Art in America

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"Nay, start not at the word! America!"
—Shelley

History offers no parallel with the situation of Art in America. In the very flower-tide of English literature out go the Pilgrim Fathers with the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and John Bunyan, into a country whose natural beauties and whose natural rigours seem as if they would force art from out the veriest savages. The history of American development, one might hastily assert, offers every inducement to art in every form.

And yet the result is relative sterility. If we except Poe and Whitman in literature, Whistler and Sargent in painting, these remarks on Art in America seem likely to be as few as those on Snakes in Ireland.

Do we find anything that even aspires to be of the first rank? Poe is not in any sense a local bard; he is, of course, universal; yet he seems almost anti-local; most of his stories are drawn from the Old World, or might just as well have happened there. Whistler and Sargent never worked in America at all. The astounding inspiration of much of American scenery, ranging from the cliffs of Yosemite and Niagara to the plains of Texas and the Mississippi, fails to inspire the native. I have at my tongue's tip a dozen superb nature-pictures of their country—God's country! no empty boasting that!—and every one of them was written by an Irishman or a Scot.

Why could not Whistler have painted in the Yellowstone? The nearest he ever got to it was Valparaiso.

I think the truth of the matter lies in this, that where life is so abundant only the eldest souls can even begin to turn themselves to that quintessentialising of it which

is the secret of art, and that such souls, overwhelmed by its immensity, or lacking in the youth of genius, have failed.

Even of those whom we may claim as at least candidates for election to the Elysian fields, we must remark that their output is infinitesimal. In prose, it is true, Poe managed to sustain himself in aether well enough, and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (too little known here) is a greater achievement than any of the shorter stories. But you can pack away his poetry into a hat-box, "The Raven" is, to my mind, a much over-rated piece; "The Bells" is as bad as Southey's "How the water comes down at Lodore." What remains? "Ulalume," "Anabel Lee," "For Annie," "Al Aaraaf" (more or less), "Israfel," and three of four pieces which are barely more than stanzas.

All very exquisite, all lacking body, and all monotones in a single key.

I say this, although I consider Poe to have been one of the greatest men of his century. The thought in "Eureka," "Monos and Una," and one or two other essays, is profound and lofty. But there is little breadth in the depths. His philosophy is based not on a study of all human thought, but on odd books which drifted his way. He tried to make bricks without straw, and it was bad for his pyramid.

His book-learning, too, slight as it was, was too much valued. He is always hinting at his own scholarship. He was "cultured," though with enough real genius to laugh at the "frog-pond" of cultured Boston.

Of American culture, I have one perfect sample. Travelling from Nagasaki to Hong Kong, two mature maidens from Massachusetts discovered that I sometimes wrote, and "took me up." "And who," I asked, "is your favourite poet?"

A warm flush overspread each sallow cheek as the two thin mouths exclaimed "Rossetti!" "And which" (I tactlessly pursued) "which of his poems do you like the best?"

This remark closed the conversation. They had put the name Rossetti down in a note-book; and right there "culture" ended.

This I found characteristic of many American women. I have seen American girls in Italy laboriously writing down the names of more painters than I shall ever know, without any further comment than the dates at which they painted. To ask a single question on the broadest lines was to court silence; in fact, it became the most useful method in my daily life and conversation.

The national American game is Poker; and as "calling," in artistic Jack-pots, costs nothing, it is a safe rule never to lay down your hand.

It is the same even with children. I once talked with a boy of thirteen years old, as bright and intelligent as I ever met. He knew no Latin or any modern language; he did not know where Berlin was; he knew the names of only eight of the States in his own country, although he was getting "a quarter" for every one he could name; he knew no arithmetic beyond the first four rules, and those he knew badly; his history was confined to George Washington and James G. Blaine, to the exclusion of such insignificant characters as Napoleon; and his other mental bunkers were equally empty of coal. He had excellent machinery; nothing for it to work with.

Now, one might expect a boy of this type—a type almost universal in America—to develop into an artist. He lived in Salt Lake City, but spent most of his year in California and Honolulu. Having nothing else to feed on, one would expect him to feed on his surroundings; and I cannot conceive of anything much more sublime. The Mormon adventure is one of the most romantic in the world's history; the ghastly grandeur of Utah is an epitome of death as Oahu and the Golden Gate are of life. The finest island in the world; the third finest harbour in the world; the most wonderful valley in the world; and the most admirable climate in the world; one of the

most intoxicatingly varied populations in the world—what comes of it?

What do we know of the whole splendour of the people and the place? Just exactly what Robert Louis Stevenson has to tell us: "only that and nothing more!"[1]

This brings me back with a jerk to Edgar Allan Poe. He lives in a land whose every breath is lyric exaltation, and the only nature-poetry he gives us concerns Venice (in the "Assignation") and "the dark lake of Auber in the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir," which is no more American than Battersea Bridge. The only other picture that rises to my mind is "The House of Usher," which sounds more like Germany or Norfolk.

Whitman is almost equally unconvincing as far as scenery goes. The secret of all Nature-poetry is *the interpretation of every phenomenon as a direct dealing of God with the soul,* and Whitman rarely reaches to be more than a recorder or reflector of Nature. It stirs him at times to big thoughts, but hardly ever in that intimate manner, that sense of necessity, which we see in Keats, Coleridge, and even Wordsworth.

And yet he does something better than all this. He gets, as none other ever got it, the sense of vast open space and the vigorous autochthon rejoicing in his strength—man made one with the biggest kind of Nature.

Most of Poe's best scenery is pure imagination; for example, the matter of ice-lands in *Arthur Gordon Pym;* of the realists Mark Twain is the only one worth a moment's consideration. The Mississippi really seems to have impressed him; but it is only in rare moods, and these poetic moods are by no means his best. I find it difficult to refrain from shouting for joy at the immensity of those swirling waters. I understand Beethoven rearing at the sunrise. But Mark Twain at his best is a profaner of these sublimities; the shallow criticism is usually uppermost in his mind. Indeed, one wonders whether his deeper passages were not written just to show us

that he could do it. With the obvious result that he shows us that he couldn't.

In fact, if we are to take the loftiness of the habitual plane of thought to be the first qualification of a great artist, Poe and Whitman stand alone.

Of these Poe, philosophy and all, is little more than "Thoughts on Death," a limitation as bad as that of Degas or Gustave Moreau. There is more deep and more varied thought in a single sonnet of Baudelaire. Poe lives principally by the vividness of his imagery and the excellence of his style. But Europe, in the same century, can name in literature alone fifty artists with superior vision and equal execution.

As to Whitman, I confess that I praise him with an exceeding bad grace. I am cursed with a public school and university education, though luckily I was born with enough native sense to shirk the soulless ritual of it so far as might be, and its bad influence has been corrected by years of wandering in the wilds. How the "scholar" can pretend to admire Whitman one can only explain by theories highly discreditable to the scholar. But, however we may despise the scholar, there are yet natural laws of rhythm. I do not argue that we know them all; on the contrary, I expect every new artist to declare new laws. But I deny that Whitman did so.

As an artist, he appears to me incomparably deficient. There is not one line whose music is retained by memory; I simply fail to understand the people who talk of his "subtle rhythm." I am deaf to it. And though his thought is so finely pantheistic, now and again, what point is there in the quotations from the catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores which make up three-quarters of his work? A great mind, perhaps; it seems to me as if that mind had been overwhelmed by the immensity of its material. He obtained such mystic rapture from every object that he could do nothing but scribble down its name!

He has been most praised, too, and has probably achieved most fame, by the perfectly gratuitous coarseness of his phrase whenever that phrase becomes articulate.

It is rather like Satan rebuking sin; but I think that the passage in *A Woman Waits for Me* ending with the words "accumulated within me" is revolting and beastly.

Quite right, someone will say, that pure beastliness should find expression; the point of view is as well worth recording as any other. Whitman has no doubt expressed the gross animal instinct which growls in man, and I think no man before Whitman ever consciously expressed it to himself. But is it art? Is there any merit in this expression? Is there melody, or fitness of any kind, in it? Why is this more poetic than the remarks expressed in even simpler (and therefore better) language on the walls of our "Vespasiennes"?

What said Blake? "Everything that lives is holy"; "the lust of the goat is the Glory of God";—true as truth itself.

But "truth is beauty," too; and the truth of life is not beautiful like the truth of Art, because Art selects the essential truth, the truth that is common to all, the "thing-in-itself," and declares that truth in fitting language. Whitman's language is occasionally not fitting; it is filthy; it has no link with eternal truth such as is given by beauty of expression, by style, which manifests the internal harmony of the universe.

We should not tolerate such language even in a newspaper, even in a modern 'drawing-room whose conversation is confined to enlightened comment upon the works of Professor Von Krafft-Ebing; but we must praise it, must we, "because Whitman saw the great vision of the Universal Unity"? Every artist sees this vision; every truly religious person sees this vision; many of them have deemed it most fitting to express this vision by symbolising it as Sex; but not one has made the indecent gesture. In India many millions worship the

Shivalingam; it is represented over and over again in every temple in every material and every size; but there is never anything to shock or to disgust. It is not a question of morality—Whitman's morals are in all respects admirably clean—but of decency; and Whitman's indecencies—I have not quoted the worst—seem to me as pointless and inane as those of a crew of drunken sailors in a Limehouse bar. Even in the cleaner poems, the "Song of Myself," the "Song of the Open Road," one gets this conviction of the domination of mind by matter which is to me the supreme horror. That and the monstrous egoism of the man, the bombast and crudity alike of thought and utterance, leave me with the feeling that I did well indeed to close my Whitman after a conscientious perusal, never to open it again, at least with the idea of obtaining anything of worth.

I think that the real ground of his reputation lies in the very uncouthness of his form, and in the fact that one said: "Here is an American voice in tune with the most advanced voices of Europe." Max Nordau, too, in classing him with the great men whom his spite prompted him to spit upon from an altitude about a million miles beneath their boots, gave him an altogether false importance.

In Art a man's views count for nothing. It is a curious paradox that a man can only write if he is so white-hot over something that his work pours through him, not from him; and yet it is not of the least importance what that something is.

I agree with Walter Pater; but I know that Bunyan, with whom I disagree, was first-rate, and Pater second-rate.

What does it matter whether anyone *is* right? If he *does* right, it will last.

This tirade is, however, to be taken as from the point of view of the purely literary mind. It is easy enough for the university-trained European to avoid the blunders which shock purists in Walt Whitman, and we

consequently obtain a quite false idea that such European work is "good."

From the philosophical, and even more from the human view, Whitman is an artist supreme in so far as he mirrors the spirit of his time and country. He has the childish petulance and bombast and enthusiasm, the gross, naked lust and the ultra-refined delicacy, the essential rough vigour, the hurry, the conceit, the egoism, the astounding incompetence and the still more astounding capacity, the Jingoism, even the cant, of the American-as-he-is-in-himself, the Yank *an sich.* I find meaning even in the strings of names; I understand how, in a country so new and generous, the mere crying of the names of things fills the soul with ecstasy—the ecstasy of poetry. Whitman says "lint, bandages, iodoform" as the Greeks said "Thalassa! Thalassa!"[2] and thereby conjures a vision of all the heroism and suffering of the War of Secession. That war was never sung as we understand song. But there is many a heart to thrill at "O tan-faced prairie boy." Two "lines" which are not lines! Yet the superhuman rapture of an unexpected love in the open air—not beyond the experience, I hope, of those who live there!—is given, naked and gorgeous beyond all royal pomp, in those two lines that are not lines.

All this America is crude, formless, hurried, crowded. There is little real music, even of the simpler lyric sort, in the Americans. "Culture" is a pose; even common education sits ill on him. We must not expect his literature to follow our lines. His literature is to come. We shall know when it does—it will be stupendous, it will be gigantic and elemental beyond all our experience. It will not keep our rules. It can only come with a settlement of some of the main social and political problems; but when it does, we shall, I believe, clearly recognise Walt Whitman as the fountain and origin of it all.

I am well aware that I am thus placing on the highest of all possible pinnacles a man whom I detest and

despise; but I deliberately do so. A Balaam come to judgment!

Whitman is America. He is the real thing, the spirit of the new continent made word. Not the voice of imported culture, or of any other thing inessential. He is raw, untutored, tameless, crude, the America of the War. I have lived on the prairie myself, and I recognise the note.

The claims of Emerson, Longfellow, Bryant, Whittier and the rest are more easily delt with. Emerson's ruggedness saves him from the barber's-assistant fate of the others. In some ways Emerson is quite the greatest of the Americans. His outlook is wide, and his thought profound; but his speech (as far as the poetry is concerned) is very imperfect, and (as far as the prose is concerned) too perfect, while the quantity of his best work is quite negligible if we think of Carlyle, or Nietzsche. Nor do the Essays rank with Bacon or Montaigne.

Longfellow is merely the polite professor; he has little learning, even for an undergraduate, and he has never penetrated a single GR:mu into the varnish of any 'drawing-room idea. Smooth, shallow optimism, a faith even more frock-coated and silk-hatted than Tennyson's, a style absolutely wooden.

Said Poe, having printed a long passage of "Evangeline" as prose: "There is good, respectable prose, and no one will ever again run the danger of mistaking it for poetry."

There are one or two lyrics, good second-class: for example:

"The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of night
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in its flight."

That is fairly fine poetry. It is simple; the image is clear and coherent, as well as beautiful; and the infinite purpose of the Universe is suggested by the introduction of the eagle. But there is not much else of this calibre; most of Longfellow is pop-gun loaded with pop-corn. Bryant is, on the whole, even more spectacled than Longfellow; and Whittier is little better than Moody and Sankey.

If most of these people had lived in England, should we have had a quarter as much fuss made about them? But in the desert which Childe Roland crossed "a burr had been a treasure-trove."

Of Bryant the best quotations which Poe (who was trying to extol him) can find are this sort of thing:

> "And what if cheerful shouts at noon
> Come, from the village sent,
> Or songs of maids beneath the moon
> With fairy laughter blent?
> And what if, in the evening light,
> Betrothèd lovers walk in sight
> Of my low monument?"

Echo answers "what?"
A sonnet beginning

> "Ay, thou art for the grave,"

ends

> "We will trust in God to see thee yet again."

After this we wonder if Poe was not smiling softly to himself in concluding his appreciation:

"He is married (Mrs. Bryant still living), has two daughters (one of them Mrs. Parke Godwin), and is residing for the present at Vice-Chancellor McCrown's, near the junction of Warren and Church Streets."

Walter Savage Landor was an exile in Italy, and in any case I find it difficult to read him. How he came to conquer Swinburne one cannot imagine, unless one knows all about Swinburne.

Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving are difficult to rank in the first class. The sentimentality of the one and the obviousness of the other are enough to bar them from the Immortals. And Hawthorne at least was caught red-handed in a very open plagiary. In their time and place, however, they stood for a good deal of good. They did excellent work of its kind. *R.I.P.*

Of others who had their measure of fame some seventy years ago, there are some surprisingly facile writers.

Amelia Welby has these excellent lines. I cannot quote better from any English writer:

"And softly through the forest bars
Light lovely shapes, on glossy plumes,
Float even in, like wingèd stars,
Amid the purpling glooms."

and keeps it up, more or less, for nearly fifty lines.

But this is a very solitary swallow.

May I be pardoned a note of flippancy in dealing with the rank and file? Their names are forgotten even by their umquhile flatterers. I revive them because one or two of them were most richly endowed by Mr. Robert Ross' favourite 10th Muse—the "Muse of Bad Poetry."

Seba Smith, for instance, became immortal on this:

"But bravely to the river's brink
I led my warrior train,
And face to face each glance they sent
We sent it back again.
Their werowance looked stern at me,
And I looked stern at him."

Of the Channings, one need only remark that the uncle was a pedant, and the nephew an ignoramus.

Kentucky, however, produced a very fine few lines from the pen of a Mr. William Wallace.

He saw:

> "A swathe of purple, gold and amethyst
> And luminous, behind the billowing mist
> Something that looked to my young eyes like God."

Of course, one might object to mixing purple and amethyst; but the last two lines are first-class. Only—only—only—there it seems to stop. He never wrote anything else.

Anna Lewis talks about "Rapine and Vice" disporting "on Glory's gilded tomb" and "the dark inscrutable decrees of Fate," and we pass rapidly to the Reverned Joel T. Headley, who wrote the most comic account of the Crucifixion that has ever been penned. It is impossible to transcribe it, unless in a professedly religious journal, without risking the ire of Mr. Joseph McCabe and the other supporters of the Laws against Blasphemy.

George P. Morris, of whom I know little but that he is dead, appears to have been the original of Frederick E. Weatherley and Mr. Clifton Bingham.

There seems also to have been a Robert M. Bird, who would have imitated Sir Walter Scott well enough if his mind had not so constantly wandered.

And there was undoubtedly one Cornelius Mathews, who burst his poetic gun the very first time he fired it.

W. G. Simms was at one time exceedingly popular as a writer of short stories; they resemble those of Poe, but lack alike his genius and his style. Still, they were good enough to alarm the older writer, and perhaps it is a pity that they are now only to be found in the national collections.

Ambrose Bierce has at least one magnificent short story to his credit.

James Russell Lowell is better known in England than any of the last dozen I have mentioned; but his work is altogether without merit. It is the worst Journalese, and the man hardly better than a political hack. His success is worth no more than that of a new kind of pole-cat might be.

The only touch of true satire that I recall is the excellent

> "I dew believe in Freedom's cause,
> As fur away as Paris is."

Henry James, good or bad, is too important and too *sub judice* to discuss in this brief appreciation of the literary stars that spangle Old Glory.

Another writer well-known in England is Fennimore Cooper. He, again, succeeded chiefly by the novelty of his themes; his method is stilted, and after all he is only boyhood's friend. That I still like him only proves—what everybody knows—that I have never grown up.

But I do like him, and, if pressed, will maintain against the world that his pictures of the manners of an extinct race may be one day the most trustworthy data that posterity can command. (But what has that to do with Art?)

There are some dozens of others, Sprague, Dana, Hulleck, Willis, Hoyt, Hunt, Authon, Bush, Cheever, Mowatt, Francis, English, Stephens, Cranch, Dyckink, Aldrich, Kirkland, Fuller, Epes Sargent, W. W. Lord, Sedgwick, Clark, Walsh, Child, Hewitt Hoffman, Ward, Richard Adams Locke, Wilmer, Kettell, Brainard, Hirst, Drake, and the prince of them all, Rufus Dawes, author of "Geraldine" with its immortal climax:

> "He laid her gently down, of sense bereft,
> And sank his picture on her bosom's snow,

And close beside these lines in blood he left:
Farewell for ever, Geraldine, I go
Another woman's victim—dare I tell?
'Tis Alice—curse us, Geraldine!—farewell!"

Of all these there is not one whose name is today familiar to any American of whom I have inquired, though W. W. Lord made a big bid for fame—of a sort—by his impudence in publishing

"And the agèd beldames napping,
Dreamed of gently rapping, rapping,
With a hammer gently tapping,
Tapping on an infant's skull."

Ward is best known by his

"Bees buzzed, and wrens that thronged the rushes
Poured round incessant twittering gushes."

and the inimitable

"Oh, curl in smiles that mouth again,
And wipe that weeper dry!"

I momentarily forget—the world will remember—who wrote:

"His sinuous path, by blazes, wound
Amongst trunks grouped in myriads round."

But it matters nothing. The conclusion of the whole matter is that English is rare—one gets constantly "done" for "did," "took" for "taken," and the like—music rarer still, imagery and thought alike almost never stirring from the commonplace unless to fall into the abyss of the absurd.

I have not exhausted the list of claimants to literary fame; but Mark Twain's "James Ragsdale McClintock," whoever he was, is not really very much worse than the rest.

I have a prize specimen of my own, but (for all I know) he is still living, while this article is principally concerned with the dead, and, besides, I have endeavoured elsewhere to divert the discerning public very greatly with him in an article entirely devoted to so rare a bird.

We can then fold our wings sadly over our faces when we contemplate the past (in this article I avoid dealing with the present) of American literature.

It must, however, be remembered that it dates back very few years indeed. There are no American contemporaries of even Shelley. Why should there have been? They were too busy as pioneers. The only bright spot is the humour; and of course humour is the most perishable of all commodities. American humour, especially, depends almost entirely on local realism; and the railway changes that.

When we turn to Art, it is an even blanker prospect. After Whistler and Sargent, the former not even really an American, and both exiles from America by adoption, there is literally nobody at all till we strike the geological stratum of Penrhyn Stanlaws (whose name is Adamson, and whose birthplace Dundee!) and Charles Dana Gibson, of whose parentage one neither knows nor wishes to know anything.

One may reproach me with forgetting Alexander Harrison, who once painted two quite passable pictures, by accident, at the age of 32 to 33, "The Wave" and "In Arcady." The former of these is actually the first purely marine picture ever painted, and one may consequently class the artist with the immortals for historical importance. But of course he has always lived and worked in France, and he has never added a third passable picture to the former two.

Turn to music: I do not know of anything, except McDowell's work, which even pretends to be ambitious, or to have any real connection with anything beyond musical comedy and dollars.

The only American sculptor that I know of is a Lithuanian living in Paris.

No American actress has made any mark on serious acting, but that question is beside the point. Nearly all actors are Jews, in America as elsewhere. Only one really great singer has hailed from Columbia, and one incomparable dancer. I speak of Jenny Lind and Isadora Duncan.

Even the national hymn, "My Country, 'tis of thee," is little better than a parody of "God Save the King"; and I have heard the Imperial Japanese Band at a State festival perform "After the Ball" under the impression that it was the National Anthem of their guests of the evening.

It may be remarked in passing that America has only produced one really great man of science—Simon Newcomb. The boasted inventions of the Americans do not exist.[3] What they invent is "notions" based on the discoveries of others. Edison is merely an organiser and adapter of scientific brains. The telephone itself was due to Bell, an Englishman. I cannot think of any one scientific discovery of the first importance which was made in the United States. In Europe we had Kelvin, Helmholtz, Hertz, Haeckel, Darwin, Young, Lister, Pasteur—the pen runs on, one could fill a page from memory. I studied chemistry, physics, and biology pretty thoroughly at one time; I do not recall any American name in the textbooks. Such men as we know are people like Tesla and Lowell, who are not even serious. We must absolve America from Tesla, however, as he is but a recently imported product. In medicine the only name that occurs is Weir-Mitchell, and all that he did was to point out that over-worked people had better stay in bed. Of course, there is an enormous amount of work of second-rate importance; but none of the first rank.

As to philosophy, we have even less material for our criticism. The earliest figure in American philosophical literature of any notoriety is George Starkey, the alchemist. There is, however, nothing very distinctive about him; it needs an expert to tell him from Fludd, Ripley, or Sendivogius.

After him, no name awakes in memory until Emerson, and Emerson did nothing particularly new; William James is the only name that occurs to me with anything like a feeling of respect.[4]

A sorry story!

And why is it? Why is it that with everything in favour of new birth, of "variation," we find so very little born? Consider the astounding avidity with which the American swallows every kind of idea, the rage for literature, the subsidising of Art, the passion for music. Consider even the new blood that pours into the States to the tune of two millions a year from every art-producing country in Europe: and wonder grows, and grows.

Americans say that the immigrants are the scum of Europe. Perhaps, but they beat the native out of most of his money and power in no time. Isn't there a touching song about the "poor exile of Erin" who in a fortnight became "Alderman Mike inthrojuicing a bill"?

There is, firstly, the question of the critical faculty. This is curiously infantine in nearly all Americans. A man will determine to study philosophy. To whom does he go? To Kant? To Hume? To Aristotle? Dear me, no! he is quite happy with Fra Elbertus, with his sham Kelmscott Press and his platitudes, or with Swami Vivekananda, that burliest of Babus. It never strikes him to refer to the Upanishads, from which Vivekananda derived all that is of value in his work.

He is satisfied with any good machine-made stuff; he really thinks that Swinburne was "the English Ella Wheeler Wilcox." When it comes to criticism of "old masters," he rarely looks at them with the eyes that God

has given him; he looks through the spectacles of a guide-book.

Not that the English are not equally incapable in this respect; but they appear less ignorant, because they are fixed in traditional opinions which are (on the whole) right. The American cannot stay there; he is restless; he wants to know—and this will ultimately save him—but as yet he has only learnt to know *via* Baedeker, and the moment he is off the track he is hopelessly lost.

The Englishman would be as bad, but he knows the danger, and confined himself to the remark that Shakespeare was a great poet. Show him the Futurists, and he holds out a confiding hand to any professional or amateur leg-puller that may be about.

The "ministry of all the talents" of Art—Leader, Marcus Stone, Poynter, Leighton, Sidney Cooper, and so on—do well enough in England; anything like genius is suspect, as Beardsley found. But the American cannot distinguish between Goya and Gerald Kelly; and if he prefers Leader to the others, it is because he remembers "some scandal about a swan." No artist has any advantage with an American; he is perfectly fair, and if he were not also perfectly ignorant, he would make an ideal critic. As a matter of fact, I have sometimes met Americans whose native good sense made them finely appreciative of good work. But they are too often "put off their game" by the comments of "cultured" posers, usually of that Press which has discovered that "woman is the market," and thought it best to write down to the assumed level of woman's intellect.

Now, as Wilde urged, criticism is the foundation of creation; at least, it is the negative side of creation. And so, with no power of selection from the enormous mass of material at his disposal, he is entirely incompetent to do much more than copy the people he admires. In England we find people imitating Keats, or Swinburne, or Tennyson; in America they can sometimes be found doing their best to produce replicas of Anthony Hope!

The second point for our consideration is that of climate. I am sometimes tempted to believe that climate is the only thing that matters. Now New York, for example, is in the latitude of Madrid, and can be a great deal hotter than Madrid. The people consequently tend to behave like the Madrile. However, the old Puritan conscience is in absolute antipathy to the lazily, lazily, drowsily, drowsily frame of mind. So the people "get a move on" and restlessly rage throughout the day—and get nothing done. *"Festina lente"* and "More haste, less speed" ought to be painted up at every street corner in New York.

Of course, this condition of things does not obtain in every town or in the country.

Toronto makes a Sunday in a Scotch village seem like a hashish dream!

In short, there is every variety of life and every variety of scene, and every variety of climate and surroundings.

How is it that every variety is barren? One might not expect a Goethe or a Rodin; there is—outside the cities, where any work is impossible owing to the jolting—a sort of isolation from the pulse of the world which might (conceivable—though I don't see why it should) inhibit the manifestation of that cosmic sense which is the principal asset of the artist; but at least America might have produced a Herrick or a Burns. The continent is epic in mass, lyric in detail, dramatic in motion, dithyrambic in rest—and nothing comes of it. Is it because there is no settled order of things, no standard acquiesced in for centuries? Sometimes I think it must be that. Archimedes must have a fulcrum for his lever. In Europe the overturning of the dynasties has usually been the signal for an outburst of every kind of art. Here, however, there is in a sense nothing to overturn. People drift from Methodism to Zionism through Theosophy, Christian Science and Nut-foodism, without a single wavelet over their mental gunwale. If you tell a

man that black is white, he gets thoughtful, and says: "Yes, stranger, I guess that is so."

Nothing is a shock; nothing shatters a great citadel in the soul. Hence no fireworks when the fortress falls, which it does at the blast of no ram's horn, but at the rattling of dried peas in an ass's skull!

If this is not a satisfactory explanation, one must fall back upon the old platitudes about America being a "very *young* country." It is true: there is so much to do that no one has time to reflect. Poetry is born in the stillness of the soul; boredom is one of its chief stimuli.

The actual life of America is anything but favourable to art production; and there is such exuberance of vitality that there is no need of its concentration. America, too, is a great place for mute inglorious Miltons; a thousand poets might write masterpieces, and we never hear of it. The commercialism of the country is too rampant.

And yet (in conclusion!) the record of America is not bad. Giant inducements, no doubt, but also giant obstacles, and this—deeper and higher than all—that, take one thing with another, man is not equal to his circumstances. Art comes when man has understood his milieu, mastered his life.

There is one poet who has spent most of his life among mountains. He has sung a good deal of the hills of Cumberland, written a little of the Alps, made a poem or so on the mountains of Mexico, an allusion here and there to the Himalayas, thought he spent more time in the last than the first, and the impression was a thousandfold more intense. The Himalayas are too big for anyone to sing, and America is all Himalayas of one kind or another.

No doubt, when immigration stops, when the negro problem, and the Japanese problem, and the labour problem, and the political problem, and all the rest of the problems are solved, when a class arises which has time to reflect upon life instead of living it, American art will lead the world.

Until then, the theme is likely to continue to overwhelm the artist. Whitman alone has risen to the height of destiny; and Whitman was baulked by his own mind. He was Being without Form, as Poe was From without Being; and creation is the marriage of these twain.

NOTES:

1. Lloyd Osbourne, however, is responsible for much of the best of my favourite novel *The Wrecker.*
2. All language is hieroglyphic, from the blessed word Mesopotamia downwards. When I was a child my favourite Bible readings were the genealogies with the far-sounding names.
3. It must be understood that the author is expressing purely personal opinions, for which, editorially, we are nowise responsible.—ED.
4. That feeling is, however, very strong; I think "Varieties of Religious Experience" one of the most important books ever published. But why did the good man waste such a lot of time on Mrs. Piper? Automatic writing will never open the Gates of Immortality.