

INTERNATIONAL  
STUDIOGABBAGES AND KINGS *DEOGH  
FULTON*

A NEW RACE, differing in many ways from the heroes of old, has been admitted to mythology. Instead of slaying dragons and rescuing ladies fair they sat; instead of going forth to battle, men and gods together, they went to bed. Such, at least, is the evidence. No Homer has sung the glories of this people or given them life; their thin ghosts wander unhappily through shops, galleries and auction rooms. But, if one listens carefully, the echo of their ancient chant may be heard:

*Hickory maple pine cherry  
Banister ladderback windsor  
Wistarburg Sandwich and Stiegel  
Primitive waxwork engraving.*

For these were the Early Americans.

Even where some acquaintance with American history persists, there seems to be small connection between the actual people and the race whose furniture we buy. For we think of statesmen and soldiers as active, and chairs are our chief heritage from the E. A.'s; chairs and beds and portraits of unhappy ladies and gentlemen stiffly sitting. These were no "embattled farmers."

It would be almost as difficult to reconstruct the New York of Petrus Stuyvesant from the top of the Woolworth Tower as to get an impression of the Americans of his time from the collections of antiques displayed in shops and auction rooms. The objection will be raised that to give such an impression is no part of the business of salesrooms. True. But why, then, this chanting of the mystic spell "Early American?" Why the attempt to read into furniture and paintings qualities which they have not? Can it be for the same reason that the stores on Third Avenue, in New York, which a few years ago sported modest signs of "Second Hand Furniture Bought and Sold" now carry, in the largest letters which space will permit, the magic word "Antiques?"

The Chinese, we are told, worships his great-grandfather and respects his former possessions. Such an attitude is, to our more cultivated minds, ridiculous. So we reverse the procedure.

I have no quarrel with furniture made in America in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I like it; and, when I can afford to, buy it. But I am not at all sure of just what an "Early American Atmosphere" would be or that it would be pleasant if found. For many even of the New England towns which are today so charming, are so largely because the activity which built them has moved on leaving a simple

record. The colonists built simply because they lacked time and money to be elaborate; because, having both, they could afford and appreciate simplicity; or, and most important, because the builders were craftsmen to whom good construction was an essential factor in all work.

Therein, I think, is the answer, often stated and as often forgotten, of the real value of their productions. To build well is the foundation of enduring work in any craft. And that is why, dollar for dollar, the furniture which was built on that basis by the early craftsmen and cabinet-makers is often better than new. This, of course, has nothing to do with collectors. A true collector is a man to whom rarity is the final standard. No normal man is without the passion in some form or other and, as collectors, we live in a fortunate time. In another hundred years the tortured Queen Antics of the mid-nineteenth century may be the vogue and certainly will be admitted to the category of "rare and valuable antiques." That time may not be even so far away. The supply of genuine pieces of furniture in maple, pine and cherry—woods which, although so fashionable today, were scarcely noticed until it became difficult to find mahogany—has limits.

Save your horsehair!

Another version of the Early American legend is found in portraits. Not in those by Stuart, Morse, Trumbull, *et al.* Not at all. Those mythical E. A.'s were Primitives. Somehow Primitives have always impressed me as persons with whom it would be difficult to get on. Imagine, if you can, being asked to amuse the "Dover Baby" whose portrait was reproduced in the February number of INTERNATIONAL STUDIO. The child, as the caption stated, was probably of the seventeenth century and certainly, as the caption did not state, of another world. It was suggested, you will remember, that a more exact dating of the picture might be made from the bottle which the child grasped so firmly and so insistently displayed.

I was seized by the antiquarian urge. And, allowing for the isometric drawing of the bottle in the portrait, the duplicate was found. Not, as one might suppose, in a museum or collector's case, but in that of a druggist on Sixth Avenue. Moreover, the bottle contained a mixture guaranteed to promote the growth of hair. I looked again at the portrait, noted the astonishing hirsute accomplishments of the child. Here, I said, is a great discovery—the first Early American advertisement.

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