

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN MIND

BY LEWIS MUMFORD

DURING the last generation we have learned to trace a good part of the ailments and peculiarities of America back to the rough life of the frontier. Van Wyck Brooks, in "The Ordeal of Mark Twain," has diagnosed the pioneer as a neurotic; and as we examine more carefully the Spoon Rivers and Gopher Prairies and Winesburgs that he left in his wake we become less and less impressed by his heroism, and more and more concerned with his pathology. But we have still to take up an interesting question: What created the pioneer? If he was a typical product of the New World, why was it that he did not appear in the Catholic settlements of Mexico? If his culture showed the overwhelming influence of a raw physical environment, why was it that the Seventeenth Century colonies of Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia did not bear that plain impress? Was he really the beginning of a new stock, as we like to think, or the running to seed of an old one?

I cannot pretend to answer all these questions; but I purpose to put them a little more sharply by tracing the pioneer's mind and disposition back to its remoter historic beginnings. For the settlement of America had its origin in the unsettlement of Europe: the pioneer came into existence when the European was already so distant in mind from the ancient customs of his birthplace that the whole span of the Atlantic did not widen the gap by an inch. This dissociation, this displacement, and finally, this disintegration became most apparent in America; but the process had begun in Europe, and the interests which

eventually dominated the American scene all had their origin, I think, in the Old World. The Protestant, the inventor, the politician, the explorer, the restless, de-localized man—all these types appeared in Europe long before they rallied together in America. If we can understand the forces that produced them, we shall see what created the pioneer.

II

In the Thirteenth Century the European heritage of medieval culture was still intact. By the end of the Seventeenth it had become only a series of fragments, and men showed, in their actions if not by their professions, that it no longer had a hold over their minds. What had happened?

If one tries to sum up the world as it appeared to the contemporaries of Thomas Aquinas or Dante one is conscious of two main facts. The physical earth was bounded by a narrow strip of seas: it was limited: while above and beyond it stretched the golden canopy of heaven, infinite in all its invitations and promises. The medieval culture lived in the dream of eternity: within that dream, the visible world of cities and castles and caravans was little more than the fore-stage on which the prologue was spoken. The drama itself did not properly open until the curtains of Death drew aside, to destroy the illusion of life and to introduce the main scene of the drama, in heaven itself.

During the Middle Ages the visible world was definite and secure. The occupations of men were defined, their degree of excellence described, and their privileges

and duties, though not without struggle, were set down. Over daily life lay a whole tissue of meanings, derived from the Christian belief in eternity: the notion that existence was not a biological activity, but a period of moral probation, the notion of an intermediate hierarchy of human beings that connected the lowest sinner with the august ruler of heaven, the idea that life was significant only on condition that it was prolonged, in beatitude or despair, into the next world. The beliefs and symbols of the Christian Church had guided men, and partly modified their activities, for roughly a thousand years. Then, one by one, they began to crack; one by one they ceased to be "real" or interesting; and gradually the dream that held them all together started to dissolve. When the process ceased, the united order of Christendom had become an array of independent and sovereign States, and the Church itself had divided up into a host of repellant sects.

At what point did medieval culture begin to break down? The current answer to this, "with the Renaissance," is merely an evasion. When did it finally cease to exist? The answer is that a good part of it is still operative and has mingled with the customs and ideas that have succeeded it. But one can, perhaps, give an arbitrary beginning and an arbitrary end to the whole process. One may say that the first hint of change came in the Thirteenth Century, with the ringing of the bells, and that medieval culture ceased to dominate and direct the European community when it turned its back upon contemporary experience and failed at last to absorb the meaning of that experience, or to modify its nature. The Church's inability to control usury; her failure to reckon in time with the Protestant criticism of her internal administration; the unreadiness of the scholastics to adapt their methods to the new interests and criteria of science; the failure to prevent the absorption of the free cities, the feudal estates, and the monasteries by the central government—

these are some of the stigmata of the decline. It is impossible to give a date to all of them, but it is pretty clear that by the end of the Seventeenth Century one or another had come to pass in every part of Europe. In countries like England, which were "advanced," all of them had come to pass.

It is fairly easy to follow the general succession of events. First, the bells tolled, and the idea of time, or rather, temporality, resumed its hold over men's minds. All over Europe, beginning in the Thirteenth Century, the townsman erected campaniles and belfries, to record the passing hour. Immersed in traffic or handicraft, proud of his city or his guild, the citizen began to forget his awful fate in eternity; instead, he noted the succession of the minutes and planned to make what he could of them. It was an innocent enjoyment, this regular tolling of the hour, but it had important consequences. Ingenious workmen in Southern Germany and the Low Countries invented clocks, rigorous mechanical clocks; they adapted the principle of the woodman's lathe and applied it to metal. Here was the definite beginning of the exact arts. The craftsman began by measuring time; presently he could measure millimetres, too, and with the knowledge and technique introduced by the clockmaker, he was ready to make the telescope, the microscope, the theodolite—all of them instruments of a new order of spatial exploration.

The interest in time and space advanced side by side. In the Fifteenth Century the mapmakers devised new means of measuring space, and scarcely a generation before Columbus's voyage they began to cover their maps with imaginary lines of latitude and longitude. As soon as the mariner could calculate his position in time and space, the whole ocean was open to him; and henceforward even ordinary men, without the special skill and courage of a Marco Polo or a Leif Ericson, could travel to distant lands. So time and space took possession of the European's mind. Why

dream of heaven or eternity while the world was still so wide, and each new tract that was opened up promised, if not riches, novelty, and if not novelty, well, a new place to breathe in? So the bells tolled, and the ships set sail. Secure in his newly-acquired knowledge, the European traveled outward in space, and, losing that sense of the immediate present which went with his old belief in eternity, he traveled backward and forward in time. An interest in archaeology and in utopias characterizes the Renaissance. They provided images of purely earthly realizations, in past and future.

The fall of Constantinople and the diffusion of Greek literature had not, perhaps, such an influence on this change of mind as the historian once thought. But they accompanied it, and the image of historic Greece and Rome gave the mind a temporary dwelling-place. Plainly, the knowledge which once held it so firmly, the convictions that the good Christian once bought so cheaply and cheerfully, no longer sufficed: if they were not altogether thrown aside, the humanists began, with the aid of classic literature, to fill up the spaces they had left open. The European turned aside from his traditional cathedrals and began to build according to Vitruvius. He took a pagan interest in the human body, too, and Leonardo's St. John was so lost to Christianity that he became Bacchus without changing a feature. The Virgin herself lost her old sanctity. Presto! the Child disappeared, the responsibilities of motherhood were gone, and she was now Venus. What had St. Thomas Aquinas to say about theology? One could still read the *Phaedo*. What had Aristotle to say about natural history? Leonardo, unaided, discovered fossils in the Tuscan hills and inferred that the ocean was once there. Simple peasants might cling to the Virgin, ask for the intercession of the saints, and kneel before the cross, but these images and ideas had lost their hold upon the more acute minds of Europe. They had broken outside the tight little world of

Here and Eternity: they were interested in Yonder and Yesterday; and since eternity was a long way off and we'll "be damnably moldy a hundred years hence," they accepted tomorrow as a substitute.

There were some who found it hard to shake off the medieval dream in its entirety, so they retained the dream and abandoned all the gracious practices that enthroned it in the daily life. As Protestants, they rejected the outcome of historic Christianity, but not its inception. They believed in the Eucharist, but they did not enjoy paintings of the Last Supper. They believed in the Virgin Mary, but they were not softened by the humanity of Her motherhood. They read, voraciously, the literature of the ancient Jews and the legends of that sect which grew up by the shores of Galilee, but, using their private judgment and taking the bare words themselves as the sum and substance of their religion, they forgot the interpretations, from the early Fathers to St. Thomas, which refined that literature and melted it into a comprehensible whole. When the Protestant renounced justification by works, he included under works all the arts which had flourished in the medieval church and created an independent realm of beauty and magnificence. What remained of the faith was perhaps intensified during the first few generations of the Protestant espousal—one cannot doubt the original intensity and vitality of the protest—but alas! so little remained!

In the bareness of the Protestant cathedral of Geneva one has the beginnings of that hard barracks architecture which formed the stone-tenements of Seventeenth Century Edinburgh, set a pattern for the austere meeting-houses of New England, and finally deteriorated into the miserable shanties that line Main Street. The meagreness of the Protestant ritual began that general starvation of the spirit which finally breaks out, after long repression, in the absurd jamborees of Odd Fellows, Elks, Woodmen, and kindred fraternities. In short, all that was once made manifest

in a Chartres, a Strasbourg, or a Durham minster, and in the mass, the pageant, the art gallery, the theatre—all this the Protestant bleached out into the bare abstraction of the printed word. Did he suffer any hardship in moving to the New World? None at all. All that he wanted of the Old World he carried within the covers of a book. Fortunately for the original Protestants, that book was a whole literature; in this, at least, it differed from the later Protestant canons, perpetrated by Joseph Smith or Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. Unfortunately, however, the practices of a civilized society cannot be put between two black covers. So, in many respects, Protestant society ceased to be civilized.

III

Our critical eyes are usually a little dimmed by the great release of energy during the early Renaissance: we forget that it quickly spent itself. For a little while the great humanists, such as More, Erasmus, Scaliger, and Rabelais, created a new home for the spirit out of the fragments of the past, and the new thoughts were cemented together by the old habits of medieval civilization, which persisted among the peasants and the craftsmen long after they had been undermined in the church and the palace. But the revival of classic culture did not give man any new power to take command over the workaday routine of life, for the very ability to re-enter the past and have commerce with its great minds implied leisure and scholarship. Thus the great bulk of the community had no part in the revival, and if the tailor or the tinker abandoned the established church it was only to espouse that segment called Protestantism. Tailors and tinkers, almost by definition, could *not* be humanists! Moreover, beyond a certain point humanism did not make connections with the new experience of the Columbuses and Newtons any better than did the medieval culture. If the criticisms of the pagan scholars released a great many minds from

Catholic theology, it did not orient them to what was "new," and "practical" and "coming." Therefore, the Renaissance was not, properly speaking, the launching out of a new epoch: it simply witnessed the breakdown and disruption of the existing science, myth, and fable. When the Royal Society was founded in London in the middle of the Seventeenth Century the humanities were deliberately excluded. "Science" was indifferent to them.

Once the European, indeed, had abandoned the dream of medieval theology, he could not live very long on the memory of classic culture; that, too, lost its meaning; that, too, failed to make connections with his new experiences in time and space. Leaving both behind him, he turned to what seemed to him a hard and patent reality: the external world. The old symbols, the old ways of living, had become a blank. Instead of them, he took refuge in abstractions, and reduced the rich actuality of things to a bare description of matter and motion. Along this path went the early scientists, or "natural philosophers." By mathematical analysis and experiment they extracted from the complicated totality of everyday experience just those phenomena which could be observed, measured, generalized, and if necessary, repeated. Applying this exact methodology, they learned to predict more accurately the movements of the heavenly bodies, to describe more precisely the fall of a stone and the flight of a bullet, to determine the carrying load of a bridge, or the composition of a fragment of "matter." Rule, authority, precedent, general consent—these things were all subordinate in scientific procedure to the methods of observation and mathematical analysis: weighing, measuring, timing, decomposing, isolating,—all the operations that led to "results." At last, knowledge could be tested and practice reformed, and if the scientists themselves were usually too busy to see the upshot of their investigations, one who stood on the sidelines, Francis Bacon, was quick to announce

their conclusion: science tended to the relief of man's estate.

With the aid of this new procedure, the external world was quickly reduced to a semblance of order. But the meanings created by science did not lead into the core of human life: they applied only to "matter," and if they touched upon life at all, it was through a post-mortem analysis, or by following Descartes and arbitrarily treating the human organism as if it were automatic under all conditions. For the scientists all these new abstractions were full of meaning; they tunneled through whole continents of knowledge. For the great run of men, however, science had no meaning for itself: it transferred meaning from the creature proper to his estate, considered as an independent and external realm. In short, except to the scientist, the only consequences of science were practical ones. A new view of the universe developed, naturally, but it was accepted less because of any innate credibility than because it was accompanied by so many cogent proofs of science's power. Philosophy, religion, art, none of these activities had ever baked any bread: science was ready, not merely to bake the bread but to increase the yield of the wheat, grind the flour, and eliminate the baker. Even the plain man could appreciate consequences of this order. Seeing was believing.

The process of abstraction began in the theology of Protestantism as an attempt to isolate, deform, and remove historic connections; it became habitual in the mental operations of the physical scientist and it was carried over into other departments. The extended use of money, to replace labor and service, likewise began during the same period of disintegration. Need I emphasize that in their origin Protestantism, science, and finance were all liberating influences? They took the place of habits and institutions which, plainly, were moribund, being incapable of renewal from within. Need I also emphasize the close historic inter-connec-

tion of the three things? We must not raise our eyebrows when we discover that a scientist like Newton in Seventeenth Century England or Rittenhouse in Eighteenth Century America became master of the mint, nor must we pass by, as a quaint coincidence, the fact that Geneva is celebrated both as the home of Jean Calvin and as the great center of watches and clocks. These connections are not mystical or metaphysical. The new financial order was a direct outgrowth of the new theological and scientific views. First came a mechanical method of measuring time: then a method of measuring space; finally, in money, men began more widely to apply an abstract way of measuring power, and in money they achieved a calculus for all human activity.

This financial system of measurement released the European from his old sense of social and economic limitations. No glutton can eat a hundred pheasants; no drunkard can drink a hundred bottles of wine at a sitting; and if anyone schemed to have so much food and wine brought to his table daily, he would be mad. Once he could exchange the potential pheasants and Burgundy for marks or thalers, he could direct the labor of his neighbors, and achieve the place of the aristocrat without being to the manner born. Economic activity ceased to deal with the tangible realities of the medieval world—land and corn and houses and universities and cities. It was transformed into the pursuit of an abstraction—money. When some incipient Rotarian finally coined the phrase, "Time is money," he expressed philosophically the equivalence of two ideas which could not possibly be combined, even in thought, so long as money meant houses, food, pictures, and time meant only what it does in Bergson's *durée*, that is, the succession of organic experiences.

Does all this seem very remote from the common life? On the contrary, it goes to the root of every activity. The difference between historical periods, as the late T. E. Hulme pointed out, is a difference be-

tween the categories of their thought. If we have got on the trail of these essential categories, we have a thread which will lead outward into even remote departments of life. The fact is that from the Seventeenth Century onward, almost every field is invaded by this process of abstraction. The people not affected are either survivals from an older epoch, like the Roman Catholics in theology or the humanists in literature, or they are initiators who are working through to a new one. Last, and most plainly of all, the disintegration of medieval culture became apparent in politics.

Just as "matter," when examined by the physicist, is extracted from the matrix of our daily experience, so the "individual" was abstracted by the political philosopher of the new order from the bosom of human society. He ceased, this individual, to maintain his omnipresent relations with family, household, club, college, guild, and office: he became the new unit of political society. Having extracted this purely conceptual person in thought—he had, of course, no more actual existence than an angel or a cherub—the great problem of political thinking in the Eighteenth Century became: How shall we restore him to society?—for somehow we always find man, as Rousseau grimly said, in chains, that is, in relations with other human beings. The solution that Rousseau and the dominant schools of the time offered was ingenious: each individual is endowed with natural rights, and he votes these political rights into society, as the shareholder votes his economic rights into a trading corporation. This principle of consent was necessary to the well-being of a civil society; and assent was achieved, in free national states, through the operation of the ballot, and the delivery of the general will by a parliament.

The doctrine broke the weakening chain of historical continuity in Europe. It challenged the vested interests; it was ready to declare the existing corporations bankrupt; it was prepared to wipe away the

traditional associations and nets of privileges which maintained the clergy, the nobility, the guilds. On its destructive side, the movement for political liberty, like that for free contract, for free associations, for free investigation, was sane and reasonable; for the abuses of the past were genuine and the grievances usually had more than a touch of justice. We must not, however, be blind to the consequences of all these displacements and dissociations. Perhaps the briefest way of characterising them is to say that they made America inevitable.

IV

Now we begin to see a little more clearly the state of mind out of which the great migrations to the New World became possible. The physical causes have been dwelt on often enough; it is important to recognize that a cultural necessity was at work at the same time. The old culture of the Middle Ages had broken down; the old heritage lingered on only in the backward and unprogressive countries, like Italy and Spain, outside the main currents of the European mind. Men's interests had become externalized—and abstract. They fixed their attention on some narrow aspect of experience, and they pushed that to the limit. Intelligent people were forced to choose between the fossilized shell of an old and complete culture, and the new culture, which in origin was thin, partial, abstract, and deliberately indifferent to man's proper interests. Choosing the second, our Europeans already had one foot in America. Let them suffer persecution, let the times get hard, let them fall out with their government, let them dream of worldly success—and they will come swarming over the ocean. The groups that had most completely shaken off the older symbolisms were those that were most ready for the American adventure: they turned themselves most easily to the mastery of the external environment.

The ultimate results of this disintegration of European culture did not come out,

in America, until the Nineteenth Century. But its immediate consequences became visible, step by step, in the first hundred and fifty years or so of American settlement. Between the landing of the first colonists in Massachusetts, New Amsterdam, Virginia, and Maryland, and the first thin trickle of hunters and trappers who passed over the Alleghanies, beginning figuratively with Daniel Boone in 1775, the communities of the Atlantic seaboard were outposts of Europe: they carried their own moral and intellectual climate with them.

During this period the limitations in the thought of the intellectual classes had not yet wrought itself out into defects and malformations in the community itself: the house, the town, the farm were still modeled after patterns formed in Europe. It was not a great age, perhaps, but it had found its form. Walking through the lanes of Boston, or passing over the wide lawns to a manor-house in Maryland, one would have had no sense of a great wilderness beckoning in the beyond. To tell the truth, the wilderness did not beckon: these solid townsmen, these freeholders, these planters were content with their civil habits; and if they thought of expansion, it was only over the ocean, in search of Palladian designs for their houses, or of tea and sperm-oil for their personal comfort. On the surface, people lived as they had lived in Europe for many a year.

In the first century of colonization, this life left scarcely any deposit in the mind. There was no literature but a handful of verses, no music except the hymn or some surviving Elizabethan ballad, no ideas except those that circled around the dogmas of Protestantism. But, with the Eighteenth Century, these American communities stepped fully into the sphere of European ideas, and there was an American equivalent for every new European type. It is amusing to follow the leading biographies of the time. Distinguished American figures step to on the stage, in turn, as if the Muse of History had prepared their

entrances and exits. Their arrangement is almost diagrammatic; they form a résumé of the European mind. In fact, these Edwardses and Franklins, seem scarcely living characters: they were Protestantism, Science, Finance, Politics.

The first on the stage was Jonathan Edwards: he figured in American thought as the last great expositor of Calvinism. Edwards wrote like a man in a trance, who at bottom is aware that he is talking nonsense; for he was in love with beauty of the soul, like Plato before him, and it was only because he was caught in the premises of determinism that, with a heavy conscience, he followed his dire train of thought to its destination. After Edwards, Protestantism lost its intellectual backbone. It developed into the bloodless Unitarianism of the early Nineteenth Century, which is a sort of humanism without courage, or it got caught in orgies of revivalism, and, under the name of evangelical Christianity, threw itself under the hoofs of more than one muddy satyr. There were great Protestant preachers after Edwards, no doubt: but the triumph of a Channing or Beecher rested upon personal qualities, and they no longer drew their thoughts from any deep source of conviction.

All the habits that Protestantism developed, its emphasis on industry, upon self-help, upon thrift, upon the evils of "idleness" and "pleasure," upon the "worldliness" and wickedness of the arts, were so many gratuitous contributions to the Industrial Revolution. When Professor Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was still a painter, travelling in Italy, he recorded in one of his letters the animus that pervaded his religious creed; the testimony loses nothing by being a little belated. "I looked around the church," he wrote, "to ascertain what was the effect upon the multitude assembled. . . . Everything around them, instead of aiding devotion, was entirely calculated to destroy it. The imagination was addressed by every avenue; music and painting pressed into the service

of—not religion but the contrary—led the mind away from the contemplation of all that is practical in religion to the charms of mere sense. No instruction was imparted; none ever seems to be intended."

It is but a short step from this attitude to hiring revivalist mountebanks to promote factory-morale; nor are these thoughts far from that fine combination of commercial zeal and pious effort which characterizes such auxiliaries as the Y. M. C. A. The fictions of poetry and the delusions of feeling were the bugbears of Gradgrind, Bounderby, and M'Choakumchild, in Dickens' classical picture of industrialism: for the shapes and images they called forth made those which were familiar to the Protestant mind a little dreary and futile. It was not merely that Protestantism and science had killed the old symbols: they must prevent new ones from developing; they must abolish the contemplative attitude in which art and myth grow up, and create new forms for men's activities. Hence the fury of effort by which the leaders of the new day diverted energies to quantitative production. Did not God's word say: "Increase and multiply?" If babies, why not goods: if goods, why not dollars? Success was the Protestant miracle that justified man's ways to God!

The next figure that dominated the American scene stood even more completely for these new forces. He was, according to the pale lights of his time, a thoroughly cultivated man, and in his maturity he was welcomed in London and Paris as the equal of scientists like Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, and Buffon, and of scholars like D'Alembert and Diderot. As a citizen, by choice, of Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin adopted the plain manners and simple thrifty ways of the Quakers. He went into business as a publisher, and with a sort of sweet acuteness in the pursuit of money, he imparted the secrets of his success in the collection of timely saws for which he became famous. The line from Franklin through Samuel Smiles

to the latest advertisements, in the paper that dates back to Franklin's ownership, for improving one's position and doubling one's income is a pretty direct one. If one prefers Franklin's bourgeois qualities to those of his successors, it is only, perhaps, because his life was more fully rounded. If he was not without the usurious habits of the financier, he had also the dignity and freedom of the true scientist.

For Franklin was equally the money-maker, the scientist, the inventor, and the politician, and in science his fair boast was that he had not gained a penny by any of his discoveries. He experimented with electricity; he invented the lightning rod; he improved the draft of chimneys; in fact, on his last voyage home to America, shortly before his death, he was still improving the draft of chimneys. Finally, he was a Deist: he had gotten rid of all the "gothick phantoms" that seemed so puerile and unworthy to the quick minds of the Eighteenth Century—which meant that he was completely absorbed in the abstractions and myths of his own time, namely, matter, money, and political rights. He accepted the illusion of time: time is money; the importance of space: space must be conquered; the desirability of money: money must be made; and he did not see that these, too, are phantoms, in preoccupation with which a man may lose most of the advantages of a civilized life. As a young man, Franklin even invented an elaborate system of moral-book-keeping: utilitarianism can go no further.

Although Franklin's sagacity as a statesman can hardly be over-rated, for he had both patience and principle, the political side of the American thought of his time is best summed up in the doctrines of a new immigrant, that excellent friend of humanity, Thomas Paine. Paine's name has served so many purposes in polemics that scarcely anyone seems to take the trouble to read his books; and so more than one shallow judgment has found its way into our histories of literature, written by worthy men who were incap-

able of enjoying a sound English style, or of following, with any pleasure, an honest system of thought, clearly expressed. "The Rights of Man" is as simple as a geometrical theorem; it contains, I think, most of what is valid in political libertarianism. I know of no other thinker who saw more clearly through the moral humbug that surrounds a great many theories of government. Said Paine:

Almost everything appertaining to the circumstances of a nation has been absorbed and confounded under the general and mysterious word government. Though it avoids taking to its account the errors it commits and the mischiefs it occasions, it fails not to arrogate to itself whatever has the appearance of prosperity. It robs industry of its honors by pedantically making itself the cause of its effects; and purloins from the general character of man the merits that appertain to him as a social being.

Passage after passage in "The Rights of Man" and "The Age of Reason" is written with the same pithiness. Paine came to America as an adult, and saw the advantages of a fresh start. He believed that if first principles could be enunciated, here, and here alone, was a genuine opportunity to apply them. He summed up the hope in reason and in human contrivance which swelled through the Eighteenth Century. Without love for any particular country, and without that living sense of history which makes one accept the community's past, as one accepts the totality of one's own life, he was the vocal immigrant, justifying in his political and religious philosophy the complete break he had made with old ties, affections, allegiances.

V

Unfortunately, a man without a background is not more truly a man: he has merely lost the scenes and institutions which gave him his proper shape. If one studies him closely, one will find that he has secretly arranged another background, made up of shadows that linger in the memory, or he is uneasy and restless, settles down, moves on, comes home again, lives on hopeless tomorrows, or sinks back

into mournful yesterdays. The immigrants who came to America after the War of Independence, gave up their fatherland in exchange for a Constitution and a Bill of Rights: they forfeited all the habits and institutions that had made them men without getting anything in exchange except the rights of citizenship. When they migrated in bodies, like the Moravians, they sometimes managed to maintain some sort of cultural life; when they came alone, as "free individuals," they gained little more than cheap land and the privileges of the ballot-box. The land itself was all to the good, and no one minded the change, or felt any lack, so long as he did not stop to compare the platitudes of the Fourth of July orations with the actualities of Constitutional Conventions, Alien and Sedition Acts, and Fugitive Slave Laws. It was possible for Paine, in the Eighteenth Century, to believe that culture was served merely by the absence of a church, a state, a social order such as those under which Europe labored. That was the error of his school, for the absence of these harmful or obsolete institutions left a vacancy in society, and that vacancy was filled by work, or more accurately speaking, by "busy work," which fatigued the body and diverted the mind from the things which should have enriched it. Republican politics aided this externalism. People sought to live by politics alone; the national state became their religion. The flag, as Professor Carleton Hayes has shown, supplanted the cross, and the Fathers of the Constitution, the Fathers of the Church.

The interaction of the dominant interests of industry and politics is illustrated in Paine's life as well as in Franklin's. Paine was the inventor of the take-down iron bridge. Indeed, politics and invention recurred rhythmically in his life, and he turned aside from his experiments on the iron bridge to answer Edmund Burke's attack on the French Revolution. "The War of Independence," as he himself said, "energized invention and lessened the

catalogue of impossibilities. . . . As one among thousands who had borne a share in that memorable revolution, I returned with them to the enjoyment of a quiet life, and, that I might not be idle, undertook to construct a bridge of a single arch for this river [the Schuylkill]."

"So that I might not be idle!" What a tale those words tell! While the aristocracy was in the ascendant, patient hirelings used to apply their knowledge of hydraulics to the working of fountains, as in Versailles, or they devised automatic chess-players, or they contrived elaborate clocks which struck the hour, jetted water, caused little birds to sing and wag their tails, and played selections from the operas. It was to such inane and harmless performances that the new skills of the exact arts were first put. The bored patron was amused; life plodded on; nothing was altered. But in the freedom of this new day, the common man, as indifferent to the symbols of the older culture as the great lords and ladies, innocent of anything to occupy his mind, except the notion of controlling matter and mastering the external world—the common man turned to inventions. Stupid folk drank heavily; ate gluttonously, and became libertines; intelligent, industrious men, like Franklin and Paine, turned their minds to increasing the comforts and conveniences of existence. Justification by faith: that was politics: the belief in a new heaven and a new earth to be established by regular elections and parliamentary debate. Justification by works: that was invention. No frivolities entered this new religion. The new devices all saved labor, decreased distances, and, in one way or another multiplied riches.

With these inventors, the American, like his contemporary in Europe, began the utilitarian conquest of his environment. From this time on, men with an imaginative bias, like Morse, the pupil of Benjamin West, men like Whitney, the school-teacher, like Fulton, the miniature painter, turned to invention, or at least to the

commercial exploitation of inventions, without a qualm of distrust: it all seemed natural and inevitable. Not that America began or monopolized the developments of the Industrial Revolution: the great outbreak of technical patents, in fact, began in England about 1750, and the first inklings of the movement were already jotted down in Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. The point is that in Europe heavy layers of the older culture kept a large section of the directing classes in the old ways. Scholars, literary men, historians, artists still felt no need of justifying themselves by "practical" activity. In America, however, the old culture had worn thin,^f and in the rougher parts of the country, it did not exist. No one in America was unaffected by the progress of invention; each improvement was quickly cashed in. When Stendhal wrote "L'Amour" the American love of comfort had already become a by-word: he refers to it with contempt.

Given an old culture in ruins, and a new culture *in vacuo*, this externalizing of interest, this ruthless exploitation of the physical environment was, it would seem, inevitable. Protestantism, science, invention, political democracy, all of these institutions denied the old values; all of them, by denial or by precept or by actual preoccupation, furthered the new activities. Thus in America the new order of Europe came quickly into being. If the Nineteenth Century found us more ^rraw and rude, it was not because we had settled in a new territory; it was rather because our minds were not buoyed up by all those memorials of a great past that floated over the surface of Europe. The pioneer was thus a stript European; and the colonization of America can, with justice, be called the dispersion of Europe—a movement carried on by people incapable of sharing or continuing its past. It was to America that the outcast Europeans turned, without a Moses to lead them, to wander in the wilderness; and here they have remained in exile, a little more than the Biblical forty years.

WHITMAN IN CAMDEN

BY DANE YORKE

AND now it would appear that Camden, New Jersey—where he spent eighteen years of his life and where, thirty-four years ago, he died—has finally adopted Whitman. They have named the new hotel—a town pride—the Walt Whitman. There are, also, a Walt Whitman garage and a Walt Whitman Building and Loan Association. They have bought the little frame house in Mickle street and turned it into a Whitman memorial. And I have seen, in a New York newspaper, a letter from an ardent Camden booster hailing the memorial as “an everlasting credit to its [Camden’s] administration.” True, it is creditable. But to me, remembering my years in Camden, and the contact I had with Old Camden—the generation that had personally seen and known Whitman—all this new enthusiasm simply means that the Camden I knew—Old Camden—is dead. And that New Camden—the generation that has grown up since Whitman—is now definitely in charge. How Old Camden must be turning in its grave!

For ten years I was in close, friendly, almost daily contact with the Whitman generation in Camden. I was not there to ferret out Whitman data but I did welcome, at first, the chance to listen to first hand stories about Walt’s life, and my interest was intensified by the curious and marked disinclination on the part of Old Camden to discuss him. It was very evident that the town took no pride in him. Some—the non-readers—had known Walt simply as a town character, “a nice, friendly old man.” But there was nothing remarkable in him—to them—to talk about. Others—members of the articulate, governing class—

were not only not proud of him, but actually went out of their way to discourage anything even remotely resembling what they contemptuously called the Whitman cult. Today New Camden is naming the *community hotel*, of which it is so proud, after Whitman. Eighteen or twenty years ago the “better” opinion of Old Camden protested seriously at the mere inclusion of his name—as only one of a list of American poets—on the walls of the then new public library.

It was just not the thing in Old Camden to be interested in Whitman. There was an elderly friend of mine, a life-long resident, president of the Board of Education, amateur astronomer, Dante scholar, a man of wide reading and one who prided himself upon the catholicity of his acquaintance. I asked him one day if he had personally known Whitman. “Know him,” he said, “I should say I did! But why are *you* interested in that smutty old man?” The question was typical of Old Camden. Even twenty-five years after Whitman’s death a visitor encountered it. When he questioned another Old Camden resident—at that time, for all practical purposes, the literary censor of the town—the man exclaimed angrily that “we knew him [Whitman] as an incorrigible old beggar who lived very immorally . . . an old loafer.”

Certainly I found that Old Camden was a very poor environment for the appreciation of Whitman the poet. Many and many a time after a talk with that generation I have had to deliberately put out of my mind the figure of Whitman, the man, that they portrayed. Because that figure coarsened and smutted and cheapened and