

Friends with the World

BY EDITH M. THOMAS

THE World has played fair with me
(And I with the World, I trust!)—
Broken no pact nor plight;
No wrong but Love could adjust;
Or, if fight we must,
We ever shook hands with a will,
At the end of the fight.

If a Better World there be—
Let be! I can only say,
Here I have found delight
That steads me upon my way,
Going out with day. . . .
I have been good friends with you, World—
Good night, good night!

Editor's Easy Chair

OUR nation likes a bold stroke of fancy, the kind of bolt in which the electrical genius of Emerson often delivered its lightning; so that when, the other day, President Eliot said, or was said to have said, that if a man would read the books which he could put on a five-foot shelf for him, he would end an educated man, a thrill of joyous response ran through the Union. Here was something that the average American could take hold of with his teeth, natural or artificial, and Fletcherize upon, and swallow and inwardly digest; he felt richly nourished by the mere notion without any of the fatigue of knowing severally or collectively the five feet of masterpieces which were to educate him. The notion not only nourished him; there was the relish of a fine irony in it, the gust of a broad humor; and the average American felt himself capable

of the irony in being sensible of the humor. He beheld himself sawing off a five-foot plank in his wood-shed, and putting it up in his entry or his parlor, and waiting for Doctor Eliot's list of books to fill it; he had a glad vision of himself when he should go among university men as well educated as the best, and make those snails in the race of learning haul in their horns.

Nobody knows better than the average American how short a step it is from the sublime to the ridiculous, and if he has allowed himself to have some fun with that notion of five feet of books, it is because he realizes that from the ridiculous to the sublime there is only that short step back, and that when he has had his fun with it he can be as serious about it again as his severest critic could wish him to be. In like manner he indulged a constitutional gayety in watch-

ing through the newspapers the defeated endeavors of the Wright brothers to fly at the national capital, in the earlier stages of their recent experiment, knowing very well that he could resume all his pride in them with little or no exertion when the ultimate event justified him. After having seen, in print and picture, the brothers Wright smiling in easy converse with the reverent crowned heads of Europe, and noted with a glow of satisfaction the honors paid the aerial prophets by their fellow citizens of Dayton, Ohio, in contravention of the ordinary usage of prophets in their own country, why should he refuse such amusement as came his way from their provisional discomfiture? A few meagre minutes aloft, and then an earthward career, with or without disastrous contact with terrestrial objects, seemed at first to form the record of their aerostation at Washington, so different from the tale of those triumphal hours spent in the alien atmospheres of France and Italy. The inventors did not appear to have been disturbed by the opening incidents, but were able to share the joke, though they had to do all the hard work of the common experience. Their undiscouraged perseverance eventuated in that victory over the adverse powers of the air which the whole world knows of now, and all their failures, to the patriotic joy of the most ironical of the witnesses, were turned into successes far surpassing anything in their European annals. For anything we can assert at this writing to the contrary, they may since have been giving

"the first watch of the night
To the red planet Mars."

in a picnic on the shores of one of its canals, with tea or coffee made from the flow of its melting ice-caps. If that shall have been the fact, we are sure that it will have followed the Wright brothers' timely perception of a peculiar quality of the American atmosphere, an electrical thinness, lightness, dryness penetrating it from the American humor which we all prize and strive to practise, but which they were finally able to overcome by charging the air with some pleasantries of the British mind, or some jokes Made in Germany, and so render-

ing it dense enough to support their aeroplane for hours and even days at a time.

So far as this is a conjecture after the fact, it is unscientific, for science proceeds from conjecture before the fact, and hinges the most precise mechanical result upon hypothesis. Still we think there may be something in it, though we advance it so modestly; but what we should more confidently note with the hope of engaging the philosophic mind is something which seems to have escaped it. Nothing has been more interesting to us in the recent experiments in aerostation than the spectacle of the collective human mind bending itself in so many times and places at once to the solution of the same problem. In America, in France, in Germany, in England itself, the experiments have proceeded with an impressive simultaneity. The success of the Wright brothers may be the Vespuccian avatar of the Columbian genius of Langley, but they will merit all the glory they will have won if they really reach the continent while he touched the shores of the islands in his little-regarded ventures. The Germans may be said to be only working forward from the old balloon ideas of the eighteenth century, with a cumbrous dirigibility for their supreme achievement. The French aviators, like the Wright brothers, have adopted and improved upon the principle of the aeroplane as Langley imagined and applied it; yet all these explorers and inquirers in the uncharted realms of space have worked together with one aim, and with a wonderful simultaneity have forced a tangible result from science, and proved, now more, now less convincingly, that the air is as navigable as the ocean. The event is apparently the effect of a consensus of minds on the point of central interest, and the fact contains the germ of a truth which may be made to flower and fruit perhaps in every field of inquiry. Out of the scattered hopes and vague beliefs instinct in the race ever since men began to watch the flight of birds, and wonder why men could not fly too, there had finally gathered a faith embodying itself in a unanimous effort which no misgiving or denial could resist. Some of us always thought we could fly, and in spite of those who said we could not fly, we thought with

a unanimous propulsive energy that we could, and upon trying, behold we do fly.

How long or how far we shall ultimately fly is a thing which has nothing to do with the undeniable fact that we fly, and the lesson is plain. Let us bend collectively the powers of our minds and souls upon any given point, and it must yield. Votes for women are wresting themselves from the grudging hold of ignorance and injustice by the sheer virtue of concentrated volition; and who shall say that the peace of the world, ever since the Spanish and Boer and Russo-Japanese wars, has not been kept by the world-wide intention and volition of peace? A generation ago the nationalities unified themselves through a universal impulse, which is not yet spent, and now the trend toward constitutionalism in Russia, Turkey, and Persia may be the effect of the same determination which we see working in the Philippines and Porto Rico. We have had in the last decade an explosion of romantic novelists in our literature comparable only to the discharge of a machine-gun in its apparent unisonance; and every candid student of literary history must own that this has been the effect of inventive criticism in many widely separated sources uniting simultaneously to produce these novelists as by a species of intensive culture. It can as little be denied that the many wonders of applied electricity have eventuated from the pressure of large numbers of creative minds converging upon the science with united energy. The arc light, the incandescent bulb, the wireless telegraph, the electric car, the electric cab, the electric chair, are only a few of the fruits forced by common effort in that field; and so it has been in so many others that we ought not to despair of equal results from equal efforts anywhere. The remarkable discoveries in medicine and in sanitation are the results of investigations as diffused in place as single in time, and the remedies applied seem the fulfilment of innumerable intents and wills acting as one force. It has been declared that the mosquito, the house-fly, the rat, and even the harmless necessary cat are the agents of infection, and that they must all go; when the power lodged in the human

race is applied with the same unanimity, who can doubt that they will go? The matter of interplanetary communication has of late commanded a good deal of attention from advanced thinkers, and the notion of a terrestrial display of electric lights on a vast scale has suggested itself to some of these by its inherent poetry, and its presumable attractiveness with a population so highly civilized as that, say, of our next neighbor Mars. But this notion is only a refinement upon the old idea of immense bonfires kindled at the same moment on many widely separated points of the earth's surface, in hopes of surprising the curiosity of beings who have as yet shown little interest in us. What we have to do is not perhaps to use the means already within our knowledge, but to bend the collective forces of the most ingenious minds among us to the invention of some altogether novel system of signalling, in the reasonable hope that the Martians will feel and manifest some small share of our own concern in the demonstration. It is but a step from aerostation to interplanetary communication, and the one logically follows the other if the same creative pressures are employed in both.

In some cases it must be owned that the consensus of intellectual energies has failed, or apparently failed. The large endeavor to condense the vapors of superstition and distil from them some drops of truth about another life which the Society for Psychical Research has made still lacks undeniable success; there are some such drops, but they have failed to run together in quantity to refresh the mind thirsting for final satisfaction. The experiments have not eventuated in the conviction which the many experiments in aerostation have carried to those who read about them in the newspapers; it may be said that as yet we know little more of the other world than we know about the planet Mars, and there remains a feeling that if there were a universal concentration of the inquiring forces made upon that mystery, its secret might be forced, as the consensus of invention has forced the secret of aerostation, and embodied it in aeroplanes and dirigible balloons; and it is by no means too late for such

a movement. Perhaps the means to this great end might be found in a symposium of newspapers; it is hardly imaginable that the question of man's survival after death could resist the investigations of an army of disciplined reporters attacking it from all sides, and a proportionate corps of journalists collating, comparing, and commenting the facts which the assignment men should turn in to the different managing editors.

What seems to be needed in the study of every problem of importance is the application of the principle of simultaneity, which has always existed, but which seems to have been discovered in its full effectiveness by our own age. When the minds of men press toward a common point from every side at the same moment it appears that their force is irresistible. Some intimation of the fact has appeared in the history of the arts, where we learn that the masterpieces of architecture, sculpture, and painting have been created in widely parted times and places, by large groups of artists contemporaneously working together in this country or that, or in all countries at the same epoch from the same impulse. The like fact is apparent in the history of literature. The revival of learning was not confined to one country, but the great things in the epic and the drama were done in every land and language at once, or so nearly at once that we may say so. It is not without supreme significance that Shakespeare and Cervantes were born on practically the same day, and that Bacon came into the world so nearly at the same time as to save the face of theory if he should happen to have written Shakespeare. It was not for no meaning that Napoleon and Wellington were contemporaries, or that the great day of science was adorned with the spectacle of many supreme intellects striving together for the truth in unanimous emulation. It is said that the Germans no longer accept the Darwinian theory, but this does not disqualify for the purposes of our argument the fact that Darwin and Wallace were, unconscious of each other, forcing its proofs from nature together.

It is, however, the value of conscious team-work, to borrow the admirably graphic phrase of the baseball field (or

perhaps it is the football field), which is the lesson of our era. If a large number of astronomers were to adopt as an hypothesis the belief of Professor Lowell that Mars is inhabited, and putting aside their doubts for the present, were to join him in one confident rush upon that planet, is it imaginable that its mystery could resist the impact of their united equatorials? In like manner, if all the inquirers into psychical phenomena the world over were to concentrate their investigations upon some one point, such as, say, the materialization of spirits, what might not the advocates of immortality hope to prove?

Team-work, in fine, is the cry of the present, and it must be more and more the cry of the future. It may be, as Ibsen contends, that the strongest man is the man who stands alone, but it is a barren strength. The great results, the results far surpassing the strength of the strongest man, can come only from the power of the mighty men who stand together, and it is their joint effort from which the thoughts that shake mankind must proceed in the form of discoveries and inventions. Instinctively the race is everywhere recognizing this principle, with a simultaneity which is the first expression of its spontaneous energy. From day to day the proofs of the fact accumulate, and the latest proof will not be the latest when these divagations reach the eye of the reader. We ourselves have just now read of the formation of a society in London to cultivate the love of poetry. This passion, which has not been volcanically active since the time of the Victorian poets, has only lain dormant, and is to be awakened to new life by the organization of clubs devoted to reading and studying poetry, to the public and private recitals of verse, the publication of poetry by new poets, the offer of premiums for the best poems, the establishment of poetical lectureships, the publication of a poetical journal, and the commemoration of the great poets' births and deaths. If the achievements of team-work in other regions has been so prodigious, what may not we expect of it in this, what Shakespeares (Baconian or Unbaconian), what Miltons, what Wordsworths, what Byrons, what Tennysons, what Brownings?

Editor's Study

THE forthcoming December number begins the one-hundred-and-twentieth volume of the Magazine—the volume completing its sixtieth year. The Magazine has been intimate to four generations of readers, if we include its youngest at the start and its youngest to-day. At the outset it was a novelty, being the only illustrated magazine in the country, singular in its type, and without precedent or rival; and it had this advantage of position—a complete monopoly of the popular heart—for twenty years.

The decade, 1850-1860, veiled more surprises than any other in human history, for the world, indeed, but especially for these United States. Darwin was imminent and Herbert Spencer, with the psychical revolution that these names suggest. But, for America, was opening a new era of peculiar significance. The argonautic note had just been heard, heralding the quick expansion of civilization beyond the Rockies. The impending cloud of civil war shadowed activities which were to create a new nation and bind it together by transcontinental railways, leaving no space for provincial isolation or for a stagnant humanity between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

Yet this wonderful decade began for Americans in the quietest of moods, with no presage of the coming storm or of the instant quickening of physical and intellectual forces. It was into this serene mid-century season that *Harper's Magazine* was born—part of it, and reflecting its even poise and repose. More significantly, this Magazine was the mirror of Victorian literature, then in its summer solstice; was radiant with the fiction of Dickens, Thackeray, and Bulwer, and with the best English short stories and essays of the time. Of the time, we say, but what a blessed disregard of timeliness is shown in the reprinting, in the first volume, of Coleridge's essay on William Pitt, written and published half a century earlier!

Where then was our American literature? Were there not writers in this country upon whom a magazine could depend for its secure establishment in the popular favor? Poe died the year before *Harper's* was born, and the mention of his name recalls several magazines with which he had been editorially associated—the *Broadway*, *Graham's*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. James Russell Lowell had organized a monthly periodical of a higher type, depending largely, however, on eminent English contributors; but it had a brief career. *Graham's* was widely acceptable, but, like its few contemporaries that relied upon American authorship, it was only a miscellany. The only well-sustained periodical of high literary merit thus far had been a quarterly review—the *North American*; to which Motley, Lowell, Prescott, Longfellow, and the elder Dana had contributed scholarly articles.

In the middle of the century imaginative literature in America, except as disclosed in the fiction of Irving, Cooper, Poe, and Hawthorne, and in a few notable poems, was held in suspense behind the same veil which covered from view the greatest wonders of modern science and invention. *Harper's* was therefore doing the best thing any magazine could then do in spreading broadcast the treasures of Victorian literature. It sounded the right note in its initial promise to give the best, wherever found. Hence for a year or two it had the appearance of an eclectic. But it was not a miscellany. Its principle of selection was organic, permitting a natural evolution, the first stage of which involved the divestment of the eclectic feature—so that within three years it was at once American and cosmopolitan, as it has ever since continued to be. Its selection was creative, bringing into being entirely new species of magazine literature—the most signally distinctive of which was its illustrated articles of travel and