

South American states: "Spain, which represents much of the culture and tradition of the Spanish-American states, meets the United States on a common ground. While the one may be considered the spiritual home of these peoples, the other is the one to whom these states are turning for the most active coöperation in their development. We must know each other and come closer together in the progress of these countries."

Count Romanones expressed the same hope and called my attention to some of the recent financial legislation. "All

of our work at this time," he declared, "is directed to facilitate financial relations between Spain and foreign Powers. America will be called upon to-morrow to aid in the reconstruction of Europe. To-day she could turn her attention to Spain to our mutual advantage. The Government would look with a friendly eye upon this coöperation." The King also has taken a personal interest in the amelioration of transportation facilities between the two countries.

SANFORD GRIFFITH

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## The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James

"NO one has the faintest conception of what I am trying for," says the celebrated author in "The Death of the Lion," "and not many have read three pages that I've written; but I must dine with them first—they'll find out when they've time." The words are tinged with Henry James's own disdain of the fashionable world which wears, and wears out, a man of genius like a spangle on its robe. Perhaps twenty years ago every one had read, or had attempted to read, a recent novel of his; but there has come up a generation of young people who have been permitted, with the connivance of critics, to concede the excellence of his earlier productions and the "impossibility" of his later ones without looking into either. Shortly before his death he emerged for the general public from his obscure memoir-writing, and stood for a moment conspicuous on the skyline—a dark, august figure bowed in devout allegiance beneath the English flag; then with a thunder of ordnance not made for *his* passing he slipped below the horizon. In the hour of trial he had given to England a beautiful gesture which derived much of its interest from his life-long refusal to commit himself to any cause but art. Though the adoption of English citizenship by an American would have excited in ordinary circumstances the profane wit of our paragraph-writers, the gravity of this occasion chastened them; and when, a few months later, his death called for comment, many of them clutched at this transferral of allegiance as the last, if not the only, intelligible performance of his that was known to them. Some of them, to be sure, remembered, or said they remembered, "Daisy Miller" as a "perfect little thing of its kind," or professed a not unpleasant acquaintance with "The Portrait of a Lady," or even exhibited a vague consciousness that the novelist had treated extensively the "international situation"; but in general they betrayed their "unpreparedness" for defining his talent and valuing his accomplishment.

Criticism should have declared by this time, and should have declared with emphasis and authority, what Henry James was "trying for." It should also have declared whether, when he slipped below the horizon, he sank into the deepening shadows of literary history, or whether he passed on into a widening world of light—the Great Good Place of a grateful and enlightened posterity which will not dine with him but which will read him. May we securely let him pass while we go on to something better; or shall we find, if we go on, that he is the something better to which we come at last? There are wide differences of opinion in the critical jury. Mr. Brownell,\* who has said a multitude of penetrating things about his mind and his art, and who is, one

should suppose, the critic in America best qualified to enjoy and to value him, does not conceal his quiet hope and expectation that among the novelists of the future we shall not meet his like again. Professor Pattee,\* who is "out" for American local colors and big native American ideas, declares in so many words that Henry James's novels "really accomplish nothing." Recent English criticism strikes up in another key. Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer† promises him immortality, if there is any immortality for extraordinarily fine work—a point about which he is doubtful; but he struggles to his handsome conclusion through such fantastic arguments, with such explosions of temper and erratic judgment, through such a stream of "Godforbids" and "Thank-gods" and "Godknowses," with such ostentatious self-advertisement, and with such a display of the "new vulgarity," the new literary bad manners, that one wonders how he ever came to occupy himself with an author so dedicated to refinement. The little book of Miss Rebecca West,‡ an acutely positive and intensely glowing young "intellectual," has delightful merits: its adverse criticism is cuttingly phrased if not always precisely keen, its appreciative passages are full of fresh ardor and luminous if not always illuminating imagery; it holds up a candle and swings a censer in the principal niches and chapels of the wide-arching cathedral upon which the builder toiled for half a century; but it rather evades the task of presenting a central and comprehensive view—of explaining, in short, in the honor of what deity the whole edifice was constructed.

### I.

Let us cut an avenue to the inner shrine by removing from consideration some of the objects for which most of Henry James's American and English compatriots profess a pious veneration. He has insulted all the popular gods of democratic society—for example, the three persons of the French revolutionary trinity and the "sovereign people" collectively. Capt. Sholto, almost unique among his characters in uttering a political thought, must express pretty nearly his creator's position when he says, "I believe those that are on top the heap are better than those that are under it, that they mean to stay there, and that if they are not a pack of poltroons they will." It would be difficult to name an American author more nearly devoid of emotional interest in the general mass of humanity. His attitude towards the "submerged tenth" is chiefly established by his silence with regard to it. In "The Princess Casamassima,"

\*History of American Literature Since 1870. The Century Co. 1915.

†Henry James. Dodd, Mead & Co. 1916.

‡Henry James. Henry Holt & Co. 1916.

\*American Prose Masters. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1909.

one of the rare places in which he permits a view of the dark Netherward of society to fall upon the eye of a sensitive observer, this is the reported reaction: "Some of the women and girls, in particular, were appalling—saturated with alcohol and vice, brutal, bedraggled, obscene. 'What remedy but another deluge, what alchemy but annihilation?' he asked himself as he went his way; and he wondered what fate there could be, in the great scheme of things, for a planet overgrown with such vermin, what redemption but to be hurled against a ball of consuming fire." The passage is a little deficient—is it not?—in warm fraternal feeling. Let us round out this impression with the reported reaction of a sensitive observer in "The Madonna of the Future" to a glimpse of free life in Rome: "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats; all human life is there!"

These sensitive observers doubtless had cause for a shudder of revulsion, and dramatic reason as well. Their behavior becomes interesting when one compares it with James's personal account in "London Notes" of his own attitude towards a very different scene—the preparations for Victoria's Jubilee. "The foremost, the immense impression is, of course, the constant, the permanent, the ever-supreme—the impression of that greatest glory of our race, its passionate feeling for trade. . . . London has found in this particular chapter of the career of its aged sovereign only an enormous selfish advertisement." Later he reports that he has been taking refuge from the Jubilee in novel-reading. The great thing to be said for the novelists, he adds, is "that at any given moment they offer us another world, another consciousness, an experience that, *as effective as the dentist's ether, muffles the ache of the actual* and, by helping us to an interval, tides us over and makes us face, in the return to the inevitable, a combination that may at least have changed." Was it a pose to speak of fiction as an ethereal pause in the midst of the perpetual toothache of the actual—and of a great patriotic demonstration as a peculiarly sharp toothache? Or was it "American humor"? I do not remember that any one has charged James with being a *poseur*. The pose at any rate is curiously of a piece with his saying to John Hay, who had been received with an "ovation" on his arrival in Southampton, "What impression does it make in your mind to have these insects creeping about you and saying things to you?"

A partial explanation of this disgust and this detachment from the major interests of the majority of men may be found in a half-dozen familiar facts of his biographical record. His whole life was an evasion of circumstances. The ordinary road to character in a democracy is through struggle and conflict. The ordinary man is moulded, battered, or squeezed into his shape by struggling for an education, a livelihood, a wife, a family, a "place in the world." As he approaches middle age he finds himself becoming stable, adjusted, solid through the complex pressure of commonplace responsibilities as husband, parent, business man, vestryman, property-owner, and voter and payer of taxes. In order to hold up his head he has had to put down his roots among all the institutional bases of society; he has had to become vitally attached to the all-embracing not-himself. The leading idea in the elder James's plan for his son's life seems to have been to rescue him from the typical democratic process in order to open to him some finer destiny: to provide him with comfortable means and ample leisure, to save him from every exacting pressure, to preserve him from the stamp

of any definite educational system, by perpetual migrations to snap the root of local attachments, to postpone for him as long as possible the choice of a career, so that at last the young man should be whatever he was and do whatever he did by the free impulse of his own spirit. The perfect working of this plan was probably marred by a physical accident at the time of the Civil War, which, as Henry James circuitously explains, assigned him to the rôle of an engrossed spectator. Whatever the significance of this incident, the result of the plan of tasting life in New York, Boston, Geneva, London, Paris, Rome, Florence, and Venice was to set up an endless process of observation, comparison, discrimination, selection, and appreciation—a process which for this highly civilized, highly sensitized young spirit, became all-absorbing, and made of him a fastidious connoisseur of experience, an artistic celibate to whose finer sense promiscuous mixing in the gross welter of the world was wearisome and unprofitable.

There is no getting round the fact that he was as prodigiously "superior" inside as he was outside the field of art. In his recent much-quoted essay on the New Novel he has the air of a conscious old master condescending for the nonce to notice "the rough and tumble 'output'" of the young vulgar democratic herd. A false note in Miss West's treatment of his character is her remark that he lacked "that necessary attribute of the good critic, the power to bid bad authors to go to the devil." Mr. Brownell, on the other hand, puts him at the head of American criticism. He sent authors to their appropriate places so civilly and suavely that they probably failed frequently to notice where they were sent; but no critic ever more remorselessly sent to the devil bad authors, mediocre authors, and even very distinguished authors. In his later years, he very blandly, very courteously, sent the whole general public to the devil. He was mortally weary of the general public's obtuseness; he despaired of the general public and despised it. At the same time he reiterated in his stories, his critical articles, and in the prefaces to the New York edition of his work challenges and entreaties to the critical few to come and find him.

## II.

In that fascinating work "The Figure in the Carpet" he depicts, for criticism, what he would have called his own "case." He presents there, amid various intensifications of interest, Hugh Vereker, a master-novelist, head and shoulders above his contemporaries; so that even his devoutest admirers and his most studious critics miss the thing that he has written his books "most for." "Isn't there," he says to one of them, "for every writer a particular thing of that sort, the thing that most makes him apply himself, the thing without the effort to achieve which he wouldn't write at all, the very passion of his passion, the part of the business in which, for him, the flame of art burns most intensely? . . . There's an idea in my work without which I wouldn't have given a straw for the whole job. . . . It stretches, this little trick of mine, from book to book, and everything else comparatively plays over the surface of it. The order, the form, the texture of my books will perhaps constitute for the initiated a complete representation of it. So it is naturally the thing for the critic to look for. It strikes me," Vereker adds—smiling but inscrutable, "even as the thing for the critic to find."



The thing which, as it seems to me, James hoped chiefly that his critics would some day recognize is not that he is a great stylist, or a learned historian of manners, or the chief of the realists, or a master of psychological analysis. All these things have been noted and asserted by various more or less irreligious strollers through that cathedral-like edifice to which we have likened his works. The thing which he, as the high priest solemnly ministering before the high altar, implored some one to observe and to declare is that he adored beauty and absolutely nothing else in the world. To the discovery of beauty he dedicates his observation, his analysis, his marvellous and all too little recognized imaginative energy. That is why he sends the rest of the world to the devil, that is his romance, that is his passion, that is why when he discusses his own creations he talks veritably like a soul in bliss. The intimate relation of his fiction to modern realities beguiles the uncritical reader into an erroneous notion that he is a "transcriber," a literal copyist, of life. What in his prefaces he begs us again and again to believe is that his stories originated in mere granules and germs of reality blown by chance breezes to the rich soil of the garden of his imagination, where they took root, and sprang up, and flowered; then they were transplanted with infinite art to the garden of literature. What he offers us, as he repeatedly suggests, is a thousand-fold better than life; it is an escape from life. It is an escape from the undesigned into the designed, from chaos into order, from the indiscriminated into the finely assorted, from the languor of the irrelevant to the intensity of the pertinent. It is not reality; he goes so far as to say quite expressly that it is poetry. If that is true, his novels should, in spite of Professor Pattee, "accomplish" something; they should give us on the one hand an ideal, and on the other hand a criticism; and they do give us both. Henry James's importance for Anglo-Saxons in general and for Americans in particular is that he is the first novelist writing in English to offer us on a grand scale a purely æsthetic criticism of modern society and modern fiction.

His special distinction among writers of prose fiction is in the exclusiveness of his consecration to beauty—a point which in this connection probably requires elucidation. To the religious consciousness all things are ultimately holy or unholy; to the moral consciousness all things are ultimately good or evil; to the scientific consciousness all things are ultimately true or not true; to Henry James all things are ultimately beautiful or ugly. In few men but fanatics and geniuses does any one type of consciousness hold undivided sway, and even among the geniuses and fanatics of the English race the pure æsthetic type was, till Ruskin's time, excessively rare. The normal English consciousness is, for purposes of judgment, a court house of several floors and courts, to each of which are distributed the cases proper to that jurisdiction. In the criticism of Matthew Arnold, for example, there are distinct courts for the adjudication of spiritual, ecclesiastical, moral, æsthetic, political, social, and scientific questions; but Ruskin handles all matters in the æsthetic chamber. In Shakespeare's criticism of life, to take the case of a creative artist, the discrimination of experience proceeds on clearly distinguishable levels of consciousness; the exquisite judgment of Sylvia—"holy, fair, and wise is she"—is a certificate of character from three distinct courts. But Henry James, on the contrary, receives and attempts to judge all the kinds of his experience

on the single crowded, swarming, humming level of the æsthetic consciousness; the apartments above and below are vacant.

It is a much simpler task to indicate his position in literature with reference to the nature of his consciousness than with reference to the forms of his art. Critics attempting to "place" him have said the most bewildering things about his relationship to Richardson, Dickens, George Eliot, Trollope, George Meredith, Stevenson, Turgenieff, Balzac, the Goncourts, Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, and Daudet. To say that he is the disciple of this galaxy is to say everything and nothing. He knew intimately modern literature and many of its producers in England, France, Italy, and Russia, and he is related to them all as we are all related to Adam—and to the sun and the moon and the weather. He doubtless learned something of art from each of them, for he took instruction wherever he could find it—even from "Gyp," as he blushingly confesses in the preface to "The Awkward Age." But what different gods were worshipped in this galaxy! Even Meredith, who resembles him in his psychological inquisitiveness, does not in nine-tenths of his novels remotely resemble him in form; moreover, Meredith is a moralist, a sage, a mystic, and a lyrical worshipper of Life, Nature, and other such loose divinities. James called Balzac "the master of us all," he called Turgenieff "the beautiful genius," he sympathized intensely with Flaubert's dedication to perfection; but his total representation of life is not much more like that of any of his "masters" than George Eliot's is like Zola's.

It is a curious fact that, while American criticism tends to refer him to Europe, English criticism tends to refer him to America. A pretty argument, indeed, could be constructed to prove that he might have been very much what he was, if he had not gone body and soul to Europe, but had simply roved up and down the Atlantic Coast comparing the grave conscience of Boston and the open and skyey mind of Concord with the luxurious body and vesture of New York and the antique "gentility" of Richmond—comparing the harvested impressions of these scenes, and weaving into new patterns the finer threads which American tradition had put into his hands: Hawthorne's brooding moral introspection, his penetration of the shadowed quietudes of the heart, his love of still people and quiet places, his golden thread of imagery beaded with brave symbolism, the elaborated euphony of his style; Irving's bland pleasure in the rich surface of things, his delight in manorial dwellings, his sense of the glamour of history, his temperamental and stylistic mellowness and clarity, his worldly well-bred air of being "at ease in Zion"; Poe's artistic exclusiveness, his artistic intelligence, his intensity, his conscious craftsmanship, his zest for discussing the creative process and the technique of literature. As a matter of fact, Henry James does "join on" to the Eastern American traditions; he gathers up all these enumerated threads; he assimilates all these forms of consciousness. Hawthorne plays into his hands for depth and inwardness, Irving for outwardness and enrichment, and Poe for vividness and intensity.

The result of this fusion of types is a spacious and "richly sophisticated" type of the æsthetic consciousness of which the closest English analogue is the consciousness of Walter Pater. James is like Pater in his aversion from the world, his dedication to art, his celibacy, his personal decorum and dignity, his high æsthetic seriousness, his

Epicurean relish in receiving and reporting the multiplicity and intensity of his impressions, and in the exacting closeness of his style. There are distinctions in plenty to be made by any one curious enough to undertake the comparison; but on the whole there is no better sidelight on James's "philosophy" than Pater's Conclusion to the "Studies in the Renaissance" and his "Plato and Platonism"; no better statement of his general literary ideals than Pater's essay on Style; no more interesting "parallel" to his later novels than "Marius the Epicurean" and "Imaginary Portraits." To make the matter a little more specific let the curious inquirer compare the exposure of Pater's consciousness which is ordinarily known as his description of Mona Lisa with the exposure of James's consciousness which is ordinarily known as the description of a telegraph operator ("In the Cage").

### III.

The reduction of all experience to the æsthetic level James himself recognized as a hazardous adventure. At the conclusion of his searching criticism of a fellow-adventurer, Gabriele D'Annunzio, he raises the question whether it can ever hope to be successful. D'Annunzio's adventure he pronounces a dismal failure—that is, of course, an æsthetic failure; for in the quest of the beauty of passion the Italian, he declares, has produced the effect of a box of monkeys or, as he periphrastically puts it, "The association rising before us more nearly than any other is that of the manners observable in the most mimetic department of any great menagerie." But, he continues, the question is whether D'Annunzio's case is "the only case of the kind conceivable. May we not suppose another with the elements differently mixed? May we not in imagination alter the proportions within or the influences without, and look with cheerfulness for a different issue. Need the æsthetic adventure, in a word, organized for real discovery, give us no more comforting news of success? . . . To which probably the sole answer is that no man can say."

The last sentence is modest, but cannot have been wholly sincere; for James must have known that his own works answer all these questions in the affirmative. His own case is an altogether different variety of the species; his "news" is infinitely more comforting than D'Annunzio's. The particular ugliness, the morbid erotic obsession, on which D'Annunzio foundered, James, like Pater, sailed serenely by. His æsthetic vision had a far wider range and a far higher level of observation than that of almost any of the Latin votaries of "art for art"—Gautier or Flaubert, for example. And yet, let us admit it frankly once for all, his representation of life offends the whole-souled critical sense intensely in some particulars and on what is fundamentally the same ground as that on which these others offend it. His representation of life is an æsthetic flat; it sins against the diversity, the thick rotundity, the integrity of life. Its exquisitely arranged scenes and situations and atmospheres are not infrequently "ugly," as he would say, with the absence of moral energy and action. In "The Awkward Age," for example, in that society which lives for "the finer things," which perceives, and compares, and consults, and so perfectly masters its instincts, the situation fairly shouts for the presence of at least one young man conceivably capable of bursting like Lochinvar through the circle of intriguing petticoats to carry off the heroine. The atmosphere of "The Golden Bowl" is ineffable—"There had been," says

the author, "beauty day after day, and there had been for the spiritual lips something of the pervasive taste of it." The atmosphere is ineffably rich, still, golden, and, in the long run, stifling; the perceptive Mr. Verver, who is in it, gives a telling image of its effect: "That's all I mean at any rate—that it's 'sort of' soothing: as if we were sitting about on divans, with pigtailed, smoking opium and seeing visions. 'Let us then be up and doing'—what is it Longfellow says? That seems sometimes to ring out; like the police breaking in—into our opium den—to give us a shake."

One may properly stress the point of his sin against the integrity of life because it is of the essence of the æsthetic case. It explains the vague but profound resentment which some readers who do not balk at James's difficulty feel when they have got "inside." Mr. Brownell, Mr. Hueffer, and Miss West all point towards but do not, I think, quite touch the heart of the matter when they say that James lacks "the historic sense." A part of the historic sense he indubitably has, and far more historical learning is implied in his work than is explicit in it; he loves the color and form of the past, he feels the "beauties" of history. But history to him, even the history of his own life, is a kind of magnificent picture gallery through which he strolls, delightedly commenting on the styles of different schools and periods, and pausing now and then for special expression of rapture before a masterpiece. Miss West beautifully flames with indignation at his "jocular" references to the Franco-Prussian War and at his unsympathetic treatment of the French Revolution, till she hits upon the explanation that he was out of Europe while the Franco-Prussian war raged, and that he was not born at the time of the French Revolution, so that he could no more speak well of it "than he could propose for his club a person whom he had never met." The explanation doesn't fit all the facts. He was not out of England when in his introduction to Rupert Brooke's letters he expressed his satisfaction that the English tradition "should have flowered in a specimen so beautifully producible." The appreciation of Brooke is one of the most beautifully passionate tributes ever written; but the passion is purely æsthetic; the inveterate air of the connoisseur viewing a new picture in the gallery of masterpieces he cannot shake off. He was not speaking of events that took place before he was born when he said of the assassination of Lincoln in his "Notes of a Son and Brother": "The collective sense of what had occurred was of a sadness too noble not somehow to inspire, and it was truly in the air that, whatever we had as a nation failed to produce, *we could at least gather round this perfection of classic woe*. True enough, as we were to see, the immediate harvest of our loss was almost too ugly to be borne—for nothing more sharply comes back to me than the tune to which the æsthetic sense, if one glanced but from *that* high window, recoiled in dismay from the sight of Mr. Andrew Johnson perched on the stricken scene."

Any good American will flame with indignation when he reads that passage; it so fails to present the subject; it is so horribly inadequate; it so affronts what Lord Morley would call "the high moralities" of life. With its stricken "scene," its æsthetic rapture, its æsthetic dismay, it insults the moral sense as a man would insult it who should ask one to note the exquisite slope of a woman's neck at the funeral of her husband. It sins against the integrity of life as, to take some distinguished examples, Renan's "Vie



de Jésus" and Pater's "Plato and Platonism" sin against it. To present the Spartan boy as a nineteenth-century æsthete or to present the life of Jesus as essentially "delicious" is to miss in the quest of distinction the most vital and obvious of distinctions. It is a blunder into which simple, gross, whole-souled men like Fielding or Smollett or Dickens could never have fallen. It is a crudity of which only the most exquisite æsthete is capable; and he, perching exclusively in his high æsthetic window, absolutely cannot avoid it. It is of the pure æsthetic consciousness, not the intellect, that Emerson should have written his terse little couplet:

Gravely it broods apart on joy  
And truth to tell, amused by pain.

#### IV.

When all the discriminations already noted against the usurpations and blindnesses of the æsthetic sense have been made, it remains to be said that the infinitely seductive, the endlessly stimulating virtue of Henry James is the quintessential refinement, the intriguing complexity, the white-hot ardor of his passion for beauty. One feels the sacred flame most keenly, perhaps, in novels and tales like "The Figure in the Carpet," "The Next Time," "The Death of the Lion," "The Lesson of the Master," "Roderick Hudson," and "The Tragic Muse," in all of which he is interpreting the spirit of the artist or treating the conflict between the world and art. One feels it in the words of the young man in "The Tragic Muse" who abandons the prospect of a brilliant political career to become a portrait painter: "The cleanness and quietness of it, the independent effort to do something, to leave something which shall give joy to man long after the howling has died away to the last ghost of an echo—such a vision solicits me in the watches of the night with an almost irresistible force." One feels it in the described emotion of the young diplomat in the same novel, who is infatuated with a fine piece of acting: "He floated in the felicity of it, in the general encouragement of a sense of the perfectly *done*." One feels it in the words of the novelist in "The Lesson of the Master," who says he has missed "the great thing"—namely, "the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played."

For a born man of letters the first effect of this passion for perfection is an immense solicitude for style; that is to say, for an exact verbal and rhythmical correspondence between his conception of beauty and his representation of it. Judgment upon style, then, involves two distinct points: First, the question whether the conception is beautiful, and, secondly, the question whether the representation is exact. In the case of Henry James there should not be much dispute about the exactness and completeness of the representation; no man ever strove more studiously or on the whole more successfully to reproduce the shape and color and movement of his æsthetic experience. The open question is whether his conceptions were beautiful; and on this point the majority of his critics have agreed that his earlier conceptions were beautiful, but that his later conceptions were not. To that, in the last analysis, one must reduce the famous discussion of his two, or three, or half a score of "styles." Any one who reads the works through in chronological order can explode to his own satisfaction the

notion that James in any book or year or decade deliberately changed his sentence structure. What changed from year to year was his conception of beauty, and that changed by an entirely gradual multiplication of distinctions through the enrichment of his consciousness and the intensification of his vision. To his youthful eye beauty appeared in clear light, clear colors, sharp outline, solid substance; accordingly the work of his earlier period abounds in figures distinct as an etching of the eighteenth century, grouping themselves as on a canvas of Gainsborough's, and conversing and interacting with the brilliant lucidity and directness of persons in a comedy of Congreve's. To his maturest vision beauty has less of body and more of mind; it is not so much in things as in the illimitable effluence and indefinable *aura* of things; it reveals itself less to eye and ear and hand—though these are its avenues of approach—than to some mysterious inner organ which it moves to a divine abstraction from sense, to an ecstasy of pure contemplation; accordingly late works like "The Sacred Fount" and "The Golden Bowl" present rather presences than persons—dim Maeterlinckian presences gliding through the shadow and shimmer of late Turner-esque landscapes and Maeterlinckian country-houses, and rarely saying or doing anything whatever of significance to the uninitiated ear and eye. The evolution of James's artistic interest may be summed up in this way: He begins with an interest in the visibly and audibly seen, said, and enacted; he ends by regarding all that as a nuisance—as an obstruction in the way of his latest and deepest interest; namely, the presentation of the unseen, the unsaid, the unacted—the vast quantity of mental life in highly organized beings which makes no outward sign, the invisible drama upon which most of his predecessors had hardly thought of raising the curtain. The difficulty of the later works is not primarily in the sentence structure, but in the point of view. The sentences in the most difficult of the novels, that psychical detective story "The Sacred Fount," are for the most part as neat, as terse, as alert as the sentences in "The Europeans." When they are long and intricate, they generally imprison and precisely render some intricate and rewarding beauty of a moment of consciousness luxuriously full—for example, this moment of Strether's in "The Ambassadors":

How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright, clean, ordered water-side life came in at the open window?—the mere way Mme. de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their *omelette aux tomates*, their bottle of straw-colored chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the smile of a child, while her gray eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back to his face and their human questions.

Attend till this delicious moment of Strether's reproduces itself in your imagination, and you will not much complain of the difficult magic of the evocation.

Beyond almost all the English novelists of his time Henry James has applied his passion for beauty to the total form and composition of his stories. He cares little for the "slice of life," the loose episodic novel, the baggy autobiographical novel, so much in vogue of late, into which the author attempts to pitch the whole of contemporary life and to tell annually all that he knows and feels up to the date of publication without other visible principle of selection. With extremely few exceptions his subjects pre-

sent themselves to him as "pictures" to be kept rigorously within the limits of a frame, or as "dramas" to be kept within the limits of a stage, or as alternations of "drama" with "picture." How he imposes upon himself the laws of painter and playwright, how he chooses his "centre of composition," handles his "perspective," accumulates his "values," constructs his "stage," turns on the "lights"—all this he has told with extraordinary gusto in those prefaces which more illuminate the fine art of fiction than anything else—one is tempted to say, than everything else—on the subject. The point for us here is that he strives to make the chosen form and the intended effect govern with an "exquisite economy" every admitted detail. The ideal is to express everything that belongs in the "picture," everything that is *in* the relations of the persons of the drama, but nothing else.

## V.

Henry James's exacting æsthetic sense determines the field no less than the form of his fiction. A quite definite social ideal conceived in the æsthetic consciousness is implicit in his representation of a really *idle* leisure class—an ideal ultimately traceable to his own upbringing and to his early contact with the Emersonian rather than the Carlylean form of transcendentalism. He has a positive distaste for our contemporary hero—"the man who does things"; the *summum bonum* for him is not an action, but a state of being—an untroubled awareness of beauty. Hence his manifested predilection for "highly civilized young Americans, born to an easy fortune and a tranquil destiny"; for artists who amateurishly sketch and loiter through lovely Italian springs, though conscious of "social duties" that await them beyond the Alps; for diplomats devoted to the theatre and members of Parliament who dabble in paint; for Italian princesses and princes free from the cares of state; for French counts and countesses who have nothing to keep up but the traditions of their "race"; for English lords with no occupation but the quest of a lady; for American millionaires who have left "trade" three thousand miles behind them to collect impressions, curios, and sons-in-law in Europe. Objectors may justly complain that he seems unable to conceive of a really fine lady or a really fine gentleman or a really decent marriage without a more or less huge fortune in the background or in the foreground of the picture; and it may be added that to the sense of a truly "Emersonian" mind the clink and consideration of gold in most of his crucial instances is a harsh and profound note of vulgarity vibrating through his noble society. He is entirely sincere when he says, in speaking of Balzac, that the object of money is to enable one to forget it. Yet fine ladies, fine gentlemen, and fine society as he understands these matters are, to tell the hard truth, impossible except in the conditions created by affluence and leisure. In comparative poverty one may be good; but one cannot, in the Jamesian sense, be beautiful!

Society cannot in the Jamesian sense be beautiful till the pressures of untoward physical circumstances, of physical needs, and of engagements with "active life" are removed, and men and women are free to live "from within outward," subjecting themselves only to the environment and entering only the relationships dictated by the æsthetic sense. Let us not undervalue the significance of this ideal, either with reference to life or with reference to literature. It is inadequate; but it has the high merit of being finely human.

It has the precious virtue of utterly delivering Henry James from the riotous and unclean hands of the "naturalists." To it he owes the splendid distinction that when half the novelists of Europe, carried off their feet by the naturalistic drift of the age, began to go a-slumming in the muck and mire of civilization, to explore man's simian relationships, to exploit *la bête humaine* and *l'homme moyen sensuel*, to prove the ineluctability of flesh and fate and instinct and environment—he, with aristocratic contempt of them and their formulas and their works, withdrew farther and farther from them, drew proudly out of the drift of the age, and set his imagination the task of presenting the fairest specimens of humanity in a choice sifted society tremendously disciplined by its own ideals but generally liberated from all other compelling forces. Precisely because he keeps mere carnality out of his picture, holds passion rigorously under stress, presents the interior of a refined consciousness—precisely for these reasons he can produce a more intense pleasure in the reader by the representation of a momentary gush of tears or a single swift embrace than most of our contemporaries can produce with chapter after chapter of storms and seductions.

The controlling principle in Henry James's imaginary world is not religion nor morality nor physical necessity nor physical instinct. The controlling principle is a sense of style, under which vice, to adapt Burke's words, loses half its evil by losing all its grossness. In the noble society *noblesse*, and nothing else, obliges. Even in the early "international" novels we witness the transformation of Puritan morality, of which the sanction was religious, into a kind of chivalry, of which the sanctions are individual taste and class loyalty. Madame de Mauve, the lovely American married to a naughty French husband in that charming little masterpiece which bears her name, is not exhibited as preserving her "virtue" when she rejects her lover; she is exhibited as preserving her *fineness*. Her American lover acquiesces in his dismissal not from any sudden pang of conscience, but from a sudden recognition that if he persists in his suit he will be doing precisely what the vulgar French world and one vulgar spectator in particular expect him to do. In the earlier novels such as "Madame de Mauve," "Daisy Miller," and "The American," the straightness, the innocence, the firmness of the American conscience are rather played up as beauties against the European background. Yet as early as 1878 he had begun, with the delightfully vivacious and witty "Europeans," his criticism of the intellectual dulness and emotional poverty of the New England sense of "righteousness"—a criticism wonderfully culminating in "The Ambassadors," 1903, in which the highly perceptive Strether, sent to France to reclaim an erring son of New England, is himself converted to the European point of view.

*Noblesse* in the later novels inspires beauties of behavior beyond the reaches of the Puritan imagination. It is astonishing to observe how many heroes and heroines of the later period are called upon to attest their fineness by a firm, clear-eyed mendacity. "The Wings of a Dove," for example, is a vast conspiracy of silence to keep a girl who knows she is dying from knowing that her friends know that she knows. To lie with a wry face is a blemish on one's character. "I lie well, thank God," says Mrs. Lowder, "when, as sometimes will happen, there's nothing else so good." In the same novel poor Densher, who rather hates lying, rises to it: "The single thing that was clear in com-



plications was that, whatever happened, one was to behave as a gentleman—to which was added indeed the perhaps slightly less shining truth that complications might sometimes have their tedium beguiled by a study of the question of how a gentleman would behave." When he is tempted to throw up his adventure in noble mendacity he is held to it in this way: as soon as he steps into the Palazzo Leporelli in Venice where the dying lady resides he sees "all the elements of the business compose, as painters called it, differently"—he sees himself as a figure in a Veronese picture, and he lives up to the grand style of the picture. He actively fosters the "suppressions" which are "in the direct interest of every one's good manners, every one's really quite generous ideal."

The most elaborate and subtle of all James's tributes to the æsthetic ideal in the conduct of life is "The Golden Bowl"—a picture in eight hundred pages of the relations existing between Maggie Verver and her husband the Prince, between Maggie's father, Adam Verver, and his second wife, Charlotte, and between each one of the quadrangle and all the rest. Before the pair of marriages took place we are made to understand that an undefinedly intimate relation had existed between the Prince and Charlotte, of which Maggie and her father were unaware; and after the marriages we are made to understand that the undefinedly intimate relation was resumed. All four of the parties to this complex relationship are thoroughly civilized; they are persons fit for the highest society; that is to say, they have wealth, beauty, exquisite taste, and ability to tell a lie with a straight face. What will be the outcome? The outcome is that, without overt act, or plain speech, or displayed temper on any hand, each one by psychic tact divines "everything," and Mr. and Mrs. Verver quietly return to America. Why is the *liaison* dissolved with such celestial decorum? It is dissolved because the "principals" in it perceive the æsthetic "impossibility" of continuing their relations in that atmosphere of silent but lucid "awareness"; and it is dissolved with decorum because all the persons concerned are infinitely superior to the vulgarity of rows, ruptures, and public proceedings. The "criticism of life" implicit in the entire novel becomes superbly explicit in Maggie's vision of the ugliness and barbarousness of the behavior of ordinary mortals in like circumstances,

She might fairly, as she watched them, have missed it [hot angry jealousy] as a lost thing; have yearned for it, for the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion, as for something she had been cheated of not least; a range of feelings which for many women would have meant so much, but which for *her* husband's wife, for her father's daughter, figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles.

Does not that description of Maggie's vision throb with a fine passion of its own—throb with the excitement of James's imaginative insight into the possible amenity of human intercourse in a society æsthetically disciplined and controlled?

## VI.

My thesis is simply that James's works throb with that fine passion from the beginning to the end—just as Pater's do. Criticism's favorite epithets for him hitherto have

been "cold," "analytical," "scientific," "passionless," "pitiless" historian of the manners of a futile society. That view of him is doomed to disappear before the closer scrutiny which he demanded and which he deserves. He is not an historian of manners; he is a trenchant idealistic critic of life from the æsthetic point of view.

He is not pitiless except in the exposure of the "ugly," which to his sense includes all forms of evil; in that task he is remorseless whether he is exposing the ugliness of American journalism as in "The Reverberator," or the ugliness of a thin, nervous, hysterical intellectualism and feminism as in "The Bostonians," or the ugliness of murder as in "The Other House," or the ugliness of irregular sexual relations as in "What Maisie Knew," or the ugliness of corrupted childhood as in "The Turn of the Screw." The deep-going uglinesses in the last three cases are presented with a superlative intenseness of artistic passion. If the effect is not thrilling in the first case and heartrending in the last two, it is because Anglo-Saxons are quite unaccustomed to having their deeps of terror and pity, their moral centres, touched through the æsthetic nerves. Granting the fact, there is no reason why they should deny the presence of a passion of antipathy in a man to whose singular consciousness the objectionable inveterately takes the shape of the ugly.

What, however, is more incomprehensible is the general failure of criticism to recognize the ardor of his quite unscientific attachment to the beautiful. His alleged deficiency in charm, it is asserted, is due to the fact that he does not sympathize with or love any of his characters. The alleged fact is not a fact. He sympathizes intensely with all his artists and novelists, with all his connoisseurs of life, with all his multitude of miraculously perceptive persons from the American homesick for England in the "Passionate Pilgrim" through the young woman aware of the fineness of old furniture in "The Spoils of Poynton" to Maggie and Mr. Verver in "The Golden Bowl." And he dotes, devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry upon the enriched consciousness, the general awareness, and the physical loveliness of his women. He cannot "abide" a plain heroine, even if she is to be a criminal. Of Rose, the murderess in "The Other House," he says the most exquisite things—"She carries the years almost as you do, and her head better than any young woman I've ever seen. *Life is somehow becoming to her.*" In almost every novel that he wrote he touched some woman or other with the soft breath of pure æsthetic adoration—a refining and exalting emotion which is the note of Sherringham's relation to Miriam in "The Tragic Muse":

Beauty was the principle of everything she did. . . . He could but call it a felicity and an importance incalculable, and but know that it connected itself with universal values. To see this force in operation, to sit within its radius and feel it shift and revolve and change and never fail, was a corrective to the depression, the humiliation, the bewilderment of life. It transported our troubled friend from the vulgar hour and the ugly fact; drew him to something that had no warrant but its sweetness, no name nor place save as the pure, the remote, the antique.

This is the "very ecstasy of love"; and for this virtue, in the years to come, one adept after another reading the thirty or forty volumes of James which any one can read with ease and the fifteen or twenty richer volumes which demand closer application—for this virtue one adept after another, till a brave company gathers, is certain to say, "I discriminate; but I adore him!"

STUART P. SHERMAN

## Correspondence

### THOR'S HAMMER-CAST

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: This poem, written several years ago by a famous German novelist, since dead, is a melodious statement of a position and intention which Germany is just now vigorously illustrating. I translate it from the German of Felix Dahn as follows:

God Thor, at the Midnight end of the world,  
Stepped back with an arrogant motion:  
"Where falls the hammer this arm has hurled,  
All mine are the land and the ocean!"  
And the war-axe flew like the word from his mouth,  
Flew light as on feathery pinion,  
Till it fell at the edge of the Farthest South—  
And the earth was Thor's dominion.

Since then 'tis the Teuton's joyous need  
To hammer the lands we covet.  
We come of the hammering Deity's seed:  
We are God Thor's heirs, and we prove it.

ROY TEMPLE HOUSE

Norman, Okla., March 10

### WAR-RELIEF FUNDS AND THE COLLEGES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In your last issue a correspondent requested statements as to the amount of money being raised for war-relief funds by college men and women. At the risk of blowing my college's own trumpet I am glad to give the figures for Oberlin because I think they represent a great deal of sacrifice, although perhaps not a large amount of money. One thousand dollars was raised for the relief of Armenian sufferers (some part of this was contributed by citizens of the town), and three thousand seven hundred dollars for prison relief. The women of the college, who have been conducting an energetic campaign for a women's building, have abandoned this and will give the proceeds of their activities to the Belgian Relief Fund. The amount thus raised will be considerable by the end of the year. In addition to these, the students have contributed something like two thousand dollars to the support of an academy in China. Contributions for the equipping of a motor ambulance are also being raised. These represent the contributions of a student body not large in numbers and not wealthy.

LOUIS E. LORD

Oberlin, O., March 27

### ECONOMIC PRESSURE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: It may be well at this time to call attention to a principle of the League to Enforce Peace that has been but little noticed. Article 3d of its proposals reads: "The signatory Powers shall jointly use forthwith both their *economic* and military forces against any one of their number that goes to war before any question arising shall be submitted" as previously provided.

The report of the committee of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States upon the "Economic Results of the War and American Business," after discussing the need for "an adequate pressure or force to compel signatory

nations to bring their cause before an International Court or Council of Conciliation before going to war," goes on to say: "These forces can be summarized in the term economic pressure, by which we mean the commercial and financial boycott of any nation that goes to war without submitting its dispute to judgment or inquiry. Our plea is that in the first instance the use of economic force is clearly indicated, and that the military force should be resorted to only if economic pressure proves ineffective."

Economic pressure can be applied almost immediately and with much greater certainty than the use of military and naval power. By declaring an embargo and refusing to admit to our shores all commerce coming from nations who want to fight and preventing the clearance from our own ports of all exports to such nations, we can immediately bring economic pressure to bear on them. Assuming that all loyal members of the League to Enforce Peace do the same, this pressure upon the recalcitrant would soon become unendurable.

There would of course be some loss of trade to ourselves and other members of the League, but the losses so incurred would be small as compared with the cost of even preparation for war. We should, however, be ready to do *our full share* to enforce peace by military and naval pressure if it became necessary, and assuming that other members of the League do likewise that would lessen the burden of "preparedness."

The United States would suffer less than any other nation by the use of economic pressure. Our domestic commerce is so much larger than our foreign that the loss of the latter would be felt by comparatively few. We have within our own borders more of the raw materials for transformation into usable goods than any other nation, and hence are self-dependent. The few great staples that we export in large quantities, such as cotton and wheat, could, if necessary, be cared for by the Government advancing money to carry and store any overplus that could not otherwise be disposed of, at a much less cost than going to war before it was necessary. Our immediate duty now is to use both naval and economic pressure in aiding the Entente Allies, and the stronger and more effective we can make this pressure the sooner will the war be ended.

ROBERT MATHEWS

Rochester, N. Y., March 23

### A BELGIAN SCHOLAR IN WANT

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: May I, through the columns of the *Nation*, call the attention of our college presidents who may be looking for a professor or lecturer in the French language and literature to a Belgian scholar in straitened circumstances? I refer to my friend M. Célestin Demblon, member for Liège in the Belgian Parliament and professor of French literature in the New University of Brussels. He was in Liège when the Germans began their base attack on martyred Belgium, but escaped from the wretches through Antwerp, leaving his family behind him. He is now living very modestly in Paris, separated from his wife and children, supporting himself with his pen. In a letter just received from him, he writes: "The price of things is exorbitant here and it is on America that I count for relief."

THEODORE STANTON

Cornell Campus, March 30