

THE NEW ENGLAND CULT

By Walter A. Dyer

SOME one has said that there are more Lithuanians in the United States today than bona fide New Englanders of Colonial stock. That is probably hyperbole; at any rate it is beside the point. For those of us who were born within musket-shot of Faneuil Hall and whose ancestors came over in the Mayflower or some other seventeenth-century excursion boat do

not reckon our importance in numbers. We are the salt of the earth. We know it, if the rest of the benighted world does not. The dome of the State House in Boston is still the hub of the universe, and the Sacred Cod is the symbol of the only American aristocracy worth consideration.

We are proudly, arrogantly provincial. We know not "the Loop", but we expect Chicagoans to reverence "the Common". We speak of "the Cape", and resent it when New Yorkers speak of "the City". We have a tradition that the Revolution was fought and won at Lexington and Bunker Hill and that Samuel Adams was the Father of his Country. As for literature, nothing has happened since the dissolution of the Saturday Club.

There are indications a-plenty that we sometimes bore our fellow citizens of the vast, crude hinterland, but, speaking seriously, I doubt whether we greatly antagonize them. I suspect that they look upon us with kindly, tolerant eyes, seeing New England somewhat in the aspect of a dear, stubborn, gray old lady, relic of an outworn age, full of old-fashioned notions, but to be gently humored until she passes quietly away.

But the old lady, like Charles II, is an unconscionable time a-dying. She displays an amazing vitality. And, when all is said and done, she has some interesting old keepsakes in her reticule.

It cannot be said of us New Englanders that we hide our light under a bushel. We are not inarticulate; we still have a passion for the printed page. And it is a poor season in the book publishing business that does not see new volumes setting forth in some fresh form the ancient charm of our native land. Furthermore, as a refu-

tation of all insolent arguments with their undercurrent of envious ridicule, these books appear to be widely read by the barbarians themselves.

Without apology, therefore, but rather with a sense of having acquired further merit, we present to what we hope will prove an appreciative public the latest grist of New England lore.

I do not happen to know whether Helen W. Henderson is a thoroughbred New Englander or not. With true New England caution we are inclined to suspect the pedigree of one whose previous volumes have been entitled "A Loiterer in New York" and "The Art Treasures of Washington". Why wander so far from home? Still, she writes like a New Englander. If she has the high sign and the password she will be readily admitted to the cult.

In "A Loiterer in New England" Miss Henderson has done all any New Englander could ask, for she has glorified the past and upheld the superiority of the Yankee. She has told us a lot of things about our native land that we did not know before, with the result that she has added not a little to the complacent sense of satisfaction that we feel in having been born where we were born and not in some obscure elsewhere.

The title of her book is a bit misleading in two ways. In the first place she has left New Haven and Portsmouth, Bennington and Deerfield quite untouched. But we will not quarrel with her there; perhaps there's another volume coming. What she has done has been to treat Cape Cod, Plymouth, Salem, and Boston so thoroughly from the point of view of the cult that little remains to be said.

In the second place, Miss Henderson is assuredly no loiterer. She is a delver, an excavator. Loiterers get

their history from railroad guide-books, not from original sources. Miss Henderson is too modest. The scroll of history she has unrolled with a practised hand and has rewritten it with a rare gift for selection and interpretation, a sense of proportion and significance, not lacking the saving grace of humor. She has told the story of the early settlers, of the Pilgrims, of the Salem sea captains and the rest in a manner that I fancy will hold the attention of readers who would quickly side-step John Fiske.

Not only history. With quite as sure a tread she leads us among the sand dunes of the Cape and we find local geology fascinating. In Salem we find our eyes opened to unrealized or half-realized beauties of architecture,—architecture, to be sure, associated with romantic history and tradition,—while in Boston Miss Henderson becomes frankly an art critic.

Domestic architecture, indeed, invariably crops out in most New England writings, for we are inordinately proud of our old houses. And in Salem, that Mecca of the Yankee antiquarian, we find the very best of it. Salem ship-owners amassed wealth, and they spent it on houses. In Salem lived and worked that remarkable wood carver and architect, Samuel McIntire, the greatest American exponent of the Palladian and English Georgian tradition. And in Boston there was Charles Bulfinch, whose trail Miss Henderson entertainingly follows.

Of McIntire Miss Henderson tells us something, but for fuller knowledge one may turn back to "The Wood Carver of Salem", a book produced in 1916 by two New England collaborators, Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley. From these same two we now have another handsome volume, in a limited

edition, entitled "The Colonial Architecture of Salem". This book could not have been written without a good deal of McIntire in it, but it covers a much wider field. The chapter headings will serve best to indicate this—The Gable and Peaked-Roof House; The Lean-To House; The Gambrel-Roof House; The Square Three-Story Wood House; The Square Three-Story Brick House; Doorways and Porches; Windows and Window Frames; Interior Wood Finish; Halls and Stairways; Mantels and Chimney Places; Public Buildings; Salem Architecture of To-Day. The first five chapters trace a definite development in Salem architecture by periods in a more thorough manner than has before been attempted. The last chapter deals with modern houses designed and built with rare good taste along historic lines since the disastrous Salem fire of 1914. It is not a chatty book like Miss Henderson's; it is rather a serious, analytical, descriptive, and semi-technical study. The volume is illustrated with nearly 250 photographs by Mr. Cousins, a few of which one discovers in the "Loiterer" also. Miss Henderson's book, I neglected to say, is beautifully illustrated, largely with reproduced etchings.

Speaking of architectural loiterings in New England tempts me to mention a book already noticed in these pages, on "Old New England Doorways". It belongs in the same family.

It really doesn't matter what the New Englander goes out to seek, whether it be history, architecture, or natural scenery. He returns with the conviction that it will scarcely be necessary for him to stray beyond the Hudson River in search of treasures of any sort. Mrs. Alice Van Leer Carrick's quest (I think I am correct in the Mrs.) has been for antiques, a

quest which, though not confined to New England, had its beginning here when Dr. Irving Whitall Lyon of Hartford started that collection of old furniture which later found a resting-place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And the modern collection still turns a fatuously hopeful eye on the now pretty thoroughly exploited garrets of New England.

Mrs. Carrick calls her book "Collector's Luck", and its sub-title is "A Repository of Pleasant and Profitable Discourses Descriptive of the Household Furniture and Ornaments of Olden Time". Sallying forth from her New England home, Webster Cottage, Hanover, New Hampshire (attention is called to the significance of "Webster Cottage" and Dartmouth associations), Mrs. Carrick followed the lure of her hobby, with another amiable addict, to New England farmhouses, country auctions, and city shops. Her book, though full of interesting and valuable information for collectors, is less an analytical study than a pleasantly readable record of the loiterings of these twain, shot through with that youthful enthusiasm which every ardent collector knows. For the benefit of fellow an-

tiquers I will simply state that she has traveled such highways and byways of collecting as stenciled furniture, pressed glassware, hand-woven coverlets, lustre ware, lamps and candlesticks, old valentines and silhouettes, old white counterpanes, and ancient dolls and their furniture. The volume is illustrated, of course, with photographs.

So much for this season's New England books. Next season there will be others; you can't keep us silent. For most absurdly and vocally do we love our native land, we New Englanders. We love her old traditions and her old furniture; we love her historic cities, her pleasant farming country, her colleges; we love her white houses and her White Mountains; we love her woods and templed hills and eke her stern and rock-bound coast (which, as Miss Henderson points out, was not stern and rock-bound at all, but a sandy waste with one lone glacial boulder against which the Mayflower's shallop poked her Calvinistic nose).

A Loiterer in New England. By Helen W. Henderson. George H. Doran Company.

The Colonial Architecture of Salem. By Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley. Little, Brown and Co.

Collector's Luck. By Alice Van Leer Carrick. The Atlantic Monthly Press.