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American Traits as Seen by the French

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AMERICAN TRAITS AS SEEN BY THE FRENCH

I

Long before the vogue of Taine's theory of literary criticism made it incumbent on the critic to explain the characteristics of his author by *race*, *milieu*, and *moment*, many of his compatriots had already employed the method—in so far, at least, as the element of environment is concerned—in attempting to account for the peculiarities of American novelists. Each of these attempts, whether it was successful or not, gives us a glimpse of the author's conception of the American people. If we supplement the information obtained in this way with that contained in the direct affirmations which they have made concerning our national characteristics, we have sufficient data to enable us to determine what, in their estimation, our leading traits are.

We find, as might have been expected, that the trait most frequently noted in us by these old-world critics is energy. It was in the fifties that translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the best of the tales of Poe convinced men of letters in France, where indifference to the works of American authors had been only half dispelled by the popularity of Cooper's novels, that there existed on this side of the Atlantic a literature worthy of their notice. Philarète Chasles, one of the first of them to take a serious interest in our literary productions, recognized energy as one of our leading characteristics when he said, in 1852, "In this young world activity is forgiven everything." In the following year the eccentric novelist and critic, Barbey d'Aureilly, spoke of it in the first of his articles on Poe. He was attracted by Poe's genius for the fantastic, which he considered to be of a very high order. He felt, however, that such a genius had no chance in a country so "feverishly active" as America.

"America is not kind to dreamers," he says, "it is too active to understand them"; and he adds, apropos of the deciphering of the cryptogram in the *Gold Bug*: "To be sure, in order to render probable and acceptable the explanation which he gives us, the author shows a very special talent . . . you lose your breath following him in his audacious inductions, but the fantastic has disappeared and you see, instead of the dreamer, only a robust, ingenious, obsti-

nate nature wrestling with a difficulty and determined to conquer it. Is not that the complete American?"

Two years later Emile Montégut, one of the most intelligent and best informed of our French critics, hazards the assertion—with just how much seriousness we are left to conjecture—that the excessive activity of Americans has led to widespread insanity among them. It is thus that he accounts for the large number of demented personages in the writings of Poe, Hawthorne, Willis, and others. "It seems that insanity must be endemic among this excessively feverish and nervous people," he says, "a people active beyond measure, restless, agitated, frenzied in its pursuit of success and wealth." The poet Baudelaire, in the introduction to the first volume of his remarkable translation of Poe's tales (1856), takes up the refrain of d'Aureville. "Poe represents," he says, "that portion of American genius that rejoices over an obstacle surmounted, an enigma explained, a *tour de force* successfully accomplished." About the same time, M. L. Cartier, a contributor to the *Figaro*, accounts for another peculiarity of Poe in the same way. He claims that the absence of sentiment in his tales is due to the fact that there is no leisure in America: "He is the natural product of a busy democracy that has no time to spend on sentimental theorizing, on the slow development of a passion, on the oft repeated sweet nothings of love." It was in this year, too, that George Sand declared in one of her few critical essays that Cooper personified the genius of America, inasmuch as he was the painter of energy overcoming all obstacles—of "sailors crossing the seas in search of unknown lands," of "hardy pioneers victorious everywhere over savage tribes and subduing nature herself in her most dreadful sanctuaries."

In the following year Louis Étienne, a professor of literature, made his contribution to French criticism of Poe in an essay showing, in many respects, keen insight and unusual breadth of view. The *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, bears the "stamp of America," in his opinion because it reveals an intense love of adventure. "Not content with chronicles of real explorations," he writes, "America requires tales of fictitious ones." Seven years later, in 1863, Charles de Moüy, a diplomatist of considerable ability, felt impelled, in his turn, to write an appreciation of Poe, whom he proposes to consider "*de haut, et, pour ainsi dire, par les sommets.*" And from his lofty point of view he likewise

discerns the genius of America in the object of her gaze. Like M. Étienne he sees the mark of the American in Poe's love of adventure, in his "passion for hypotheses," in his "daring quest of the impossible," in his "passionate yearning for the unknown." And in comparatively recent times (1887) the brilliant essayist and editor, Remy de Gourmont, finds in the hurried life of Americans the explanation of the crudities which he notes in American humour. "In haste to live its life," he says, "America can not take time to meditate upon the depth or the delicacy of witticism—it is a burst of gaiety that it seeks, a sudden flash that shall quicken the pulse. . . . The productions of American humourists are railway literature."

Next to excessive activity, the trait they have most frequently noted is materialism: we are too practical, they say, we care only for industrial pursuits, we do not believe in the supernatural, and, above all, we care for nothing but money and material comfort. Barbey d'Aureville, who was greatly perturbed because the air of mystery surrounding the discovery of the treasure in the *Gold Bug* was not maintained to the end, attributed the rational explanation of the incident to the aversion of Americans for the supernatural. Furthermore, he perceives in this same episode an indication of our passion for wealth. "No one but an American," he declares with fine scorn, "could have thus worked his brain up to a frenzy over such a barren idea as the discovery of a treasure of precious stones or silver worth a million and a half of dollars." In the following year Montégut asserts that the realism of Mrs. Cummins's *Lamplighter*, its "unromantic incidents," its "commonplace characters," are just what one would expect to find in a "country, without a past," where there is "no motive for reverie, for the enjoyment of the fine arts or of nature"; and a little farther on he says that we are "relentless" in our "pursuit of success and riches." The absence of reverie in America is complained of by M. Cartier also, who claims that Poe's tales present, in this respect, a marked contrast to those of Hoffmann. Two years later Baude-laire writes: "Over there so much value is attached to time and money. Material activity, exaggerated to the proportions of a national mania, leaves little place in the mind for the things that are not of the world." In the course of the next few years half a dozen other writers comment on various phases of this materialism. The first of them, George Sand, does not seem, however,

to consider our preoccupation with material things a fault. On the contrary, it is, in her judgment, "this life of reality and material utility which constitutes the strength of North America." M. Étienne thinks that Poe's *Descent into the Maelstrom* must appeal to the American because it shows him how he might extricate himself from a most difficult position. He finds evidence of our love of the practical in the writings of Hawthorne also, whose imagination, he says, bears the genuine American stamp in that it accepts the supernatural only on condition that it "prove something," that it serve some "practical end." Our inability to appreciate works of art is pointed out by Montégut, who sees an indication of it in the "weakness and hesitation" displayed by Hawthorne in his comments on art in the *Marble Faun*, a weakness which, he claims, is characteristic of Americans. He finds in this writer, too, proof of America's utilitarianism. Hawthorne's philosophy, he says, is the German philosophy "modified to meet American requirements," it is "utilitarian idealism." M. Forgues, the journalist who introduced Poe to the readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, says bluntly, though not in the Poe essay, that Americans are "industrial, matter-of-fact, and dull." Considerably later, in 1874, the talented novelist and essayist, Madame Blanc, speaks of our propensity for making money in terms quite as plain and quite as uncomplimentary when she says that we are a "people consumed with the first thirst for sudden wealth." Finally, at the very end of the century, our commercial instinct is perceived in the writings of Poe. Remy de Gourmont asserts that Poe is a much more representative American than Emerson or Walt Whitman because his mind had a "practical side." "Had he not possessed a literary faculty," he says, "he would have been a wonderful business man, a promoter of the first order."

Feverishly active and grossly materialistic, we are also, in the opinion of certain French critics, lacking in literary taste. In the first place, they say, we scorn simplicity and accuracy. "The Americans," writes Philarète Chasles, apropos of Herman Melville's *Mardi*, "like all people who have no personal literature, think that simplicity is a vulgar thing and truth of detail contemptible. Hyperbole is one of the most common vices of literatures that are young and literatures that are decadent." M. Étienne considers the popularity enjoyed by such tales as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, *The*

Purloined Letter, and *The Gold Bug* as proof that the Americans confuse the astonishing with the admirable. "Their stories are masterpieces of ingenuity," he says, but he doubts whether ingenuity carried to this excess is literature. Barbey d'Aurevilly also speaks of this trait. "The genius of America," he says, "enjoys only what is astonishing." Another witness to our aversion for simplicity is to be found in M. de Moüy, who maintains in his appreciation of Poe that the taste of Poe's country for unbridled extravagance in the realm of the imagination is revealed in his "monstrous personages," in his "superhuman clowns," in his "supernatural scenes." Furthermore, M. de Moüy sees in the double suicide of Poe's *Assignment*, an effect of the fondness of Americans for "brutal conclusions." In his tales taken as a whole, he sees the "bloody brutality of a people that makes frequent use of the revolver." Our sense of humour seems to no less eminent a critic than Remy de Gourmont to lack delicacy. "American humour," he says, "employs methods that are either childish or bizarre; hyperbole, one should say hyper-hyperbole, antithesis, fantastic enumerations, illogical gradations, *qui pro quos* and, above all, the use of slang, of outlandish spelling, of grammatical constructions that make one shudder."

The attitude of our critics, which, up to this point, has been, in the main, decidedly unsympathetic, becomes, in their comments on our religious and moral tendencies, much more friendly. Although Montégut did not say in so many words that Americans were religious, it is clear that such was his conviction, for he considered Hawthorne, who, in his opinion, was Puritanism personified, as being, next to Emerson, the most typical American the United States had produced. John Lemoine, writing for the *Figaro*, voices the same sentiment when he says of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Its prodigious success in America and in England is explained by the fact that it is profoundly impregnated, and, as it were, saturated with the spirit of the Bible." In an essay on the "Biblical Novel," published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1853), M. Forgues asserts that the author of the *Wide, Wide World* and of *Queechy* endeavoured to show what an important place the Bible holds in American life. This trait is recognized also by M. Étienne, who says, speaking of Poe:

"In America materialism must not only preserve an air of spirituality, it must try to be orthodox. Edgar Poe takes care not to place himself in an

attitude of opposition to the doctrines of Holy Writ. In *Mesmeric Revelation* he is careful not to pass over in silence the resurrection of the body."

Madame Blanc notes that religion is never made a subject of jest by our humourists. Apropos of Mark Twain she says, "There are subjects which the most audacious American humourist never turns into ridicule—it is a superiority of their light literature over our own."

Montégut and Madame Blanc have spoken also of the morality of Americans. The former, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1853), recognizes purity of morals as an American trait. He speaks of the "pure morals" of our home life; he says that the vices peculiar to us are "petty hypocrisy, austerity, and hard-heartedness in small things, vices which are, as it were, the infirmities contracted as a result of a too narrow life and of Puritan habits uncorrected by education." Again, he says: "Americans lead a life industrious and pure. They are plebeians, they are merchants and farmers, and society with its corruption is not to be found there in spite of all their talk about 'fashionable life.'" Madame Blanc likewise commends America for its high moral tone. She notes, especially, the attitude of men toward women. In 1872 she says in an article on Mark Twain, "The distinctive mark of all American humourists,—and it does them honour,—is that they have a profound respect for modesty; any girl could read these amusing sketches with perfect propriety." On reading the *Lady of the Aroostook*, she was impressed by the chivalry of American men: "The work acquaints us with another characteristic of Yankee character, the respectful protection offered, under all circumstances, by the strong sex to the weaker one."

The love of equality in America has been mentioned by French critics of our fiction less frequently than one would suppose. A contributor to the *Revue Encyclopédique*, one of the leading literary journals of France in the second quarter of the last century, touches on this subject in connection with Cooper's *Bravo*. He asserts that the "democracy of a Boston democrat" is exhibited in the character of Antonio, who "personified all the republican repugnance of the author." Baudelaire speaks of America as a country where there are "millions of sovereigns, a country without a capital, properly so called, and without an aristocracy." M. Forgues recognizes the trait but finds it strangely mingled with a fondness for titles. Apropos of Eliza-

beth Wetherell's *Queechy* he writes, "The love of titles is amalgamated in a remarkable fashion with the sentiment of political equality in this peculiar people," and in support of his claim ventures the assertion that a fair share of the success of this novel may perhaps be attributed to the fact that the "little Yankee housekeeper" marries the "aristocratic Carleton."

II

Let us now examine these appreciations with a view to discovering some of the graver errors of interpretation into which the authors have been led by the very natural tendency to consider the characteristics of a foreign writer as indicative of national traits. D'Aurevilly and Baudelaire both held that Poe's passion for grappling with difficulties stamped him as an American. In so doing they failed to observe that the tasks that Poe loved are of an entirely different order from those that appeal to the average American. The difficulties with which he loved to grapple were of a purely intellectual nature. He had a passion for solving riddles great and small. He challenged the world to submit to him a cryptogram that he could not decipher. In *Eureka* he attempted to solve the riddle of the creation of the universe. He loved to forge long chains of reasoning, such as we find in *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*, in *The Purloined Letter*, and in *The Mystery of Marie Roget*. Triumphs of the intellect were the victories that delighted him. But who will assert that Americans, as a rule, are characterized by a passion for solving problems merely for the pleasure of solving them? The American, whether it be a fault or not, is not given to abstract speculation or to pure mathematics. He is interested in overcoming difficulties of a much more material nature. It is in the triumphs of mechanical ingenuity and of commercial enterprise that he rejoices. The only problems he cares to solve are those that have some practical value. The fallacy in the logic of d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire appears also in that of M. de Moüy. Poe's "daring quest of the impossible," his "passionate yearning for the unknown," cannot be explained by a supposed American taste for adventure, for if Americans have a taste for adventure, it is certainly not for adventure in the region of speculative philosophy. As to Montégut's assertion that the works of some of our writers indicate that insanity is endemic among us and the

suggestion that this is due to our "feverish, nervous, excessive activity," it may be said, assuming that the statement was made in seriousness, that so far at least as Poe is concerned—and of all American writers Poe looms largest on the French horizon—the multiplicity of maniacs in his tales may be explained in a much simpler way. If, as it seems probable, after years of controversy among men of letters it has been finally established by medical and psychological experts that Poe was not at all times wholly sane, if it is true, as asserted by that gifted young critic, Émile Hennequin, that the most painstaking investigations have never been able to discover the prototypes of the personages of his tales, if M. Lauvrière has demonstrated in a work crowned by the French Academy that Poe and his heroes are one and the same person; then the rational view concerning this matter would seem to be that the multiplicity of maniacs in his stories is due to the author's own mental aberration. "To create them," says Hennequin, "he had only to consult the needs of his story and to draw from the experiences of his own soul, disordered, torn, maddened, and diseased, the convulsions of which were observed by his lucidly cold intelligence." In his mental condition, too, is to be found, apparently, the explanation of the lack of sentiment in his tales. This peculiarity was not due to the fact that he lived in the midst of a democracy too busy to read love stories, as was claimed by M. Cartier—and the proof is that among all our writers of fiction Poe is almost the only one who has not used love as a motive of interest—it was due rather to his passion for originality and to his morbidity, which made it difficult for him to take an interest in perfectly normal human beings. "Two fluttering hearts, two mouths uniting in a kiss, that would be life and health," says M. Arnould; "the domain of Poe is disease, crime, and death."

The appreciations dealing with our materialistic tendencies also contain some curious errors. The assertion that an American would prize the story of *The Maelstrom* for its practical value is too absurd to discuss, but deserves mention because it shows what exaggerated notions of a foreign people it is possible for even an intelligent, well educated person to entertain. What shall we say of Montégut's contention that the realism of *The Lamplighter* is due to the fact that it was written in a new country? Does he forget that in this same country, without a past, without "motive for reverie or for the enjoyment of the fine arts," were

produced the weird novels of Charles Brockden Brown, the dreamy romances of Hawthorne, and the fantastic tales of Poe? That he greatly exaggerates the influence of environment becomes apparent when one reflects that in France, in spite of its long and glorious past, in spite of its countless "motives for reverie and the enjoyment of the fine arts," the spirit of realism was dominant for more than a quarter of a century, not only in literature, but in art and philosophy as well. And what of d'Aurevilly's views concerning the ending of *The Gold Bug*? Does the fact that Poe gives a rational explanation of the finding of the treasure show that Americans have an aversion for the mysterious, for the supernatural? Those who are acquainted with Poe's tastes will not think so. They will see in it not so much a reflection of American character as a result of his love of solving problems. Furthermore, does the incident show that Americans are fond of money? If it does, then the discovery of the treasure in *The Count of Monte Cristo* must reveal the same trait in the French. The search for hidden treasure is a very old theme and one of which America has by no means a monopoly. Much nearer the truth, we take it, is the conclusion reached by M. Arnould, which is that this episode, instead of being the true climax of the story, is really only a pretext for the long chain of reasoning by which the discovery is brought about. Is not, after all, the final impression left by the story, a feeling of amazement at the wonderful cleverness shown by the astute Legrand in deciphering and interpreting the cryptogram? Again, was there in Poe the making of a business man? Could he, if he had let literature alone, have become a successful promoter of business enterprises? The story of his life furnishes no indication that such was the case. On the contrary, he seems to have been peculiarly lacking in business sense. If he had been a practical man, he would not always have been on the verge of starvation.

Among the criticisms concerning our literary taste, the most curious perhaps are those of M. de Moüy. Why he should conclude that Poe's "monstrous personages" and his "superhuman clowns" reveal a fondness, on the part of Americans, for unbridled extravagance is not clear. Of many of the works of Balzac it has been said, by no less eminent a scholar and critic than Gustave Lanson, that no words can be found that are strong enough to characterize the sickening extravagance of their plots. And what sane critic will deny that both the prose and poetry of

Victor Hugo often betray frantic extravagance. *L'Homme qui rit* and *Magnitudo Parvi* are veritable debauches of the imagination. But it would be absurd to argue that the wild extravagance to be found in the works of these two writers reveals a French trait. The truth is, it reveals only a trait of Balzac and of Hugo, just as Poe's predilection for "monstrous personages" reveals merely a peculiarity of Poe. Nothing in the tales of the American writer has been more severely and persistently criticized by his fellow countrymen than this very extravagance. It is because of the abnormality, the grotesqueness, and the monstrosity of his creations, that he has not been accorded, in his own land, a position of undisputed pre-eminence among American writers of fiction. And what of the assertion that Poe's tales reveal the brutality of the American people, a "people that makes frequent use of the revolver"? As to the double suicide in *Assignment*,—it is no more brutal than the deliberate shooting of a boy by his father in spite of the entreaties of the mother, which constitutes the *dénouement* of Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone*, a *dénouement* of which it has been said that there is none more brutal in any language. And yet who will claim that this story indicates brutality in the French people?

Of the assertions made in connection with the religious aspect of American character, the most questionable, perhaps, is that concerning the cause of the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. That its popularity in America was not due to its being saturated with the spirit of the Bible, is indicated by the fact that other novels, quite as religious, have by no means enjoyed the same degree of popularity. *The Lamplighter*, for instance, is a novel saturated, if there ever was one, with the spirit of the Bible, but it is to-day so nearly forgotten that in eight out of eleven histories of American literature, chosen at random, neither the book nor the author is even mentioned. The immediate success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the United States was doubtless due to its timeliness; but its enduring fame, both at home and abroad, must be attributed to its intensely human quality, to the extraordinary strength of its emotional appeal.

In this discussion we have called attention only to the most obvious errors of interpretation. Others could probably be found. The claim, for instance, that Poe's *Mesmeric Revelation* owes its origin to the author's desire to show respect for American orthodoxy in religion, and the assertion that the marriage of

the "little Yankee housekeeper" with the "aristocratic Carleton" betrays in our people a hidden longing for titles, are at least open to question. Other contentions, not cited among the foregoing but equally dubious, could be mentioned, such, for example, as the claim that Poe's sadness, as revealed in his tales, is a reflection of the "profound and solemn emotion of the pioneer wandering over the prairies." But we believe that enough mistakes have been pointed out to show the weakness of the Taine method when applied by the average man of letters to the writers of a foreign country. The failure of so many attempts to explain the peculiarities of Poe and other American writers by the environment is only one more demonstration of the truth that in every man of genius there is something for which environment can not account, something which is peculiar to him alone and in virtue of which he is himself.

III

There are excellent reasons for calling in question the finality of the verdict of these judges. It is too much to expect d'Aurevilly, Moüy, and Gourmont, representatives of the French nobility, to look with unprejudiced eyes upon a country where democratic ideals prevail; Montégut, ardent Catholic that he was, could not forgive us our Protestantism; Baudelaire hated America because he was convinced that it persecuted his idol, Poe. Furthermore, neither they nor any of the other critics whose opinions we have cited, had ever been in America, so that the information they possessed concerning us was at best second-hand. But, strange as it may seem, their opinions are found to be in substantial accord with those of Tocqueville and Paul Bourget, two eyewitnesses whose intelligence, impartiality, and keenness of observation cannot be questioned. Although Tocqueville does not seem to have considered us active to excess, he did find us money-loving, incredulous, imaginative, and worldly. "I know of no other country," he says, in his *Democracy in America*, "in which the love of money has taken deeper root." And although Bourget admires the American businessman for his energy, although he is pleased to discover among us an ardent desire for knowledge and a certain craving for art, he at the same time condemns that abuse of energy which makes competition in our business world so ferocious, which renders our

sports dangerous, violent, and even brutal, which is responsible in short for a very general tendency to overshoot the mark. Our buildings are too high, our trains run too fast, our newspapers are too big, we spend money too lavishly. "Energy and will," he says, "are developed to the point of hypertrophy." He deplures also the utilitarianism which blinds us to the value of everything that cannot be put to immediate use. America, he says, is "supersaturated with the love of the practical. Its whole educational system is determined by the sole desire to make it practical." The religious phase of American character was noted both by Tocqueville and Bourget, the former declaring that the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck his attention, the latter giving it a rank among American traits second only to the love of activity. As to the high level of morals in our country, they are also substantially agreed.

In view of this unexpected confirmation of the opinions of the literary critics, it may be well to give them a sober second thought, especially those that are the most unflattering to us. In fact, it requires but little reflection to discover that they are not wholly without foundation. Take, for example, the criticism which charges us with being excessively active. Are we quite sure that our life is not too strenuous? Do we not, at times, wonder whether the American pace is not too rapid, whether we are not living too fast? What is our notion of recreation? Travelling with us is largely a matter of getting over ground. "The American motorist," says F. Hopkinson Smith, "possessed by the demon of haste, drives into a city, sees the city hall, imagines he has seen everything, and goes on to the next town." It has been observed by another writer, that when the American tourist reaches the Rhine, whose wonderful scenery he has travelled thousands of miles to see, he takes the express boat and rushes past it as fast as possible. The state of exhaustion in which we reach home after our summer outings has become one of our stock jokes. The truth is, as Alain Locke stated not long ago in the *North American Review*, that we are a "people who have not as yet made any real distinction between work and play." And are not the lack of thoroughness and the wastefulness that are so common in our country due in large measure to excessive haste, to our mania for "getting things done"? Rejoicing in our strength, impatient of restraint, confident of our

ability to "go it alone," we plunge ahead, only to discover, when too late, that our work must be done over again.

"The craze for speeding in a literal sense," says the *Independent* apropos of the fast driving of automobiles in America, "is only one phase of our acceleration madness in general. . . . The American not only tears and sweats to catch his car or his train, to 'turn over his capital,' to make record time in building sky-scrapers. . . . he also accelerates his 'education' and his 'culture.' . . . He would accelerate the kingdom of heaven if it could be made to come within observation, so that he could watch the speedometer."

Must we not admit, also, that we do have an inveterate tendency to go to extremes? In what other country do fads spring up and flourish as they do in our own? In what other country are *crazes* so common? There is scarcely a moment when hysteria, in one form or another, can not be seen in our midst. The cry of "safety first" now heard in our land is a confession that we had gone too far in our craze for speed. The present reaction against the sky-scraper in New York indicates that the mania for tall buildings is passing. And although there are no indications that the habit of lavish spending is becoming less noticeable among us, we are beginning to recognize that it is a national evil. Only recently one of our most conservative and highly esteemed journals asserted, editorially, that "we are unquestionably the most extravagant people in the world."

Finally, are we not too materialistic in our ideals? Brander Matthews recently called attention to the fact that America has done very little toward the advancement of science. He notes with chagrin that of the twelve great scientific discoveries credited to the nineteenth century by Alfred Russel Wallace, there is not a single one to which America can justly lay claim. He declares, furthermore, that not one of the chief leaders of art, during this period, was native to our country. When M. Brunetière, the great French critic, visited us in 1897, he said that one of the two things that stand in the way of the higher civilization in the United States is the spirit of commercialism; and Hamilton W. Mabie, commenting on the utterance, made the following admission:

"This shrewd judgment of one of the most intelligent foreigners that has visited the country in late years finds confirmation in the judgment of the best informed Americans. The higher interests of the nation are imperilled by—the tendency to let the development of the soul of the country wait on the development of its land and its mineral resources and its trade."

Again, if it is true, as Bourget affirms, that a nation's ideal is revealed in its educational system, then it would seem that our ideal is highly utilitarian, for education in America is every day becoming more and more practical. Vocational training is now being introduced into our public schools, and in some quarters we are even asked to do away with the study of history, civics, and economics in order to make room for it. One may even wonder whether the highest function of the university, the pursuit of truth for its own sake, is not in danger of being lost sight of temporarily, as a result of the discovery of the great service which the university can render society by helping it solve its problems. No matter how important this newly discovered function may be, no matter how desirable vocational training may be, the solving of practical problems is not disinterested science, and the ability to earn a living is not a liberal education.

When driven into a corner, and compelled to acknowledge that in certain fields of endeavour we have not reached the highest levels, we invariably excuse ourselves on the ground of necessity. Look at the obstacles we have had to overcome, we say, in taking possession of this continent and winning it for civilization, and consider how young our nation is. Is it any wonder that energy has been at a premium among us? Is it any wonder that the development of our highest intellectual powers, of our imagination, and of our aesthetic sense has been neglected? We have had no time for dreaming, we have had no time to follow learning for its own sake. We have been obliged to be practical and prosaic. But, however satisfactory this excuse may have been in the past, it is every day losing something of its force. Professor Matthews reminds us that more than seventy-five years ago Emerson asserted that the world's expectation of us was not being fulfilled, because we were centring our efforts on the development of mechanical skill. We may well be proud of our achievements in the field of invention, of our progress along material lines, but we can hasten the coming of the day when the world's expectation of us shall be fulfilled if we remember that the industrial arts may flourish side by side with science and the fine arts. The country in which industrial development has been most rapid in recent years, is famous among nations for its scientists and its philosophers; and the country to which we owe the discovery of radium, the country

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which is the artist's Mecca, is at the same time the country which has given us the automobile and which is our most formidable rival in the struggle for the conquest of the air.

GEORGE D. MORRIS.

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