

These United States—IX*

OHIO: I'll Say We've Done Well

By SHERWOOD ANDERSON

I AM compelled to write of the State of Ohio reminiscently and from flashing impressions got during these last ten years, although I was born there, my young manhood was spent within its borders, and later I went back and spent another five or six years as a manufacturer in the State. And so I have always thought of myself as an Ohioan and no doubt shall always remain, inside myself, an Ohioan.

Very well, then, it is my State and there are a thousand things within it I love and as many things I do not like much at all. And I dare say I might have some difficulty setting down just the things about Ohio that I most dislike were it not for the fact that what I am to write is to appear in *The Nation*, and *The Nation*, being, well anyway what they call broad-minded, cannot well refuse room to my particular form of broadening out, as it were.

Ohio is a big State. It is strong. It is the State of Harding and McKinley. I am told that my own father once played in the Silver Cornet Band at Caledonia, Ohio. Warren G. may remember him as Teddy, sometimes called Major Anderson. He ran a small harness shop at Caledonia. Just why he was called Major I never knew. Perhaps because his people came from the South. Anyway, I ought to have a job at Washington. Everyone else from that county has one.

And now Ohio has got very big and very strong and its Youngstown, Cincinnati, Akron, Cleveland, Toledo, and perhaps a dozen other prosperous industrial cities, can put themselves forward as being as ugly, as noisy, as dirty, and as mean in their civic spirit as any American industrial cities anywhere. "Come you men of 'these States,'" as old Walt Whitman was so fond of saying, in his windier moods, trot out your cities. Have you a city that smells worse than Akron, that is a worse junk-heap of ugliness than Youngstown, that is more smugly self-satisfied than Cleveland, or that has missed as unbelievably great an opportunity to be one of the lovely cities of the world as has the city of Cincinnati? I'll warrant you have not. In this modern pushing American civilization of ours you other States have nothing on our Ohio. Credit where credit is due, citizens. I claim that we Ohio men have taken as lovely a land as ever lay outdoors and that we have, in our towns and cities, put the old stamp of ourselves on it for keeps.

Of course, you understand, that to do this we have had to work. Take for example a city like Cincinnati. There it sits on its hills, the lovely southern Ohio and northern Kentucky hills, and a poet coming there might have gone into the neighboring hills and looked down on the site of the great city; well, what I say is that such a poet might have dreamed of a white and golden city nestling there with the beautiful Ohio at its feet. And that city might, you under-

stand, have crept off into the green hills, that the poet might have compared to the breasts of goddesses, and in the morning when the sun came out and the men, women, and children of the city came out of their houses and looking abroad over their sweet land of Ohio —

But pshaw, let's cut that bunk.

We Ohioans tackled the job and we put the kibosh on that poet tribe for keeps. If you don't believe it, go down and look at our city of Cincinnati now. We have done something against great odds down there. First we had to lick the poet out of our own hearts and then we had to lick nature herself, but we did it. Today our river front in Cincinnati is as mean looking a place as the lake front in Chicago or Cleveland, and you please bear in mind that down there in Cincinnati we had less money to work with than they did up in Chicago or even in Cleveland.

Well, we did it. We have ripped up those hills and cut out all that breasts-of-goddesses stuff and we've got a whanging big Rotary Club and a couple of years ago we won the World Series, or bought it, and we've got some nice rotten old boats in the river and some old sheds on the waterfront where, but for us, there might not have been anything but water.

And now let's move about the State a little while I point out to you a few more things we have done. Of course, we haven't any Henry Ford over there, but just bear in mind that John D. Rockefeller and Mark Hanna and Harvey Firestone and Willys up at Toledo and a lot of other live ones are Ohio men and what I claim is—they have done well.

Look at what we had to buck up against. You go back into American history a little and you'll see for yourself what I mean. Do you remember when La Salle was working his way westward, up there in Canada, and he kept hearing about a country to the south and a river called the Ohio? The rest of his crowd didn't want to go down that way and so, being a modest man and not wanting to set himself up against public opinion, he pretended to be down of a bad sickness. So the rest of the bunch, priests and Indians and others, went on out west and he just took a couple of years off and cut out southward alone, with a few Indians. And even afoot and through the thick woods a man can cover quite a considerable amount of territory in two years. My notion is he probably saw it all.

I remember that an old man I knew when I was a boy told me about seeing the Ohio River in the early days, when the rolling hills along its banks were still covered with great trees, and what he said I can't remember exactly, but anyway, he gave me the impression of a sweet, clear, and majestic stream, in which one could swim and see the sand of the bottom far below, through the sparkling water. The impression I got from the old man was of boys swimming on their backs, and white clouds floating overhead, and the hills running away, and the branches of trees tossed by the wind like the waves of a vast green sea.

It may be that La Salle went there and did that. It wouldn't surprise me if some such scandal should creep out about him. And then, maybe, after he got down to where

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This is the ninth article in the series entitled *These United States*. The first was on the State of Kansas by William Allen White (April 19), the second on Maryland by H. L. Mencken (May 3), the third on Mississippi by Beulah Amidon Ratliff (May 17), the fourth on Vermont by Dorothy Canfield Fisher (May 31), the fifth on New Jersey by Edmund Wilson, Jr. (June 14), the sixth on Utah by Murray E. King (June 28), the seventh on South Carolina by Ludwig Lewisohn (July 12), and the eighth on Nevada by Anne Martin (July 26).

Louisville, Kentucky, now stands, and he found he couldn't get any further with his boats because of the falls in the river—or pretended he couldn't because he was so stuck on the fine Ohio country up above—it may be, I say, that he turned back and went northward along eastern Ohio and into a land of even more majestic hills and finer forests and got finally into that country of soft stepping little hills, up there facing Lake Erie.

I say maybe he did and I have my own reasons. You see this fellow La Salle wasn't much of a one to talk. He didn't advertise very well. What I mean is he was an uncommunicative man. But you go look him up in the books and you will see that later he was always being condemned, after that trip, and that he was always afterward accused of being a visionary and a dreamer.

From all I've ever been able to hear about Ohio, as it was before we white men and New Englanders got in there and went to work, the land might have done that to La Salle, and for that matter to our own sons, too, if we, God-fearing men, hadn't got in there just when we did, and rolled up our sleeves, and got right down to the business of making a good, up-and-coming, Middle-Western, American State out of it. And, thank goodness, we had the old pep in us to do it. We original northern Ohio men were mostly New Englanders and we came out of cold stony New England and over the rocky hills of northern New York State to get into Ohio.

I suppose the hardship we endured before we got to Ohio was what helped us to bang right ahead and cut down trees and build railroads and whang the Indians over the heads with our picks and shovels and put up churches and later start the anti-saloon league and all the other splendid things we have done. I'll tell you that the country makes no mistake when it comes to our State for Presidents. We train our sons up right over there.

Why, I can remember myself, when I was a boy, and how I once got out of a job and went one fall with a string of race horses all over our State. I found out then what La Salle was up against when our State was what you might call new, in a way of speaking. Why, I got as dreamy and mopy, drifting along through the beautiful Ohio country that fall, as any no-account you ever saw. I fooled along until I got fired. That's how I came out.

Then of course I had to go into the cities and get a job in a factory and the better way of life got in its chance at me, so that for years I had as good a bringing up and knew as much about hustling and pushing myself forward and advertising and not getting dreamy or visionary as any American there is. What I mean is that if I have slipped any since I do not blame the modern Ohio people for it. It's my own fault. You can't blame a town like Toledo or Cleveland or Akron or any of our up-and-coming Ohio cities if a man turns out to be a bum American and doesn't care about driving a motor at fifty miles an hour or doesn't go to the movies much evenings.

What I mean to say is that this business of writing up the States in the pages of *The Nation* is, I'll bet anything, going to turn out just as I expected. There'll be a lot of knocking, that's what I'll bet. But I'm not going to do that. I live in Chicago now and our motto out here is, "Put away your hammer and get out your horn." Mayor Thompson of Chicago got that up. And, anyway, I think it is pretty much all silliness, this knocking and this carping criticism of everything American and splendid I hear going on nowa-

days. I'm that way myself sometimes and I'm ashamed of it.

The trouble with me is that I once had a perfectly good little factory over in Ohio, and there was a nice ash-heap in a vacant lot beside it, and it was on a nice stream, and I dumped stuff out of my factory and killed the fish in it and spoiled it just splendid for a while. What I think now is that I would have been all right and a good man, too, but on summer afternoons I got to moping about the Ohio hills alone, instead of going over to the Elks Club and playing pool where I might have got in with some of the boys and picked up some good points. There were a lot of good bang-up Ohio pushers over in that Ohio town I had my factory in and I neglected them. So of course I went broke and I'll admit I've been rather a sorehead ever since. But when I come down to admit the honest truth I'll have to say it wasn't Ohio's fault at all.

Why, do you know, I've had times when I thought I'd like to see that strip of country we call Ohio, just as that Frenchman La Salle must have seen it. What I mean is with nothing over there but the dear, green hills and the clear, sweet rivers and nobody around but a few Indians and all the whites and the splendid modern cities all gone to—I won't say where, because it's a thought I don't have very often and I'm ashamed of it.

What I suppose gets me yet is what got me when I stayed away from the Elks Club and went walking in the hills when I was trying to be a manufacturer, and what got me fired when I was a race-track swipe. I get to thinking of what that darned old man once told me. I'll bet he was a Bolshevik. What he told me set me dreaming about swimming in clear streams, and seeing white cities sitting on hills, and of other cities up along the northern end of my State, facing Lake Erie, where in the evening canoes and maybe even gondolas would drift in and out of the lake and among the stone houses, whose color was slowly changing and growing richer with the passage of time.

But, as I say, that's all poet stuff and bunk. Having such pipe dreams is just what put the old kibosh on my factory, I'll bet anything. What I think is that a man should be glad it's getting harder and harder for any of our sons to make the same mistakes I did. For, as I figure it out, things are going just splendidly over in Ohio now. Why, nearly every town is a factory town now and some of them have got streets in them that would make New York or London or Chicago sit up and take notice. What I mean is, almost as many people to every square foot of ground and just as jammed up and dirty and smoky.

To be sure, the job isn't all done yet. There are lots of places where you can still see the green hills and every once in a while a citizen of a city like Cleveland, for example, gets a kind of accidental glimpse at the lake, but even in a big town like Chicago, where they have a lot of money and a large police force, a thing like that will happen now and then. You can't do everything all at once. But things are getting better all the time. A little more push, a little more old zip and go, and a man over in Ohio can lead a decent life.

He can get up in the morning and go through a street where all the houses are nicely blacked up with coal soot, and into a factory where all he has to do all day long is to drill a hole in a piece of iron. It's fine the way Ford and Willys and all such fellows have made factory work so nice. Nowadays all you have to do, if you live in an up-to-date

Ohio town, is to make, say, twenty-three million holes in pieces of iron, all just alike, in a lifetime. Isn't that fine? And at night a fellow can go home thanking God, and he can walk right past the finest cinder piles and places where they dump old tin cans and everything without paying a cent.

And so I don't see why what such cities as Cleveland and Cincinnati have done to knock dreaminess and natural beauty of scene galley-west can't be done also by all the smaller towns and cities pretty fast now. What I'm sure is they can do it if the old New England stock hasn't worn out and if they keep out foreign influences all they can. And even the farmers can make their places out in the country look more modern and like the slums of a good live city like Chicago or Cleveland if they'll only pep up and work a little harder this fall when the crops are laid by.

And so, as far as I can see, what I say is, Ohio is O. K.

[The next article in this series, to be published in The Nation of August 23, will be The State of Maine—"Down East," by Robert Herrick.]

In the Driftway

THE Drifter hears much about the gouging of tourists in Europe this summer but nothing to equal the recent experience of a doughty American general in a famous Paris hotel. He is a rich man this soldier, now civilian again, but the bill he received was too large even for his abundant exchequer. But the manager refused to alter it. "What is this item of five thousand francs?" roared the general. "Why, that," said the manager, "is our charge for the use of our elevators by your servants." "But I have no servant," stormed the American, "only a private secretary who comes and goes once a day." "That makes no difference," said the *hôte*lier. But just then a page entered the room and presented to the general the card of Marshal Foch. The discussion of the bill thereupon came to an end. When the Marshal's visit was over the *hôte*lier reappeared to announce that after all there had been some mistakes in the bill which in its final form represented about half its original size—which shows the Drifter that field marshals sometimes have their uses after all.

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FROM Poland the Drifter hears a delightful story about General Pilsudski. Poland has never quite recovered from the dispatch of an American commission headed by Henry Morgenthau to investigate the charges of pogroms against the Jews, although that American commission was very much kinder to Poland in its findings than was the corresponding British one. The other day, the story runs, General Pilsudski went up to an American—it was soon after the news of the latest burnings in Texas—and solemnly said to him, with a twinkle in his eyes, that he very much feared he should have to appoint a Polish commission to investigate the pogroms against the Negroes in America. "You know," he said, "we have two Negro Polish citizens. On behalf of this important minority of my people I feel that we must protest, and I am seriously considering appointing a commission composed of one of our Negro citizens, a white Pole, and an American." The American listener begged him to carry out his plans, believing it would shame America a little, but the General merely laughed and went his way.

THE DRIFTER

Correspondence

An Eminent Scholar Gone

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: The death of Sir George Prothero must bring more than the common measure of sorrow to those who knew him. It is as though something of irretrievable beauty and value had passed from us. His biographers will speak of the scholarship and learned achievement which the world has recognized. They will tell of the historian who in the "Cambridge Modern History" made real the dream of Lord Acton, and at Paris, from that background of knowledge, looked out with level eyes of pain upon the vagaries of the Peace Conference.

But here in these few lines the wish is to recall and fix in memory that figure of gracious charm as it revealed its stores of learning and sensitive sympathy among the not-to-be-rivaled hospitalities of that home in Bedford Square. There, during the darkest days of the war, gathered around their host and the most exquisite of hostesses a unique company who seemed to at least one onlooker the saving remnant in a dissolving society. One has read with envy of the night-long talks so recently painted by Mr. Strachey, which Madame du Deffand would never allow to be ended, when the same room held Montesquieu and Voltaire, D'Alembert and Fontenelle, to join in which in later years Horace Walpole slipped over from London. But those who gathered at the Protheros came under the shadow of a great event that gave a seriousness and a significance to every flash of wit, every allusion to history, every venture into philosophy. Learning that rivaled the encyclopedists' was there, women whose experience of the great world transcended that of the French ladies who knew only their Paris. And all went forth thence, as Haydon phrased it, "with propulsive force against the evils of life."

It would be wrong to close without one word of that Editor who sat in the hallowed spot where Scott and Byron met, to walk thence arm in arm down Albemarle Street—that Editor with whom to talk and to work was to be admitted a novice into the great tradition of English letters.

Philadelphia, July 25

C. H. B.

A Soldier on Amnesty

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In your issue of July 19 I noticed a reference to a petition to the President asking that the political prisoners now held in Leavenworth for expressing their opinions be freed. I should like to get a copy of the petition, as I think that I could get some few signers here. I should also like to know what has been done toward making a canvass of this part of the country.

I am very grateful to *The Nation* for the information it has given me about these cases, among other things. I was in the American Expeditionary Force, and shall very likely be in the next war if it comes while I am still physically fit, but some of my best friends, who did their part in the last war, will go to Leavenworth in the next if the country is as intolerant then as it has been for some years. And the worst of it is that I shall feel that theirs is the nobler part.

Cumberland Center, Maine, July 21

R. L. BLANCHARD

Dr. Johnson on New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Apropos of Mr. Wilson's article on New Jersey in a recent issue it may interest you to recall what Dr. Johnson says on the subject in his "Lives of the Poets." Speaking of the poet Waller's sons, he says: "Benjamin, the eldest, was disinherited, and sent to New Jersey as wanting common understanding."

Amenia, New York, July 18

J. E. S.