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EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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Is New York American?

IS New York American? The usual answer to this question is, no, and then, with rising indignation, No! Sometimes the hope of those that think our morals, our taste, our language, and our literature are going to the dogs, is that New York, where most of the novelties come from, is not American.

When it comes to books, this statement will not stand analysis. New York in the arts is the most American part of America, though by no means necessarily the best. It is the living edge of growth and experiment.

American literature has grown sophisticated. It is hard where it used to be soft, self-conscious where once it was naive, poised and aware where once it used to blunder into excellence. Especially is this true of the stage. American books have grown more realistic in the philosophic sense. No longer do they accept all the conventions as doctrine. Marriage, the state, religion, morality, love, as the nineteenth century knew them, are all under challenge. Only magazine writing of the two million reader variety accepts the old conclusion that a beautiful bride and a million dollars will make any man happy for life. American writers, like those of Europe, have immensely widened the area of their studies. They have plunged into the inner consciousness, as in Christopher Morley's "Thunder on the Left," and finding drama there have brilliantly exposed it. They have discovered the psychological importance of sex, and have not hesitated to discuss it in all its reality. American authors, first under European influence, and then by their own volition, have become fertile in technical experiments. They have turned the play inside out, and taken the novel apart in the attempt to see what it was made of. The old-fashioned reader sometimes does not know whether it is poetry, prose, or sheer madness that he is reading. And lastly, these new Americans have become satiric, ironic, sarcastic, until no withers are unprung.

And all these characteristics of a changing American literature are inevitably associated with New York. There they have begun, or been most encouraged. There, in New York, the waves of European ideas carrying novelty and change beat most strongly. There, in New York, men and women come from all over the United States bringing the desire for change bred in their home community and to be discharged in New York. Searching reality, they find New York sophisticated, open-minded, intelligent, aware of Europe, yet self-dependent. And they make, there or elsewhere, then or later, since New York (like old Boston) is a state of mind by no means geographical, the books that are different.

Is New York, then, American? Acutely so, for in literature at least it represents America in the future tense. The rapid extensions of fiction, the new diction of poetry, the quick sophistication of the stage, are all normal results of a change in ideas and beliefs which are as inevitable for one part of the Union as another. Anyone who still reads the great Victorians and will take the pains to study the ideas implicit in the news of his daily paper, knows that we have entered a new era, and also that change in art, literature, music, as well as in education, government, and society is certain. If New York reflects this most vividly, it is not because it is anti-American.

The animosity aroused by the new literature is readily to be accounted for. In part it is a natural resentment against new ideas that ignore old ones.

Mamertine

By LEONARD BACON

T WAS here they strangled Vercingetorix. Here the Numidian tyrant, as the knot Drew tighter, rolled his eyeballs scarlet-shot, Shivered, and died, for all his politics. And there are other names you ought to mix With these, to show us that you know a lot, But which unhappily you have forgot, A memory will play a man these tricks.

Dull little guide, who tread the sacred street Lying about your ancestors. God knows His purposes. The she-wolf, I suppose, Had she forseen you, and your shrugs and grins, Forth from the suckling lips had drawn the teat, And breakfasted in quiet on the twins.

This Week



"The Tortoiseshell Cat." Reviewed by *Hulbert Footner*.

"Three Rousing Cheers for the Rollo Boys"; "Bigger and Better"; "The Family Album"; and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Reviewed by *William Rose Benet*.

"From an Old House." Reviewed by *Meade Minnigerode*.

"The Greatest Book in the World." Reviewed by *Arthur W. Colton*.

"Disraeli; Alien Patriot." Reviewed by *Wilbur C. Abbott*.

"The Carburetor Handbook." Reviewed by *William McFee*.

"Israel." Reviewed by *Joel Blau*.

Newcomers: Gertrude Stein. By *Paul Rosenfeld*.

Next Week, or Later

"An American Tragedy," by Theodore Dreiser. Reviewed by *Sherwood Anderson*.

"Beatrice Cenci." Reviewed by *Ernest Sutherland Bates*.

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But this is not all. The new era is still formless in its philosophy, uncertain of where it is going, only sure that it does not believe what the nineteenth century believed. Hence the effect upon the conservatives is precisely as if a mob on floating cakes of ice were trying to pull the safe and sound after them. We will not believe the ice is breaking up. We do not like floating cakes. And likewise, while this New York literature has vigor, growth, invention, skill, it displays in excess the qualities of the new era which we are not going to like—lack of restraint, lack of taste, wild expressiveness, indecency, cynical wit.

There is reason enough for distrusting New York in its excesses, but none at all for thinking it untypical. It is American precisely as a child's precocities are the child. Like it, or like it not, New York in literature and journalism is America in experimental becoming.

Quakers and Puritans

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

IT IS the fashion to say that world history, European history, most of all American history is being rewritten. It is not so much being rewritten as reinterpreted. Although the new willingness to be interesting has given style again some of its old importance, and the innumerable facts which research has discovered in the past half century have revised many a conclusion, neither circumstance in itself is so important as our changed attitude toward desired truth. We have more information about the past, and of late the record has been more acceptably written, yet the essential change is in the theory of living according to which facts are arranged and words chosen to present them, and this theory depends upon the special interests of our age. Indeed one can say with little exaggeration that our interest has created the new facts by drawing them from the obscurity in which nine-tenths of the past must always lie, and that those curious in mental processes may well find what we in our time wish to know about history more significant than what we have discovered in the tombs of the Egyptians or the records of the American pioneers. For we seek neither with the Middle Ages a record of God's dealings with men, nor with the eighteenth century a political philosophy, but instead evidence which will help us to apprehend what we regard as the most important aspect of human life: the developing power of man over nature and his own mental processes, and proof from any era that the mind and its body progress, or regress, and why. The fifth century in Rome, the twelfth in France, and the seventeenth in America all interest us for reasons that would not have strongly held the actors in those periods. Augustine, we imagine, would have read Gibbon with disdain. Abelard surely would regard H. G. Wells across the ages with something like contempt, and Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather declare in their heaven of the elect that our discussions of puritanism are irrelevant if not stupidly ignorant of the vital needs of humanity.

Right or wrong, we pursue our own interests, but are not thereby permitted to vilify or misunderstand our ancestors whose motives differed so sharply from ours. Books like Mr. Murdock's new life of Increase Mather* and Miss Best's recent study of Quaker saints,** are therefore welcome because they are in effect explanations of strong and ancient forces persistently uncomprehended by the very civilization they still mould and shape.

The Puritan influence came from emigrants who took with them the bone and sinew of British individualism in religion and education. Their descendants, who gave the United States its most characteristic mental habit, have been misconceived both by the great New Englanders, Hawthorne and Emerson, and by the anti-puritans of our day. All have sought in them what they wished to find. The Quakers, possessors of a set of ideals and a practice of living each more perfectly realized than any other doctrine or ethics that came to America, have been neglected as a shaping force. And yet the ten generations since the puritan beginnings or the eight since the friendly impact of the Quakers are a tiny span in history, even in a packed history like that of the United States. Their mental habits and ideals are stronger in the American mind today than anything else that has been brought over seas and

* INCREASE MATHER. By KENNETH B. MURDOCK. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1925. \$6.
** REBEL SAINTS. By MARY AGNES BEST. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1925. \$3.

only to be equalled by the effect of the native environment itself.

Mr. Murdock is more interested in a reputation than in influences. His scholarly treatise is a well documented history of a typical puritan who was second only to Edwards in power of the intellect, and to none in his public relations with his narrow but fecund epoch in New England. The author's purpose is to justify Increase according to the Mathers' own lights, and thus demolish the legends of superstition, self-seeking, sourness, and obscurantism that cling about the tormentors of witches and makers of gloom for later America. His book, otherwise satisfying, suffers from this avowed purpose; he has indeed proved too much. The tension of the Puritan mind is explained, but the tension remains, a force that made great men great though unlovely, but drove lesser human nature toward hypocrisy and hysteria. The argument which clears the Calvinist because he was a good Calvinist, would excuse Torquemada for his consistency in upholding the Inquisition.

He does not make Increase and the great divines of his period more lovable, but he supplies well-ordered evidence for a conclusion which is really more important. He depicts a typical leader of seventeenth century New England who, whether in the English court or at home in Boston, was to be compared in intellectual stature and relative influence to any man of his era, and his book will help to confirm an estimate of puritan New England not as a sour and wrangling community of cantankerous pioneers (which was sometimes nevertheless a good description) but as one of those communities like Florence of the quattrocento where, in small compass, responsibility, genius, energy developed in a remarkable degree and made a print upon history far sharper and deeper than might be expected of so small and struggling a state.

The key to the problem is the quality of the puritan leader as an intellectual, in the sense in which we use that significant word. The New Englanders in general were picked men, as is shown by the prepotence of their heredity, but more significant for the dominance of the puritan habit of mind was the status of the clergy who came with them or were chosen and educated on this soil. They were not only thinkers of unusual energy, but they functioned under conditions likely to give even inferior intellects the greatest of opportunities. Men like the three Mathers, like Davenport, like Edwards, were not of course inferior in any sense. All of them came into active rivalry with statesmen, soldiers, above all intellectuals, both at home and in the great world overseas, and it is doubtful whether their superiors in native intelligence and acquired ability were alive in their times. Increase gained the respect of Cromwell and two English kings, Edwards in his "Freedom of the Will" displayed a power in pure metaphysics not exceeded since. But if they had been lesser men their position as leaders in a theocracy with as much civil power as moral, and as much dominance by character as by doctrine, would have assured them an influence in their country to be measured only by generations. For in the rough world of early New England, where there was plenty of drunkenness, lechery, worldly self-seeking, and unspiritual grabbing of land and power, the clerical ideals were nevertheless dominant, and the majority, whatever their practice, honestly believed that the will of God as their leaders taught it was more important than trade balances or the acreage annually cleared.

The New England theocracy failed, as was to be expected. The idea of a God's experiment in a new England where all conditions should favor the elect and success be measured by perfection vigorously interpreted, was doomed in birth. It was not predestined to failure because human nature could never survive such a test. Who knows that it cannot? It failed for the deeper reason that the test itself was faulty. Real saints from the Quaker fold, gentle and liberal natures like Roger Williams, lovers of the Lord, who, like Vaughn or Herbert, adored him in the Arminian fashion, were, according to its stern tenets, more dangerous to a logical and unalterable orthodoxy than debauched Indian traders or profit-seeking Yankees who gave only lip service to the puritan Jehovah.

It failed, casting a premonitory gloom over the last days of Increase Mather, stirring Cotton Mather's petulant femininity to incredible exertions,

and rousing Edwards to the height of his great and hopeless arguments for a fatalistic creed that in spite of him could not stand prosperity or endure the relaxations of common sense. But the decay of God's New England was only the beginning of the story.

Five generations of intellectual leaders had insisted upon the will to perfection and imposed a doctrine of never relaxing strain upon New England and the colonies of New England spread from Charleston to the beginning of the new West. They put an emphasis upon willing, and planted in the most obdurate consciousness the idea that man must hourly strive for improvement. According to the doctrine, it was only thus that men could discover whether they were of the elect, but in the subconsciousness of the puritan descendant this became not so much a doctrine as a mental habit of moral strenuousness.

I do not refer to the will to reform, although that of course ran with the other. The will to make others good so evident throughout American social history is a concomitant of individualism in religion. If I, rather than Holy Church, am responsible for morality, then I must see to it that my brother behaves himself. But reform, as we have it, is more humanitarian than specifically puritan. Increase Mather and his kind legislated for the will of God not for ethics; the point with them was not whether society behaved itself for prosperity's sake, but whether man was freed of his passions to devote his whole attention to the commands of God. Drunkenness was not wicked because it degenerated but because it interrupted the concerns of the soul. Good liquor strengthened the elect, and was therefore praiseworthy; excessive mirth in a teetotaler was more dangerous than rum soberly administered since levity hid from man the sternness of his God. Increase would have heartily approved the political methods of the anti-saloon league and violently attacked their humanitarianism as tending to advance the damnable theory that comfort, prosperity, health, good morals had any value in themselves if not a function of the soul's complete election to salvation. A dozen puritan divines today of the old stamp and old power would blow the eighteenth amendment to flinders in a generation—and probably give us something worse.



It is, indeed, not the ethical formula for making everybody good that is the chief legacy of the puritans, nor, except in weak forms, their dominant fear of the passions. Nor is it their anti-aestheticism, for in that, if they were blind to color and deaf to music, their intellectual sense of proportion, their appreciation of decorous beauty, is manifest in their furniture, their houses, and most of all in the exquisite order of such of their villages as we have not yet destroyed. Nor have the ideas, which intellectuals usually leave behind them, in this case survived in any consistency. No, it is a mental habit which New England chiefly gave to the United States, a deep-laying will to achieve and accomplish, essential at first to all Calvinists who could never know whether they were of the elect or the damned unless they strove unendingly, and in the decline of Calvinism become a will to succeed in any fashion, not to lie down and take one's ease, not to be content with what one was or had, never to cease trying to rise in the scale, which in a hundred forms, many degenerate, some admirable, is a part of American strenuousness throughout history. The aim was lost or transmuted, the will, the habit, the custom of energy remained.

That the influence of a pioneer environment with its obstacles which had to be overcome was great in this, I of course do not deny, and that boundless opportunity in the same environment also called forth the will is obvious. Nor do I forget the later Scotch-Irish whose equivalent doctrine had like effects. Climate too has been a factor, yet the more carefully one studies American literature, religion, and social history, the more evident and the more continuous does this mental habit appear. And in both its ethical and unethical forms—whether in the reforming clergyman, the tireless organizer of business, or the American undergraduate strenuous beyond comparison in the pursuit of his own ideals—it is essentially puritan (as Keyserling incidentally has recently stated) and specifically in America owes its strongest impulses and immediate origin to the leaders of New England thought who were the strongest moral and intellectual force in our early history. We have lost, or denied, the ends they sought. We have sub-

stituted control of nature or of other men for the will of God as they interpreted it, but in accordance with familiar psychological laws, the mind has kept the direction they gave. There are no puritans alive today except in phases so pallid that the seventeenth century brethren would have cast them out. Billy Sunday would have been whipped in New England, and the present Methodist leaders confounded in doctrine and convicted of heresy. The research scientist, inflexibly bending his whole energy to making man's knowledge conform to a nature with whose secrets he wrestles, is the nearest counterpart to the Mathers (who themselves were far more scientific than literary). And the scientist, though he lacks the moral fervor and breadth of purpose of the puritan, is our strongest intellectual influence now, as they were then. Let us hope that he will not become equally besotted. But in any case, the puritan habit of mind is still ours, and we are not likely soon to escape it.

Miss Best's "Rebel Saints" reveals what the Quaker influence upon so much that we essentially are has come to in the general memory. She writes brief biographical essays about men and women familiar to those born Quakers, or to readers of Sewel's History, or to students of religion—Mary Dyer, Elizabeth Katherine Evans, famous in Malta, Mary Fisher who invaded the "Holy Land of New England" and the camp of the Sultan, the astonishing sailor, Thomas Lurting, and, of course, William Penn, and that most satisfactory of modern messiahs, George Fox. But it is necessary that she should write of them aggressively, stressing their militant radicalism, their fire, their youth, their great program of universal communion with the best of the inner nature of man, in order that she may cancel in the minds of her readers the common idea of the Quaker as a peace-at-any-price man who believed that plain clothes and non resistance made religion.

Her heroes were the real fighting Quakers in contradistinction to those commonly so called who lacked the courage of their convictions and chose in time of warfare the easier way. These real Quakers were bold beyond the experience of their times, more daring than the most daring pioneers, more reasonable, more far-seeing, more resolute in their insistence that man must rely upon the God within him, than the puritans in their determination that he must serve God according to formula. If Miss Best in her desire to make her Quakers vital has adopted a false style of over emphasis, full of cant colloquialisms drawn from stale military journalism, and with such unpardonable vulgarisms as "a fly was discovered in the ointment in the person of Mistress Anne Hutchinson," that is because the Quakers whose principles she well understands have not given her their spirit, which though often excessive was never cheap. Not her Quaker subjects, but Mr. Strachey and Mr. Guedalla, who began some years ago to rewrite history in epigram, are responsible for such lapses from taste as the style of this their less gifted imitator.

The Quakers of her book are the founders, and though so deeply influential in America were not, except incidentally, Americans. We recognize, of course, some aspects of their influence. We know that Penn's state was the first model of a liberal government, and far closer in ideals and practice to our United States than was the Puritan theocracy. But it is too commonly supposed that essential Quakerism was lost in the rigidity which strangled the Friends in the eighteenth century and changed a world-wide enthusiasm into a prosperous sect. This is not true. The seed of the Quakers was sowed as widely if less deeply than the mental habits of the puritans. The Quakers, while their energy lasted, permeated every corner of the infant country. New Englanders carried their strenuous but decaying doctrine with them as they emigrated westward to improve their economic status, but the Quakers on their first flood went far and wide as missionaries preaching the inner light. See Woolman's Journal as one of many testimonies. They too, in rapid expansion, became part of every American community, influencing it by example which is always stronger than doctrine, generally liked and always respected, where the Yankees outside of New England were generally disliked and often feared.

Indeed, one need not fear over-statement in saying that the fundamental qualities of what can properly be called the American brand of idealism are es-