

THE ENGLISH REVIEW

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!"* 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

* 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-resounding names.