

**WILLIAM HENRY
WILLCOX:
A SKETCH**

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William Henry Willcox: A Sketch by Various

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VARIOUS

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A SKETCH**

WILLIAM HENRY WILLCOX



A SKETCH BY HIS CHILDREN
WITH AN ADDRESS BY
GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

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1906

This is peculiar to the good man,—to be pleased and content with what happens, and with the thread which is spun for him; and not to defile the divinity which is planted in his breast, but to preserve it tranquil, following it obediently, neither saying anything contrary to the truth, nor doing anything contrary to justice.—MARCUS AURELIUS.



WILLIAM HENRY WILLCOX was born January 28, 1821, at his father's home in Cedar Street, about two blocks from Wall Street, New York city, a region which at that date was just ceasing to be a residence quarter. He was the sixth child and third son in a family of seven.

Though city born and bred, the boy came through both father and mother from lines of New England farmers extending back for nearly two hundred years of Pilgrim ancestry. His father's early life had been spent in the farming town of Newport, New Hampshire, where the grandfather, Jesse, had been one of the original settlers, coming in and breaking ground before the American Revolution and just after the conquest

of Canada by the English had made the Connecticut Valley, previously much traveled by Indians in their raids upon the colonists, fairly safe for settlement. Perhaps because of his delicate health, the father did not continue the arduous life of his farming ancestors, but joined an older brother in business in New York city. Soon after, he married Sally Stanton, daughter of a merchant in Killingworth, Connecticut, which had been the birthplace of the grandfather, Jesse, and the family home for a hundred years before the removal to Newport. Throughout his subsequent life he was a resident of New York, and for most of that time an influential officer in the Presbyterian Church.

In the recollections of his early life which, when more than eighty years of age, Mr. Willcox wrote for his children and grandchildren, the picture of the father fills the whole centre. Speaking of his first day at school, he says : " I went out into the play-

ground with the rest of the boys, but as I was a shy and sensitive little stranger I took no part in their games. But I recall, as distinctly as if it was yesterday, how I stood off by myself and watched the others ; and as I reflected that not one of them had such a father as I had (for I was sure there was not another such in all the world), I got to crying out of sorrowful pity for them all."

Father and son were much alike in character, and especially in a tender, affectionate sensitiveness of nature. This resemblance, and a perennial youthfulness of spirit which lightly spanned the difference of forty years between their ages, drew them into a close comradeship far from usual in a Puritan family of eighty years ago. The father died when William was sixteen years old. Sixty-five years afterward the son wrote : "Its effect upon myself was so crushing that it sometimes seemed as if I could not survive it. For there was no one else in the world

so dear to me as he. . . . He was a peculiarly gentle and loving nature, full of genial sympathy, of playful humor, and of such youthful feeling as made him strongly attractive to children, and drew them to him with the happy assurance that he was a true friend worthy of their fullest confidence and love. I have never met a more lovable man than he." Surely the mantle of the father descended upon the son, for no words can more truthfully describe his own family life and the feelings of his children.

At the age of twelve William completed the high school course, and except for one year was in business until his father's death. The methodical habits there formed were lifelong. No one could excel his neatness and accuracy in wrapping a parcel or footing a column of figures, and his handwriting was invariably clear. His father had himself purposed to become a minister, but had been compelled by ill health to give up his studies.

It was his ardent wish that this son should enter the calling thus closed to him, so at thirteen the lad returned to school for a time. Referring to this, the reminiscences explain: "Father wished me to study Greek, and Latin too, and prepare for college, for it was his earnest hope that I would some day be a minister. . . . I had at this time no reason to think myself a Christian, but father had an unwavering faith that I would become one, and he said that, if I was prepared for college, I could enter at once when I did become a Christian, and go on with my preparation for the work of the ministry to which he and mother had devoted me from childhood."

The father's death gave a new emphasis to the hopes he had cherished and uttered for his boy. "Father's last words to me as he lay upon his dying bed in regard to my becoming a Christian, emphasized by his triumphant, jubilant death, awakened in me a