

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

VOLUME III

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 1927

NUMBER 39

### The Squid

THE squid (if our biology is correct) sucks in whatever comes its way and, when excited, squirts out ink. So does New York. Philadelphia, once the intellectual capital of America, is cultivated but uncreative. Some scholarship, some excellent essays, about as much good poetry as a New England village produces, an occasional novel, seldom important—that is all. Boston suppresses more books of the imagination than she produces. Publishing is still vigorous there, and scholarship, but pure literature looks elsewhere for a habitat. When Boston writes it is of her past; her present is largely silence. San Francisco, still a cosmopolis, still congenial to the literary mind, has by no means fulfilled the expectations of those who saw new airy castles of the imagination about to rise on the Pacific. She has a past, like Boston, which is more brilliant than her present. Chicago is assertive, but her best writers will not stay at home; she is best when rough, the dove of self confidence refuses to light in her bosom. Foreigners rave over her as the great exponent of raucous America, but her best contributions might have been written in New York—and often are. Detroit and Cleveland, the fourth and fifth cities of the United States and among the great congeries of the world, are pockets in the literary radio, silent, inexpressive, and apparently content. There is no intellectual center in America not strictly academic, but New York.

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Of course Paris sums up France—but Paris can. London is Great Britain's focus, but there is an autonomy in British writing which results from roots sunk deep in the English counties, the highlands, Ireland. Berlin, in a federated Germany, has no such powers of suction and destruction as New York.

This great ink squirter, this vast eddy into which young writers from all the States drop like chips and whirl in the maelstrom, is no friend to local talent. It welcomes it, at the price of absorption. Tentacles reach everywhere, drawing in talent, pumping back ink.

What is the matter with Philadelphia? Is it content with two national weeklies, written not for or by Philadelphia? Is there no literature in her, no energy of the creative imagination, no pleasure except in appreciation? Why is Boston the last of the great cities in which producers care to put on a good play? Why do Detroit and Cleveland support admirable symphony orchestras (the leader of one from Russia, of the other from New Haven), one good magazine of journalism, but no publishers, no poets or few, few writers of any kind. Why has Indianapolis, once a literary allusion, sunk into obsolescence except for its excellent publishing firm (with a branch in New York) and Booth Tarkington, who spends half the year in New England? Why is there no general publishing firm, no literary magazine not academic, in all of the South? Why are Santa Fé, New Orleans, Santa Barbara spoken of as "literary colonies," more closely bound to New York than to their own soil?

Few will deny the facts. Are they encouraging? Has the State died in literature as in politics; is sectionalism, which was the great irritant in the intellectual life of this country, become a means of local color and no more? Is it inescapable that the voices of the States (as Whitman would have expressed it) should come singly from a Cabell, a Glasgow, an Elizabeth Roberts, a Frost, a Heyward, a Tarkington, a Gale—with nowhere a community

### Lavish Kindness

By ELINOR WYLIE

INDULGENT giants burned to crisp  
The oak-trees of a dozen shires  
Adorning thus a will o' the wisp  
With momentary pomp of fires.

The waters of an inland sea  
Were magicked to a mountain peak  
Enabling dwindled pools to be  
Cool to a single swallow's beak.

But whether prodigies of waste,  
Or idle, or beneficent,  
Such deeds are not performed in haste  
And none has fathomed their intent.

### This Week



"Origins of the War." Russia. Reviewed by *Michael Florinsky*.  
Qwertuio: A Shirtsleeves History.

"The Marriage Bed." Reviewed by *Gladys Graham*.

"The Islanders." Reviewed by *Lawrence Cornelius*.

"The Minister's Daughter." Reviewed by *Lawrence S. Morris*.

"Four O'Clock." Reviewed by *Grace Frank*.

"From Man to Man." Reviewed by *Amy Wellington*.

"Decadence." Reviewed by *Arthur Ruhl*.

### Next Week or Later

"France and America." Reviewed by *Newton D. Baker*.

"Origins of the War." France. Reviewed by *William R. Langner*.

of minds, like Concord's, nowhere an intellectual center (as Edinburgh once was) outside of the capital?

If so, let us make the most of New York, even though New York has several marked disadvantages as the Rome of our modern empire, being too heterogeneous to be American, too expensive to be a permanent domicile, too close to the magnets of profitable journalism to be safe for the young and ambitious.

But the situation is not fortunate—either for literature or good living. The author who (having learned his world) goes home, and brings his friends, and stays there, is likely to profit both his city and himself. Ideas spark from contact with others. Self criticism operates where there is competition among meeting minds as well as among published works. It is not good for the writer to write by himself and for himself too long, as the work of Cabell often shows. The New York hive should swarm.

### James Fenimore Cooper\*

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

COOPER is the fighting Quaker of American literature. While Irving, the esthetic Federalist, tidied his garden plots and built Dutch Alhambras, humorously romantic, on the Hudson, Cooper swung toward democracy, colored his social philosophy with the ideas of Jefferson, and took the continent and the oceans for his theme. He is a pound American where Irving is an ounce, yet more propagandist than artist; a maker of national epics (almost our only one) who never achieved a style, a man on a scale as great as the popularity of his books, which exceeded that of any other American writer and equalled Byron's and Scott's, with faults on a scale as great also. He alone was able to make literary use of that passion for what his compatriots called so vaguely freedom which inspired the political and social achievements of the young United States. Not creative in his ideas like Emerson and Thoreau, not a humanist and artist like Poe and Hawthorne, he belongs with Melville and Whitman, men born upon the surge of the American flood and torn by its conflicts, incoherent like them sometimes and sometimes eloquent and expressive.

It is impossible to discuss Cooper merely as a man of letters, for he was artistic by instinct only and a writer by compulsion rather than determined choice. To write of him, as has been the custom, solely in terms of the romantic movement, as if Rousseau and Scott plus a forest made Leatherstocking inevitable, is to reduce one of the most revealing figures of the early century to the dimensions of a second-rate imitator. Cooper's sins against art were sometimes monstrous, and when he wrote in what he regarded as a literary tradition, he could be insufferable; but when he was his own man he was a world figure.

The panoply and trappings of the romantic movement have gone stale in Cooper's books. The Unknowns who stalk through his novels and at the end are little more than gestures, the chivalrous gentlemen always proposing to die for someone, the rebels against tyranny, the blighted souls, the too modest women who would burn to death rather than remove their petticoats, are all imitated from the fashionable romance of the day or his favorite Shakespeare, and are usually tiresome and sometimes impossible. Nothing could be less like the direct force of Cooper's correspondence than this fol-de-rol. He was fascinated by it, as we are fascinated by realism, but it was not the man himself nor his real "gift" in writing. Like most unliterary writers, he picked up the vices of a contemporary style and thought they made literature. More of this later. It was the inner spirit of romanticism, its expansiveness, its passionate cult of the ego, its rush back from artifice to the vast simplicities of nature, that touched his heart and moved his pen to its best writing, perhaps because one hope of romance was a fresh world where man could be reformed in the image of desire, and Cooper knew the wilderness (and the sea also) when, for a moment, it was, in this sense, romantic.

The influence of Rousseau was as great, though less direct, upon Cooper as upon Jefferson. The rights of man (when he likes the men) are to him indisputable, the primitive draws him like a magnet, he distrusts every convention that interferes with free development, provided his prejudices allow him to call it a convention. It is he and not Scott

\*This essay is part of a chapter to be included in a forthcoming book.



who describes the wild landscapes in which Rousseau's ideal man might return to nature. The Trossachs are mere stage scenery beside the Adirondacks, the plains, and the forests of the Genesee. Scott's primitives are by-characters merely, while with Cooper they become protagonists of the stories. Cooper gave to his country and to Europe, particularly to restless Europe, the concrete figures of noble savage, simple-hearted woodsman, and the conception of free opportunity in a boundless West which called like Alps to Jura to fervid imaginations fed on Rousseau's philosophy. After the disillusionment of the Napoleonic wars, here courage, innocence, generosity, skill might all adventure upward in romantic air.

The happy union of history and romance which Scott had effected for two continents was undoubtedly a factor in Cooper's success. He borrowed and worsened not merely the romantic trappings of Scott's novels but their stiffening of historical incident, and so profited by the path round the world which they had made. Yet he realized his essential independence. "Americans," he wrote in "The Travelling Bachelor," "have too much common sense to make good subjects for literature. Descriptions of society on the borders have positive though no very poetical interest. History and romance have not been successfully blended in America." His "gift" lay elsewhere, and nothing disgusted him more than to be called, as he so often was, the American Scott.\* Their provinces were different, and where they overlapped, he was an imitator, and often a bungling one. To help the imagination to escape from a cramped or a petty life is a function of romance which both men shared. To let man return to nature and the unspoiled virtues of a wide but not unfriendly wilderness was a function of romance also, in which Cooper was Rousseau's disciple and a scout in the new continent for the powerful romantic ideas of Europe. Hence his easy popularity. But to stop with such a definition is to miss the qualities which make Cooper unique. If there were only Rousseau and Scott to account for Cooper, we should have added one more to the long list of American literary parasites upon European fashions which still fill our libraries with volumes that nobody reads.



It is difficult indeed to grasp Cooper from the accounts usually given of him. Lounsbury, whose history of the reception of his books can scarcely be excelled, was too engaged with carrying on the Cooperian vendetta against a supercilious England to be much concerned with subtle analyses of the man. D. H. Lawrence, in his epic chapter,† neglects the patent fact that Cooper's perfect domesticity makes him a bad theme for an essay upon blighted lives, and does not see that Cooper's intense virility is poor evidence for his revival of the eighteenth century thesis that man degenerates in America. American critics have discussed him merely as a child of the romantic movement or an offspring of the frontier. The unique quality of Cooper's romance at its best cannot be explained by either Rousseau in Europe or the forest at home. It comes from deeper levels than his truculence or his hard-headed desire for an income, and the escape of energy suppressed is merely its vehicle. It is based upon predispositions deeply bred in the man. It is characterized by two strong emotions of which one, a fierce republicanism, is obvious, and can be left for later discussion. But the other is not obvious. Cooper, in one part of his soul, was and always remained a Quaker. As a Quaker he judged human nature, and created character when he could create at all. To call Cooper the Quaker romanticist is to put too much in a term, but without his Quakerism he would have been much nearer to a merely American Scott. Without this imprint of a peculiar culture he would never have made Natty Bumppo or Long Tom Coffin, never in short have been Cooper. Lounsbury calls him a puritan, forgetting for the moment that his dislike of New England Yankees was so strong that even Boston biscuits kept him awake at night‡. He was puritan when he scolded, but at his moral best a Quaker. The distinction is important.

The Quaker doctrine of the inner light and the Quaker discipline of simplicity so widely spread in

early America, have seldom survived in the conflict with more noisy or more adaptable religions, and have ever given way before an increase in luxury and self-gratification, or hot blood demanding the active life. Yet where youth has been exposed to their sweet austerities there is seldom complete escape. The intellect may seek a more measured approach to the Deity, yet a sense of fortifying spiritual presence will remain. Gusto for living, a will and a means to sharpen taste and savor experience, may make impossible for the Quaker's child that plan of simple living, self-restrained, which keeps the soul in readiness for the inner voice; yet a belief that simplicity of heart is more valuable than cleverness will persist, and the conception of a spiritual democracy, in which the pure of soul are equal in the sight of God, remains as a social philosophy which is overlaid but seldom entirely forgotten. Tolerance, respect for the good wherever found, non-aggression, a readiness to trust human nature, distrust of all mere worldliness, these traits have been carried out of Quakerism by thousands once subjected to its discipline, and woven deep into the fabric of American idealism. Some of the threads have quietly rotted away, but many are still strong although they have long since lost the name of Quaker.



Curiously enough, but not so curiously after all, the rebels from Quakerism who have covered their hearts with the shields and armor of the world, have with remarkable frequency, gone to the further extreme of Protestantism. The Episcopal church, with its decorous ritual, its traditional discipline, its language attuned to lonely communication with God, received the too worldly Quaker, and gave him a spiritual home and a creed and authority to stiffen the faith which his sophisticated soul could no longer find for itself. Simplicity and ritual, authority and self-discipline, are akin in this, that both escape disorder; and tradition is but self-dependence at a long remove.

Cooper is a perfect example of the Quaker transformed. His truculent, militant spirit, his willingness to fight (but not to seek combat), whether imaginatively at sea or in the forest, or actually in courts of law, his dogmatism, his violent energy always seeking deeds (though after youth seldom achieving them), seem little fitted to Quakerism. Yet George Fox was truculent. The Nantucket Quakers sought the whale in baths of blood around the world, and the practical energy of the Friends made Pennsylvania the model community in prosperity as well as government in the middle eighteenth century. That Cooper could have remained a Friend in any circumstance short of persecution, where he would have shone, is improbable. He was too full-blooded for such a faith except in its creative youth. He was not the Quaker type, and he was never consciously Quaker in his professions.

But no man can escape his youth, especially the child of a Quaker. His mother, so I judge from her portrait made in Cooperstown shortly before her death in 1817, was a good Quaker until the end, for she wears the "plain clothing," sure sign of an unwavering adherence to the "discipline." Quakers from the South (which means presumably New Jersey) visited Cooperstown "by fifties" in those early days. Judge Temple, in "the Pioneers," Cooper's study of his father, is just such a Quaker as I have been describing, forced by temperament and his own ambition into a pioneer world where the already stiffening Quakerism of Burlington was too ideal and too rigid to live by. It is rumored that the real Judge had been "put out of meeting." Yet in his ethics and his deeper purposes, Judge Temple seems Quaker still. He smiles with the author at the attempt to foist high church upon the New England immigrants, laughs at the pretentious worldliness of Richard, despises the pious legalism of Hiram Doolittle, and yet responds to good wine, good living, and good adventure as such hearty men will, but Quakers should not. In strong emotion he drops constantly to the "thou" and "thee" of his upbringing, and Cooper says of him, "he retained them (the habits and language impressed upon his youth by the traits of a mild religion) in some degree to the hour of his death." His dress is described as plain neat black. Thus did Cooper depict his father in the Judge, and thus, with qualifications and a deeper self-analysis, he might have described himself.

From this influence Cooper never entirely departed. There are numerous references to Quakers and Quakerism in his books, most abundant naturally in the early volumes, but all respectful and some-

times affectionate. "A sect," he says in "The Crater," written toward the end of his life, "whose practice was generally as perfect as its theory is imperfect." Long Tom Coffin is a Nantucket whaler, and therefore a Quaker by inference, and his simple religion is essentially Quaker as any one who reads over the chapter which records his death in the wreck may see. When Natty Bumppo in "The Pathfinder" is urged to join the church of England: "The 'arth is the temple of the Lord, and I wait on him hourly, daily, without ceasing, I humbly hope," he says. "No—no—I'll not deny my blood and color, but am Christian born, and shall die in the same faith. The Moravians tried me hard . . . but I've had one answer for them all—I'm a Christian already." This is naïveté, but it is not difficult for the reader of the Leatherstocking Tales to discover that Natty's Christianity is rudimentary Quakerism, with its sense of the immanence of the Creator, its non-aggression, its distrust of the intellect, its intense self-respect, its tolerance: "Each color has its gifts," says Natty, "and one is not to condemn another because he does not exactly comprehend it." This was the first Christianity which Cooper knew, the simple and persuasive religion of his youth.



In spite of Miss Cooper's indignant denials, old Shipman, who supplied them with fish and venison at Cooperstown, was undoubtedly the prototype of Natty ("a very prosaic old hunter," she calls him, who wore leather stockings but was otherwise not the noble scout of the books). Miss Cooper was thinking of the transmogrified Natty of the later romances. Natty in "The Pioneers," scrawny, simple, a little dull, is presumably a free portrait, like the others in that group, most of whom can be identified with the figures of Cooper's youth. But in a moral sense even the unromantic woodsman of "The Pioneers" is a new creation. "In a moral sense," Cooper says in his preface to the Leatherstocking Tales,\* "the man of the forest is purely a creation," and he adds in the Preface to a revised edition of "The Pioneers,"† "a creation render probable by such auxiliaries as were necessary create that effect." At first this moral concept is expressed in simple terms of loyalty and an intuitive sense for the right. But later the moral nature of Natty gets a sharper definition. He becomes a philosopher who talks garrulously of his relations to the universe. Indeed, once past "The Pioneers," Cooper never wavered in his conception, which was, as he says in the general Preface already quoted from, "a character who possessed little of civilization but its highest principles as they are exhibited in the uneducated, and all of savage life compatible with these great rules of conduct."

It was into Natty Bumppo that Cooper put his Quaker heart, and his description of the old scout as "a character, in which excessive energy and the most meek submission to the will of Providence were oddly enough combined,"‡ might have been self-portraiture of his best moments. But Cooper made of him a symbol, first of all of romantic escape, a figure ever retreating from the crash of falling timber and the smoke of clearings, on into the unspoiled West. And next, an incarnation of ideal man in a definite limitation of circumstances. He is a primitive Christian who holds "little discourse except with one, and then chiefly of my own affairs."§ He depends for inspiration upon no book, for he cannot read, and upon no man, for he sees few who are spiritual, but only upon the inner light. He is tolerant. If the Indian scalps, it is because he is Indian, not because he is wicked. He is humble, and yet self-respectful as one who reverences God in himself. He defers to differences in worldly station, but only as of the world. He kills only where he must, and in needful killing is mindful of a concession to necessity that puzzles him. It is the one compromise the wilderness forces upon him. He is proud only of his "gifts" of white blood and a sure aim, his "nature" he takes from God and is true to it by simple inevitability. Strip him of his romance and he sinks to such a figure of a daring frontiersman as Simms, in Cooper's own time, has drawn; then, on broader view, rises again by his ethical qualities to a figure of literary importance. The moral study of the naïve Hawk-Eye is in many respects more interesting than the far subtler but turgid analyses of "The Scarlet Letter."

\*†Edition of 1861.

‡"The Prairie."

§"The Pathfinder."

\*The Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper. Edited by his grandson, James Fenimore Cooper. p. 227.

†"Studies in Classic American Literature."

‡See his Journal for 1848. Corr.