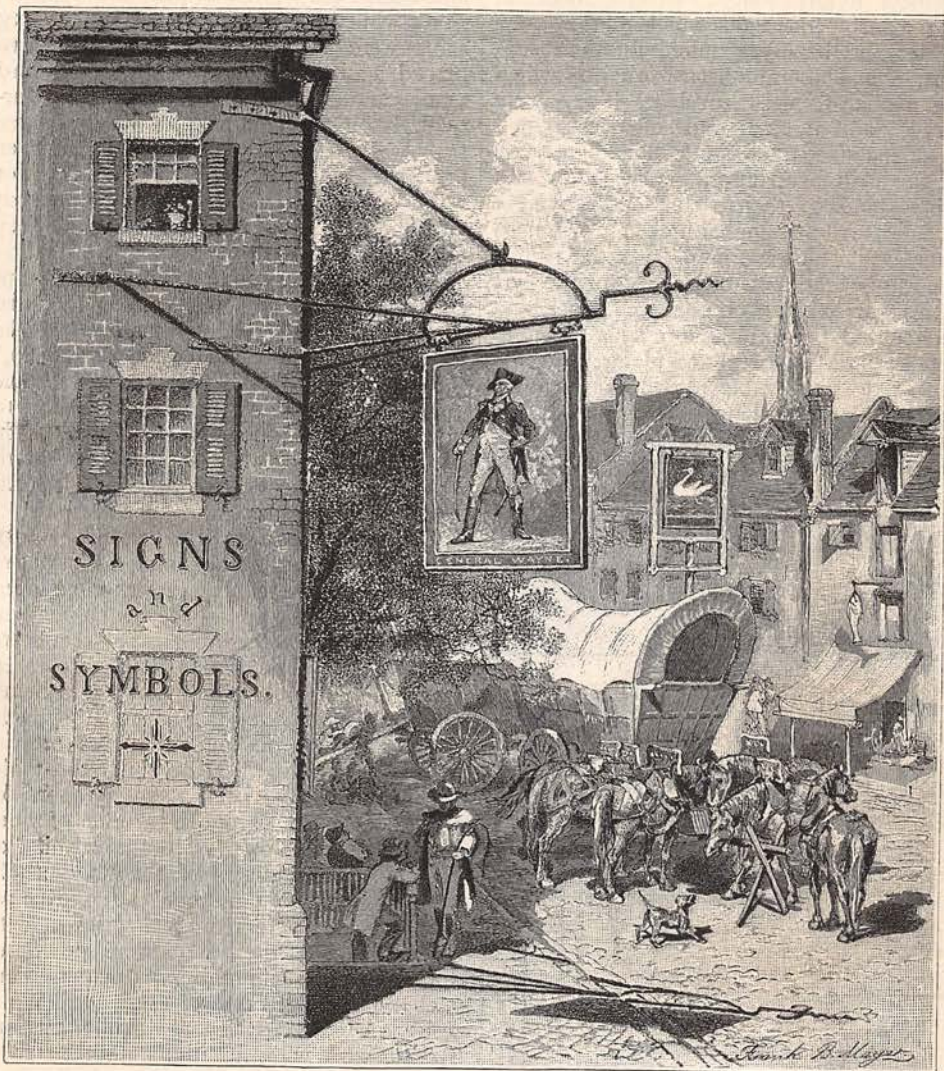


SIGNS AND SYMBOLS.



THE "GENERAL WAYNE" INN, BALTIMORE, IN THE OLDEN TIME.

UNTIL recently we affected to despise the Middle Ages; but a nearer view of that shadowy time gives us vistas of light and color, of graceful and quaint forms, of a people quick to see the beautiful and prompt to put their wits to work in expressing it. No little of this activity was absorbed in carving, forging and limning, and it was during this period that symbols and sign-boards, vanes and weather-cocks, figure-heads and door-knockers, were in their glory; they were indeed the peculiar off-

spring of the age of feudalism. Then the houses and castles of the nobles were always open to the traveler, and the prominent feature of the family crest or armorial bearings above the door bore fruit of suggestion in such names as the "Blue Boar," the "Red Lion," or the "White Rose."

When the hostelry replaced the hall, the carved scutcheon of the castle was probably represented by a banner bearing the arms or crest of the lord of the manor, which, in its turn, suggested the more permanently

suspended board or *enseigne*. From a family crest, or some such rude device as the "Vintner's Bush," or the "Cakes and Ale," business rivalry sought advertisement in more conspicuous signs, which, as they grew in size and beauty, required for their support, the elaborate iron-work in which the mediæval artist reveled. They were carved and gilded, and often sustained in a massive frame-work united marvels of the skill of painter, gilder, smith and joiner, and in their redundant ornament became verily triumphal arches in honor of Bacchus. The tradesman, from the simple exposure of the tools of his craft or the best of his wares, emulated the inn-keeper, and each juttied beyond the other his claim to notice; until the useful and picturesque sign became an intolerable nuisance or a mere commonplace; no longer a landmark to the stranger, or the pride of the citizen. At the word of the law, its creaking music

trees, and herbs; signs biblical and religious; signs of saints and martyrs; emblems of dignities, trades and professions, humorous and comic, even pictorial puns and rebuses. For a while after the projecting or hanging signs were forbidden, similar ones were placed against the front of the house, and many carved in stone; some of these, particularly on the continent of Europe, were truly works of art. The lingering love of art or old associations has preserved or reproduced many of the old devices, but with the general knowledge of reading they are no longer a necessity.

Convivial England has always clung to its old inns, and one may yet feel a genial glow at the mention of mine host of the "Garter," the "Boar's Head in Eastcheap," the "Markis o' Granby," or the "May-pole Inn." Nor has there been lack of effort to celebrate them by pen and pencil; so that in the pages of novelists and poets, the American people have become tolerably familiar with their appearance and their customs.

With old American inns our people can hardly be said to be acquainted,—still less with those whose symbolism was most interesting. New England—whether on account of Puritanism we cannot say—seems to have little to show in this line. Preserved in the historic collection at the "Old South Church" in Boston is a colonial sign in which the generous punch-bowl asserts its independent swing. Nor could this "old continental" have been a solitary example, if we believe the European travelers of those days, who speak of the "insatiable thirst of their fellow-passengers of the stage-coach, who never saw a sign-board but they must halt the coach to refresh themselves with 'grog.'" That these signs were sometimes turned to more spiritual use is evident from a chap-book of the time of Wesley and Whitfield, in which we read that "Sign-boards are spiritualized with an intent that when a person walks along the street, instead of having his mind fill'd with vanity and their thoughts amus'd with the trifling things that continually present themselves, they may be able to think of something profitable." In the old "Middle States," they took a wider range. Our American Vasari, Dunlap, in acknowledging "that many a good painter has condescended, and many a one been glad, to paint a sign," records that in Philadelphia the signs have been remarkable for the skill with which they are designed and executed, and in support thereof cites the testimony of the artist Neagle as

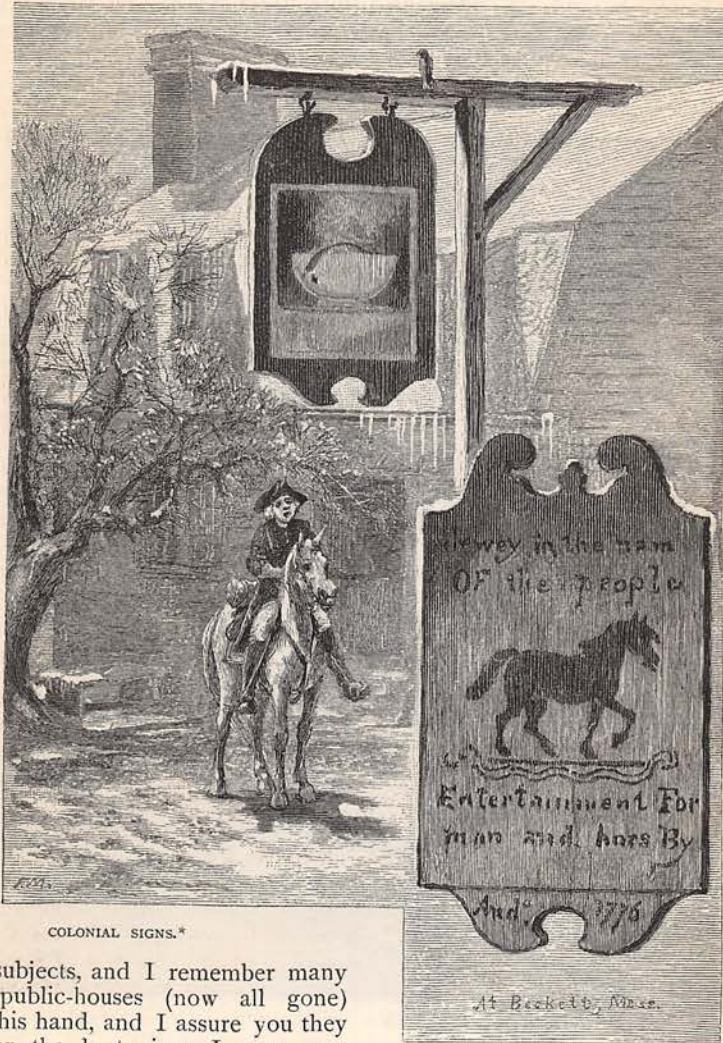


THE SCRIVENER OR BOOK-SELLER. (FROM A MEDIÆVAL CUT.)

ceased. So departed in the Old World historic and commemorative signs; heraldic and emblematic signs; signs of monsters, of birds and fowls, fishes and insects, flowers,

that of "an excellent artist and judicious man" in his appreciation of the merits of the signs of Matthew Pratt. "I have seen the works of Pratt," says, Neagle "portraits,

tinguished men assembled on that occasion, and day after day the streets were filled with crowds occupied in identifying likenesses. The sign must have been painted



COLONIAL SIGNS.*

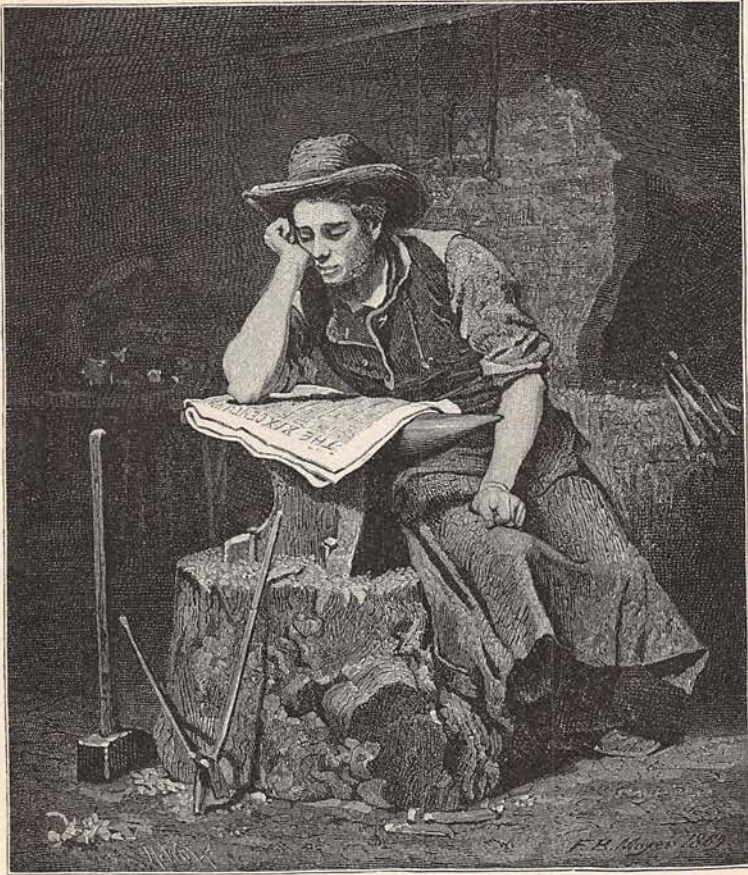
and other subjects, and I remember many signs for public-houses (now all gone) painted by his hand, and I assure you they were by far the best signs I ever saw. They were of a higher character than signs generally, well colored and well composed, the works of an artist descended from a much higher department. A notably fine piece of work was a game-cock in a barnyard, which for many years graced a beer house in Spruce street. In the sign of the Federal Convention of 1788,—first raised at the corner of Fourth and Chestnut streets,—Pratt gave excellent portraits of the dis-

soon after the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and I remember many a time gazing as a boy at the assembled patriots, especially at the venerable and conspicuous head of Dr. Franklin." Other signs by this artist were a "Neptune" for Lebanon Gardens, an admirable "Fox Chase" with a sunrise landscape, in Arch street, a drover's scene, and others, most of them with verses at bottom composed by himself. Pratt's signs were broad in effect and were loaded with color, and his style and touch were free from "niggling." "I remember them

*The writer acknowledges receipt from an unknown friend of the sketch for the lower sign.

well," says Neagle, "for it was in a great measure they which stirred a spirit in me for art whenever I saw them, which was frequently." Pratt, who was born in Philadelphia in 1734, was a school-mate of Charles Wilson Peale and of Benjamin West, "at Videl's school up the alley, back of Holland's hatter's shop." At ten years

"Gallagher," says Dunlap, "in 1800, in Philadelphia, painted portraits, scenes, and signs, but his taste for lounging exceeded his devotion to art, and he met the fate of idlers." Not so a more noted name and a truly American genius, William S. Mount, born at Setauket, L. I., 1807, an orphan, and a hard-working farmer's boy, until



THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. (FROM AN OIL-PAINTING BY F. B. MAYER.)

of age he wrote twelve different hand-writings and painted a number of marine pieces. As the friend of West and in company with the latter's father, he conducted the betrothed of Benjamin to London, where he became a student and member of his family. He assisted West in painting the whole royal family, and aided Peale in forming the first museum in Philadelphia. He was devotedly attached to his profession, but, feeling that the legitimate path of limner could not support his increasing family, he painted at intervals a number of signs.

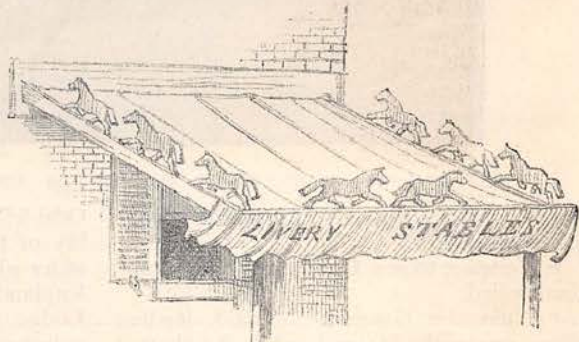
the age of seventeen, at which age an elder brother took him as an apprentice to sign-painting. In 1827, however, he returned to the fields and the farm, and under congenial influences painted some charming pictures of rural life and humor. Many of our artists have owed their first lessons either to coach or sign painting, and had the age permitted their development in the wider and higher field of decorative art, they would no doubt have proved as distinguished in that line as at the easel.

It was as a pupil of a noted decorator of

fire-engines that Charles L. Elliott with his fellow-pupil, the late Colonel Thorpe, received his first instructions in art. "This artist was John Quidor, whose shop was in Pearl street, between Elm and Centre,—a large-framed man, with unusually large projecting eyes. He enjoyed a great reputation as a painter of 'backs' of fire-engines, when firemen were especially noted for their frequent fights, and their engines for their decorative display. Quidor also tried his hand at figure subjects."

Philadelphia was not alone in the number or quality of her signs; for among the old towns of Pennsylvania, the German attachment to old ways is shown in the maintenance of the tavern signs, and in Maryland with its English traditions, we recall creditable works of art, where all the operations of the cooper's shop or the forge were faithfully depicted, and particularly the flattering risks of the lottery. We remember with pleasure the old inns of Baltimore, where signs of the "Golden Horse," the "White Swan," the "Black Bear," the "Open Hand," the "Seven Stars," the "Wheatfield Inn," the "Three Tuns," the "General Wayne," the "May-pole Inn," the "Rising Sun," the "Bull's Head," the "Beehive," and the "Golden Lamb," hung amidst groups of immense Conestoga wagons,—great terrestrial arks, drawn by six or eight horse teams, the link between the pack-horses and mules of colonial days and the railroads of our time. In the town, these land-ships crowded the streets, and their horses fed from troughs sustained on the wagon-poles. With the old signs, to the youthful eye such wonders of art, we associate the life of the old turnpike roads: the stage-coach with its lively horses, and the bugle-notes of the driver as he approached the post-office or the inn; the turnpike gate with its overhanging roof and turn-stile for the wayfarer and its keeper, often a rural character; and the long wagon trains with the emigrants to the "Western Country," as all beyond the Alleghanies was then called. Immense herds of cattle passed along these roads to Eastern markets, following the lead of a clanking chain, and the road was alive with horsemen and footmen,—the itinerant preacher, the returning drover or farmer, the peddler and the traveling tinker. Of the inns where these people tarried we recall on the great stage route from Philadelphia

to Baltimore, the sign of the "Red Lion," a relic of English loyalty, and the "Heart in Hand," expressing a welcome. In "Baltimore-town," at that time, the Wheatfield Inn (now transformed, as others have been by false pride, into the name and dignity of a "hotel") presented as a sign a luxuriant growth of ripened grain invaded by hungry rats; the "Three Tuns" spoke of unlimited joviality, and the "General Wayne" exhibited, suspended from its iron frame, a full length of "Mad Anthony" in his Continental uniform. This sign, the last of its kind, still hangs in mid-air, faded out of countenance amid street cars and locomotives. Of more pretentious inns, the resort of people of quality, there was the "Globe," with its elaborate sign-board, a golden hemisphere hanging from iron work above its wide door. The "Indian Queen" was noted as "the best kept house of its day, and having accommodations for two hundred guests with bells in every room;" thence rode forth General Jackson in company with the Indian chief Blackhawk, to see and be seen by the town. The "Seven Stars" sparkled in a blue sky, and the "Fountain Inn," with its refreshing sign, was a substantial caravansary after the style of the galleried inns of England, but little modified in plan from "Ye Tabard in Southwark," whence Chaucer's friends set out to Canterbury, or from those inns in whose court-yards Shakspeare's fellow-comedians acted in Good Queen Bess's time, amusing our forefathers of summer afternoons with quaint jokes and comic parts.



AN ANNAPOLIS SIGN.

It was built around a court having a refreshing fountain in the center, access to the bedrooms being afforded by shady galleries on each story. Here Washington tarried on his way North from Virginia, and here this little anecdote still clings to its memory: After the fatigues of a day passed

in the interchange of official courtesies and a review of the troops, the General had retired to his room to seek a much-needed repose, when he was drawn to the door by a gentle tap. Opening it he met the awe-struck gaze of two little boys.

The boy, who lived to be a distinguished jurist, always preserved the treasure.

The origin of Odd-fellowship in America is closely connected with a Baltimore inn. At the "Seven Stars," on the 26th of April, 1819, the first American lodge of



E. HEINEMANN, SC.

THE FEDERAL COCKADE. FOUNTAIN INN, BALTIMORE, 1794. (FROM AN OIL-PAINTING BY F. B. MAYER.)

"What can I do for you, my little men?" said Washington.

"We want to see General Washington," one replied.

"I am the General," he said, leading them graciously in; and, while he chatted with them familiarly, he observed that one wore a cockade in his hat, but not that of a Federalist. Calling a servant, he sent for ribbon, pins, and scissors, and quietly fashioned a cockade, which he pinned to the hat of the other boy, saying:

"That, my boy, is the Federal cockade, the cockade of the Union; wear it for my sake."

Odd-fellows was instituted—by the assembly of the required number of five of the order who had previously been initiated in England—under the name of Washington Lodge, No. 1. Thomas Wildey, to whom a monument is erected in Broadway, Baltimore, as the father of Odd-fellowship in America, was elected Noble Grand. At the "Three Loggerheads," a dismal out-of-the-way tavern, near the docks, and much frequented by sailors and wharf loungers, the organization grew into importance, and received the first warrant ever granted to a lodge in the United States from the order

in the Mother Country. Here the grand lodges of Maryland and of the United States were instituted, and held their first sessions. Its sign, swung from a projecting beam, represented upon each side *two* extremely ugly faces with the legend above them: "We three loggerheads be." The social character of the lodge at the "Loggerheads" is described by a passer-by, who, one summer night, was attracted beneath the open windows by the sounds of mirth. A large room in the second story was well lighted and pretty well filled; a noisy commotion was prevailing, but by three vigorous blows of a mallet orderly silence was produced. All at once, a deep-toned tenor voice sang "Old King Cole," with all the original variations. The vocal imitations of the four-and-twenty fiddlers, fifers and drummers, were loudly given amid thunders of applause. A soliloquy from "Richard III.," in imitation of a great actor of the day, followed. This was also well received. There was then a hubbub of internal commotion which lasted until stopped by the loud-sounding mallet. A sweet, soft voice then executed "The Poor Little Sweep." Entering the tavern, the stranger demanded: "What is the charge to your free-and-easy?" To which mine host indignantly replied, "There's no free-and-heasy 'ere, it's the hodd-fellows' lodge hover 'ead."

The American sign-painter has usually been inspired by national feeling rather than popular humor or local renown, hence the "spread eagles" that have taken flight, alas! to be replaced by the "National" or the "Union" hotel. The heads of Washington and Franklin, with a few of the earlier presidents, remain, but strange to say, that prototype of the Yankee nation, not the Father but the Uncle of his country, the ubiquitous Uncle Sam, has yet to be honored in this class of out-of-door art. We offer his typical portrait in the national bird, that

"Emblem of Freedom, stern, haughty, and high,
The gray forest eagle, the king of the sky."

In old Annapolis, as in other colonial capitals and provincial sea-ports, loyalty to the crown and love of the sea suggested the choice of such names as the "Duke of Cumberland," the "King's Head," the "Ship and the Topsail-sheet-block." A famous inn in Williamsburgh was the "Ra-leigh Tavern," and the Old Dominion must have had many a noted sign-board.



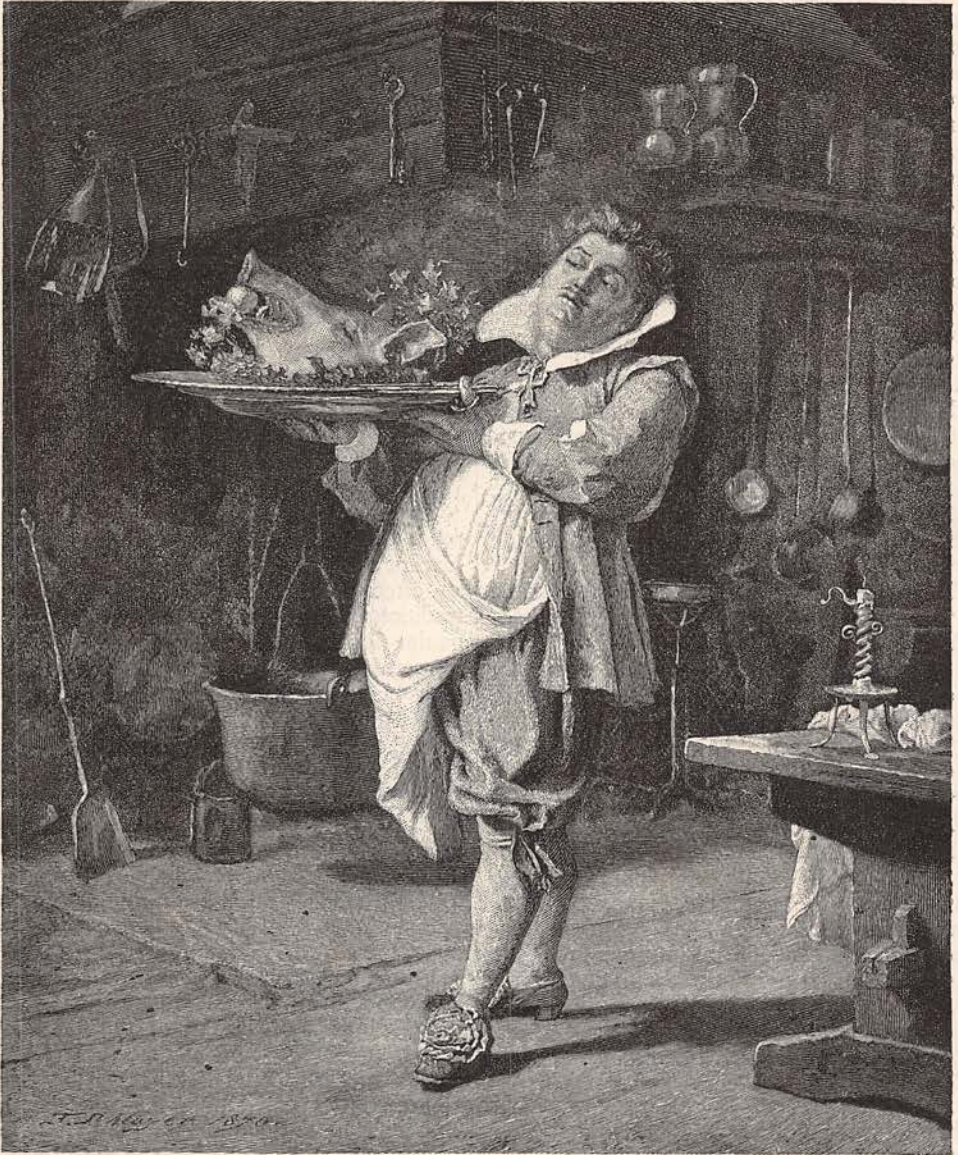
"UNCLE SAM." (FROM AN OIL-PAINTING BY F. B. MAVER.)

In vain we look in modern New York for relics of the signs of the Knickerbockers. Except the "Crowing Rooster," who served so often as the Dutch weathercock, few traditions exist of the sign-boards, with quaint devices and odd verses, which must have guided the Nieuw Amsterdammers to their beloved schnapps. Only the oldest New Yorkers remember the "Uncle Toby"; the "Pewter Mug," the retreat of the old Democracy of Tammany; the "Bull's Head" in the Bowery, or even the "River God" of the Manhattan Water-works. One of the most inviting, perhaps, was an old New York coffee-house, which bore for sign a sirloin steak with the appropriate Shakspearean motto, "If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well 'twere done quickly."

From signs proper we turn to trade symbols, and recall the "Golden Spectacles," the "Mortar and Pestle" or the "Galen's Head," the "Dangling Key," the "Bell," the "Awl," the "Fish," the "Gun," the "Three Gilt Balls" of "my uncle," the barber's pole and brass basin, and notably the tobacco manikins. The old warehouses with steep-tiled roofs, and dormer-doors with overhanging blocks for hoisting; the low counting-rooms with dingy rows of musty ledgers, tall desks, and a wood fire, with rows of leathern buckets hanging from the beams, were the background to the trader's sign, as the inns were to the more

conspicuous sign-board. America may claim as peculiarly her own the manikins of the tobacco vender. So conspicuous were these wooden pieces that it is not to be wondered at that a foreigner arriving in

figure-heads and "tobacco-boys." As one of the family, we present the time-honored remains of one of the oldest of the boys. He is a jolly dorky of the olden time, and must have seen the American troops march



BRINGING IN THE BOAR'S HEAD. (FROM AN OIL-PAINTING BY F. B. MAYER.)

this country asked if these were the statues of our great men. Before these objects became an article of wholesale manufacture, the skill and humor of the ship-carver alternated between land and sea, and his amphibious art begot a varied progeny of

by after their triumphant repulse of the British from Baltimore in 1814. As a veteran, he has lately been placed on the retired list, and, withdrawn from the wind and weather, he enjoys an honored repose in the interior of the shop he has guarded since his infancy.

The three uses of the weed were represented by the smoking Dutchman, the Highlander with his "mull" of snuff, and Jack Tar with his quid; and these, with the aboriginal



AN AMERICAN FAVORITE.

American, the son of Africa, and the turbaned Turk, were formerly the chief favorites; but recent ingenuity has devised many more, including "Punch" and his companion "Judy," the "Girl of the Period," the "Fast Young Man," and others. "Vulcan Lighting His Pipe" and "Sir Walter Raleigh" were favorites in Old England, the latter's merits as a commander being merged in his celebrity as the giver to the world of the great narcotic. A sign-board in London proclaimed that

"Great Britain to great Raleigh owes
The plant and country where it grows,"

under which some one wrote grimly,

"To George and North Old England owes
The loss of country where Tobacco grows."

In Holland, curiously enough, the "Dairy Maid" became the sign, *par excellence*, of tobacco shops; the process of sucking or inhaling the smoke having, by a rather remote association, carried back the Dutchman's mind to tender years of innocence and milk diet. "*Troost for Zuigelingen*" (consolation for sucklings) is still seen as a tobacco-motto, and one from a sign in Holland may be translated:

"Tobacco is a wondrous weed, 'tis easy to explain,
Since people who were long since weaned begin to
suck again."

And here we may balance our books with Old England, to whom for the many sign-board devices she has given us we have returned the "Indian King and Queen," "Jim Crow," "Uncle Tom," and the "Red Rover," all popular signs of London. "Jim Crow" and "Captain Jinks" are almost the only instances of the hero of a song being promoted to the sign-board. "Uncle Tom" or "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is to be found everywhere, not only in England but on the Continent. The title of Cooper's novel seems to have taken hold of the popular fancy to an astonishing degree, not only as a publican's sign, but also for race-horses, ships, and locomotive engines. The "Indian King" is due to a visit to London, in 1710, of four Indian kings from America "who had audiences of Queen Anne and were a good deal talked about." Publicans have a strange fancy for Indian kings, chiefs, and queens, thus bearing out Trinculo's assertion of the nation at large: "When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian." There is a sculptured sign of an Indian chief at Shoreditch having all the appearance of an old ship's figure-head, and in Dolphin Lane, Boston, Lincolnshire,



AN ENGLISH FAVORITE.

there used to be a sign intended for the "Three Kings of Cologne," but by the vulgar called the "Three Merry Devils."

Eventually, by a strange metamorphosis, it became a quaintly dressed female called the "Indian Queen." The "Black Boy" seems to have been a tobacconist's sign from the first; for in Ben Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair" we find: "I thought he would have run mad o' the Black Boy in Bucklersbury, that takes the scurvy rogyu tobacco there." In Jews' row or Royal Hospital row, Chelsea, a sign which greatly mystifies the maimed old heroes is "The Snow-shoes." It is the sign of a house of old standing, and was set up during the excitement of the American war of Independence, when snow-shoes formed part of the equipment of the troops sent out to fight the battles of King George against "Mr. Washington and his rebels."

The "Brood Hen and Chickens," an old English rural sign, the prevalence of which may be accounted for by the kindred love for the barley-corn in the human and gallinaceous tribes, is probably the origin of the "Blue Hen and Chickens," so famous in our Revolution as the sobriquet of Delaware.

A new claimant to sign-board honors in our day, the only sovereign who in our republic asserts his prerogative of popular homage is his majesty "King Gambrinus," liege lord of lager-beer. His origin is mythical, and probably, like Old King Cole,

of fabulous existence. But with the universal consecration of the sign-board to Bacchus, it would be unfair to neglect the mention of the Holly-tree Inns, established in the interests of temperance and economy, and setting as admirable an example in their interior conduct as in the adoption of the old-fashioned sign-board.

We owe to Messrs. Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten, the London antiquaries from whom we have occasionally quoted, a most interesting book in their "History of Sign-boards," which calls up many a picture of the olden time. There is a peculiar pleasure in pondering over these old houses and picturing them to ourselves as again inhabited by the busy tenants of former years; in meeting the great names of history in the hours of relaxation; in calling up the scenes which must often have been witnessed in the haunt of the pleasure-seeker: the tavern, with its noisy company; the coffee-house, with its politicians and smart beaux; and, on the other hand, the quiet, unpretending shop of the ancient book-seller, filled with the monuments of departed minds. America offers no such extensive store of interest as the older lands of Europe, but the field is not altogether barren, and it is to be hoped that much more will yet find record concerning our old inns, shops, and taverns.

