The View From Chesapeake Bay

An Experiment with the Image of America

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JUST BEFORE THE LAST WAR and during it I saw something and heard more of the life of those German refugees who had taken shelter together in a hotel at Central Park and spent their afternoons and evenings at a neighboring café—all the time intent on having as little to do with America as possible except in so far as it was necessary to brave the prairies in order to reach Hollywood. My pilot to this foreign island was an urbane Viennese who himself gave the appearance of being a man least likely to adjust to American circumstances, and yet did adjust nicely without losing his right of entry into this port of lost souls. I suppose it was these impressions that first set me to wonder about the strange phenomenon of Germans (and other Europeans) who in the face of America quickly fall apart into three groups: those who learn to paddle and swim around in the medium almost at once, those who at first flounder about desperately but gradually learn to swim, and those sad mortals who never take to America any more than America takes to them. However, between the ducks in water and the fish out of water one common German bond remains: they all come from the land of the philosophers, and therefore each one of them is an authority on America from the moment he sets foot on its soil—even before he sets foot: Germany

(indeed Europe) has been filled for generations with a babel of wildly authoritative voices each claiming to delineate the true image of America.

Far better than any personal example I could give about such attitudes toward America is the wise and witty report of one of those German refugees himself who at first floundered in America, then learned to swim beautifully, and ultimately fell so in love with the place that he could not bear entirely to leave it even though his chief fame and success lay in Europe. I refer to Carl Zuckmayer, whose screen play, *The Blue Angel*, gave us Marlene Dietrich, whose *Captain of Köpenick* has been successfully filmed for the second time, and whose *Devil's General*, written on his farm in Vermont, brought him back to Europe in 1948. At that time he gave an address in Zürich entitled 'America is Different.' This is certainly one of the best as well as briefest analyses that any European has ever written about America; among the few rivals it has is the charming book by his wife, signed with her maiden name, Alice Herdan, and called *The Farm in the Green Mountains*.

At the beginning of the address Zuckmayer makes fun of himself and of the opinions he held about America before he knew anything about America. I should like to quote from this since it leads us to the heart of the matter with which I am concerned, offering as it does a miniature anthology of the clichés about America that Europe has been passing down from generation to generation.

Zuckmayer tells how Hitler's annexation of Austria forced him to flee to Zürich and how he there met his friend Franz Werfel who still had a few francs in his pocket and so invited him to a wine shop for a glass of sherry—one at a time, that is.

As the golden glow of their third was suffusing them, their literary agent rushed in and urged them to go at once to the American consulate; he had made an appointment, they could still get in under the quota and obtain their visas. Zuckmayer continues:

> We had really had the intention . . . [of going], but that was before the first sherry. In a state of grey and sober resignation. Now we were already enlightened and capable of higher insight. American consulate? quota number? questionnaires? declaration? affidavit? What does all that have to do with us? we don't want to go over. Why should we with shameful, unseemly haste scurry for a land where we did not belong, which had nothing to offer us, from which we could learn nothing, to which we could tell nothing? I had never been there, Werfel only once for a short stay in New York. But we knew exactly what was over there and what wasn't, from the bad food to the psychic and erotic frigidity; and the sherry helped us to express all this in words of dithyrambic revulsion. A land of unimaginative standardization, of shallow materialism, of anti-intellectual automatism. A land without tradition, without culture, without urge to beauty or form, without metaphysics and without wine shops, a land of artificial fertilizer and the can opener, without refinement and without manure piles, without classicism and without slovenliness, without Melos, without Apollo, without Dionysus. Should we flee the slavery of European dictatorships only to submit to the tyranny of the dollar, business, advertising, and girl culture?

Both men did reach America finally, each by a hair-raisingly circuitous route, after the boom was down. The address continues with the painful hilarious story of the Americanization of Carl Zuckmayer and culminates in a description of the intrinsic nature of America and the Americans of unusual insight. If it were put into the hands of immigrants and visitors it might serve to put a halt, or at least a hesitation, to the compulsive neurotic repetition of the same old or slightly modernized sets of clichés with which European writers about America have filled their accounts for decade after decade.

For years now I have been interested in finding out how all this started, how the picture of America first took shape in the European mind, developed and changed up to our time. I shall not take you back to the Greeks and Romans who had already developed the set stereotypes about the noble savage and the golden lands across the Western Ocean, which the

Europeans then came to apply to America. I shall not even go back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when most of the contours of the image of America had already taken shape in the European mind. Only one example: that rumor about American frigidity was started four hundred years ago, by a monk in Mexico. I shall only go to Baltimore, to the time when that city was the chief port of entry of immigrants heading for the newly opened West. The national turnpike from Baltimore across the Alleghanies to the Ohio Valley had been opened in the early 1820s, and this was then the shortest and quickest way overland to the river routes of the Mississippi Valley.

I choose Baltimore because it affords us an unusual opportunity for carrying out a psychological experiment. By singular good luck, during these decades three Germans, all excellent writers and one a famous poet, came to Baltimore. They came not in the same year but at the same time of year, October, in its most glorious glow of autumn coloring which at that time (as we also know from English accounts) made the view from the bay over the environs of the Patapsco a vision of breathtaking beauty. Here we have three different men looking at the same city and countryside. What will happen: will they see the same things or will they see quite different things? It did not take the much publicized psychological experiments of some years ago to tell us: keen students of man have long known the answer, this part of the answer, that according to temperament, training, mood they will see three different things. Oddly enough, however, this comparative method has not been applied for testing the validity of the most famous and the most problematic of the three accounts of Baltimore, that of the poet Nicolaus Lenau. No one is to blame for this; a valid experiment cannot be arranged in the past the way it can in the present, and it was only in the course of a long search for American materials that I came upon the finest of the early accounts of autumnal Baltimore, that of the physician

Robert Wesselhoeft, who had some fame as a writer under the pseudonym Kahldorf. To be sure, the other account, by Prince Bernhard of Weimar, has long been known; it is simply that no one has thought of consulting it for this purpose.

Prince Bernhard's account comes first in time. On October 25, 1825, he set forth from Philadelphia in pleasant and distinguished company, including that of President John Quincy Adams. Much of what he tells us about Baltimore, interesting though it is and in part amusing, we can for our present purposes pass over except to make the general observation that the prince was a practical man as well as an unusually well-trained observer. Goethe himself had carefully briefed him in methods of observation and of recording his observations, and there was little of importance that the young man missed. If I add the fact that he was an unusually charming and convivial gentleman who thoroughly liked America and the Americans and if I add further that he wrote very well, you will understand why this is one of the most interesting and readable accounts of the early republic. As a general in the service of the Netherlands he cast an expert eye on Fort Henry and the other military installations, as a progressive industrialist he gave a vivid description of what may well have been the first almost completely automatic flour mill. He, of course, saw the medical school, the museums and monuments, and attended what was for him the great musical event of his entire American stay: the singing of a mass of Cimarosa at the cathedral in connection with the consecration of the new bishop of Boston. He particularly commends the female soloists and remarks that he does not remember having heard 'such quite outstandingly good music' in a long time.

I must quote his brief characterization of Baltimore society since what he says about the singing of American ladies contrasts so amusingly with what we shall hear Lenau say: 'Society in Baltimore I found unusually pleasant. At the dinners everything was free of constraint, and the conversation was

intelligent and vivacious. At the evening parties music was performed and excellently. The ladies, some of them very beautiful, usually sang, and they sang no less excellently.'

With all his practical, scientific, musical, and social interests he took time to enjoy the natural beauty of the environs: 'From Fort [Henry] there is a fine view of both branches of the Patapsco and its banks; especially beautiful were the trees in their natural dress of variegated leaves. On our return we ascended one of the hills overlooking the city and enjoyed another extremely beautiful view.'

Prince Bernhard saw the last of the autumn coloring around Baltimore in late October and early November. Nicolaus Lenau seven years later had the advantage of seeing it in early and mid October, and the extension of it after mid October along the beautiful road to Frederick, Hagerstown, Cumberland, Wheeling, and Pittsburgh. But you would not know it from reading his account. By the time he landed in Baltimore, he was not in the mood to see anything good about America; when he did, as on his first coming to shore, he admitted it only grudgingly and at once cancelled it by adding some nasty detail. Let us hear his first impressions of America, recorded not immediately but eight days later, and then let us try to find out where the trouble lay.

Lenau first tells us how he left the ship in the bay and took a boat to shore with the captain and another passenger; the last shallow stretch he was carried pickaback by a sturdy sailor and so on October 8, 1832, was safely put down on the American strand. He goes on:

> The view of the shore was charming. Scattered oaks on a meadow, grazing cattle, and a rod-long, ragged American with a raffish fur cap were the first things we saw. From this living rod (the fellow was so thin that we could really see nothing of him but his length) the captain inquired the way to a farm house where we could buy provisions. Mumbling and chewing tobacco the rod took us on a half-hour walk to a fairly nice brick house.

Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), View of Baltimore
from Beech Hill, the Seat of Robert Gilmor, Jr., 1822.
Courtesy of the Baltimore Museum of Art.

The large family of the resident received us quite politely. The women and the children were all dressed up. I was very much surprised at the luxury in this lonely remote farm house; I was less surprised at the showy, the ostentatious, the tasteless in the dress, especially of the children. I believe that when a person adorns himself in isolation, he does it without taste. Taste is a son of society, perhaps the last born. They at once served us cider . . . , butter and bread. The latter were good, but *cider* rhymes with *leider* [*alas*]. The American has no wine, no nightingale. Let him sit over his glass of cider listening to the mocking bird, with his dollars in his pocket; I would rather sit down with a German and over his wine listen to the sweet nightingale, even if my pocket is the poorer for it. Brother, these Americans have sordid shopkeeper souls that stink to high heaven. Dead to all the higher things of life, stone-dead. The nightingale is right not to put up with these wretches. It seems to me to be of grave significance that America has no nightingale. It looks like a poetic curse to me. The voice of a Niagara is needed to preach to these scoundrels that there are higher gods than those stamped out at the mint. You need only see these fellows at an inn to hate them forever. A long table, on each side fifty chairs (that is the way it is where I am staying); food, mostly meat, covers the whole table. Then the feed-bell rings, and a hundred Americans rush in, no one looks at another, no one says a word, each plunges at a platter, bolts down his food, then jumps up, upsets his chair, and rushes away to earn dollars.

Later in Lisbon, Ohio (March 5, 1833), where he was convalescing from a head injury after he was thrown from a sleigh on a wintry trip to his farm, he continues with his great and general curse on America under the heading of 'raw climate,' 'raw people.' He calls his hole in the head a useful one because through it his last illusions about America are escaping.

The rawness [of the people] is not the rawness of wild powerful nature; no, it is a tame one, and therefore doubly revolting. Buffon was right that in America human beings and animals degenerate from generation to generation. I have not yet seen a courageous dog, or a spirited horse, or a passionate man. Nature is frightfully limp. Here there are, as you know, no nightingales, and indeed no true song birds. Nature's heart never feels so glad

> or so sad that she has to sing. She has no sentiment and no fancy and so she cannot give her creatures any such thing. There is something very sad about seeing these burnt out people in their burnt out forests. Especially the German immigrants made a dismal impression on me. Once they have been here a few years, all the fire that they brought over from their homeland is lost, to the last spark. . . . At first the strange (frightfully strange) land seems unbearable to them and they are overcome by a violent homesickness. But how soon this homesickness is lost. I must rush, head over heels, to get out, out of here, otherwise I'll also lose mine. Here there is a treacherous air, a creeping death. In the great mist-shrouded land of America love has her veins gently opened and imperceptibly she bleeds to death. . . .

And again; 'America is the true land of the decline, the setting sun of humanity. The Atlantic Ocean, however, is the insulating belt for the spirit and all higher life. . . . '

The next day he wrote to another friend in Vienna:

> Here man lives in a strange cold hilarity that borders on the sinister. For the most part certainly this is the work of nature. Nature herself is cold. The contour of the mountains, the indentation of the valleys, all is monotonous and unimaginative. No true song bird. All is only twitter and unmelodic whisper. Even man has no voice for song. I was frequently at musicals where young ladies were heard singing. Their tone was indeed to be compared to that produced by running a wet finger around the rim of a filled water glass, a queer shrill noise, at best resembling that of a sea gull. I listened with deep horror, for I heard in every note the resonance of a frightful inner emptiness. Similarly these ladies do not look, they only gaze; there are only two wide-open cellar windows. . . . And obtrusive, by the way, is the high respect and great gallantry with which husbands here treat their wives. . . .Women are almost held sacred. I have already in my soul raised the secret and daring question whether the reason for this phenomenon might not be related to that which causes some German Alpine folk to hold their cretins sacred. . . .

With these ungallant remarks we must leave Lenau to find his lone way back to Europe, even though he still goes on at some length about the degeneration of American industry,

trade, and finance, the rootless mercenary character of the people, the superficial sham of their democracy and patriotism merely cloaking self-interest, the total discomfort in which they live.

Ever since the Lenau letters and reports on America were published in 1855, the question of their credibility and reliability has been debated. The anti-American elements in the German lands gleefully seized upon them as they had upon the earlier and equally vitriolic reports of Mrs. Frances Trollope, of Captain and Mrs. Basil Hall, then those of Charles Dickens and the others. Ferdinand Kürnberger that same year even made a Lenau-like figure the hero of his novel *The America-Weary* (*Der Amerikamüde*) in which he presented as sober factual truth a satiric anthology of all the worst that had been said about America and the Americans.

Those on the American side have sought to discredit Lenau's account by dwelling on his grave mental instability which was already a cause for worry to his friends before his trip and did, some twelve years later, end in hopeless insanity. Then there were the external mishaps of upsetting business reverses and grave physical illness to add to an utterly irrational subjectivity. What is more, there are flaws and distortions in his narrative. For instance, his account of the Exchange Hotel where he stayed is contrary to the facts and to the account of at least one distinguished British visitor who stayed there. One of the funniest lapses, however, previously unnoticed, is that he apparently believed that 'Yankee-Doodle' was the American national march and that it was taken seriously over here. His brother-in-law, Anton X. Schurz, who issued the biography and letters in 1855, does not name or identify the tune in any way, but he does print the musical notes, after appropriate remarks on this stiff, pretentious, boorish American national march, telling us that Lenau would often whistle it in ridicule. The real shock comes when we start to hum or play these notes: they no longer give us more than an intimation of

'Yankee-Doodle,' they have gone most of the way over to Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy.'

The only conclusion we can draw is that the musically cultured in the German lands had at this time only the foggiest notion of the Ninth Symphony.

But all this will really get us nowhere. The main point, after all, is that other men free from Lenau's personal afflictions also reacted with the same bitter hostility to America, even though not with his bizarre wit, vivid color, and wondrously wild sense of humor. If instead of concentrating on his eccentricities and lapses we examine what he had in common psychologically with the other hostile minds, and just how they all together differed from those who took a liking to America and reacted positively, Lenau's case will be more than an isolated curiosity, it will be symptomatic of a broad and long-extant area of European opinion about America. Furthermore, about Lenau himself we must never forget that the poems he wrote over here are, many of them, among his very finest, some of them among the finest that have ever been written on American themes. Even the melancholy that suffuses so many of them

here rings true and deep and there is a complete absence of that wild, witty zaniness that can make his prose so amusing. His poems on the tragic fate of the noble savage nobly carry on a noble three-thousand-year-old tradition. Aside from them and one other poem, equally melancholy and dignified, there is nothing really anti-American about them, nothing that could cause indignation even in the bosom of a Daughter of the American Revolution.

We shall have better perspectives on the whole matter if we first turn to the third well-known German writer who came to Baltimore, again several years later, but at the same time of the year. It was Robert Wesselhoeft, son and nephew of the Wesselhoeft and Frommann who had the great printing and publishing establishment at Jena. Through the Frommanns he knew Goethe well, as a boy listened wide-eyed to his stories, and even with his older brother received drawing lessons from him. This older brother Wilhelm and their friend, the artist Friedrich Preller, assisted Goethe in his meteorological studies by making drawings of cloud formations. During his student days Robert became one of the chief leaders of the new patriotic fraternity movement, the *Burschenschaften*, and was one of the chief instigators of the great German student jamboree on the Wartburg in 1817, which had the official sanction of liberal Duke Karl August himself. I shall merely mention here incidentally that in this connection Wesselhoeft later told his friend Longfellow a charming Goethe anecdote, that he stimulated Goethe to several verse epigrams, and that he also later, like Lenau, became a character in a mid-century novel, Ludwig Bechstein's *Berthold the Student*.

The whole atmosphere changed radically some two years later when a fanatic fraternity member assassinated August von Kotzebue. In the 1790s and early 1800s Kotzebue had been beyond doubt the world's most successful dramatist, with his series of sensational hits the mainstay of the theatre from Moscow and St. Petersburg to Boston and Baltimore. But

there were other reasons for doing him in: he had become a Russian agent, an unprincipled tool of reaction, and a cruelly sarcastic writer against all that the liberal students stood for. With his death the Metternich reaction stiffened, the fraternities were dissolved, the police continued on the alert for any secret survivals or revivals. Robert's brother escaped to America, Robert himself was safe for a while in liberal Weimar, but once outside the ducal territory, he was apprehended, imprisoned in the fortress of Magdeburg, and quizzed about secret revolutionary activities through long weary months. True, his confinement must have been quite loose; he made friends with the fortress physician, accompanied him freely on his rounds, and here first learned what a natural aptitude he had for medicine. What is more, he continued his career as a political writer for the liberal side, contributing articles to two of the leading periodicals and issuing such pamphlets as an oft-cited one on the fraternities and, best known, his work against hereditary nobility written under the pseudonym of Kahldorf and published by Heinrich Heine with a preface.

All that the Heine scholars know about Kahldorf is his real name, only one editor adds 'vanished in America' (*'in Amerika verschollen'*). To this editor apparently, going to America was the same as getting lost. Robert Wesselhoeft got lost so thoroughly that he became the friend and personal physician of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the physician of James Russell Lowell, Richard Henry Dana, ex-president Van Buren, and others eminent in their time. He was the next-door neighbor of Margaret Fuller, the friend and helper of Harriet Beecher Stowe in time of need, and the father of two sons who are to be found in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

The way it happened was that Duke Karl August's son and successor secured his release, reinstated him in Weimar government service, and made a very favorable financial settlement with him when his position became untenable because of the intrigues of the reactionary clique. So it was that Wesselhoeft

came to America with a small fortune, finished his medical studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and wrote a dissertation on the scarlet fever epidemic for which he received another doctoral degree in Switzerland at the University of Basel.

Newly settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he translated the novel written by his neighbor, the famous painter Washington Allston. Quite appropriately he dedicated this translation of *Monaldi* to his old friend, Friedrich Preller (who had made the last portrait of Goethe) and prefaced it with a charming letter. He felt strongly that friend Fritz ought to make a trip to America, and to show him why, he added this description of Baltimore, preceded by a few general remarks about America and the Americans:

> One thing stands high in the hearts of Americans, elevated higher than anything else, and this is the principle that had to take flight from the Old World, the principle of the sanctity and inviolability of the rights of the individual. To feel this, to acknowledge this benefaction with inexpressible gratitude, one must have been forced to live here. It is a consolation even for the loss of one's fatherland.
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> I only wish you could once see nature in America. The impression of rawness and wildness is the first thing that strikes us when we bring over with us the remembrance of the garden culture of the German soil as the last impression of our beloved homeland. Like the soil, the whole of life here still has an unutterable need for development. But let me not speak of that which human hands have made, let me speak of that which God's hand has made. This sky, this atmosphere, these tonalities of light! Italy has some of these phenomena, but as a whole the character of nature is a different one. Indescribable is an American Indian summer. You cannot study this in Italy any more than you can in the Kjölen Mountains. Take your stand on the charming Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Patapsco where Baltimore lies on a circle of descending hills, look at the blue water, the deep red and strong yellow oaks, beeches, bushes and vines, especially the luxuriant poison sumach which strives to reach out over the highest trees, and from the midst of the forests the

> splended evergreen of the cedars and the tree-tall rhododendron, now singly, now in groups—and above it: the clear, pure, inexpressibly delicate and transparent tone of the air, upward into the blue sky—and you have a coloring of landscape so gay, so remarkable, so utterly lightheartedly different from everything you have seen in the way of grey yellow autumn landscapes, that surely your brush will slip from your fingers. Fritz, Fritz, I know now: for the sake of your health you must come over, in order to expand your circle of ideas as a landscape painter, in order to eat oysters every day at Chester Bay, in order to draw an American plantain, in order to get a rear view of the Atlantic Ocean, a better angle on Europe, and—talk more with me about all these things.

Here, by contrast, we have the implicit commentary on Lenau, the explication of his type and set of mind. Wesselhoeft also finds America raw and strange at first, but then he reacts positively to the newness. He is thrilled at the dry clarity of the atmosphere which does not dim but rather enhances the gem-like brilliance of the autumn landscape. Quite differently Lenau: he has a fear reaction to the new and unfamiliar. What he does not understand arouses his distrust and hatred. The first farm house he encounters in America is not a humble peasant cottage in a village, it is a fine brick house standing proudly alone. The inhabitants do not come to meet him in humble soiled peasant costume, they are dressed like city folk, therefore inappropriately, therefore in bad taste. When his own hotel is too urbanely cosmopolitan to feed his prejudices, he seeks out a low-class boarding house, either in reality or in Duden's travel book, and thus satisfactorily reduces the level of American culture to bolting down food and chewing tobacco.

To put it most tersely: Wesselhoeft was an impressionist, Lenau was an associationist. Robert Wesselhoeft was completely open to the new, however different it might be from the old familiar back in his European homeland. To this day every man of sensibility who changes his country is a pioneer and courageous. One of these pioneers who ventured to ex-

change his European destiny for an American career told me how repelled and alarmed he was at first by the clarity of the air, the lack of a mystic veil drawn over everything, the lack of a dank mossy intimacy and enveloping comfort. To him there was something downright sacrilegious about the American climate and atmosphere and only gradually did he learn to enjoy it, to approve of it, and to exult in it.

With weaker personalities the reaction of fear wins. When Lenau failed to make associative connections between the sounds, looks, smells, and feels of his homeland and the New World, he was at first bewildered, then frightened, then hostile, and then he hid behind the wall of standard derogatory clichés which Europeans have ready for self-defense. Wesselhoeft, on the contrary, revelled and gloried in the new: the brilliant colors, the exhilarating atmosphere, the clear blue sky, rejoicing to be away from the muted effects of his homeland, wherein alone Lenau could feel secure.

Lenau's retrogression to old clichés is most pitifully apparent at his allusion to Buffon when he goes back to the even then long discredited notions of that eighteenth-century French naturalist, who by means of a marvelous confusion of North and South America and the West Indies conceived of the whole New World as shot through with pestilential tropical swamps. Buffon demonstrated 'scientifically' that life in the Western World tended toward the progressive degeneration of all its higher forms; over here only the swampy reptiles such as the alligators enjoyed a burgeoning prosperity. During the American Revolution Benjamin Franklin attended a party in Paris at which the Abbé Reynal, one of the chief philosophic disciples of Buffon, was discoursing on his favorite theory of the degeneracy of animals and even of man in America. Jefferson smilingly records the measures Franklin took to set the record straight. Franklin simply asked the French guests and the American guests to rise, 'to see on which side nature has degenerated.' It happened that his American guests were 'Car-

michael, Harmer, Humphreys, and others of the finest stature and form; while those on the other side were remarkably diminutive, and the Abbé himself was a mere shrimp.'

Now that we have seen Lenau at the side of two compatriots, all three telling us what Baltimore was like in October a century and a quarter ago, all three telling us quite different things about it, I do believe that we not only understand these three more objectively, we are also in a better position to evaluate most other critiques of America, including the recent ones. The realistic observer will go about observing and recording everything important. On a lower level, of course, he will take the 'What's in it for me?' attitude but on the higher levels he will be the most reliable of observers. The associationist will have the hardest time in adjusting and will incline to judge everything from the vantage point of his pre-formed physical, social, and mental habits, of his fixed principles and philosophic attitudes. He actually may be sharply critical of his own environment, but if he is, he is usually a utopian who may set out for new shores but then can never be reconciled to any alien reality; only if his philosophy is a sound and liberal one, will he eventually learn to adjust. Most of the 'fish out of water' who came to our shores during the Hitler era were associationists. Likewise, in reverse, the most painful variety of American tourist in Europe is usually also of this type. Then there are the impressionists. The genuine ones, the ones who are not merely superficial, are very rare, and it was a singular piece of luck that we had one available for our little experiment. After a slight initial shock at the new and unfamiliar, he will quickly take a liking to it, enjoy the new experiences, and, what is more, he will sometimes penetrate with remarkable quickness to the deep underlying basic assumptions which motivate and make coherent this totally new way of life. For instance, in an earlier section I did not read to you, Robert Wesselhoeft shows unusual insight into the vital role of religion in advancing American culture and restraining the all-too-sovereign indi-

vidual. When the impressionist visitor is at his best, even the native can learn a great deal from him about his own country.

But we should not be satisfied to rest here and conclude complacently that we have now analysed and solved the whole central problem of American-European cultural relations. The matter of understanding and misunderstanding among nations is far more complicated than that, and we shall certainly not solve it today, or tomorrow. Perhaps two further small observations in conclusion will serve to suggest what other approaches to the problem still lie open. Both of these observations also were crystallized for me by means of personal experiences.

On my first trip to Europe after the war, in an army plane, a distinguished, grey-haired English gentleman was piped on board at Westover Field with a nice bit of military ceremony. During the course of our pleasant conversation on the trip across it turned out that he had reacted to America and the Americans in much the same way that Robert Wesselhoeft had and was quite as colorful in his descriptions. But another trait fascinated me even more, then and later when we met again. Being so eminent and inwardly so entirely secure, he was as uninterested in his own reactions to things as he was interested and fascinated by the things themselves. A bit later, thinking back over my readings in American travel literature, it suddenly occurred to me that the one class of traveller that almost invariably reacted positively to America and the Americans was the upper stratum of aristocrats, such as the English lords, the German dukes and princes who came over for big-game hunting and other adventure, and the select few who like Prince Bernhard had serious as well as pleasurable purposes in mind. Here I missed the point, of course, for there are other people outside this class who react just as positively and for the same reason. The real point is that they are all inwardly secure and do not need any outward props for their self-assurance.

By contrast, when we look at the long line of anti-American travel books from the 1820s onward, we notice that they have one thing in common: they were, nearly all of them, written by snobs. Their authors did think of themselves and their own reactions. They did feel the need to obtrude themselves, to let the reader know again and again how cultured and sensitive they were, how painful it was for them to be exposed to the new barbarism of America, what a relief it was to find occasional exceptional Americans who were somewhat nearer their own cultural level, to whom they could point patronizingly as offering some promise for the future, and whom they could use as evidence that they did also see and report the more favorable side of America.

Most distressed or infuriated about the snide remarks of la Trollope, Dickens, and their successors are those Americans with feelings of uncertainty or inferiority about themselves and their land. They would be much relieved and reassured if they would only cast a glance at the quivering jelly of psychic conflict amid which those anti-American reactions were born. It is a bit ominous that the most frequent question Americans put to foreign visitors is 'How do you like America?' or 'What do you think of America?' It really doesn't matter a particle what they think of America. Most of them can only answer in polite clichés and when they do not, their remarks are not likely to be any more significant.

Now for the second observation. On our way from Hamburg to Spain some years ago my wife and I were crossing Paris between stations when we were slowed down in a traffic jam just on the street where many of the better middle-class furniture stores are. As our taxi inched along, we had good opportunity to study the displays in detail. I tell you it is a shocking experience if one believes in the old article of faith that the French have good taste. Only the thinnest layer of the French upper crust can have good taste. It is no better elsewhere in Europe: leave the main shopping streets of Florence or Rome

with their breath-takingly beautiful displays of modern furniture, which only a tiny fraction of Italians with both money and taste can and will buy, and go to the sections of town off the tourist track where the Italians shop for their household goods, what you will find are pieces inferior only in size but not in bad taste to the Victor Emmanuel monument. Have you seen the pictures of the interior of Sigmund Freud's home in Vienna? I have seen other turn-of-the-century homes there furnished in the same spirit. With people wandering through such chambers of horror, it is no wonder that psychoanalysis had to be invented. As for English taste, perhaps the best descriptive adjective is 'soggy.'

We must come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a cultured country or a cultured people. There is always and everywhere only a relatively small proportion of people who try precariously to preserve and promote the cultural heritage. The perennial barbarian and Neo-Neanderthal we shall have with us always in all countries. We should not deplore that, it may even be a good thing; certainly it is a fact.

When we are dealing with cultural relations and comparisons, however, we should guard against the logical fallacy of comparing the average of America with the best of Europe. The only fair approach, and the only profitable one in literature and the arts is to concentrate on the upper levels of understanding and achievement. The rest can be better handled as economics, or sociology, or anthropology. On the higher cultural levels the climate is different, for it is there that the fascinating and puzzling differences occur, between lands, between epochs, between groups, and even (or especially) between individuals. Here is where our chief materials of study lie, and it is here perhaps that we shall some day find out just how the highest and rarest expressions of man's mind and soul and sensibility really come into being, in science, art, literature, and society, and how they are related to one another. That is a fine and noble prospect, but I should not want to guarantee

that it will be as enjoyable as is the present scene, populated as it is with such gorgeously wrong-headed creatures as Nicolaus Lenau or Simone de Beauvoir, wandering along through a wildly chaotic, picturesquely slanderous, anarchically subjective state of relationships. I like it here, and I don't mind if the future is a bit slow in coming.

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