

THE LATE GEORGE APLEY by John Marquand

Jerry O'Connell

The gem of History has many facets. Historical accounts are not only found in the history books but can be found in old letters between friends, diaries, and even pictures of a particular time. The Late George Apley is such a facet. This book is a collection of letters mainly between George Apley and his son. These letters reflect not only what George Apley is like but what the Boston where Apley lived was like during the late 1800's and early twentieth century.

In 1866 George Apley's Boston was a town with strong puritanical beliefs; a town where your ethnic background was very important. During Apley's life in Boston, the Irish immigration inundated Boston; changing it to an Irish-American city full of brawling, carousing men with political fights, corruption uncharacteristic of the puritanical Boston of the past.

The most delightful part of this fictional book is Apley's letters to his son and his family. In these letters we see Apley's reflections of what is happening not only to himself but also to Boston. In many of Apley's letters, especially those written to his son, the spendthrift puritanical Boston family-oriented Brahmin becomes visible.

"Dear John,

...You can never forget now, whether you like it or not that you bear the family name. It may not mean much to you now but it will. You will be harassed by a number of requests for contributions. You must learn to spend your money wisely and I need not say that your father will be ready with advice. Half of your income should be reinvested annually and the remaining be divided between living expenses and charities..."

In just this brief excerpt we see that Apley is concerned very much about family name, money and the idea that it was the responsibility of the rich to provide for the needy through charity.

In conclusion, this book is a superb example of a man living in a rapidly expanding town. Although Apley is fictional this book is an excellent reflection of how the upper strata of Bostonians reacted to the changes of their community. It is for that reason I recommend this book to any one interested in the history of Boston social life in the seventy years from around 1860 to 1930. Read it!