



EDITOR'S STUDY

HENRY MILLS ALDEN

WHEN we were saying in a recent Study that our American literature was fairly entering upon its maturity, our readers may well have been bewildered by such a prospect, and many of them dismayed. When the locomotive has destroyed our provincialism, or at least that isolation which preserved it in its primitive and most interesting stage, and when our Western frontier has no further room for expansion and we seem hemmed in under one open sky with no new horizons, what can compensate us for the vanished romance of our American past?

We associate with maturity formed character; the training and discipline derived from technical education in sciences, arts, and letters; conduct established upon rational motives—in a word, that conformity to the establishment of which the institutions of conventional civilization tend. If this be the prospective maturity of American literature, it spells dry rot. A living literature can be fed only from the native springs of life.

Perhaps no better vision of the future growth of our literature can be suggestively reached than by a study of its sources of growth in the past and in the present. From such a study it will be apparent:

That this literature, instead of having conformity for its chief aim, is, in its sources as in its specialization, characterized by heterogeneity—the language itself having the same characteristic, through its historic assimilations before it branched from the parent stem;

That, in its living course, like life itself, it is informed by reality and seeks not to unveil the mystery of that reality, but rather creatively to embody it, preserving its freshness and wonder;

That, therefore, it is forever nourished by that romance which gives immunity to surprise by introducing us to reality

in all its strangeness without the impertinence of explication. This romance is of the very essence of realism; it is like the romance of scientific discovery, which does not attempt to explain to us the outlying universe, but enables us to behold it in all its wonder, and delight in it.

Should our cosmopolitanism abolish the last vestige of our American provincialism and cut off every new source of native recrudescence it would still the more stimulate and help to satisfy our avidity for foreign elements of strangeness beyond our borders. Nay, has not our freedom and our progress during the last two generations been bringing these elements in ever-increasing volume and variety within our borders, until we have ceased to be a homogeneous people?

How great would have been our loss if during the last generation we had been shut off from Russian, Spanish, Polish, and Swedish fiction and the Norse drama!

Recently Tagore has added a contemporary imaginative strain from Asia, to this European symphony. Formerly what we have had from the East has come to us from a great antiquity and through traditions shared with the English people. The first and richest of these treasures, considered simply as literature, was the English Bible, including the Apocrypha. Not to be mentioned in the same breath, but still next in literary value and general appreciation, was the Arabian *Thousand and One Nights*. Nowhere else have the people had access to the rich storehouse of Oriental fancy. Southey's and Tom Moore's Eastern poems were delusive. Faithful translations of the finer Persian poets have been for the few, with the notable exception of Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam—a transcendent distillation rather than a translation. The scholarship and

research of the nineteenth century made accessible to our deeper culture, though not to the same extent for the enrichment of our literature, the great religious books of Asia—the rabbinical legends, the Zendavesta, the Vedic Hymns, the Hindu epics, and the subtle and mystical philosophies of the East.

Archæology during the last century has drawn aside the veil hiding pre-historic humanity, disclosing a world as remote as possible from literature, but fertile in suggestions to the imagination. The cave-man, surrounded by strange forms of animate existence, becomes for us the hero of a living drama. The area of human romance is extended into an indefinitely remote past, with glacial epochs for its background.

Every expansion in our knowledge of life, prompted by a curiosity which has its root in sympathy, though it may not be directly tributary to literature, broadens and deepens the field of sensibility and of all creative faculty. The streams which enrich literature are fed from such springs. The folk-lore which antedated written speech, long before science was born, found its elemental symbols, as of a living language, in the commonly observed habits of insects and plants—of a life not human, and therefore obliquely illuminating the human. It was an every-day romance—the first impulse to literary communication, the beginning of world gossip.

We have but to imagine that man was the only living animal on earth, and that all the tribes of men spoke the same language and were alike in dress and manners, to eliminate the possibility of romance and curiosity. We need only to intensify the blankness of this hypothesis by reducing all human conduct and feeling to a scheme of uniformity on, say, an ethical basis—doing for humanity what dogmatic theology has done for divinity—to make life perfectly intelligible and uninteresting.

Then, supposing any literature at all to be desirable, we might have one uniformly and internationally standardized.

But we are living in another kind of world, created and not fashioned, and therefore harmonious only through heterogeneity. It is a world in which there are happenings contrary to anything we

would call rational expectation. Nature is too mettlesome and sportive for any accountability to our notions; and nature in us is not less refractory. Beyond the scope of our petty management, which is confined to unliving things, it would seem to be—so far as our idea of a plan is concerned—a world of chance. What clue does our logic give to the labyrinthian complexity of animate existence upon the earth? Yet naturally we are reconciled to the bewildering confusion and blend with it readily and with native sympathy, as we would not with a scheme of life fashioned and accommodated to our conscious intelligence, but wholly devoid of delight and wonder. Is it surprising that we should instinctively conserve and cherish the wild life of the world, if only for the romantic surprise it perennially gives us?

So it is when we confront the equally bewildering human world. Here, at least, we should suppose that, since man is emphatically a political animal, he must find his way to a consistent and harmoniously working civilization. But the terms native to life—even to human life—are not those of civilization. The heterogeneity upon which life insists antedates civilization, which, on the contrary, in so far as it is conventional and arbitrary, aims at conformity. Our first glimpse of human history discloses a marked differentiation of races, no more to be accounted for by conscious institutional development than the far less distinctively specialized variations in other animal species.

This racial separation, with the other differences involved—of manners, customs, and especially of language, before Babel was feigned, as an afterthought—was the first barrier of seclusion, and so the first door of romance, which was the beginning of literature. If the peoples of Egypt and Asia Minor had been like those of Hellas, Herodotus would have had no prompting to his travels, and the fascination of history would never have existed. It was not the sameness of things reduced to complete intelligibility that awakened vital interest, but otherness, connoting shyness and a sense of strangeness, as the conditions of worth-while acquaintance. It was as if the creative imagination

demanded ignorance rather than assured knowledge—some veil of separation—as a premise of satisfying realization in its creation. How else is the wonder to enter—that mystery which shadows and attends everything that lives and is the seal of its reality?

Thus in those ages when annals were lacking, tradition and legend took advantage of the *lacunæ*, easily magnifying ancestral heroes into supermen and bringing the gods into comradeship with them in their exploits. Epics—like the Iliad, the Mahabharata, and the Nibelungen Lied—became possible. The uncharted seas gave more room for such spaciousness and freedom of imagination. The veil of the invisible world was a more potent premise to the operation of creative imagination, peopling the darkness with life, beautiful and wonderful in an infinitely diversified divinity, so spontaneously abundant that it blended with all the visible haunts of mortal habitation—and in all this not one rag of formal ethics, save as the later reflection of an arbitrary civilization. We might be reminded that any sort of ethics could hardly be expected of sensuous paganism. But when that higher plane of spiritual evolution was reached which found its embodiment in the Gospel, here also we find no trace of formal ethics. The very essence of the Evangel is Life—abounding life, in grace, beauty, and love.

In Christendom, as in the ancient world, we behold always and everywhere, on the one hand, the check of civilization, in its artificial conventions and activities, upon the native springs of life, and, on the other, life bursting these bounds—the soul reclaiming its own. The one tendency is toward stability and fixed order, through institutional authority, laying stress upon discipline and efficiency, upon the things that may be taught—a wholesome restraint from blindly spontaneous impulse, but one which, if wholly yielded to, would reduce human existence to static conformity, insignificance, and unreality. But, happily, the issue at least is not committed to the arbitrary will of man. Life, which is no preceptor, is our master, and we must submit to the living control on Life's own terms.

Faith, art—including literature, in so far as it is of the imagination—and the intuitions of creative reason are not our planned achievements, but rather, like ghostly visitants, too elusive for our grasp, with wayward manners and humors of their own that yield to no classification. In the case of literature we have seen how far its vital quality has depended upon the variety of the strange guests admitted to its hospitality. The extent of this assimilation on the part of English literature and of the American, as closely identified with the English, we have only hinted at—with no allusion to the very important infusion from classic, romance, and later Italian and Spanish sources, let alone the modern Celtic, Gaelic, and Gallic enrichment. The language has been assimilative of these varied elements, thus preparing the way for the intimate, catholic, and immensely profitable accession to the literature of all this wealth of world-culture, expressed in terms of creative imagination rather than in those of erudition.

Taking our literature altogether, along with that we share with England, the most vividly interesting portion of it, and by far the most romantic, has been drawn from abroad—from races whose languages are strange to our own tongue. Our country, moreover, has drawn within itself the living peoples of all races on earth, to be themselves assimilated; and these, under the direct and sympathetic observation of our story-writers, have contributed immensely to the cherished treasures of our literature. Some new foreign element is constantly being added—like the Portuguese on our New England coast, whom Wilbur Daniel Steele has made so much of in his short fiction. Not less haunting than the American Indian and the gipsies are in the childhood memories of some of us, or the plantation negroes in those of all our Southern people, have these later strange visitants been in the record of our lives as well as in our literature.

This world-gossip, this real culture of humanity, will go on in the future as it has in the past, following its own uncharted course, making education and progress its servants, but undetermined by technical formulas and standards.



The Conqueror

(AN ALGONQUIN LEGEND)

BY ARTHUR GUITERMAN

GLUSKAP the Mighty was haughty and vain,
Gluskap the Mighty was proud;
Painted and feathered, he danced on the plain,
Chanting his praises aloud:

“Ah, who that is mortal dare face me, defiant?
My war-club has shattered the stone-headed giant;
The storm-bird and thunder-bird fly me like sparrows;
The flame-breathing serpents are pierced by my arrows;
And dead lie the ghouls where the waterfall pitches;
And dead are the wizards and dead are the witches;
Unconquered, unchallenged, I fear no disaster,
And no one is left for my Greatness to master!”

Ahpet the Woman was lovely and wise,
Ahpet the Woman was gay;
Singing, she laughed in the Warrior's eyes,
Mocking his valorous lay:

“Yes, mighty is Gluskap! and none may withstand him
But Wahsis, brave Wahsis—for who shall command him?
Oh, Wahsis the Fearless! All women adore him;
The Chiefs of the Turtle are humble before him;



SINGING, SHE LAUGHED IN THE WARRIOR'S EYES

VOL. CXXXV.—No. 805.—19