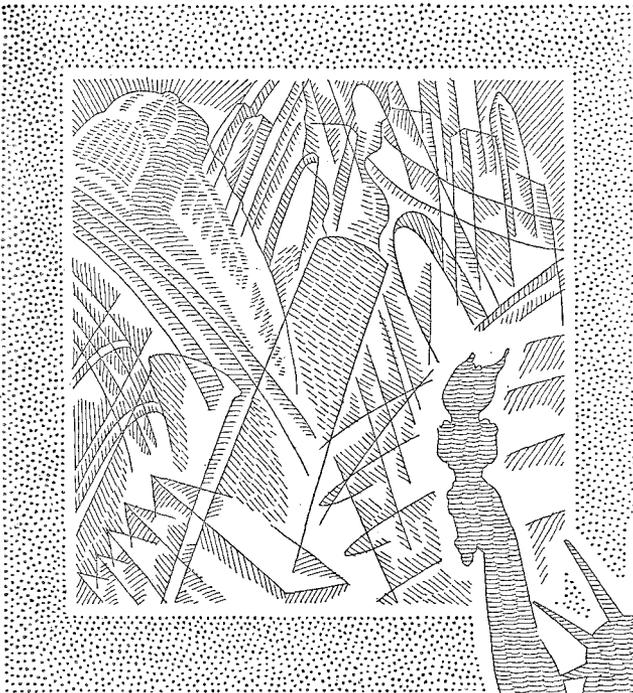


# Farewell To America

By John Cowper Powys

*Few people have wandered the length and breadth of the United States as has the Englishman, John Cowper Powys. Reviewing his thirty years in this country, he bids it adieu in a most unusual tribute to the places and the people he has known*



**M**y adieu to America is charged with the burden of the gathered-up memories of thirty years—just half of the three-score years to which I have now attained! Yes, thirty years is a big fragment, a considerable cantle, out of a person's life; and the years from thirty to sixty cover moreover what is generally known as a man's prime.

For good or for evil, then, my human output, both as a speaker and writer, has already been achieved, and achieved in the American milieu and under the the American influence. But however this may be, what have I got from my thirty years in America? Certainly no "modest competence" as one friendly newspaper puts it, wherewith "to live out my days at peace in my native land"!

No, I am not in the position of an Englishman returning from the exploitation of far-off "natives" to live and die in comfort at home. It is much rather as if—aged sixty-two—I find myself, save for a certain measure of literary reputation, fated to begin my whole life over again from the ground up.

But what have I gained from my thirty years of life in America if I have not gained money? Well, to try and analyze this is precisely the subject of the present sketch.



There is no doubt that with all the unscrupulousness and the anti-social brigandage wherewith so many Americans exploit their simpler and less predatory companions, and in spite also of the universal esteem that the possession of riches excites, there is a real spirit of social equality in America. Rich men are respected in America, and we admire them, for having, by their energy and cunning and their lively geniality, obtained what we would all like to obtain; but we do not feel in any way different from them.

Save among certain small circles in Boston and Philadelphia and Charleston and New Orleans—the old aristocratic centers of historic culture—there is fundamentally no difference of class in American life at all, none of that irrevocable cleavage between those who have gone to a particular kind of school, or those who have been brought up with particular privileges, and the rest

of us, such as we suffer from in England.

It was my lot to know America ten years before the war and for twenty years after the war, so that I have seen her in her reckless pride, in her abnormal prosperity, as well as in her puzzled adversity, angry bewilderment, and the beginnings of a completely new epoch of her history.

Have I been what they call *Americanized*? I do not think so; not at any rate in the particular physical senses in which that phrase can be employed. My accent, though certainly not what they call an "Oxford" one, has remained, in spite of living all these years in America, unmistakably English.

But in certain much subtler ways I cannot help feeling that I *have* been Americanized, or at any rate immensely affected by my life in America.

The larger part of this influence has taken the form, if I am not mistaken, of the release of tendencies already within me, rather than of the imposition of new tendencies from without. But this is of course the most vital method in all intellectual and spiritual education. If, as Goethe says, outside influences do not draw forth a response from your own deepest nature, they remain nothing to you.

I think, as so often happens with Englishmen, who tend in their own

island to grow gnarled and crotchety and perverse from too close contact with one another, the mere fact of moving about in a larger country, where the very horizons seem more extensive, compels you to wrestle with the world with the free unrestrained force of your whole being. A human soul struggling in detached desperation against the universe tends to treat its fads and its fancies, its crotchets and its manias, with less absorbing pre-occupation.

Few foreign visitors, indeed few native commercial travellers, know the length and breadth of North America as well as I. What strange scenes, what queer vignettes of the way, come floating back into my mind as I write! My feeling at present is that I shall never return, that I shall lay my bones—or rather some one else will—in the land where I was born and under the sovereignty to which I have never renounced my adherence. But who can say, in a world like this, “I will do so and so,” or “I will *not* do so and so”? If I have learned anything in all these turbulent years it is the wisdom of sinking down into the present, like a plummet into a deep sea, and letting past and future, like the scriptural Mercy and Truth, “kiss each other” and settle their receding mysteries over my submerged head.

But for the moment—a moment that seems to me now likely to stretch itself out to the end—I am minded to bid a long farewell to all these exciting scenes.

A long farewell, for instance, to the proud city of New York, that air-hung, sea-washed, weather-white Megalopolis, with its two millions of intelligent Jews and its thousands of club-swinging Irish policemen. Majestic in their polished, towering façades, those up-town commercial palaces, with the gay exclusive shops at their feet, remain in my mind as the supreme challenge of hard, unsympathetic matter, raised up in obedience to the dictates of a haughty and extravagant commercialism, and defiantly directed towards all subtler human values. This up-town district, with its cloud-aspiring architecture, glittering shops, palatial hotels, sumptuous cars, returns upon me as the realm of the rich mistresses, the richer wives, the petted daughters, the reckless salesmen and saleswomen, the insolent doorkeepers, of those magnificent gamblers

who labor, after their fashion, in the pleasanter purlieus of the yet more mountainous office-buildings, where Wall Street plays her ambiguous game.

I used greatly to prefer this “down-town” section to that other. The rich men of Manhattan, engaged in their predatory sport, exhaled, to my thinking, a more agreeable, a more natural, a more affable aura than that which emanated from their proud harems and colossal picture-palaces in the residential quarter.

But as I kiss my hand in everlasting farewell to this dazzling wave-washed, marble-frocked cosmopolitan baggage, “kept” by these industrious rogues, this iridescent harlot of the nations, to whom all the mountebanks and all the peddlers of the world flock with their antics and their wares, this tireless courtesan with her white skin, her cold eyes, her dazzling tiara, her trailing unwashed skirts, it is really neither of the “up-town” nor of the “down-town” districts of Manhattan that I think most. It is of that intermediate region, that Alsatia of artistic pimps, that Grub Street of literary panders, that Bohemia of “creative work” and no less “creative” play, which radiates, like the dim spokes of a dusty wheel, north and south, east and west, from the famous square, where the double images of the Father of his Country—supporting the “standard” of the questionable “event”—gaze sphinx-like up the great Avenue.

For it was within five minutes’ walk of this, now almost historic, square that in the top-floor-front of a house in Patchin Place I used to hear the Jefferson Market clock-tower tell the hours.

Perhaps, as I have tried so often to explain, the sweetest and deepest sense of silence, “silence, eldest-born of all divinities,” that I have ever known, used to come to me between seven and ten of a Sunday morning, as I lay, half-awake and half-asleep, staring at the tops of the ailanthus tree and listening to the far-off sounds of the boats on the river.

Greenwich Village, like Chelsea in London and like the Left Bank of the Seine in Paris, resembles God, in that it is a circle whose circumference diminishes and increases according to human volition! But Patchin Place is unquestionably near its center; and in Patchin Place—where it was my good luck to

live for five years—I met some of the most interesting and singular human beings I have ever known. May the mysterious Tao of the great-little Kwang-Tze, then, as still, my chosen household god, hover, with the waving of those ailanthus boughs—his own favorite branches because of their Taoistic freedom from self-assertion—forever over that room and over him who inhabits it and over all those who shall enter into it!

Thirty years of wandering about the United States have rather deepened certain prejudices of mine than lessened them. My personal happiness was so mysteriously increased by my contact with the mellow natures and musical voices of the colored race that I was always finding myself uneasy and disturbed in those southern states, where, to regard these people as human beings, with rights and sensibilities like our own, is to be a suspected and detestable interloper, “who does not understand the Negro Problem.”

I understood only too well “the Negro Problem”; at least those aspects of it which belong to the bad red blood, the same under all skins, wherein flows the natural selfishness and cruelty of our common human heart.

And if my prejudices—or, as I would myself put it, my instructive conscience—stirred within me over the Southern attitude to Negroes, another aspect of my nature was always being “rattled” by the puritanical and illiberal temper which I so often encountered in New England. This disturbance, this feeling of human indignation in the presence of ideas so different from those of Socrates mounted up to an angry outburst of moral wrath when I contemplated the proceedings of the magnates of Massachusetts in the affair of Sacco and Vanzetti.

My personal farewell to America contains certainly no grain of regret at never seeing the “aristocratic” South again or “cultured” Boston again; and I confess, too, that it is an immense relief to me to say good-bye forever to the Pacific Coast.

How differently I feel to the City of New York, how differently to the whole expanse of the great State of New York! When I finally gave up lecturing and settled down to the quietness of a country life I did so under

the psychic aura of the ghosts of the proud Mohawk nation, and surrounded by descendants of the great Dutch families who colonized the banks of the Hudson River.

It is curious that as an Englishman I should be driven to say such a thing; but my personal feeling is that the ethnological strain in America which has been least corrupted by the insidious elements in the soil and climate and atmosphere is the Holland-Dutch strain, and my instinct about this is borne out by the fact that the present President—in my opinion second to none in the whole roll of the chiefs of the nation—has, of course, just as Walt Whitman had, a line behind him of Dutch ancestors.

But it is not only towards New York City and New York State that I “raise,” as Walt Whitman would say, “the perpendicular hand” in a deep-felt affection of emotional farewell—I feel the same about Philadelphia and about Reading and Lancaster and York and Wilkes-Barre and Williamsport and Harrisburg and Altoona and many another town in the Quaker State. To every portion of New Jersey also I wave an affectionate *adieu*. No state have I been happier in, from the borders of Rockland County to the “board-walk” of Atlantic City! Trenton for instance will always remain one of my favorite capital-cities. She is indeed, to my taste, one of the mellowest and friendliest of all the old-fashioned repositories of the liberal American tradition.

But with the exception of the State of New York and the City of Philadelphia my most tender farewell to this huge weird chaotic country where I have been so happy and so unhappy must be—and will ever be until I die—to the Middle West.

This is the real America, this is—let us hope!—the America of the future, this is the region of what may, after all, prove to be, in Spenglerian phrase, the cradle of the next great human “culture.”

It is in the Middle West—I am not speaking of Chicago, because to my Taoistic mind, a sinister aura must always emanate from animal-slaughter on so stupendous a scale—that there seems to be growing up, in spite of all the simplicities of those barbarous “Main-Streets,” and in spite of all the perversi-

ties of those drabs, rogues, cheats, degenerates, philosophers, whores, bankers, imbeciles, editors, and drunkards, described by our great poet in “Spoon River,” a human temper and a human attitude to life that is really a new thing in the world.

It is significant that both Dreiser and Masters, the greatest novelist and the greatest poet of the America of today, come from the Middle West.

New England used to be the mouth-piece for American expression. The cleverest young American writers of our time—those who are experimenting most boldly with forbidden subjects and with new tricks of manner and style—come from the South, where the mere presence of the wicked lynching-spirit seems to evoke a sadistic magnetism all its own. I confess to being at once tempted and repelled, attracted and repulsed, by this ammoniac smell of psychological bedlam-wine, but when the cruelty of its aura deepens and I get sounds as if from a vivisection-laboratory, I turn from the whole thing with a sick distaste. The great Middle-Western writers, though it must be admitted that like Homer they nod now and again, depend for their effects on the cubic solidity of the reality they handle, while these fantastical writers from the South pulse and throb and jerk spasmodically in some queer mental region where reality is forever appearing and disappearing, like a drowning goblin spitting bloody flukes.

Visitors to America who cannot feel the enormous difference between the spiritual and emotional tone of the Middle West and that of the rest of the continent are unworthy to cross the borders of Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. And what will be the psychic essence of this new Spenglerian culture which according to my geographical divining-rod may refresh the jaded over-civilized spirit of the human race? In the first place, let me say at once, it will realize the prophetic intimations of some of the greatest discerners of spirits. It will realize Rousseau’s idea of what the syllables “America” might come to mean for the human race. It will realize what Goethe meant by this same “word of liberation” when he used it in *Wilhelm Meister*. It will have a mystical

correspondence not easy to analyze with the spirit of Soviet Russia; for although the Middle West is temperamentally as remote from the theory of Communism as any land on earth, it holds so passionately to the great Rousseauish idea of what might be called “the equality of all souls” that it evokes in the very heart of capitalistic America one of the most singular moral phenomena that it has ever been my luck, as an observer of the *animula vagula* of perplexed humanity, to catch on the wing.

In Ruth Suckow’s work the Middle West becomes more articulate than in any other writer, but quite independently of this autochthonous Iowan I did manage as I went about to catch *some* revelations of its secret.

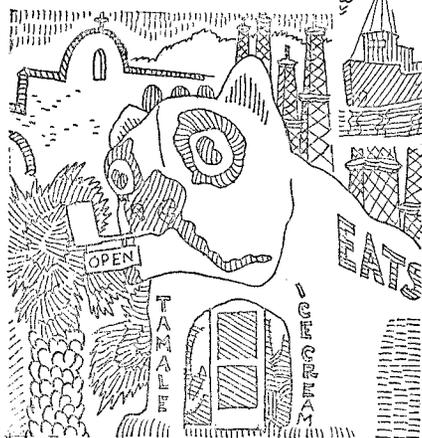
As with the Russians—and there is a singular resemblance between the great Russian horizons and these Middle Western ones—you feel in these parts as if it were natural and inevitable to call people by their “first names.” The rich drawling accents of their speech even, not melodious with the full-throated languor of the South, yet not in the least “Yankee,” remain, though my ear could never really catch the exact tone of those broad prairie-sounds, full of a heart-to-heart insouciance, a nonchalant affability, which, like the sun-baked door-yards of those ramshackle dwellings, levels human consciousness to a certain homely acceptance of the common lot that gathers dignity from its mere simplicity, and solemnity from the mere presence of its vast-stretching background.

The cold of the winters, the scorching heat of the summers, all these “extremities of the skies,” along with the devastating fury of the monstrous winds, do indeed level down, and we must admit it and make the best of it, to a majestic monotony, to an overwhelming commonplaceness, to a staggering ordinariness, all those passionate subtleties and sharply cut distinctions, which for fastidious spirits are the salt of life upon earth. But life goes on, and what you come at last to feel is, after dwelling with these sublimely ordinary people, that by the relinquishing of the aesthetic values and the levelling out of all intellectual refinements there comes into existence a certain bare drab dusty primordial human

grandeur (a grandeur not exactly poetical, but one that draws its weighty essence, all the same, from the "old essential candors" of human experience).

In old market-towns, in old and new college-towns, throughout Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, I tore my heart—such as it is—to pieces, and stretched my intelligence—such as it is—to the breaking-point to disturb all this titanic commonplaceness with "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls," or with thoughts beyond the dusty monotony of those blistering suns and interminable horizons.

But I went on doing this only to discover that in exchange for the spasmodic eruptions of the "perilous stuff" of the spirit that I stirred up I received all manner of earth-born intimations of the dawning of a new temper. I received intimations of a new attitude in the world, where-



in certain tremendous human simplicities, sometimes infinitely genial and friendly, sometimes infinitely stark and grim, gather the power to shake themselves free of all "fine shades" and of all subtle nuances, the power to be *just what they are*, not without reserves, for they are too close to Nature, the mother of all reserves, for that, but without the posturing, gesticulating, elaborating, embroidering with which the demons of artistic cleverness trick up the solemn and tragic lineaments of our common destiny.

The vast Jewish population of New York City is in my opinion the best arbiter of literary judgment in America; and so intensely intellectual is this ancient and impassioned race that they are much less victimized by the artistic fashions of the hour than are the groups

and cliques of the modernistic Gentile youth. I suspect it is by the intellectual Jews, more than by any other readers of books in the country, that the great Middle-Western figures of Dreiser and Masters are kept alive in a due and rightful appreciation.

But while our newest young men, led by the feverish Southerners, have turned from Dreiser and Masters, just as the French Dadaists turned from Anatole France, the young



Jews of New York City continue passionately interested in these great men from the Middle West.

And I too—closely allied, as most Englishmen are, with the moving tents of Israel—also continue interested in this sort of imaginative realism, a realism stark and grim and simple, but totally impervious to literary fashions.

Alas! I know only too well that my own work has much more in common with that of these morbid young Southerners than with that of either Dreiser or Masters. I am feverish and hectic and evasive and perverse, where these great Middle-Westerners keep their heads; yes, and keep too, as the elder of them almost savagely insists, the unchristian clarity of the ancient classics. The secret of the Middle-Western spirit, this royal commonplaceness, this miraculous ordinariness, this heroic goodness, too un-mystical to be called Christian though as full-fleshed and as foursquare as Fra Lippo Lippi's angels, took on its first outline and shape through Dreiser and Masters.

But Dreiser and Masters are at once too individualistic and too comprehensive to concentrate their whole mind upon what I am alluding to now. Ruth Suckow, just because she deliberately narrows her sphere, comes nearer it.



But in my humble opinion as a reverent and fascinated observer, no writer has really yet—no! not Vachel Lindsay or any other—fully articulated this new way of taking life, this reserved-genial, animal-religious, un-mystical-pious, moral-profane "culture," so totally unsophisticated, so close to nature, and yet so profoundly initiated as if by some terrestrial revelation, into that particular aspect of Saint Paul's mysterious *Agapé* which emphasizes, not only the "equality of all souls," but the sin of brooding on those negative thoughts that cast an evil eye upon the roots of life.

As I thus wave my farewell to America I cannot help recording what seems, at least to some deep vein of superstition in me, to be a definite occult influence exercised upon my nature by the psychic aura, diffused through that whole vast land, from the life of the aboriginal Indians.

And there were other definite influences too, that of the colored people for instance, and that, as I have been trying to make clear, of the mysterious spirit of the Middle West. To these I must add—though perhaps they will seem incongruously joined together—my growing respect for the revolutionary youth of America, largely Communistic, and my constantly revived respect for the Roman Catholic Church. Finally it is impossible for me to help adding to this list of the various psychic vibrations that follow me back to my native land, that emanating from the pragmatical personality of the liberal-minded gentleman in the White House.

But what—when I come to turn whatever psychological powers of analysis I possess upon my own character—what I have definitely and palpably added to my own moral stature from



all these various and in many cases contradictory influences is a more subtle matter. I would say I have acquired the art of a particular kind of stark and rather grim stoicism. And although it is true that I have found the neurotic and reckless Southern school of fiction-writers, most of them so young, rather a temptation to me and what might be called a disintegrating force, because of its influence upon my own too natural morbidity; my imaginative weakness has always been strengthened and hardened by the more solid, less bizarre realism of Dreiser and Masters. Robinson Jeffers, on the other hand, though dwelling so far from the South and dealing with the elemental powers in a manner much more congenial to the stronger side of my nature than anything I could ever get from the South, remains, in his way, a temptation too! In plain words I have more than enough of non-humanity, or anti-humanism, or elemental lust in my nature to need any stimulus along *those* lines!

What my morbid nerves most need is just what I have been able to get from America as a whole, this especial sort of stark stoicism, which, like a vast continental "Salt Lake," so many formidable American writers, as different from each other as Whitman from Melville, have at moments tapped.

Primarily I think it springs from the American sense of the instability of everything, a sort of Heraclitean awareness of the universal flux that both the wise and the stupid feel. This awareness encourages the nomadic mania of all Americans.

As far as England itself is concerned, though, as I have hinted, we Britishers are forever shooting off to remote places to get more elbow-room for our per-

sonal peculiarities, our temperamental tendency is to accept as inevitable, and make the best of, whatever "location" or state of life it may be to which fate has called us.

But Americans treat their destiny in a more profane and less resigned manner—they reluctant at regarding themselves as "called" to any particular "state of life." They "get a move on"—they pull up their stakes and are off and away! What



they have in their mind to discover they hardly know themselves. Money with them is a mere symbol of the power to be moving somewhere.

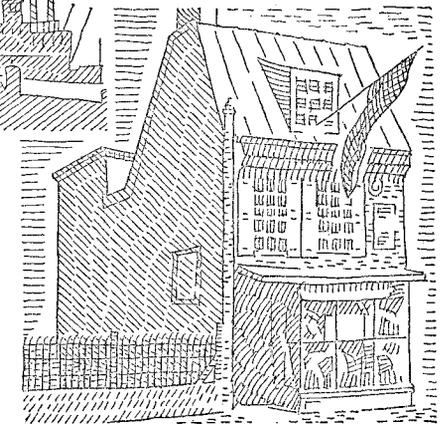
And this nomadic instinct in Americans is encouraged by the conditions of their life. It is not only the well-appointed city apartment full of the latest improvements that lures them on. It is not only their passion to be on the road in the latest invention among automobiles. Nature herself with her terrific extremes of hot and cold takes a hand in it. The truth is, nature is much less under control with them than with us; and none of the works of their hands sink deep into her bosom or arrive at a permanent understanding with her. Energetic though the Americans are, and though their architectural achievements are so awe-inspiring, one never feels that their houses, their bridges, their piers, their pavements fuse themselves with nature, as do our own less stupendous erections. They seem barely to scratch the surface of their intractable native elements. The sky seems always so much further away than with us; while their villages and farms seem perpetually invaded by the unredeemed wilderness and the unconquerable jungle.

How should Americans not have a tendency to move on to "some place else" when their household gods sink such shallow roots into the soil and they themselves have only to intermit their labor for a few short weeks to find their hard-won cosmos overrun by chaos?

In England there has taken place during the last thousand years a singular truce between man and nature. Nature in England is like an immortal pet, upon whose spine the hair may start up at the presence of a stranger, and whose aged teeth may snap, while with the familiar inmates who understand her ways she remains grandly and sublimely harmless.

But it has been this very sense of impermanence, this very sense of being separated from nature by an impassable gulf that has endowed your average American with the stark stoicism of which I speak.

Ultimately Americans are



much harder and grimmer than we English are, though we are calmer, tougher, and far less strung up. American humor is more cruel than ours and their slang more ferocious. Their slang indeed is much nearer bed-rock than ours. *Our* slang is part of our "protective coloring," part of that artful and elaborate play-acting, by which under adverse conditions we "save our face."

English resistance to fate is an ancient and complicated tradition, as with the Chinese. It has become in the long course of history a kind of secular ritual, I might almost say a conventional drama. Yes, it is our best evidence of *propriety* to "carry on" as though our tragedy was merely "a bit of an annoyance." Yes, we English always keep up our optimistic play-acting, our "cheerio" tone, as if to fool God himself into

thinking we feel no more than a pin-prick when he shoots at us with his worst arrows.

But the stoicism I have learned from America is quite a different thing. It hits back at God; and instead of diminishing the magnitude of the divine blow, it sardonically exaggerates it, and then proceeds to condense and drag down this exaggeration in some laconic piece of profane gallows-wit at the expense it might seem of Omnipotence itself. Well have I come to know the tight-lipped American mouth, drooping at the corners, the mouth shared alike by trappers in the Rockies and by stock-brokers in Wall Street, the mouth with an expression as if nothing short of catastrophic repartees to fate had opened it for years!

My own mouth has not grown habitually like that yet, but I fancy sometimes it turns that Indian-at-the-stake-look upon its enemies!

But I have learned from America something much more definite than just this grim delight in a profane stoicism, this delight in being at odds with the universe like a spiritual gangster and of saying to myself, like Satan—"What though the field be lost, *all is not lost!*"

I have learned the further secret—and this I regard as of the utmost importance—of being able to fall back upon the great basic elements of the planet, wherever I may be, and in spite of the particular things that would fain pound and grate and harrow every pulse of my peculiar nature. You see I never trod the side-walks of any American town, from Portland, Oregon, to Shreveport, Louisiana, or from Fargo, North Dakota, to Fort Worth, Texas, without walking and walking till I reached some strip of parched grass or some stump of a wretched tree.

And it was in these eternal walks about the towns of half a hemisphere, that I acquired the mental habits of isolating myself as a perambulating skeleton-shape moving betwixt zenith and nadir. Though like the people of the Middle West, and like Jean Jacques Rousseau, and like Dostoievsky, I religiously believed in the "equality of all souls," I preferred the society of such among them as were disembodied, such among them as reached me only through their thoughts. Nor did I greatly worry as to matters of geograph-

ical nomenclature. I would say to myself *not* "this is Bowling Green, Kentucky," or "this is Columbus, Ohio," but "this is the surface of the earth upon which I, an anonymous individual, am walking in time surrounded by space."

In England—and I feel it particularly as I look round me after my return—every man, woman, and child is surrounded by a dense, though subtle, medium, a medium made up of old traditions, old habits, old customs, old laws, old prejudices, old injustices, old oppressions, old wrongs, old protests against wrongs, old resignations under wrongs, old panaceas and anodynes for immemorial if not irrevocable wrongs. As each person in England, each man, each woman, each child, gazes at you through this legendary medium, you feel as if the individual's personal power and personal value was as nothing compared with the power and value given him by this vaporous medium, which, with its diffused distillation of old habitual customs, old respects, old distinctions, old venerations prevents us from catching with any clear outline the stark lineaments of his personality.

Superficially of course the standardizing methods of America militate against the self-assertion of powerful and eccentric personalities. But what *is* this standardization? It is the expression of the psychology of the mass-instinct working through the individuals that compose it and deriving a human satisfaction from the contemplation of vast numbers of energetic and friendly people, acting just as we ourselves are acting, and not one of them making any petulant claim to be regarded as essentially different from the rest. American "standardization" is in fact, when you come to analyze it, the outward and visible materialization, under democratic idealism, of that passionate wish to bring people to a common level, to lift them up and pull them down till they can pass under the same yoke in the service of the nation, which, under communist idealism, we see today actually dominating Russia.

When however I look round me in my native land I am conscious of the fact that there hangs about every English person I meet a sort of airy chrysalis or emanation of invisible light-rays, which represents, not so much their own personal weight, or value, or power, or formidableness, or dignity,

or heroism, or nobility; as some legendary *simulacrum* of these things clinging about the inherited idea of their position in the social fabric, whether they be tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, farmer's son, thief.

The amount of touchy awareness that I carried with me to America in 1905 would fill a volume, if I had Proust's inspiration or Henry James's genius. But my thirty years of acquaintance with the railway stations of America have changed all this. I can still—in the interest of pure analysis—discuss these English niceties but I am no longer touchy about them. I don't care. And not only don't I care, but I am bold where formerly I was diffident.

All this I owe to America and I like to think I especially owe it to those perpetual walks to escape from the pavements of Kansas City, of Saint Louis, of Cleveland, of Cincinnati, of Denver, of Des Moines, of Buffalo, of Detroit, of Pittsburgh, of Boston,—I never needed to "escape" from the old brick sidewalks of my favorite Philadelphia—for it was in these walks that my life-illusion of myself as a perambulatory skeleton, a skeleton isolated from the competitions of humanity, if not from humanity itself, took what may easily prove to be its last and lasting avatar.

It is risky to boast; and I won't go so far as to say that English class-distinctions mean absolutely nothing to me any more; but they certainly have lost their power to make me skip and dance and utter ferocious maledictions. And the same thing applies to people's praise or blame, admiration or contempt, and their estimate of my mental qualities. I am far prouder than I used to be; but it is Indian pride. It is pride in myself as an anonymous human-skeleton, stalking up and down the face of the earth, adjusting its spirit to the necessities of life and death, and giving itself up to the most thrilling of all sensations, the sensation of sharing the little, evasive, casual waftures of mystic happiness, coming on the air in a doorway, on the sun-rays in an old barn, on the moon over a turnip-field, on the wind across a bed of nettles, and of sharing these *with the forgotten generations of the dead.*

What I owe to my thirty years of train-life and hotel-life in the New Hemisphere is nothing less than a plunge into chaos with its accompany-

ing loss of all the traditional securities of our English Cosmos.

For after all there is such a thing as too much order, too much respect for old habits, many of which—considering the selfishness of our common human nature—are bound to be packed with convoluted injustices. I have seen of course, in the America I am leaving, things far more patently abominable, things far more deliberately cruel, than anything I can imagine happening here in my native land. There is no need to give particular examples of this; for such things “cry to heaven” from all over the United States.

The psychology of the South for instance is always approximating to the brutal attitude towards the Negro Question of what Southerners call “White Trash”; and though there *are* Southerners who feel differently, many quite educated persons down there have a point-of-view fundamentally the same as that of these morbid “nigger-baiters.” The brutality of the police all over the country, but especially in the great cities, is as shocking to a civilized person’s nerves as the equal brutality of the gangsters and kidnappers upon whom they make war, while the unscrupulous thefts of the bankers and the great monopolists are only rivalled by the reckless “coups” of the bandits who break open their safes. Public opinion in America, though easily worked up to a murderous frenzy over any sort of sex-crime or passion-crime, takes the embezzlements of their wealthy rascals as something humorously inevitable, and the brigandage of their outlawed gunmen as something heroically spectacular.

Intensely individualistic though America is, I feel clearly, as I bid her farewell, that I have learned from her many of the lessons that I should have learned—as an “educated” Englishman—were I bidding farewell to Russia. Out of all the countries in the world it is, I fancy, only in Russia and America that one feels the real pulse of the creative future of humanity.

We English are naturally eccentric. It is easy for us to become obstinate and ascetic reformers of normal human weaknesses. But with all our eccentricities we are deeply afraid of one another, distressingly conscious of the opinions of our neighbors, and made embarrassingly uneasy in the presence of traditional authority.

What I have brought back from the hotels in Hoboken, in Baltimore, in Boston, in Jacksonville, in Cedar Rapids, in New Orleans, in San Diego, in Albany, in Buffalo, in Saint Louis, in Topeka, in Pittsburgh, in Rochester, in Saint Joseph, in Santa Fé, in Denver, in Philadelphia, as well as from looking out of the train on the waters of Salt Lake, or on the windings of the Susquehanna, or on the strangely colored deserts of Arizona, is something more formidable than mere eccentricity. I have learned to fall back upon the elements as craftily as a red man, to think of religion all the time as obstinately as a black man, to keep my own affairs to myself as shrewdly as a Quaker, shamelessly to express myself and profoundly to conceal myself just as Whitman used to do, and above all to grow more and more stark in my acceptance of myself in my ultimate loneliness as a queer “guy.” Farewell to America!

But a certain proud grim humor, as “unsquared” by the devils as it is “unsquared” by the angels, that I have learned over there I shall go on hugging against the inmost ribs of my being until the day of my death. I have learned from the aboriginals of America and from the colored people of America and from the stoical farmers of America that it is possible to detach yourself with an indifference that might be regarded as cosmogonic “slickness” from the whole “Triad,” as the old Welsh Bards would call them, of the three “great curses” of modern existence: the superstitious obsequiousness in the presence of science, lending itself to such a monstrous crime against our conscience as vivisection, the superstitious obsequiousness in the presence of public opinion, destructive of the individual soul, and the superstitious obsequiousness before the material universe, blighting to the experiments of the spirit. I know the abominations—who better than I?—of the great Republic to which I am kissing my hand in farewell. I know the weird, ghastly, appalling feeling that comes upon you so often in America when you get a sensation of sick terror in the presence of the work of men’s hands. Such works often strike me as so garish and so artificial compared with the ways of nature as to evoke that peculiar shudder that turns human flesh into “goose-flesh” when it is confronted by objects that have a

shocking reality and yet seem to have so little connection with the normal realities of life that they resemble the sight of a corpse extended at length in a well-appointed bath, or the sight of an advertisement of some toilet article scrawled across an altar-front.

And yet, in a sense that is really abysmal, you drink up, as you cross those titanic expanses, the sense of a positively dizzy freedom, freedom not only from political human traditions and social human traditions, *but from the human point of view itself!* Yes, this is the gist of the matter; this is the crux; this is the rub. I can never, never, *never* repay the debt I owe America in the inmost penetralia of my soul. For the enormous mass of the soil of America has itself poured into me a formidable kind of super-magic—not “black” nor “white,” but beyond them both! It is as though the excess of magnetism, exuding from a continued contact with such an enormous segment of planetary matter as this huge continent supplies, turns a person into a sort of cosmogonic medicine-man. The salt water, washing the cliffs and pebbles and sands of my native land, acts, on the contrary, it may easily be, as an electric “transformer,” diverting, modifying, mitigating, diluting, the magnetism of the earth-substance.

But with its sky above your head so much further away, and its earth-surface below your feet a thousand times more overpowering, continuous contact with America isolates a person from the nuances of human society, paralyzes and numbs and atrophies his more fussy social and normal antennæ, till it really does *de-humanize* him a little!

For even if the crimes committed in America are a thousand times more violent, more numerous, more appalling, than those committed in England, even if the attitude towards cheating and lying and stealing in America is far more recklessly and childishly indulgent than in England, even if existence in America is a wild chaos compared with the orderliness of England, it still remains that you can sink your soul down behind the desolate litter, the ghastly realism, the mad idealism, and the Panurge-like cynicisms, till it touches a hidden spring of the purest, simplest, shyest water of life, a spring that is not only hidden, but is, in a true sense, *inland*.

# The Case for the Soldier

*A Commentary on Critics*

By Major John W. Thomason, Jr.

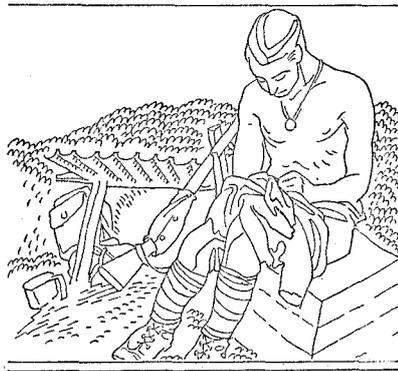
U. S. M. C.

*A soldier defends the profession of arms and replies to some of the criticisms which have been hurled at military men. Without defending war as an institution, he comments particularly upon the quality of recent anti-war advertising*

THESE are always two wars: the last one, and the next to be fought. Current life now dates itself pre-1914 or post-1918, and we have not yet been able to assess the cost, or to estimate the results, of the World War, now designated by certain authorities as the First World War. In Europe and Asia the kindling is piled and ready for a lighted match; and restlessness runs through Africa; and the Americas wait uneasily upon the event. More men stand under arms than marched in 1914. The armaments of sea and air have been renovated and extended, and new and dreadful appliances for killing, unimagined by the simple, earnest warriors of twenty years ago, wait to be disclosed.

The volume of war talk and war writing is very great. Commentators are hampered by an inability to forecast the line-up: who will fight whom, and for what: but the confusion of international relations affords a free field for speculation and surmise. The Cassandra's point with alarm; the nationalists fulminate and thunder; and economists, statesmen, pacifists, and even generals and admirals attain the widest publicity for their views. It is quite possible that the next war, lacking more cogent reason, may simply be talked into being.

Much of the discussion proceeds from uninstructed sentimentalists, who run the scale from rhapsody to hysteria. Some of it is mischievous and conceivably dangerous. Some of it is informed and useful. The hopeful thing about it is that we begin to look with attention at the trend of affairs. Hitherto, Americans have been largely dis-

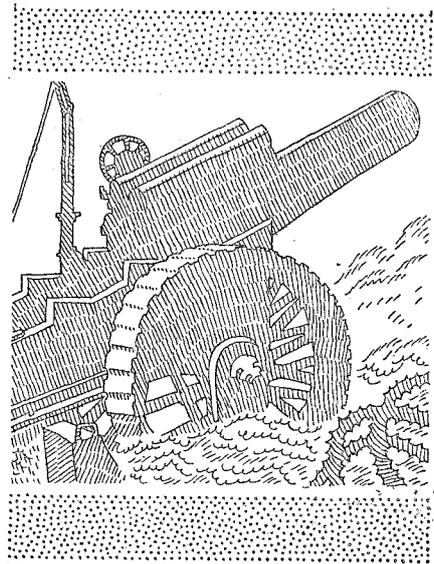


interested in matters beyond their personal concerns, and our previous wars have surprised us profoundly.

As one studies these popular expressions, it is seen that they follow two channels, both condemnatory in principle. The first is directed against the institution of war, and the second assails the military profession. This is unfortunate, because to condemn an institution, and everything connected with it, is not to eradicate it, unless another expedient is substituted for the purpose that it serves.

## II

The institution of war is one of the oldest of human activities. Soldiers locked in an infantry tussle revert simply and naturally to the Stone Age; and populations in the grip of war psychology react, in hate and fear and frantic courage and galvanic energy, as Stone Age folk. When the Western civilization emerged from barbarism, warfare was the business and recreation of the nobility and gentry. It became the major weapon of the kings, but the Wars of the Spanish Succession were about the last of the purely dynastic assaults upon society. Warfare got out of hand in the German religious troubles, and devastated sections of Europe with a thoroughness not exceeded by the late World War. Then, for some centuries, professionals did the fighting as polit-



ical instruments, economically and, on the whole, humanely. The populace took control with those wars ushered in by the French Revolution, and in its popular form war became intolerably burdensome to whole peoples. Where Marlborough and Eugene operated in narrow theaters, with neat, restrained formations, Napoleon loosed upon Europe hordes that ate up the land like grasshoppers, and mounted battles that imposed prohibitive drains upon national birthrates. The hideous mass slaughters and destructions of the World War, the war of physical and economic exhaustion, are the logical projections of the institution in its modern or parliamentary form. It is doubtful that Western civilization can endure such another ordeal, and emerge recognizable.

An incorporated organization with a mellifluous name has, recently, published a series of full-color pictures in the advertising sections of the slick-paper magazines. I recall one, the work of a skilful color-photographer, with ideal models at his disposal. A fine young woman, tastefully gowned in figured silk, tosses her man-child high, to his delight: he waves his rattle and crows gleefully. His blue rompers are appealingly tight on him, and his arms and legs are chubby, and his hair is dusty gold. Across the picture is scrawled in letters of angry red: *To Be Killed In Action*. Two quarter-columns of small print, lower left, balance the composition, and the hand of the go-getting ad-writer is evident, with his heart-throb stop pulled out: "No—he's never going to grow up at all. If