

#### PASSAGE FOUR (Questions 25–32)

*Paragraph*

##### **Horatio Alger, Jr.**

- 1► Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832–1899) was the author of more than 100 books for boys in the second half of the nineteenth century; books that focused on the theme of success coming to those who work hard to achieve it. The majority of Alger's stories highlighted a "rags-to-riches" triumph based on integrity of character and persistent personal effort, a tendency that may have been influenced by Alger's childhood. Though Alger grew up as the eldest son of a respectable Massachusetts family, his early years were marked by financial struggle. As the namesake of his father, Horatio Alger, Sr., Alger's professional course was determined while he was still a youth: he was to follow in the path of his father, a Unitarian minister. Ultimately, Alger was not able to follow his father's wishes, instead becoming a highly popular writer of books for juvenile boys.
- 2► Initially, Alger set out to be a minister, for which his father had prepared him. He graduated with honors from Harvard in 1852 and graduated from the Cambridge Divinity School eight years later. Alger did in fact serve as a minister in a congregation in Massachusetts for a short time, but his term of service ended abruptly in early 1866. This

event resulted in Alger permanently moving to New York City in 1866 to devote his time to writing inspirational books for boys.

3► As an author, Alger established a recurring theme in virtually all of his stories. Typically, he wrote about the poor and homeless children of the slums of New York City, seeing them as unfortunate pawns of society, who, if only given the opportunity, could improve their lot. A general plotline that followed often was of a poor boy who managed to achieve a respectable and successful life by working hard and taking advantage of opportunities presented. Though his writing style was characterized by simplicity and repetition, it was at first well received by his target audience; his books were enormously popular, selling millions of copies well into the first few decades of the twentieth century.

4► There is widespread belief that Alger created his stories not only from his childhood observations, but also as a direct result of the environment he found himself in as an adult. Both in his ministry and his ensuing work as a tutor, the prominent author came across boys from opposite ends of the social classes. His constant championing of the poor youth rising above his circumstances through honesty, hard work and the generosity of an affluent benefactor may have stemmed from his hope of inspiring the youth around him to reach across social barriers and benefit one another. In his own life, Alger informally adopted young boys, usually impoverished, and took delight in their successes as they escaped the poor surroundings they had been born into.

5► Unfortunately for Alger, during the latter part of his lifetime, his novels experienced a decline in popularity, when he was criticized for his formulaic writing style, which critics claimed invariably presented the same plot, differing only in the settings and minor details, such as the names and occupations of the various characters. The writer added a darker tone of violence in an attempt to appeal to the new generation of youth he wanted to reach. However, this backfired on him, and as a result, librarians across the country declared his new works inappropriate for young boys, and called for restrictions on who could read his novels. By the end of Alger's life, his viewpoint had become so inconsequential that his death went nearly unnoticed outside of the circle of family and friends.

6► However, after Alger's death, a resurgence in the popularity of his work occurred in the early part of the twentieth century, with a bulk of his book sales coming from the first two decades of the 1900's. This revival of his popularity in turn inspired a number of organizations that recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of struggling youth. Thus, in spite of the fact that his works are rarely read in current times, his influence lives on through these groups that offer acknowledgement to individuals who persevere through adversity to achieve the "American Dream" of prosperity, one that is based on the principles outlined in Alger's writings.

25. The word "it" in paragraph 1 refers to

- (A) the second half
- (B) nineteenth century
- (C) theme
- (D) success

26. The phrase "this event" in paragraph 2 refers to

- (A) serve as a minister
- (B) congregation
- (C) term of service ended
- (D) moving to New York City

27. The word "them" in paragraph 3 refers to

- (A) books
- (B) children
- (C) slums
- (D) stories

28. The word "it" in paragraph 3 refers to

- (A) simplicity
- (B) style
- (C) repetition
- (D) audience

29. The word "his" in paragraph 4 refers to

- Ⓐ poor youth
- Ⓑ Alger
- Ⓒ tutor
- Ⓓ prominent author

30. The word "which" in paragraph 5 refers to

- Ⓐ lifetime
- Ⓑ popularity
- Ⓒ writing style
- Ⓓ plot

31. The word "this" in paragraph 5 refers to

- Ⓐ names and occupations
- Ⓑ a darker tone of violence
- Ⓒ attempt to appeal to a new generation
- Ⓓ youth he wanted to reach

32. The phrase "one" in paragraph 6 refers to

- Ⓐ youth
- Ⓑ adversity
- Ⓒ the American Dream
- Ⓓ prosperity