

Norman Hapgood in Petersham

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To have known Norman Hapgood as he moved in and out among us in this hill town of Petersham was a revealing experience. He had a deep affection and a profound respect for the town, its history, its institutions, its life and people. He was at home here where his ancestors had been strong factors in transforming a rugged hill-top wilderness into a town and community of character and quality. One felt that the stability and forthrightness of his character had their roots in this rocky but fertile soil. One can easily imagine his buoyant pioneer virility, his toughness and fineness of fibre [sic] felling trees in the wilderness, building stone walls, constructing spacious frame houses with solid foundations and great fire-places. One would know that he would have been a leader in the common enterprises, building roads, town halls, meeting houses and schools. One would know that his keen and understanding mind would be observing all things, penetrating all things. One would know that his opinions, his thoughts, his convictions, his judgements would have their weight among his townsmen.

Thus it happened that when he came here for his leisure hours in summer, he moved in and out among us as if perchance he had always been here, a familiar figure, at home in his own hills. Some spirit of eternal youth was with him. Only last summer he took a leading part in a play put on by the young people in the town hall. He not only entered into the spirit of the show itself, but into the spirit of the whole enterprise as if he were youth itself. What a good bit of acting it was. Sunday afternoons would find him frequently over on the Baseball grounds watching the Petersham team play some rival team. Each summer he gave a talk on current events under the auspices of the Laymen's league, always a stimulating and remunerating event. Always the casual meetings, in the Post Office, at the library, in the garden, or wheresoever, brought to the front some important and interesting item. He was a genial talker with something to say, and above all an alert and understanding listener.

To me one of the most significant phases of his personality was his attitude towards religion and especially the service of

worship in the church. His experience in life, his poetic insight, and his sense of historic undercurrents were factors. He was always present, an active sympathetic presence, whose very attitude contributed to the vitality of the service. Essentially a deeply religious man, he was alive to all the implications of religion both in its individual and social aspects. The memory of his genuine sincerity will always be a rebuke to anything unworthy, and his catholic spirit a powerful support of a tolerant intellectual integrity.

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