



They swayed about upon a rocking-horse, and thought it Pegasus.—*Keats*

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America Van-Looned

THE magnificent blurbage which launched *AMERICA* (Boni & Live-right, \$5.00) informs us that Hendrik Willem van Loon has "revolutionized" American historical methods and American thought since 1922! In this connection it will be remembered that Royal Cortissoz pointed out that the only trouble with American art since 1913 was "too much Ellis Island". So, too, Kipling diagnosed current American literature as suffering from the same ailment. As one delves into the 463 pages of *America* with its 119 illustrations, the whole conceived with movie technique in chapter headings and text (make 'em snappy, snappier, snappiest!), one wonders if Ellis Island has not reared its head in historical writing too. The philosophy of the book, caricatured in picture and in text, is summed up in this: that we have "created a great nation, but have not produced a great people;" that we are "the polyglot boarding-house", and that "in due time it will be a little less polyglot but that will not change the fact that the days of the Anglo-Saxon as a ruling class of the Republic are numbered".

Opportunely, "The New York Times" ran a recent editorial showing, by the figures of an American historian, that the

Senate is dominated by 81 per cent of the old substantial Anglo-Saxon groups,—exactly the same per cent that controlled the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Thus immune to facts, van Loon believes, unlike Burke, that he knows how to indict "a whole people". He presents us as a nation whose fathers borrowed their ideas from Holland and whose multitudes to-day are apparently expected to get their ideals and culture from the lately arrived intelligentsia. That we are still suffering from frontieritis and only "know things" and, of course, "worship the great god Success," is part of the indictment reiterated *ad nauseam*.

The movie captions and the general gaiety of the movie text give us a jolly book about the United States, in which smart-Aleck conclusions are mistaken for wit, slang for humor, jest for mordant irony, burlesque caricature for penetrating observation of the American scene and American achievement. Inevitably van Loon's *America* becomes a kind of comico-economic or economico-comic Merry Andrew. Our development is seen as a fight for pepper and nutmegs, tobacco, herring, rum, tea, sugar, molasses, gin, coal, iron, lead, lumber, water power, oil, silver, and gold,—with light wines and beer overlooked!

With such lovely chapter headings as

"God and Guess" and "Uncle Tom and Puffing Billy", the real American scene goes glimmering. It was "General Bates" who won the battle of Saratoga, and "George Channing, the Secretary of State of England" who bedeviled Monroe into announcing the Monroe Doctrine. Perhaps it was William Ellery Channing! Why not? Surely a slap-dash and slap-stick jazz history of the United States is justified in all its allusions. Up-to-dateness is the very essence of the book's being; 1927 is blazoned on all its conclusions.

The lexicon van Loon consulted in preparing this *coup de foudre* apparently did not contain the word "beauty". The only chapter that deals with art, literature, and our educational, scientific, and cultural accomplishments is characteristically entitled "The Frivolous Jugglers and the Useless Players on the Lute". It snatches a glimpse at the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and dismisses it all as of no consequence.

Architecture and the magnificence of American cities only appear in pictured cartoons. The adaptation of beauty to utility, which Fiske Kimball has pointed out as beginning in the seventeenth century, is ignored in favor of cardboard canyons and "over-topped" Manhattan Island.

Poor Benjamin West, father of a score of notable American painters known as "the Tribe of Ben", is mentioned as a side issue, and then only to give Robert Fulton a dig as a good steamboat man but a "bad portrait painter". Gilbert Stuart, who produced one of the twelve unforgettable portraits known to Western art, neither thunders in the index nor looms in the text, and, of course, Whistler and Sargent are quite outside the horizon of things.

The merry facts and ribald conclusions here presented suggest Horace M. Kallen, Waldo Frank, and Ludwig Lewisohn, — the school of "our America, your America, and how do you like the hideous thing?" Page after page the latitude of the humor is that of the Court Jester who, sooner or later, sees that "everybody gets his'n". In the end one can but marvel how this unfortunate country has managed to get along all these years without the guiding hand of Flying Dutchmen.

HARVEY M. WATTS

No Answer, — Dusty or Otherwise

"Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this life."

THUS do Meredith's lines on the title page explain to us the purport of Rosamond Lehmann's arresting title, *DUSTY ANSWER* (Holt, \$2.50). It is well to note this fact at once to save the reader idle queries and perhaps irritating uncertainty. For nowhere is there any answer, dusty or otherwise. With all the temerity and extravagance of youth, the author thrusts at life, demanding everything, risking everything, and failing, is ready at the end of the book to begin again. Perhaps that is the answer, this readiness to begin again.

"When Judith was eighteen, . . . the house next door, empty for years, was getting ready again." In this house had lived a grandmother with five grandchildren, "all cousins except two who were brothers, and all boys except one, who was a girl." These were the only children solitary Judith, tutor-taught, had ever intimately known. Scenes from this intimacy are retrogressively sketched through Judith's insistent memories. In the meantime, Charlie had married Mariella and died in the War, leaving a child. And now the others, — Julian, Martin, Roddy, and Mariella, — were coming back, grown up.

Straightway in turn the boys proceeded to fall in love with Judith. At least Judith thought Roddy fell in love with her, so deeply in love with him was she. Martin did fall deeply and truly, offering her an old-fashioned constancy and devotion. Julian made love to her after the cynical manner of the dilettante in erotic love. To unappreciative Roddy she gave herself. Martin she tried to marry to save her pride, but could not bring herself to do it. From becoming the mistress of Julian she was rescued by the sudden news of Martin's drowning at sea. It is as if Judith lived three separate lives between eighteen and, — was it twenty-five?

Dusty Answer is the story of Judith's inner life, her desires and her bruises, her yearnings and her disappointments. It is the story in reverse of the butterfly bursting from its chrysalis, — youth, the butterfly, coming out a drabish worm as, I