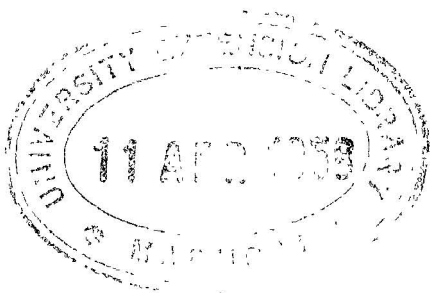


# SKETCHES IN CRITICISM

BY

VAN WYCK BROOKS

*Author of "The Life of Emerson," "The Pilgrimage of  
Henry James," "The Ordeal of Mark Twain," etc.*



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*In Memory of My Brother*  
CHARLES AMES BROOKS





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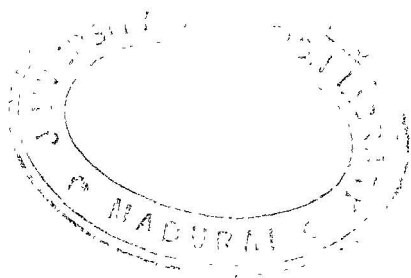
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SKETCHES  
IN CRITICISM







## THE CRITICAL MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

**I**T WAS only the other day that America first came in for its effective share of self-criticism. The critical movement in America happened, as it were, overnight; and the critic in this country is still so new a type that we cannot be surprised if he is regarded as an undesirable alien, even a traitor. There is nothing else in all modern history like the unanimity of praise and confidence with which, by its passengers, the American Ship of State was launched and manned. In all our long nineteenth-century past, there was scarcely a breath of dissent, doubt or censure: the semi-outlaw Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* was almost unique in this regard, for Emerson's and Lowell's strictures were lost in the flood of their social optimism. No wonder we became the most complacent of peoples. No wonder the tide of criticism rose at last.

One thinks of all this as one considers, for instance, such an alien point of reference as John Ruskin. To most of us, no doubt, Ruskin has always seemed a normal and familiar possession. Yet, as one reflects on his career, the thought comes to one's mind: How different this man was from anything the America of his day could have produced! Hear, for example, what Mr. Masfield recently said of him: "Ruskin, looking out upon

his native land some eighty years ago, decided that he could not believe in it, that there was nothing spiritual there which he could trust, nor human work being done which he could share." Imagine a nineteenth-century American giving utterance to such a sentiment, the sentiment from which Ruskin's work sprang! Yet this was surely the animating sentiment of the greatest English literature of the century, even of Charles Dickens: who but Macaulay, of all the writers of England, was not filled, as regards the future of his people, with more or less fundamental doubts? And meanwhile, the writers of America chanted a unanimous hymn to progress. They were happy, they were hopeful. They agreed, or seemed to agree, with the famous utterance of Edward Everett: "Our government is in its theory perfect, and in its operation it is perfect also. Thus we have solved the great problem in human affairs." Was this because the American life of their epoch was finer and more wholesome than English life? Because it contained a greater spiritual promise? Few in our generation would affirm this. We know too well how fully justified were most of the European travellers' reflections on our old social life—which used to cause such resentment in American breasts: they were not malignant, those travellers' reflections, any more than the comments of the European critics and scholars—Ruskin himself, for instance—who looked upon "Americanism" as a poisonous growth that might well infect and destroy all civilization. And as we observe the complacency to which our national optimism gave birth, we ask ourselves whether this

optimism was ever a symptom of health, whether it was not indeed the symptom of a great evil: the loss of a clear sense of the true values of life.

It is certain, in any case, that our criticism has suffered from the obvious necessity of making up for much lost time. We do not understand criticism, and this is because we have had so little of it. We have had no candid friends of our own race, no "national conscience," in short, such as every European people has had, for England is not unique in this respect; and, consequently, it was difficult a few years ago for most Americans to question the belief of Mr. Meredith Nicholson, for instance, that "if there is any manifestation on earth of a divine ordering of things, it is here in America." This is the sort of belief the Philistine majority in every country cherishes in its heart; it is the sort of belief that Matthew Arnold so well described as "vulgar, and not only vulgar but retarding," for retarding it surely is if, in order to go somewhere, to get somewhere, to advance, to develop, we must first have an inner conviction that we have not already arrived. If American life as we know it is indeed a manifestation of a divine ordering of things, there is nothing for us to do but to continue to manifest our divinity. But is our life divine? Is it so much better than the life of England, France, Germany, Russia that the comments of a Ruskin, a Renan, a Nietzsche would have been sheer impertinences on our side of the Atlantic? The prosperous middle class the world over looks upon itself and its own fatness with an overkindly eye; but America is the only modern country

where, until recent years, the prosperous middle class has gone unchallenged, where the Philistines have never been aroused to a sense of their limitations. Heine never permitted the Germans to forget how much they had to learn; no one was ever more outspoken than Nietzsche in regard to "what the Germans lack." The French are complacent enough; but Renan never ceased to remind them of their "incurable religious mediocrity," of "the alternations of levity and dullness, of narrow timidity and foolish temerity" which are among the features of the French mind. Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, as we know, kept their guns steadily trained on the weaknesses of the English character; and while Ibsen lived, how many illusions in regard to their peculiar superiority were the people of Norway suffered to cherish?

Merely to mention these names is to suggest how uniformly our American fur has been rubbed the right way. For while Emerson, Lowell, Whitman deplored the imperfections of our social life, their criticism was neither sustained nor drastic. Emerson was the incarnation of optimism and lived, besides, too much in a timeless world to concern himself with a single phase of history: this was not his rôle. Lowell was so conscious of that "certain condescension in foreigners" that he could not sufficiently draw the veil over the shortcomings of his countrymen. And there was Howells, with his rosy vision of the American scene, all the more delusive because he professed an intransigent realism. There was even Henry James, whom nothing could have induced to live in America: did he not apolo-

gize in one of his prefaces for having spoken in terms of disrespect of a certain small city in Massachusetts, adding so much thereby to the ultimate obloquy of those who have since reproached our Gopher Prairies? These men, of course, were not primarily critics, and that is just the point; Thoreau was not primarily a critic; in fact, before the war we had no critics. Those who could not put up with our life in the East quietly went West, and those who could not put up with our life at all quietly went to Europe. No one stood still and spoke out; and after the Civil War, even the voices of the travelling foreigners who told the truth about many of our ways were cloaked and muffled. Everyone waited, waited, by common consent, to see how the great experiment of democracy was going to work out. We had sixty years of grace, while the oracles were dumb.

We were, in a word, singularly unconscious. America "just grew"—in the manner of the British Empire perhaps, but certainly in a very different manner from England itself, or France or Germany. It grew by sheer activity, expansion, immigration, without forethought, afterthought, reflection of any kind. That is to say, since no population is ever aware of itself as a population, save perhaps in times of war, it had no governing and directing minority more conscious than the multitude, more conscious of human values, no class of thinkers who, while having no administrative authority, might yet have exercised a real authority over popular opinion, interpreting the movements of society in the light of historical principles, and

arousing in those who were intelligent and articulate a just sense of what was really happening. Who knew, for instance, that America was becoming an empire, apprehended this fact in all its implications? America never "meant" to become an empire, and few Americans know, even today, really know, I mean, *apprehend*, that America is an empire, with all the paraphernalia of imperialism. This change came automatically, as it were, because, contrary as it plainly was to the professed genius of the Republic, no strong, articulate minority showed the people what was taking place before their eyes. One has only to compare the feeble protests that arose throughout this country over the annexation of the Philippines with the outburst of resentment and remonstrance, of satire and impassioned poetry, evoked in England by the Boer War, to perceive the difference between a conscious and an unconscious society; and the difference only widens when we remember that imperialism in the England of those days had been for generations a deliberate national policy.

So it was that after the Civil War our social history became an illustration of what might be called a policy of indifference. The individual stood aside and let things take their course. To a large extent, this has been true of our thought from the beginning: whether optimistic, as with Emerson and Whitman, or pessimistic, as with Henry Adams and Mark Twain, it has always tended to be fatalistic. It has assumed, or tended to assume, that things were "coming out all right," because Americans are Americans, or else that things were

coming out all wrong, because nothing could stop them from doing so, because human life itself is a mistake, as Mark Twain thought, or because, as Henry Adams thought, evolution is merely a matter of thermo-dynamics. These attitudes are all fatalistic because they beg the question of human control or deny its possibility; and together they have formed the various strands of a national tradition in which the critical intellect has played scarcely any part whatever. That America must and will be perfect just by being itself, or that America is doomed and damned: these are the two poles between which, even to this day, our public opinion oscillates. The cultivated classes are too often convinced, although they keep their opinion to themselves, that the country is already doomed and damned. The rest are equally sure, not that the country will be, but that the country already is what Mr. Nicholson calls it; and they have plainly arrived at this opinion by lowering their human standards to a point where the great values of life do not exist. Mr. Nicholson, who speaks so complacently of the "divine ordering of things" in America, also says that "a town is better advertised by enlightened sanitary ordinances duly enforced than by the number of its citizens who are acquainted with the writings of Walter Pater. If Main Street knows," he adds, "what America is all about, and bathes itself and is kind and considerate of its neighbours, why not leave the rest on the knees of the gods?" Why, indeed, if we share Mr. Nicholson's indifference to the great human values? "We do not know," he says again, "we do not



know but that in some far day a prowling New Zealander, turning up a banjo and a trap-drum amid the ruins of some American college, will account them nobler instruments than the lyre and lute." But why wait for the "ruins" of this American college? The ruins are with us already if we have lost a sense of the distinction between the trap-drum and the lyre and lute.

And the sense of this distinction has been lost, too largely lost, because criticism, in all these years, has failed to keep it alive. Mr. William Allen White has observed that he would like to collect the junior pessimists who are raking America with their criticism and duck them in the town-pump. One readily understands Mr. White's resentment, for he has himself gone through life without once being held up, without once being checked in his rampant career of self-congratulation over the virtues of Kansas. And Mr. White's resentment is widely shared; one constantly hears of apostles of good-Americanism who have "had about enough" of these junior pessimists. And it cannot be denied that for this resentment there exists a certain reason, for few indeed of the pessimists in question are not open to the retort that they are themselves no more essentially civilized than the civilization they attack. We are always well aware of what they hate; we are seldom aware at all of what they love, and only what they love can civilize us. This is true; yet, save for these same vipers, whose critical equipment is, one admits, defective, where else in America can we turn for criticism? The "best" magazines freely

open their columns to Mr. Nicholson's and Mr. White's opinions; the "best" people, as we are led to suppose, delight in these opinions. At every adverse comment on our civilization the cry still goes up: But there is so much to be said on the other side! And no one questions this; what one asserts, and asserts, and asserts again, is that there is so much to be said on *this* side. If it were not for these vipers who have risen among us, we should all find ourselves intellectually on the level of the "man in the street" for whom Messrs. Nicholson and White are so proud to speak. The conservative reviews, as one might think, exist for the purpose of combating the radical reviews, giving aid and comfort to that false-Americanism, now dominant through the world, the rise and spread of which was the nightmare of those European critics of the nineteenth century whose standards they profess to uphold.

In short, before the emergence of our critical movement, the clear sense of the great values of life had long been submerged in America. For we are obliged to take Mr. White and Mr. Nicholson at their word and assume that they really do not know the difference between the trap-drum and the lyre and lute, or between the Valley of Democracy and the Kingdom of Heaven. We are even obliged to take at their word the defenders of some pseudo-American tradition who failed to challenge Edward Bok, for instance, when he adopted the word "Americanization" to describe a career that was throughout devoted, with whatever good intentions, to the vulgarization of American life. And

we cannot expect that those who are colour-blind to the great values of life, in the name of which criticism speaks, will see anything but animus in this criticism, or regard it as anything but insulting. This indeed would be true if our criticism were ten times more certain of its values than it is: we know that Mr. White would as readily duck a Ruskin as a Mencken. For Americans are not accustomed to plain speaking. We cherish a romantic view of our activities, and an American spade, to most of us, is not a spade at all: it is a sword, an implement of knighthood, and to call it a spade is to challenge our fondest prepossessions. The romantic soul dwells in the region of hyperbole, and its virtues are not the virtues of understatement. This fact explains the apparent censoriousness of much of our recent social criticism. Some of this criticism has really been censorious, it has been so by reaction; but much of it has only appeared censorious. If we had been accustomed to a realistic view of our affairs, and a true historic sense of human values, we should have accepted this criticism, and even rejoiced in it.

For we know how America appears in the eyes of the world. The Japanese poet, Mr. Yone Noguchi, is the spokesman of contemporary humanity when he describes our country as "floating comfortably on the ocean all by itself, as if a well-fed seal or lazy iceberg." And those who have an interest in America, its true life, its true historic rôle, are aware that such a posture is a perilous posture. No doubt, in the beginning, this uncritical attitude, this attitude of uncriticized faith and hope,

contributed much to our dawning civilization. A new country is obliged to affirm its existence, to believe in itself against all comers. If the America of three generations ago had seen itself as Europeans saw it, as its own cultivated minds saw it in the privacy of their souls, it would have lost heart; for with nations as with individuals nothing is more paralyzing than a premature self-consciousness. Our old writers were surely well aware of all that was imperfect in our society, but they were aware also that too much cannot be expected of a new country. They saw, moreover, that America was too deeply in the grip of unusual natural forces for criticism to have much effect upon it; for, as Frederick Turner pointed out in his study of *The Frontier in American History*, the development of American civilization in the nineteenth century exhibited a constant return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier-line. Our social development was always beginning again *de novo* on the frontier, and this largely prevented Americans even in the settled areas from retaining a firm hold upon civilized values. And so our old writers, convinced of the futility of criticism, turned their reluctant energies in other directions. Meanwhile, with few exceptions, the immigrants from the Old World belonged to the inarticulate classes; and for them it was enough, or seemed enough, that the New World afforded them opportunities, of an economic sort, which they had not possessed in the Old. We know how these immigrants expressed themselves. Such works as *The Promised Land* and *The Making of an American*

contributed immensely to our national self-esteem; and, what is more to the point, in the absence of native spokesmen who might have maintained the sense of human values, they served as the final proof in American eyes that our civilization was superior in all essentials to the civilization of Europe. In this realm, the realm of self-congratulation, it never rains but it pours.

Because of these peculiar circumstances, our social history differs from that of any of the European countries. We have never conceived it as possible to shape our social life. This social life has grown and changed so rapidly, so many racial strains have merged themselves in it, so many new territories have opened before it, this life has indeed existed in such a flux that the idea of moulding it has scarcely even entered our calculations. It was this that prevented for so long the development of criticism in America. We know how quietistic Hawthorne was regarding every prospect of social change; we know his fear, embodied in the character of Hollingsworth, of tampering with "the natural order of things." A similar diffidence inhibited Mark Twain, and surely this was one of the reasons that led Henry Adams to hide his life and restrained him from coming forward as the critic he plainly wished to be. They felt, these gifted men, that the only course for them was to stand aside and watch the American process—some in faith, others in despair, and more and more in despair, as they saw how little the process contemplated of what to them was important for civilization. For they felt that they could never

shape the process, or control it in any way. Yet the longer the process continued, the more it became apparent that Americans, in so far as they were Americans who piqued themselves on their "Americanism," were ceasing to desire, were ceasing even to be able to desire, consciously and with their minds and wills, any goals in life except the goals that were placed before them by the world of trade. Yes, even to the point where their perceptions had come to rest on a purely physical plane.

But *autres temps, autres mœurs*. We have nourished ourselves on hope in America, where we should have nourished ourselves on desire. Many have hoped for America, few have desired for America. And desire is the mother of intention. And desire cannot come without criticism. "It is an *idea*," as John Eglinton says, for which we wait. "Without an idea man is frivolous, dissatisfied, despicable. With an idea the long-hoarded initiatives of his nature are liberated, he strains forward to new consummations." Criticism, so silent in the past, is vocal now in America; and why should it be vocal if there were not within it a sudden faith in the ability of Americans to shape their destiny, to mould it and give it form, to ride things as things have ridden them? The division between the two great camps of modern American writers is a division between those who are still satisfied with a national state of adolescence and those who exact of America the traits and responsibilities of maturity; and if the latter appear a little rough and importunate, it is because they are

obliged to shake out of a deep sleep a population that should have been kept awake by an unbroken succession of gentle proddings. The recent damming-up of our social energies, through the closing of the frontier at the West and the slackening of immigration at the East, enables us really for the first time to submit to a candid scrutiny our prepossessions in regard to property and every other fundamental issue, to desire a great and beautiful corporate life. How scattered our forces have been! We have taken pleasure, it seems, in making machines of men; and, repudiating the vision of a good society, we have not discouraged our finest intellects from giving up society as a bad job and devoting to the material periphery the passion they might have devoted to human beings. Our thought has been centrifugal instead of centripetal; it has gone out to the frame, it has never fixed itself upon the picture.

The great social thinkers, the great critics have given us a sense of society as a whole, and of man as a social animal, capable of moulding his environment towards a humane ideal. And Ruskin, as Lawrence Binyon says, might well have taken as his motto the lines of Blake:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.

American criticism, too, is capable of such a vision. But this is certain, American criticism will never

attain its object as long as it fails to conceive, as something ever-present in its purview, the "green and pleasant land" it contemplates. The great critics have always convinced the world in spite of the prepossessions of the world; it is their ability to do so that makes these critics great and worthy of attention, for unless they speak with reasonableness and human understanding they confess in their own words that they do not possess that in the name of which they pretend to speak. No doubt, for many years in this country the critics and the unconverted public are destined to wage the blindest kind of warfare; for the critical attitude in our general mind has perished from disuse. But as long as this continues let us remember that our work is only a kind of spadework, which antecedes the real task of criticism. To forget this is to have lost the battle. For Amiel expressed the just motto of critics in those memorable words: "Truth should not merely conquer, it should win."



## MR. MENCKEN AND THE PROPHETS

NOT long ago Mr. Mencken indulged in a rather grim exultation over the discomfiture of the prophets of a spiritual awakening in American literature. From Emerson to Carl Sandburg, he said, there has been a long line of enthusiasts predicting, in Whitman's words, that "a great original literature is sure to become the justification and reliance (in some respects the sole reliance) of American democracy"; and he pointed out that, after a hundred years of this brave assurance, nothing has been produced to justify it. What is the literature, he asked, that America has produced and continues to produce? "Viewed largely," he said, in reply to his own question, "its salient character appears as a sort of timorous flaccidity, an amiable hollowness. In bulk it grows more and more formidable, in ease and decorum it makes undoubted progress, and on the side of mere technique, of the bald capacity to write, it shows an ever-widening competence. But when one proceeds from such agencies and externals to the intrinsic substance, to the creative passion within, that substance quickly reveals itself as thin and watery, and that passion fades to something almost puerile."

Certainly Mr. Mencken is quite right in saying

that time has not in any tangible way borne the prophets out. "I know not a land except ours," said Whitman, who would have used the same words today, "that has not to some extent, however small, made its title clear." Nevertheless, there is an aspect of this prophecy, and an aspect of the literature that has given it the lie, which Mr. Mencken has ignored. And it happens that these aspects are, from the point of view of criticism, precisely the most essential.

Mr. Mencken has read the Bible. He has read the prophets of the Old Testament; and he knows that they were "mistaken," too. They were always predicting a Utopia and a Messiah and a spiritual awakening in Israel. Did anything of the sort come to pass? Even those who assume that the Messiah did eventually come are obliged to admit that centuries intervened between the prediction and the event. But the fact is that prophecy has nothing to do with events: that its wishes are not fulfilled in no way invalidates its function. Prophecy, whatever it seems to say, concerns not the future but the present; and prophets, if they are true prophets, are never "mistaken." False prophets, of course, exist; but what makes them false is not that events fail to bear them out, but that they are untrue to their office.

What is the office of prophecy? And why is it that prophets are never mistaken? Mr. Mencken quotes these words of Emerson: "The office of the scholar"—in Emerson's mind another name for the prophet—"is to cheer, to raise and to guide men by showing them facts amid appearances." These

"facts amid appearances" give prophecy its secure basis, and the function of prophecy is to insist upon them and upon their implications. And what are these facts? That life is not being but becoming, that men are almost infinitely suggestible, that humanity contains the permanent possibility of a spiritual awakening, and that whether it awakens or not, whether it lives an existence preoccupied with inanimate things, motor-cars, bath-rooms, underclothes and the general stock-in-trade of the advertisers, or with animate things, colour, line and harmony, poetry, friendship, comedy and tragedy, depends upon the conditions that surround it and the stimuli that are brought to bear upon it. In ages like our own, which have known hardly any other stimulus than that of animal competition, people not only cease to believe or to be interested in this permanent possibility, they willingly forget that any other mode of life than their own has ever prevailed; and this although authentic records tell us how, seven centuries ago, for instance, whole countrysides, with radiant gaiety, with a rapturous joy of life, dedicated themselves to the building of the cathedrals, and a city turned out, not as a mob but as an army of persons, sentient human beings, to follow a painted picture through the streets. Does Mr. Mencken remember Huysmans's account of the building of Chartres Cathedral? Has he read Vasari's life of Cimabue? Then he knows that humanity in the mass is capable of responding to almost any stimulus, if it is powerful and constant enough. And the office of prophecy is to keep it aware of this fact. It keeps men aware

that they have certain inalienable opportunities. Its predictions are simply the fulfillments on paper of wishes that exist in men's minds and that men can still fulfill in their own persons.

Provided, of course, that they get the stimulus! And here is the second point that Mr. Mencken ignores. He says that the prophets of our literature have been deluded because this literature has not come up to their wishes, ignoring the fact that it is no concern of the prophets whether or not their predictions are carried out. He also says that the substance of our literature "reveals itself as thin and watery," and that its passion fades when we examine it to "something almost puerile," ignoring the fact that if a literature is thin, watery and puerile, it is because the spirits of its creators are thin and puerile, too, and that not the prophets but the creators of a literature are individually and collectively responsible for the character of what they create. Mr. Mencken, who is human, all-too-human, and rightly does not wish to play the prig, tends by the very tone of his criticism to deprecate this notion of responsibility: he asks the public to produce an aristocracy that will uphold the writers! And yet this notion of responsibility is the law upon which the prophets are obliged to depend in stimulating the writers whose task it is, in turn, to give other men the stimulus they need. What is a national literature? Is it anything at bottom but the work of half a dozen men? What is Russian literature? Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoievsky, Gorky and a small company of others who have been touched into life by these

great leaders and who have in turn touched others into life. And even these great leaders have acknowledged that they were touched into life by Pushkin, the fount of everything the world knows as Russian. Mr. Mencken has stated very clearly why it is that American literature has not fulfilled the prophecies that have been made regarding it. "One is conscious," he says, "of no brave and noble earnestness" in our literature, "of no generalized passion for intellectual and spiritual adventure, of no organized determination to think things out." And he knows that these good things are not to be expected of any mere invisible Authors' League. Mr. Mencken speaks of the need of an aristocracy; but what is aristocracy in essence but the sense of being responsible? And since that is what every American repudiates, the writers no less than the rest of the population, is it surprising that the prophets have been "deluded"? To responsible writers, prophecy is not a prediction, prophecy is a challenge; and the trouble with American literature is that no one has had the strength to take the challenge up.

This is the root of all our American troubles. We have lived for a century and a half on the bland assurance that everything is coming out right, at the same time passing on the responsibility to everybody and anybody else, until things have actually come out as wrong as things well could. The assumption of democracy in all departments of life has resulted in a sort of reversal of rational values, so that we have become aristocratic in the material sphere and plebeian in the sphere of the

spirit. The sphere of the spirit, meanwhile, is the only sphere of which it can be said that beyond all question it requires an aristocratic polity. What is our literature, if it is not, to quote a phrase of D. H. Lawrence, a "disarray of falling stars coming to naught"? And why do they come to naught, these falling stars? Because writers, unlike men of affairs, who consolidate their power through the simplest of the moral faculties, by seizing upon material opportunities, are obliged to work with their obscure perceptions, obliged to follow the most treacherous mental leads, the leads of an imagination that is conditioned by all sorts of intangible, incalculable things, temperament, health, fluctuating energy, poverty, divided loyalties and all the rest of the devils that beset the human spirit. Why should anyone write? And why should anyone write well?—especially when the less one writes the more esteem one has, and the worse one writes the more money one gets? There is no more fantastic occupation from the point of view of mere common sense; and, as common sense prevails in America, our literature naturally becomes what it is. And in every other country literature would become what it is in America if it failed to produce, as regularly as the stars go round, an aristocracy of the spirit that keeps it up to the mark.

For what does this aristocracy accomplish? It creates, in the first place, by its rightful prestige, such a sense of the splendour of the vocation that sensitive men, perceiving it, are eager to put up with an army of devils, eager indeed to pass

through purgatory, in order to have even a chance of serving a cult that is so divine. It preserves the secrets of the vocation so that men of good will can come to it and learn the discipline by which the human spirit gains possession of itself and finds its direction. It creates standards by which men can measure themselves; it sets up signposts that prevent men from wandering off the highway and getting their feet entangled in quicksands. It infuses literature and the literary life with grace, magnanimity, knowledge, passion, disinterestedness and all the other conquests of which great men alone are fully capable but which all of us can share in a measure. These are some of the services an aristocracy of the spirit renders to literature. Without them, indeed, literature in the proper sense cannot exist at all.

This is what Whitman meant by his "promulgation and belief in such a class or order—a new and greater literatus order . . . fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision." And it defines the challenge that Whitman and all the rest of Mr. Mencken's prophets have offered the American writer who is capable of making something of himself. For American writers are themselves responsible for the confusion that results from their indolence and cynicism, their indulgence of every all-too-human whim. Is it for nothing that the letters of Ibsen and Flaubert have been spread out before us, the confessions of Tolstoy and Nietzsche, the most intimate revelations of the lives of all the

high priests of modern letters? To what, said William James, do the better men owe their escape from a perpetual inferiority to their own full selves? "Either some unusual stimulus fills them with emotional excitement, or some unusual idea of necessity induces them to make an extra effort of will." One might suppose that it would be enough to observe the state of American literature, which Mr. Mencken describes, to convince the capable writer of this unusual idea of necessity; and as for the unusual stimulus, well, we are obliged to depend for that upon those who, accepting the necessity, have made the effort of will. "The aristocracy of the spirit," says Mr. Middleton Murry, "is the only aristocracy in the world worth having, for any man may enter it. But . . . if it is to disregard, as it must, alien attributes such as wealth and popular esteem, it must replace these by titles more arduous. To wink at any defection from its own standards, to tolerate slovenly thought or meretricious art, to admit for one single moment that the republic of the spirit is a place of license because it is largely screened from the public eye . . . is to have forfeited the claim to present respect and ultimate allegiance." If as many as half a dozen American writers, as gifted and truly capable as a dozen we now have, accepted a responsibility as harsh as that, we might soon see the fulfillment of those prophecies that Mr. Mencken considers so absurd. Indeed, the burden of proof is not on Mr. Mencken's prophets but on us, who lack the wit and grace to respond when the prophets call.



## MOTHER-ANT AMERICA

“**D**ESCRIBE the average Western man,” says Mr. Lowes Dickinson, “and you describe the American; from East to West, from North to South, everywhere and always the same—masterful, aggressive, unscrupulous, egotistic, at once good-natured and brutal, kind if you do not cross him, ruthless if you do, greedy, ambitious, self-reliant, active for the sake of activity, intelligent and unintellectual, quick-witted and crass, contemptuous of ideas but amorous of devices, valuing nothing but success, recognizing nothing but the actual. Man in the concrete, undisturbed by spiritual life, the master of methods and slave of things, and therefore the conqueror of the world, the unquestioning, the undoubting, the child with the muscles of a man, the European stripped bare, and shown for what he is, a predatory, unreflecting, naïve, precociously accomplished brute.”

It is true. One may, at this, that or the other point, modify a detail; nevertheless, here is the dominant American type, as it would have appeared in the eyes of St. Francis, or of Oliver Goldsmith, or Charles Lamb, or Spinoza, or, for that matter, Erasmus, or Cervantes, of any of the spirits, sacred or profane, who have painfully built up, stone by stone, the temple of humanity. We

have here, with obvious variations, the cave-man once more; and all the virtue and poetry that have failed to fulfill themselves in the American character are the very meat upon which he has waxed so fat. The passivity of our finer types gives scope for his activity; for in proportion as they are unable to become poets and by so doing awaken in men the immaterial desires, he has taken possession of the popular mind, in all its suggestibility, and filled it with his own appetites. And thus the desert propagates the desert.

A few years ago one heard people talking of "the conservation of natural resources." It had been discovered that the spoliation of our soil and forests was compromising the future of the country. It was the prophet of the strenuous life who saw this, and he was a great statesman because he saw it; but what he did not see was that the strenuous life represented a far more sinister form of spoliation. "Unless above himself he can erect himself, how poor a thing is man!" One does not have to believe this in order to feel that, however rich man is, he cannot afford to drop too far below. And so if we really care for the conservation of our natural resources, those that essentially matter, we shall have a more than ordinary concern for the welfare of American literature, in which largely lies whatever hope our civilization has. For a great literature is a reservoir of spiritual energy: and every writer who can be kept from going astray, who can be helped to the possession of everything he has in him, is like a stream turned into this reservoir and replenishing it every day.

The conservation of our natural resources!—the discovering ourselves, the defining our aims, the grasping and educating our faculties, the seizing upon our proper lines of growth, the breaking this tie, the repressing that other impulse, the reading these books and not those, the ignoring one master and following another! As it is, our gifts become, too often, more and more unreal to us: they turn into phantoms which, as we vainly pursue them, flee, as Creusa fled from the arms of Æneas, unsubstantial as the winds and in every way like a fleeting dream. Our contemporary literature is strewn with promising first books: it is this that often gives us the sensation of being in the midst of a literary revival. Then fatigue and effort begin to appear, life ceases to replenish the spirits of our writers, and when the forties come they gradually drop away. It is just as when one lowers a glass over a candle: the flame devours what oxygen there is, quivers desperately for a moment and then vanishes, leaving behind a wick that will never be lighted again. And America goes on its way like that mother-ant that Fabre describes, which, carrying its young on its back, incontinently spills them overboard (spills, that is, the liveliest) and, being blind and very imperfectly conscious, tramples on them and blindly passes on. If we learned to think of dissipations of talent as national calamities, we should soon find means for the storing-up of this energy which now goes to waste. One might even conceive of such a thing as a concerted plan for the reforestation of our spiritual territory.

## THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM JAMES

"You grow six inches high, and then you stop. Why will not somebody grow to be a tree and cast a shadow?"

—Mrs. Lightfoot Lee, in Henry Adams's *Democracy*.

AS WE observe the latest American generation of "young intellectuals" shading off into the majority, losing its contour, its colour, its tang, one asks oneself why it is that not so many as a handful of our fellow-countrymen seem to be able to withstand the solicitations of the crowd-existence. Without this remnant and its leaders, a remnant insulated against the common life and its common values, no real development can ever take place in society; for "the power and salvation of a people," as Chekhov was only the last to say, "lies in its intelligentsia, in the intellectuals who think honestly, who feel and are able to work." That is understood in other countries, and in other countries the remnant stands firm and reconstitutes itself from decade to decade. We have, it is true, if not this remnant, at least the impulse towards it, the feeling for it, the intention of it; but with us, instead of taking permanent form, it is permanently in process of dissolution. One standard-bearer after another emerges from the mist, group follows group, and there is a great pother about a new heaven and a new earth. But as nothing really decisive ever happens,

one at last concludes that, examining it more closely, our malcontents find the old earth good enough; they seem, for the most part, to have so little difficulty in making friends with it. Thus it appears that American society is like a cog-wheel which has lost its cogs, and that, in spite of all its malcontents, it is destined to turn round forever in its own unbroken beatitude.

It is certainly not that our intellectuals are lacking in projects, practicable and impracticable, projects of good omen and evil omen. What they do lack is plainly conviction, and what is equally plain is that they lack conviction because they lack values. When men have values their minds become tough, there is within them a resisting certitude to which their desires and their emotions can firmly affix themselves; and this, in comparison with anything we know in America, is evidently the case with many of the intellectuals of Europe. Their minds are tough because they have values that prevent their energies from being dissipated; and where do they get these values? From the creators of values. It is an error to suppose that society itself, that the stoutest tradition, can alone maintain even the simplest values by which our human souls are kept alive. Values have to be recreated, or at least re-stated, in every social group and in every generation; and when this re-statement fails to take place, one has the stagnant epochs and the stagnant peoples.

So it is that the true creator of values is the one human type with whom society cannot for a day dispense. And how does the creator of values con-

duct his vocation? By ceasing to live in the world of common values, the world of everyday preoccupations, by forming no entangling alliances with it, by retreating into the cave of his own soul and using himself there as a *corpus vile* for the attainment of new frames of mind, new attitudes, new standards of measurement. How is it possible to create that to which the environment is to adapt itself if one has adapted oneself to the environment? It is because, in good measure, the poets and philosophers of the Old World refuse to adapt themselves to the environment that the intellectuals of the Old World get their values, and, having values, get their convictions. Thus, instead of revolving like ours in a perpetual beatitude, society in Europe does, in its calamitous way, blunder forward.

Evidently, then, our American philosophers are somehow at fault for the stagnancy of our life; and indeed, to explain the lapse, the defection, the fatuity of our own intellectuals one need go no further back than their acknowledged master, William James, that golden man and poet whose every personal trait, even to his "Gothic earnestness," as Mr. Santayana would perhaps call it, was lovable and magnetic. To trust a spontaneous self that has not been leavened either with great new values or with great old values, to turn whatever values one actually has, whether great or small, into moral "cash," to live the life not of thought but of will, such is the virtual fiat of the Jamesian pragmatism; and as thought is not too common in America, and our present values are as stale and

musty as values can well be, this, for us, is to beg the whole question of philosophy. By giving a fresh *cachet* to the ordinary working creed of a pioneer civilization, James led his disciples back into the wilderness from which they might otherwise have emerged; and there he left them. And their impulses trickled away into the sand.

Now every philosophy, as Nietzsche well says, is "the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious autobiography." As we read James's letters, we see that his philosophy of self-adaptation, for that is what it comes to, was indeed the expression of his own life—a sort of "masculine protest," as the psycho-analysts say, on the part of one who was by nature "tender-minded," a poet and artist, who, as a boy, had rejected an invitation of his brother Henry with the remark, "I play with boys who curse and swear." All his life, the philosopher William James wanted to play with the boys who curse and swear, the men who "do" things, in this practical modern world; and after his death he played, so to speak, with Mussolini, who found in his pragmatism the justification for his own *coup d'état*. He was unable to create values because he had never transcended his environment, and his failure to do so is perhaps typical of the failures of all those other men who might have deepened and strengthened the character of our society. He was, as he said, and like so many of us, a "victim of neurasthenia," of a constant nervous fatigue that drew him periodically into the abyss; and that he did not instinctively "like" the American world in which he spent his

life, that he liked it, in fact, temperamentally, little better than his brother Henry, that its values in no way corresponded with those he had absorbed from his early education and travels, we can see from his perennial desire to escape from it, "back to nature," back to the woods, back to a "purely animal" existence, when "the nervous and gas-lit side of life" had had too much play, back even to the Europe that made his America by contrast seem so sad, "sad because so empty," and hardened him, as he said, "in the resolution never to go away again unless one can go to end one's days." He said: "I am a badly mixed critter, and I experience a certain organic need for simplification and solitude that is quite imperious." And again: "The word came out of one who is unfit to be a philosopher because at bottom he hates philosophy, especially at the beginning of a vacation, with the fragrance of the spruces and sweet ferns all soaking through him with the conviction that it is better to be than to define your being. I wish I could give it all up." And, filled, as he felt himself to be, "filled to satiety, with all the simpering conventions and vacuous excitements of so-called civilization," he hungered for their opposite, the "medicinal things." And of course he was not a philosopher—a man who, regardless of his neurasthenia, regardless of the medicinal things that cure it, is consumed with the philosophic passion, a man who does not have to react against the conventions and excitements of ordinary life because he inhabits a world in which such things exist only as elements for his observation.



James's whole life, the life of a "sick soul" who was drawn by a natural affinity to the study of morbid psychology, who wrote so divinely of other sick souls, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, because he had entered their life by a deep inner line, was thus plainly, in its effort to achieve "healthy-mindedness," an effort also to reconcile himself, to bring himself into rapport with a busy, practical, "tough-minded" world, an effort in which, in order to play the game, he gradually and unconsciously surrendered his belief in the final importance of any values superior to those that were current in the American society of his day. Not without reason Henry James told him that he would be "humiliated" if his brother liked a certain novel of his and thereby lumped it, in his affection, "with things of the current age," as Henry James put it, "that I have heard you express admiration for, and that I would sooner descend to a dishonoured grave than have written." For, as Henry James rejected the America of his epoch, rejected it root and branch, so William, a child of the same inheritance, of the same education and aptitude, accepted it root and branch, or forced himself to accept it, as we cannot but think. What can we say of a natural man of the world, an artist, a man of William James's culture, who, at the age of sixty-six, remarks that the architecture of Stanford University is "purer and more lovely than aught that Italy can show"? William James knew better than that, knew better than to make the apparent mistakes in taste and judgment that abound in all the records of his conversation. He was all

too "willing to believe" things that in his heart of hearts he could not have believed. He revealed, in his comments on books and men, in his comments on public affairs, an immaturity, a want of discrimination, a levity of conviction that remind one of Mark Twain and Theodore Roosevelt. "He seemed to me," says Mr. John Jay Chapman, "to have too high an opinion of everything. The last book he had read was always 'a great book'; the last person he had talked with, a wonderful being . . . I should say that James saw too much good in everything, and felt towards everything a too indiscriminating approval. He was always classing things up into places where they didn't belong and couldn't remain." He always knew better, but this was "pragmatism," this will-to-believe which, carried a step further, destroys all honesty of mind. To give the half-born thought, the half-thought effort, a little more than the benefit of the doubt is, to be sure, a gallant personal impulse. But what becomes of values in the process?

Thus it came about that James's "reactions," in the spheres of politics, literature, art, sociology, were virtually the typical reactions of the ordinary enlightened citizen—expressed, of course, with all the happy genius of a born man of letters. And that is just the point: they show how successfully James's self-adaptation had taken place. This philosopher, this golden human being, with his radiant human charm, with his "genius," too, as he said, "for being frustrated and interrupted," who, regretting that he had not completed the arch of his thought, permitted himself, in the culminating

years of his life, and with his philosopher's conscience always angry at him, to be drawn off by every invitation to popularize his ideas, this philosopher had become, in essence, an engaging, impulsive member of the "normal" American tribe of his generation. And his gospel of risk and adventure—how it suggests the bravado of Robert Louis Stevenson, how it suggests Roosevelt's "strenuous life"! These victims of neurasthenia, James, Stevenson, Roosevelt, the most captivating men of their age, yet neurasthenics all, these lovers of "simplification," of the wilderness and the woods, how well we know, when they express themselves *fortissimo*, that they are not attempting to set new goals for human endeavour, that they merely wish to live, with whatever excess of power, the normal life of their normal contemporaries!

It is not perhaps for the philosophers to legislate for the remnant alone; but unless they do legislate for the remnant, the remnant loses itself in the majority, and movement comes to a stop. If those who should have been our creators of values have been, on the whole, men of inadequate strength, we have to remember the handicaps they have had to encounter. Our mechanistic life overstrains the nerves of sensitive men. Our society, gigantic and chaotic, reduces the strongest to a sort of fatalism; and we have no ripe tradition, artistic or aristocratic, to mitigate the predominance of purely tribal standards. And yet it remains true that the vicious circle of good customs that corrupt the world will never be broken in America until we have produced a few men who are able to

look our conventional life in the face and reject it, deliberately reject it, not through any neurotic need to escape, but at the command of a profound personal vision. We have surely had too many facile meliorists, too many apostles of the "glad hand." How much we should enjoy the spectacle of a sour-faced American Schopenhauer, an indigestible American Tolstoy, an insufferable American Ibsen, an incredible American Nietzsche—just one true-blue solitary rhinoceros! Yet why should we resort to these violent fancies? We have a pattern of the philosophic life on the nearest bookshelf. For every one recalls the words of Alcibiades, at the end of *The Symposium*: "This Marsyas has often brought me to such a pass, that I have felt as if I could hardly endure the life which I am leading (this, Socrates, you admit); and I am conscious that if I did not shut my ears against him, and fly from the voice of the siren, he would detain me until I grew old sitting at his feet. For he makes me confess that I ought not to live as I do, neglecting the wants of my own soul, and busying myself with the concerns of the Athenians." To busy oneself with the concerns of the Americans, after the fashion of the pragmatists, is surely the last way to create the values by which Americans might learn to live.

## THE REMNANT

OF THE plight of the idealist in our modern world no one has written more sensitively than the Irish essayist, John Eglinton. His *Two Essays on the Remnant*, published more than thirty years ago, has remained as obscure as its author perhaps wished it to remain; yet few comments on modern society are more poignant than his. What could be better than his test of a civilization?—"whether in assisting it the individual is astride of his proper instincts." As for the idealists, he says, unemployed by the civilization we know, they are tolerated only when they minister to "alien interests." And so he urges them to go apart into the wilderness where they may keep their inspiration fresh and their faculties in tune till the day comes when the State has need of them.

It is an old idea, as we see, as old as Isaiah's "remnant," as old as Plato's remnant, whom he compares to "a man who has fallen among wild beasts; he will not be one of them, but he is too unaided to make head against them; and before he can do any good to society or his friends, he will be overwhelmed and perish uselessly." Plato, too, says that, considering his plight, this man will "resolve to keep still, and to mind his own business;

as it were standing aside under a wall in a storm of dust and hurricane of driving wind." Matthew Arnold, in his lecture on "Numbers," applied the notion to the situation of America, pointing out the need of just such a remnant, or "tribe of idealists," in John Eglinton's phrase, to preserve the values which the majority overlooks. And indeed we must feel that this notion has for us a peculiar validity. Without such a remnant, such a tribe, we can hardly hope for an art or a literature or a body of thought that is worthy of this country, if it ever comes to desire them.

The true character of this remnant is suggested by M. Julien Benda in words that deplore what he calls their secularization in his own France. "Men of letters," he says, "descend every day, for reasons which are beyond their control, from the condition of clerics to that of the laity. More and more they are coming to know the cares of a household, and of a double household, and of the head of a family, and the preoccupations about money for the necessities and luxuries even, which their worldly condition increasingly demands. But the gravest thing is that this intenser claim of life has spread to the philosophers. . . . Philosophy, also, to be well served, requires celibacy of her priests." That was a truism in the greatest ages. "Leave all and follow me" has been the motto not only of every religion but of the arts as well; and as it is only outside the world, with its entanglements and obligations, that imaginative men collect themselves, the secularization of the arts almost means their eclipse. The repudiation of this inner law

has resulted in what we know as the externalization of our culture.

Emerson understood this law and lived by it; he knew well that the cause of the "rooted capitalists," as he called them, was not his cause. Thoreau understood it, and the exodus from society of the Brook Farmers was a logical attempt to legitimize their position. For sixty years thereafter there are few recorded cases in our history of the creative instinct in full possession of a man's life. It would have seemed fantastic to Mark Twain not to write to "sell," although something within was always girding at him; he recognized every bourgeois claim as equalling in legitimacy the claim of his gift. And even Henry James, monk of letters that he almost was, never outlived the all-too-human desire for the corroboration of what his brother William called the "bitch-goddess Success." The citizen, the tradesman, the householder that exists in every man all but engulfed the rest. Few indeed willingly turned their backs, in the name of some intellectual conviction, upon all the obvious prizes, and preferred deprivation of every kind to the forgoing of their proper will-to-power. To refuse to serve "alien interests" is of itself a going forth into the wilderness; it is the recognition of one's order, and the step between recognizing one's order and accepting its discipline is not a long step.

It is not in the name of any authority that one speaks of writers and thinkers as forming a sort of priesthood. Nothing could be more "practical." The great men, the Michael Angelos, the Spino-

zas, the Rembrandts, the Miltons, in advocating and practising solitude and other monkish virtues, in ignoring the claims of custom, have been simply the efficient captains of their type; and if they have convinced themselves that theirs was a higher sanction than any society offered, at least it can be said that men in general have ratified their conviction. The phraseology of Wordsworth's lines, "The world is too much with us," is as applicable to the painter who has lost the "innocence of the eye," or the writer who has lost his personal impulse, as it is to any devotee who has compromised his hope of salvation. And what inhibits our own idealists, confronted with this idea, is not so much their natural affections and passions, or the claims of family life, as a certain morbid fear of priggishness—which brings us back to the code of the Anglo-Saxon schoolboy whenever we stray too far. For indeed our dissenting intellectuals are not so remote from the code of Kipling and Roosevelt as they like to think themselves: they do not "play the game in the white man's way," but they pay an oblique tribute to the white man's game—and to play the game itself would be much better—by rejoicing in the rôle of naughty boys and girls. In short, they glorify a "free life" that has nothing to do with custom, ignoring the fact that a free life has nothing to do with art. For art begins where freedom leaves off; and, although freedom is the basis of it, the structure of the creative life resembles, in its constituent elements, the structure of the religious life. Patience and conscience, as



Rodin well said, are its two pillars; and as long as we continue, in our infantility, to pay indirect tributes to tribal custom we shall remain incompetent Philistines. We shall shuffle in the vestibule of society, and the true wilderness will have known us not.

## THE PARVENU INTELLECTUALS

**M**ORE and more it appears that the World War really marked the end of a literary epoch. The main preoccupation of pre-war literature was a faith in human evolution. The "life-force," the "élan vital," the "will to live," the "will to power": these allied conceptions, with all their various personal and social implications, lay at the heart not only of European literature but of American literature as well, in so far as the latter had broken away from the romantic heritage of the pioneers. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky had invaded our literature, had invaded even the literature of the Latin countries. Who hears their names today, as the names, I mean, of planets, morning and evening stars, in the literary firmament? The nineteenth century, with its immense hopes, its passionate beliefs, has vanished from the mind of the rising generation; Tolstoy has followed Thackeray into the discard, and Ibsen has gone the way of Tennyson. One hears people questioning their pre-eminence! Dim ghosts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—secondary ghosts, at best—have begun once more to walk the stage. A strange, brittle, cerebral aristocratism has succeeded the robust faith of the last age, a faith by turns demo-

cratic and aristocratic; and one cannot guess whither it is tending.

All this represents an extraordinary drop in the literary thermometer, a perceptible cooling and thinning of the atmosphere. For this aristocratism has next to nothing in common with aristocracy. What is it then, and what does it mean? Does it not spring, unlike either democracy or aristocracy, from a fear of life, a disgust with life, a disillusionment with life, from a cynicism so profound, a weakness so extreme that it cannot but set aside the whole question of human destiny as a hopeless and irreducible tangle? Goethe, says Mr. Lowes Dickinson, "did not live to see what has followed from the dispersion of the elements his whole life was an effort to hold together. He did not see science divorced from humanity, and art from both. He did not see the triumph of abstract thought and the materialization of human life. He did not see, in a word, the twentieth century." He did not see, it would be more accurate to say, the epoch that has followed the war; for twenty years ago the tendencies of which Mr. Dickinson speaks were opposed by other tendencies of which it could not have been said with certainty that they were fighting a losing battle. Today the "triumph of abstract thought" and of an art divorced from humanity is very evident in the literary world. The humanistic synthesis, so dimly suggested in the somewhat repellent writings of Messrs. More and Babbitt, remains for a few minds as clearly as ever the one thing necessary; but there is no doubt that for

the majority even of serious writers it has become mere schoolmasters' talk.

The great game of countless writers of today might be described as a sort of learned spoofing. They spill out, in all sorts of ingenious patterns, the contents of the upper levels of their minds; they fetch up the tags and tatters of a badly assimilated erudition, so that one can almost say, with the Florentine humanist, that "diphthongs and consonants are the talk of the town"; they match unfamiliar quotations; they no longer seek to shock the grocers, they are satisfied if they can dazzle one another. These are the fruits of a parvenu intellectuality; and indeed the fashionable pedant, the last-born child of a popular education that was inaugurated with prayer and fasting, occupies the centre of the stage. What serious aim dignifies these activities? The passion for experimentation. It would be foolish to say that this passion is without dignity; but it is equally impossible to deny that the dignity is superficial. Experimentation in form? But however it may be in the plastic arts, in literature the subject, the content, dictates the form. The form is an inevitable consequence of the thing that is to be said and rises out of it as naturally as the flower rises out of the seed. And so to begin with the form, to seek the form, is to confess that one lacks the *thing*. It is a frank acknowledgment of literary insolvency.

Who can deny that all this is largely the result of a war that has made reality hateful and seared and withered the life of the emotions? The great

ideas that animated literature twenty years ago are too strong for the enfeebled stomachs of today. And there is another point to be remembered. Northern Europe—and this, too, is a consequence of the war—has gone out of fashion. The mighty currents of thought and feeling that sprang from Germany, Russia and Scandinavia and had begun to change the face of European literature were defeated as effectually in 1918 as the arms of the North; and Paris, a weakened Paris, a Paris that had forgotten Victor Hugo, became once more for literature what it had long justly been for painting, the centre of all attention. The criteria of the plastic arts prevail today in the field of literature, and it will perhaps require another Lessing to dissolve this unholy alliance.

## THE HEROIC

THE greatest literature is always heroic literature. But heroic literature is an expression of heroic experience; one must have, in however partial a degree, the great man, in order to have the great writer, as one must have the great writer in order to have the great book. That is what Milton meant when he said that "he who would aspire to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy." Our own sincere contemporaries seldom attempt the heroic, and they are to be praised for not doing so, since to do so would be hypocritical. We have lost too generally the heroic pattern in our own personal lives and cannot pretend to possess it. And yet we must not, for any such reason, be allowed to lose sight of the heroic—least of all because, as Mr. T. S. Eliot says, "the age objects to the heroic." That the age objects to the heroic is the very reason why the age should have it: in fact, the heroic in literature has usually appeared in ages when the heroic pattern has ceased to prevail in life. That is the poet's incen-

tive. But, as Milton says again, in one of his Latin poems: "The lyrist may indulge in wine and in a freer life, but he who would write an epic to the nations must eat beans and drink water." We are all of us well advised to remain "lyrists," "not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men," unless we have the hardy disposition to live as Milton lived.

The modern heroic is too often a sort of stuffed heroic, an imposing skin that has been filled with shoddy. This is so generally true that there is nothing we view with more suspicion than the heroic attitude. Let the real thing make its appearance, however, and, as John Eglinton says, "the human faculties, which scatter like hounds where the trail is false, are recalled as by the horn of the huntsman." How many hundreds of thousands of our contemporaries in all countries have experienced this recognition in the pages of *Jean-Christophe*, or *Pelle the Conqueror*, or *Growth of the Soil*? These are the works of men who have, in the process of becoming writers, "squeezed the slave" out of themselves, in Chekhov's phrase, enfranchised and transcended their old Adam. Similarly, Maxim Gorky has been able to turn tramps into heroes, thanks to the qualities which he himself brought to the rôle of the tramp. Does anyone wish to know why it is that the world has revered its great writers, why whole populations have turned out to march through the streets when a Björnson or a Dostoïevsky dies? It is because in these writers (in their madness, if you will) the gods have come to life again; and men come to

feel, in their presence, or in the presence of their work, that they are themselves akin to the gods whom their imagination has created. Thus it is that great writers are always the harbingers of revolution; for men, reminded that they have such powers, cannot for long submit to being slaves.



## LITERARY GENERATIONS

MR. ALFRED STIEGLITZ once remarked that in this country we have a new generation every five years. He was speaking, of course, of our art and literature, and the aptness of the observation comes home to us as we watch another wave, the wave of the "youngest writers," breaking on our turbulent literary beach. To these new writers, we are told, Freud is already an old wives' tale, the Georgian poets are as antiquated as the Victorian, and the testament of Karl Marx as obsolete as that of John Wesley; form is what concerns them, and if they have a hero in their own tongue it is perhaps Henry James. One accepts the description: it seems to fit a literary group sufficiently large to constitute a generation. And it is also true that at this rate, and since everything is relative, a spectator whose memory of the American literary scene extends over thirty years is, in a way, a sort of Methuselah. From the standpoint of the youngest writers, Mr. Mencken is a back number, while Mr. Dreiser was a back number before the star of Mr. Mencken rose. *The Seven Arts* is enveloped in the haze of a middle distance; it is difficult to recall the years when *The New Republic* bore the banner of the young; and the hour of Norman Hapgood and *Harper's Weekly* seems almost prehistoric. Thus we appear

to have had four generations during a period in which England has hardly exhausted one.

To speak more strictly, of course, these "waves" are not waves at all. The sea that breaks on our literary beach is a sea without a ground-swell; it is a choppy sea, incessantly arriving, without rhythm and without intention. For, to drop the figure, one has only to compare the creed of our youngest writers with the creed, let us say, of Stephen Crane, to realize that no decisive change has taken place in our literature. To Stephen Crane also, we may be sure, Mr. Mencken's quarrel with the Puritans would have seemed an anachronism, and Freud would have seemed an irrelevance; as Henry James did actually seem (in Crane's less irritable moments) the "real right thing." A literary generation in France or England accompanies a generation in thought, in feeling, in manners; it signifies a movement forward, whether "progressive" or not, and the finger never turns back to trace quite the same impression again. It is impossible to imagine a Maupassant or an Oscar Wilde out of the frame of his epoch. On the other hand, one can easily picture Stephen Crane writing today precisely as he wrote in the 'nineties; it seems a mere accident that Amy Lowell's talent did not emerge thirty years ago when such work as hers was already an old story among the countrymen of Mallarmé; Mr. Robert Frost's poetry might have appeared during any of the last four decades; and the naturalism of so many of our new novelists is indistinguishable in its essence from that of Frank Norris. If, in short,

our literature perpetually supersedes itself, so that its "waves" break almost before they have formed, so that a group of writers appears only to pass at once out of vogue, it is not because we have really "moved on." We change as a kaleidoscope changes, and an attentive eye perceives that the same patterns take shape again and again.

What constitutes a real generation in literature is, no doubt, the emergence and the dominance of some one writer, of two or three writers perhaps, powerful enough to impose their ideas upon the mass. When a writer is great enough, it is impossible for those who grow up under his shadow to escape from his authority; as long as his genius remains active, he sets his stamp upon the whole spiritual life of his immediate successors. Thus the duration of the literary epochs of England and France, the existence of these epochs indeed, is to be ascribed to the sovereign status of a few master-writers, who exercise an irresistible influence over the rank and file and whose ascendancy is tacitly recognized; and it is to be noted, moreover, that the rank and file, participating in ideas more fruitful than any they could discover for themselves, gain rather than lose by their subservience. In America, a complete anarchy prevails; the individual writer is thrown entirely on his own feeble resources, he follows the lead of this European writer or that, he doubles and turns and hesitates, he loses touch with a contemporary life that criticism has not interpreted for him, and the total result is a literature that is incoherent, without characteristic principles and incapable of development.

To say, therefore, that we have a new generation every five years is to say not only that we have no authoritative writers but also perhaps that we lack the disposition to recognize them. We are not accustomed—it is a racial habit—to distinguishing between the greater and the less, we do not assimilate ideas with a firm grasp and hold fast to those that are important: we are too generally the victims of a short memory and an easily sated appetite. To hear that Freud, from the point of view of the youngest generation, is already an old wives' tale is not surprising, for these writers are no less impatient of any other imposing reservoir of contemporary ideas. One draught from any spring is enough for most of us: our stomachs are not stout enough for prolonged potations. Easily sophisticated, as befits the race of the *ephemeridæ*, we lose a taste in the very act of acquiring it.

No doubt if we had been having our master-writers all this while, writers able and willing to accept the "burden of superiority," our literary life would not be what it is; and I say this not to indulge a regret but to reestablish a principle. The republic of letters will never be a society of equals: it depends for its existence upon the rule of a literary aristocracy, for without leading ideas we can have no convictions, and only the few can create our leading ideas, and we can only absorb these ideas by subjecting ourselves to those who create them. What we lack in America, lacking the masters themselves, is the sentiment of self-subordination without which masters cannot exist: there is so little in our life to foster this sentiment, so much

that requires us to withhold it, that we have virtually ceased to possess it altogether. And because of this we have lost the sense of values. One goes back to Mr. Stieglitz's remark: that we have a new generation every five years means that nothing takes root in our minds, that nothing deeply impresses and germinates in us. And this renders it impossible for us to prize and cherish the superior things we have. Let a school of writers begin to take shape, and as if by the necessity of our life it begins to disperse before it has borne mature fruit. Let some single writer launch a new idea or open up some powerful vein of thought: he dies or ceases to write, and within a year or two he has passed out of recollection.

And this will inevitably continue to be the case until some commanding genius, some true-blue Olympian, emerges from the existing protoplasm. Our literature exhibits a lively energy, and the sentiment of respect for distinguished work is visibly increasing. What ought to concern us, meanwhile, is the principle that to him that hath shall be given, that nothing is more important than for the weak to recognize their weakness and for the strong to recognize their strength. It is very difficult for Americans to play second fiddle. With a much more general self-subordination, and a man to give us one dominant idea, an idea that would require thirty years to exhaust, we should soon slow down and begin to get our bearings, and understand what a value is. Until then we shall revolve like a windmill that turns so rapidly because it is, in reality, grinding so little corn.

## A SCHOOL

**I**F ONE were asked what it is that keeps the life of art and letters going in the world, one would be obliged to say perhaps that it is not so much the men of genius as the rank and file of workers in the field of art and letters. Who are these workers? They are the artisans and journeymen who have the simple decencies of their trade, who continue at their task even when they know their own powers are mediocre, who take pains to find out just how mediocre their powers are, who have an impersonal regard for distinction wherever they find it, and whose sole concern is to keep thought and taste alive.

It is these men who fertilize the creative life; they are to genius what honesty is to honour, and unless the soil of the popular spirit is plentifully sprinkled with their qualities, a nation can hardly be expected to give birth to great works. For it is they who bear the palladium of the creative life: good work, though the heavens fall. Are they humble? One can only say that the tactics of the life of art and letters, whatever the force of its manifestations may be, are based upon their qualities, for without a scrupulous study of one's capacities, without disinterestedness, without a contempt for trickery and effect, no artist ever finds

the path of development: the "modesty" that Flaubert reviled was not the frank acceptance of one's limitations but the truly servile estimate of oneself that leads an artist to seek a merely personal applause. Such men, in fact, create an atmosphere of realistic self-criticism without which the values of the spirit cannot exist.

And this is only a beginning of what they do. Their greatest service lies in the fact that because, however limited their powers are, they find in their work not humiliation but freedom, they prove to one generation after another that the life of the spirit is not personal but impersonal. It is this that renders possible the hierarchy of the arts, the justification of which is that, while each is expected to contribute only what he can, all are enabled to derive from the arts the fullest benefit of the powers, great and small, of every contributor. Did the learned monks of the Middle Ages experience any humiliation in accepting it as their task not to create the comedies and tragedies they were unable to create but rather to preserve the comedies and tragedies of the ancients? Do the members of a symphony orchestra today experience any humiliation in accepting the rôle of interpreters of a genius which they themselves lack? On the contrary, they experience nothing but pride in it, for they know that if it were not for them and their grace and good faith, and the secular tradition their grace and good faith maintain, the works of the great composers, indeed music itself, which they serve in its highest manifestations, would die out of human memory. Genius is imper-

sonal, the life of the spirit is impersonal; and that is why everyone, great and small, can find his own fulfillment in serving it. And it is the rank and file who keep us in possession of this truth. Goethe attributed all his own good fortune—and he might have added, the good fortune of the world in having had Goethe—to these obscure workers who, he said, had made his advent, his career and his influence possible.

“A school,” says M. André Gide, “is always composed of a few rare, great, directing spirits and of a whole series of others who are subordinate, who form as it were the neutral terrain upon which these few great spirits are able to erect themselves. We recognize in it first a subordination, a sort of tacit, unconscious submission, to a few great ideas which a few great spirits put forward, which the less great spirits accept as truths. And if they follow these great spirits, what does it matter?—for these great spirits will lead them further than they would be able to go by themselves.” That, to mention the last point first, is why, where great spirits exist, or even perhaps their memories alone, as is usually the case, the rank and file experience no humiliation in remaining the rank and file, in immolating themselves, as it might seem. For literally they gain their own souls by losing them; they find, that is, by immolating themselves, or rather by subordinating themselves, a direction which they cannot find alone.

And this hierarchy of the arts is justified as obviously in the breach as in the observance. What happens, for example, when a great orchestra,



which is always a school in M. Gide's sense, loses its conductor and its organization? Do its members, when it falls apart, burst forth like butterflies from a chrysalis? Do they not rather, or the majority of them, who have found themselves by forgetting themselves in Bach, lose themselves in becoming aware of themselves, reduced and humiliated indeed, playing the music of Broadway? And even the exceptional ones, the men of genius—do they find themselves the more rapidly through this dispersal? Is it not rather true that they find themselves in the "school," and by graduating from the school only when their powers are ripe? And the same thing is true in literature; we have in America today a living illustration of it. For what could be more obvious than that American literature has become what it is—and it pleases no one—because it lacks a school, a "few rare, great, directing spirits"? The majority of American writers, unaware that such a thing has ever existed, and incapable therefore even of desiring it, go their own way; and the more they "strike out" for themselves, and the more they lose that sense of a general momentum which all writers have in their youth, even where no school exists, owing to a vague feeling of association with other young writers, the more they come to resemble so many peas in a pod. They have never been able to profit by the law, which is really the law of the school—the law formulated by Goethe, the wisest of all men who have speculated on the creative life, that "one should consider oneself successively as an apprentice, as a journeyman, as an older

journeyman, and finally, but with the greatest circumspection, as a master." As for the few who care, the exceptional ones, the men of a little genius, they spend half their lives groping in the darkness for that very direction which, as they are more than half aware, only a school can give them.

But a school, in the history of art, is a sort of lucky accident: only the exceptional generation has its "rare, great, directing spirits." And if Europe is more fortunate than America, if it has never quite witnessed a literary chaos like ours, it is because, even if the great spirits are lacking, the "neutral terrain" is always, in some degree, maintained. That is to say, there is preserved in it a sense of the dignity of letters in the abstract, and the rank and file continues to subordinate itself just as rigorously and just as impersonally as if the great spirits were actually present; it preserves, in this neutral terrain, the atmosphere of sincerity and expectation that serves, more than anything else, to call the great spirits into existence. For we know that, times without number, the occasion has produced the man, and that the way to get leaders is to call for them; the great men in every art have appeared periodically among those peoples who have practised the art in question, and served it assiduously, who have, in short, as it were, provided the conductor with his orchestra in advance. A school may be an accident, but it is a sort of logical accident: the rank and file have much to say in calling it into existence.

The problem of literature in America becomes therefore quite evidently the problem of evolving

something in the nature of a school. And in the absence of the directing spirits the control of its tactics devolves upon the rank and file. Are they as helpless and irresponsible, as much the victims of Mr. Dreiser's "idle rocking forces" as they perhaps feel themselves, or have they, as writers, a margin of free will, if not to do, at least to desire? A high level of literary virtue existed in this country in the days of New England's domination. New England had its "spirits" and its "school," to show us that a school is possible, and greatly advantageous. But for many complex reasons it never gained for our literary life a prestige capable of attracting the energies of the young when other and more glamorous opportunities were presented to them. During two generations, the spirit of exploitation and self-assertion, of shoddy workmanship and shoddier aims, of private and domestic self-advantage, all but obliterated from our memory the sense of true values. Can one, out of our myopic herd, of which we are all members, for good or evil, expect the emergence of a rank and file such as we have mentioned? One believes it: one has reason to believe it.

For if we still lack our neutral terrain, we have evolved something that approaches it: a *cordon sanitaire* against the germs of popular misunderstanding, the crowd-spirit and the habits of commercialism. A race has grown up, a race within a race, for whom the commonplace magazines have never existed, to whom the "short-story," in the conventional sense, is remoter than the pyramids, who have never thought of "making good," to

whom "success" and the "high standard of living" are as idle sounds as the rumblings of the street. And is it not evident that this class, which has been created by ideas, cannot fail to become, and in fact is, a breeding-ground of ideas, and that its leisure and freedom, however obtained, are of the quality from which, in the past, literature has arisen? In these camps, already, the passionate intelligence, even the enlightened scholarship of America, more and more takes up its abode. There honest work is respected, and honest work is done. There is the germ, at least, of our neutral terrain, the germ of sincerity and expectation. And out of this class will surely come in the end the rare, directing spirits who will give it the Forward, march.

## ON CREATING ONE'S PUBLIC

**I**N THE great and fertile ages of literature, there is a profound rapport, unlike anything we have in America today, between the writer and the public. One may say, if one wishes, as Mr. Mencken says, that this must have its roots in an "aristocracy of taste," and that without this aristocracy the writer can accomplish little. But there is another phenomenon equally familiar in literary history, and that is the writer who creates the taste by which he is understood. Since we have no aristocracy of taste that is truly organized, it is upon the hope of such lonely spirits that our literature has to rely; indeed, until we have produced them—as we shall, if we demand them—how can we say what the writer can accomplish in America? Such spirits are, with us, as a matter of fact, the condition of a literature: two or three such spirits, indeed, provided they have sufficient energy, constitute a literature. And how immensely our criticism might help matters, might help to produce such types, if, instead of browbeating the public, and making demands on the public in the name of the writer, it were to make demands on the writer only.

The great danger of polemical criticism is that it tends to establish an orthodoxy of rebellion as

complacent and stagnant as the established orthodoxies; and where even the rebels have their orthodoxy, how can anyone grow? The important thing is that our best writers should become still better writers, that they should not be encouraged by the critics they respect to rest on their laurels and regard themselves as masters. The sole concern of criticism is with the welfare of literature itself; to aid in the struggle of writers for recognition—a humane and friendly thing in itself—is not to serve literature: in fact, it is often a disservice to literature, especially at this time in America when to be in revolt is itself almost a sufficient title to recognition. One cannot engage in two struggles at once, and the real artist is so busy struggling with his own thoughts that he has no time for anything else. And what else should he think of?—aside from the question of earning his bread and butter. (For “recognition,” which pleases our vanity, does more harm than good in every other respect.) That is the only struggle which concerns the writer, and the writer’s success or failure in that struggle is all that concerns the critic. What would be the condition of American science if our scientists, instead of devoting all their thoughts to science, railed at the public for not appreciating them and for putting up with quacks?

Our writers and our writers only are responsible for the state of our literature and the state of our literary taste. In their lower grades they demand money from the public and repay the debt by debauching the public mind. In their higher grades

they demand recognition, and if, in return, they do not debauch the public, they at least fail to give the public any coherent, stirring, enlivening vision of life. If writers have any function in the world, it is to show that the disinterested life is possible, that it is possible for human nature to exist without making demands upon anything but itself. Far better would it be if our criticism, instead of holding up the ideal of some hypothetical aristocracy of taste, the absence of which virtually relieves the writer of any responsibility for his condition, upheld the ideal of the writer who, in his full-blooded and intelligent individualism, accepts the responsibility for himself and never relinquishes the solitary search after his own perfection.

## THE WRITER AND HIS AUDIENCE

DEAN INGE observes, in his *Outspoken Essays*, that those who are in the habit of disparaging the great Victorians ought to make a collection of their photographs and compare them with those of their own little favourites. "Let them set up in a row," he says, "good portraits of Tennyson, Charles Darwin, Gladstone, Manning, Newman, Martineau, Lord Lawrence, Burne-Jones, and, if they like, a dozen lesser luminaries, and ask themselves candidly whether men of this stature are any longer among us." When this essay first appeared, in the form of a lecture, one of our magazines acted on the suggestion and drew the deadly parallel: side by side with these eminent Victorians, who might have been replaced by eminent Americans, it presented the no less familiar features of Messrs. Wells, Bennett, Chesterton, Shaw, Lloyd George and one or two others. With the possible exceptions of Shaw and Chesterton, the effect, one had to admit, was damaging to the moderns: it gave point to Mr. Orage's remark, apropos of the Victorian character, that his own generation (and ours) has "provided the soul of the world with nothing so fine." What was it they lacked, these heads of our contemporaries? In juxtaposition with the heads of their predecessors,



they were at as great a disadvantage as the politicians at Washington who sit surrounded by the marble busts of Houdon and his disciples.

The difference can hardly be ascribed to the fortuities of dress and fashion. Capes and beards, to be sure, impart to the human aspect a wondrous venerability: no one, for instance, to judge from photographs, ever looked more the authentic *vates* than the forgotten author of *Festus*. The personages of two generations ago imposed themselves upon the outer eye; but it is not merely this that gives to so many of the Victorians, both English and American, their air of authority. It was partly the religious depth of their convictions, and partly something else. In its proper definition, authority is not only power but delegated power. Some secret principle in society determines the preëminence at a given moment of this type or that; and literature, which has ceased to speak, from its own point of view, as it used to speak (with whatever derelictions in the matter of form), the words of "the immensities and the eternities," has also ceased to speak for the human race. If the faces of our modern writers are so often marked either by impudence or an excessive shyness, it is largely because, lacking the intrinsic power, they lack also the delegated power of public spokesmen.

For, say what we will, literature depends upon some deep law of supply and demand. Whether we can ever apprehend that law is one of the main problems of criticism; it was a problem that occupied Taine, and nothing more clearly proves the frivolity of our own criticism than the fact that

we pay so little attention to it at a time when literature has been driven to the very periphery of the human consciousness. In this country our minds are so busy with beginnings, with first works and opening careers, that we are impatient of any attempt to take a long view of our situation: we assume that discussions of literary form are all that are necessary to produce a race of artists. We do not observe that when writers are not adjusted to society, discussions of form can merely lead to the point where, having an adequate command of their medium, writers have nothing to say. A literature of this kind is only a substitute for chess; it is a game for a few hundred people, a very different thing from the literature that Goethe had in mind when he said that the writer who lacks the sense that he is writing for a million readers has mistaken his vocation. And we can surely make no greater mistake than to be satisfied with the expectation of a mere private or group-literature.

The great writer always expresses what Renan called "the silent spirit of collective masses." For the great writer to exist, there must also exist a secret, unspoken understanding in the society from which he emerges. He responds to this understanding, he voices it, he feels that he is needed; and who can doubt that this fact accounts for the self-confidence of the Victorian writers, their astonishing tenacity of life, the volume, the depth, the sustained power of their utterance? We, too, before the great dispersal, had in this country, in a less degree, a literature that expressed the general mind; and how admirably our writers thrived on

the sense that they were fulfilling a genuine popular need! There is a passage in Howells's *Years of My Youth* that partially explains the calm pertinacity of so many of our old men of letters. Howells, who had been living in Cambridge, had returned to Ohio and was sitting one evening with the Garfield family on the verandah that overlooked their lawn. "I was beginning to speak," he says, "of the famous poets I knew when Garfield stopped me with 'Just a minute!' He ran down into the grassy space first to one fence and then to the other at the sides, and waved a wild arm of invitation to the neighbours who were also sitting on their back porches. 'Come over here!' he shouted. 'He's telling about Holmes, and Longfellow, and Lowell, and Whittier!' And at his bidding, dim forms began to mount the fences and follow him up to his verandah. 'Now go on!' he called to me, when we were all seated, and I went on, while the whippoorwills whirred and whistled round, and the hours drew toward midnight." Nation for nation, and writer for writer, we have there the sort of correspondence between the mind of the individual and the mind of the "collective mass" that is always to be found in the great literary epochs.

One doubts if there exists in America a writer who has reached the age of fifty without believing that he could have written ten times more and better if only someone—some one, some thing, he never knows what or who—had wished him to do so. It is easy to ridicule this feeling, still easier to explain it in various false and discreditable ways;

but one hears it on the lips and sees it in the faces of too many sincere men not to know that it cannot be dismissed in any such fashion. It is essential for the artist to feel that he is needed; it is natural for him to wish to be needed and to wither when that support is withdrawn. And it is this assurance, this birthright, as every artist feels it to be, that our writers of the passing generation have been obliged to forgo: hence their vague but deep and general sense that they have been somehow cheated. Too many of the seats of authority in this country are occupied by hardy vulgarians, while the aging men who have contributed most to the real thought of the time creep about in corners with scarcely more of the will-to-live than Jack London possessed at the end, with scarcely more of the will-to-complete their thought than William James possessed. The rising generation, to be sure, inherits the small co-operating public for which Henry Adams seemed always to be looking in vain; but even this, as yet, is a very different public from the public which the great Victorians knew.

## IN SEARCH OF A CAUSE

**H**AZLITT, in one of his essays, expressed a doubt whether in another twenty years any of his contemporaries would still be read. The remark gives point to the observation of another essayist that we cannot criticize the writers of our own time, that we can only talk about them; we cannot know what developments may lie before them, and we lack the necessary perspective to form any estimate of their permanent value. This is true in a special sense today, for the reading public is so disintegrated, it has become so much a party public, that few writers can expect to survive in the general mind. A "standard author" is a peculiar phenomenon created by certain conditions of which his own genius is only one. The standard author of the nineteenth century may be regarded as the successor of the classical author of previous ages: the one implied the existence of an organized aristocracy, the other of an organized bourgeoisie. The middle class appears now to be following the aristocracy into dissolution; and the result is a feeling of insecurity that manifests itself in every corner of the literary world.

We note, first of all, the absence in contemporary literature of many of the normal phenomena of literary history. For example, the monumental

undertaking, not merely in history and poetry but in fiction as well. Such an effort as Balzac's or Zola's, both of whom attempted to give a complete picture of the society of their time, is hardly conceivable today; nor do we produce works that represent long study and preparation or that finally express some original intention that has been slowly maturing for years in the mind. Such works, at least, are rare. Indeed, we no longer use the words that describe them; the very terms "works," "monumental," and the like are all but obsolete; and if, thanks to this, we escape the pomposity of the past, how much do we lose that accompanied that pomposity! A certain number of exiles from Culture-Philistia who are still in touch with the deep sources of life continue to produce regardless of the comminution of society, but the æsthetic journalist, whose impulse is to strike while the iron is hot, is generally in possession of the field. Literature today is entertaining, but every generation provides its own entertainment. The future can be trusted to do so without help from us.

All this has its compensations. Who can regret the passing of the social order from which sprang the splendours of nineteenth-century literature? Besides, there is a genuine freedom from pretence in the present generation; it is frank and well aware of its own weakness, and the solemn humbug is as rare today as the divinely appointed creator. The spread of skepticism and incredulity has had this among its many sanative effects; and this negative virtue makes up for certain positive

vices. On the other hand, there has been a strange growth of cliques and coteries, mutual benefit and protective societies and magazines devoted to the propagation of secret writings. These curious efforts to communicate and at the same time obstruct communication, to court a public that is generally despised, to express and yet refrain from expressing, to substitute a cipher for a language, are perhaps what they profess to be—the most symptomatic literary facts of the moment; but, like the phenomena of spiritualism, they lend themselves to a very unflattering psychological interpretation. The elements of gregariousness, evasiveness, contradictoriness (not to mention others more obviously pathological) of which they largely consist, reveal them as very notable signs of the insecurity I have mentioned.

“Men are free,” said D. H. Lawrence, “when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep inward voice of religious belief. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealizable purpose.” This, we might almost say, is the condition of a great literature—although the community may be, ideally perhaps should be, and indeed in the eighteenth century was, the whole Western world. There still exist communities that retain this belief; in others it is always on the point of being regenerated, and we may look forward with absolute confidence to a day, not too remote, when a new assembly of philosophers, gathered

from all the peoples, will revive, in some undreamed-of form, the pan-human faith of the Encyclopædists. But for our contemporaries—those, at least, whose consciousness dates from the war—nothing of this kind has ever existed. They inhabit a ravaged world, a world that has ceased to believe in itself and offers them scarcely any postulates, moral or social, that they can share.

This fact explains, as it also excuses, the chaotic ineffectualness of so much contemporary literature. It is unable either to uphold or to react against anything either socially or morally important, and consequently has no fulcrum. Without the general Christian notion of sin, Baudelaire's diabolism would have been a mere succession of passes in the air. Whether they attacked or defended the accepted values of society, the great writers of the nineteenth century derived their intensity from the existence of those values. If they opposed tradition, they opposed it in the name of reason; if they opposed rationalism, they opposed it in the name of faith. They were able to resist one cause because they were so firmly grounded in another; and this gave them their momentum, called their forces into play and developed that astonishing energy, so common in their generation, which has no counterpart in ours. Left to himself, separated from these general currents of a living society, the individual can accomplish very little. He becomes an "infinitely repellent particle," feeding on his own states of mind.

Because of this the world that is reflected in contemporary literature is a very small world. When



we think of Whitman, Melville, Ibsen, of Hugo, Borrow, Tolstoy, we seem to be looking out through immense windows that open on vast spaces—continents, oceans, long vistas of history. Everything is magnified. The human drama assumes colossal proportions; we are participants in some elemental conflict of darkness and light, and human nature regains in our consciousness the tragic dignity it so seldom seems to possess in our own personal experience. It is extraordinary, considering the extent to which science has enlarged our knowledge of life, that literature today should convey so small a sense of it; but this is because our experience is more and more personal and less and less general. For science is not experience. If William Butler Yeats attached himself to the cause of Irish nationalism, if Maurice Barrès attached himself to the cause of nationalism in France, if Anatole France attached himself to the socialist movement, it was, we may be sure, from motives of spiritual self-preservation: there are few social institutions from which we can still draw the sap of existence, and each of these great causes has contained, as Zionism contains, a fund of general life. If literature is not to pass into a long sleep, the prey of a sterile æstheticism that substitutes the means of art for the end, it must reëstablish its connection with the labouring body of humanity, assuming that this body has a purpose, or giving it a purpose. And one of the great tasks of the writers of today is to discover, among the cross-currents of the choppy sea of our generation, the causes that contain the most fruitful germs of the future.

## ON READING

OF HIS passion for reading, Gibbon said that he would not have exchanged it for all the treasures of India. And it seems to me that many of the "states of mind," those strange neuroses that beset American youth, are in some degree due, if not to the lack of reading, at least to a mistaken attitude to reading. How can one doubt this when, on the one hand, we consider the vast range of interests in which the mind can lose itself, and by losing itself find itself, the histories to be written, the explorations to be made in a hundred fields, the materials for which are to be found in books, and, on the other, a whole generation caught in the snares of introspection and a morbid indolence, while, at the same time, it wishes to write? "I estimate," said Renan, "that I should require five hundred years to exhaust the domain of Semitic studies, as I understand them; and if ever my taste for them should begin to grow enfeebled, I should learn Chinese. . . . When one is powerfully attracted by things," Renan adds, "one is sure that they exist, and that one is not grasping a vain phantasmagoria." Innumerable "things" of this kind are to be found in books; in the course of an afternoon one can happen upon a dozen subjects any one of which, selected in cold blood and pursued long

enough, may be guaranteed to create its own attraction. And by so doing, as a result of study, of mental concentration, which brings the faculties to a sort of unison, it cannot but contribute, in some degree, to solve one's "state of mind."

We Americans tend to demur at this procedure. We tend to believe that our only proper course is to strike out with a bold stride and register our individualities. But this is a fatal mistake, as a survey of our recent literature might show us. It is an assumption that we carry over from the practical world; and the methods of the practical life play us false in the sphere of the immaterial. The spectacle of Stevenson sedulously aping his masters is repugnant to our notions of freedom and equality. And yet this striking out with a bold stride, this imagining that, because we are "original" men, it will make us original writers, has proved not to be satisfactory either. For the writers who succeed in the end in differentiating themselves most from the mass, in attaining a point of view that is all their own, are usually those who have served the longest apprenticeship; their early works as a rule are timid, tentative, imitative, scarcely to be distinguished from others of the same school and tradition.

This is because true originality is not so much freshness of talent as a capacity to survive and surmount experience, after having met and assimilated it, which implies a slow growth and a slowly and powerfully moulded intention. It was the prolonged infancy of man, according to John Fiske, that carried him beyond the ape; and great writers

generally have a longer infancy than other men—they have so much more to learn. Has America produced two more original writers than Thoreau and Whitman? And how long an apprenticeship did Whitman serve, to Homer and Emerson, before he became “original”? Until he was long past thirty he was writing doggerel, slavishly imitative doggerel that a poet of our day would be ashamed to sign. As for Thoreau, we are told that in his rôle of disciple “he imitated Emerson’s tones and manners so that it was annoying to listen to him.” And what can the writers of this generation do, who have so few masters in the flesh? They can only do what Emerson did, the master of Thoreau and Whitman, who had himself no literary masters in his own generation,—become apprentices to books: *only from books indeed can they learn that they must become apprentices, for in the world as it is today this very idea (and with it the true pattern of the artist’s life) has passed out of fashion.* How many of these neuroses of which I have spoken spring from the fact that our writers force themselves into a premature activity at a time when passivity is what their natures demand? As Nietzsche said, expressing the thought of every real master, whether in philosophy or letters: “How happy are we, we finders of knowledge, provided that we know how to keep silent sufficiently long!” The day when young American writers, instead of attempting to register their individualities, express themselves in impassioned imitations, will be a day of hope for American literature.

Reading, in short, is a form of experience with-

out which writing is an empty exercise; for the poet has never lived who, without books, be they only primitive laws and hymns and Bibles, has attained a universal point of view. By means of reading alone, half the writers of history have fitted themselves for the parts they have played in history, for through books they have arrived at standards of comparison which they have brought to bear upon themselves and the unenlightened worlds in which they moved; through books they have learned how to pull their wits out of the ruts of peasants, of impotent and blundering social misfits, getting out of themselves and into the great currents of life and a sense of the range of human possibility. And are not these the advantages our writers lack, who are merely sure that they hate the life that surrounds them and cannot conceive what is to be done about it? For, indeed, what is the use of our saturation in "life" if our point of view remains as rude and raw as that of the "boobs" and "Babbitts" we satirize?

What reading can especially give the writer is a fortifying sense of his vocation. What could the scholars of the Renaissance have done, oppressed as they were by the fumes of the Middle Ages, if the images of the ancients had not come to life in their imaginations, come to life through books, and told them that they were right in proclaiming the divinity of the visible earth? What could the Italian philosophers of the seventeenth century have done if certain patterns of the philosophic life, patterns recorded in books, had not filled them with such boldness of conviction that they were able

to face the threats of the Inquisition? And if our American novelists, instead of being beleaguered by "boobs" and "Babbitts," instead of seeing life as the helpless sport of "idle rocking forces," were encompassed in their own imaginations by the cloud of witnesses that encompassed the great creators of the past, we should have no cause to complain of the epoch of Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser.

## THE VISITING CELEBRITY

**I**T HAS often been observed that European peasants, settling in this country, lose many of their finest characteristics without gaining anything to take their place. The same phenomenon is also familiar as regards European writers and artists who either come here to live or stay long enough to be influenced by American life. They deteriorate, they are demoralized—what is the accurate word? However single-minded they have been at home, however impervious to seduction, almost as they touch our shores they undergo a certain transformation, they become something less than themselves, they lose their convictions, they lose their individualities. For these voyagers, in fact, America is a sort of Circe's island.

Not for money do men surrender their gifts: that is the simplest and crudest of misconceptions. An infinitely complex web of circumstances surrounds the betrayal of every talent. One must consider what these writers and artists are who come to us and suffer such a tragic alteration, and what it is they encounter when they come. They are human like other people; that is, they are creatures of habit. Stendhal said that in the nineteenth century an artist had to be either a monster or a sheep; and the same thing is just as true today.

In order to travel far, an artist must cultivate his qualities to a degree that is incompatible with social life as the contemporary world knows it. Gauguin called himself a wolf, Nietzsche was haunted by his fantasy of the blond beast, and how many philosophers have conceived of themselves after the fashion of that old Hindu image of the "solitary rhinoceros"? There we have Stendhal's "monster," and indeed the artist's conscience is a fearful thing: heaven knows into what caverns it may lead us if we give it full rein. But this bitter sincerity no one expects of the rank and file of artists; and of this rank and file, on the whole, are those who come to America and whose fate one has in mind. They are not the monsters, they are the sheep; they are creatures of habit, even as you and I.

One pictures them at home before they come, living along in the established grooves of their craft. They have their appointed places, they know their tasks, they belong to their school. The skeptical faces of their comrades remind them how limited their capacities are. The critical reviews lash them without mercy whenever they go astray. They live, in their suburbs, a sober, humble, orderly existence. In short, they have guideways of every kind; they feel their way forward, step by step, knowing themselves and what they can do, and knowing that they are known. They are almost as firmly fixed in their little world and in the integrity of their tradition as the village carpenter. And when they travel, in France, in Germany, in Italy, they find the same conditions as those they know at home. The confraternity welcomes them; they



meet the familiar groups; nothing is expected of them but what they can honestly do, and they are expected to do precisely what they can. They find society stratified along the lines to which they are accustomed; and willing guides, who speak the language of their own minds, initiate them into whatever aspects of this foreign life they cannot easily grasp. In short, creatures of habit that they are, as long as they remain in Europe they are able to pursue the development of their personal points of view in a security that is quite unknown on this side of the world. They are craftsmen and nothing but craftsmen; and one might almost say that nothing tempts them to become anything else.

Then, for whatever reason, they come to America. One does not need to speak of the interviewers who meet them at Sandy Hook, the women's clubs that seize upon them, the editors who pursue them. These agencies could never have their demoralizing effects were it not for something else. That something else is the state of their own profession in this country, and what their own profession has done and left undone. They find no one to receive them who understands them, no one to initiate them on their own plane into this strange new world, no one to give them the criticism upon which they depend to keep their compasses true; they find that our native writers have done no fundamental thinking about America and cannot stand between them and the public. In other words, they find themselves received not as writers but as celebrities, of whom everything is expected which they

are least capable of giving. Their own kind, standardless and irresponsible, fairly surrender them over to the importunities of the public, at the very moment when they have lost sight of all the familiar constellations by which they have steered their ships.

The importunities of the public! It is like a furnace of intensely personal emotions into which these writers fall; it would melt a heart of iron. They are asked to decide whether American women are prettier than English women, whether one ought to divorce one's husband or not, how American men can be induced to think about something besides their business, and, in fact, what is the right way for people to live, love, think, behave, write, paint, eat, sleep, build, teach, work, dress and breathe. A chorus of appealing, tearful, bewildered, charming, all-too-charming voices goes up to them like an intoxicating incense. And these poor little humble novelists and poets, who have patiently practised their craft and lived on beer and cheese in some dismal suburb—what are they to do? The proportions of their lives are instantly deranged. Far from having willed it, they find themselves prophets, ambassadors, missionaries, father confessors by *force majeure*. Dollars? They cannot drive the dollars away! Their art, which was small enough at best, becomes in their minds smaller and dimmer than ever. And to write so that the millions can hear their message soon becomes a sort of obligation which they can scarcely repudiate as human beings. Their hearts, in a word,

become suddenly inflamed, and they find themselves following the propulsions of their hearts as if they were divine commands.

Yes, the heart, the slippery human heart, is really at the bottom of all this mischief. They go to pieces, these European writers who see too much of America, because, while they are off-guard themselves, America beseeches them for everything its own writers ought to have given it and leaves them no energy to collect themselves. In fact, nothing but evil results from this phenomenon; for the writer can give the world nothing but the fruits of his own personality, and the importunate frame of mind in which the public approaches the visiting celebrity neutralizes whatever good counsel it might procure from him. And who is to blame but ourselves, the American writers, who should be answering the questions of the public, the real questions, the fundamental questions, instead of leaving the public in such ignorance of itself that it has to ask advice of every traveller? Inevitably, as things are, the European writer who shares our life degenerates to the level of our own degeneration—ceases, that is, to be actuated by the demands of his craft and becomes the victim of his personal emotions. And until we have charted this country intellectually, and absorbed the shock of the public by satisfying its desire for something positive and commanding, this will always be so. Meanwhile, we can understand the remark of Bernard Shaw, who knows perhaps that his heart is not impervious, that not for a million dollars would he visit America.

## THE HERO AS ARTIST

THE artist, one might almost say, is the typical hero in contemporary fiction. From *Jean-Christophe* to *Mendel*, from *The Flame of Life* to *The Moon and Sixpence*, and how much further, as one glances over the list of significant novels of the last two decades, one is surprised to find how often the leading character is a painter, a musician or a writer. The artist has always appeared as a character in fiction, but never before, surely, has he so filled the novelist's stage. One might imagine that the writers of our time had formed a sort of conspiracy to foist their type upon the world, to proclaim their own superiority and their right to leadership. Apparently, however, in doing so, they fulfill some deep and general demand on the part of the public. The writer, whose office it was in more primitive times to glorify the deeds of the man of action, finds himself now in a world that is eager for nothing so much as the record of his own spiritual processes. And that is perhaps natural. Thanks to the universal blocking and checking of instinct that modern industrialism implies for the run of men and even women, the type of life that still, at whatever cost, affords scope for the creative impulses is haloed with an immense desirability. In our age in which everything tends towards

a regimentation of character, the average man, presented with no ideal but that of success, finds himself almost obliged to yield up one by one the attributes of a generous humanity. No wonder the artist has come to be the lodestone of so many wishes. He alone seems able to keep open the human right of way, to test and explore the possibilities of life.

The phenomenon of the artist as hero is no less general in American than in European fiction. There is, however, a significant difference between the American and the European treatment of this phenomenon. In the European novels I have mentioned, and in many others one might mention, the artist always succeeds in being an artist and in convincing us of his reality. Of no American novel that I remember, save perhaps Miss Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, is this true. There is Mary Austin's *A Woman of Genius*, there is Jack London's *Martin Eden*, there is Theodore Dreiser's *The "Genius,"* there is Stephen French Whitman's *Predestined*. In every one of these books the chief character is ostensibly an artist, but there is not a convincing figure among them. They do not convey the impression of the presence of genius or even of an economy of talent. They reveal this universal preoccupation with the artist as a type, but they offer the strongest internal evidence that we lack in this generation a grasp of the psychology of the artist and a sense of the artistic vocation.

Why is this? A dozen reasons suggest themselves, but one of them surely is that our writers

tend to take a humble view of their trade and to disbelieve in its importance to society. Not long ago, for instance, one of our distinguished novelists permitted himself to be quoted as having found "his real excitement, his real interest," in receiving a certain prize, not so much in receiving this prize for literature, as in feeling that he was actually, for the moment, on a "par" with three scientists who were also receiving prizes; for writing, he said, is "an escape from something." Does this novelist really believe that Tolstoy, Dickens, Hugo spent their lives "escaping"?—in any sense that would not be equally true of Darwin, Pasteur, Einstein? This general feeling of inferiority, which characterizes writers in America, and is almost always accompanied by a sentimental admiration for scientists (who have, it is true, more frequently than writers, a superior habit of minding their own business)—this feeling can be attributed, in large measure, not only to the fatal ways in which our writers entangle themselves with sycophants and agents of publicity, which turns them, in disgust, against themselves, but also to the example of our leaders, and what they have left unsaid. For half a century no one in America has spoken of greatness, no one has praised greatness, no one has insisted that there is a hierarchy in human activities, no one has asserted that literature, art and philosophy represent values of transcendent importance. Unless men are inspired in their youth with a sense of these things, they cannot truly develop the creative will, which is in so large a degree a matter of emulation; and there is nothing that stimulates youth

like the existence, the presence, the propinquity of men of great gifts who radiate a sense not of their own importance but of the importance of their gifts, of their vocation—who accept, in short, the responsibility of being leaders. The strength of our New England literature sprang from the fact that those old writers were almost conscious of being heirs of a priesthood; they had, and they disseminated, the sense of an extra-neighbourly, almost an extra-mundane, sanction. Since then, and because the literary life demands, almost as much as the ecclesiastical life, a sort of apostolic succession, the sense of the vocation, where it has existed in Americans, has been, to an extraordinary degree, the result of European contacts. One recalls not only Whistler and Henry James, but men like Frank Norris and Stephen Crane.

Our stay-at-home leaders, conforming to the democratic pattern, have evaded this responsibility. They have too readily accepted the illusion that one man is, in the nature of his function, and the doctrine that one man ought to be, as good as another. Hear, for example, what Howells says (and let it be understood that I do not underestimate the noble pertinacity with which, within his limitations and according to his lights, Howells pursued his craft): “It is good for the literary aspirant to realize very early that he is but one of many, for the vice of our comparatively virtuous craft is that it tends to make each of us imagine himself central, if not sole. As a matter of fact, however, the universe does not revolve around any one of us; we make our circuit of the sun along

with the other inhabitants of the earth, a planet of inferior magnitude." It is a virtue, no doubt, that Howells reminds us of, but is it not one of the least of the virtues? Is it one, for instance, that a grateful humanity would wish to have been inculcated in the youthful Goethe, in the youthful Thomas Carlyle or Victor Hugo? As a counsel for the literary aspirant, its value is more than dubious, in so far as it seems to impugn something else than personal self-conceit; for the sense that the great man *may be* central, and that for this very reason greatness is worth pursuing, is surely one of the indispensable motives that lead men to accept the dust and heat of the race. They were wiser, the ancients and the men of the Renaissance, who spoke of immortal garlands and fed themselves on the idea of fame (so different from the acclaim of kindly reviewers, kindlier friends or anything contemporaneous), for whom some personalities *were* "central, if not sole" and who were led to emulate those personalities. Childish as they may seem to us now, those men of old, they had, in their vanity, if you will, a far more genuine understanding of the needs of the "aspirant" in question. And a better understanding as well of the importance of their own activities! Convinced as they were that human life has its elements of grandeur and glory, and that they were appointed by nature as it were to represent these elements, they were not unwilling to forgo the virtuous reflection that the world is petty and man little better than a worm.

This attitude of Howells is really typical, typical of our leaders both in literature and philos-



ophy; for Professor Dewey would surely not resent the imputation of a similar view. Humble in their own persons, touchingly and delightfully humble, as great men ought to be, these two captains of our intellectual life have been humble also in their instinctive conception of the fields of activity which they represent. And that is the basis of our grievance against them: they have unconsciously yielded to the contempt under which ideal activities labour in this country, they have failed to challenge, clearly and overtly, the assumption of the man in the street that ideal activities are indeed contemptible. And how, in the nature of things, does this affect the ardour of the "aspirant" in question?

Yet who is more important to society than the artist and man of letters? Who but they can project images of a beautiful, desirable and possible social order, focussing the blind and desultory efforts of other men? Who but they can communicate, amid the cynicism of these present years, that sense of the miraculous potentialities of life without which the impulse of movement perpetually flags and wavers and loses itself in what Mr. Dreiser calls the "mere idle rocking of forces"? Let me quote a few lines from the *Nouveaux Prétextes* of M. André Gide: "Everything has always existed in man, more or less obviously or in secret—and what new times uncover in him, disclose to the eye, has always slumbered there. . . . I believe that as humanity, after all, outweighs race, one can find elsewhere than in St. Petersburg—in Brussels, I mean, or in Paris"—and let us add,

New York—"the Nejdans, the Muichkins and Prince Andrés. But as long as their voices have not been heard in books or on the stage they languish or lose patience under the cloak of custom, waiting, waiting, for their hour. How many secret Werthers there were, unknown to themselves, waiting for the bullet of Goethe's Werther in order to take their own lives! How many hidden heroes await only the example of the hero of a book, only a spark of life given off by his life, in order to live, only a word from him in order to speak!" If literature is capable of these evocations of the dormant possibilities in human nature—and who denies it?—who can deny the importance of literature, and who can estimate the opportunity the American writer has, confronted as he is with a society in which only two or three of the notes of the human scale are ever heard! And at this time especially, when youth in America is so suggestible! The American novelist has it in his power to call into life innumerable impulses that would make society rich and significant, he has the power of opening up new paths and directing the floods of energy that refuse to flow in the old channels. He has only to create new heroes on the printed page and they will follow soon in flesh and blood. And why should he not begin by creating for once, and embodying in American terms and under American conditions, the convincing image of the hero as artist?

## AMOR FATI

**I**N ONE of his soliloquies, Mr. Santayana speaks of the immense value in the world of thought of a complete indifference to forms of life that are beyond one's power of realization. He is discussing snobs and snobbishness; and he suggests, apropos of the instinct of social emulation, that nothing could be better calculated to advance the material well-being of society: it is in ages and among races in which that instinct is weakest, on the other hand, that we find the most marked variations in the sphere of the intellect. Mr. Santayana cites the Hindus who roll in the dust, rapt in their separate universes, oblivious of the destiny of king and merchant; but we do not need to go to Asia to perceive that nothing is more advantageous in the life of thought than a certain fatalism in all mundane affairs. It has been plausibly argued that the decline of English letters dates from the hour when the writer was enabled to compete with the gentleman. Charles Lamb and his circle, for example, knew nothing of that social aspiration which has had such an ill effect on their successors; and who will deny that what we call "opportunity" has had much to do with retarding the development of our own literature? Man is a being who thinks, but only by compulsion; and when there are so many

open paths to fortune why should he subject himself to that discomfort which, as Renan said, is the principle of movement?

The probability is, indeed, that as long as other and more natural forms of life are not beyond one's power of realization, the mind cannot be quite indifferent to them. If that is true, the absence of caste in our civilization is a positive detriment to literature; for writers, like all craftsmen, are happiest when they possess a sphere of their own, a self-sufficient sphere out of which they are never tempted to stray. That ancient tag about "the world forgetting, by the world forgot" really states the first principle of the conservation of energy in the literary life: such modern writers as Thomas Hardy and George Gissing exemplify it, and it was their acting on this principle that justified, as the late Alexander Teixeira de Mattos observed in one of his letters, so many of the "men of the nineties." They "hadn't clubs, homes, wives or children," he says; they "lunched for a shilling, dined for eighteen pence, and didn't want a lot of money. They cared neither for money nor fame; they cared for their own esteem and that of what you call their *coterie* and I their set." There we have the guild-spirit, the pride of the vocation, out of which the art and literature of the past have come; but how far has not that pride been a consequence of the stratification of life in societies in which the individual has had virtually no chance of "rising in the world"? That heights can exist at every social level is a notion that seems to lodge only in minds that accept their level as predeter-

mined. Thus the extremity of the old Adam is the opportunity of the new; and we may say that the star of hope rose over our spiritual life on the day when the last barefoot boy in Kansas ceased to dream of inhabiting the White House.

It is certainly true that the writers of our generation have, as a class, begun to accept their fate. They have seceded, that is, from the bourgeoisie, and ceased to accept the verdict of their bankers as the last word on their own success or failure. Henry Adams remarked that the American mind of his day had less respect for money than the European or Asiatic mind, and bore its loss more easily; but he added that it had been deflected by the pursuit of money "till it could turn in no other direction." We can see the result in the American literature of the generation preceding the war: it was characteristic of the age of the "best sellers" that the chief preoccupation of its authors was the maintenance of a "standard of living," and few were those who were not driven by the fear of dropping behind in the race. That essentially alien idea, to the pursuit of which we can trace much of the exaggerated "inferiority-complex" of the American writer as a type—for how can artists compete with captains of industry and preserve their self-respect?—that alien idea no longer dominates our literary life. Our chief difficulty is that as yet no other ideal has taken its place.

The historians of the next generation who look back upon the literature of our day will find in it all the traits of an interregnum of ideals. It will appear as marked, that is, by the habits of mind of

the preceding epoch, oddly disoriented, fading, dissolving, undergoing all manner of transmutations; it will seem to bear a sort of intermediate character, as between a pioneer literature and a high literature in the proper sense. It is, in other words, the expression of a will-to-create in minds imperfectly adapted to the creative life. The assumed necessity of having to justify themselves financially, to conform to public opinion, to be useful and to produce only the useful, combine to prevent American writers from accepting their status and making a fine art of it. They have at bottom the mental constitutions of practical men; and an ingrained need of the approval of the majority stands in the way of their strongest conscious desires. Hence the egomania of our contemporaries, their itch for publicity, their haunting fear of not being known, their anxiety to keep up with every new idea, every new movement.

In the normal course of things, the conscious cravings of one generation are likely to become the unconscious impulses of the next. The passionate material desires of fifty years ago have passed below the threshold of the consciousness of our epoch. Meanwhile, the typical minds of our day, moved unconsciously by those desires, have been consciously filled with desires of a very different order: everyone wishes to follow some "creative" pattern. When these latter desires have been ploughed under the soil, we may expect a genuine literary movement in this country: all the signs seem to point that way. In things of the mind, however, nothing is automatic; and the American

Renaissance will not get very far unless it develops the guild-spirit in place of the spirit of log-rolling. The bad habits of the writers of today are due to the precariousness of their situation. Our society is so chaotic that they cannot feel they are voicing anything but their individual sentiments, and for this reason they lack confidence in themselves. Towards the organization of society, which is indispensable as a condition of a high literature, they can contribute very little. But the development of a craft-sense, a sense of the art not only of writing but of being a writer, of belonging to a caste that has its own character and responsibilities, is within their power; and by means of it they can prepare for the hour when society has need of them, and perhaps hasten its coming. By doing so they will escape from that state of unstable equilibrium in which they now achieve so little that is good. "Let each one ask himself," said Goethe, "for what he is best fitted, and let him cultivate this most ardently and wisely in himself and for himself," passing through all the stages of apprenticeship before he presumes to think of himself as a master. How different this attitude is, and how much more productive, than the prevailing attitude of our well-intentioned contemporaries! Strictly speaking, however, it is one of the logical consequences, in a human nature that exists by faith and will, of the necessity of accepting a limited status in life.

## THOUGHTS ON BIOGRAPHY

“THE education of a people with a view to culture,” said Nietzsche, “is essentially a matter of becoming used to good models.” That has been the social justification of biography from the days of Plutarch down. But who and what are these good models, and how can they be presented most effectively? One thing is certain, that to set out with any sort of *parti pris* in regard either to human nature or its environment is to be incapable of determining who the good models are, or of treating them in such a way as to stir the instinct of emulation; and if we are the most irreverent of peoples, the least inclined, that is, to believe in distinction and to have a wholesome regard for it, American biography is largely to blame. And I do not mean the new “debunking” biography, which is largely a mere reaction; I mean the old respectable biography against which the “debunkers” have reacted. For it placed a premium on conformity and mediocrity, and bowdlerized even these to such an extent that for us the saints were all of lath-and-plaster. It expurgated the writings of the “founding fathers”; it was actuated by an inveterate will-to-ignore the spots on the heroic reputation. It considered it a sort of duty to turn out plaster saints for the edification of the newly



arrived, who might otherwise have been disposed to doubt that all American life is a Fourth of July.

That is what comes of thinking of the model first instead of the man, thinking of the good boys who are going to have their lives brightened by the model instead of thinking of the man again. A biographer is nothing if he lacks the innocence of the artist, if anything clouds the simple candour with which he contemplates the facts. To familiarize men with good models is indeed the social justification of biography; its artistic justification is quite another matter, and this alone, after he has chosen his subject—and the real biographer will waste few thoughts on subjects that have no heroic implications—is the biographer's concern. He should not think of the audience at all, in the sense, I mean, of adapting the subject to them. The ancients were more fortunate than we: they loved greatness, and loved to emulate it, as much as we love littleness and conformity. And so Plutarch was able to think of his subjects as heightened expressions of the life about him, to marry, as it were, his subjects and his audience and to think of each in relation to the other. But the modern biographer, if he is an artist, concerned for the survival of great values, is obliged to work, like every other artist, largely in the teeth of the public: it is only by so doing that he can serve the public in the end. Carlyle is a greater hero for the future just because of all the unpleasant truths, truths that were not to the public's taste, that Froude revealed about him. Froude destroyed the proportions of things as the public wished to see them, he deprived the public

of the hero it thought it wanted ; but in doing so he forestalled the "debunkers" and stole all their thunder, and to those who really care, and who are able to avail themselves of a hero, he presented an image of Carlyle with all the elements of strength balanced as they were in reality against the elements of weakness. If American biographers had followed his example, trusting to their instincts as artists, and really believing that their subjects were heroic, permitting the moral example to take care of itself, and ignoring the sentimental demands of the public, we should never have had the new "debunking" biography ; and, what is more important, the present generation might have found in American history half the heroes it needs. In short, an honest and mature art of biography might have given us much of the glamour that we abundantly find, and that feeds us, in the heroes of the Old World.

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According to Goethe, the significance of the subject is the Alpha and Omega of art ; according to Manet, the subject has no importance whatever. There we have the difference between two æsthetic philosophies, the classical and the impressionistic ; but, however it may be in painting, in the art of biography Goethe's dictum will always remain true. The most interesting biographies are biographies of the most interesting persons, nor can any amount of insight and ingenuity coax out of a dull, conventional, unconscious, undeveloped life the

image of a morning star. The biographer is at the mercy of his subject; he is even at the mercy of the circumstances of his subject. He requires, that is, in order to bring his full powers into play, not only a highly developed "sitter" but one who has lived in a more or less highly developed environment: the David Crocketts and Daniel Boones are subjects for epic poetry, not for biography. If a distinguished man has not been "seen," or partially understood, or even intelligently misunderstood, he is predestined to remain a figure of legend: the biographer cannot really take possession of him. That is why, although lives of the saints flourish in the obscure epochs, the psychological study, the literary portrait, only appears, along with high comedy and satire, in mature societies.

It is true that American biographers have sometimes failed to make the most of their opportunities: we know this because in so many instances it has been left to Europeans to explore the possibilities of American subjects. We have produced, in their respective fields, nothing quite so good as Léon Bazalgette's *Whitman* or H. S. Salt's *Thoreau*, as Mr. F. S. Oliver's *Alexander Hamilton* or Lord Charnwood's *Lincoln*. On the other hand, it must be admitted that American biographers are faced with peculiar difficulties. Mr. Gamaliel Bradford's *American Portraits: 1875-1900* are excellent portraits; moreover, they show how far Mr. Bradford might have gone towards picturing a whole civilization were it not for the obstacles I speak of—to which indeed he refers in his preface. The period with which the book deals is the last

quarter of the nineteenth century, and Mr. Bradford says: "I am aware that in the present volume I have not carried out my aim as fully as I could wish. There are too many writers and artists. . . . I should like to have included a man of pure science, and especially one of the men of large business capacity who are so typically American. What balked me has been the difficulty of obtaining satisfactory material." As a matter of fact, of the eight figures who appear in the book, all but two, Blaine and Grover Cleveland, are writers and artists of one kind or another; and could any selection be less representative of American society during the epoch in question? What it really means when Mr. Bradford speaks of "the difficulty of obtaining satisfactory material" is that the biographer is excluded from the spheres in which everything that is most characteristic of American society is carried on. We can draw our own inferences regarding the significance of these spheres, the want of real and ultimate human value, as expressed in terms of interest, in the characteristic lines of activity pursued in modern America. But these are the inferences that all our critics are drawing every day. Our concern at present is that the biographer cannot paint a broad picture of this society, even if he wishes to do so.

The reasons for this are sufficiently manifest in Mr. Bradford's portraits of Cleveland and Blaine, who were certainly more "representative," by which I mean less peripheral, than Whistler or Henry Adams. It happens that Mrs. Blaine was an observant woman, with a gift for expression: other-

wise Mr. Bradford could scarcely have written about her husband at all. And yet in spite of this we learn very little. We learn that Blaine was involved in dubious financial operations, that his one ambition was to be elected to the presidency, that he was devoted to his family, that he had great personal charm; but as for any clear and precise image of a unique human being, it simply fails to emerge from these skillful pages. Or again, consider Cleveland, his personal utterances: "The Bible is good enough for me; just the old book under which I was brought up"; "It is a condition which confronts us, not a theory"; "Of all the wonders that I have seen during my life, none has quite so impressed me as the reserve power of the Democratic Party, which seems to have the elements of earthly immortality." Is it surprising that, aside from a general impression of moral force (which expressed itself chiefly as a will-to-veto), we derive nothing from all this that can be described as in any sense distinctive? Both portraits are essentially commonplace, yet both have an air of truth. And is it possible to doubt that Mr. Bradford has done the best he could?

Evidently not, inasmuch as we perceive what Mr. Bradford can do with men as diverse as Whistler, Henry Adams and Mark Twain. And thus the truth appears, that, aside from the literary-artistic sphere, the American character, during the last half-century, has failed to undergo any distinct individual development. It has been dominated by material interests, and material interests have bred the sort of "crowd," the crowd of "successful" men,

whom Charles Francis Adams described in those well-known words: "A less interesting crowd I do not care to encounter." Generally speaking, this typical American character has acted only along party lines, its thoughts have all been typical crowd thoughts, its desires have all been typical crowd desires. This explains why there is no "satisfactory material" about it; for men who say that the Bible is good enough for them, and who find the "reserve power of the Democratic Party" the greatest wonder in the universe, can hardly expect to have their opinions quoted for the joy of posterity. The individual must make the first move before the diarist can come into action, as the diarist must have come into action before there is any chance for the biographer. The characteristic forces of our modern society are too impersonal to lend themselves to psychological treatment. They lend themselves only to the "big stick."

An American Saint-Simon or Sainte-Beuve, or even a Lytton Strachey, finds himself therefore confronted with unusual problems. Where, for instance, would Lytton Strachey have been if he had not been able to depend on his Mr. Cheever and his Greville, if his Eminent Victorians had not been highly conscious (though not quite as conscious as Lytton Strachey), if they had not been introspective themselves, and given to self-expression, and if they had not been surrounded by the "mirrors" of a highly conscious society? This is not to say that American life offers no material to the biographer, far from it; but I think it can be said that, as a rule, American biographers will find them-

selves unrewarded whenever they choose as subjects our so-called national figures. For of these national figures, who correspond with Strachey's diverse heroes, it is safe to say that never before in history have cardinals, capitalists and military commanders so closely resembled one another under the skin. Cardinal Gibbons was not a Cardinal Manning, General Pershing is not a General Gordon; and Boswell himself could not have made them so. There is not sufficient culture, not enough natural diversification, among the figures of our public life, to requite the biographer's efforts. And this, in spite of great and often picturesque superficial differences, has been true in America for three generations.

It may thus be fairly asserted as a general fact that the more nearly central an American character may have been, in the sense of having had some abundant share in the open life of the democracy, the less he is likely to have developed his own uniqueness. And so the American biographer is driven, to find his true subjects, to the outer edges of our society, among exiles and intellectual hermits; and it is surely no accident that Mr. Bradford's portraits of such men are his really successful portraits. And for this reason Mr. Bradford's series should have grown better and better the further back he went. Before the Civil War, the most interesting American characters were also the most central. As subjects, they meet the biographer more than half-way.

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Mr. Bradford's *Damaged Souls* seems to bear out this contention, the contention that the American character of the last three generations has lost something in variety, individuality, subtlety, in culture, in uniqueness, or whatever it is that awakens our psychological interest. One supposed that as Mr. Bradford passed behind the period 1875-1900, he would find himself confronted with many figures—public, national figures—intrinsically more exciting to the mind than his typical figures of the last epoch; and it seems to me that his portraits of Burr, Paine and Randolph confirm this general view. Burr and Randolph beside Blaine and Cleveland! There is indeed something characteristic of their respective epochs in these two pairs of names; and how much more the former pair interests us than the latter! The difference lies in the sphere of the inner life, its richness, complexity and articulateness in the one case, its poverty, simplicity and muteness in the other. It is impossible not to suppose that Mr. Bradford has felt this distinction: did he not, in writing his masterly *Aaron Burr*, experience sensations that were unknown to him as he composed, conscientiously, with all the art and insight at his command, the portrait of Grover Cleveland? With these illustrations before us, it seems to me that we can almost measure the degree of standardization, of conventionalization, the degree of repression to which, in its path to material power, the American character, considered generically, has more and more subjected itself. To adopt, for a moment, the language of psycho-analysis, and to speak in general terms, the "introvert" has been



replaced, in American society, by the "extravert"; and what I mean to imply is that the extravert does not lend himself to psychological portraiture.

Why this is so—for the subject surely deserves a moment's consideration—we can see from the following passage from Jung's *Psychological Types*. Dr. Jung assumes that the two types are of equal value to society: his purpose is to explain why it is that a description of an extraverted person is apt to contain "an element of caricaturing depreciation," why, in other words, the extravert is so much less accurately describable—and thus we may say, interestingly describable—than the introvert: "With the intellectual medium it is almost impossible to set the specific value of the extravert in a fair light; while with the introvert this is much more possible, since his conscious motivation and good sense permit of expression through the intellectual medium as readily as do the facts of his passion and its inevitable consequences. With the extravert, on the other hand, the chief value lies in his relation to the object. To me it seems that only life itself can concede the extravert that justice which intellectual criticism fails to give him. Life alone reveals and appreciates his values. We can, of course, state the fact that the extravert is socially useful, that he deserves great merit for the progress of human society, and so on. But an analysis of his means and motivations will always give a negative result, since the chief value of the extravert lies not in himself but in the reciprocal relation to the object. The relation to the object belongs to those imponderabilia which the intellectual

formulation can never seize." What does this mean to the biographer if not that there are good subjects and bad subjects, that, aside from any question of his "social usefulness," the individual is a good sitter, from the point of view of the literary artist, in proportion to the abundance and diversity of his inner life and his own consciousness of it? I say the "literary artist," for no doubt the typical qualities of the extravert, the man of sheer action, may be registered in stone or paint—they register themselves visibly in the features. In words, they are lost, or all but lost: since they express themselves in action, it is impossible, in Dr. Jung's phrase, to do justice to them in description. That is why, for example, a psychological portrait of Theodore Roosevelt would surely contain an unjust measure of "caricaturing depreciation": life, in our own mind, does ample justice to Roosevelt, but our "intellectual criticism" presents him to us too much as a variation of the mere type *puer Americanus*. In short, the psychological biographer who is also an artist wastes his time in dealing with extraverts.

That is why such relatively unimportant figures as Eugénie de Guérin appeal, generation after generation, to biographers, why Mr. Bradford himself has re-handled this subject; for they are interesting, from a literary point of view, as what Mr. Chesterton calls the "strong, silent men," however important they are, can never be. And the stronger and more silent, the emptier and more spiritually poverty-stricken the American character becomes, the more ardently it follows the path of external power, the less the man of letters will be able to

memorialize it for posterity. For these men are like pebbles that have been rolled so long in the stream of material interests that all their attractive facets have been rubbed away.

## THOUGHTS ON HISTORY

**I**T IS related of Napoleon that having, in 1816, while on St. Helena, read in Sallust of the conspiracy of Catiline, he remarked that he was unable to understand what Catiline was driving at. No matter how much of a bandit he may have been, said the Emperor, he must have had some object, some social purpose in view. Pío Baroja, the Spanish novelist, who reminds us of the incident, comments upon it as follows: "The observation of this political genius is one which must occur to all who read Sallust's book. How could Catiline have secured the support of the most brilliant men of Rome, among them of Julius Cæsar, if his only plan and object had been to burn and loot Rome? It is not logical. Evidently Sallust lies, as governmental writers in Spain lie today when they speak of Lerroux and Ferrer, or as the republican supporters of Thiers lied in 1871, characterizing the Paris Commune."

These historians, how well we know them! We know them too well indeed to call them liars. Do they pervert the truth? What is truth? they might retort upon their accusers; and most of their accusers—being pragmatists, as a rule—would not, I fancy, care to stay for an answer. The fact is that most of us are under the domination of leading ideas that are not, save in the rarest cases, our own:

the disinterested mind is almost as rare as the roc's egg. The historians are like the rest of us: they have a certain conception of society which they believe they have thought out for themselves but which they have, in reality, absorbed from their friends and club-mates, from the contemplation of their national flags or their party emblems, from the books of other worthy citizens and from their natural desire to witness and defend the triumph of their own customs. Sallust was no more a "liar" than James Ford Rhodes, who, before he wrote his *History of the United States*, had been the partner in business of Mark Hanna; and Rhodes was no more a liar than those who re-write history in order to prove that Jesus was a labour-leader.

We have to admit that few of us, in this respect, are in any position to cast the first stone. We are in no position to impugn the work of men who, having a greater interest in history than ourselves and possessing a wider range of historical facts, are carried away, exactly as we ourselves are, by their own prepossessions. They write what they see, and as they see it; they seldom pervert the truth, they are merely blind to the truth. We can only say ourselves that truth exists, in spite of all the pragmatists; and that the really great historians are men who, in extraordinary measure, have depersonalized and universalized their minds (while continuing to exist as vivid personalities). For the rest, we can only assert our own prepossessions, in the light of as much truth as we can compass—and let humanity play the referee.

This must be our approach to the ever-present

problem of our own historians, our latter-day American historians. They are dull, almost without exception, and they make American history dull, because their prepossessions are in favour of a type of society that is also dull, a society, in short, that is ruled by commercial interests. One turns from Mr. Rhodes, Mark Hanna's partner, to this or that six-volume chronicler in the hope of discovering what sort of exciting adventures of mind, heart and soul one's forbears must have found in this world. Vain is one's effort. If they had been explorers and pioneers, these forbears of one's own, one might perhaps be better satisfied: the "romance of American history," as who would deny, has been worked for all it is worth. But this romance is altogether external; and most of one's own forbears stayed at home. They were not explorers, or pioneers, or trappers; they were not romantic at all, but they were real. And they did not stay at home because they were humdrum, but because for them the test of a human spirit was what it can make out of circumstances. In fact, they were much more real than the pioneers, and their lives must have been more interesting; for the world owes less to those who migrate in search of freedom than to those who liberate themselves on their own acres and oblige their neighbours to come round to their way of thinking. The stay-at-homes were more interesting than the pioneers, just as the original stay-at-homes in England were more interesting than the Pilgrim Fathers. They were the superior types in both cases; but somehow the historians fail to see it.

Most of us have grown up in the assumption that American history is dull because our historians lack the straw to make any other kind of bricks. Those interminable facts about the tariff, the growth of industry, the winning of the West, mechanical facts, romantic facts—is there anything to choose between them after one has passed the cowboy-and-Indian stage and has not yet arrived at the stage where dollars and cents comprise the whole of life? But American history itself is not to blame for this: what is to blame is the minds of the historians. For these latter-day historians of ours (Motley and Prescott are in quite a different category) grew up, as we see, in a world in which dollars and cents, and the infantile romanticism that issues from the same mint, were the sole desiderata. They consumed the newspapers, interviewed the great financiers they met at their clubs, visited the political conventions, and, now and again, to get a breath of the bustling actuality, to prove to themselves that they were not mere scribes and that “manifest destiny” was really coming off, they took a trip through the Great Lakes or down the Mississippi. They wrote for the business men, whose wives were too immersed in a higher culture to read a page of their writings, and the business men occasionally snatched a moment to enjoy the casual pleasure of perceiving that history approved of them and their activities. And this was presented to us as the story of the American people!

Truth exists, after all; and one would be stretching truth were one to say that during all this time

great and momentous thoughts and passions agitated the souls of our countrymen. Who would insist that a mighty literature, a nobly expressive art, a beautiful religion occupied, behind the scenes of business, the spirit of this people? Few were the mute, inglorious Miltons our busy historians have left out of their picture, yet Gray was right when he spoke of the flowers that are born to blush unseen. Under the damp leaves of many winters, the winters too often of ignorance and poverty and hardship, of cruel traditions and perverse ideals, the flowers came to birth. Germination, gestation, creation, all the terrible and the kindly processes of the spirit unfolded themselves there. To few in that day, lost in the hamlets of New York and Vermont, confused and distorted by the delusions of a savage mythology, were given the words of Ulysses: "Consider from what seed you spring; you were not born to live as the beasts live, but to follow courage and wisdom as a sinking star." Yet it is certain that men sought the sunlight with all the powers they had—in poetry, in philosophy, in religion; in pottery, in carpentry, in weaving; in carving, architecture, botany; in chemistry and navigation; in shipbuilding and portrait-painting; in schoolmastering, lexicography, even music. And what they did, or worthily tried to do, along these genuine lines of the human spirit, is the real history of America: the history of the tariff, of the growth of industry, of the winning of the West, of the distribution of material goods and the multiplication of mechanical inventions, has meaning and value only in relation to this. The historians have given



us the fruits of their prepossessions: they have virtually told us that a country is great in the measure of its statistics. They have given us, in short, the sour grapes of our history: no wonder the children's teeth are set on edge.

And are even the men of business really pleased with a history that has been composed especially to please them? What do they think of the historians who have assured them that they, by virtue of their conquests, are the legitimate masters of the world? Something in them desires, as much as ever you and I desire, to be told that history consists not of statistics but of the effort of humanity along the lines that feed and express humanity. The business men may sometimes defend themselves against this damaging affection which they cannot suppress, and they take pains to keep the Sallusts on their side; but all the time they hope, or something in them hopes, to see the ideas of the Catilines have their inning. They may be grateful to the historians for giving them the past that is good for their business; but they are aware that somehow in the process the historians have disinherited them as men. "Let the scholar stand by his order," said Emerson—the scholar and the historian. For if he makes the mistake of echoing the men of business and giving back to them their own ideas, he may find them answering: "We paid you that you might not be a merchant. We bought and sold that you might not buy and sell. We did not want apes of us, but guides and commanders." And interpreters, let us add, of the highest reality that actuated our suffering and striving forbears.

## MORE THOUGHTS ON HISTORY

THE proudest claim of modern historians is to say that they are "impartial." Almost all our histories since the Civil War have been "dispassionate marshallings of the facts" (even, if we believed the historians, the histories of Germany that were written during the last war). Not to have drawn any personal conclusions, not to have revealed any personal bias, that is the boast of these historians, whose greatest horror is to confess that they are human. Let the facts speak for themselves, they say: the facts will speak more eloquently and truthfully if no other voice speaks through them.

But, unfortunately, another voice does speak through them, a voice far less worthy of respect than that of any enlightened individual. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum; vox populi, vox Dei*. Who denies the truth of these axioms? But they are true only in the long run, a very long run, and they imply, as existing in the majority, a remnant of the instructed. And it happens that the dominant moods of our national life during the age of our latter-day historians have been hostile to the humane point of view. The mood, on the one hand, of a somewhat narrow gentility, and, on the other, the mood of exploitation: to the censorship of one or both of these, every fact in our social history has had

to subject itself in order to survive in the popular mind. It might be all very well to let the facts "speak for themselves" if all the facts spoke, and if they spoke frankly; the result would not be history, which is an art, but it would be at least "the past." But the past contains innumerable facts, and every fact that survives implies that some selection has taken place; and, as things are, the historians who do not select their facts along the lines of their own prepossessions—prepossessions that ought to be "universal"—merely make their minds the impersonal registers of the prepossessions of the man in the street. And because the "street" in our day is Wall Street, except where it happens to be Main Street, the more history claims to be "scientific"—impartial and impersonal—the more it becomes the business man's history.

In point of fact, every historian is actuated by personal motives and wishes in regard to the character and direction of society. This is inevitable, since history is an art, in the very nature of things, and will never be a science, say what they will—an art because it deals with elements that cannot be precisely classified; and the great historians, Thucydides, Gibbon, Michelet, are simply those whose motives and wishes are great. A history that represents itself as a science enables the meanest minds to escape detection under the guise of this "impartiality." It is only natural that historians should have recourse to this misrepresentation; they have resurrected such a mass of facts that they are helpless before them—unless they are men of genius, they cannot "choose." And if

they would only confess that they are helpless, one would have no quarrel with them: it is true that they have a Frankenstein on their hands. Having lost their criterion, however, their sense of the good life and its proper values, they confess nothing; instead, they make a virtue of necessity and tell us that their "impartial" attitude is not only the correct attitude but that it represents a moral advance. Thus we have the ironical result that, unable as they are to dominate facts and infuse them with great personal desires (personal in the sense that they spring from persons, but persons who have been universalized), they register these desires of the average man, from whom they have failed to differentiate themselves. This explains their behaviour in the war. Of all the hysterical propagandists, there were few at that time to compare with those who had always maintained the "impartial" attitude because they had no convictions of their own, whose house was therefore already swept and garnished for the devils of propaganda to enter in—who, in short, in the act of mishandling history in the name of science, had neglected to enfranchise their own minds.

## THE TRADITION OF ROOTLESSNESS

**I**T IS one of our just grievances against the historians of this country—a proof, rather, of what they still have to accomplish—that they have thrown so little light on the sources of our national habits, our characteristic modes of thinking, feeling and acting. They seldom write intuitively; they have been lawyers and statisticians rather than poets.

To say this is virtually to say that our history has not been written. And thus we are oddly unconscious of ourselves and our motives. Why does the American mind so naturally take to business and mechanics? Why are so few Americans disinterested? Why are so many of them susceptible to faith-cures, mind-cures and other strange religions? And why are we always moving, restlessly moving? Why is our life, in almost every aspect, so kaleidoscopic? These are important questions, and we might well partially understand them; for all sorts of conditions and circumstances lie behind them, as behind every racial disposition—one does not have to go back to Taine for that. It is not the business of history to explain the present, but an adequate history does explain the present. In it one should see, in all the complexity of cause and effect, the very nature of the hidden impulses that determine a people's life.

America, in short, from this point of view, is still a dark continent; and it is destined to remain a dark continent until it has produced historians who, like Michelet and Carlyle, are also diviners and poets. To perceive this is to perceive at the same time how exceptional is the opportunity of the most casual explorer in this field; for since all the great books about America are yet to be written, and all the great discoveries and generalizations are still to be made, a little intuition goes a long way, and one can happen almost by chance upon ideas that would have made the fortune of a Gibbon. Consider, for instance, a little article, "Whom the Land Loves," by Miss Mary Alden Hopkins, which appeared in a recent magazine. Miss Hopkins describes the rejuvenation of a certain Connecticut countryside: a colony of Slavs has settled there, and under their hands, as she puts it, the tired, disconsolate soil is recovering its health. These new colonists do not fight the land—that is her theory—they love it; whereas, with the old New Englanders, it was just the other way. "The Puritan forefarmers," says Miss Hopkins, "lived in perpetual conflict with nature. They 'wrested a living from the soil.' They were never reconciled to being farmers. Each farmhouse had its shelf of books—and they were not about agriculture. Every family tried to put one son into the ministry. The daughters had a term at the nearest female seminary. . . . The New England farmers took and took and took from the land, and they hated the land they looted. The land held back more each year. The struggle grew fierce. Abandoned farms

all over the country are the result. The humans fled from the conflict. The soil had—nervous prostration!" At last, under the new peasant ownership, and although, as Miss Hopkins says, the newcomers know nothing of scientific farming, the land has gradually come back into bearing, for "the land likes the change"; and all this region of the Housatonic has once more a future.

To most of our historians, this would naturally seem a kind of moonshine. In their lexicon there are no such words as love and hatred, and they are not open to the idea that there is any emotional relationship between man and the soil, or rather that it makes any difference what the character of that relationship is. But how Michelet would have welcomed such an intuition!—it would surely have struck him as a historic fact of the first order. Miss Hopkins's article is slight and unpretentious; nevertheless, a six-volume history of the United States might be written on this thesis and its implications, a history which, discreetly and skillfully done, might throw more light on our actual life than all the political histories put together. Ideas of this sort appeal with equal force to the poet and the monomaniac. The monomaniacs drive them into the ground, but in the hands of poets they are the stuff of history. One can imagine a sombre epic rising out of this intuition of a casual essayist, as the genie rose out of the lamp, an epic that would restore to American history the creative rôle it possessed in former times.

It is certainly conceivable, the argument might run, that most of the evil features of our civiliza-

tion are due to a false relationship in this country between man and the soil. Some original misunderstanding, as it were, between the human organism and the source of its vitality—to what else do they point, those sinister phenomena with which we are so familiar, our habit of incessant motion, the inconstancy of our personal relations, the externalization of our life, its want of depth and tranquillity, the superficiality of our literature, our idealization of business? What is the missing link between our life and the traditional life of humanity? All wisdom, all religion, all art, all values, in fact, have, in the general experience of the race, sprung, if not from the soil, at least from man rooted in the soil. America has gone off at a sort of tangent, inventing such words as “Rube” and “hayseed” to signalize its temperamental divorce from the natural fount of its energy; and America has paid for this in the drying-up of its own “collective unconscious,” in the mediocrity of its creative life. That missing link one might well find in the character of the original settlers and the tradition they established for their descendants, in the fact that they were not indeed peasants but townspeople and artisans, in large measure, of a bookish, genteel tendency, and ill-adapted to elemental circumstances. Merely to make this point would be to reset much of American history in a key at once tragic and realistic.

In such a story, for instance, as Hamlin Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border*, a striking illustration of this thesis, one sees the causes of many of the phenomena of our own generation. It



was not because of the obstacles they encountered that these pioneers, who have given our life so much of its present character, were incessantly moving on. They left Wisconsin for Iowa, and Iowa for Dakota, for the same reason that they had left Vermont for New York, and New York for Ohio. They had come too late, they were born too old to root themselves permanently in their first clearings, and they established a tradition of rootlessness. Thus we have a country that has not been loved, since its soil was never loved—the Main Streets and their resentful brood: for it is not newness and the want of education that have made these towns unlovable and ugly, but distorted instincts. Some day, in the far future, it may be the descendants of the peasant colonists of our own time to whom America will owe its real culture, because they have loved the soil, because in them humanity and the soil have successfully met one another. Meanwhile, this thesis explains with tragic emphasis the psychological fault that underlies our existing civilization. A rootless people cannot endure forever, and we shall pay in the end for our superficiality in ways more terrible than we can yet conceive.

## THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-EXPRESSION

AS REGARDS the doctrine of "self-expression," one has to consider that the mature artist is, above everything else, as Rodin said, patient and conscientious. Does this not suggest that his search is to express, not himself—who would bother to express a "self"?—but his sense of something that exists in himself, something not personal but universal? What that something is has never been clearly defined; it has been felt, however, as the "reality behind appearances." To express not his own feeble or defective emotions but his conceptions, his apprehensions of that reality, felt through his emotions—that is the object of his search.

And how different this is from disburdening one's own gross ego! "In every new play or poem," said Ibsen, "I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification," by which, if I understand him, he meant what others have called the progressive identification of the personal with the universal. And this was Nietzsche's aim as well: "Every defamation, every misunderstanding has made me freer. I want less and less from humanity, and can give it more and more. The severance of every individual tie is hard to bear, but in each case a wing grows in its place." This is the key of the character

of the artist. He feels himself a man, certainly, and at the same time an agent, a spokesman, a witness of the reality, greater than himself, of which his own spirit is a constituent part. Is there any other explanation of the artist's "conscience"? His sense of duty to the creative principle in himself could never have such authority over him were that creative principle anything less than the principle of reality whose service is perfect freedom. Understanding this, we understand why it was that Handel always composed in court-dress, why Machiavelli, who sincerely felt that he was in search of truth, why Machiavelli, before sitting down at night to seek with brain and pen for the realities of statecraft, threw off the garments of the tawdry day and arrayed himself in his robe of ceremony.

But to carry a little further this definition of the "universal": we mean that it expresses our own field of reality as aptly as it expresses the writer's field of reality, and this because of a certain transmutation that has taken place in the mind of the writer himself. "Who touches this book," said Whitman, "touches a Man." But this man, in *Leaves of Grass*, is by no means the man revealed, let us say, in Horace Traubel's biography. The pomposity, the trickery, the triviality of the old mystagogue of Camden have dropped away from the poet who sings the *Song of Myself*; what emerges from the symphony of his words is the majestic spirit that broods over America with healing in its wings. What was the man Whitman? A product of conditions, a victim of prepossessions—

even as you and I, an *homme incompris* with a chip on each shoulder: one can see him clearly enough in his conversation and his unconsidered prose. But of this little appears in his verse and his noble prefaces; and that is why other men, who are products of very different conditions than Whitman's, and victims of very different prepossessions, find themselves expressed and reflected there. The personal characteristics of the man remain, and yet they have been transfigured. His grievances have ceased to be one man's grievances, his lusts have become our lusts, his pride no longer excites our contempt but makes us proud as well. Something, in short, has happened to the man in the process of becoming a poet. He has transcended all that is personal in him and placed himself in rapport with the reality to which we also respond with the same vibration.

Then what shall we say of that type of poetry, so familiar in our day, which reveals, with whatever talent, scarcely anything but the "complexes" of the poets?—those exceedingly tender egos that have carried on, during the last two decades, the campaign of "self-expression." They are serious, honest, gifted, many of them, but the "selves" they express are surely not the selves that we have ever known. Life, experience, adventure, human feeling lie visibly behind these compositions; but they are a life, an experience, an adventure that are at no point married to our own. For us, therefore, and inescapably, these compositions are not literature—in spite of all their talent and sincerity (and much as we are obliged to respect them beside the

poems and stories that express mere crowd-desires). One sympathizes, one has a fellow-feeling, with this or that "complex," conveyed so indirectly, in well-chosen words. One may be drawn indeed to this Valley of Jehoshaphat, which our contemporary poetry so largely is, in a belief that these dismembered bones will be assembled at some future day for some prodigious flight to Paradise. (Although, truly, it sometimes seems as if our literature had become, and wished to remain, as it were like the shrine of Lourdes, a repository of the sighs and crutches of the maimed.) But literature is quite another matter. We all have our "complexes," heaven knows, but we know that they belong to the sphere of the unregenerate ego; and those who express them, however ingeniously, must expect to find their compositions regarded as flights of the alone to the alone. They do not express my reality, they do not express your reality; they do not really express even their authors' reality. Too often they merely permit the truth about their authors to leak through in a way that was never intended.

## ART - BOLSHEVISM

TWO books lie before me in a juxtaposition that is not without an element of irony. One of them is a new edition of Miss Vida D. Scudder's *Social Ideals in English Letters*, the other is a translation of Dr. Oscar Pfister's *Expressionism in Art: Its Psychological and Biological Basis*. Both might be described as documents of our day, yet an abyss deeper than ever plummet sounded seems to divide them. With the drift of Miss Scudder's book a large public has long been familiar: it is, briefly, a study of the reflection in English literature, from the author of *Piers Plowman* to Messrs. Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, of the "struggle by which democracy and freedom are slowly realizing themselves, and the earth is becoming in substantial sense the heritage of all the children of men." Dr. Pfister's conception of art in general is in harmony with the conception that is implied here. "Art," he says, "is to depict the whole of reality but also the forces of deliverance lying within the latter. . . . [The artist] penetrates into the innermost of things and recognizes remedial powers, ideal forces indicating a new direction which ordinary mortals do not see." The American essayist and the Swiss pastor-psychoanalyst are, in short, of one mind at bottom. Nevertheless, as I say, a gulf seems to separate their works.

It is, in a sense, the war that lies between them. Both writers share the same ideal: it is their subject-matter that is so different. Miss Scudder deals with art (specifically literature) in its healthy, "normal" state, as a stimulus and aid in the evolution of man. In the nineteenth century, this function of the creative process was almost an article in the faith of humanity. Was it not taken for granted that art had a social office, that it might indeed achieve in the end the regeneration of society? This, at least, was surely the assumption not only of the authors of whom Miss Scudder writes, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold and their English predecessors, but of Ibsen, Nietzsche, Tolstoy; and it would not be difficult to indicate that a similar conviction prevailed, despite innumerable minor differences, in the field of the other arts. Dr. Pfister's book, on the other hand, shows us how vain was any such hope. Not ultimately vain—but that is another matter: it merely illustrates the change that has overtaken, temporarily, the mood of art itself.

For what was the great struggle of the nineteenth century?—and which side came out the victor? Was it not the struggle between two principles, those that Bertrand Russell has characterized as the possessive principle and the creative principle? To paraphrase the terms, one might describe this opposition as that between industrialism and art, two modes of employing a fundamental instinct, the instinct of workmanship; and we can see now that the possessive principle prevailed, that industrialism prevailed—that it prevails, indeed,

for the time being. The war confirmed the victory of this principle, and not only defeated art but disabled it, cast it into the ditch where it remains, while industrialism continues on its self-devouring way. This is not ostensibly the burden of Dr. Pfister's book, but it is a burden that we are justified in reading into it; for the "expressionistic" art that Dr. Pfister analyzes is obviously a consequence of industrialism, and Dr. Pfister's analysis is enough to convince us that it is a crippled art. That is what we mean when we say that industrialism, at least for the present, has won the victory. It has produced an art from which it no longer has anything to fear, an art which, driven by the very instinct of self-preservation, has withdrawn from the struggle by retreating from reality itself.

"Reality," the whole social world, has grown more and more grim and irksome, to every sensitive mind, ever since the industrial era began. We know how it is in this country: the fiction of the last two decades shows us that there is scarcely a sentient American of the rising generations who is not filled with a most corroding resentment—that hatred which, as *Æ* well says, corrupts the soul of a nation—against the industrialized small-town existence in which a good half of our population seems to have been born and bred. Now an art that is to "regenerate" reality can only be repelled by reality up to a certain point. It must remain within the sphere of reality if it is to reach the generality of men; it must appeal to the real, and through the real, if it is to have any force against the real. And if there is nothing in the real that



engages it, attracts it, holds it, if, on the contrary, the real is only menacing, it simply, by an inevitable process, retreats into itself and turns reality over to the devil. This is the process the consequences of which Dr. Pfister so ably describes: "In fact, the human spirit, after having drunk to the lees the cup of a capitalistic-materialistically externalized civilization, and loathing it, has realized the impossibility of going any further in that direction. More prophetic than the statesmen, the artists with whom our study deals have anticipated the final judgment on our Mammon-civilization. . . . It is wrong to go on enquiring about the purposes of the new art-movement and to ruminate about its usefulness. This movement was simply fated to appear like a revolution, like a crushing judgment. Only a fool can disregard the deep seriousness, the very significant symptomatism, the absolutely justified and necessary longing for life to be found in expressionism, this phenomenon of our time, this art-bolshevism spreading over the whole world of culture."

Expressionism, then—and I leave Dr. Pfister to define the term—is a *fait accompli*. So far as sincerity is concerned, the deepest, the most tragic sincerity, the expressionists may almost be said to hold the centre of the field. For the "normal" artists are, too often, weak brethren beside them—weak in purpose, weak in sincerity, weak in temperament, in almost all the qualities that matter. The dominant art of the moment is hostile to reality, and ineffectual for the purposes of reality; and the question is, whether it can return decisive-

ly to reality unless there is something in reality to win it back. The artist has almost severed the tie that binds him to society, has become, what he has always tended to become, an out-and-out Ishmael. Can he resume the tie of his own accord, can he return to the society that has cast him out unless the mood of society itself changes? That is the question with which one confronts Dr. Pfister's hope for a day "when the strong desire for reality-ideals" shall have "superseded the expressionist's art."

We can only say, meanwhile, that Dr. Pfister's psycho-analysis of an expressionist artist, a possibly typical case, is deeply interesting. He shows that all the works of this artist are representations of his own psychical state; that his self-conceit is not vanity but a "psychologically well-founded experience, indeed a necessary means to escape the collapse of the lonely personality denuded of all reality"; that he is driven to address himself to the public in order to escape from madness and "maintain himself within reality," while, at the same time, only those can understand and enjoy his work whose psychical constitution corresponds with his own. For "of what concern to us," says Dr. Pfister, "are the brawls, the disappointments, the ugly scenes of childhood which the expressionist secretes into his work? If we had known them in their actuality we might manage to rake up perhaps at least some general human interest. If, however, we cannot be acquainted with those scenes of childhood, and if we merely have to guess from oblique houses how the artist's soul is

helplessly collapsing, from the inharmonious ugly features how the artist's mind is at discord with itself and remains fixed in the realms of ugliness, nothing but compassion is what we can offer. Compassion, however, is not an æsthetic attitude."

And so—but let us follow Dr. Pfister: "If man is not merely a self-sufficing monad, if it is part of his destiny and a life-necessity to hold a definite attitude towards reality, if it is his vocation to love, to serve, to rule in his environment, in society, the State, mankind, if he is to fill the world from his station with Spirit and subject it to Spirit, then it is a just demand on art that she, too, should give expression to this conquest and transfiguration of the world." Who questions it? And who, to quote our author a little further, can question his definition of the "true" artist?—"He is a painter who *must* paint, who *cannot* paint in any other way than he does paint, and who is prepared to hang for his way of painting.' A 'painter,' certainly! But an artist? No. Never will he be an artist who cannot give to his own sufferings the larger significance of universal sufferings and who cannot in his artistic work perceptually and symbolically realize, anticipate, prophesy a universally valid method of overcoming them. . . . The artist's sufferings are not caused by the trifles of everyday life. His inspiration springs always from some great sorrow . . . caused by the general imperfections of our race and by the very nature of Reality. . . . Even though he feels his own sufferings intensely, highly strung as he is, he yet connects them at once with

the sufferings of mankind as a whole, he looks upon his own as a fraction of man's sufferings."

Who would question this, or any other of the arguments by which Dr. Pfister mounts to the conclusion that the true artist is the "sensorium of mankind"? And who doubts that he attains this position through a sort of personal struggle, the struggle that Ibsen described as "self-purification"? But his struggle is surely in vain unless it takes place in the field of reality; and the question is, whether the attractive, the magnetic elements of society have not been so far unravelled by industrialism as to prevent the artist from reassuming the responsibilities of a social being. No one who is in touch with the world today will affirm too confidently that the breach between the artist and society is likely to be healed in our generation, and it is the sense of this unlikelihood that gives to such an appealing book as Miss Scudder's its air of a sort of fabulous remoteness. But of one thing we can be sure: if the breach is not healed, it will mean the death not only of the artist but of society itself as we have known it.

## THE FEAR OF INFLUENCES

IN HIS study of Booth Tarkington, Mr. R. C. Holliday tells us that the impelling purpose of the author of *Penrod* is "not to see things along book lines." Howells, he adds, is, in Mr. Tarkington's opinion, "the only genuinely American realist; Norris and Dreiser are Zola and Russian." An odd opinion, surely, considering that of all our modern writers Howells was the most saturated in books and in European literary influences, as Dreiser is the least, Dreiser whose greatest handicap it is that he has remained so largely an unlettered product of Mr. Tarkington's own Indiana! What is the explanation of this fear of being influenced by books, of being "offensively bookish," that seems to actuate so many of our writers? Certainly it was his saturation in literature that made Howells the distinguished writer he was: his limitations are to be ascribed to very different influences. And this may be said also of Henry James, and even of Walt Whitman. There is a myth that Whitman was a man ignorant of literature, a myth that should have been exploded long ago. It was not for nothing that Whitman spent long months reading his Homer to the rhythm of the surf: he was probably, in his generation, the best reader of Homer in all America. The great writer is

surely far to seek who has not submitted himself to many masters in a passionate novitiate.

The fear of being influenced is always a confession of weakness; and there is a certain truth in Nietzsche's saying that one should not feel obliged to say No to anything. What are they afraid of, these writers of ours who are so afraid of books, of becoming "offensively bookish"? Are they not afraid of becoming writers, of differing too widely from the normal type? Danger lies that way—the danger of self-discovery, the danger of individuality (or of losing their individuality!), the danger of unpopularity, the danger of a life that will oblige them to surrender their formulas. "Those who fear influences and shelter themselves from them," says M. André Gide, "make a tacit avowal of the poverty of their souls. A great man has only one care: to become as human as possible, let us rather say to become commonplace. . . . And it is thus that he becomes the more personal." And the only way for a writer to become as human as possible is to become aware, through experience and books alike, of as many modes of human thinking, feeling and being as the world offers. There is nothing that makes one more American, for example, than to have lived outside America, to have subjected oneself to the greatest number of influences that are not American—provided that one is strongly of one's race, that is to say, well-organized by nature; and whenever we find a nation or a nation's literature stirred to new life, it is always the result of influences from without. Would New England have had its Transcendentalism if Emerson and his

contemporaries had followed in the ruts of their fathers instead of reading German philosophy? Would there ever have been a Restoration comedy if London had not, at a certain moment, fallen under the influence of Paris? Would the literary spirit of nationality in half a dozen countries of Eastern Europe have awakened so soon if Byron, by his writings and his death, had not aroused it? Whatever manifestations of a new spirit have appeared in our own literature within recent years have been distinctly, in very large measure, the result of "seeing things along book lines," of deriving from foreign books new patterns, alike in the matter of form and the matter of vision.

## LITERARY STYLE AND RENAN

WHISTLER, in the presence of a certain enthusiast who had been discussing the progress of American taste in interior decoration, is said to have remarked that no matter how "perfect" an American house was, there was always some one detail, some trifling object, in a dim corner, perhaps, that gave the whole show away. That a house ought to be "perfect" is a notion that Whistler, in all probability, never questioned; it is one of those capital vulgar errors into which they are most prone to fall whose constant preoccupation is to avoid vulgarity. Still, one knows very well what Whistler meant: that in our American undertakings of whatever kind it is the final touch, the "little more," that is almost always wanting. It was Napoleon who said that victory goes to him who can best endure the last quarter of an hour, a truth that is nowhere more obvious than in writing. The American books that begin well only to end in disaster are not to be counted; and how many books are spoiled by half a dozen inadvertences their authors would perhaps consider trivial! These lapses are not at all what the practical mind takes them to be: to the discerning eye they signify all the difference.

Certainly in the course of a year we produce in



this country enough books to constitute the liveliest of literatures. Yet how inert, on the whole, our literature is; how utterly it fails to leaven our civilization! It is largely because of this inattention to the last quarter of an hour, this neglect, in other words, of form. And by "form" I do not mean the mystical form of modern æstheticians, who, in defense of their theories, write in a style that might scandalize a schoolboy; I mean the form that befits the genius of our race, the genius of our tongue, the form that Newman knew, and Swift and Franklin. Our thinkers and pamphleteers, confiding in their good intentions and the justice and virtue of their programmes, turn out book after book and revelation after revelation, and the mind of the public continues to doze as if we had no literature at all; and one is scarcely surprised as one surveys the flat, pasty mass to which it is all reduced at the end of the year. One remembers how constantly William James complained of the style in which our philosophers clothe their thought. "Our American philosophic literature," he says in one of his letters, "is dreadful from a literary point of view. Pierre Janet told me he thought it was much worse than German stuff—and I begin to believe so: technical and semi-technical language, half-clear thought, fluency, and no composition!" And again: "I am getting impatient with the awful abstract rigmarole in which our American philosophers obscure the truth. It will be fatal. It revives the palmy days of Hegelianism. It means utter relaxation of intellectual duty, and God will smite it. If there's

anything he hates, it is that kind of oozy writing." If the voice of God is the voice of the people, God ~~has~~ indeed smitten it; for things have come to the pass where, so far at least as speculative literature is concerned, it is we ourselves who are obliged to ask, as the English reviewer asked a century ago, Who reads an American book?

Such reflections come to one's mind by contrast as one turns the pages of Professor Lewis Freeman Mott's life of Ernest Renan. There is no sign here of what James further speaks of as "the grey-plaster temperament of our bald-headed young Ph. D's, fed on 'books of reference.'" On the contrary, it is a delight to read anything so admirably composed, so plainly written with that faculty of enjoyment which the author ascribes to his subject; especially at a time when one scarcely looks to the departments of English for these evidences of gusto and curiosity. Mr. Mott's book is written with so much distinction that it reduces to the last insipidity one's sense of the stale, monotonous productions of so many of our academic investigators; and what strikes one, as one thus surveys Renan's career afresh, is the extraordinary degree to which he himself, as a writer, achieved the "final touch." Is there, at least after this passage of years, anything so indispensable in Renan's leading ideas? Nietzsche showed how painfully his French contemporary had failed to catch the point, as it were, in his general affirmations, in attempting, for example, to reconcile *la noblesse* with *la science* (which belongs to democracy) and to represent an intellectual aristocracy while at the same time

kneeling before the *évangile des humbles*. So much the more credit to Renan's temper! How many thinkers as self-contradictory as he are capable of inspiring, four decades after their death, in a foreign tongue and country, such a lively book as Mr. Mott's? "Penetration, suppleness, varied culture of mind," Mr. Mott quotes our author as saying, "are the true logic. The form in philosophy is at least as important as the substance; the turn given to the thought is the only demonstration possible, and it is true in a sense to say that the Humanists of the Renaissance, apparently occupied solely in saying things well, were more truly philosophic than the Averroïsts of Padua." Whether it is true or not, this opinion has well served Renan himself. Because he was an artist, there is simply no getting him out of the way.

With our own philosophic writers still in mind, one pursues, therefore, with amused interest, the story of the development of Renan's style. It is true that he was fortunate, not in his genius alone, but also in his circumstances. He was blessed in that wonderful sister Henriette, who read his proofs and hunted out, as he said, "with infinite delicacy," the negligences he had overlooked: "she convinced me that everything might be said in the simple and correct style of good writers, and that neologisms and violent images always spring from misplaced pretension or ignorance of our real riches." Almost better, if one can imagine anything better, was the experience he gained in his connection with the *Journal des Débats*. There is a tradition that Henley the poet revised, or in other

words rewrote, everything that went into his own paper, with the exception of Yeats's contributions; and Henley had on his staff the most accomplished of the younger writers of England. The *Journal des Débats* under Ustazade de Sacy was a somewhat similar school. "Write with five hundred people in mind," was the advice offered by this editor to his new contributors; he also invited Renan regularly to read his essays aloud to him and suggested changes as he read. But this would have amounted to little if Renan had not realized how important it was for him, precisely because he was enamoured, as Mr. Mott says, of "Hebrew, mediaeval mysticism and primitive archaism," to devote himself to the classics of his own language. What he desired above everything was to seize the accent of the world. He had, in short, the intuition of the artist, so vigorously denied by our own American customs, that the way to save one's personality is to get rid of it as quickly as possible.

"I have not succeeded in defining my thought," he writes in one of his early notebooks. "It has not the necessary sharpness; I see it sketched like the point of a dagger under a veil, a statue under a veil." He had confidence in his thought; he knew that he had only to make it clear, that his thought would vindicate him; and for this reason he deliberately sought to escape from all forms of personal mannerism, he weeded out of his writing everything that tended merely to assert his individuality. When he came to re-publish his early essays, he suppressed all their slighting insinuations, every

implication of bad faith, all absolute statements, all emphatic phrases; and thus, as Mr. Mott says, his ideas, in their final form, were "allowed to operate by their own motive force, instead of being driven in with a hammer." That, as I understand it, is what Flaubert meant when he spoke of one's having "arrived at losing the notion of one's own personality"; for it is only then that everything a writer really possesses in himself comes to the surface of its own accord, and manifests itself by its inherent strength. Renan comments on the Port-Royalists as having "known the simple manner of antiquity at its best, the style that leaves to each his own shape, and does not give the air of genius to him who possesses none." It was by refusing outlet to the incidental, temporary, captious impulses of his spirit that he consolidated his individuality, so to speak, and created his "own shape," of which his writings then became the memorable expression.

What an example for us! For without speaking of a great literature, it is always possible to have an effective literature; and William James was surely right in saying, of the bad form of our speculative writers, that it "means utter relaxation of intellectual duty." Certainly we have no right to complain of the unresponsiveness of the public when the public is so seldom really invited to respond to our ideas.

## “THE CALAMITIES OF AUTHORS”

I WAS looking for something else, but I happened on Isaac D'Israeli's *The Calamities of Authors*. Could anyone pass indifferently a book with such a title? We are all authors nowadays, and the lamentations of the literary tribe are ever in our ears. What could be more amusing, therefore, than to examine our common predicament in the light of history? I turned to the table of contents: "The Maladies of Authors," "The Despair of Young Poets," "The Pains of Fastidious Egotism," "Laborious Authors," "Genius, the Dupe of Its Passions," "Miseries of Successful Authors," "The Illusions of Writers in Verse." Then I turned to the preface. "It will be found," the writer observes, "that the most successful Author can obtain no equivalent for the labours of his life. I have endeavoured to ascertain this fact, to develop the causes, and to paint the variety of evils that naturally result from the disappointments of genius. Authors themselves," he continues, "never discover this melancholy fact till they have yielded to an impulse, and adopted a profession, too late in life to resist the one, or abandon the other." Evidently, I said to myself, our essayist regards the case as pretty hopeless; but so much the better. Let him paint it as black as he can; he will be the

more likely to confine himself to evidence, and the less inclined to indulge in exhortation.

There was little of the calamitous, assuredly, in Isaac D'Israeli's own career: history records few literary lives that have been more placid and prosperous. What attracted him to this sombre topic? A kindly and sensitive nature, we seem to divine, together with the faculty of a born anecdotist who surveyed the world from the summit of the most tragic, as well as the most brilliant, of the literary centuries. The splendours and miseries of authorship! The eighteenth century gives us the supreme examples of both. The prodigies of unrequited learning, the iniquities of a brutal tradition of satire, the squalor and the ferocity one associates with the name of Grub Street: of all this the rumour, and more than the rumour, had reached D'Israeli's ears, for he tells us that he had known many of the victims of whom he writes. The moral of his book may be expressed in the phrase that "to devote our life to authorship is not the true means of improving our happiness or our fortune," but the author's purpose was rather to combat the "tardy and phlegmatic feeling" of the public where authors were concerned. "I turn," he says, "from the leaden-hearted disciples of Adam Smith, and from all their vile vocabulary of 'unproductive stock,' to appeal to the livelier genius of any auctioneer's puffer, any chapman of second-hand wares, any huckster of old iron and broken china, whether he does not feel himself a being more important than an 'Author by Profession,' and far less miserable?" And while he takes the

authors themselves to task for their vanity and bad temper, he insists that they justly feel neglect "as ordinary men might the sensation of being let down into a sepulchre, and being buried alive." Any opinion to the contrary, he says, "may be stoicism, but it is not Humanity."

Such is the spirit in which he takes us behind the scenes of Grub Street. He shows us from within, among others, certain of the lives that Pope lampooned in *The Dunciad*. He shows us the rapacity of the booksellers, and the insolence of patrons. He describes the case of the mendicant author, Myles Davies, who, driven to the wild resolution of hawking his own works, received from a certain duke and his lady the following attentions: "His and Her Grace came after dinner to stare at me, with open windows and shut mouths, but filled with fair water, which they spouted with so much dexterity that they twisted the water through their teeth and mouth-skrew, to flash near my face, and yet just to miss me. . . . [A second time] out fly whole showers of lymphatic rockets, which had like to have put out my mortal eyes." The age of chivalry had passed, as we see, and as Burke was observing at this very moment. Or take the case of the learned Sale, the translator of the Koran, who "too often wanted a change of linen, and often wandered in the streets in search of some compassionate friend who would supply him with the meal of the day." Or the "English Montesquieu," De Lolme, who spent half his life in a debtors' prison. Or the great Smollett who passed his whole existence amid "incredible



labour and chagrin." Or Dryden and Hume, mighty men and stoics, and yet so vexed and slighted that they regretted that fate had ever made them Englishmen. If such has been the lot of the greatest authors, what shall we say of the lot of the most popular?—Henry Carey, for one, the "delight of the Muses," the creator of "God Save the King," who died broken-hearted, a suicide, with a halfpenny in his pocket.

In his *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, George Gissing, meditating on his old life in London, asked whether there still existed the wretched race of authors he had known. A gratuitous question, this: one doubts if there is a single type described in D'Israeli's book that is not to be duplicated in the New York of 1932. The outward conditions of the literary life have changed; otherwise, even to the mendicant author, history repeats itself eternally. There is no difference in the kinds, there is only a certain difference in the degree: the miseries and the splendours of the eighteenth century are perhaps on a somewhat larger scale than ours. There is something enormous about the literary wrecks who emerge in D'Israeli's pages, as enormous as their fortunate contemporaries, Gibbon, Richardson, Fielding, Dr. Johnson. Consider Joshua Barnes, who, "besides the works he published, left behind him nearly fifty unfinished ones; many were epic poems, all intended to be in twelve books, and some had reached their eighth." Or Robert Heron, who "lived by literary industry in the confinement of a sponging-house," wrote a history of Scotland in six volumes, a system of

chemistry, innumerable works in Latin and French, translations, biographies, and "a great multiplicity of articles in almost every branch of Science and Literature." Literary leviathans of this order suggest an extinct race; and extinct as well are those fierce intellectual passions of an earlier age that still survived in the eighteenth century.

These and their calamitous results fill a good half of D'Israeli's pages. That authors have literally died of criticism we can well believe as we review some of the controversies of the age of Pope. The *odium theologicum* had passed into literature: there were critics in those days whose professed aim was to vex authors to madness. Everyone remembers Goldsmith's encounter with Kendrick, "one of the great disturbers of literary repose," as D'Israeli calls him; more formidable still was Dr. Gilbert Stuart, whose critical labours "were directed to annihilate all the genius of his country." Truly, the literary scene of the eighteenth century was a battlefield, and a cold and bitter wind blew over it. D'Israeli had seen too much of this carnage; and he wrote his book, in the spirit of his time, as a warning to youth. "Most authors," he remarks, "close their lives in apathy or despair, and too many live by means which few of them would not blush to disclose." But he adds, with resignation: "The first misfortune a Poet meets with will rarely deter him from incurring more."

## FROM THE LIFE OF STEPHEN CRANE

MY FRIEND H——, who fought in the Spanish-American War, described to me once a moment which he witnessed in the life of Stephen Crane. They were together at the Battle of Guantanamo, where Crane was acting as a correspondent. An unusually vicious fire was in progress, directed by the Spaniards against an earthwork behind which the American troops were huddled. Suddenly Crane, who was incapable of bravado, let himself quietly over the redoubt, lighted a cigarette, stood for a few moments with his arms at his sides, while the bullets hissed past him into the mud, then as quietly climbed back over the redoubt and strolled away. It was impossible, H—— said, to question the insouciance of this act: Crane's bearing was that of a somnambulist. He appeared to be, as it were, detached from himself, possessed by an irresistible impulse to register, in his body, and without regard to the safety of his body, certain sensations. The curiosity of the artist, who wishes to know, was so completely in the ascendant as to inhibit the fundamental instincts of the man.

For to the pure artist, as countless incidents show, physical existence is not an end but a means,

something that has value not because it *is*, but rather because, having it, one can feel and express it. Mr. Clive Bell, writing of artists, justifies this attitude when he says: "I call him a religious man who, feeling with conviction that some things are good in themselves, and that physical existence is not amongst them, pursues, at the expense of physical existence, that which appears to him good. In Paris I have seen young painters, penniless, half-fed, unwarmed, ill-clothed, their women and children in no better case, working all day in feverish ecstasy at unsalable pictures, and quite possibly they would have killed or wounded anyone who suggested a compromise with the market. They were superbly religious. All artists are religious. All uncompromising belief is religious." Do we ask why the human animal, born to inherit a very gracious world, subjects himself to these tortures? Could Stephen Crane have explained why he exposed himself to the Spanish bullets?—and would have exposed himself, with a similar purpose, to the Spanish Inquisition? Let Nietzsche answer for him: "What an endless amount of distress, privation, bad weather, sickness, depression, isolation we have to endure! Yet, after all, we manage to put up with all this, born as we are to a subterranean, struggling existence; every now and then we emerge into the light, we live once more through our golden hour of victory, and we stand there, as we were born, unbreakable, taut and ready to aim at new and yet more difficult, more distant targets, like a bowstring ever tightened by necessity."

As for Crane himself, who saw everything, heard, tasted, felt with the exquisite aptitude of a convalescent, of one who is recovering from an illness (from which he never recovered), so sensitive that the tremor of a butterfly's wing was not too slight to escape him—as for Crane, who had none of that desire to “see life” which is felt by those who have little capacity for it, his ruling passion was yet a kind of curiosity. The recurring theme in his stories, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, in *Active Service*, in *The Open Boat*, is that of the sensations of a man in peril of death. For some reason, the deepest part of his nature had elected the theme for him, and no doubt to have experienced the sensation in its sudden fullness he would have risked death not once but a dozen times.

## THE AMERICAN SHORT-STORY

**D**IOGENES, with his lantern, crept about the streets of Corinth in search of an honest man. "What!" we can hear the good burghers exclaiming. "Doesn't he know, this foolish fellow, that Corinth is full of honest men?" The contemporary cynic whose interest happens to be literature finds himself in a similar case; he is always scrutinizing America for real writers only to be assured that America produces nothing else. A few years ago, our local Conan Doyles and Rider Haggards were read for what they are and enjoyed without a second thought. But that was before "normalcy" entered our universities and became the passport to a higher esteem. Today, O. Henry is already an American classic; our fictioneers find their work discussed in treatises on the short-story and expounded in lecture-courses, and the author of a recent volume in the *Modern American Writers* series observes that if Mr. Irvin S. Cobb had written nothing else than his *Judge Priest* he would "have the right to a tablet in the Hall of Fame." The cynics go about wishing we had a literature, and all the time we have a literature—a literature as confident as the navy, and as ready to challenge the world.

One is moved to these reflections by Professor

Blanche Colton Williams's *Our Short-Story Writers*, with its formidable array of talents in a single department of this surprising literature of ours. For these short-story writers are merely the submarines and light craft of our literary navy: if we turn to the other volumes of this same series we can reassure ourselves that, for every cruiser of every other navy, we have a first-class armoured novelist and for every dreadnought a most redoubtable playwright. Professor Williams includes twenty authors, and yet she says in her preface: "I desire to state emphatically that these twenty authors are only representative of our short-story writers. I labour under no delusion that they are all we have of high rank." High rank, forsooth! Some of them, it appears, are of world-calibre. Thus we learn that in 1915 a certain Mr. Hodder-Williams asserted that "in Europe" (which presumably includes the Scandinavian countries) Mr. Irvin S. Cobb's *Paths to Glory* was being proclaimed "the most vivid, most moving, most convincing of all books on the Great War." And apparently we can do better even than that: if we can beat the contemporary world, we can climb the heights as well. Thus, Mr. Robert W. Chambers, we are told, "might say of himself with Bacon, 'I have taken all knowledge to be my province.'" And thus again, one of the characters in a play by Miss Alice Brown "testifies to his creator's kinship with Shakespeare." After this, the following words of our author are almost an anticlimax: "America has produced more good short-stories than England and Russia combined, and continues

to produce them. The fact is that they appear in such amazing numbers as to give a critic full-time work in merely spotting the few that are best."

Those old familiar phrases, how relieved one is to hear them! One had begun to think that possibly one had been missing something all this time, that some strange new dawn had really been breaking without one's noticing it. But here we are in the old reassuring paths, the happy-go-lucky America of our childhood. There comes to one's mind the statement in the preface of a previous volume in this series: "The author does not contend, nor will he so much as allow, that the production of literature artistically fine is a greater achievement than the satisfaction of many thousands of readers." Of mere "literature," as we see, this writer is as scornful as Verlaine (though perhaps for a different reason); and when we further observe Professor Williams making a hasty distinction between the "short-story critic" and the "critic of literature," we realize that even she is not quite serious in her odious comparisons, that she is not actually thinking of all those Russian stories that pale beside the productions of Mr. Chambers, that this, in short, is just the way we true-blue Americans like to talk strictly *entre nous*. Literature?—who ever thought of such a thing? This is just a jolly family party.

Away, indeed, with odious comparisons! Away with the supercilious Europeans! Away with the "art artists"! Here we are all good Americans together, rejoicing in our innocent promiscuity, without a shadow of suspicion or self-consciousness. A momentary whiff of cold air comes from



the door: "An English novelist," we read (just any English novelist), "visiting these shores, is reported to have spoken of Mr. Hergesheimer as one of three great American artists, the others being Willa Cather and James Branch Cabell." But to show how unperturbed she is by this, our author omits Miss Cather from her book. For this is no place for finical preferences, this is the region of the free and equal: is not "Edith Wharton, representative of culture," every bit as good as "Fannie Hurst, stylist of distinction"? Thus we observe our creative artists, with the world shut out, in the full flood of being their happy selves. It is a busy scene. To the left one catches a glimpse of Miss Fannie Hurst, "mastering the mechanics of emotion," while over the way Richard Harding Davis is "learning from Maupassant how to construct surprise." Mr. Tarkington is occupied on the right putting into his stories the "struggle element" that makes them so successful, and close by we see O. Henry inserting at the bottom of a handful of tales the "plot principle" that is going to carry them sky-high. Over all, like the humming of summer bees, one hears the murmur of such phrases as "story value," "character interest," "long shorts," "technician," "non-technician" and the like. One would suppose one had stumbled, by a happy error, into a convention of mechanical engineers.

And perhaps that is just the reason why, although America has produced more good short-stories than England and Russia combined, and continues to produce them, England and Russia

are not aware of this fact. Professor Williams quotes a remark of Mr. Melville Post: "The laws that apply to mechanics and architecture are no more certain or established than those that apply to the construction of the short-story." This may be so, or it may not be so; but certain it is that the interest of a story, that which makes it "good" in the eyes of mature readers, consists not in its conformity to these laws but in the quality of the mind behind it. And what is the quality of mind behind these stories? Is there any mind at all? Is there any of that creative element the nature of which is that it dominates life instead of being dominated by life? This lady whom we see "breasting out against new subjects, swimming with the times," this gentleman who is "reflecting the spirit of the age"—have they any "times" of their own, or any world? Is it a personal vision that informs them, or merely a crowd-vision? In learning to "construct surprise," and all the rest, have they not subdued themselves to what they work in? The preëminence of the American short-story is one of the most tenacious of our national myths: it is based on an illusion, that one can have a "good" story with nothing inside or behind it. But perhaps this myth is not as tenacious as it seems. The American short-story, in so far as it differs from other short stories, has entered its critical period: if it is being studied and expounded, it is also being scrutinized. This may well mean that its autumn has begun.

## THE WANDERERS

NO ONE has crossed the threshold of Russian literature, the great Russian literature of long ago, without becoming acquainted with those "superfluous men," those "unhappy wanderers in their native land" who, throughout the nineteenth century, haunted the pages of Russian poets and novelists. Pushkin first drew the type, but how many Alekos there have been since his Aleko sought for the ideal in the wild life of the Gypsies; how many Onyegins since his Onyegin felt himself nowhere more an exile than in Russia! Blades of grass, as Dostoievsky called them, torn from their roots and blown through the air, agitated and unsatisfied, loving their country but not trusting in it; aware of its ideals but not believing in them; incapable of any work in their native land and looking with scornful derision upon those who found work that suited them; distrustful also of themselves, consumed with ennui and self-contempt, these wanderers are indeed to the casual eye the most typical figures of the old pre-Revolutionary Russia.

During the last half-generation these types have become familiar in America. Well-conditioned, well brought-up, well-educated, having had all the "advantages"—who does not know them, these

"superfluous men" of ours who deny the "national truth," who "do not wish to work with others" and "suffer sincerely"? These men exist, they are the germ, one might almost say, of a new race; they have become indeed one of the formidable facts of our civilization. For American society has developed in such a way that it cannot easily command the allegiance of sensitive men. Our universities boast that they are becoming helpmates of business; our tradition long ago brought us to a point where the business life has become the "normal" life—normal for a human race which, in other ages, has followed a hundred patterns, has built cathedrals, and gone crusading, and pursued passionate desires to this, that and the other *altitudo*. The personal energy of our people has been absorbed in pioneering tasks that all but obliterate personality. Its social energy has likewise been absorbed in the unification of all the warring racial elements that compose our society. The struggle for unity that began with the Revolution, became a religious cause in the Civil War, and has been continued in these latter years in the campaign of Americanization, has given this vast assemblage of territories and races a forced cohesion; and the result has been to turn our society into a machine, which produces only one standardized human product. And few have as yet observed the inevitable reaction. The machinery of business speeds forward faster and faster, and, as it speeds, human nature becomes, beneath the surface, more and more recalcitrant. The most cynical, the most thick-skinned of men begin to ask themselves

whither they are going and for what purpose. The others, the more conscious, the more gifted, who have tasted life and the world, and cherished a dream of justice or of beauty, find themselves tossed by the wayside. What have they to do with this mechanical America?

They are not children of this clime,  
But of some nation yet unborn.

The war no doubt greatly enlarged this class. Many a young business man who would have gone on complacently mumbling his oats became at that time a malcontent for life, thanks to a few casual glimpses of a civilization more gracious than ours; for this mechanical America cannot stand the test of a comparison. But we had our bolshevists of the spirit before ever America heard of the bolshevists of the flesh. We are, indeed, a nation of neurotics, a fact from which one derives a certain consolation: that we comprise more men of good will than one is inclined to suppose in moments of despondency. For it is certainly true that while neurotics may not be men of good will, it is equally true that men of good will, confronted with the America of the present, tend to become neurotic; and a multitude of the latter argues a large proportion of the former. These wanderers of ours, who cannot find themselves, who deny the "national truth," these victims of maladjustment—are they not visibly manufactured by conditions of our life, economic, religious, educational, domestic, upon which the most cursory diagnostician can

lay a confident finger? And if we are a headless, a leaderless people, as headless and leaderless almost as those peasant peoples of Eastern Europe whose educated classes were in the past seduced away from them by their imperial masters, is it not because *these* are our natural leaders, these men who have fallen to the ground, as apples drop from a tree whose vitality has been so sapped that it cannot support them? Heine showed how the gods of Greece became devils in an age when men refused to recognize their divinity. By the law of its being, commercial America turns into tramps and outlaws those who are most capable of redeeming it. And who can say that in the end they will not redeem it? The more they detach themselves from the mechanistic world, the more they perceive the unreality of what at present passes in America for literature, art and religion, the more sensitive they become to the ideas, to the intuitions and gospels of the great forerunners who have given mankind its true art and religion. This disaffection of the gifted and the well-disposed is, if one is to judge from history, the natural first step in the evolution of the genuine illuminati. It is the becoming again as little children; and when these children begin to grow up in their own way, when they become, as certain of them cannot fail to become, masters of themselves—who will be America's outlaws then?

## L O N E L Y   A M E R I C A N S

ONE cannot have wandered far from America, either in the flesh or in fancy, without coming to feel that the destiny of the American is a lonely destiny. Loneliness is stamped on the American face; it rises like an exhalation from the American landscape. We are the most inarticulate of peoples, and the most essentially unsocial. We go through life, nine-tenths of us, without establishing a true communication with any other human soul.

To the casual eye, no doubt, the contrary is the truth. If we are lonely, we are also gregarious; ours is preëminently, for example, an urban civilization. In our actions we follow the laws of the herd as no European people follows them. And consider the mutual-benefit societies that gather in their vast nets such multitudes of the plain folk. We are inarticulate, but surely we are also talkative. All day long, in offices, in hotels, at conventions, our chatter goes up among the skyscrapers. But is it not a perpetual attempt, this very gregariousness, to establish communications that we have never been able to establish in our private persons? In what measure do they really meet one another, these frequenters of conventions, these brothers of the badge, these loquacious men of

business? They meet in the field of superficial interests, on the plane, not of the highest common factor, but of the lowest common denominator. There is no more solitary spectacle in the world than that of a burly drummer sitting by himself after the convention is over.

Certainly real friendships are always rare. History itself records very few the memory of which may truly be called immortal. And in times of transition like ours—and America is always in transition, in societies that have no settled order, friendship seems all but impossible. Our life, as the war revealed it, is devoured by suspicion. We are of such different races and traditions, we are so constantly passing one another in our pursuit of such incompatible ideals, we have experienced so few things in the same way and at the same moment in our development, we undergo and we believe so little in common, that we are able to meet one another in confidence only at intervals and then only on one or two sides of our natures. How many of the facts of our social, our economic, our artistic life are to be explained by this! And what a formidable prospect it suggests of the day when the social revolution that has invaded every other land invades this land of ours where already "ignorant armies clash by night"! In such conditions, to close one's eyes for the moment to these ghastly inferences, the most singular aptitude for friendship is continually baffled.

It has always been so: it was so even in New England in a day when many men, bred under the same conditions, pursued similar ends. "I have felt



sure of him, in his neighbourhood, and in his necessities of sympathy and intelligence," wrote Emerson in his journal on the day of Hawthorne's burial, "that I could well wait his time—his unwillingness and caprice—and might one day conquer a friendship. . . . Now it appears that I waited too long." And of Thoreau he said, that he would as soon think of taking Henry's arm as the arm of an apple-tree. This morbid reticence in the American character springs in part from the deep distrust of human nature that belongs to our Calvinistic heritage. "Good fences make good neighbours," says Robert Frost's poem, and the old Yankee believed it, afraid, perhaps, to let down the bars, for the devils that might enter into him. Aside from Bronson Alcott, Emerson's greatest friendship was that with Carlyle; and it is characteristic of American friendships that one end of the rainbow is apt to drop on the other side of the ocean. This explains a part of the singular cordiality that European travellers have noted in us. Americans have always found it easier to make friends of foreigners. There is much to reassure us in the space between the hemispheres.

Undoubtedly, too, this cultivation of reticence has its practical aspect. To foster our distrust of human nature is to sharpen the competitive instinct: when we understand one another, we find it difficult to cut one another's throats. There is something symbolic of the unity of Puritanism and commercialism in the story of John Muir, whose life was divided, one might say, between two activities, that of adoring God in the wilderness and that of

cornering the fruit-market in Los Angeles. Solitude has its compensations, and like silence they are sometimes golden.

This loneliness of American life is responsible for certain anomalous types of character we have produced, characters like monstrous growths or fungi that sprout and spread only in shadowy places. Since the days of Mohammed the world had scarcely produced a figure like Brigham Young; and these fabulous and sinister shapes are by no means rare in our history. The Leatherstocking God of whom Howells wrote was a familiar phenomenon in the old West, and in our own time we have witnessed, among the founders of strange religions, more than one portent equally disquieting; for we really know so little about one another, and we are at the same time so willing to be deceived and so unfamiliar with any rational standard in human relations, that we are easy victims of imposture. A priest of Mumbo Jumbo is a miracle of sunny candour beside the popes of our American sects.

But it is the gifted ones who are the loneliest in this dark continent where everyone, after the bustle of the day, retires not into the castle of his household but into the dungeon of his confused and anxious ego. Never was the sensitive man so exiled. It is not the artists, perhaps, who feel this; for artists are men who have made their world, men who have struck water from the rock and to whom even the wilderness affords its manna. But those who lack this power surely feel it, and theirs are the voices one hears, in countless stories and poems,

endeavouring to establish a network of communications. For there are two kinds of solitude, as there are two kinds of poverty, the voluntary and the involuntary. In one we find ourselves, in the other we lose ourselves, and often it is by escaping from the one that we become eligible for the other.

## WHERE THINGS ARE IN THE SADDLE

ONE of the memorable moments in Frank Norris's novels is that scene in *The Octopus* where the ineffectual poet Presley encounters Shelgrim, the president of the great railway that has devoured the West. Presley has lived among the ranchers, he has been the sensitive witness of their undoing, he has watched the relentless railway moving across the land like a blind monster breathing ruin. His vision of a new world of free men, a truly Homeric world of Western heroes—what has become of it? He, the poet, the Homer, as he has dreamed, of this new world, has been turned into a frantic desperado, a secret planter of bombs. And at last, when his devices have failed, he has sought Shelgrim himself. What is he not going to say to Shelgrim, the master, the evil and appalling mind that has directed the monster's manœuvres? Shelgrim receives him courteously; the terrible Shelgrim has even read his poems! Presley falters, Shelgrim explains. It is not his evil will, it is not his will at all, that has built the railway. "The railway," he says—and this, in fact, is the burden of Norris's book—"the railway has built itself."

One finds this idea repeated in Norris's other novel, *The Pit*. As Curtis Jadwin says: "The wheat

cornered itself. I simply stood between two sets of circumstances. The wheat cornered me, not I the wheat." And this, perhaps, is the conviction of every man of affairs who has reached the point where, as the ironical phrase has it, he controls things. To "control" things, in short, as Curtis Jadwin controlled the wheat-market, as Shelgrim controlled the Western railway, is, in one's own mind, to be controlled by them—hardly a new discovery, but one that may well bewilder us Americans. For we who have boasted that ours is the land of the free, who have gloried in our free opportunities—to what a pass are we brought when we come to realize that opportunity, in the old American sense, is another name for enslavement!

This is what Emerson meant when he said that "things are in the saddle and ride mankind." And indeed we have long known that, in the land of the free, freedom scarcely exists. There was something that perceived this in all the finer spirits of the last age. Did not Mark Twain perceive it, the author of the aphorism that in this country we have "freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practise either of them"? Did not Henry Adams perceive it, he who might well have called his autobiography not the Education but the Betrayal of Henry Adams? For he, who never understood himself, felt simply that he had been born to play a free man's part in a world of men; and he found himself in a world not of men but of mechanical forces, a world in which a man could really act only through the suppression of his personality. Well said Emerson, indeed,

that the "law for thing," which is not the law for man, "builds town and fleet"—

But it runs wild,  
And doth the man unking.

And thus we have that all-American doctrine of "adaptation to environment," the doctrine of unkinged men who depend for their existence on the technique of "protective coloration": clergymen who keep office-hours to show that they are as "efficient" as their brokers, novelists whose highest wish is to be mistaken for business men, artists who lack the courage of their vocations. And behold the result. "Look down at that crowd on the Avenue," Lord Northcliffe remarked to a friend, as he stood one day at the window of his New York hotel. "Nothing but straw hats—and all exactly alike. Not a shadow of variety. They even fix a day to change the straw hats in the spring, and everyone must comply with the custom. Clothes all the same, too, as if they had come from the hand of the same tailor. Get down among them and you will find that their faces are all the same. I tell you, the American people are the most docile, the most easily led, the least individualistic people in the world."

For half a century, this instinctive practice of protective coloration, which properly belongs to the lower species, to polar bears, penguins, parrots and snowbirds, this subjugation of life to the means of life, of all the attributes of personality to the exigencies of the mass, has almost been the Amer-

ican religion. Edison, we are told by his biographer, adapted his very handwriting to the purpose of taking quick telegraphic reports; he repelled the congratulations of a well-known scientist on one of his inventions with the remark, "Yes, but it doesn't bring in any money"; he wrote to the press indignantly in reply to some "accusation" that he was engaged in scientific experiments, in a line "not purely practical and useful." The mere suspicion that he had deviated from the strict business pattern filled him with abhorrence; and if it might be said that this attitude was a condition of Edison's special genius, one might still reply that anyone with a sense of history would accept it as the typical American attitude in any line of work. Thus it is that genius in this country has enslaved itself to things, devoting itself to the devising of what Thoreau called "improved means to an unimproved end"; and thus the "mystics of industry," foretold by Saint-Simon and Carlyle, have betrayed themselves and us. Civilization, to use their own language, is like a bank-account that has to be constantly replenished with new investments. Our inventors have added nothing to the principal of culture; they have merely made spectacular use of the interest—and that way bankruptcy lies.

For half a century, in America, in short, man has been an effect, not a cause. In no sphere of activity has he decisively imposed himself upon life. His desire is to swim as fast as the current; and as long as he maintains his speed, he does not perceive that the current is pushing him. Things are going forward, he believes, and he is going with

them; and, feeling no resistance, he half-deludes himself into thinking that he is free, while all the time he knows that he is not. And yet the world, in reality, is not, as Mark Twain thought, a chaos of mechanical forces—when human beings will it otherwise; it is not even, as Henry Adams thought, a cosmos of mechanical forces: it is—when human beings will it—a purposeful enterprise, however few the spirits may be who are conscious of that purpose. And surely it is the business of those few to impose their conceptions on life and awaken the many. This “mass fatalism” of ours in America, of which James Bryce warned us years ago, is the natural result of an abdication of human personality in the presence of material facts. “We have lost,” said William James, “the power even of imagining what the ancient idealization of poverty could have meant: the liberation from material attachments, the unbribed soul, the manlier indifference, the paying our way by what we are and not by what we have, the right to fling away our life at any moment irresponsibly.” To control things is to be controlled by things; to possess things is to be possessed by things. It is this that explains the instinctive repugnance of so large a part of the younger generation to the life of business, “expansion,” exploitation.



## THE INFLUENCE OF WHITMAN

A GREAT writer, a great artist, is not to be judged by his influence upon other writers, upon other artists. It could easily be shown, indeed it has been shown, by Mr. Middleton Murry, that Milton's genius perverted English poetry for two or three generations by turning it away from its normal course; and it is proverbial that Michael Angelo was the ruin of Italian painting, for every artist who came under his sway was constrained to attempt what he alone was able to carry out. Irresistible in their own craft, among their own folk, is the ascendancy of these dynamic men, and there appears to be no law that governs, for good or ill, the times of their coming. Side by side with a Dante or a Pushkin, emerging at a moment when the forces of a people's life, assembled or assembling, want only the direction a supreme spirit can give them, one finds these calamitous interruptions of genius at moments when a people's life is already perhaps in decay, concurring with the forces of decay, which but for them, or under the influence of a different sort of spirit, might well have been arrested. This is to speak only from the point of view of the nation and the craft; in the general sense, in the human sense, is the great artist ever inopportune? Is the ox to be judged by

the fate of the frogs who, under the spell of his propinquity, and driven to imitate him, burst themselves in the process? The greatness of Whitman, for instance, who can ever now impugn? Yet in certain respects, in its relations of time and place, Whitman's influence, it seems to me, has been more than dubious. Over our literature he has cast his long, luminous shadow, and some of the weakness of our literature lies at his door. How ironical it is, if it is true, that he who prophesied for this country a "class of native authors fit to cope with our occasions" should have contributed to postpone its coming!

To Whitman, certainly, the literary craft in this country owes its greatest possession—that imposing idea of its office and opportunity thanks to which *Democratic Vistas* will always be the Bible of American writers. "Few are aware how the great literature penetrates all, gives hue to all, shapes aggregates and individuals, and, after subtle ways, with irresistible power, constructs, sustains, demolishes at will. . . . At all times perhaps, the central point in any nation, and that whence it is itself really swayed the most, and whence it sways others, is its national literature." Maxim Gorky, alone among living writers, has equalled the elevation of this manifesto, Gorky, who wrote in 1920: "Literature, the living and imaged history of the exploits and errors, of the excellencies and failures of our ancestors, possessing the mighty power of influencing the organization of thought, of refining the crudity of the instincts, educating the will, must finally fulfill her planetary rôle—the rôle of

the power which most firmly and most intimately unites the peoples by the consciousness of their sufferings and longings, by the consciousness of the community of their desire for the happiness of a life that is beautiful and free." If Whitman has bequeathed to his fellow-writers this conception of their office, what a conception of their opportunities he has also bequeathed to them!—for never has the countenance of America received such a terrible scrutiny as it receives in these same *Democratic Vistas*. Yet after all these years, this diagnosis still remains true, as Whitman's description of our literature remains, in large measure, true also. We cannot flatly speak of this literature as "profoundly sophisticated, insane," or say of it that "its very joy is morbid"; but we cannot assert, on the other hand, that it has progressed very far in "furnishing the materials and suggestions of personality" for the men and women of this country. And for this Whitman himself is in a measure to blame. His influence has been irresistible; and this influence is in certain ways unfitted to bring about the results that he desired.

It was, no doubt, from Carlyle that Whitman derived his idea of the writer's office, that idea which originated with Fichte (*On the Nature of the Scholar*) and which, to this day, impregnates the literatures of Northern Europe. The Russians, indeed, who developed the conception of an "intelligentsia" as the potential saviours of a people, the Germans, the Scandinavians, among whom this view of the writer as a spiritual leader has always chiefly prevailed, have understood its manifold

implications. Regarding as the purpose of literature the "elevation of the type Man," they have realized that this can be achieved only by a constant effort of self-discipline, of self-emancipation, on the part of the few: for them the mere fact of being a writer entails the obligation of being a sort of pace-maker also. And this means selection and discrimination. "No shepherd and a herd!" said Nietzsche. "Each desires the same, each is equal to the other! But because life needs a height, it needs stairs and a conflict among the steps and among those ascending them." In short, a class of "sacerdotal authors" presupposes a kind of hierarchy; and a hierarchy, an aristocracy—call it what you will—demands a perpendicular as well as a horizontal development. And here Whitmanism has no place. "Who touches this book," said Whitman, "touches a Man"; and never was a man more magnetic. But was there ever a man less likely to breed in those who touched him the very desires which his philosophy of the writer's rôle demanded?

Whitman, the poet of the "spontaneous life," whose every word and thought was a negation of discipline, selection, discrimination, who accepted all things living "on equal terms"? In his own soul, as in the common earth, the weeds and the flowers found equal nourishment. Those foibles that became so evident in his later years, his fatuous garrulity, his circuitous pursuit of *réclame*, his bold ignorance, his peasant cunning, were enough to show that even his ample spirit was very far from "naturally" universal: never having worked on him-

self, he had never, in Chekhov's phrase, "squeezed the slave" out of himself,—he whose character contained so little of the slave. In Whitman, this mattered little. What mattered his profound animal indolence, his passivity, his folding of the hands? This great serene Quaker, with his miraculous draught of life: was not his rôle precisely *not* to make distinctions, not to separate in himself one element from another, but rather to reveal, for once, nature itself incarnate in a human being? It was by means of the "spontaneous" life that Whitman, in his own person, thanks to a unique endowment—but thanks to that alone—realized his ideal of the writer. But one can easily see how, as a precedent, Whitman has had a baleful influence. Everything in our American life, our flaccid, pusillanimous American life, has combined to make this influence baleful.

If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the earth would have been changed. If Whitman had not become an invalid, the whole course of our literature might have been different. He might have attained a further stage of development and set working in our literature the leaven without which it will never have either depth or elevation: we know that *Leaves of Grass* as it stands is only the arc of a projected circle. As things are, the idea of "spontaneity," to which Whitman gave so powerful a prestige, remained for a generation the dominant idea of our literature; and to what has it led, or rather failed to lead? To giving our life decision, to radiating and begetting heroic manners, to furnishing the sug-

gestions of personality, to elevation, self-emancipation, or any of the other aims that Whitman himself proposed? Or rather to "psychology" and "experiment"? No doubt, the literature of our day represents a certain advance on the "perpetual pistareen paste-pot" work of the literature that followed the Civil War; but surely it has not redeemed the promise of *Democratic Vistas*. It is still at the awkward age and reveals no decisive signs of passing beyond it. And for this, without doubt, the ideal of "Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature" is more than a little responsible.

## WHITMAN : SIXTY YEARS AFTER

A FRENCH critic spoke the other day of the strange contemporaneity of *Democratic Vistas*: he said it might have been written last year. This is true in certain important respects; in others it is less true, and we might find it worth our while to measure, by this mile-post of sixty years ago, some of the changes that time has brought in the actual tendencies of our life. Not long ago Mr. Mencken amused himself with the prophecies of this great manifesto; he had as easy a time with them as other critics have had with the predictions of Karl Marx—for none of those vast Hegelian eggs of the nineteenth century has hatched as it ought to have hatched. In his observations on the American temper, in his sentiment of the creative life, Whitman is a man of our day; but the nation he reflects and projects is very different from ours.

Whitman did not foresee the immense urban development of this country. He thought of the people as consisting for all time chiefly of independent artisans, carpenters, farmers, boatmen, mechanics. Although he often mentions clerks and speaks of business, and the great cities of the future, he never dreamed of the mechanistic society we know. He took for granted space, leisure, a life

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carried on in the open air. He never imagined that America would know the class-war of the old world. He had the deepest faith in politics. Politicians played a very large rôle in his view of society. He lived in a political, not an economic world; and a world essentially rustic.

We cannot recapture his mystical republicanism; and few of us are able to recapture even that noble religion of nationalism, so different from the common or garden kind, which he shared with Mazzini. It has all but vanished from our horizon (and the worse for us), along with those trailing clouds of Carlylean metaphysics. Moreover, we cannot share any longer Whitman's doctrine of a New-World civilization. We can see plainly enough how necessary that doctrine was in order that America might realize its own existence: like the "over-determination" of the inadequately liberated individual, it has had its usefulness and will even continue to be useful as long as the colonial spirit hampers our free development. When, on the other hand, Whitman says that "America seems singularly unaware that the models of persons, books, manners, etc., appropriate for former conditions and for European lands, are but exiles and exotics here" and ought to be barred out, when he insists that America must set the past aside and strike out as if from a Garden of Eden, then we simply say that we shall never be such bad economists. For every day, from every corner of the world and every epoch of history, we gather suggestions that fertilize and enrich our life. We wish to unite with other peoples; we do not wish to



ignore them or supplant them. The "New World" myth, formulated by Emerson in the days of our infancy, long since became an abuse, a pretext for ignorance, dullness and provinciality. Nietzsche's "good Europeanism," properly understood, has taken its place in our minds.

In still another sphere Whitman seems alien to us. If he was a Carlylean in his feeling for "the immensities and the eternities," if he was a coeval of Mazzini in his cult of nationalism—and very great in both, let us remember, he was also a Utopian who had much in common with William Morris. And how he suffers in the comparison! Whitman's definition of literature, its character and function, has never been surpassed: it recalls the great classical definitions. Moreover, he shows courage—for he had no faculty of invention—in attempting to illustrate by examples what he means by the sort of personality to which literature can give birth. At this point he enters the Utopian sphere, for he is actually sketching his ideal America; and no sooner has he done so than we think of Morris and his *News from Nowhere* and perceive how poverty-stricken, from the æsthetic standpoint, Whitman's imagination was. Those pictures of "perfect fathers" and "perfect mothers" are all very well: the "clean-blooded, strong-fibred physique," the "good health," the "healthy and bracing presence." But when Whitman has said this he has said all: the only adjectives that he can use are virtuous, chaste, industrious, cheerful, resolute, friendly, devout. He even suggests that his Utopia may have been realized somewhere

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in America: "Perhaps, unsung, undramatized, unput in essays or biographies—perhaps even some such community already exists in Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, or somewhere, practically fulfilling itself and thus outvying, in cheapest vulgar life, all that has been hitherto shown in best ideal pictures." There we see what it means to have so arrogantly put aside the suggestions of the "feudal past," for nothing exists for Whitman but the physical and the moral. The men and women of Morris, on the other hand, have all these qualities that Whitman suggests, and how much else they have! To pass from Whitman's Utopia to Morris's Utopia is to pass from a Quaker meeting-house into a cathedral. And whatever one's religious beliefs may be, one surely prefers the cathedral.

So much for the aspects of Whitman's New World Symphony with which we are unable to feel at one. How much is left? In a sense, everything is left; for everything is clothed in Whitman's style. The composition as a whole, with its dense, fibrous, closely-woven texture, reminds one of the subterranean root-structure of some vast oak-tree. And then one has those critical passages in which, like an old and wise physician, Whitman searches the face and frame of America, as it has never been searched before or since. Well he knows its "highly deceptive superficial popular intellectuality," its "flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims," its "thoroughly appointed body" and "little or no soul": never can it be said that Whitman's faith in his country lacked ballast. And he had that feeling for the creative life that

underlies all our living thought: "The problem, as it seems to me, presented to the New World, is . . . to vitalize man's free play of special Personalism, recognizing in it something that calls ever more to be consider'd, fed and adopted as the substratum for the best that belongs to us (government indeed is for it), including the new æsthetics of our future." And finally one returns to that tranquil faith, a tranquil faith without complacency, and thus little short of miraculous, to which, as we are obliged to live in the future, it would be well for us not to be disrespectful.

Is it true, as a matter of fact, that Whitman's prophecies in regard to our literature have wholly failed to justify themselves? He wrote in a time of reaction, after the Civil War, and he was able to describe the poets of his day as "a parcel of dandies and ennuyés, dapper little gentlemen from abroad, who flood us with their thin sentiment of parlours, parasols, piano-songs, tinkling rhymes, the five-hundredth importation—or whimpering and crying about something, chasing one aborted conceit after another, and forever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women." That particular swarm of gnats passed long ago; and Whitman would be the first to acknowledge that in our day the artificial has given place to the personal, the borrowed to the experimental, and the "gilt-edged" to the home-woven. On the other hand, what would he say to the recent remark of a certain English banker that the only difference between American and English business men is that the

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former consider that heaven has appointed them to run the universe, whereas the latter have some doubts? He would surely have to admit that his "sweet democratic despots of the West," his "new and greater literatus order," his heroic bards of the future, have not yet arrived to take charge of things.

## HENRY JAMES AS A REVIEWER

“**W**HY is it,” asks Thomas Hardy, in one of his novels, apropos of a certain Australian character, “that these preternaturally old boys always come out of new countries?” One can think of a dozen reasons for the phenomenon, which is scarcely less frequent in America than its exact opposite, the man of sixty-five who has remained preternaturally young. Young old men and old young boys—in the intellectual sphere, at least—largely divide the American scene between them: we are all wiser than our elders, yet who has ever seen a veritable American sage? Consider our most distinguished writers of the last generation. Mark Twain never really transcended the horizon of Huckleberry Finn, and even the serene, benignant Whitman retained to the end of his life the traits of adolescence. On the other hand, Howells and Henry James seemed to have been born old and with ink in their veins. In one of his letters, James accused Howells—it seems to amount to an accusation—of being more “passionate” than himself, and we know how exclusively Howells’s passions were “literary passions.” As for James himself, we are surely justified in attributing to him, from the very earliest moment, the instinct he attributes to his own Roderick Hudson, that

of "investing every grain of sense or soul in the enterprise of planned production": never had a life been less than his at the loose ends of youth. It was a singular fact that, in the old age of both Howells and James, their warmest admirers, in all deference, in all affection, had a way of referring to them, each and singly, as "old women," as extraordinary old women: neither of them had ever been a child, as Stevenson complained in the case of James, and it was felt that somehow they had been always incompletely men. They had been simply authors, "eminent authors"—"born cultivated," as Lowell said of Howells; and no eye of living man could remember having seen either of them in the act of growing their abundant literary plumage.

Of the precocity of Henry James we have been able to form some idea from the several volumes of his uncollected writings that have appeared since his death. His development as a novelist was not, relatively speaking, rapid. One can understand the disdain he felt in later years for *Watch and Ward*, written when he was twenty-seven; and even *Roderick Hudson*, the work of his thirty-second year, is crude enough beside a number of the shorter stories of his early twenties. Accomplished as these stories are, however, we have seen nothing to compare, as a revelation of James's youthful maturity, with the remarkable volume of *Notes and Reviews* which has lately been edited by Mr. Pierre la Rose. One feels that the anxious parent who presided over our author's infancy might well have been troubled by such an exhibi-

tion of intellectual self-control in a son scarcely over twenty, for all the reviews collected in this book were printed before his twenty-fourth birthday: Henry James the Elder was himself, as his son William said, so "full of the fumes of the *ursprünglich* human nature, things turbid, more than he could formulate," so much a searcher for the realities that refuse to yield their secrets too easily, that we cannot but fancy him as a little disturbed by the spectacle of an offspring so adept at coining the metal of his soul. Certainly, it might have been foreseen that no such "little master" as Henry James was at twenty-two could eventually be numbered among the greatest masters: the condition implied too much complacency, too many vital exclusions. For it is ever true, as Amiel said, that "all creation begins with a period of chaotic anguish, and the chaos that is to give birth to a world is vast and dolorous in proportion as the world is to be one of grandeur." But however the anxious parent may have felt, he was himself chiefly responsible for the aplomb of this young critic. "Outdoing the head of the family in the matter of language," we learn from a descendant in the third generation, "was an exercise familiar to all his sons." And Henry James himself has observed: "As I consider both my own and my brother's early start—even his, too, made under stronger compulsions—it is quite for me as if the authors of our being and guardians of our youth had virtually said to us but one thing, directed our course but by one word, though constantly repeated, Convert, convert, convert! . . . Simply

everything that should happen to us, every contact, every impression and every experience we should know, were to form our soluble stuff." It was not the fault of these guardians that the experience in question was to be somewhat limited.

Remarkable indeed is the maturity of these reviews, which enable us to see how single-mindedly, and with what curiosity and devotion, Henry James embarked on his career. How nimbly he moves about in this little world of the mid-Victorian novel, of the Trollopes and the Kingsleys, George Eliot and Mrs. Gaskell, Miss Alcott and Miss Braddon! His subjects have for us a more qualified interest, and his chief preoccupation is with technical questions: the book is for Jamesians alone, although many an apprentice reviewer might be amused, as he glances through it, to see how passing well the thing can be done. It was easier to write reviews in those days, and to write novels, too: this, making all allowances for James's talent and precocity, is one of the reflections with which one turns the pages. It was easier because there still existed a school, to which, as a matter of course, one attached oneself. There was Matthew Arnold in England, there were Sainte-Beuve and Taine in France; one could simply accept the limits marked out by these potentates and still have a little universe in which to give the reins to one's private taste. James never questioned the established order of ideas in his generation; he took not a single step out of bounds; he looked askance and strangely upon Ibsen and the other Cocqsigrués of the North; whenever, as a critic, he ventured



outside the circle of contemporary fiction, he followed in the footsteps of his masters, rewriting the *Essays in Criticism* and the *Causeries du Lundi* in a slightly personal idiom. That was his strength, and that was his good fortune! And within these limits, if he had chosen to follow criticism as his predominant interest, he might have gone far indeed: his paper on Epictetus, for example, shows us the grasp he had, and might have had, over general ideas. But most of these reviews deal, as I have said, with the Victorian novel; and it might be added that in their easy mastery over the resources of the school out of which their author emerged they reveal him as potentially a freer spirit than Henry James actually became.

For, incorruptible as the artist in him was, the artist was still subservient to the man, and the man was always conscious of his relation as a sort of liegeman of the country of his adoption. That was the penalty of James's expatriation—subject as he was to conventional worldly valuations. In the critical essays indeed which, in his thirties and forties, he devoted to English fiction, essays of a richness with which nothing in the present volume is to be compared, we can see how the social compulsions of the "middle years" had constrained the freedom of his early manhood; for if there is anything a reader of these reviews might have predicted of their accomplished author it is that, granting the limitations implied in their precocity, he would never have surrendered a grain of his independence. He reveals here a notable skepticism, the skepticism an artist ought to have, in regard to worldly values,

the values of his time, English as well as American. Of Kingsley he observes, for instance: "In the muscular faith there is very little of the divine, because there is very little that is spiritual. For the same reason there is nothing but a spurious nobleness. Who would rest content with this as the last word of religious sagacity: that the ideal for human endeavour is the English gentleman?—unless, indeed, it be the English gentleman himself?" Most of these reviews are equally saline—adequate fruits, in short, of the education their author has described in his memoirs, an education intended to produce a certain ironic detachment, so that he and his brothers should be amused, as he says, at their sensibility, "should it prove to have been trapped and caught." Trapped and caught, in a very decided way, James's sensibility was in his later years, when, like so many other colonial Tories, he was to find himself the eager defender of many a custom that native Englishmen were glad to lay aside. More than one of the stones he had rejected in his infancy he built into the structure of his later world: as an instance one might mention a point which Mr. La Rose makes in his preface, that, having vehemently, and with good reasons, criticized Louisa Alcott for choosing a precocious child as a heroine, he gave us himself later, at fifty-four, "an acute study of perhaps the most pathetically precocious little girl in English fiction." He who had so scorned the search for the subject found himself, in his last phase, driven back to America for the "contact of new material," and ready to pick up old themes which, at the height of his career, he

would have thought unworthy of a great talent: so far had that skepticism and detachment failed to liberate him. There is something oppressive in the spectacle of what we can only consider the decay of Henry James. All the more we delight, accordingly, in the evidence these reviews put before us of the cheerful, if anxious, vigour of his prime.

## THE MISEDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS

THE readers of *The Education of Henry Adams* are as numerous as the stars of the Milky Way, yet few seem to have been troubled by the burden of this book, by Adams's belief that he had missed his destiny. He went through the world with the air of a deposed emperor, not quite knowing who had deposed him, or from what; his life, as he says somewhere, had been a broken arch, and this was surely because the artist's instinct in him had not had proper scope.

There is a curious passage in one of John Adams's letters of 1782 that throws light on the enigma of this later Adams. "I must study politics and war," the old President wrote to his wife, "that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain." The life of art, in short, in the logic of the Adams mind and family, was scheduled—one can use no other word—to emerge in the third generation. And the life of art emerged, with a certain difference. It was not his own line alone that John Adams had in mind in this prognostication. He had in mind, as always, the nation of which he was one of the

founders. He saw this nation labouring for humane ends: by the third generation the machinery of society was to be in good running order and men were to begin really to live, free to devote themselves securely to the ideal activities of the spirit. The tragic testimony of Henry Adams, looking back a century and a quarter later, was that this machinery, instead of subsiding into its place as the servant of human beings, had become the soulless master, and that man had lost forever his grip on the rudder of his own destiny. Samuel Butler's nightmare! How much objective truth was there in this conception? Part of it, at least, was subjective. Henry Adams knew that something had gone amiss with his own career. He saw in himself a patrician born too late in a world too old for patricians. But he never clearly saw, what we can see, that he was by nature an artist who, partly because he was also an Adams, sprung from a family in every member of which, as he noted in one of his early letters, two tendencies predominated, family pride and a tendency towards politics, was prevented by a conspiracy of circumstances from finding his own soul.

It is all very well to say that Henry Adams actually was an artist. An imposing list of books came from his pen. But how much of the true element of creativity is there in those voluminous historical studies that occupied the best years of his life? Even if we had never read them, we could find a certain answer to this question in his own retrospective view of these professional labours. "I care more for one chapter, or any dozen pages, of

*Esther* than for the whole history, including maps and indices," he writes in 1891; "so much more, indeed, that I would not let anyone read the story for fear the reader should profane it." That is not the word of the born historian, the way of Motley and Parkman, for example, or George Bancroft, who wrote their poems and their novels first, and turned to history as their vital interest. *Esther*, slight as it is, was the work that was "precious" to Adams, the work that was written in his "heart's blood." And this alone suggests that it was only partially the instinct of the artist, the instinct that animates the great historians, that led Adams into these toilsome paths. The family conscience also had its word: his ancestors had made this history, the least he could do was to write about it. His real disposition he revealed elsewhere. Who has failed to observe his obsessing interest in Swinburne, a man of his own caste (one can hardly ignore that!) who had flouted all the Victorian respectabilities and made himself the symbol of a divine anarchy? Or that constant preoccupation with the life of the artist, regarded so oddly from the outside, with so much of the mere collector's passion, that interest in the processes of workmanship which the *Life of George Cabot Lodge* exhibits, that passion for the age of cathedral-building, that restless desire to try his hand at fiction and poetry, which always remained the desire of an amateur? Here was the buried artist in Henry Adams, who looked at art ever askance and strangely, with a touch of that "otherwise-mindedness" which his brother Charles Francis ascribed to himself. For surely it is not

without significance that he published both his novels anonymously, that he had his name as the author printed not on the title-page but only on the fly-leaf of the life of Lodge (these trifles mean so much), that he issued *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* privately, as well as the *Memoirs of Marau Taaroa*, that he destroyed his diaries and notes and recalled and destroyed as many as he could of the letters he had written, that he refused to publish the *Education* and wrote it in the third person. As we see, he was "otherwise-minded" all the time. All the time, but once! And that once, that episode of his life in the South Seas, in 1891, with John La Farge, reveals the inner Adams, the true Henry Adams, as all his previous life had never revealed it.

For what a change came over this "dull dog," as President Hayes called him, dull for all his brilliant intellect, ruled by caution and the family conscience, for whom the Jay Goulds had blotted out the sun, when, with an artist for his sole companion, a "spectacled and animated prism," he escaped from his "eternity of hares and rabbits," of empty politics and emptier society, escaped from the harness of his "caste" to the velvet-green mountains of Tahiti, streaked by their long white threads of waterfalls, where the ferns grew thick on the dripping banks and the sea glowed blue through the lace-work of pandanus leaves, where the leaves of the palm-trees rustled in the strong gusts and he learned how to feel the subtle and various charm in the colour and light of every hour, the violets and masses of

purple and the broad bands of orange and green in the sunsets! La Farge taught him this, as La Farge taught him to understand years later the stained glass at Chartres; but had there ever been an apter pupil than this man who, in his youth, had "learned" the Dresden Gallery by heart? What if he could, after it was all over, write in his old vein to Senator Lodge, "As financial investments, none of the Pacific islands, except the Sandwiches, are worth touching. They are not worth any one of the West Indies, if you lumped them all together." The retired man of affairs whom "motion alone amuses" could still have his say; but this was not Adams's vein in writing to the women who understood him. The ice that bound his soul had melted in this man who found himself for once in a social setting that broke his inhibitions and revealed the tender feelings that lay beneath them, where he took to his water-colours, mixing his colours by the dozen, and laid one deep wash over another, struggling to follow La Farge, feeling as he had felt as a boy about going fishing, "as though I might get a bite tomorrow," where he sat in his native house, receiving and making visits, watching the sea and sky that made him so desperately homesick, for what he could hardly say, writing disquisitions on Tahitian legends and folk-songs, coaxing the queen of the islands to write her memoirs, fancying himself a kind of king of Babylon who had loved a Tahitian girl in the days of great warriors and splendid lovers and immortalized her in verse. There, in the South Seas, he had met for once an aristocracy that made his own caste of



no account, that made him feel like "the son of a camel-driver degraded to the position of stable-boy in Spokane West Centre." And there he had found a communistic system, where private property was unknown or disregarded; rather a pleasant system, as he noted—"On the whole, it suited me better than our own." There, in short, he ceased to be "otherwise-minded"; and, for the rest of his life, this man who had passed his climacteric gave himself, otherwise-minded or not, with all the energy an elderly man can muster, to the world of art and poetry.

Who can pretend to elucidate all the motives that lay behind his earlier diffidence? He had not been able to bring himself to believe in the free rôle of the artist; he had always accepted the "protective coloration" of the conforming citizen, in spite of an irrepressible aspiration. From the first, he had had too much native Yankee caution, too much of the pride of prudence. "One findeth rarely," as Meister Eckhart said, "that people come to great things except they first go somewhat astray"; but Adams had never been willing to take this chance. He would rather have died, as he wrote in his early twenties, than "make one of that butterfly party which New Yorkers seem to consider their literary world," than to do what the men did who wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Putnam's* and *Harper's*. Such risks as that involved, and such associations, he felt were beneath his dignity, he whose joy was always the study of art and who, in the midst of his desert of politics, wished only that he might "quietly slide into the literary set." Was

ever a man more outwardly cold-blooded in his attitude to the literary life? "The question," he writes to his pupil, Henry Cabot Lodge, "the question is whether the historico-literary line is practically worth following, not whether it will amuse or improve you. Can you make it pay? either in money, reputation, or any other solid value. . . . I think you will see at once that this profession does pay. No one has done better and won more in any business or pursuit, than has been acquired by men like Prescott, Motley, Frank Parkman, Bancroft, and so on in historical writing. . . . Boston is running dry of literary authorities. Any one who has the ability can enthrone himself here as a species of literary lion with ease, for there is no rival to contest the throne. With it comes social dignity, European reputation, and a foreign mission to close." How is that for a counsel of perfection, that counsel of "doing better" and "winning more" which is worthy of a Yankee tradesman—a counsel that involves the life of art, the life that a real artist would gladly pursue naked in a tub, or mounted like St. Simeon on a pillar, if any question of "contesting thrones," of "social dignity" and "foreign missions," stood between him and his private *altitudo*? The marvel is that, having had such thoughts, he could ever have written a paragraph worth reading.

Better even than the *Education*, the letters exchanged during the Civil War between his father, his brother and himself reveal the seed of this divided interest. One easily perceives between the lines Henry Adams's natural inclination. "You

tired of this life!" his brother writes from the seat of the war. "You more and more callous and indifferent about your own fortunes! Pray how old are you and what has been your career? . . . How am I throwing myself away? Isn't a century's work of my ancestors worth a struggle to preserve?" One sees there all the contempt of the "red-blood" for the "molly-coddle," of the "tough" mind for the "tender" mind; the railway magnate of the future is rebuking this skulker among the tombs of the Old World who, in the midst of his country's struggle for existence, can speak of "Young England, Young Europe, of which I am by tastes and education a part." Henry Adams, serving in the London Embassy, is plainly at the crossing of the ways: his instinct drives him towards the life of thought, and all he requires is a little corroboration. We see him depressed, irresolute, at bay; and no wonder, since, craving this corroboration of his deepest self, his principle of growth, he finds himself subjected every day to influences of the most powerful kind that run directly counter to this desire. Every day, in fact, he is reminded that he is a son and grandson of the Adamases, and that the political fortunes of America are at stake.

A strange inner drama these pages reveal. In this hour of crisis we see the family pattern stamped, for good and all, on the wax of Henry Adams's adolescence. "Your family is large," his brother Charles writes to his father, the Ambassador, pleading for permission to enlist in the Union army; "your family is large and it seems to me almost disgraceful that in after years we should

have it to say that of them all not one at this day stood in arms for that government with which our family history is so closely connected." How, in the nature of things, could Henry Adams, whatever his preoccupations were, fail to share this acute sense of patriotic responsibility? With his brother writing in this strain from home, his father was as constantly reminding him that the Adamses were statesmen by divine right and that all his sons must uphold the family tradition. "It may be my predilection that biases my judgment," the Ambassador says, in words that have since become famous, "but I think I see in my father the only picture of a full-grown statesman that the history of the United States has yet produced. By this I mean that in him were united more of all the elements necessary to complete the character than in any other man." And thereupon, a true connoisseur of statesmen, he launches into that elaborate comparison of John Quincy Adams with all the other builders of the Republic—a comparison with which we of a later time cannot but agree, so great is the distinction of this man, as corresponding, in his own sphere, the sphere of the *genus* statesman, with the highest and purest type of the classical artist—ending with these words: "In my opinion no man who has lived in America has so thoroughly constructed a foundation for his public life as your grandfather."

There was the daily object-lesson that was held up before Henry Adams's eyes. It may have been true that America needed artists and thinkers, but no one ever mentioned this to him; and America

certainly needed men of action, it needed statesmen, more perhaps than ever. It needed, in short, Adamses! The Adamses had surely made America; and the time had come for the Adamses to save it. And so, "it worries me all the time," we find Henry Adams writing soon, "to be leading this thoroughly useless life abroad while you are acting such grand parts at home." And "great will be the responsibility," his father writes to his soldier-brother, "that devolves upon you!" How could they ever have known, these Adamses, in the days of the Civil War, that the sun of their race was setting, that America in the coming generations was to have no manner of use for classical statesmen, who felt themselves appointed to guide their country? Had not Charles Francis Adams, before their eyes, by the force and skill of a diplomacy that had kept England from uniting with the South, shown that they were as securely in the saddle as ever their fathers had been? How then could Henry Adams plan to live the "irresponsible" life of thought and art, he whose race and its peculiar rôle had been so magnificently vindicated? An Adams he was, an Adams he must remain. "Let us have order and discipline and firm ranks," he writes to his brother, "among the soldiers of the Massachusetts school." And again: "The nation has been dragged by this infernal cotton, that had better have been burning in Hell, far away from its true course, and its worst passions and tastes have been developed by a forced and bloated growth. It will depend on the generation to which you and I belong, whether the country is to be

brought back to its true course and the New England element is to carry the victory." To the Adamses, America must still yield the helm!

We remember how, in his autobiography, the younger Charles Francis Adams tells us that, emerging from the war, he found the railway system "the most developing force and largest field of the day" and determined to attach himself to it. There was the centre of power of the new age, and Charles Francis Adams approached this centre in the spirit of his fathers; he prepared himself for the task of railroad-building as for a learned profession, he "constructed a foundation" for his active life as laboriously as his grandfather had done. But railroad-building was not statesmanship; and America was not the same America. Intellectual and moral force no longer counted; the nation had ceased to have a "true course," or any course at all; the nation was out of hand; the *genus* statesman had become extinct, and Charles Francis Adams, looking cynically backward in his old age, perceiving the vanity of his family's dream, perceiving that the reality of power had long been held by men whom he despised, felt only one regret, that he too had not accumulated, as he might so well have done (with a little less learning and "foundation"!), "one of those vast fortunes of the present day rising up into the tens and scores of millions—what is vulgarly known as 'money to burn.'" And as for the tender-minded Henry Adams, overborne by another pride than that of the artist—what work did America offer him? Obligated to adapt himself to the Adams pat-

tern, to become, if not a statesman, the nearest possible equivalent of a statesman, he accepted the rôle of the political historian. Not for long, to be sure; he has amply told us in the *Education* how distasteful he found this rôle. Indeed, before he had passed middle age he was adrift again. We remember how, in *Democracy*, Mrs. Lightfoot Lee goes to Washington in search of "the mysterious gem which must lie hidden somewhere in politics. . . . What she wanted," our author says, "was Power." It was in search of this mysterious gem, this same phantom Power, that Henry Adams also, resigning from Harvard, went to Washington ("I gravitate to a capital," he wrote, "by a primary law of nature"), following the ancestral trail, only to pass the rest of his life as a bewildered spectator of the "degradation of the democratic dogma." And there, among the dying embers of the old political traditions of the Republic, among the ghosts of his fathers, a ghost himself, as he said, "dead as a mummy," living in "spectre-like silence," this man who had repressed so many of his natural instincts, in order to conform to an obsolete model, amused himself constructing one of the bleakest philosophies of life that has ever crossed the human mind.

Philosophies are confessions; our spiritual needs shape and determine their forms. This is plainly true of Adams's philosophy. That "the universe has steadily become more complex and less reducible to a central control" is a proposition that may have its objective validity. But if, for the term "the universe," one substitutes the term "the

United States," as Henry Adams himself conceived this term, we can see that it surely has a subjective bearing. Again, it is certainly more than arguable that "the American man is a failure." But when these possible truths are held as Henry Adams held them, not as interpretations of a moment in history, but as final pronouncements on destiny, then we ask ourselves, What sort of life has this man lived who utters them? For we know that the world is reborn every day—not for us, perhaps, but for someone else!—that every day some child comes into the world who is going to create new life, and that not till another million years have passed can any man say, with any more finality than cynics have always said it, that humanity is a failure. We are pessimists of pessimists, perhaps, dwellers in all the dungeons in the air; but our reason tells us this. What Henry Adams meant—for these words clearly say nothing else—was that *he* had failed (as he himself asserted), because he could not control *his* universe, because, in a word, his energies had been dissipated, and his deepest instinct had never come into its own. John Quincy Adams had flouted Emerson for his "wandering" of mind; the Adams tradition had always prevented his grandson from feeling that there was any ultimate dignity, any justification, at least, to be compared with the true Adams rôle, in the rôle of the artist and thinker. What else could have lain behind that diffidence with which he presented all the books he wrote? For surely he had no fear of public opinion, or, what is more general perhaps with American writers who are truly con-



scientious, no feeling that his work was inadequate. He was all too eager to maintain, at the cost of what he most desired, the habits of mind and feeling of what he called, without a touch of irony, —he who possessed, in regard to so many other worldly considerations, such a genius for ironic depreciation!—his “class and breed”; and that is what the artist cannot do, whatever his “class” may be. He dreamed himself back into the great age when art was the central activity of man; with fascinated eyes he saw and remembered in Swinburne another Anglo-Saxon, an aristocrat like himself, who had thrown himself into the creative life with all the abandon of a Dionysus. But when he wrote himself, it was somehow different. He wrote with his head turned, as it were, the other way.

## THE TWILIGHT OF NEW ENGLAND

AN ARTICLE in a recent magazine opens with the remark that "the individuality which has always characterized New England is passing." The remark has been made before, it might almost have been made half a century ago; but no one can utter it lightly, or without sincere regrets. Forgotten are the days when *The Liberator* and *The Dial* were published in Boston, when a Connecticut farmer's boy could write a standard dictionary for the English-speaking peoples, when the sons of a Boston merchant and a Salem lawyer could present the peoples of Spain and the Netherlands with classic histories of their own races, when a New Hampshire girl (Madame Bougureau, that feminine Commodore Perry) could oblige the Paris art-schools to open their doors to women. New England impressed itself upon the world—even Renan had to reckon with the theology of Dr. Channing; and the story of its rise and fall, of the waxing and waning of all that intellectual and moral vigour, will long retain its interest.

The *Letters and Journals* of Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson do not explain the decline of New England, but they certainly reflect it. In 1900, Colonel Higginson enquired of Mrs. Howe

whether the Boston Authors' Club had "the intellectual resources for a Chaucer celebration." The only available resource appears to have been a certain editor of Shakespeare for schoolboys. "It would seem a risky enterprise," said Colonel Higginson (who might, for the rest, have added, What other town would have thought of such a thing?) The shades of night had fallen fast over the American Athens; for it was little to the point that Higginson himself was descended from Chaucer's sister. Early in this book we find a note about Miss Sarah Palfrey who, "at the age of seventy-five, took morning spins round Fresh Pond on her tricycle." Towards the end we have a glimpse of Colonel Higginson wandering about the countryside collecting old New England furniture. It is true that Miss Palfrey rode her tricycle within the memory of still living men, true that Higginson himself was to the end an energetic soul, but this does not affect the symbolism of the contrast: the first picture belongs to the heroic age, the second to the age of the antiquarian.

Between these two scenes, as we read the book, we can watch the sands running out. In 1856, Colonel Higginson, as a radical Abolitionist, went to Kansas to take part in the struggle of the Free Soilers. "One learns in a single day," he writes from the centre of operations, "more about Greeks and Romans and English Puritans and Scottish Jacobites and Hungarians and all heroic peoples, than any course of history can teach. The same process is producing the same results before your eyes, and, what is most striking, the same persons whom you

saw a year ago in Boston, indolent and timid, are here transformed to heroes." For those were the days when respectable Americans regarded it as a "compliment" to be indicted, and would cheerfully undergo six imprisonments "for righteousness' sake." But no sooner was the war ended than the spiritual thermometer began to drop. In later life, Higginson found a cause in the Woman's Suffrage movement; and it indicates the change in the temperature that when he went to England in 1872 he was able to accept the statement of a friend that the daughters of Queen Victoria were "also" radical. New England's crowded hour, with all its heightened values, had even then grown dim.

Two entries in the book seem to tell the story. In 1857, Colonel Higginson, at that time a Unitarian minister, remarks: "The congregations are crowded as much as ever, though half the original ones are gone West." Shortly before this he writes to his mother: "For, as you must know, all statistics fail in the presence of Irish children." Nothing further is said on either topic, but the rest of the book is really a commentary on this displacement of vital forces. The old stock was to fade away, comparatively, as the Red Men had faded away before it, so that the world in which Colonel Higginson's career was to taper off was a twilight world indeed. His life opened on a very different scene. In those days, when New England's spreading chestnut-tree covered the land, and American authors had "Homes" about which other authors wrote essays for a filial multitude, and Emerson's

lecture-fee was twenty dollars—in those days, the West was a colony of the East, and the East, on the other hand, was less colonial than it is now. There is a passage in one of Lowell's letters of 1878 that marks this latter change: "One thing seems clear to me, and that is that the Americans I remember fifty years ago had a consciousness of standing firmer on their own feet and in their own shoes than those of the newer generation." And Lowell adds: "The English press is provincializing us again." All this is reflected in Colonel Higginson's record. In the early pages our New Englander's window opens on a wide Western vista; but as time goes on we hear no more of Kansas and Michigan, those former seats of heroic operations, or even the Adirondacks, where John Brown lived. All we see, or seem to see, is a New England that has returned upon itself and looks back across the Atlantic. "Thus," as Colonel Higginson remarks, in a somewhat appropriate connection, "thus does gracious Queen Anne resume us under her sway."

Of the heroic age, to be sure, we get but a mild picture in these pages; Colonel Higginson came too late for that, and there was too little of the intense in his own composition. We receive rather an impression of the completeness, the homogeneity of that old New England society, with its common faith, its common discipline, its capital city, its colleges, its meagrely adequate provision for most human desires. If you wanted a water-cure, for example, you went to Brattleboro; if you wished to "break all links of habit," you were not obliged

to go to the South Seas—the Isles of Shoals were there, and remote enough. But perhaps if the general picture is so low in tone, it is because the achievements of old New England were isolated achievements, numerous as they were: the current that ran through the country heightened the individual life without greatly affecting the life of the community. One recalls Charles Francis Adams's somewhat acid description of the Boston society of his youth as "a boy and girl institution, a Sammy and Billy, a Sallie and Millie affair; very pleasant and jolly for young people, but, so far as the world and its ways are concerned, little more than a big village development." Similarly, Colonel Higginson writes in 1845: "There are so seldom gatherings of intellectual people here, too, in this Athens of America. We are in a forlorn state hereabouts, I think, in more ways than one." The social matrix, in short, was always perhaps a little meagre. The difference between the earlier and the later phase lies simply in the fact that New England had ceased to produce vigorous personalities.

The effect, at any rate, is of a slow but rather steep descent. In the rôle of an Aspasia, Margaret Fuller's limitations were marked. But what shall we say of those of Mrs. Howe? "Generally," Colonel Higginson writes in his diary, "she feels about her editorials as if she were a pair of tongs that could not quite reach the fire. This she said to me and it well describes them." Indeed, it well describes most of the personalities who flit through the pages of this book. It is a panorama of a debilitated world, or, perhaps we should say,

of a very unconscious world. "When I think," says Colonel Higginson, "that Richard Greenough (a most cultivated, gentle and agreeable sculptor) told me the other day that Hawthorne was a man of talent, but had not the faintest conception of literary art, I see how far we are from any standard of criticism and how little people's opinions are worth." But Colonel Higginson himself, who was the editor of Emily Dickinson's poems, seems not to have set any particular store by that remarkable genius; in all this book he refers to her only three times, and most perfunctorily, as if he had never for a moment realized the gulf between her and her commonplace contemporaries. In his *Life of Whittier*, who was far from commonplace, Colonel Higginson remarks: "It is needless to explore these little divergences of the saints." We can see there how faint was the pulse of this late New England criticism. "These little divergences"—the divergence of Emily Dickinson, for example! In them, in reality, lies the whole interest of literature. For two, as Mr. Chesterton says, is not twice one, in the sphere of critical values: "two is two thousand times one."

The son and biographer of Edward Everett Hale once observed of his father that in all probability no great demand had ever been made upon him: "It can rarely have cost him very much effort to do whatever in print was done by those around him, and to do it better than most." This is an adequate explanation, and one that ably describes these ever-gentle New Englanders of the last age, and the pathos of their position. A note of Colonel

Higginson's expands the point: "Miss Charlotte Cushman delightful in evening at H. H.'s room—talking about George Sand, about whom she is enthusiastic, and of the difference between American and English audiences as to applause. Jefferson acted so much better in England because more called out; she told him so and he admitted. Even an English auditor goes to be amused—a Frenchman *to take part in the play*—he knows he is essential (*assister*).” The American audience cannot be expected to “assist”; but perhaps if it had been better prepared merely to be amused these writers of the New England decadence would have lived to better purpose. They were not “called out”: that was the trouble.



## ROBERT INGERSOLL

IT IS odd as one looks back at Robert Ingersoll, as one recalls the sensational legend of his career, and the great jagged hole he was thought to have cut in the American consciousness, to find how dim the outline of his personality has grown, how he melts into the background of his age. One often thinks of American public opinion as resembling a rubber ball that imperturbably rounds itself out again after every dent. Ingersoll's dent has been absorbed in this way: the great Free-thinker has left behind him no visible heritage of really free thought. Is it because he was not a free thinker at all, because there is a profound difference between free thought in the ordinary sense and Free Thought as a profession? The "noble human being" of Whitman's phrase, the "fiery blast for the new virtues," the prophet who yielded "deep-sea fruit," whose witty and generous nature won so many hearts, seems today to fit as cozily into the orthodox American scheme as any of the other worthies of his time, Beecher, for instance, or Barnum.

Why this is so, one quickly discovers from a glance through a recent volume of *Fifty Great Selections* from Ingersoll's speeches. Here we find, of course, all the stock themes of the Freethinkers:

What Infidels Have Done, Bruno, The Foundations of Faith, The Church in the Time of Voltaire. What we do not find is a personal style, a critical view of life, a detachment from everyday preoccupations—in short, all that characterizes free thinking. Substitute a few words (surprisingly few), change the titles and you might imagine you were reading an ordinary collection of Unitarian sermons. The impetus is not intellectual but emotional, and the attitudes are those not of an individual but of the evangelical preacher as a type, of the lawyer as a type, of the husband and father as a type, and always of the typical orator. The “silver tongue” carries one along, but it is a sort of generic silver tongue; one has heard others like it. It does not speak to the individual because it does not proceed from an individual; and so it cannot, in the strict sense, stimulate one to think, either freely or otherwise.

For there is only one way to make people think, and that is to arouse them as individuals. Ingersoll had his one queer unorthodox streak—he had got his Calvinism turned inside out and attributed the original sin to the priests instead of to the people; but otherwise he seems to have been merely an uncommonly vigorous, honest, kind-hearted, liberal-minded, intelligent and opinionated everyday citizen. His ways were the ways of the folk; and that being so, he could not arouse the individual because, in the very moment when he was venting his one heresy, he was venting all the other orthodoxies and putting the intellect to sleep in the act of challenging it. If he turned his back on the

Church, it was only to accept the Republican Party as a religion: in his "Indianapolis Speech" he anathematizes the Democrats with all the fury of a mediæval pope. Similarly, the anti-militarist implications of his gospel grew very dim in his mind when the presence of his fellow-veterans and the opportunity for a meteoric flight, as people used to say, reminded him of the "grand, wild music of war." Did he stimulate thought in regard to the national life in general? "We have covered this nation," he says of his party, "with wealth, with glory and with liberty. We have the first free government that ever existed." Did he stimulate thought in regard to domestic life? "I hold in utter contempt," he says, "the opinions of those long-haired men and short-haired women who denounce the institution of marriage." There is no reason surely why a citizen should not regard his age and his country and the institutions of his age and country as approaching the perfection of the ideal. Only, to do so, and to express one's satisfaction in flights of oratory, is not to make people think. Ingersoll's agnosticism was bound up, just like the ecclesiasticism it attacked, with all the prepossessions of the man in the street.

That is why, as it appears, although he was always talking of "intellectual development" and advocating it as the way of life, Ingersoll can hardly be said to have promoted it. He asserted the common man's "right" to a free mind in speculative matters, ignoring the fact that no one in modern society is effectively able to deny it. In Voltaire's time, to attack priests was to attack a legalized

tyranny. A century later, as the European successors of Voltaire saw, man could have his free mind for the asking. It had ceased to be significant to assert the right to freedom; what had become significant for criticism was to suggest incentives to a deeper freedom, to present freedom no longer as a right but rather as an interest. Renan and Matthew Arnold, for example, showed how the mind might avail itself even of the history of dogma as an interest of the richest sort. In other words, to create, by the spread of general culture, positive channels for the spirit had become the function of criticism; for, having these channels, the spirit, as it were automatically, liberates itself. Ingersoll, because of the poverty of his culture, was incapable of this. He could deny but he could not affirm; or, rather, what he was able to affirm was just the complex of the tribal tastes and attitudes of his contemporaries. Bold and frank and honest as he was, the quality of his general culture may be inferred from his words on the art of the theatre: "The stage brings solace to the wounded, peace to the troubled, and with the wizard's wand touches the tears of grief and they are changed to the smiles of joy. . . . When the villain falls and the right triumphs, the trials and the griefs of life for the moment fade away."

Such an attitude as that can never be an incentive to anyone's liberation. And in truth it is vain to "reason" with people about their beliefs, it is vain to present them with "evidence." Unless one is able to give them a new and more vital interest to take the place of the one they have, they will revert to type and to custom five minutes after the

silver tongue ceases to enthrall them, or lapse into a sullen passivity that lacks even the leaven of a vigorous superstition. Merely to disbelieve is no more critical than uncritical belief. One can see, perhaps, in the effect he had on Mark Twain how Ingersoll's preaching actually worked out. Mark Twain, like many Americans of his generation, a thorough-going skeptic in regard to the dogmas of evangelical Protestantism, made a pretence of accepting these dogmas to please his domestic circle. Naturally, therefore, he found that Ingersoll's books "contented and satisfied" him, as he said, "to a miracle." But did they contribute to liberate him? They merely served him as an escape-valve for the hatred he had stored up in himself against these dogmas; they never suggested to him the desirability of making his own escape. In this must have lain the secret of Ingersoll's general influence and popularity: like Mark Twain's humour, in another way, this Free Thought, by affording an outlet for the repressions of American society, helped the individual to live at peace with it. But by so doing, far from giving him the courage of his individuality, it enabled him to evade the responsibility of being himself: which goes to show how a "good custom" can corrupt the world. Free Thought as an obstacle to free thinking! What would Voltaire have said if he had foreseen that?

AN EASY SWEETNESS  
AND AN EASIER LIGHT

HENRY ADAMS, contemplating General Grant in the White House, found himself thinking of Julius Cæsar and wondering how mankind had ever persuaded itself to believe in the theory of progress. A similar reflection comes to one's mind as one turns the pages of *The Life and Letters of Hamilton W. Mabie*. One does not, in this case, have to go back as far as Julius Cæsar in order to taste the luxury of disillusion. Emerson will do: the descent of man, *homo Americanus*, since Emerson, as this book witnesses, is precipitous enough. O land of the fathers, how have you laboured like a mountain in order to bring forth mice! The spectacle of this life alone might explain why the new generation so ardently desires a transposition of the forces in our society.

When Emerson asked: "Is it not the chief disgrace in the world not to be a unit, not to be reckoned one character, not to yield that particular fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned by the gross, in the hundreds of thousands, of the party, of the section to which we belong, and our opinion predicted geographically, of the North or the South?"—when Emerson asked that, he gave us the permanent measure of men and

societies. If there is anything a leader of opinion, a representative man has to be, in order to exist, it is an individual, revolving on his own axis and separated by a gulf, as regards his habits and beliefs, from those of the majority; for if this were not so, in what could progress consist, or, if not progress, at least movement? How could the majority, or the susceptible elements of it, ever receive a new idea, a new impulse, a new stimulus? One traces the development of a society through the individuals it produces who, unable and unwilling to conform to the patterns of their time, create new patterns; and it is the plentifulness and the strength of these individuals that give a society its character and significance. Who can deny that Emerson himself, and Thoreau, and John Brown, and William Lloyd Garrison and a dozen other dissenters from public opinion placed America in their day on the moral map of the world, made it count for something in the eyes of humanity, as Franklin, Paine, Jefferson made it count for something in the revolutionary age, something the like of which all its wealth and power have been unable to compass ever since? A few men accomplished this, and they were not the adroit statesmen; they were the men of intellect and conviction who pursued their own orbits in serene disregard of public opinion and with only one end in view, what Mr. Edwin Muir calls "the elevation of the type Man." One seizes upon *Mabie's* life because, characteristic as it is of its time, it shows us the mechanization of our native culture which, once so fruitful in variations from the ra-

cial norm, has lost the sense of their desirability.

For if Mabie was not the typical man of letters of a certain American epoch, one might enquire, Who else was more eligible for that rôle? And what else did Emerson have in mind when he spoke of men being "reckoned by the gross"? Mabie's beliefs, Mabie's tastes and opinions were those of almost all "nice" Americans, a fact that would exempt him from criticism altogether did it not, in a writer, represent the evasion of the first of all responsibilities. What strikes one is that the sentiment of individuality, the sense of himself and the desire to become his own unique self, which is the basis of all literary expression, seems never to have entered his head. "Editors are always eager to get a young man who can do what they want done," Edward Eggleston said to him at the outset of his career. Imagine a confessed admirer of Emerson accepting a summons like that! But it seems not to have occurred to Mabie that there is anything not to be condoned in a writer's running smoothly along the grooves of his age: not one pang of discovery is recorded in these pages, not one sting of the intellectual conscience, not so much as a momentary impulse towards some hardier life. He mentions having been "stabbed" by a critic in *The Nation*. Is he affected by it? He shakes the incident off with a shrug as a drowsy ox shakes off a gadfly; and, although he speaks once or twice in his letters of being depressed by the quality of his work, it required only one of those votes of confidence with which he was perpetually inundated to start him off again on his



mild and placid way. No demands being made on him, in short, he made no demands on himself, never dreaming apparently that a critic has any other function than to smooth the pillows of sleeping souls, murmuring of an easy sweetness and an easier light. "The special shade of its identity," wrote Henry James of the *New York* he knew in the 'fifties, "was thus that it was not conscious,—really not conscious of anything in the world; or was conscious of so few possibilities at least, and these so immediate and so a matter of course, that it came almost to the same thing." An apt comment also on this literary career, so ingenuously devoted to the cause of "comfort, peace and happiness."

Now what a mockery such a life is of those "large issues" of the Rooseveltian era with which, as a writer, an editor, a lecturer, an emissary of peace, a counsellor of the great, Mabie was so intimately concerned! Who were his friends, his associates, his correspondents? Roosevelt himself and a variety, among humbler folk, of corporation lawyers, financiers and bishops. Mabie was an unofficial ambassador to Japan; he lived in ample bourgeois comfort; he travelled freely about the world; he was hand in glove with half the popular leaders of the day; his life was one of leisure, opportunity, abundance. Yet the total note of this externally spacious career is of a benighted provinciality to which one can scarcely imagine a parallel before the Civil War. One finds him troubled by Lowell's "touch of worldliness"; one finds him congratulating Howells for his "clean heart and genuine purity," not in the least mind-

ing the vast exclusions the possession of these traits in a novelist implies. One finds him ruling out the greatest poet of his time with such a criterion as this: "What a fine thing it is that practically all our writers have been and are gentlemen, men of honour, breeding and charm!"—a criterion which, accurately applied, would leave little room for Johnson, Voltaire, Carlyle and how many others? One finds him observing in 1913, the year before the war, that "the world is becoming a neighbourhood."

There is nothing discreditable to a good citizen about these primly virtuous attitudes. It is simply that they suggest such a limited knowledge and experience, that they have such an odd savour of the evangelical atmosphere of the country Sunday School and sewing-circle. Mabie, in his prosperous maple-clad suburbia, seems to have known nothing of the realities of modern life, nothing—and this is oddest of all in a critic—of modern literature, its gospels, its visions, its experiments, its disillusionments, its fierce hopes and bitter chagrins. Which, we ask ourselves, was the essential villager, and which the man of the world, this contemporary New Yorker, with all the resources at his command, or any of a dozen of those spokesmen of culture and freedom of a generation before, men whose lives were externally pinched and cramped, to whom a journey abroad was a momentous event, whose acquaintance was almost incredibly limited, who were, in the popular sense, villagers indeed? Plainly enough, beside Mabie and his friends, with their "large issues," the dis-

senters from public opinion of that earlier time were truly men of the world, because they knew and recognized and were in touch with the great world-impulses, intellectual, moral, artistic, economic, of their generation. Can anything else than the existence of such men ever make a nation really "large"?

It has remained, in short, for the modern age to witness, in the unholy alliance of writers and men of affairs exhibited in such lives as Hamilton Mabie's, the closing-up of the necessary gulf between public opinion and the individual from whom alone, in his moral isolation, come those ideas, those visions, those spiritual discoveries by which the race advances. Neither worldly nor unworldly in the admirable sense of either word, such writers as these become a sort of namby-pamby mock-parsons, who shun the rigorous rôle of the priest as much as they shun the rigorous rôle of the artist. Their creed is "service," their aim "to give people courage and hope." But what does this really mean? What else but oiling the human machinery of a brutal industrialism? The gospel of "uplift" was never intended to awaken men from the prison of their slavery, their subservience to unenlightened custom; it "helps" because it eases the strain of a mechanized life, but has it ever been known to turn a man, for the sake of his soul, against his bread and butter? To be given the courage and the insight so to turn is what men really desire, to their honour be it said; and that is why they respect the honest saints, and the honest sinners as well, both of whom transgress the

tribal law. It is hardly an unjust inference that in such Laodiceans as Hamilton Mabie lies the real meaning of the cult of "bigness," expansion, prosperity—little men, inhibited men, sentimental men, passive men, parochial men.

## JAMES HUNEKER

**D**O YOU remember the roses in the Luxembourg Gardens, those roses, at once so opulent and so perfect, that blossom against the grey stone of the old balustrades? But one does not forget them: it is as if in some unique fashion they fulfilled the destiny of all the roses. What one perhaps does forget is the sacrifice they represent. Who can estimate the care lavished upon the organisms that bear those blossoms, which are indeed the fruit of a ruthless and incessant pruning? They have scarcely known what it is to sprawl in the sunshine; every stalk, every tendril has submitted to the most rigorous of disciplines. It is a Spartan life, in short, which those plants have led; all their energy has been canalized to a single end. But what a sumptuous end! A good part of our delight in it springs from our having witnessed there the perfect fulfillment of an intention.

That is the French way, with roses and with artists. Our American way is different. We believe, before everything else—and with reason, heaven knows, considering our laborious history—in “having a good time.” For us the leaves and the tendrils have as much right to a place in the sun as the blossoms. But what becomes of the blossoms? They are small, too often, defective and

short-lived; for nine-tenths of the energy of the organism has been used up in "living." I am thinking, on the one hand, of those French critics with whom James Huneker invites a comparison, and, on the other, of Huneker himself. The life disclosed in his autobiography, *Steeplejack*—how full it is, how abounding, how generous, and yet, from another point of view, how wasted! Nothing is more appealing about Huneker than his humility. "I have written," he says, "of many things, from architecture to zoology, without grasping their inner substance. I am a Jack of the Seven Arts, master of none." Remembering all we owe to him, we cannot quite accept that protestation; yet it does suggest his status in relation to his own by no means extravagant ideal. Huneker was not an Anatole France, a Jules Lemaître, a Remy de Gourmont, but who will deny that he had the making of one? Where their works were at once so opulent and so perfect, his, on the whole, were defective and short-lived; and this was because of the dissipation of energy to which his autobiography bears witness. Nothing is more touching than the account he gives of his periodical efforts to stop the "leakage of moral gas" in his career; and certainly no one has ever been more conscious of the creative ideal than he. And if one dwells upon this aspect of so rich a life, it is merely because it so perfectly illustrates the American view of art as a by-product of "having a good time."

Huneker, in fact, was an American of the Americans: they waste their breath who attempt to prove that there was anything "foreign" in his love

of beer and music, anything exotic in his real fibre. He tells us that his cosmopolitanism "peeled off like dry paint from a cracked wall when President Wilson proclaimed our nation at war." He seems always to have been cheerfully adaptable and happily adjusted to the ways of his country and its beliefs and assumptions. Fully a third of his book deals with his boyhood in Philadelphia; and there was never a boyhood that more fully meets the qualifications of Professor Brander Matthews for a true-blue American critic, namely, that he should have had firecrackers on the proper occasions and played baseball in a vacant lot. His shudders at the memory, now of the lurid Madame Blavatsky, now of a Black Mass that he witnessed in Paris, his acquiescence in Roosevelt's "amazement" at the fact that, having been in Paris when he was twenty-one, he had not given up his studies and rushed home to cast his first vote, reveal all the ingenuousness of heart, the childlike acceptance of common sense, that mark our countrymen among the peoples of the world. And then there was his inconsecutiveness and his impulsiveness ("I fly off with ease on any tempting tangent, also off my handle"), his breakneck style, his breezy familiarity with all things sacred and profane, his joy in collecting celebrities as a boy collects their autographs, and finally that homesickness for Europe which makes half the charm of his writing—that endowing of everything, philosophic, religious, moral, artistic, so long as it is European, with a rosy veil of romance. Huneker, in fact, was very much, at bottom, the man of the tribe, the *homme*

*sensuel moyen*, both in the general and in the national sense; and, perceiving this, we can understand more readily why he never quite got possession of himself. In retrospect, that engaging personality strikes one as a sort of national symptom.

For one might almost say that Hunecker was a scapegoat for the repressions of a desiccated Puritanism. Starve a people too long, fail to educate its eye, its ear, its palate, drive its senses back, tell it to be satisfied with eating straw, to hold its tongue, to ignore its preferences, not to let its fancy stray, not even to have a fancy, to keep its nose to the grindstone, and sooner or later you will have an eruption. Mediævalism had its eruption in Rabelais, Victorian England had its eruption in the art of the eighteen-nineties, the Middle West is having its eruption today in Greenwich Village. Our whole American generation indeed is having its eruption, and Hunecker foreshadowed this eruption. One thinks of him as in some way incarnating the banked-up appetite of all America for the colour and flavour, the gaiety and romance, the sounds and smells of Continental Europe, which our grim commercialism, fortified by Mark Twain's humour, had led us to ridicule and decry, and as going forth to devour it like a cake. Hunecker, in a word, was Europe-struck, and his gusto and voracity had behind them the momentum of a nation's hunger. And so it was that, although he had grown up in a singularly free and artistically friendly atmosphere, he could not stop and discriminate, but ran about riotously like a kitten in a field of catnip. Everything in Europe was mag-



ical to him, Offenbach as well as Mozart, Chartres Cathedral and the Strauss waltzes, the Brussels beer and the graves of the philosophers: it was all just one blazing Turner sunset. America, in fact, in Hunecker, was making up for lost time. He fell on his knees and fairly ate Europe, as Nebuchadnezzar in his madness ate the grass.

It is thus that Hunecker might be figured in a sketch of the successive phases of America's artistic development. He is our *Yellow Book*, more violent and promiscuous than England's, as our repressions had been greater; and it is difficult not to see him as a victim for all the sins our countrymen have committed against art. "I have no grievances," he says. "I am what I made myself; therefore I blame myself for my shortcomings." A frank and charming attitude, and one for which we honour him, even as we shall continue to enjoy his writings; for he kept to the end the zest of a hungry crow in a newly sown cornfield. Yet we cannot but think how different the results would have been if the sprawling vine of his talent had been planted in a ripper soil and had had the right gardeners to tend it. In short, he is one of those barbaric natural forces, incompletely personalized and differentiated, that stand for us in lieu of a literature, and show us how rich we are in the sheer raw material of creative energy. Half of that creative energy is ice-bound, half of it spills over in a tropical exuberance, but it *exists*, awaiting the apparatus of civilization. Meanwhile, to them that love much (even if they love too many, as Heine said), much is forgiven; and who has loved more than

James Huneker? "I can love, intensely love, an idea or an art," he remarks. "I am a Yea-Sayer." It is true; and, thanks to this love, he will always seem to us as much a creator as a victim of America.

## THE BYRON OF THE SIERRAS

**J**OAQUIN MILLER'S handwriting is—or used to be, in the days when there were more to care about it—a byword among autograph-collectors. When I was a boy one of my friends wrote to the poet asking for his signature. He replied with not one signature but twenty: scraps of verse he had written, portraits of himself clipped from newspapers, “sentiments” scrawled on bits of paper and signed with Indian hieroglyphics. A bountiful harvest indeed for one stilted boyish note to have reaped! What did it matter that, turn it about as we might, we could scarcely decipher a word of all this extravagant script the poet had showered upon us?

We were grateful to the kindly poet; we were also duly impressed. This handwriting was appropriately barbaric; but not until years later did I discover that there was a motive in its illegibility. I then learned from another poet who had had commercial dealings with the old man that in epistolary discussions of the problems of real estate Joaquin Miller's handwriting became, and consistently remained, very legible indeed. But what literary man is without his vanity? If the democratic American bard forgoes the privilege of shocking the grocers, who is to judge him harshly

for wishing to impress schoolboys? One is only amused to note that for ways that are dark, or dusky, the Christian pioneer is quite as peculiar as the Heathen Chinee. These apostles of the simple life, these lovers of nature and scorers of civilization, and all its duplicity and complexity—how far from simple they often are themselves! Truly, as Henry Adams said, "Simplicity is the most deceitful mistress that ever betrayed man."

Certainly Joaquín Miller was far from simple. If the evidence of his autograph is insufficient, glance at his photograph. The long white beard, the high boots, that aspect of the *muzhik* philosopher, are plainly reminiscent of Tolstoy; but the boots are patent-leather boots, such as Buffalo Bill might have worn at a presidential reception, and there is something that suggests the gentleman-gambler of the old mining-camps in the carefully curled moustache that adorns the prophet's beard. As one studies this theatrical apparition, one becomes more and more fascinated; the word "pose" of which people used to be so lavish entirely fails to quiet one's curiosity. If the face is the portrait of the soul, then there was never a more singular revelation of conflicting attitudes, of incompatible desires. This man, we say to ourselves, has fed on the dream of Tolstoy, and there we have the communist Joaquín Miller who wrote *The Building of the City Beautiful*. But the moustache seems to add: "Do not take this communism too seriously. I wish to keep on terms with a society where the real-estate agent is the leading citizen." And the patent-leather boots chime in: "I've been a

cowboy. I've been a woolly desperado. Fifty cents admission." If you are under fifteen, the photograph impresses you as much as the autograph. If you are over thirty, you feel, first the absurdity, and then the pathos of it.

For what a drama that career was! One may not greatly admire *The Songs of the Sierras*: they are somewhat coarse and gaudy. Besides, they are too evidently derivative. In essence, Joaquin Miller's Sierras are merely a literary reflection of Byron's Alps; the rhythms are Byron's, too, and would this Western poet ever have conceived his brigands and filibusters if Byron had not given him the models in his Giaours and his Corsairs? These flowers of Byron are gaudy enough indeed, sun-flowers at best, if not actual interlopers in the garden of poetry; and in Joaquin Miller the selfsame seeds grew up outside the garden altogether. But whoever denied the presence in that work of a certain exuberant force, a richness of temperament, that energy, in short (however unmodulated and uncontrolled), of which Matthew Arnold said that poetry is "mainly an affair"? It was the want of art, of the disciplined feeling which lies behind art, that left this work not poetry but journalism; but the energy was there, the germ was there, and what became of that? Glance once more at our poet's photograph. A part of the secret, perhaps, may be divined in this face and figure.

What one sees, written as it were all over it, is the word environment. Here is the professional Californian; and here is something else, something very like a mountebank. And if one knows how

the pioneers regarded the poet as a type, how instinctively they despised him as a drone and a molly-coddle, one can understand these two aspects of Joaquin Miller. He was obliged to make amends for being a poet by showing that the poet had a pragmatic value in the pioneer scheme of things. There one has the professional Californian, the walking advertisement of California, in all its aboriginal picturesqueness. And what is the natural impulse of a man who feels his rôle despised but to play that part melodramatically, as a sort of protest? There one has the mountebank. Between these two lines of activity, what energy was there left for the poet, the poet who dreamed of a communistic Utopia, to invest in his own personal development? What at first had been a spontaneous expression became, when he returned to California from his triumphs in London, a factitious glorification of pioneering in the abstract. No one who has read his '49 needs to be told to what depths of artistic infamy he was willing to descend in order to keep the name of a local patriot. No one who remembers the assiduous dithyrambs, in prose and verse alike, on the subject of Californian scenery, which he pumped out of himself for a generation, will mistake the note of the press-agent or doubt that Joaquin Miller was an "asset" of the State of his adoption. There was the pragmatic value of the poet in the pioneer scheme of things! And our Byron of the Sierras was compelled to prove it, as the price of his survival. He was so much the pioneer himself, so unconscious indeed, that he probably never felt it as

a violation of his own proper freedom. Yet this alone was enough to kill the poet in him.

And that other activity? That hardest of hard work, that posing, as people used to call it, which is, in reality, the counterbalancing of one's feeling of inferiority by extravagant assertions of oneself? We all remember the story of his *début* in London, the story of that dinner in the midst of which he drew from his pocket two cigars and, thrusting them both into his mouth at once, exclaimed, with a great burst of fire and smoke, "That's the way we do it in the States!" It is a sort of courage of despair that leads a human being to behave in that fashion: one feels impelled to do something a little *outré*, if one finds oneself at too great a disadvantage. And Joaquin Miller, because he was a poet, felt himself at an equal disadvantage in his own little pioneer world. Was it not because of this that he, Cincinnatus Hiner Miller, like the savage who eats his enemy's heart in order to absorb his enemy's virtue, assumed the name of Joaquin Murietta, well knowing that a bandit's name commands respect? And with what a halo of adventurous prowess he surrounded his boyhood in that fabulous autobiography which contains, one is told, not a syllable of truth! Without this history and this mystery and the legend of all these exploits, what would a rhymester's life and fame have been worth among all those rowdy seekers of gold? In the light of this, one can understand our poet's theatricality and those unceasing efforts to cover himself with the lustre of romance—the photographs, and the autographs, and the Indian hieroglyphics.

## THE LETTERS OF AMBROSE BIERCE

THE Book Club of California has done a service to all lovers of good writing and fine printing in issuing a collection of the letters of Ambrose Bierce, and one wishes that it were possible for more readers to possess themselves of the book. Few better craftsmen in words than Bierce have lived in this country, and his letters might well have introduced him to the larger public that, even now, scarcely knows his name. A public of four hundred, however, if it happens to be a chosen public, is a possession not to be despised, for the cause of an author's reputation is safer in the hands of a few Greeks than in those of a multitude of Persians. "It is not the least pleasing of my reflections," Bierce himself remarks, "that my friends have always liked my work—or me—well enough to want to publish my books at their own expense." His wonderful volume of tales, *In the Midst of Life*, was rejected by virtually every publisher in the country: the list of the sponsors of his other books is a catalogue of unknown names, and the collected edition of his writings might almost have been regarded as a secret among friends. "Among what I may term 'underground reputations,'" Arnold Bennett observed, "that of Ambrose Bierce is perhaps the most striking example."



The taste, the skill and the devotion with which his letters have been edited indicate, however, that, limited as this reputation is, it is destined for a long and healthy life.

It must be said at once that all the letters in the volume were written after the author's fiftieth year. They thus throw no light upon his early career, upon his development, or even upon the most active period of his creative life; for in 1893 he had already ceased to write stories. Moreover, virtually all these letters are addressed to his pupils, as he called them, young men and women who were interested in writing, and to whom he liked nothing better than to give advice. We never see him among his equals, his intimates or his contemporaries; he appears as the benevolent uncle of the gifted beginner, and we receive a perhaps quite erroneous impression that this, in his later life, was Bierce's habitual rôle. Had he no companions of his own age, no ties, no society? A lonelier man, if we are to accept the testimony of this book, never existed. He speaks of having met Mark Twain, and he refers to two or three Californian writers of the older generation; he lived for many years in Washington, chiefly, as one gathers, in the company of other old army men, few of whom had ever heard that he had written a line. Otherwise, he appears to have had no friends in the East, while with the West, with San Francisco at least, he seems to have been on the worst conceivable terms. San Francisco, his home for a quarter of a century, he describes as "the paradise of ignorance, anarchy and general yellowness. . . .

It needs," he remarks elsewhere, "another quake, another whiff of fire, and—more than all else—a steady trade-wind of grape-shot." It was this latter—grape-shot is just the word—that Bierce himself poured into that "moral penal colony," the worst, as he avers, "of all the Sodoms and Gomorrahs in our modern world"; and his collection of satirical epigrams shows us how little he found to admire there. To him, San Francisco was all that London would have been to Pope if its population had been confined to the characters of *The Dunciad*.

To the barrenness of his environment is to be attributed, no doubt, the trivial and ephemeral character of so much of his work; for while his interests were parochial, his outlook, as these letters reveal it, was broadly human. With his air of a somewhat dandified Strindberg, he combined what might be described as a temperament of the eighteenth century. It was natural to him to write in the manner of Pope: lucidity, precision, "correctness" were the qualities he adored. He was full of the pride of individuality; and the same man who spent so much of his energy "exploring the ways of hate" was, in his personal life, the serenest of stoics. The son of an Ohio farmer, he had had no formal education. How did he acquire such firmness and clarity of mind? He was a natural aristocrat, and he developed a rudimentary philosophy of aristocracy which, under happier circumstances, might have made him a great figure in the world of American thought. But the America he knew was too chaotic. It has remained for Mr. Mencken to develop and popularize, with more

learning but with less refinement, the views that Bierce expressed in *The Shadow on the Dial*.

Some of these views appear in his letters, enough to show us how complete was his antipathy to the dominant spirit of the age. He disliked humanitarianism as much as he liked humanism. He invented the word peasant in Mr. Mencken's sense, as applied, that is, to such worthies as James Whitcomb Riley. "The world does not wish to be helped," he says. "The poor wish only to be rich, which is impossible, not to be better. They would like to be rich in order to be worse, generally speaking." His contempt for socialism was unbounded. Of literary men holding Tolstoy's views he remarks that they are not artists at all: "They are 'missionaries' who, in their zeal to lay about them, do not scruple to seize any weapon that they can lay their hands on; they would grab a crucifix to beat a dog. The dog is well beaten, no doubt (which makes him a worse dog than he was before), but note the condition of the crucifix!" All this in defense of literature and what he regards as its proper function. Of Shaw and, curiously, Ibsen, he observes that they are "very small men, pets of the drawing-room and gods of the hour"; he abhors Whitman, on the score equally of sentiment and form; and of Mr. Upton Sinclair's early hero he writes as follows:

I suppose there are Arthur Sterlings among the little fellows, but if genius is not serenity, fortitude and reasonableness I don't know what it is. One cannot even imagine Shakespeare or Goethe bleeding over his work and howling when "in the fell clutch of

circumstance." The great ones are figured in my mind as ever smiling—a little sadly at times, perhaps, but always with conscious inaccessibility to the pinpricking little Titans that would storm their Olympus armed with ineffectual disasters and popgun misfortunes. Fancy a fellow wanting, like Arthur Sterling, to be supported by his fellows in order that he may write what they don't want to read!

Bierce was consistent: his comments on his own failure to achieve recognition are all in the spirit of this last contemptuous remark. "I have pretty nearly ceased to be 'discovered,'" he writes to one of his friends, "but my notoriety as an obscurian may be said to be world-wide and apparently everlasting." Elsewhere, however, he says: "It has never seemed to me that the 'unappreciated genius' had a good case to go into court with, and I think he should be promptly non-suited. . . . Nobody compels us to make things that the world does not want. We merely choose to, because the pay, *plus* the satisfaction, exceeds the pay alone that we get from work that the world does want. Then where is our grievance? We get what we prefer when we do good work; for the lesser wage we do easier work." Sombre and at times both angry and cynical as Bierce's writing may seem, no man was ever freer from personal bitterness. If he was out of sympathy with the life of his time and with most of its literature, he adored literature itself, according to his lights. It is this dry and at the same time whole-souled enthusiasm that makes his letters so charming. Fortunate was the circle of young writers that possessed so genial and so severe a master.

One forms the most engaging picture of the old man "wearing out the paper and the patience" of his friends, reading to them Mr. Ezra Pound's "Ballade of the Goodly Fere." Where poetry is in question, no detail is too small to escape his attention, no day long enough for the counsel and the appreciation he has to give. "I don't worry about what my contemporaries think of me," he writes to his favourite pupil. "I made 'em think of *you*—that's glory enough for one." Every page of his book bears witness to the sincerity of this remark. Whether he is advising his "little group of gifted obscurians" to read Landor, Pope, Lucian or Burke, or elucidating some point of style, or lecturing them on the rudiments of grammar, or warning them against what he considers the misuse of literature as an instrument of reform, or conjuring them not to "edit" their thought for somebody whom it may pain, he exemplifies his own dicta, that, on the one hand, "literature and art are about all that the world really cares for in the end," and on the other that, in considering the work of his friends, a critic should "keep his heart out of his head." Elsewhere he says, "One cannot be trusted to feel until one has learned to think." And again, "He is strongest who can lift the greatest weight, not he who habitually lifts lesser ones."

In certain ways, to be sure, this is a sad book. At seventy-one Bierce set out for Mexico, "with a pretty definite purpose," as he wrote, "which, however, is not at present disclosable." From this journey he never returned, nor since 1913 has any word ever been received from him. What was that defi-

nite purpose? What prompted him to undertake so mysterious an expedition? Was it not, almost certainly, the hope of exchanging death by "old age, disease, or falling down the cellar-stairs" for the "euthanasia" of death on the battlefield? He had come to loathe the civilization in which he lived, and his career had been a long tale of defeat. Of journalism he said that it is "a thing so low that it cannot be mentioned in the same breath with literature"; nevertheless, to journalism he had given nine-tenths of his energy. It is impossible to read his letters without feeling that he was a starved man; but certainly it can be said that, if his generation gave him little, he succeeded in retaining in his own life the poise of an Olympian.

## JACK LONDON

“THE Red-Blood,” says Mr. Lowes Dickinson, “is happiest if he dies in the prime of life; otherwise he may easily end with suicide.” The hero of Jack London’s autobiographical novel, *Martin Eden*, actually does commit suicide; and if Jack London himself died at forty, it was not, we are obliged to believe, against his will; the “Long Sickness,” as he called it, had got the better of him. The Red-Blood evidently is not quite what he seems, the strong man rejoicing in his strength and spreading himself like the green bay-tree: he protests too much for that. The heroes who lived before Agamemnon knew nothing of the strenuous life, for there was no division in their members; they took the day as it came, and freely left the rest to fate. The Red-Blood is in a different case; he is, oddly enough, the most neurotic of men. Whatever his physical equipment may be, he is always the victim of an exaggerated sense of inferiority that drives him to assert himself; he wants to “beat” society, and this desire inhibits his own growth. So it appears to have been with Jack London. The strongest impression one derives from Mrs. London’s biography of her husband is of a man in whom the will-to-power long survived the will-to-live.

Jack London's note was from the first the note of an abnormal self-assertiveness. Consider any of those early stories that reveal his talent in its freshness: was ever a talent more obvious or better calculated to stun the public? I am not thinking so much of the content of all this work, its typically American glorification of the will, its repudiation of the intelligence, the relief it brought to a sedentary race of half-mechanized city-dwellers by evoking a world in which nothing exists but an abounding physical energy. But consider the style, the treatment, that brazen style, that noisy style; never for an instant does the performer shift his foot from the loud pedal. And besides the swagger of the style there is the swagger of the incidents. "The boom, sweeping with terrific force across the boat, carried the angry correspondent overboard with a broken back." It was quite unnecessary for this man to be swept overboard or to have his back broken; the story did not require it—but Jack London had to maintain his pace. He wanted to dazzle the reader. If his characters are not so much human beings as ninepins whom he bowls over with a turn of his hand, it is because, in his egomania, he never opened himself to life. His desire was to score, to dominate, to succeed, and for this reason, as he knew very well himself, he failed as an artist.

Everyone who has read *Martin Eden* remembers how the hero of that novel smarted under the contempt of the people among whom he was thrown. No one could have had a more passionate desire to excel, but stronger than the passion to excel was



the passion to beat the enemy at his own game. Why has this happened so often with American writers who are born, as Jack London was born, on the outer edge of society? It was not so with Dickens, it was not so with Gorky: poverty no doubt stimulated their ambition, but it never affected the integrity of their work. The story of Jack London's apprenticeship, as he has told it himself more than once, would have been one of the great episodes in American literary history had his motives not been so curiously mixed. On the one hand, he had a disinterested thirst for knowledge, science, thought, art; on the other, from the beginning, he was, as he said, "in pursuit of dollars, dollars, dollars," and it was not long before the desire to break down the resistance of the magazines had supplanted every other in his mind. "Lucrative mediocrity?" he writes at twenty-three. "I know, if I escape drink, that I shall be surely driven to it. My God! if I have to dedicate my life to it, I shall sell work to Frank A. Munsey. I'll buck up against them just as long as I can push a pen or they can retain a MS. reader about the premises." After that he took no chances. He blundered into his first marriage (as we can see between the lines of Mrs. London's biography) in order to escape from another woman with whom he was in love but who, as he realized, would have kept his artistic conscience uneasily awake. He settled down to a strict business-like routine. At twenty-nine he wrote to a friend, with an irony that tells his own story: "So you're going to begin writing for money! You're changed since

several years ago when you placed ART first and dollars afterward."

Like many other American writers, Jack London convinced himself that in all this he was taking a superior line. "After all," he continues, in the same letter, "there's nothing like life; and I, for one, have always stood, and shall always stand, for the exalting of the life that is in me over Art, or any other extraneous thing." A fine bit of rationalizing, as the psycho-analysts call it. Another is the materialistic philosophy by which he convinced himself that "man is not a free agent, and free will is a fallacy exploded by science long ago"; for men only wish to believe in determinism, and take pleasure in this belief, as he took pleasure in it, when it serves to justify them in their own eyes for not being masters of themselves. Jack London became an expert at this game of rationalization. At twenty-eight he took into his employ a Korean valet to look after his wardrobe and dress him in the morning. "Why tie my own shoes," said Jack, "when I can have it done by some one whose business it is, while I am improving my mind or entertaining the fellows who drop in?" He went so far as to assert that success to this tune was a service to "the Cause": "to 'show them' that socialists were not derelicts and failures," as Mrs. London interprets her husband's mind, "had a certain propaganda value." So he believed, or willed himself to believe, and he piled up the dollars and became a sort of cowboy magnate. But what did his behaviour really mean? "Every moment, energy incarnate," Mrs. London says, "he rushed and

crowded as if to preclude thinking of aught except the work or the recreation of the moment. Speed, speed!—and he began saving for a big red motor-car to mend the general pace.” And here is a memorandum of his own: “I never had time to bore myself—do you know I never have a moment with myself—am always doing something when I am alone—I shall work tonight till midnight, then bed, and read myself to sleep.” From what was he trying to escape?

Mrs. London does not tell us, in spite of a number of ominous references to the “Long Sickness” and her husband’s desperate efforts to “drug the perception of futility.” She does not quote his remark, in a letter to one of his correspondents: “I know better than to give this truth, as I have seen it, in my books. The bubbles of illusion, the pap of pretty lies are the true stuff of stories.” Her narrative, indeed, cloaks in a heavy, rosy veil of romance the bitter cynicism of this driven soul whose one fear was to look himself in the face. Yet it is, for all that, a very suggestive comment on the real character of the Red-Blood. The more he asserts himself, the more we become aware that he is not his own master, a damaging discovery if it is true, as Mr. Dickinson says—though less true today than a decade ago—that “the Red-Blood nation *par excellence* is the American.”

## THE BOOK OF MORMON

THE Book of Mormon is seldom mentioned in histories of our literature. The genteel tradition quietly brushed it aside, along with the records of Mormonism itself, its rise, its progress, its leaders. Yet the man who composed this solemn parody of the Bible, this Joseph Smith with his impudent cherub's face who walked with an angel and dreamed of a new papacy, is one of the characteristic figures of our history; and Mormonism was as much and as logical a product of New England as any of those other movements of the delirious half-century before the Civil War came and the nation "got down to business." This universal preoccupation with business has had the effect of imposing a false unity upon our life; it has imparted an air of simplicity and comprehensibility to the American scene, past and present, that is far from according with the facts. We speak of Russians as "queer" and of Africa as the "dark continent," but nothing could be queerer and darker than this continent of ours, if one penetrates behind its mask. Our history, if we could ever envisage the whole of it, would appear as an almost fantastic spectacle. New England itself, dove-coloured New England, produced, in the same generation with Emerson and Whittier, not only Bar-

num the showman, but also Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

These black sheep of the house of the Pilgrims grew up, to be sure, in New York State, and it was in the Mississippi Valley that they found their following; but they were born in Vermont, and it is certain that that strange seed of theirs which came to blossom in the deserts of Utah would never have germinated had it not been for the old Puritan theocracy. Has the coincidence ever been properly noted, that at the very moment when Boston, when the society of the seaboard, mollified and humanized by prosperity and the contact of Europe, turned its back on the Old Testament and began to flower in the warm, charitable air and sunlight of modernity—that at this moment the spirit of Cotton Mather and the priestcraft and provincial Cromwellism of the seventeenth century came to life again among these back farms of the north country? Mormonism in time adapted itself to its age, ending, with a few traces of its origin, as a commonplace evangelical sect, a commercial trust and a political machine; but it began as a Puritan Walpurgis-night. That age in other countries gave birth to similar orgies: did not even Paris witness the career of Père Enfantin, the chosen of God, and his quest for the Female Messiah, that same prophet who, like Brigham Young, proved himself a master of practical affairs? But in a generation of isms that one and all embodied some phase of the modern spirit, Mormonism was sheerly atavistic. It sprang up as it were out of a pile of old roots in a forgotten corner of the New

England cellar, just as the dawn was breaking through the upper windows.

Joseph Smith remains a mythical figure. A modern American feels more at home with the characters in a Japanese print than he can ever feel with those prehistoric people who, in 1830, at Palmyra, New York, accepted the revelation of the golden plates and the Reformed Egyptian gospel. One cannot quite place men and women speaking an Aryan tongue who persuaded themselves that the original Garden of Eden lay in western Missouri and that the red Indians were Biblical Jews—bad Jews, of course, but quite authentic. The prophet's pictured face has a strangely apocryphal air, and the wars that he waged in the Mississippi bottoms are dimmer than the Wars of the Roses. Once only he swims out into the light, when, receiving his revelation on plural marriage, and being told that he should show it to his wife Emma, he said, after hesitating for a moment: "Hiram, you take it to her." But even this sounds like a gloss: it scarcely mitigates the obscure grotesquerie of the prophet's legend. Only after the Great Trek begins and Brigham Young has become the priest-king is one really convinced that Mormonism ever happened.

The elements of European life have been so universally scrutinized that every European character falls into a familiar category. One can take a Rhodes or a Bismarck or a Mussolini and reduce him to his historical components. But who has ever sufficiently studied the American character to give us the key to such a type as Young? This back-

woods Mohammed, this Oom Paul Kruger of the Yankee veldt, this evangelistic magnate with his great bull's head and his tight lips, this preacher of blood-atonement who was also a patron of music and encouraged his daughters to become actresses, this "industrious dancer," evoked by Artemus Ward, who, in his own theatre, sat "in the middle of the parquette, in a rocking-chair, and with his hat on," who preserved among his nineteen wives the gravity of a deacon—this Lion of the Lord seems to partake of a dozen different personalities belonging to a dozen different centuries, as disparate as the Austrian Empire and held together by nothing but a will-to-power that was worthy of the original Tyrannosaurus.

They were like vast weeds from the green jungle—and how many of them there were, and how luxuriant!—these monstrous aberrations of human nature our soil put forth in the nineteenth century. And what a frank and innocent little thing the American historical tradition seems beside them, with its Stephen Decatur and all the other good boys! Russia alone, among Western nations, with its Rasputins and Iliodors, can match the reality of this nation in the realm of psychological melodrama,

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMBUG

THE autobiography of P. T. Barnum is a very instructive document for any one who wishes to understand the old-fashioned rustic American temper. There was no hypocrisy in Barnum. He had himself, as he says, a "too confiding nature," and it is touching to find that he was almost as easily fooled as the public, that he was given, as he admits, to sentimental emotions, and carried forward as much by gusts of impulse as by calculating shrewdness. It is the charm of his book that he trusts his readers, assuming, as he explains the complicated science of "catering for the public," that we shall feel flattered, as in fact we do, to think that someone else has been deceived. If he were not himself so vulnerable, if he were not so patently one with his readers ("If I thought," he says, "there was a drop of blood in me that was not democratic, I would let it out if I had to cut the jugular vein"), if he were less ingenuous in his revelations of the "philosophy of humbug" and the "art of money-getting," we might view with a colder detachment the spirit that animated Barnum's Great Asiatic Caravan, Barnum's Grand Scientific and Musical Theatre and all those other pompous enterprises.

There is an anecdote in the book that seems to



throw some light on the real nature of Barnum's humbug, its origin and its success. He tells us that at his christening his grandfather, who was a great wag, presented him with a piece of property, five acres of land known as Ivy Island. It was a great feather in his cap; he was encouraged to pride himself on his good fortune and to consider himself the richest child in the village. But a mystery was made of the matter; he was not permitted to visit his domain until he was ten years old. Then the family and the neighbours assembled, and, conducting him to the felled oak-tree that served as a bridge to his island, waited there and bade the young heir cross and explore his realm. Hardly had he set foot upon the island than the truth flashed upon him: he had been for years the laughing-stock of the village, for his property was a worthless bit of swamp. Approached by his only tenant, a huge blacksnake, he ran back with a cry to find his family and the neighbours waiting to congratulate him upon his inheritance: even his mother "hoped its richness had fully equalled his anticipations." And as long as he lived in that village he never ceased to be reminded of the pride that goeth before a fall.

One seldom hears of a grandfather outwitting an infant in arms, of a mother conspiring to jeer at her own offspring, of a whole family, in fact, inviting the village to make game of its youngest and most helpless member. And when one considers the notorious effect that such experiences in childhood have upon the after-life of the victim, one cannot fail to draw certain deductions from this

episode in the life of old Connecticut. One is led to suggest, first, that the force of Barnum's dominating motive, to fool others, bore some relation to the degree in which, as a child, he had been fooled himself. And secondly, that the motive of his family, far from being, as one might suppose, consciously malevolent, was to give him such a lesson that he himself would not be fooled again. In short, we have here a clear case of tribal initiation, as the anthropologists know it. Life, to the old-fashioned Connecticut Yankee, was a battle of wits, and shrewdness was the greatest virtue. Barnum had had his education, even if it remained imperfect, and he passed it on. Each time he fooled the public, he was putting the public on its mettle; he sharpened the instincts through which a commercial regime is carried on. In supporting him, in brief, his contemporaries were supporting nothing less than the competitive principle itself. Here is to be found at least one explanation of Barnum's triumphant vogue.

## JOHN BUTLER YEATS

**M**Y MEMORY of John Butler Yeats goes back to 1908, to a little gas-lit bedroom in the old Grand Union Hotel, whither I had been taken to meet the "father of the poet." At that time, the Irish Literary Revival was at its height, and there were no names more glamorous than Yeats and Synge. The "father of the poet," with his air of a benevolent sage, looked the part to perfection, looked it and spoke it indeed so perfectly that he shone at first only with innumerable reflected lights. He had come to America for a fortnight; he was to stay for thirteen years. He was to experience between the ages of sixty-nine and eighty-three a second career as abundant as his first had been. How soon it was to be forgotten that he was anyone's father! In that early time—it was natural enough—he pulled for us all the strings of association. If he had not seen Shelley plain, he had been as an art-student a commensal of Samuel Butler and William Morris; he had been one of the first Whitmanians—Whitman sent him his affectionate remembrance in a letter of 1872; for forty years he had agreed with York Powell and disagreed with Edward Dowden; he had known the father of Wilde and the mother of Shaw. All these recollections he poured out in a

stream of enchanting anecdotes. He was lost for us at first in the light of his own talk.

His earlier career, to be sure, had been wanting in no element of the illuminative, when it was not the paradoxical. It was the career, as rumour told us, of genius in solution, or at least not too forbiddingly crystallized, the career of being human to such a tune that two generations of Irish poets and artists had grown up literally under its wing. The story of Mr. Yeats's Dublin studio is to be found in Miss Katharine Tynan's autobiography and I do not know how many other books, just as the record of his influence is to be found in his elder son's *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*. Never, surely, had a man been more the cause of a more various wit in others, and this without prejudice to his having been—shall I say?—the Reynolds of a stirring age in his nation's history. He had painted all the distinguished, the interesting, the charming men and women of his time, painted them with such insight and such grace that his gathered work constitutes of itself—remote as it must have been from any suggestion of the public, the official—a sort of National Portrait Gallery. He would not paint the dull, if only, it might seem, because it was they who wished to pay him for the trouble: it was the angel of impecuniosity, as he once remarked, that had given him his freedom, a sensitive angel, no doubt, whose protection he wished not to jeopardize. His studio was thus closed only to clients—he would fly to escape from a lucrative commission, which meant that there would not be

good talk during the sittings, the good talk that implied a current of sympathy. Nor was this merely petulant: he could paint only those whom he saw, and he could see only those whom he admired. He painted, as Swinburne criticized, for "the noble pleasure of praising." In this, as in so many other respects, his fashion was that of the ancients; and one cannot but think that his pride, and all this multiform expression of his pride, must have had its effect in the rebirth of the Irish spirit.

Such questions could hardly have interested Yeats himself. "Your artist and poet, unless he becomes a rhetorician," he wrote in one of his last essays, "is a solitary and self-immersed in his own thoughts and has no desire to impress other people." It was thus that we were to see him, a true solitary himself, and never more so than when he most suggested (to those who did not know him) the autocrat of the dinner-table. But as time went on, his interest in painting in a measure dropped away. When he first came to New York, it was still strong; in the early days at Petitpas' he always had a sketch-book in his pocket and would draw as he talked; to the end his letters, even his briefest notes, were usually adorned with a little pen-and-ink impression—of himself, as a rule, and not too hasty to fix some humorous or ironic "state of the soul." I imagine, however, that few of the portraits he did here were as good as those he had done at home, perhaps because his sitters were not initiated into the secret, which must have been legendary in Dublin, that unless his pictures were

carried off, discreetly but forcibly, at the right moment, he was sure to overpaint and spoil them. His son speaks of his having painted a pond somewhere in Ireland: "He began it in spring and painted all through the year, the picture changing with the seasons, and gave it up unfinished when he had painted the snow upon the heath-covered banks." Everyone discovered this trait sooner or later, but in New York it was usually later: it was not the open secret it might have been if his American sitters had been able to compare notes. And besides, who could escape from his presence?—like Socrates, he was a flute-player more wonderful than Marsyas, who charmed us with the voice only. His art suffered in consequence, for he required the coöperation of a practical and resolute sitter. Alas, he should have painted only men without ears.

It was at Petitpas' that his star rose for us. He had found his way to that friendly house within a year of his arrival and was not to leave it again; and there he had his "Indian summer of the mind," a Jovian old age without any visible counterpart in a country where age as well as youth obeys the counsel of Mr. Rockefeller—not to talk but to saw wood. For his play of conversation he required no such preliminaries as Sarah Battle—there was no rigour in Yeats's game; yet one condition he would not forgo—a clear, abundant light. He disliked the duplicity of the candle-lit American interior; he wished to follow the expressions of his interlocutors and would recall the luminous mahogany tables of old that reflected

the dazzling chandelier and brightened the faces from below as they were brightened from above. The lights were high in Twenty-ninth Street—witness John Sloan's portrait-group, "Yeats at Petitpas," or even George Bellows's murky lithograph of the same subject. It was really characteristic, this desire, for it signified that our philosopher could not have loved art so much had he not loved human nature more.

His conversation was all of human nature. It flowed with every sort of engaging contradiction, with a wisdom that was by turns cheerful and tragic and a folly that was always somehow wise. Mr. W. B. Yeats tells us that when he was a boy his father would choose to read to him the "less abstract" poets; he preferred Keats to Shelley and the first half of "Prometheus Unbound" to the second half. During the last few years the metaphysical habit grew upon him, and, as he had a terminology all his own, it was sometimes difficult to follow him. Yet even then, as he distinguished between "feeling" and "emotion," for example, or "brains" and "intellect," one discerned his point without, so to say, perceiving it—nothing annoyed him so much as to be pressed for a definition. Besides, his point never failed to bury itself in one's mind: one would find oneself puzzling it out years afterward. He had lost some of his mischievousness, so that he would no longer maintain, for instance, that even English tailors are inferior, but he still clothed his discourse in the gayest web of images. He would say of the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait that the pho-

tograph was like the description of a ball given by a jaded, bored old chaperon who had spent the evening in an armchair, the painting like a description of the ball given by a pretty girl who had thoroughly enjoyed herself. He would say that there were three kinds of criticism, constructive, appreciative and destructive, and illustrate the three kinds by the mother who is constructive when she is teaching her little boy to keep his hands out of his pockets, appreciative when she is adding the last touches to her daughter's dress in front of the looking-glass before the ball, destructive when she is talking after the ball about Mrs. Robinson's daughter. He would speak of the ladies of the Charity Organization Society of Manchester who had known De Quincey's mother, lamenting his wild ways: "Thomas de Quincey, what is he! A waif and a stray! And to think that his mother moved in the best county society and had her feet planted on the Rock of Ages!" He would picture the Puritan minister "sitting in company with the father of the family in a sort of horrid conspiracy to poison life at its sources." He would tell of some Irish peasant who, describing a well-dressed man, added that he "fell away in the breeches." Or he would call up some picture from the past, as, for instance, of John Richard Green, in the days when he was known as a brilliant man who had done nothing and was expected to do nothing—of Green, in some drawing-room, surrounded by admirers, and remarking in a high chant: "All women seek to combine two mutually incompatible positions, the position of



perfect strength and the position of perfect weakness."

He had forgotten nothing that revealed human nature at its most singular, touching, absurd, above all its most characteristic. He could forgive anything but rhetoric, legality, emotionality and gregariousness—these were his four abominations. He had had reason in his own country to deplore the folly of the oratorical mind; and regarding legality his opinion was much the same as St. Paul's, that it was the "strength of sin": perhaps he was the more certain of this because he had begun life as a lawyer himself. As for his dislike of the emotional and the gregarious, it may have been a result of certain American experiences: I know that his opinion of Whitman changed entirely after he had lived here for a while. Having admired him for years, he turned against the "emotional bard," remarking in one of his letters: "The Sacred Nine have not heard his name even to this day." Nor was he free from reservations in regard to the Celtic Revival: I remember his horror, for instance, when a rather gushing lady accused him of having had some commerce with fairies. The truth is that he was at bottom an old-fashioned Anglo-Irish country gentleman, redolent of the classics, a skeptic of the eighteenth-century tradition, who had also drunk in his youth at the spring of "political economy" and John Stuart Mill; and upon this foundation had been superadded, to the confusion of the simple, the doctrines of Rossetti in painting, of Morris in economics and of Irish Nationalism in the political

sphere. It was a combination that made for an infinite, if a somewhat bewildering, wit—a wit, moreover, that drew the line on the other side of the banshee.

“Idleness and conversation” was his only formula for the good life. Like the “Be hard!” or the “Carefully cultivate your faults” of other sages, it was a stumbling-block to the foolish, among whom Yeats counted the population of Belfast and those who have “leather” faces and pursue the dollar. In his own case it signified an activity of the mind and the feelings that knew no check: for if his painting had lapsed, he wrote his first play at seventy-eight and was experimenting in poetry to the last week of his life. His “high-bred amicability,” to quote Goethe’s phrase about Molière, was a veritable school of manners, of the natural in manners; and he was always quick to draw out the least articulate of his companions. How many must have blessed him who had never known, until they talked with him, that they too had something to say! But what seems most fortunate now is that his exile turned him more and more to writing—his three books were all written in America. For years he had been urged to write his reminiscences—York Powell, as one discovers in the latter’s correspondence, suggested it a generation ago; and his *Recollections of Samuel Butler* shows us what the book would have been. But what does it matter? He drew his own portrait in every line he wrote. Had the *Pensées* of Pascal taken their final shape, we should have had only the same Pascal, plus the mortar

of "rhetoric"; and it is all the more characteristic that in Yeats's record we should miss the connecting links he so cheerfully ignored in life.

From his essays and his letters the thought drifts up, as Mr. Ezra Pound says, "as easily as a cloud in the heavens, and as clear-cut as clouds on bright days." In the letters his conversation lives again; in the essays we find it recollected, as it were, in tranquillity, soberer than his wont was, if only because more studied. Yet everywhere the effect is of a pure spontaneity. He will mention "the most deliciously uninteresting young girl I ever met, her perfect aplomb in selfishness was a perpetual surprise and pleasure." He will say that a "perfectly disinterested, an absolutely unselfish love of making mischief, mischief for its own dear sake, is an Irish characteristic." He will speak in this fashion of the "dungeon of self-hatred which is Puritanism";

The supremacy of the will-power implies the malediction of human nature that has cursed English life and English letters. I referred to Bunyan as foremost in the Malediction Movement. He would have called Hamlet "Mr. Facing Both-Ways," and Juliet "Miss Bold-Face" or "Carnality," and Romeo "Mr. Lovelorn," and Macbeth "Mr. Henpecked," etc., finding where he could epithets and names to belittle and degrade the temple of human nature and all its altars.

He will press to the depths and return with this:

"Except for one or two, I have never had a happy day," said the magnificently fortunate Goethe. The never-dying aches of the probe of pain are in every bosom: only while others resort to some kind of laudanum the poets let these work, finding in

them the root of happiness, the only sort which, though it be twin with sorrow, is without a fleck on its purity.

He will recur to those leading ideas—that “desire and not emotion is the substance of art,” that “character is the self-evolved enemy of personality,” that “in obeying rules, the highest even, we shall never forget that in so doing we are not alive”—which underlay all his other thoughts and expressed his own “certitude of belief.” His mind was of such a perfect candour that the printed page reproduces it like a sensitive-plate; we hear him talking as we read, we see him stoop and smile.

No doubt the novelty of his American experience, the sharp contrast with everything he had previously known, led him thus to define his point of view. His essays on “The Modern Woman” and “Back to the Home” are markedly the fruit of such a reaction: in the presence of our chaos the disparate elements in his own mind, in his life, in his memory, flew together and he rose above them in harmonious flight. So we may say that America had its share in the making of him. It was his energy, he said, a month before he died, that kept him in his adventurous exile; but he also stayed because he liked us. That was a compliment, and one we shall not forget.

## SWINBURNE IN THE FLESH

WITH every great poet we associate some characteristic gesture, some act, some posture that seems to us to belong to him alone. To the end of time we shall picture Milton seated in his dusky study, eternally dictating unintelligible words to an eternally amiable and forbearing daughter, Byron standing on the wild sea-brink apostrophizing a universe as romantic as his own hair, Li Tai Po sitting in the bamboo-grove, sipping, sipping, sipping, and Dante of the iron visage brooding on the encircling hills and flinging curses over the ungrateful city of his birth. Max Beerbohm has fixed upon this act, this moment, this gesture in the lives of many poets. Who that knows his "Poets' Corner" can ever forget William Butler Yeats interrogating the queen of the fairies, or Oscar Wilde with a sunflower in his hand, or Tennyson in that vast hall, reading *In Memoriam* to the Queen herself?

As a rule, it is foreordained that we shall actually see the great men even of our own time only under the most commonplace conditions. There was one poet, however, still living in our youth, whose characteristic gesture might have been witnessed every day of the year by Tom, Dick and Harry. And it was the more remarkable because

this poet was a recluse, as aloof as a hermit-thrush, a man who never appeared before the public and whose private life passed behind impenetrable curtains of reserve and mystery. This poet, one repeats, had his moment, his own special and characteristic act, an act celebrated by a score of roundels of his own composition, not to mention various odes, ballades and sonnets, an act, at which, day in and day out, as the seasons went round, any and every member of the population of the greatest city in the world might have assisted. Who was the poet? Algernon Charles Swinburne. What was the act? Playing with babies' toes. Yes, every day in the year, at eleven in the morning, Swinburne clicked the gate of The Pines behind him and marched up Putney Hill and across Wimbledon Common and sat him down at a public-house and drank a bottle of Shakespeare's "brown October." And it was on Putney Hill at two, three, four or five minutes after eleven every day that the act occurred. How do I know? Because I witnessed it myself.

Was it a low, unworthy instinct that led me thus to play the spy and saunter back and forth on the other side of the street, pretending I did not know that I was within twenty yards of the greatest poet living in the world? I heard the door of The Pines open and shut; with the tail of my eye I saw the little figure coming down the path. He swung the gate, he stepped into the street, he made a sharp turn to the left, he began his progress up the hill. Moment of moments! The birds were chanting in the trees, the sun showered its golden

drops among the leaves and all the window-boxes sang together. The poet had come forth to greet the morning.

What an odd little apparition! He was like a tin soldier. Who would have believed that such a great man could be so tiny, so shiny, so exactly as if he had just come out of a box? Was he more than four feet tall? One saw a prodigious head, a reddish nose, a white-and-yellow beard and a turban, a white turban with a brim: a neat little military figure, stiff and straight, with a great circular watch-chain and varnished boots that twinkled as he walked. And what an amusing gait!—like a mechanical toy. Left, right, left, right, one pace like another to the sixteenth of an inch, and his arms swung with the precision of a grenadier's on parade. One seemed to see Watts-Dunton in the background, diligently winding him up for the day.

And then one divined the event, the act, approaching. It was approaching in the form of a perambulator propelled by a nurse of nurses, with just the proper cuffs and the long blue cape and the tight blue bonnet and the gay blue streamers. Down the hill moved the perambulator, up the hill moved the poet; and all the air trembled with expectancy. Admirable nurse, how well prepared she was for the ceremony! She stopped, she waited; the little gentleman was abreast of her. He executed a sudden right-about-face, his bending body formed a right angle; up came the right forearm, down went the hand; there was a sudden plunge, and the prodigious head, the reddish nose,

the white-and-yellow beard, the turban, the white turban, brim and all, were lost amid the billows. The thing had happened, the act had been consummated! To the chant of the birds, in the eye of the morning sun, Algernon Charles Swinburne—naughty poet of secrecy and shade, perverse lover of how many a perverse and evil-flowering feminine ghost—had caught and kissed the toes of that baby. And who could doubt that, as he marched on, he was plotting still another roundel on that same inexhaustible theme, to be written down as he sat in the public-house over his bottle of “glorious British beer”?



## THE WRITER AND THE WORKERS

**G**REAT literature is always closely allied with religion, although at times this religion may cloak itself in forms that are not recognizable at first sight. Voltaire's anti-ecclesiasticism was obviously more religious than the routine Catholicism of many of his contemporaries, and Renan invested science with a sanctity that seldom appertains to the worship of the supernatural. For Tolstoy, Ibsen, Carlyle, Dostoievsky, literature was itself a form of religion, and they were priests if ever priests existed. For poets like Mickiewicz and Shevchenko, hierophants of oppressed nationalities, nationality was a religion; while for Morris, Wells and Gorky, socialism has played a similar part. In short, religion, either in its literal form or in some transmuted form or substitute, must always be the hub of the literary wheel; and writers will always be great, as a rule, in proportion as they stand *in loco pastoris*.

That is why even "æsthetic" writers, even skeptical writers, if they have a strong instinct for artistic self-preservation, tend to attach themselves to one of these forms of religion, some fund of ideas and beliefs that are shared by the generality—as William Butler Yeats attached himself to the cause of Irish nationalism, D'Annunzio to the

cause of Italian nationalism, Oscar Wilde to the cause of socialism. And this becomes ten times more necessary in a period when people continue to separate themselves from the Church, the soil, the family and all the other reservoirs of general life. And what is the nearest available fund of this nature to which the American writer can attach himself? The alliance of artists and writers with the workers is surely based upon justice, and natural and even necessary on other accounts.

To many writers, this alliance is, to speak of its lowest ground, a plain effect of necessity. Their economic status, thanks partly to the dominant regime, which has driven the creative life to the wall, has placed them squarely in the working class; and where one's treasure is, or one's lack of treasure, one's heart is also. A natural economic bond, in short, with all the overtones of sentiment and loyalty that any natural bond induces, unites in our day the creators of hand and brain. But this is not the only tie: to create is to affirm one's "free will," and writers and artists would cease to be creators if their lives were determined by "necessity." And while they have been in a sense compelled to make common cause with the workers, they have at the same time chosen to do so: for who has ever counted the writers and artists who have made the choice without the necessity? And why have they made the choice?

Since the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution, writers have tended to be at swords' points with society. Few were the great spirits of the nineteenth century who were not outspoken

members of the Opposition—whether one seeks among the Olympians, the Ruskins, the Nietzsches, the Tolstoys, or among those lesser but no less honest souls, Baudelaire and Heine, for example, who, incapable as they were of a mightier rage, gave themselves to the task of “shocking the grocers,” the complacent purveyors, that is, of material comfort. Against what were all these good men in revolt? Against the mechanization of human nature involved in a regime of trade as distinguished from industry, of wage-servitude as distinguished from artisanship. And what is the mechanization of human nature? The blocking of those natural impulses that make even quite ordinary men creators, that enable them really to grow and become themselves, that endow them with life and light. It was really in behalf of the artist in every man that the great spirits of the last age made war upon society: their sympathy with the exploited classes was an affirmation of the instinct of workmanship in themselves. And as members, for the most part, of the middle class, they felt that they were themselves in a false position, a fact that explains half their indignation, the anger, for instance, of Ruskin, who railed at himself for the “fine raiment” he wore, and of Tolstoy, who tried to live like a peasant. As for the alliance of our own generation, the alliance with the workers, it is merely a logical consequence of this “Opposition” of the last generation: it shows that artists and writers really wish to legitimize their position, by following their instinct as craftsmen and producers. For where is the real creator, the poet,

painter, musician, who does not experience a glow of fellow-feeling as he watches a skilled carpenter at his work, a cook with the gift of cooking, a mason who understands his business, a gardener who marries the soil to his seeds and roots?

There lies the true inner meaning of Rodin's quarrel with "official art": a quarrel that he waged in the name of all his fellow-artists. Rodin's life, indeed, was more prophetic even than his work: he was throughout that long age of compromise and bitter misunderstanding the type of the contemporary artist, as of the artist of times long gone, who has joined forces with the workers because he is himself a workingman. One remembers Bernard Shaw's description of Rodin as an "old stone-mason": it tallies with his own account of his point of view, his conception of the artist's life. Who can forget that story of his happy fortune as a boy in Paris, how he found, still existing there, an ancient school for artisans, an almost forgotten relic of earlier days, despised by the frequenters of the Beaux-Arts, that perpetuated the traditions of the old stonecutters of the Middle Ages? His master, his great master, as he called him, from whom he learned the most, was a poor and unknown workman who, marvel of marvels, knew how to carve a leaf with all the profound understanding, with all the truth of feeling, of some nameless craftsman of the thirteenth century. To Rodin, one of those simple leaves—simple, yes, but simple with a difference!—was worth more than all the meretricious grandiosities of the official artists. And he himself was never to

forget, never to outlive that proud apprenticeship the secret of which had been almost lost since the Renaissance. In proclaiming himself always a stonecutter, Rodin reinstated the artist in his rights.

For precisely by repudiating a gentility that is foreign to his instincts, a gentility that has next to nothing in common with the sphere of manners, real manners, that sphere of social behaviour which is also one of the conquests of humanity, by returning to his normal status as a simple workman, the artist finds himself no longer at cross-purposes with the main current of society. Like the artists of the Ages of Faith, he can feel that he is coöperating in a universal effort of the human spirit. At one with the great body of workers, and permitted perhaps by his privileged position to re-infuse the workers themselves with the true sense of their craft, he feels himself called not so much any longer to oppose and destroy existing institutions as to assist in bringing to birth that freer social order to which the cause of the workers is committed, committed by long tradition, by the voice of its own prophets, by the very instinct of workmanship itself. A great mass of organized desire, of sheer self-interest, if you will, pushes behind him towards the goal of which he alone apprehends the full glory.

MAX EASTMAN, SCIENCE  
AND REVOLUTION

FOR some years now, Mr. Max Eastman has been trying to give literature the *coup de grâce*. He has written a book on *The Literary Mind* in which he presents Literature on the Defensive, Literature in Retreat, literature in every humiliating posture; and it is only natural perhaps that, seeing literature as he does in this light, he should wish to put it out of its misery. He wishes to show us that "poets, *as poets*, don't know anything about life," and he says they have gradually been compelled to realize this. "Where our own parents," he says, "consulted the poets for direct guidance in the unmanageable crises of their lives, we consult the nerve-specialist or the psycho-analyst"; and he adds that "as science extends and deepens its domain, those cases in which the soundest judgment can be rendered by a man cultivating the mere art of letters will grow steadily fewer. That is the inexorable fact."

Here, verily, is the mouth speaking great things. Mr. Eastman is not writing as a scientist; he is writing as a literary man, with all that engaging skill in dialectics for which he has long been famous. And we might share his view if we took as the spokesmen of literature those two groups

of literary theorists who, for Mr. Eastman, fill the whole horizon, but whose intellectual vitality is in truth so low, and whose vital perceptions are so undeveloped, that their opinions are scarcely worth discussing. But literature is not comprised in those lukewarm souls who ponder such critical problems as whether a poet should be read in his entirety, whether there still exists indeed any justification for criticism, and whether it is proper to invite God to join us in our Humanistic redemption of the world. If literature were confined to these dismal purlieus, we might agree that it is "a vain effort to defend the prestige of profane letters against the inexorable advance of a more disciplined study of man." We might say, with Mr. Eastman, that it "leaves us nothing to do but smile patiently and turn to the books of science and wait for better days." But if one is going to "turn to books" at all, why not turn to books that will really show us what literature has to teach us, whether we "smile patiently" or not? We might, for instance, turn to Matthew Arnold's lecture on *Literature and Science*, which effectively disposed of Mr. Eastman's arguments before Mr. Eastman learned his alphabet.

But Mr. Eastman's "patience" is not profound. He does not wish to hear what real poets have to say for themselves. He wishes to humiliate literature; he wishes to think that literature has nothing to teach us. He has a deep contempt for his own vocation that constantly leads us to ask why he pursues it. He likes to pour scorn on its terminology and resorts to very disingenuous methods in

order to show how useless and pretentious it is. He would have us think, for example, that because the word "classic" was used by Aulus Gellius to mean "classy"—appertaining to the writings of men who are property-owners—it has not come to mean, in two thousand years of human history, something totally different, which alone counts for us. He likes to think that no one consults the poets on matters of practical wisdom, or he would not assert it with such relish; and he takes it for granted that we are wiser than our forbears, and that the psycho-analysts are better prepared than the wisest of the ancients to straighten out the world. These are large assumptions. The world is full of psycho-analysts, who are driving a roaring trade, but it does not appear to be growing wiser or happier; and how can Mr. Eastman deny with confidence that if the world had taken the word of the poets, the poets whose word is really worth taking, it might have been able to dispense with the psycho-analysts? The poets might surely have told Mr. Eastman, what the psycho-analysts apparently have not told him, that the simplest analysis of his own position reveals a personal bias behind his views which destroys their objective validity. He wishes, for reasons that may be known to himself, to discredit his own vocation; but some of those who share Mr. Eastman's vocation are not so ready to see it discredited. And they will remember that, in other times and connections, Mr. Eastman has taken this line in regard to literature. He is consistent, he has always been consistent.

We recall, for instance, how Mr. Eastman



fought, a few years ago, in *The Liberator*, against the notion that writers have any grounds for regarding themselves as leaders in the matter of the social revolution. He said that writers were, by nature, "playful," and that for just this reason they were "in need of guidance and careful watching" by the practical workers of the socialist movement. In fact, he considered them so exceedingly playful that, far from being in a position to educate the workers, they were themselves, like refractory children, in want of education—a notion that suggested even then that Mr. Eastman's literary conscience must be in a bad way. And as this is virtually what he still says, as the objects of his interest have not altered, as he is obsessed, now as then, with the notion that science is the Big Brother of literature, as even now the social revolution is the focus of all his thoughts, we may with profit transpose this old discussion into the terms of the moment.

Mr. Eastman, then, while denying that writers have any grounds for regarding themselves as leaders in the matter of the revolution, admitted that they contribute "something indispensable." What that is, he said, "we might call inspiration"; they "keep up a certain warm faith and laughing resolution in those who might weary of learning and labouring in the mere practical terms of the task"; their words are "a thrill of reviving wine to their comrades." To Mr. Eastman, we see, then as now, literature is a mistress, not the "stern mistress" of whom we have heard so much, but a very beguiling and charming mistress who delights

in trimming the beard and warming the slippers of the grim giant Science, whose business is Revolution. Mr. Eastman has even spoken of Maxim Gorky as if he were one of these gay little hand-maidens, gently chiding him for having mistaken (as one might mistake pumps for slippers) "the elementary distinction between Socialism Utopian and Scientific." One tries to imagine Gorky in this ingratiating posture, but somehow the picture refuses to take form. Gorky as a fount of "laughing resolution"? That will never do. Nor does Anatole France exactly inspire his readers with a "warm faith," ingratiating as he is in other respects and a true-blue militant by Mr. Eastman's measure. Still more unhappily, neither of these authors has accommodated us by feeling the need of that "guidance and careful watching" that Mr. Eastman thinks they ought to feel. The more, in short, we scrutinize Mr. Eastman's feminine view of literature, the more it seems to have a familiar ring, and the less it fits the facts. It is familiar because it is so American. Our writers all talk in this fashion, only for most of them the weary giant who needs Mr. Eastman's "thrill of reviving wine" is not Revolutionary Science but Reactionary Business. And it fails to fit the facts because it is based on romantic prepossessions. If, in this country, we had had any real experience either of literature or of revolution, Mr. Eastman would have been led to conceive of their relationship in a rather more realistic manner.

For let us ask Mr. Eastman one question: what is the great difference between the workers' move-

ment in America and the workers' movements in Europe?—for there evidently is a difference, since the workers of England, France and Germany, not to mention Russia, have all had actual parliamentary majorities. What do the American workers lack that these European workers have? Surely the answer is obvious enough: a sustained corporate interest in their own welfare as sentient human beings, a sustained corporate conviction in regard to life, a sustained corporate vision of some better order of things—in a word, corporate desire, enlightened desire. It is these qualities which, embodied only more consciously in a competent, organized minority of leaders, give to a movement solidity, reality, momentum, raise it above the level of that mere sporadic, exasperated state of protest in which the radical movements in this country rise and fall with the regularity, and also with the futility, of the tides, and enable it to turn a revolution into something else than a catastrophe, to guide it, handle it, hold it, keep it, and to make it really count and serve, instead of letting it slip away in oceans of senseless bloodshed—as, just because of our moral infantility, any conceivable American revolution would be almost certain to do. Vision, conviction, desire, I say, form the backbone of the proletarian movement in Europe (which differs from our own movement in having a backbone), and it owes this vision, this conviction, this desire—to what? to whom? To science? Or to those few men who have been capable of realizing in themselves, and expressing in their works, heights and depths of which the rest of hu-

manity, but for them, would never have dreamed? Have writers accomplished this? Not writers alone. Religious leaders have helped; they have given birth to a faculty of conviction that has been sometimes turned against the very religions they have led. Philosophers have helped, all sorts of persons. But writers have had much to do with it, as one could prove in the course of a hundred pages. One can safely say, for the present, that the difference between the workers' movements in Europe and America—a difference that has certainly struck Mr. Eastman—is largely due to the possession, in the one case, and the lack in the other, of a really adequate literature.

Consider Russia, for instance, since Mr. Eastman's eyes are fixed on Russia. To what is to be ascribed the partial success of the Russian revolution? Science, first of all? But other countries, Germany, for instance, are far more "scientific" than Russia ever was. The secret lies in the Russian people, in their feelings and desires; and the secret of their feelings and desires lies in those who, sharing them, have worked upon them, intensified them, endowed them with motives, objects, purposes, wills. When one has the will one gets the science quickly enough; and, if Russia has had the will, who is to be thanked for it? Pushkin, who taught Russia to believe in itself, and Tolstoy, who taught it not to believe in property, and Dostoievsky, who taught it to believe that its destiny is to reconcile the nations, and Chekhov, who taught it to look upon its actual existence as empty and intolerable, and Gorky, who, in spite of that

little error about the two varieties of socialism, taught it to recognize in the most degraded soul a man and a kinsman. Mr. Eastman says, apropos of the writers of Russia, that "from the standpoint of practical importance, in arousing a revolutionary will among the Russian people, literature has been only a tiny thing compared with conversation": Russian literature has been "only a lingering crest or high point in that mightier process." But surely that is a quibble. Common men can only get ideas, the ideas they employ in conversation, from those who have ideas; and it is indisputable that the "conversation" that gave birth to the Russian revolution received its first momentum, as it took its ultimate direction, from a few articulate individuals, namely, these Russian authors, and a few others, plus the author of *Das Kapital*. There one has the component parts of the Russian revolutionary spirit; for four generations these writers have been of the very blood and sinew of the students and workers who have helped to carry that spirit to fruition. "Desire precedes function," and it precedes the statesmen, the economists and the scientists. If Pushkin had never existed, it is certain that Lenin and Stalin would never have existed either.

Is not the same point equally true if, instead of Russia, one considers England? Whoever has sat for ten minutes in a meeting of British workers knows very well that behind the corporate consciousness of British labour stand Messrs. Webb and Wells, Morris and Ruskin, Huxley and Carlyle, Cobbett and Shelley. That a man is a man

and not an animal, that as a man he has dignity, that having dignity he has claims, that having claims he has intentions, that having intentions he means to get a decent world about him—these are a few of the discoveries of those playful beings who, in Mr. Eastman's opinion, need to be guided and carefully watched; and the curious thing is that they sometimes have to go out of bounds in order to make their discoveries. "We have," says Mr. Eastman, "to keep the poetry true to the science of the revolution—to give life and laughter and passion and adventures in speculation"—to give, in short, that "thrill of reviving wine"—"without ever clouding or ignoring any point that is vital in the theory and practice of communism." But alas, it does not belong to poets to be so circumspect. Ibsen was shockingly careless about communism; and yet without those terrible eyes of Ibsen's, no one would ever have dreamed how desperately in need Scandinavia was of every sort of social renovation. And there is William Morris: if Morris had been obliged to scrutinize the "elementary distinction between Socialism Utopian and Scientific," he would surely have given one doleful cry and vanished without leaving a trace of that gorgeous dream of the future from which English socialism has drawn a good half of its hope and faith. Worst of all, there are Gorky and Anatole France. "True to the science of the revolution"? *Monsieur Bergeret*? *Jérôme Coignard*? *The Spy*? *The Mother*? Writers, in truth, are natural-born Ishmaels who would be "agin the government" even in Utopia; and because they

were "agin the government" they would help to save Utopia from dying of ossification. Let us therefore draw the veil of charity over this word science. And let us, O let us refrain from treating the poets as dear Mrs. Caudle treated her husband.

In short, Mr. Eastman is clearly mistaken when he says there is no such thing as an "education" that has to be distinguished from "propaganda." It is because it has no education, as distinguished from a propaganda that gives it merely the emotion of revolution, that the socialist movement in America is so futile; and it is because our writers are so "playful," and so afraid of all the watchful giants, that this movement has no education. In vain does the socialist press, and the communist press, advertise all those good old musty, time-honoured radical classics, Ingersoll's *Lecture on Shakespeare*, Kropotkin's *Appeal*, Zola's *Attack on the Mill*. Well, not quite in vain; the moths have long been at them, but there is life in these ancient relics yet. But what a dim life, and how remote, how fantastically *unrelated* to the America of these years in which we are living! Radical America still feeds on the husks of Wendell Phillips and Abolition, and on the mere spectacle of Soviet Russia; and this accounts for its unsubstantial aspect. As for science, it surely has plenty of science; one can obtain science by the cartload from any of a dozen institutes of research. What radical America needs is the impulse to use this science, the sense of what to use this science for—the vision, the conviction, the desire. And it will

never get this vision, or this conviction, or this desire, until its writers have re-thought the old thoughts, and re-lived the old experiences, and presented to the workers of America, in terms of their special understanding, in terms of the American present and future, images of a more desirable life than they are themselves capable of associating with reality. Can that be accomplished by "playfulness," playfulness tinged with fear? Or by anything less than unwatched freedom, and tons and tons of pressure? Decidedly, if Mr. Eastman wants a revolution, a successful revolution in America, one that will "stay put," he had better revise his view of literature. For while "inspiration" may turn the wheel, only "education" will provide the wheel with tracks on which it can revolve to any purpose.

Indeed, there is no evasion of reality to compare, on the part of an American writer, with that of talking revolution *in vacuo*. A revolution we may have in this country; but those who most desire the results of revolution ought to be the most eager not to bring it on until there is some chance of consolidating those results, as there can hardly be while the workers themselves have no plans that reach beyond the ends of their noses. The real task, therefore, of those writers who have the revolution most at heart is to attempt, for a change, to accomplish what writers have accomplished in England and Russia. A civilization without an organized culture is a hard and stony ground; you may sow it with all the seeds in the world—they will simply blow away. And revolutionary ideas



will never take root in this country until the soil has been prepared for them, until, for instance, we have a "conversation," the conversation that is bred by literature. It is all very well to say that, for the purposes of revolution, workers have to be workers before they are sentient men. That idea emanates from a civilization in which workers are so conscious of themselves as men that in acting as workers they are acting in the name of humanity. We have to do with a population which is on all its levels so unconscious as to behave almost as if it were automatic. Nothing but literature can really arouse it, and nothing but will can really arouse literature. And as for the will, "playfulness" may be a condition of it, but only as adolescence is a condition of maturity.

## UPTON SINCLAIR AND HIS NOVELS

IN 1889, when the English nation revealed through its press how unwilling it was to be "pried up to a higher level of manhood" by the *Connecticut Yankee*, and was indeed denouncing the book as a travesty, Mark Twain tried to induce Andrew Lang to come to his defense. "The critic assumes, every time," he wrote, "that if a book doesn't meet the cultivated-class standard, it isn't valuable. The critic has actually impressed upon the world the superstition that a painting by Raphael is more valuable to the civilizations of the earth than is a chromo; and the august opera than the hurdy-gurdy and the villagers' singing society; and Homer than the little everybody's-poet whose rhymes are in all mouths today and will be in nobody's mouth next generation; and the Latin classics than Kipling's far-reaching bugle-note. . . . If a critic should start a religion it would not have any object but to convert angels; and they wouldn't need it. It is not that little minority who are already saved that are best worth trying to uplift, I should think, but the mighty mass of the uncultivated who are underneath." Whereupon our troubled humorist besought Andrew Lang to "adopt a rule recognizing the Belly

and the Members, and formulate a standard whereby work done for them shall be judged."

It is recorded that Andrew Lang failed to respond to this remarkable appeal. He could scarcely indeed have understood it, knowing as he did so little about the American mentality that Mark Twain represented. It was of the nature of our old democracy to believe that the feelings and opinions of the majority had a sort of divine sanction, the popular being regarded as *ipso facto* good. Under these conditions, a double standard of taste might well have seemed as natural to a man in Mark Twain's position as that other article of faith of the nineteenth century, the double standard of morals. And yet the *Connecticut Yankee* itself shows us how false the notion was. Mark Twain's plea was that he was "trying to uplift the mighty mass of the uncultivated." Actually, in this book, he debased them: he flattered their ignorance of history, he played on their prejudice against the Old World, he drew their attention from the abuses of their own social life by focusing their indignation on the long-forgotten abuses of the Middle Ages, he confirmed them in their complacent belief that a shrewd Yankee mechanic, a man of their own type, possessed all the secrets of life that anyone ought to desire.

It is with this instance in mind that one reads Mr. Upton Sinclair's novels, *King Coal*, or *Jimmie Higgins*, for example, or *100%: the Story of a Patriot*. Judged by the "cultivated-class standard," these books are as bad as books can be, weak, slovenly, deficient in all the qualities that

make a work of art. Novels are novels; from the standpoint of criticism their subject-matter cannot save them. It is impossible to interest oneself in "winsome Irish lasses" who are only winsome because they are not the daughters of their employers, in pretty stenographers whose "wicked little dimples lose no curtain-calls," in "patriots" like Peter Gudge, in paragons like Jimmie Higgins—impossible because they have never existed in Mr. Sinclair's own imagination. They have no more existence than the villains and the heroes and the naughty ladies of the movies and the *Red Book Magazine*. Mr. Sinclair has no more respect for psychology than his mine-owners have for their employees; he has no more respect than Mr. Hearst for the intelligence of his readers. His novels are simply "reels."

I am speaking, as I say, from the "cultivated-class" standpoint. And now the question arises whether Mr. Sinclair is any better advised in his attempt to liberate the proletariat by this means than Mark Twain was in "trying to uplift the mighty mass of the uncultivated." In his advertisement of *100%*, Mr. Sinclair quotes the opinion of one of his readers that he will have even more trouble than he had with *The Brass Check* in "getting the books printed fast enough." It is natural that Mr. Sinclair should be popular with the dispossessed: they who are so seldom flattered find in his pages a land of milk and honey. Here all the workers wear haloes of pure golden sunlight and all the capitalists have horns and tails; socialists with fashionable English wives invari-

ably turn yellow at the appropriate moment, and rich men's sons are humbled in the dust, winsome lasses are always true unless their fathers have money in the bank, and wives never understand their husbands, and all those who are good are also martyrs, and all those who are patriots are also base. Mr. Sinclair says that the incidents in his books are based on fact and that his characters are studied from life. No doubt they are. But Mr. Sinclair, like the rest of us, has seen what he wanted to see and studied what he wanted to study; and his special simplification of the social scene is one that almost inevitably makes glad the heart of the victim of our system. It fills this victim with emotion, the emotion of hatred and the emotion of self-pity. Mr. Sinclair's novels sell by the hundred thousand; the wonder is they do not sell by the million.

But suppose now that one wishes to see the dispossessed rise in their might and really, in the name of justice, take possession of the world. Suppose one wishes to see the class-system abolished, along with all the other unhappy things that Mr. Sinclair writes about. That is Mr. Sinclair's own desire; and he honestly believes that in writing as he does he contributes to this happy consummation. One can hardly agree with him. In so far as his books show us anything real, they show us the helplessness, the benightedness, the naïveté of the American workers' movement. Jimmie Higgins, who does not exist as a character, is a symbol, nevertheless; and one can read reality into him. He is supposed to be the American worker incar-

nate; and was ever a worker so little the master of his fate? That, in point of fact, is just the conclusion that Mr. Sinclair wishes us to draw. But why is he so helpless? Because, for all his kindness and his courage, he is, from an intellectual point of view, from a social point of view, unlike the English worker, unlike the German or the Russian worker, the merest infant; he knows nothing about life or human nature, or economics or philosophy, or even his enemies. How can he advance his own cause, how can he circumvent the patrioteers, how can he become anything but what he is, the football of those who know more than he? Let us drop the "cultivated-class" standpoint and judge Mr. Sinclair's novels from the standpoint of the proletariat itself. They arouse the emotion of self-pity. Does that stimulate the worker, or does it merely console him? They arouse the emotion of hatred. Does that teach him how to grapple with his oppressors, or does it place him all the more at their mercy? The workers' movements of Europe are stronger than the workers' movement in America because the individuals that compose them are, in comparison, and relatively speaking, not intellectual and moral infants but instructed, well-developed, resourceful men. They waste little energy in hating their masters; they are too busy learning to understand them. They waste still less energy in pitying themselves; they are too busy establishing their rights. And these false simplifications of Mr. Sinclair, these appeals to the martyr in human nature, are so much dust thrown in the eyes of his readers.

To return, then, to the "cultivated-class" standpoint, one respectfully urges that a book which is not good enough for oneself is not good enough for the proletariat either. One might further maintain that the only writers who can aid in the liberation of humanity are those whose sole responsibility is to themselves as artists. Consider, beside these novels that have been written with an eye chiefly to propaganda, such a book as Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*. Turgenev revealed the serf not as a Jimmie Higgins, a teary wax image, but as a man capable of pride, faith and thought; and the result was that the conscience of Russia has been occupied with nothing ever since but to rescue that thinking man and instate him in his rights.

And so when Mr. Sinclair further tells us that "the struggles of crude and illiterate men for their daily bread and their common rights have more meaning and more interest for the future than all the graces and refinements of the 'cultivated class' "—which include the graces and refinements of literature—we feel that his mind suffers from a certain confusion. The cause of common justice, the cause of these very struggles, is one that a modern writer is almost bound to share; and we might share also Mr. Sinclair's prejudice against "graces and refinements" if, by this phrase, he really meant "airs and graces" and not those aspects of life that endow with significance and beauty the whole secular effort of humanity. It was the "graces and refinements" in the characters of the novels of Dumas, of all writers in the world, let Mr. Sin-

clair remember, that aroused in Maxim Gorky his first revolutionary feeling. As a boy he used to pore over Dumas's romances, and it astonished him to hear of a society in which people were civil and considerate of one another: the streets of Paris became his Utopia, and it was then he began to dream of a day when his own Russia, the Russia of the disinherited, might also have its share of social grace and beauty. That was because Dumas, insincere as he was in other respects, conveyed a sincere picture of fine manners: which goes to show how the cause of justice is always served, in unexpected ways, by writers who are true to any part of reality in themselves. "The persons," as Shelley said, "the persons in whom this power takes its abode may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little correspondence with the spirit of good of which it is the minister. But although they may deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve that which is seated on the throne of their own soul. And whatever systems they may have professed by support, they actually advance the interests of Liberty."

Granting, therefore, that nothing has so much meaning as the struggles of the dispossessed, the question is how the writer can best aid them. Mr. Sinclair says that a critic, in order to understand the task of a revolutionary novelist, should "go and get himself a job in a West Virginia coalmine." But this is no true part of the writer's task, if he really is a writer; strange as it may seem, the only way for a writer to aid the dispossessed, *as a writer*, is by preserving his detachment. If he can-



not understand the dispossessed without sharing the conditions of their life, he reveals his own incompetence, he reveals a lack of just that intuitive power which justifies his choosing to be a writer: one calls to witness Zola, who, before committing *La Terre* to paper, spent one afternoon exploring the region with which his book was concerned. That was all the physical, corporeal Zola required, in the way of "seeing life," in order to contribute his mite to the cause of the workers: the sufferings through which this document came to birth were internal, spiritual sufferings, and that is why the results have really told. A writer who, in order to understand his characters, has to share their life in its specific actuality is almost certain, sensitive as he is, to react to that life as they themselves react to it, to fall under the sway of the same resentments and passions, and to be limited by the same self-pity that handicaps them. He becomes the "character"—and ceases to be the writer. And this course is easier than the writer's proper course. It is easier to act as an impulsive man, and give free rein to our generous human feelings, than it is to employ our feelings in the terrible cause of art. And blindness remains blindness, whether one is blind by necessity, as the dispossessed are blind, or blind by a sort of choice, made with whatever good intentions.

## THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS

**I** MUST confess I believe," said Mr. H. G. Wells, in one of his early essays, "that if, by some juggling with space and time, Julius Cæsar, Napoleon, Edward IV, William the Conqueror, Lord Rosebery and Robert Burns had all been changed at birth it would not have produced any serious dislocation of the course of destiny." There we have the Marxist view of the great man, the logic of the economic interpretation of history, the antipole of Carlyle's view which prevailed throughout the world in the nineteenth century. Any other view of the individual and his powers is, to the Marxist, and as Mr. Wells himself puts it, "melodramatic." The world in general has come round to this way of thinking; for the war seemed to confirm it. Where were the soldiers, the statesmen, the individuals of any kind who were sufficiently evil to have caused the war, sufficiently wise to have stopped it, or strong enough to have compassed either of these actions? The world, people say, has become so "big" that the human will cannot control the forces that sweep it like the tides. And the hope of the liberals in the power of an organized intelligence that knows only an intelligent leadership, a leadership that has no spiritual sanction, is all that stands between

the popular mind and an almost Oriental fatalism.

And yet this universal modern view is one which the student of literature cannot accept. "Great writers and artists," said Tolstoy once, in conversation with an American friend, "are to me the high priests and leaders of evolution, the real sovereigns, who rule, not by force of guns and armies, but by moral authority." Was Tolstoy the victim of a delusion, intoxicated with the conceit of his own power, a power over words? The history of culture plainly bears him out. No doubt the creative spirit has always fought in its day on the losing side: the great men are always despised and rejected and speak in all appearance to the wind. But the great men are not time's laughing-stocks: even in the economic sphere it is they who rule. The Marxists reject great men and are themselves the creatures of Karl Marx; and a creature of Karl Marx—Nicolai Lenin—labelled in his own person, as the lie it is, the notion that statesmanship cannot be creative. And Lenin's tomb today is the visible witness of the spiritual power which the hero exercises in life and after death. The world is too "big" to be controlled not because greatness is an illusion but because the material discoveries of the last century have put to sleep for the moment the faculty in men that responds to greatness. But a century is short, and the memory of mankind is long; and we cannot believe in the lasting dominion of blind forces, we who believe in literature. We are obliged, as regards the function of writers and artists, to accept—and let them call it what they like—the "melo-

dramatic" view: for history bears us out. We are obliged, in a word, to believe in heroes, whether they swagger or not.

And partly because of the light, corroborating our faith, that psychology has thrown upon these blind forces. So little has civilization advanced that we are still savages cowering in fear of a sinister "nature" that exists in reality only within ourselves. We no longer fear lightning and storms and those other phenomena which to primitive man appear as emanations of the Adversary. But we still fear what we imagine to be the "not ourselves" just the same; and, fearing it, we create objects for our fear. We fear poverty, and our fear is responsible for the oppression that seems to justify it; we fear war, and our fear creates war; we fear the loss of caste, we fear the downfall of our nationality, and our fear keeps us in jeopardy. These blind forces, in short, that dominate us and that are, as we suppose, outside of us and beyond our control, are, in reality, projections of the blind forces in our own spirits. If, for instance, we did not desire wealth, how could they have dominion over us, those who appear to prevent us from acquiring it? Our desire makes us their victims. If we did not fear the loss of caste, how could we lose our caste? The fearless have no caste. If people did not, as members of a nationality, wish to out-rival some other nationality, how could an aggressive war occur? The incubuses that sit upon mankind are the reflexes of mankind's own weaknesses. We tolerate them because we fear them, and we fear them because there is something in ourselves

that demands what they supply. If we became conscious of that "something," conscious of our wishes and demands, and checked them in the light of the "ideals" to which we pay lip-service every day, these incubuses would collapse like the balloons they are. What happened to "imperialism" in India when Gandhi led the boycott of British goods? What would happen to the "capitalistic system" if humanity suddenly went on a hunger-strike? One does not say that humanity will, or should, do anything of the kind; but humanity might, humanity surely can. There is nothing in the world humanity cannot do; there are few things humanity has not done. History has witnessed crusades, revolts, revolutions, flights, migrations, treks beyond all counting; it has witnessed Reformations and Revivals, holy wars, sudden "returns to nature," movements of purification, revaluations of all known values. History, in fact, has witnessed nothing else. And in every case the poets, priests and prophets have set the tune, composed the martial music.

For literature *awakens*. We Americans are all too familiar with the psychology of advertising: how many of our desires have been awakened by advertising? Without advertising, how many Americans would ever have discovered that four porcelain bathtubs, five kinds of talcum-powder, and six kinds of soap are essential in a civilized household? The brisk young business man of our day (who is not so brisk as he was a decade ago)—"Arrow" collar, "style-plus" raiment, "quality" shoes, "distinctive" necktie, haughty frown and all,

is, from top to toe, a creation of the advertisers. The desire to approximate to a certain pattern has been evoked in him from without, and he responds with all the alacrity of a true son of freedom.

What advertising does, literature does also. For who would say that the desires of men can be confined to soap and a haughty frown? In other ages very different patterns of character and behaviour have been placed before the young, and the young have responded with just as much alacrity. Who can count indeed the impulses which, in history, poets have stirred to life, unlocked, as it were, and liberated into the sphere of action? Under the eyes of this generation, Ireland has awakened to the desire to become itself, to direct its own destinies; and what was the fountainhead of that desire but the poets of Ireland? The conditions were ripe, the people had become susceptible, the poets spoke. To what extent was not the character of the Russian Revolution, of the French Revolution, determined by the characters of poets, novelists and philosophers? Who evoked in the French of the Napoleonic epoch that thirst for glory which placed them in the hands of their Emperor? Who convinced the Germans that they were a Chosen Race? Literature is not directly an ethical force; one must see it first of all as a force merely. For poets can play upon human nature, for good and for evil also, as a musician plays on an instrument; they can evoke from it desires that respond to their own desires. Man, in fact, with his whole scale of latent impulses, lies at the mercy of this

eloquent agent of what Emerson called the Over-Soul, this Pied Piper of the Unconscious.

The English novelist, Miss M. P. Willcocks, has very justly noted that Balzac "founded a whole over-world of imaginative figures that, acted upon by 'real' life as they were, yet reacted in their turn upon reality itself, and so became directly productive on the plane where men buy and sell, draw up contracts, or engage in trade-warfare. The characters found in the pages of novels, or on the boards of the theatre, became the moulds into which action itself was ultimately poured." She is discussing, apropos of Balzac, the "strange interaction between man's acts and man's dreams" and the extent to which the life of trading, fighting and begetting has been, in the forms in which we have known it, the outcome of ideals that have gathered round the stories of great "saviours" and of lesser characters, real and imaginary; and indeed, as Emile Faguet pointed out, the whole tone of French society was altered by Balzac's influence, types and characters arising on every hand, in the generation that followed him, reproducing in life all the traits that Balzac had conceived in fiction. This is merely one of the illustrations of Oscar Wilde's idea that life holds the mirror up to art. "Scientifically speaking," said Wilde, "the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt. Young men have committed suicide because Rolla

did so. . . . Think of what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Cæsar." And think, let us add, of what we owe to the imitation, in the United States, of great industrial leaders who describe history as "bunk" and philosophy as "ninny stuff"; to the imitation, in Russia, of Nicolai Lenin! It used to be said that the women of England grew perceptibly taller as a result of Du Maurier's cartoons; and no doubt Du Maurier did spread the fashion of a more erect carriage.

Thus writers and artists, and men of action, too, when they use words and phrases, play upon us and mould us to their wills. And that is why one cannot understand such contentions, for instance, as Mr. Max Eastman's, that "the real motor forces in social evolution" are "currents of material interest." Who would deny that currents of material interest are indeed forces? That is another matter: it does not conflict with Pascal's observation that history would have been altogether different if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter. During the four years of the war the world was so drugged and confused by propaganda that it lost all power of coherent action. Was any "material interest" at the bottom of it, that humanity allowed itself to be led about by the nose, a nose that lacked the sagacity of Cleopatra's? It was sentiment, sentiment, sentiment all the time: adventure, loyalty, hatred, love, bravado. And what was this propaganda but a kind of literature? Practical men do not spend tens of millions for any commodity unless they think they are getting their money's worth; and who has ever computed the tens of millions that



were spent during the war on the written word? Far from proving the truth of Mr. Eastman's contention, the events of recent years prove nothing so much as that the real motor forces in social evolution are not by any means "currents of material interest," but rather currents of feeling, currents, moreover, which, as often as not, lead to the exact reverse of any "interest." The only thing they really prove, in fact, is the infinite plasticity of human nature. For what is the meaning of the power of this propaganda? That human nature is ductile and suggestible; and, for the rest, that the human imagination can be made to work as readily for evil as for good. Granting a single instance of a social change resulting from the influence of the written word, the fact, for instance, that, as a result of Rousseau's agitation, the women of the French aristocracy began once more to suckle their own children, and how can one set a limit to the possible power of artists and writers, their ideas, their visions, their examples?

This was what Shelley meant when he asserted that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," who, in the end, will be found to legislate in the interests of goodness and beauty. And if it is true that a poet can also be what William Morris called "the idle singer of an empty day," one can still reply: That depends on the poet.

