. There was no opening for him at his trade of printing. He wrote home that "everything is very dull"—the old story; Murdstone's ill-running economic mechanism was on another dead-centre—but he added hopefully, "the late rains, by increasing the gold yield, will tend to make times better." Pending this improvement, he got a job as weigher in a rice-mill; and almost immediately the rice-mill shut down.

His thoughts turned then once more to the interior, where the mining districts were; having given up mining, he would try prospecting; which means finding a likely piece of unappropriated mineral territory, and filing a claim to it which could be subsequently sold—a purely speculative enterprise. About the only money left in the mining districts at the time was in this sort of wild-cattling. He set off for the gold-fields, and "having no other way of reaching them," he said in later years, "I started out to walk. I was, in fact, what would now be called a tramp." It seems an insane undertaking, even for a poverty-stricken twenty-year-old boy. Along the way he did odd jobs at farm-work and whatever kind of casual toil he could get

to do; he ate what was given him, and slept in barns. He did not reach the gold-fields; he gave up after a month of this exhausting life, and made his way back to San Francisco as best he might. This experience banished his last thought of quick fortune and easy money at prospecting; he wrote home that "I have given up all idea of going to the mines."

It was hard for him to face the realization that the easy money simply was no longer there; others had skimmed it all off. If he had not arrived just a shade too late, he might have had his share of luck; he might then have not only put his family safely away from the selvage-edge of destitution where they had so long clustered, but also set them up on a great height of respectability in the very best of Murdstone's civilization. How complaisantly Murdstone himself would have hobnobbed with his father after dinner of a Sunday evening in his opulent surroundings, listening to the old man's miscellaneous volubility about bygone days! How his mother would have gone in the unostentatious array of quiet elegance to call on Miss Jane Murdstone; how she would have found her sitting amidst her hard black boxes with their hard brass nails, her dress trimmed with hard

black jet; and how uncompromisingly their talk would have run on the work of the Dorcas Society, the condition of the heathen, and the wicked pretensions of the Scarlet Woman on the Seven Hills! All such hopes and expectations were gone now, and it was hard to let them go; they still haunted his imagination. A year after his wretched attempt at prospecting, he wrote his sister:

I had a dream last night, such a pleasant vivid dream that I must tell you of it. I thought I was scooping treasure out of the earth by handfuls, almost delirious with the thoughts of what I would now be able to do, and how happy we would all be; and so clear and distinct that I involuntarily examined my pockets when I got up in the morning, but alas! with the usual result.

All he could do for his family now was to suggest to this sister that she might like to go out to the coast and teach; women were scarce and much needed, their civilizing influence was greatly missed, and schoolteaching was well paid. As for himself, the cards of fate were apparently dealt down to a choice between his two trades; he could try for a chance at printing, or he could go to sea. There was always the sea, of

course; it gave one a living of sorts, but its pay was poor and the life was hard; while on the other hand, printing was precarious, but if one could once get a toe-hold on it, the pay was better. He would first try his best at printing. He did so, and through the fortunate accident of stumbling on a compositor whom he had known while learning the trade in Philadelphia, he got a job worth twelve dollars a week. It was apprentice's pay, although he was twenty years old and was doing journeyman's work; union rules did not permit a minor to qualify as a journeyman. In the course of a year, however, September, 1860, he would pass his twenty-first birthday, and would then be free of his trade.

II

Nevertheless, as it turned out, being free of his trade did not improve his condition or brighten his prospects; both went steadily from bad to worse. The story of Henry George's life during the succeeding five years, from 1861 to 1865 inclusive, makes hideously depressing reading, even in the meagre outline which is all that is necessary for the purposes of this essay. He set type, first on one newspaper, then

on another, as opportunity offered, but no opportunity of any kind throughout these five years held any chance of permanence. He had a brief period of prosperity at the outset, as foreman on a weekly paper at thirty dollars a week, but the paper was soon sold out from under him, and he went adrift again. He had saved a little money which he invested in a project with five other derelict printers, to get out a paper of their own. He worked at this "until my clothes were in rags, and the toes of my shoes were out. I slept in the office and did the best I could to economize, but finally I ran in debt thirty dollars for my board-bill." He and two others sold their shares in the paper to the three remaining partners, but got nothing; the paper was a failure, and the purchasers could not pay anything to anybody.

At this juncture he married a young Australian orphan; it was a runaway marriage, for the girl's guardian, her uncle, had driven him from the house after a brisk altercation, and forbade her having anything to do with him. At the time of the marriage, George had one silver coin in his possession, and even that was rightfully not his, as he had some debts. Apparently the uncle-guardian, or guardian-uncle,

washed his hands of his niece, for although he was well-to-do, there is no record of his giving her any help in her terrible subsequent privations, or indeed of a word passing between them; they became reconciled about eight years later.

He got substitute-work as a typesetter in San Francisco, thus managing to pay board for himself and his wife; then going to Sacramento, he got a job of the same sort, living from hand to mouth. Presently he did better; for a couple of months he got from thirty-six to forty dollars a week, but only by the very hardest labour; "working steadily, and literally working all the time. . . . Had not my necessities been so great, I would not have worked as I have during that time, for no one can do so for any time and retain good health." Great indeed his necessities were, for a month after he wrote these words to his sister, his first child was born. By a rather interesting coincidence, one of the odd jobs he picked up to eke out his income at this period was an evening's work in a box-office, taking tickets for a lecture given by another derelict newspaper-man known afterwards as Mark Twain.

Being a little ahead at the end of a year, he

paid up some of his old debts in San Francisco; leaving enough of them, however, to hang over his head, with subsequent increments, for nearly twenty years. He also sank a trifle in some mining stock of the cat-and-dog variety, and lost it, thus rounding out his experience with the precious metals in the capacity of investor. After about a year of grinding hard labour to produce these results, he lost his last job in Sacramento and returned to San Francisco; his wife followed with her baby as soon as she could get ready to do so.

George found nothing to do at his trade in San Francisco; at the moment there was nothing whatever. He tried canvassing for subscribers for a newspaper that was wobbling on its feet, and he carried a side-line of clothes-wringers, but he could not get anybody interested in either; after five days of diligent tramping about from house to house, he had not netted a dozen subscribers or sold a single wringer. He did a little typesetting on the paper for which he was canvassing, but worked harder at getting his wages than he did at the type-case. He went to another paper as a substitute for a little while, and then to another, finally going into partnership with two other indus-

trial waifs who had conceived the notion of setting up a job-printing office. He borrowed what he could for his share of financing this enterprise, and gave notes for the rest, payable out of his share of the takings; and thus at the end of 1864 he had nothing to show for three years of unceasing effort but a crushing accumulation of debts.

The job-printing enterprise was a failure; no business; the depression had set in again, this time aggravated by a great drought which prostrated mining, ranching and farming alike; which in turn took the bottom out from under all the commercial and industrial activities in California. One of George's partners dropped out. George and the other partner took twenty-five cents each out of the day's business, when there was any, to buy food; George, the partner, George's wife and baby, clubbed together in George's lodgings for such meals as they had. George could not pay his rent; he had no fire; the day after Christmas he tried at six wood-yards to get some firewood "in trade" for printing stationery, cards, labels, or what-not, but failed. His borrowing-power was used up; his wife had pawned every article of value which

she had, except her wedding-ring. Twenty years afterwards he said of this period:

I came near starving to death, and at one time I was so close to it that I think I should have done so but for the job of printing a few cards which enabled us to buy a little corn meal. In this darkest time in my life my second child was born.

It was born 27 January, 1865, a day short of one month after George's fruitless attempt to get some firewood; a month of utter destitution. He was alone in the house with his wife and the older child; there was no warmth, nothing to eat. George took the older child to a neighbour and went down to the printing-shop, hoping for some trifling order, no matter what; nothing came. He had to have money; earn it or borrow it he could not; he must beg it or steal it. Going out on the street again, he stopped a stranger and demanded five dollars. The man asked what for, and he told him. The stranger gave him the money. "If he had not," George said afterwards, "I think I was desperate enough to have killed him."

George's memoranda for the next four months are a continuous record of struggle, failure, disappointment, debt and destitution.

In mid-February there is the abrupt entry "Am in very desperate plight." Next day, "Don't know what to do." Next day, ". . . but got no work." Early in March, 1865, he began to get some odd jobs at typesetting; he tried to get wagon-builders interested in a new type of carriage-brake which one of his acquaintances had invented; his wife meanwhile did sewing for their landlady to clear a month's rent; and thus dragging on, he did succeed in somehow keeping body and soul together.

III

There began to be borne in on George the conviction that there was something radically wrong with the machinery of Murdstone's economic system; and naturally this conviction first took shape in the belief, which never quite deserted him, that there was something essentially wrong with Murdstone. There was good ground for this; whatever way you looked at him, Murdstone was a poor figure. Not for a long time, however, did George see what under the circumstances it was by no means easy to see, that the chief count against Murdstone was not his inhumanity but his unwisdom, his ap-

palling lack of intelligence. George William Curtis, writing the *Potiphar Papers* at about this time, had a better insight into Murdstone's qualities and conditions, and gave a fairer view of him, showing that his most conspicuous shortcomings sprang from this root of sheer intellectual incapacity, and that he too was much at the mercy of his own system, as a kind of Frankenstein. Henry George came into this view later; the working-out of his philosophy made it inevitable that he should do so; but his terrible experience of life made it perhaps as inevitable that he should always feel an involuntary ruffled impatience 'with Murdstone's lack of intelligence, as if it were something that Murdstone could and should outgrow or in some way make up for.

His first reaction to the grim apparition of Murdstone was emotional and superficial. He had determined to practice writing in his spare moments between typesetting and jobhunting, and he had risked sending up some trifles of anonymous copy from the composing-room, which were found printable. In one of these he fulminated against the influences which "pander to wealth and power, and would crush the poor man beneath the wheel of the capitalist's

carriage." He inveighed against society's tendency "to resolve itself into classes who have too much or too little," and against the spirit of "quick reprobation for any effort of mechanics or labourers to obtain their dues, but nothing to say against combinations to deprive them of their rights"; and he called on "the intelligence of our class" to come forth and assert itself.

This was pure labourite separatism, expressed in standard labourite idiom—one might almost say, in standard labourite slang. It was a labourite version of the earlier Jacksonians' contention in the Philadelphia of George's boyhood, indiscriminately ranging the Have-nots against the Haves, and posing Murdstone as the incarnation of a tyrannous and oppressive "money power." The idea that natural law might be operative in the circumstances, and that Murdstone might be as helplessly victimized in the course of its operation as the poorest of the Have-nots, was entirely absent from George's reflections at this time.

George emerged from his frightful experiences in a spirit of uninformed and irrational rebellion; he was for the under dog, wherever found, and under whatever circumstances. He accepted the Civil War as purely and simply a

war against slavery, and grieved that he could take no part in it; he saw it with the eyes of the most fanatical Abolitionists, as a high and holy crusade in behalf of human freedom. Of the disreputable economic designs and connivances masked by this thin pretext, he knew nothing. His fellow-newspaperman Artemus Ward, with whom he may have rubbed elbows in California, could have enlightened him; but he was in no mood to be enlightened, and Artemus Ward had too profound a knowledge of human nature to attempt it, even if the opportunity had come his way.

George was in the mood of a crusader, however, and a crusader he would be. If he could not enlist in the Civil War and crusade for the cause of anti-slavery, he would crusade for something; he would sign on for the first eligible cause that turned up—and so he did. Poor as a church mouse, in debt to his ears, with a wife and two children on his hands, and now for the first time seeing some prospect of a settled occupation, he enrolled himself in a preposterous filibustering organization called the Monroe League. The object was to go into Mexico and help the patriots under Juarez drive out the army which Louis-Napoléon had

sent over to set up a puppet-state with the Austrian arch-duke Maximilian as emperor. The Monroe League fitted out an old sailing-ship and made a start, but a revenue-cutter headed them off, and the project ignominiously fell through. Years afterwards George said he now knew it "could have had no possible good end," and that some members of the expedition, in their enthusiasm, and no doubt also in their ignorance, contemplated schemes of actual piracy; indeed, half a dozen of them were put on trial as intending pirates. The League swore in its members on the emblem of a naked sword and the republican flag of Mexico; and it put the cap-sheaf on its *opera-buffa* performances by swearing in Mrs. George as its only female member!