

ana. Then he discovered them and informed the authorities, who auctioned the slaves at eight hundred dollars and up and gave Bowie his informer's half.

Bowie took the comfortable fortune from this trade and began to work west, using his frontiersman experience to develop great rich plantations beyond settlement. This brought him more fortunes till at last the only adventure, sufficiently expansive, that was left for him was Mexican Texas.

Here he found that stories of his Indian fights and personal duels had preceded him and he was received in San Antonio in all honor. He was startled to find that he had been in numbers of encounters that he had never heard about and that the Bowie knife, from being an innocent hunting weapon, had now become a standard fighting blade. A cutlery clerk compared Jim's knife with a "genuine Bowie knife" made in Birmingham, England, and said that Jim's was a good imitation.

This fame, little as he desired it, at least earned him Ursula, the lovely daughter of one of the principal Mexican families. Jim spread his holdings to hundreds of thousands of acres, forgot Sybil in large part, raised two children and prospered, till the differences between the Yankee settlers and the Mexicans drew to a head. The Yankees were aggressive and contemptuous, the Mexicans resentful, and old limping Santa Anna determined to enforce the last sentence of his dictatorship on these unwelcome Northern invaders.

Bowie and his substantial party were anxious to compromise the differences, but there was no disposition for such compromise on either side. The Yankees were quite certain that a handful of them could whip Santa Anna's whole army—a notion which was very nearly proved somewhat later at San Jacinto—and Santa Anna had the benevolent notion of killing most of the Yankees and driving the rest back into Louisiana.

Sybil arrived about this time, married to one of Bowie's best friends, to oppose every proposition Jim brought up; Ursula was an intolerable affront to her. Finally, the whole story is resolved at the Alamo—a very fine sketch of that siege and battle—and Sybil is left with nothing but a collection of rich plantations which are not worth much to her.

The story seems to be historically authentic as far as the high spots are concerned, but that is of secondary importance—it is a first-rate novel and better than that.

Blind in One Eye

LAFCADIO HEARN. By Vera McWilliams. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1946. 44 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

EVER since Lafcadio Hearn's death in 1904 there has been a continued search for material to complete the portrait of this exotic and sensitive writer. It is ironical that the first completely two-dimensional study of Hearn should appear at a time when the country that he adopted and loved has been defeated and occupied by the armed forces of America. It is unfortunate that Vera McWilliams's biography has come too late to revive a wide interest in the man or his work, for only a few of the young people of today know his name or have ever looked into a single one of his many books. Hearn has been an almost legendary figure, so that Jean Temple, the author of a sensitive and intentionally unscholarly biography fifteen years ago, called her book "Blue Ghost." Indeed, the ghost of the tortured little man with one protruding and blind eye, who was baptized Patricio Lafcadio Tessima Carlos Hearn, has hovered over many cities and countries—the Greek island where he was born, Ireland, Paris, Cincinnati, New Orleans, the West Indies, and Japan. It would now appear that in this latest book we have about all of him that will ever be found, a tragic human being patched together from reminiscences, diaries, letters, newspapers, literary essays, translations, and his own writings.

There has never been any real controversy about the work of Laf-

cadio Hearn that was not based on the differences between those who loved and those who hated him. He had a way of making some people fiercely protective toward him and of rasping the nerves of others who recognized his genius but could not endure the man.

We are insistent today in trying to discover not only what a man accomplished but the springs that moved him to become what he was. Vera McWilliams's faithful recital of Hearn's life from conception to his death still leaves him a mystery. Why should any boy or man, gifted with the mental resources to create beauty, have been so wretched for nearly all of his existence? Why should he have acted like an imp of Satan in the Irish and very Catholic household of his father's relatives in Ireland? Why should he have married his colored mistress in Cincinnati; why should he have infuriated his earnest and admiring publishers? A biographer who was even an amateur psychoanalyst might have made a stab at giving Hearn another dimension and have thus created a solid object for one's examination. Lafcadio Hearn chose to wear a hair shirt almost all of his life until he tore it off for the sensuous Japanese kimono ten years or so before he died. His once beautiful Maltese mother, who was left with her scrawny child to the mercies of foggy Dublin and a religion and language she could not understand, lost her mind and left the boy with dismal and terrifying recollections. His myopic eyes saw the actual world so dimly that he was cut off from the reality of the tempestuous Celtic natures around him. He was handed over finally to his father's wealthy aunt, who would have made him her heir had he not seemed to her ungrateful and wicked.

Mrs. Brenane was a Catholic zealot who regarded his passionate interest in a collection of books on Oriental and classical religion and art he had found as an evidence of original sin. She took them away from him and gave them back, mutilated, with trousers, skirts, or briefer drawers crudely inked over the central portions of Greek, Chinese, and Indian gods and goddesses. At that moment a hatred of Christian saints and Christian prudery and the romantic attraction for the Orient that finally lured him to Japan were born in him. When his great-aunt died, leaving him penniless and without a soul who cared whether he lived or died, the damage was done. He had to be a rebel, unconventional, exotic, to use a

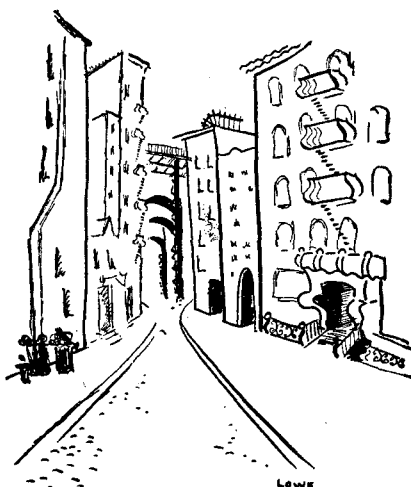


"His sympathy toward Japan helped to blind the aggressive West toward the increasing menace of the people of the rising sun." Lafcadio Hearn, his Japanese wife, and son Kazuo Koizumi.

term always applied to him, for the rest of his days in the Western world. Add to this his screaming terrors when he was shut up in a black room at night, the imprint on his sensuous nature of his brief adolescent acquaintance with the Latin Quarter in Paris, to which he had escaped from a Catholic French school, and you have the makings of Lafcadio Hearn, uneasy world-wanderer, creator of exquisite prose and of the most startling and florid journalism that America, up to that time, had ever read.

Like Poe and many another genius who has struggled to create literature in this country, he was born at the wrong time. Cincinnati, or even New Orleans, toward which his romanticism drew him, offered no ground in the seventies and the eighties to so sensitive a human plant. By the time he was thirty he knew all of the sordidness and ugliness of extreme poverty in the ruthless and expanding cities on the Ohio and the Mississippi. He was one of the first to recognize the poetic qualities of Negro speech and song as they were colored by the linguistic inheritance of the French Creoles. When *Harper's* sent him to the West Indies, Hearn's opportunity to reveal his stylistic and imaginative gifts had come. He did not need any longer to write lurid newspaper stories or articles on New Orleans cooking. In spite of the difficulty of keeping friends who were always being affronted by his apparently outrageous behavior (like Henry Krehbiel, the music critic, whose wife could not endure him, or Dr. Milbray, a literary oculist who turned from worshipful admiration to rancorous hatred), there were by this time a small coterie of critics and literary folk who regarded him as an odd and prickly genius. When he finally left for Japan, commissioned by the long-suffering editor of *Harper's*, he had become a kind of romantic legend among the writers and publishers whose lives were properly regulated.

It was typical of Hearn that he quarrelled with *Harper's* before he arrived in Japan. His employment as a teacher in a school at Matsue enabled him to cut off his financial dependence on New York. His marriage to a well-born Japanese girl of twenty-two gave him a physical tranquillity he had never known before. He could begin his real life task, the interpretation of the Orient and especially of Japan to the West, which still conceived of the Nipponese as they were represented in an opera, "Madame Butterfly," and an operetta, "The Mikado." The natural politeness of the Japanese, the reverence with which they treated a foreign profes-



sor who wore their costume and became a citizen of their country, soothed for the first time Hearn's inveterate awkwardness and sense of inferiority; his gaucheries, his blind eye, his small stature no longer mattered among these exquisite little people. When he became absorbed in his studies of Buddhism and busy

with his lucid and eloquent lectures on English literature, his soul was at rest.

Since the war it is the habit of readers of his "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan" or his "Japan; An Attempt at Interpretation" to discover that Hearn appreciated the dangers to the world that were hidden in the Japanese way of life, their mentality, and their Emperor worship. There are a few passages, particularly in the latter book, which show that Hearn, who had seen symptoms of their antagonism toward the West during the war with Russia, realized the dreadful fate toward which the country was heading. But there are only a few of these prophetic moments in his work, and it is obvious that his sympathy for Japan, his presentation of its people as an exotic, virtuous, and artistic race, helped, more than the work of any other man, to blind the aggressive West toward the increasing menace of the people of the rising sun; for was not Lafcadio Hearn blind in one eye?

A Connecticut Childhood

THE LOST LANDSCAPE. By Winifred Welles. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1946. 299 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by SARA HENDERSON HAY

WHEN Winifred Welles died in 1939, there was lost not only a fine and sensitive poet but a prose writer of great charm and distinction. This posthumous book, her only adult prose work (she had written, I believe, two books for children in addition to her five volumes of exquisite verse), is partly a recollection of her own childhood and partly the recreation of an earlier time—stories of those forebears whose relics and memories were so carefully and lovingly preserved in the attic of the old house in Norwich Town, Connecticut. Hers was a particularly fortunate and idyllic New England childhood at the turn of the century—the comfortable wide house, the meadows, and the friendly graveyards "where a child need fear nothing from those who lay so quietly and patiently beneath his scuffling feet," the sleigh bells on frosty mornings, the Decoration Day parades which "marched up to the Soldiers Monument in the Park where everyone sat on benches eating peanuts and drinking root beer out of bottles and listening to the speeches and the music," fishballs for Sunday breakfast and the starched and immaculate procession to church, the school "conducted" by two maiden ladies of Norwich Town—"Miss Cynthia Lucas, who

must have been the original pattern from which all New England school-teachers were cut," and Miss Arabella Lucas, the younger sister, "shorter, gentler and vaguer."

And there was the attic, which, "like a family memory book, had a keepsake for everybody." In the attic, she tells us, "history shrank, but the lives as I came upon them seemed distinct and important, each in its own right. The place was so cluttered that it took my mind no longer to dart across the decades, even from war to war, than it took my eyes to glance from the Union soldier's sword to the cedar-lined medicine chest which had belonged to the Revolutionary doctor." Here in the attic was the Chinese porcelain vase which had been filled with family silver and buried when the British burned New London in 1781. Here were the letters written by the boy who was killed in the Civil War, with them a bullet and his mother's note, in her delicate Victorian hand, "the Minnie Ball that killed my son." Here was the powder horn engraved "Doct. Jonathan Adgate, His Horn, Fort Edward, Sept. 29, 1758." To the dreamy, sensitive child the people whose possessions these had been were still alive; to the woman she grew up to be, so rich in memory and imagination, they continued real and vital.

In part two of the book the author re-creates the lives and times of these ancestors. There is the complete story of great-great-grandfather Jon-