

Second Growth in New England

There Were Real Giants in Those Days

ELLERY SEDGWICK

IT is written that "when Half Gods go, the Gods arrive" but in the story of the writers of New England there is a reversal of the glorious succession. I was born when New England was in flower but, by the time I was out of corduroys and buttoned into my "toga virilis," the oaks were going and the sap ran a little slow and thin in the second growth. The fact that "The Last Leaf" was buried in Dr. Holmes's grave the year of my graduation from Harvard will give my date for any substantial purpose. Although wild horses would not have dragged it out of my undergraduate bosom I will confide to my gentle readers that the criteria of Matthew Arnold were secretly woven into all my literary enthusiasms. The poet's "perfect line" was my private touchstone and, though I did not find it in magazines or even in books, I was as certain that come again it would, as I was convinced that outside my own Stockbridge "the Upper Classes were being materialized, the Middle Classes vulgarized and the Lower Classes brutalized," and that, while this condition existed, neither poetry nor literature generally could be born into an unpropitious world. In those days, as I looked up and down the decent village street, none of these three appalling Classes was visible. But Arnold had spoken of their crystallization in England and, before I went into the world, I took it for granted that this must be so in America.

At Harvard College I began to think differently. Freshman life in 1890 was not, to put it gently, conducive to a lettered education. But almost at once I saw with my own eyes that one stand at least of New England oaks still flourished. My family were old-time friends of the James's and at the outset I wandered into the classroom of William James. His very first lecture, almost his first words, changed my world. "Young gentlemen," he said (I garble the quotation but the phrase still stands clear in my mind), "you will ask yourselves why you have set about the study of philosophy; the more inquiring of you will ask why you have entered this particular doorway. The object of philosophy, my friends, is to *learn to know a man when you see one.*"

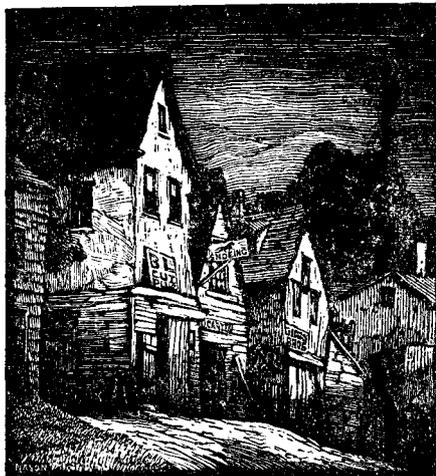
As I went out Tommy Sherwin, the

slender Mercury of the football team, threw his arm over my shoulder.

"There is something in that," he said. "Well," I replied, "that's what my education is going to be."

And so it was within my boyish limits I chose my courses not by subjects but by the men who taught them. They were all in the great tradition. I studied under William James; Francis James Child, scholar of scholars; Nathaniel Shaler, whose theme was a somewhat romantic and personal version of geology but whose laugh, the laugh of Boanerges, was a contribution to the humanities; George Martin Lane, purist of Horatian types; Royce and Palmer, the contrasted philosophers, Leibnitzian and Platonic; Charles Eliot Norton. They were the last of the Ancient Race, the last stand of New England oaks, part and parcel, though some had been transplanted, of the high tradition of New England literature.

From Norton a boy could learn anything except the subject of the lecture. For that you went to the Library but to the lecture room you went for ideas and standards of an ancient world wholly subversive of the universe of the 90's. When, in Fine Arts 3, his modulated voice dropped off to something above a pensive whisper you could just catch the words: "There are handsome landscapes in our country but in America even the shadows are vulgar." The very atrocity of the description stirred young minds to the consideration of certain elements in American life more substantial and



—Woodcut by Thomas W. Nason
Blacksmith's Shop

much more disagreeable than shadows. And when Norton began a famous lecture thus: "Young gentlemen,—and as I speak these words the realization comes over me that no one here has ever seen a gentleman," the corrosive inference almost started a riot. At the door I met Dan Shea, the butterfly son of an opulent Boston barkeep. Dan was visibly explosive; "To think, to think," he spluttered, "why that man never knew my father!"

SNOBBERY was the first thought in youthful minds as youthful ears drank in animadversions so preposterous. But they were the kind of extravagances that secure attention from three hundred impatient boys when the year is at the Spring and butterflies flutter in and out of open windows. Later, when you grew older and wiser and entered more fully into Norton's companionship, it is hardly too much to say that he brought to hundreds of underdeveloped spirits a new universe. Beauty became not esthetic satisfaction merely but took her place high among the moralities. Looking backward over fifty years, I believe the inscription written beneath his bust by his admirable pupil, Professor Grandgent, not extravagant but just and right:

HE TAUGHT AN UNSEEING WORLD TO SEE.

In that New England grove the topmost oak was Charles William Eliot, towering above his fellows, standing apart. There was an austerity about him extending to his administration. Amongst undergraduates the conviction held that he would never assume his mission accomplished until, of pupils, only a fringe of grinds remained and the University was free to meet its appointment with Destiny, untrammelled by the hobbledehoy puerilities of Harvard College. But it is astonishing how the vision changes when, in the third decade, one is fitted with glasses. When I returned to Boston in 1908, Mr. Eliot was the Institution and Harvard University almost the pseudonym of its great President. He lived through an age of transformation. It is trite to say that he found Harvard a country college and left it a world university. Men who fought or even watched the battles of his reign may sometimes differ from my judgment and join in his dispraise. But there stands his work. His successor gave it material magnificence but the real edifice, the core, rests upon Eliot's foundation. In spite of Mr. Santayana's trivial satire on the futile flickering of a decaying philosophy, President Eliot will by New England generations be remembered as the Last Puritan.

It is hardly germane to my thesis but it is entertaining to recall the ef-

fect of the austerities of the Eliot regime on officialdom about him. Until the humanizing discovery of Dean Briggs which worked a miracle in undergraduate faith and morals, the Dean of Harvard College was one efficient and possibly unjustly detested Smith. I still recall how, to the tune of

The animals came in two by two,
One wide river to cross . . .

we used to sing, as our elder brothers had sung before us,

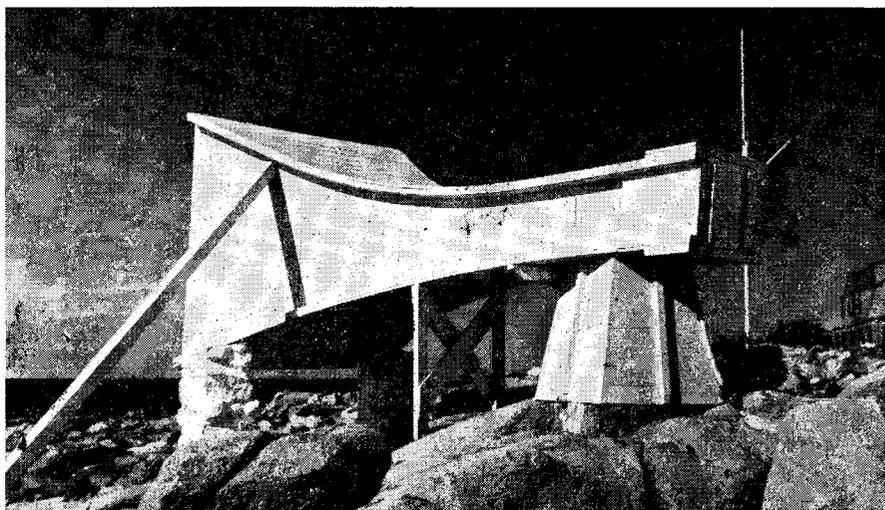
If the Dean of Harvard College
Had been there in the swim
I wonder who in thunder
Would have walked along with him!

But I grow irrelevant and impertinent. The kind editor who requested this paper may have had in mind a description of men whose names are the stock in trade of literary historians. But who the novelist, who the essayist that has labored for intellectual life, (in whose deep soil alone can literature flourish) more wisely and more well, than those champions of the eternal spirit of the Humanities?

I WAS dependent, as I have said, a hundred more times on the teacher than on the things he taught. My education was a thing of threads and patches: no Majoring, no perfect comprehension of a minute segment of the infinite circle, merely a shining and shimmering understanding of what men are and do when they are men.

Whether the oration is a branch of literature I am uncertain but I submit that some knowledge of the difference between orating and oratory plays its part in the education of a young man. Taste, despite the professor and the moralist, is one of the deepest things in life. To my thinking it points out the cleft between good and evil; the chasm between Heaven and Hell: but that is a private matter. At any rate, I count it part of the literary story of a New England inspired by the preaching of Phillips Brooks, and lay stress on the intellectual power of the spoken word.

It was a famous day in New England history when there was dedicated on Boston Common St. Gaudens's monument to Francis Gould Shaw. The "Fair-haired Northern Hero" marches in bronze at the head of his "niggers" who were buried with him at Fort Wagner. Every spectator at the great celebration knew how Colonel Shaw had been hissed by members of the Somerset Club as the black regiment paraded down Beacon Street on its march to death and immortality. On that day it was William James who spoke, and Booker Washington (and who is a more central figure in the



The Fog Horn—Annisquam

traditional thought of New England than the founder of Tuskegee?) gave the moving oration. We realized then that the Negro had stepped on the first rung of the long ladder.

On a less memorable occasion, I heard a Bostonian speak words which, in my ears, sounded like the very poetry of oratory. It was at a dinner in memory of "Billy" Russell, a Massachusetts Governor cut down in his prime, whom we thought the very type fitted for the Presidency. How I came to be invited to the dinner I have forgotten but the great and the near-great were there and among them Patrick Collins, once our Consul General in London and a popular office holder to whose Irish genius was mercifully added a probity which entitled him to the respect of all citizens. I dimly recall the toastmaster, who sat near, slipping behind Mr. Collin's chair and whispering that of course he would be called upon to speak. "Pat" Collins looked at his watch. He had two minutes for preparation. When he rose it was with the measured dignity of a man thinking of his lost leader. Slowly he began: "I have known many a politician in my time, many aye, many a statesman, but it is my deliberate opinion that he dwelt an arrow's flight beyond them all."

The effect was immediate and, on me, enduring.

I remember, too, at the solemn funeral of William James in old Appleton Chapel, the impressive bulk of Dr. George A. Gordon standing at the head of the coffin. From some old-fashioned prejudice the mere thought of eulogy numbs my soul, but that resonant invocation to a great spirit gone still reverberates in my ears: "Teacher, Preacher, Follower of the Truth."

When, after half a dozen years of Babylonish Captivity, I returned to Boston in 1908, the old landmarks of

New England had disappeared but there still survived outcroppings of the civilized era. The *Atlantic*, to which my hand was set, was creeping dizzily towards an unheard-of sale of fifteen thousand copies. Its friends became my friends. Staunchest among them and most constant delight to me was Mrs. James T. Fields, widow editor of the magazine in eons gone by. She still lived on in her Charles Street house stored with memories of the Augustan Age. There Thackeray had stayed, there Dickens had shown himself her devoted friend. In the old parlor, its western windows looking over the far reaches of the Charles, I found Mrs. Fields nearly every week, lying on her sofa, still lovely in her soft gray gown. Above her hung the portrait of himself that he had given her; the young Dickens, beardless and glowing with Copperfieldian genius. With Mrs. Fields the past was present and, as she lived it again, I became half conscious that I myself had known these undying friends of hers.

AN almost constant inmate of her house was Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, beautiful in feature but, to my thinking, a little classical, reserved, and cold. She was still in fullest command of her entrancing gifts, but to see her one never thought of the mistress of the "Pointed Firs," rather of a lady of a wider horizon and less individual domain. One dinner at Mrs. Fields's I cannot forget. There were but five of us seated about the bright china and gay Italian flasks. Mrs. Bell was there, daughter of Rufus Choate, child of genius—as Mrs. Fields called her—whose bubbling wit had rocked Boston for a generation. Like Dr. Holmes, she detested the country and her parting message to a rural friend, "Kick a tree for me," had gone the furthest rounds. George Woodberry was there, teacher

of beauty and poet of rich involuted cadences, and the guest of honor, President Taft. The two ancient ladies were like players of swift badminton, good talk, winged retorts, quips, jests, and stories flew back and forth, and for two hours I watched tears of laughter stream down Mr. Taft's substantial cheeks.

The burly figure of Edward Everett Hale no longer shadowed the Common in those days; the talented, agreeable, and lazy Aldrich had passed on his way, but "Marjorie Daw" was very much alive and the "Bad Boy" still romped and capered through New England. "J. S. of Dale" who, as Frederick Jesup Stimson, had not begun his diplomatic career, was in the background, distinguished and aloof. Old T. W. Higginson, "Twigginson," as the irreverent called him in differentiation from other Higginsons, still lived on in his abolition memories.

Perhaps the bulkiest figure in the literature of those years was John Fiske, who wrote history for all to read. To an editor he was a lure and a torment. Invariably behindhand, if the deadline were a Monday, serial postals would come from him imploring, promising, swearing copy would come Wednesday, Friday, the following Thursday. A great chronicler, a magnificent interpreter and as a procrastinator, a nonpareil!

I SHOULD like to write of Dr. Crothers, pastor of a unitarian flock and President Eliot's favorite preacher. Admirable in the pulpit, a discursive essayist without equal, he was his own encyclopedia of prose and poetry and the errors of his copy were almost as versatile as his charm. Was ever appearance as disarming as his? His great head was an oval perfect as an egg, and from out it peered the eyes of an unweaned child. In those days, Judge Grant and Barrett Wendell were famous men about town. Among unyielding conservatives Wendell stood supreme. "Did you," he inquired of a friend on a street corner, "ever hear me admit an improvement in the world?" "Surely not," "Did you ever hear me imply that progress did not lead downhill?" "No, certainly." "Thank God," said Wendell and strode off.

Let me close this paper with a toast, respectful and affectionate, to the literary spinsters of New England. Good cause have I to be thankful to them. I think of Miss Amy Lowell of preposterous manners and a golden heart. Her imagist verse was an appeal to the eye whereas only the rhythmical memory of the ear can transmit verse to posterity. Her poetry may have been temporary but it was talk wherein her

real genius lay. She talked for victory, the rest of us to save our skins; endless disputation broken by hilarious laughter while the smoke of olympian cigars breathed incense over the field of battle. Neither of her famous brothers could talk her down; always resolutely and wisely they avoided the fray.

I think of Miss Florence Converse, the best friend an editor ever knew, poet, dreamer, picker-up of dropped stitches, whose theology is ancient as her social theories are novel, but whose intense beliefs never cloud the clarity of an editorial judgment. With her we still have Miss Alice Brown, fashioner for fifty years of human stories, never trite, and full of accurate portraiture. Then there is Miss Alice Gould, self-exiled to Spain, rescuing, one by one, scores of the sailors of the *Santa Maria*, and *Niña*, and the *Pinta* from the ocean of oblivion, giving to each the background of two centuries, and attaining her immortality in a hundred footnotes.

Here is my last toast. To the dear memory of Miss Louise Imogene

Guiney. Born a Catholic, living in pitiful poverty, she early repudiated "the black arts of mathematics and sewing." Every hour she could steal from her employment, she squandered upon the origins of English poetry, coming to rest at last in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her own exquisite, gay, but not unintricate verse attracted quiet attention and, at the behest of a group of famous men, Holmes, Gilder, Stedman, and Aldrich, she was appointed to the singularly unpoetic office of Postmaster at Auburndale, Massachusetts. The good Protestants about, in fear for their souls, refused to take mail from her Papistical hands but the storm of anger arising from this incident ended it. Finally Miss Guiney struggled to England to find her paradise in the Bodleian. "I came to England," she wrote, "not for excitement, not for vogue, but for the velvety feel of the paths underfoot like moss of a forest floor to a barefooted child."

All these years she had loved New England. Now she had gone home.

The Sign

By Robert P. Tristram Coffin

HE was a working man, and he was tired,
He sat before the fire he had lit,
The island, the whole ocean, and the silence
Were leaning in against the light of it.

He was not looking for a sudden fissure
To split the night and show eyes looking through,
He had hands to warm and clothing dampened
By his sweat and by the evening's dew.

But crack the sky did. First he heard it coming,
A whistling like strong winds, and then it came,
It struck the burning oak and splashed the forest
With the sparks and embers of his flame.

There was a cry beyond all human fierceness
In the shattered bowels of his fire,
And the something went back upward screaming,
Dropping burning coals as it went higher.

A blazing brand went off above the tree tops,
Lonely and appalling, giving light
To what might monstrously be pinions,
The crying slendered out along the night.

The man sat on. But he would never after
Be a man who felled and hewed plain trees,
Had common children, and took simple honey
Out of the tenement houses of his bees.

There would be wild things slain and full of honey,
Mysterious stones piled up like a mounting stair,
Wherever he might lay his head in resting,
And bright ones coming down it pair by pair.

His plowing would be like an act of worship,
He would be a man who bends and woos
When he picked the smallest of his apples
Or brought the lambs home bleating in the dews.

A Literary Who's Who

Resplendant Acorns from Old Oaks

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

NEW ENGLAND has traditions. I recommend a pocket-size book just published, "Anglo-American Literary Relations," by George Stuart Gordon, who died in 1942. He was President of Magdalen College, Oxford, had been Professor of English literature, and had made a specialty of American literature. On his deathbed he gave to the British scholar, R. W. Chapman, his notes on a series of lectures which Mr. Chapman has edited and prepared for publication. A footnote shows Professor Gordon had read with profit the late T. G. Wright's "Literary Culture in Early New England 1620-1730," a very important book, perhaps too little known. In addition to the universally known "Autobiography" of Franklin, Professor Gordon emphasizes the beautiful literary portions of the writings of Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, and John Woolman, and after quoting from them says, "Surely I am reading literature."

Professor Gordon remarks also on the great influence of Bishop Berkeley, who will always be associated with Rhode Island and Connecticut (arriving 1729), and says his "Alciphron" and his famous poem "Westward the Course of Empire" are the best prose and the best verse written by an English writer on American soil for two hundred years. He wrote these in a wooden house near Newport, owned today by Yale, to which college he made substantial contributions in books and in money; the Berkeley Scholarships are still awarded every year to undergraduates. Yale also owns the famous painting of Berkeley and his family, where the artist, like Fra Lippo Lippi on the Coronation of the Virgin, included himself.

As Dr. Wright had pointed out, from the very beginning New England had books. Every ship brought them, for many of our settlers ordered books from Europe.

Incidentally, it is interesting to see that Professor Gordon speaks in the highest terms of the state papers of the Continental Congress, "which travelled over Europe and produced astonishment there." In 1774 "The Great Chatham" said in the House of Lords that they were unexcelled by any nation or group of men in history and added, "I have read Thucydides." Professor Gordon himself says, "From

Alexander Hamilton and *The Federalist* I learn more, I find, than from any other book of statecraft whatsoever."

We Americans do not always remember that in the eighteenth century we had writers of great ability who created traditions. In the last part of the book, Professor Gordon expresses supreme admiration for Mark Twain and quotes with appreciation two pages from Stephen Benét's "John Brown's Body."

I believe the *proportion* of men and women of culture in the Colonial population of New England was higher than it is today.

Well, we are not so badly off in 1943. Leaving out men and women on faculties of the leading colleges of Connecticut, Yale, Wesleyan, Trinity, the University of Connecticut, and Connecticut College, yet remembering that our professors have written many books that belong to literature as well as scholarship, consider the list of writers now living in our small state. I name them in alphabetical order, because the alphabet is the only thing in the world absolutely safe for democracy. F. P. Adams, James Truslow Adams, Charles Beard, Mary Beard, Van Wyck Brooks, Erskine Caldwell, Henry S. Canby, Le Grand Cannon, Stuart Chase, G. H. Coxe, Wilbur Cross, Rachel Crothers, Edna Ferber, Robert Hillyer, Brian Hooker, Helen Keller, Percy Marks, William McFee, Westbrook Pegler, Chard Powers Smith, Julian Street, Carl and Mark Van Doren, Hendrik Van Loon, Percival Wilde, Thornton Wilder.

The well-beloved F. P. A. has produced many poems that admirably illustrate Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry—they are a criticism of life. They are also an important contribution to the literature of wit and humor; he is an apostle who exemplifies his creed; although his poems are full of the comic spirit, as works of art they are to be taken seriously.

James Truslow Adams's numerous works on history, in which America is interpreted to the world, and the British Empire to America, give him a high place in contemporary literature. The same is true of the historical works of Charles and Mary Beard, although their emphasis is perhaps more on economic and social movements.

Van Wyck Brooks, in "America's Coming of Age," "The Flowering of



Billy Phelps

New England," and "New England: Indian Summer," has produced works that will be read and consulted for many years to come.

Erskine Caldwell's pictures of life are geographically distant from New England, though his individual characters can be found almost anywhere in the world.

Henry Canby, in his "Life of Thor-eau" and many other books, and literary essays, has skilfully interpreted the independence and character of New England.

Le Grand Cannon, by his novel, "Look to the Mountain," has reached a place among America's leading living novelists; this book is not only a contribution to the history of the pioneers of New England; it is literary art of distinction.

THE Hon. Wilbur Cross, famous Governor of Connecticut, made his Thanksgiving proclamations literary classics; and when his autobiography appears this autumn, it will be a revelation of the New England spirit.

Our famous American novelist, Edna Ferber, followed up her novel on Connecticut by coming to live in our state. In "The Girls" (1921), she illustrated a double transition, the transition from many clothes to few, and her own transition from an entertaining teller of tales to one of the leaders in contemporary fiction. The book that chiefly concerns us here is "American Beauty" (1931) which displeased some readers, but which happened to be a true picture of the New England life she described.

As a master of satire and invective, combined with a brand of patriotism, Westbrook Pegler's writings make Ci-