OUR ALMA MATER SEES HER 118TH BIRTHDAY

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compare for a moment in intellectual or moral traits with such historical characters as Pocahontas, Miantonimoh, Massassoit, Hendrick, Occum, or Brant. Occum and Hendrix, it may be added, were both Mohicans and were contemporary with Chingachgook and Uncas.

But whether idealized or not the Indian of Cooper has, in every part of Europe, made our early history synonymous with romance. He has supplied a means of contrast for our highly institutionalized life. He has furnished the potential material for a national drama and a national opera. He has proved not only the anvil on which we wrought our national genesis but the background against which Europe contemplates with undiminished interest the early centuries of our nationol existence.

But if Cooper had never been born, American literature would still have interest for foreigners. Let me remind you that until recently the only recognized types of literature were epic poetry, lyric poetry, dramatic poetry, the essay, the history, the novel, the biography, and the oration. To these must now be added the short story, and in the short story American writers have scored their most distinctive triumph. The short story is not the child of the novel; it is not a story that is merely short. It is a story that could not be longer or shorter—could not be other than it is—without sacrificing its individuality. Professor Brander Matthews suggests that the American short story should be written with a hypen (short-story) to indicate its distinctiveness as a literary type. Schenback says that the short story differs from the novel about as much as an example in multiplication differs from the slower process of addition.

The older masters of the American short story were Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Bret Harte. These are all widely known in foreign lands, though Poe takes easy precedence among them. Indeed, he is justly considered the father of the American short story as a distinctive art creation. His criterion was "totality of effect." The word that best characterizes Poe's constructive art is the work convergence. There are no parallel lines in his best work. With the opening sentence of his stories the lines begin to converge toward a predetermined effect. "If the author's very initial sentence," says Poe, "tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct, or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design."

Poe's short stories fall into two structural types. In the first there is an unbroken cumulative movement from the first paragraph to the last; in the second, the mystery deepens in the first half and is completely solved in the second half. The first type may be represented by a capital A: the lines of interest converge and culminate at the apex. The second type may be represented by a capital B: the story, in other words, is divided into two and corresponding sections or semicircles. To the first class belongs "The Fall of the House of Usher"; to the second class belongs the detective story, of which Poe is considered to be the founder.

The American short story appeals to foreigners because they see certain typical American qualities in its directness of narrative, in its economy of details, in the business-like efficiency with which it goes about its work. There is no formal introduction: it just begins. It does not languish to a conclusion: it simply stops. Its brevity, too, is characteristically American. It consumes in the reading about the same length of time that is spent on a game of football or baseball.

But a more notable service rendered by the American short story, especially since 1870, is that, more than any other form of literature, it has concerned itself with local color, local characters, local history and traditions. We have learned to know the different sections of our own wide country chiefly through the contributions of our short story writers. New England life is reproduced in the works of Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins; the Middle West lives in the works of Hamlin Garland, Owen Wister, and Mark Twain; the Far West has its historian in Bret Harte; and the South finds its interpreters in George W. Cable, Miss Grace King, Joel Chandler Harris, James Lane Allen, and Thomas Nelson Page. Other nations have popularized their history through novels and poetry. Europe knows us better, therefore, or at least has the opportunity of knowing us better, through our short stories than through our poetry or our novels or our formal histories. It should be said that the excessive use of dialect in American short stories since 1870 has prevented our later writers from being read as widely as they would otherwise have been. In spite of the growing European interest in the negro, for example, no one has attempted a translation of the Uncle Remus stories.

I need hardly say that another cause of foreign interest in American literature is the prevalence in it of American humor. Whether we like it or not we are considered funny folks. From Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain Americans have been the chief purveyors of wholesome merriment. We have not only fired the laugh heard round the world but we have done more than any other nation to democratize laughter itself. Pretension, hypocrisy, conventionality, pomposity—these are the targets. "At bottom," says Dr. Van Dyke, "American humor is based upon the democratic assumption that the artificial distinctions and conventional phrases of life are in themselves amusing."

When Gladstone was asked what he considered the leading characteristic of American humor he promptly replied "Exaggeration," and illustrated his point by the story of an American merchant who, when the price of ink rose, claimed to have saved a hundred thousand dollars a year by not dotting his "i's." Whether we commend or not the aptness of this illustration there is no doubt that from the appearance of Irving's "Knickerbocker History of New York" (1809) to the present time exaggeration has been part of our humor—and the suggestion has been made that it is a trait inherited from our Elizabethan ancestors. "Mark Twain," says Professor Brander Matthews, "is the foremost of American humorists because he thus relates us to our Elizabethan origins." On the contrary Mark Twain seems to me the foremost of our humorists not because he suggests the past but solely because he expresses the present. The explanation of exaggeration in American humor is to be sought primarily in the bigness of the things that confront the American on all sides. The length of American rivers, the height of American mountains, the distance from North to South and from East to West, the phenomenal growth of American population, the gigantic combinations of American capital, the varied products of American soil—these things soon begot a sort of interstate and then international rivalry that found ready expression in humorous overstatement.

The foreign view of the magnitude of things American was well expressed by a Frenchman in a footnote to a translation of Cooper's novels. Cooper, you remember, speaks of trees usually by their first names. He does not say a hickory tree or an oak tree or a poplar tree but a hickory, an oak, a poplar. In one passage he says that Deerslayer dismounted and hitched his horse to the limb of a locust. The Frenchman's dictionary knew no locust but the insect (sauterelle) but added the following illuminating note: "In America these insects grow to such a size that horses are often hitched to their dead limbs."

The foreigner's appreciation of the skilful use to which exaggeration is put in American humor may be measured in part by the esteem in which Mark Twain's works are held both in England and on the continent: "Since the death of Charles Dickens," said the *Evening Standard* of London, "no writer of English has been so generally read." "He was more esteemed in Germany," said the *Berlinea Zeitung am Mittag*, "than all the French and English humorists put together."

The last characteristic of American literature that I shall mention deserves far more time than can be given it here. It is a characteristic that has been most clearly stated by German critics. In his "History of American Literature" Eduard Engel says: "So far from being contaminated by the Americans' alleged love of gain getting, so far from being affected by what is proverbially known as Yankeeism, American literature shows decidedly less of these very traits than do the literatures of most other nations. In fact, the fundamental characteristic of American literature is its idealism. All great writers in America—all writers considered great—have been without exception idealists, yes, idealists raised to the nth power and it is no accident that from an American poet, from Longfellow, the world has received that exquisite poem whose refrain, Excelsior, has become the watchword of idealists in all lands."

This is high praise to pay American literature but it is abundantly merited. Engel might have mentioned, in addition to Longfellow's familiar poem, Emerson's "Forerunners," Hawthorne's "Great Stone Face," Poe's "Eldorado," Lowell's "L'Envoi to the Muse," Holmes's "Chambered Nautilus," Whittier's "Vanishers," or Lanier's "Song of the Chattahoochee." They are one and all instinct with an idealism as pure and as high as any literature can show. Indeed "The Great Stone Face" seems to me the highest reach of idealism to which an American short story has ever attained. It sets a standard by which any nation may measure its progress in moral and intellectual worth.

But let me remind you that many of our critics concede idealism to American literature but deny it to American life. This indeed is one of the battlegrounds of conflicting opinion. To my mind the man who sees in the typical American only or chiefly the greedy money-getter or the rabid office-seeker is suffering sorely from spiritual myopia. There are, it must be remembered, two kinds of idealism: the idealism that dreams and the idealism that does. In the former the vision is an end in itself, in the latter it is only ameans to an end. The former we may call subjective idealism, the latter constructive idealism. This kind of idealism, the constructive type, has characterized the American people from the beginning. It explains why in the Hall of Fame men of action take precedence of men of men of abstract thought. It explains the difference of attitude on the part of Americans toward millionaires who inherit or hoard their wealth and those who expend it constructively: we have learned that *Richesse oblige*. It explains why Emerson and Jefferson are quoted more often by men of all shades of opinion than any other two writers in our literature. It explains why Poe is coming into his own: we are beginning to recognize that he was essentially American because he was as truly a constructive force in American literature as was Edwards in theology or Jefferson in politics. It explains our loyalty to the stars and bars as well as to the stars and stripes. It explains the sweep of our civilization westward to the Pacific and across the Pacific to the Philippine Islands. It explains our capacity for expecting great things.

It explains our dissatisfaction with the present condition of our schools and colleges, of our churches and charitable organizations, of our city governments, our state governments, and our national government. This dissatisfaction is not weak or querulous. It is born of an ingrained idealism. It is constructive in its ends and beneficent in its purposes. It is *Excelsior* set to march time.

The American Indian, the American short story, American humor, and American idealism—these are the elements of our literature that have made the deepest impression upon the European mind. Why? There seems to me only one answer: these are the elements in which the European, consciously or unconsciously, sees or feels something distinctively and essentially American. Other national literatures concern themselves with Indians (or other savage peoples,) with the short story, with humor, with idealism. Indeed I know of no European nation whose literature cannot show notable achievements in all of these reaches of literary effort. But there is something about the American achievement in these things that stamps itself as nationally characteristic. What is it? It is, I believe, the action and interaction of two mighty forces, forces which have long been recognized in our political life, our religious life, our economic life, and our educational life, but which have not been recognized in our literature. These forces are individualism and collectivism, or, as I prefer to call them, individualism and institutionalism. "Individualism, as defined by ex-president Eliot in *The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy*, is that tendency in human society to emphasize the rights of each person and to place a high value on initiative."

Collectiveism is the tendency to distrust individual initiative and to hold "that the interest of the many should override the interest of the individual," and, whenever the two conflict, should control social action, and yet does not propose to extinguish the individual but only to restrict him for the common good, including his own." Since 1870 collectivism as a social force, Dr. Eliot finds, has made steady gains in our industries, education, and government. Evidently Dr. Eliot's definitions avail little in literature when it is not a question of rights, social or otherwise, but a question of how life is looked at and how character is protrayed.

Professor Kuno Francke comments on these two forces, as they manifest themselves in German literature, as follows: "It seems to me that all literary development is determined by the encessant conflict of two elemental human tendences: the tendency toward freedom and the tendency toward collective organization. The former leads to the observation and representation of what ever is striking, genuine, individual; in short to realism. The latter leads to the observation ann representation of whatever is beautiful, significant, universal; in short to idealism". Unchecked individualism may lead to a "vulgar naturalism or a fanatic mysticism". Unchecked collectivism may lead to "an empty conventionalism".

Without attempting to modify, far less to contcovett, the point of view which Professor Francke has so searchingly and brilliantly illustrated in his great book, let us phrase the poblem, as it relates to American literature, a little differently. Let us call individualism the tendency to regard and to potray human character as a separate unit. Let us call institutionalism the tendency to potray human character in unit groups. An individualist, then, potrays character in the manner of a psychologist; and institutionalist, in the manner of a sociologist. The one views life as so many separate peaks; the other as a seried range.

De Foe was par excellence an individualist when he created the character of Robinson Crusoe. Emerson became the philosopher of individualism when he said: Society everywhere is a conspiracy against the manhood of one its members. Society is a joint stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bred to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater". Kipling has illustrated excessive institutionalism in the character of Tomlinson. Thackery in the character of Becky Sharp. Tomlinson was so individual that neither Saint Peter nor the devil could find a place for him; Becky Sharp was so much a prey of the social forces about her that Thackery himself said he was unable to forsee what she would do at any particular moment.

But what about the Indian? Why, the Indian has played an important role in our literature and in our life partly because he has stimulated thought above the limits of individualism and institutionalism. Never till ou