

PITTSBURGH PEEPS AT THE STARS

BY GEORGE SEIBEL

WHY is it that the pilgrim visiting Pittsburgh, when he takes his pen in hand to record the event, always thinks first of Hell and so covers his pages with infernal synonyms? James Parton started the habit back in 1868, and his libelous "Hell with the lid taken off" was printed in the *Atlantic*. Parton stood on the Bluff, looking over toward the South Side, then known as Birmingham and no doubt very like Gehenna to one who hailed from Canterbury. But exactly thirty-eight years later, in the Summer of 1906, O. Henry was riding with me through the Mt. Washington tunnel in a trolley-car, and as we entered the cool shaft he mopped his forehead and said, "This is the pleasantest place I've struck between El Paso and Hell!" Thus, while the meridian had shifted a trifle, the sulphurous association remained. Perhaps it dates back to the old Scotch-Irish settlers of the region, who brought in the Presbyterian creed and paid off their pastors with firewater.

But the Smoky City has gradually damped its fires and doffed its turban of soot. Rising taxes have had something to do with it, driving foundries and factories to cheaper ground, but the discovery of natural gas did most. Pittsburgh lies in a tract that is an American Baku; puncture the rind of the earth, apply a match, and one may witness a gorgeous display of fireworks. Thus most of the murky clouds generated by soft coal were early banished. But Pittsburgh also lies in a geological ditch, scooped by its two rivers in ages past, and in this ditch the fumes and fogs, from whatever source, linger like a fundamentalist miasma in a paleolithic skull,

long after the winds have swept the hills. So the smoke myth still clings to the city's name, and many Pittsburghers are even proud of it; if at all apologetic, they will say that the smoke spells prosperity.

It has spelled prosperity in the past—a prosperity that reveled in tonnage and bank clearings, put the protective tariff among the Beatitudes, and ranked Andrew Carnegie ahead of Emerson. Busy for nearly a century in making millionaires—coal millionaires, steel millionaires, oil millionaires, railroad millionaires—both time and raw materials were lacking for Pittsburgh to turn out art or artists. There is a tradition that Edwin Booth used to be averse to playing in the town's theater for what he called "the red-shirt fraternity"; other players and singers came only reluctantly to reap the harvest of dollars, and scurried away to save their complexions and linen. Did any artist achieve fame who had come from Pittsburgh, the supercilious world sneered that it was a good place to come from.

Mais nous avons changé tout cela. At the same time that Pittsburgh was becoming cleaner, her crop of millionaires was ripening, and then came a frantic rush to discover and embrace beauty. The life of a community, in this respect, is exactly like that of a family. Three generations are needed to bring forth an artist. The first generation must lay the firm physical foundation—healthy body and clear head; the second must accumulate wealth, which alone can purchase leisure; in the third generation the artist may be born. The principle is valid despite Chatterton and Harry Thaw, and it is the same in the case

of cities. After an age of pioneering comes financiering, and then beauty. The Medici were warriors and bankers before they became patrons of art.

Pittsburgh has now entered on her third era, like Florencé; but instead of Lorenzo the Magnificent she has had only Andrew the Munificent. A city of 2500 mills and factories, a city boasting that its rail and river commerce exceeds London's, can hardly be expected to develop over night into a metropolis of art. Thus Pittsburgh's æsthetic aspirations are still green and in the bud. But they *do* exist. They'll grow bigger by and by, till they reach the dimensions deemed respectable by the Mæcenases who think in tons and dollars. When the Carnegie Institute was dedicated, one of the foreign guests became ill. A colored attendant was sent to bring some whiskey as a restorative. "Get a pint of Large whiskey," he was told. Rushing to the nearest bar—this was in ancient, happy days—, excited and under the spell of superlatives and magnitudes, he called for "a pint ob de largest whiskey you got."

Now Pittsburgh *has* an art, and Pittsburgh *has* a soul. True, to make a great impression, these things must be paraded as the fire department was once shown to a touring Grand Duke from the balcony of his hotel. As the alarm sounded, one after another a dozen engines dashed around the corner from by-streets where they had been waiting for hours. "You have the promptest and most magnificent fire department in the country," said His Serene Highness with the stop-watch.

II

In some such manner Pittsburgh might make an impressive display of her literary lights and artistic aristocracy. She counts Richard Realf and Margaret Deland among her poets, Willa Cather and Mary Roberts Rinehart among her novelists, Stephen C. Foster and Ethelbert Nevin among her musicians, John W. Alexander and C. S. Reinhart among her artists, and Bartley

Campbell among her dramatists. But these, after all, were accidents of geography. Pittsburgh, in the past, has not been any too hospitable to the Muses. The habit of hard work was fastened early and incurably upon the founders of her great fortunes. "There's only one of that crew earning his pay," said a visitor in the yard of an iron-foundry, as a dozen men were skidding a heavy casting, "—that old codger at the end." "That," replied the guide, "is Mr. Z——, the principal owner of the mill. He's worth six millions. He was passing through the yard, and gave the men a lift."

Such was the old school of Pittsburgh's plutocracy, but the men of more recent days are differently constituted. Under the tutelage of aspiring wives and ascendant daughters, they have become connoisseurs and patrons. There are still a few who would proclaim from an opera-box, during the *Waldweben*, that Wagner is damned rot, but they are awed into silence when sober. The most aggressive form their philistinism takes is to snore through a Brahms symphony. The wives and daughters appreciate art, though they may not understand it; in a timid way they endeavor to be doers, not merely hearers. Not many years ago all the music pupils of the town were impelled by purely commercial motives: the singers had unanimous yearnings after church-choir jobs, every patient piano-thumper intended to teach others, and those learning portable instruments sought careers in parade bands and dance orchestras. Today the embryo Pittsburgh musician, at his worst, practices from purely sadistic motives.

There is, of course, often a touch of humor to these cultural yearnings; quick results are always looked for. One proud mamma was telling of her daughter's amazing achievements. Only three lessons at the Art School, and behold this *lovely* fruitpiece! Upon a background of jaundiced gray a disk of sickly yellow. "It's an orange," explained Mater. "Very like an orange," bubbled Polonius in diplo-

matic rapture. He had been wondering whether it was a sunset or a full moon.

But music, perhaps, affords the best barometer of a community's artistic soul. The thousands that throng to the annual flower shows at the Phipps Conservatories might be drawn in equal numbers by a display of prize pumpkins. A chrysanthemum is only a bowdlerized cabbage; a lily but a metaphysical onion. The crowds surrounding Abbey's "Penance of Queen Eleanor" or Bouguereau's "Supper at Emmaus" in the Carnegie Art Gallery may be only manicures wondering what the story is, or Methodists admiring the Saviour's benign expression. Music tells no story, and is more "remote from the physical impulse" than any other of the arts.

By this criterion Pittsburgh's æsthetic growth has been amazing. A quarter century ago the town was still a musical desert. A concert without the Anvil Chorus by the city firemen was doomed to failure. There was one enthusiastic musician, still remembered by the epigoni as Uncle Joe, to whom Pittsburgh owes an incomputable debt. By heroic toil and thrift he would scrape together a few hundred dollars; then he would bring Tamagno, Joseffy, or some other famous and expensive artist, to give a concert before vacant tiers in Old City Hall, a magnified barn. After the concert the artist would depart with a heavy purse, and Uncle Joe would remain with a heavy heart to begin a new hoard.

Years later, when the musical conscience of the city was beginning to stir, some musicians resolved to atone for the sacrifices of this musical Curtius by a benefit concert. A handsome sum was turned over to the beneficiary—and a few days later he contracted to bring in another voracious songbird! The deficit of the second concert swallowed up the proceeds of the first, and left him several hundred dollars in debt. But Uncle Joe's sacrifices have not been all in vain: today there are in Pittsburgh not less than ten thousand people who go to concerts and appreciate the best in music.

III

Many influences worked together to educate this very respectable audience. A Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, organized in 1895, did valiant service under the baton of Frederic Archer, then of Victor Herbert, finally of Emil Paur. Though disbanded years ago, because the union label was a nuisance, it can be revived whenever the evangelical clergy of the town will permit Beethoven on Sunday evenings. The preachers still have a say as to what Pittsburghers may listen to on Sundays. To safeguard their flocks against the insidious lure of Mozart and Mendelssohn they had the sponsors of a recent concert put under arrest. As a result, what may turn out to be another Scopes trial is ahead. In the choral realm, the Mozart Club, with two hundred singers, was organized in 1878, but languished because oratorio ceased to be popular, if ever it was. But the Pittsburgh-Apollo Male Chorus, numbering about a hundred singers, and the Mendelssohn Choir, with nearly two hundred, are still flourishing. The Art Society, since 1873, has done much for the city by its concerts and exhibitions of pictures. And the free organ recitals in Carnegie Music-hall, though the organ *per se* is probably a corrupter of musical taste, have contributed greatly to elevate the local taste through the playing of such organists as Frederic Archer, Edwin H. Lemare, and, during twenty years past, Charles Heinroth. These concerts, twice a week, are attended by audiences that average fifteen hundred and run the gamut from the school-girl to the mill-worker.

Such concerts are among the few diversions permitted on the Sabbath day by the Pittsburgh theocracy. That they survive is due to the liberality and liberalism of Andrew Carnegie, who once gave a hundred dollars to celebrate the birthday of Thomas Paine, and who would never give a church anything but an organ, because "he couldn't agree with what the preacher might say, but he could agree with any-

thing the organ said." The Phipps green-houses also are open on Sundays because Henry Phipps attached that stipulation to his gift of them to the city. How many souls have been damned by gazing on dahlias and rhododendrons on Sunday instead of stained-glass saints and seraphs, only the imagination of a Cotton Mather could conceive.

Returning to Carnegie Music-hall, this citadel of the musical art in Pittsburgh was long its weakest point. The hall will not seat more than two thousand. That imposed prohibitive prices when the programme presented an acquisitive artist like Paderewski or Chaliapin. The Soldiers' Memorial Hall was more spacious, but acoustically it was better suited for the incantations of a swami, and its decorations resemble those of an Egyptian rats-keller. Now there is a Syria Mosque, with ample accommodations for large audiences.

The most important factor in the musical education of the masses hitherto was the Pittsburgh Exposition, a glorified county fair. During the forty days of its annual season, four concerts were given daily by Damrosch's and other symphony orchestras. Classic Night and Symphony Night always drew the largest crowds. Sousa and ragtime did not rouse as much enthusiasm as was shown for the symphonies of Tchaikowsky and Dvořák. It is now orthodox and safe in Pittsburgh to applaud Wagner, and a reputation for musical up-to-dateness can be gained by smacking your lips over Debussy or Richard Strauss. But when an audience could be stirred by César Franck's symphony, first introduced to Pittsburgh at the Exposition concerts, the enthusiasm could certainly not be ascribed to the instinct of conformity nor to musical hypocrisy. Nor could it be traced to the infection of fashion or the itch for display, which are probably the real reason why grand opera is popular.

Everywhere, in those experimental years, the leaven of culture was working. Even church music reached a higher plane. Several churches installed organs that surpass

the \$30,000 instrument in Carnegie Hall. But this was less significant than the advance in congregational singing; forty years ago Baumbach's old anthem book, with two or three doleful tunes, made the Sabbath day monotonous; nowadays deafness is not necessary to make piety less than a penance. The whole history of Pittsburgh's musical development, indeed, shows that the impulse came from below, rather than from above. J. P. McCollum, conductor and soul of the Mozart Club during a third of a century, was a printer when he founded that organization, and it was founded on the South Side, in the midst of the iron-mills and glass-houses.

Pittsburgh even may boast of a notable array of composers. Beside Stephen C. Foster and Ethelbert Nevin, whose "Swanee River" and "Rosary" are sung everywhere, there may be named Adolph M. Foerster, Arthur Nevin, Harvey B. Gaul, Richard Kountz, T. Carl Whitmer, Vick O'Brien, and Charles Wakefield Cadman. The *Musical Courier* has published weekly tables of American songs appearing on concert programmes all over the land, and those tables have frequently shown more songs by Pittsburgh composers than from all the rest of the country,—mainly because of the popularity of Foster, Nevin, and Cadman, and usually Cadman's name has led all the rest. Twenty years ago this slender lad was writing music critiques for the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*, and stringing together melodies that left you wondering how many beefsteaks would make him a Beethoven.

IV

Just as this musical life has been born amid the whirl and clang of the workshops, so there is now emerging the promise of a respectable art, like a sunrise out of the quondam smoke and murk. The city had an Art Association over half a century ago, which held its first loan exhibition in 1859—among the canvases being two Van Dycks, one of which it was deemed advis-

able to label "well authenticated," the other "undoubted." Old Pittsburgh had her artists too, for that embryo salon showed the names of half a dozen, but none of pronounced individuality except David Blythe, whose grotesque cartoons exquisitely colored entitle him to be called both the Hogarth and the Whistler of Pittsburgh.

To a somewhat later era belong George Hetzel, a pleasing landscapist who might be called the Homer of the Cow, and Albert S. Wall, whom fame has passed by in the most unaccountable fashion. Wall died about twenty-five years ago, little known and little appreciated; probably not one of his pictures has gone outside of Pittsburgh; yet I believe that some day he will be ranked as one of the ablest landscape artists of America. His best things will compare with almost anything by Diaz or Rousseau. John W. Alexander, one of the foremost Pittsburgh portraitists, and C. S. Reinhart among illustrators, achieved reputations national, even international. Henry Ossawa Tanner, the Boecklin of the African race, was born in Pittsburgh. Mary Cassatt, whom a French critic has put next to Whistler, was born in Pittsburgh. Martin B. Leisser has painted the portrait of Eugene V. Debs with revelatory genius. Jasper Lawman, A. Bryan Wall, Eugene A. Poole, Arthur Sparks, George Sotter and others have done excellent work. Then there is a coterie of younger men, both painters and sculptors—some at home, some in Paris or Munich—in whose promise the city's future art seems to find an assured hope. One of these young men, Malcolm Parcell, may be the Keats of American painters.

It takes less time to buy pictures than to paint them, and so, considering the brief years since Pittsburgh has emerged from the obloquy of Parton's fuliginous libel, the city has accumulated quite a catalogue of art treasures. I know of seven Corots and five Gainsboroughs, two Van Dycks and two Rembrandts. Fine collections have been made by A. M. Byers, H. C. Frick,

Charles Lockhart, J. M. Schoonmaker, D. T. Watson, H. K. Porter, L. C. Phipps, Charles Donnelly, Mrs. William Thaw, J. J. Vandergrift, John Caldwell, Herbert Dupuy, George and H. H. Westinghouse and others. There are in Pittsburgh hundreds of canvases by Millet, Murillo, Rubens, Turner, Dupré, Breton, Rousseau, Cazin, Frans Hals, Constable, Rosa Bonheur, Constant, Daubigny, Raeburn, Detaille, Abbey, Diaz, Gérôme, Jacque, Landseer, Alma-Tadema, Lenbach, Troyon, Bouguereau and Vibert. The permanent collection of the Carnegie Art Gallery already numbers about three hundred paintings. The gallery was visited by 300,000 last year, more than the Metropolitan or the Boston Museum. When some of the Pittsburgh millionaires are translated beyond this realm of moth and rust, the Carnegie Gallery may profit much.

Undeniably there is a certain savor of the *nouveau riche* about the city's artistic pretensions. Some startling *coup* was required to make the incredulous world believe the incredible—that this iron cauldron would belch a challenge to Milan and Munich. Carnegie with his millions made that *coup* possible. In 1895 Pittsburgh opened the first really international art exhibition in America. A few paintings by foreign artists had been exhibited in Philadelphia and St. Louis salons, but no consistent and determined effort had been put forth to secure an international participation of the world's artists. Carnegie's emissary invaded Naples, Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, Vienna, Munich, Dresden, Berlin, Paris, the Hague, Amsterdam, London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Unluckily, the creation of foreign advisory committees, and the election of the international juries by the competing artists, has resulted in the selection of prize-winners that every year lead the enlightened layman to wonder why and what next. But the aberrations of art juries are themselves educational, and every art collection ought to have one picture by Oscar Kokoschka as an awful example. Pitts-

burgh's artistic impulses have been vivified and vitalized even by the ugliest statue in America, that of Edward M. Bigelow in Schenley Park. He was its Father.

In the city's architecture there is yet evident that hankering after the largest whiskey which now moves the town university to plan a Cathedral of Learning that will make the Tower of Babel look like a Ford garage. Still, wealth has enlisted the service of beauty in many ways, even in office hives. The Union Trust Building has a haunting air of the Gothic. Frank D. Millet actually painted a Grecian Harvest Festival among the lunettes for the Bank of Pittsburgh, or was it Edwin H. Blashfield? For the stained-glass window of the palatial Frick Building, La Farge designed Progress, that decorously decorative lady who is own sister to Prosperity. Their children, by various liaisons, are in the homes of many wealthy Pittsburghers; for Pittsburgh is not merely what one sees from the windows of a Pullman, nor the pathetic scrapings of a social survey, nor the slag-pile of Vulcan's smithy. There are immortal stirrings perceptible to the ear of hope.

V

Literature, less ostensive, has hardly kept pace with music and painting, though the gradual growth of the reading habit, as a result of the Carnegie Library system, with its ten or twelve branches and an annual circulation of more than a million volumes, is gradually developing a writing habit, especially among the second generation of Russian and Italian invaders hated by true Kleagles. There may be a Heine in this Ghetto or a Petrarch hawking bananas. But great writers have been few in Pittsburgh's past. Richard Realf might have been a renowned poet: his life was as tragical, his verse as melodious, as Poe's—but he went west and his sun set. Jane Grey Swisshelm had greater genius and zeal than Harriet Beecher Stowe: she might have written "Uncle Tom's Cabin"

better, but she wrote too soon. Yet three names eminent in fiction have risen in Pittsburgh—those of Margaret Deland, Mary Roberts Rinehart and Willa Cather.

Mrs. Rinehart put humanity and humor into the metallic mechanism of the mystery story. Mrs. Deland transfigured the rigor of old-fashioned Calvinism in characters like John Ward and Doctor Lendar. And Willa Cather, whom Colonel McClure lured from her English classes in the Pittsburgh high-school, sheds a mild retrospective radiance upon the city where she began as telegraph editor on the old *Leader*. If Miss Cather has usurped the throne of Edith Wharton, and is the most consummate prose artist in our America, she learned that magic rite in Pittsburgh, in a little cenacle that used to plow through Balzac, Gautier, Daudet, France, Bourget, Rostand, Verlaine, even dipping into turbid tarns like Hauptmann and Nietzsche. As Miss Cather has attained the most significant artistic success in recent American literature, so that other Pittsburgher, Mrs. Mary Roberts Rinehart, has tapped the most prolific reservoirs of cash. Her annual income would make Babe Ruth throw away his bat.

There have been, there are, other Pittsburgh authors. The Rev. Cyrus Townsend Brady was a most industrious producer of thrilling adventure, as a side-line to his less thrilling sermons. Arthur Stanwood Pier, beside fiction for old and young, wrote essays of true Stevensonian urbanity. John Reed Scott almost beat Anthony Hope to imaginary lands of peril and ladies passing fair. Henry Russell Miller wrote novels of the strenuous uplift. William Kountz in "Billy Baxter's Letters" showed George Ade the way to fame. Samuel Harden Church has written a "Life of Cromwell" that has passed through seven or eight editions. Henry Jones Ford wrote his "Rise and Growth of American Politics" in Pittsburgh; William Milligan Sloane began his "Napoleon" there. Walter McClintock's "Old North Trail" is the best book about the American Indian since

Grinnell; and Hervey Allen in his "Israfel" has done for Edgar Allan Poe what Amy Lowell did for John Keats.

In the theatre, Bartley Campbell was the Belasco and Sophocles of his day; plays like "The White Slave" and "My Partner" still tap lachrymal torrents in the hinterland. Edward Locke was a glass-blower, and Allan Davis is a lawyer, but both have produced plays of performance and promise. Marc Connelly and George S. Kaufman are Pittsburgh expatriates, so are Fred Jackson and Ida Vera Simonton; all may be claimed for Pittsburgh, just as Shakespeare belongs to Stratford.

W. J. Holland, author of a "Butterfly Book" and a "Moth Book," would be accounted a scientist rather than a literary man; so would Samuel Pierpont Langley, who wrote his "New Astronomy" in Pittsburgh just before he went as secretary to the Smithsonian Institution; but few will question the literary claims, such as they are, of the Book of Mormon, which Sydney Rigdon and Prophet Joe Smith are supposed to have cooked up from the Rev. Solomon Spaulding's archeological romance, perhaps in Patterson's old printing-office. That was in the days of Nephilim, Millerites, and Alexander Campbell; Pittsburgh must have something in common with Patmos, for here Pastor Russell also sat in his watch tower and descried the new advent of the Messiah, who is still supposed to be in hiding somewhere.

He may start forth from Pittsburgh, for Pittsburgh is a fine starting-place. Audubon started on his wedding-trip from there, floating down the Ohio in an open keel-boat. Nicolaus Lenau, the unhappy German poet, started from there after the bitter Winter of 1832, to found a home in the Ohio wilderness, but stayed in America only long enough to write a poem about Niagara. Old Pittsburgh must have been an attractive place, as Bayard Taylor liked to lecture there, and Emerson, on a similar mission in the 60's, in contempt of

the almanac came a week too soon, and like a true philosopher put in the whole week seeing the sights. There were sights even later; Robert Louis Stevenson, in a restaurant near the Union Station, saw his first Negro. From the days of Fort Duquesne to the days of Fort Frick, there has been abundant romantic interest in the town, which authors from elsewhere have recognized. Gwendolen Overton's "Captains of the World" revolved around the Homestead strike, and Meredith Nicholson's "Lords of High Decision" was to be an allegory of Pittsburgh's regeneration. But what would a Dumas have made of the Biddle Boys, who eloped from jail with the warden's wife; and what would Scott have drawn from the Whiskey Insurrection—the one of 1794?

Judge Brackenridge, Pittsburgh's Herodotus, writing in the *Gazette* during 1781, had an ecstatic vision of the city's future. "When the poet comes," he exclaimed on Herr's Island, "with his enchanting song, to pour his magic numbers on this scene, this little island may aspire to live with those in the Ægean Sea, where the song of Homer drew the image of delight."

This little island is now the site of stockyards, where squealing pigs are borne to the slaughter on an endless chain; yet hope might still cling to Brackenridge's vision, if only he had selected some other Delos. A day may come when Pittsburgh will send forth an epic of industrialism—soot and smoke translated into life and beauty. Before that day comes the old Pittsburgh may be gone, with its traditions of grime and hustle, its reflections and reverberations of Hell, and in its geographical niche may be a new Pittsburgh, a city of leisure and beauty, where Beethoven has triumphed over John Knox, and where the children of mill-worker and millionaire together enjoy the harvest of dreams sown in bitterness and long deferred.

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