Side Steps in the Past.

**Within** a hundred miles of the Hub an old city rests placidly by the sea, gazing, with folded hands, eastward over the dark blue waves that used to bear her argosies to and from the Orient. Her work rests in the past, and, like an aged mother, all her thoughts are with the years that have sped. She dreams, and her vanished children once more return and fill her streets; her wharves once more are crowded with many a strange craft and shapely model that would delight the heart of the yachtsman of to-day. The tackle creaks to the tune of the sailors’ “Yo heave ho, my lads; bend your backs, hoist below, yo heave ho!” and the air is redolent with the perfume of spices from far-off climes, as the heavy bales rise slowly from the ship’s hold to upper air.

The old warehouses open their doors, and disclose the merchant and his clerks bending low over their ledgers, while porters trundle many a queer-shaped cask, box, and bale into the dim recesses beyond. But the angel of this resurrection again lays its dead, and the ghostly ships sail back into the past; the doors swing to on their hinges, and the present sees but a few aged wharves, with moss-covered piers, around which the waters gurgle as the tide sweeps in and out from the tumultuous Atlantic. The ancient commercial buildings, with their many stories and queer little Queen Anne window-panes, blink in the rays of the setting sun like old eyes just awakening from a nap. The streets run aimlessly down to the wharves with a sort of hands-in-the-pocket style, as if lounging about for companionship, and astonished to find everything so dead, wheel sharply off to visit the next one, and so on, in and out, until the tour is complete, and it is forced to strike off for town.

The streets all radiate from a common centre called the square. Here the principal church stands, from which nightly the curfew bell sends forth its note of warning and command, telling of nine o’clock and a completed day. “Innocuous desuetude” has not yet penetrated the precincts of the town, and the good old way is the way yet. Enclosing the Square come the shops, — not stores; shops is the word here, — standing shoulder to shoulder, guiltless of any new school levity, but serious, sedate, placid shops, that know they have a certain dignity to support, and are not going to upset it by gimeracks of any kind. They all stop respectfully quite a distance from the church, which stands alone. No putting stores under consecrated buildings when that edifice was erected. There was a deference and politeness toward religion and its outward habiliments that many a year has failed to weaken. In this church gathered the Puritan element, and heard unflinchingly the long prayer, an hour in length, and the sermon, with its heads, divisions, firstlys, secondlys, sometimes to sixthlys, followed by in conclusion, lastly, to conclude, finally. Farther down the town the royalists used to worship, and after them the tories, who handed it over to its present owners, the Episcopalians. The pews are, or were, all square, high-backed, shutting the occupants, when sitting, from the view of every one but the rector. The pulpit was reached by a pair of stairs that wound round and round within a column, so that the clergyman disappeared after entering until he emerged high in air, “to be seen of all men.” Above hung the sounding-board, that caught the words of wisdom and showered them back to the parishioners in the pews below. On the cushion rested the pride of the church, a large Bible with silver clasps, presented by Queen Anne in the days when church and state meant something.

It was at the library or club, however, that the best souvenirs of the last generation were to be found. At whatever time you dropped in, — morning, noon, or night,— there, gathered round the periodicals, or poring over some musty volumes, would be found the literary element of the city. A visitor could tell by the strangeness of the dress that many wore, and the courtliness with which they approached each other, that he was looking on other days. One bright particular light wore a dark-blue swallow-tail coat, with brass buttons of immense size and dazzling brilliancy. A soiled ruffle forced its