A Tide Watcher's Trover.

Every now and then ~~the~~ tide still casts ~~upon the shore of thought~~ at the loitering reader's feet some new specimen of that most curious of all ~~forms~~ literary forms, the American "international" novel. ~~Its~~ In its evolution, it has been hardly less notable than in its genesis. It has swung through ~~the~~ whole gamut of contrast from the pitying depreciation of James' and Howells earlier works, with their natural complement, the offensive-defensive apology of Richard Grant White, down to the modified approval ~~of~~ Mr. James' later works and the glaring assertiveness of "Mr. Brown of New York", "Mr. Potter, of Texas", and the reckless incredulousness of ~~Mr~~ "Napoleon Smith" of — of — let us say of the newest located section of Wonderland. To the class of American novels of which these are types, their

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

genesis and evolution, the Tide Watcher invites the reminiscent attention of those readers who readers from whose minds their ephemeral impressions are already passing away, not only as a study & an important element in the denationalization of American thought, but also, as an important interesting phase of the development of the present "realistic" ideal in our fiction.

× × ×

The American international novel is the contrast of national peculiarities in fictitious narration is no new thing. In a broad sense also a large portion of Scott's novels may be termed "international." English and Scottish types are contrasted in almost endless variety throughout his pages. Even in his foreign romances, these types remain and Caron de Leon and

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

the Knight of the Leopard, symbolize Scottish pride and English arrogance at the court of Valentia. Indeed the intellectual, historical and political mission of Scott may be said to have been the introduction of Scotland to England. More than any other influence, his genius tended to the assimilation of Scotland by England. It broke down the barriers of prejudice and made the Scottish people recognized intellectual and social peers of the united realm, in a sense that they had never been before. His purpose was to exalt the Scottish spirit and justify Scottish history. The actual result was to denationalize Scottish life and Scottish thought by opening the way for its more intimate merger with England. Having

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

no longer, the ~~heroic and~~ impulse of a separate nationality as the barrier of exclusion and prejudice to concentrate and ~~quad~~ emphasize its activities and distinctiveness, Scottish thought and scholarship lost its brilliancy becoming absorbed ~~in the~~ and losing its distinctiveness in the broader current of English literature.

× ×
× ×

A half-dozen ~~Eng~~ novelists, with keen at their hand have made the comparison of Irish and English characteristics the basis idea of one or more works of fiction. In this indeed there may be said to be two schools, the Irish and the English. In French literature there are few specimens of the "international" type, chiefly no doubt, because the Frenchman believes that

the one extolling and the other derogatory of Irish character.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

no life can bear comparison with that of France. The element of typical comparison, which is the real distinctive feature of the "international" novel, is in French literature and largely supplied provincial contrasts of speech and manners, the Parisian serving as the ideal with which all the others are compared.

So far as English literature is concerned, or at least English fiction, the same assumption of the superiority of the English ideal runs through it all. It simply reflects English thought which regards English life as the acme of excellence; that of the English colonies as next in quality; that of other English-speaking peoples as just below them in undoubtedness. It has the singular quality of regarding this Anglo-Saxon group

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY (N.Y.) HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

however, as infinitely superior, even in its meanest types, to any other life. French ideals have until very recently been only tolerated in English fiction whose masters have always shunned as if it were a leprosy, the almost universal Gallic motive of adultery.

x
x x

The provincial life of England however, though offering even greater contrasts, perhaps, than that of France, in speech and manners, lacks the accepted ideal of unimpeachable perfection. English life is essentially a country life. Her nobility is of the shires and her gentry are prouder of the ancient family-seat than of strains of noble blood. The Englishman is exalted if not ennobled by the possession of inher-

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

ited acres. London is to the Englishman sim=
ply a convenience. It is the meeting=ground of fashion, genius, wealth, nobility of England — the common metropolis of the English people. To be a Londoner is no distinction — in fact, is hardly less than a misfortune. The cockney has gone through various stages of discredit in English fiction and is today no doubt nearer upon a level with the country squire as an available and attrac=tive element of fiction than ever before. London types, high and low, have usually been employed chiefly as available contrasts with the better types of English life. The vicious and contemptible — the tough and tolerated types of it have usually been drawn from the metropolis. The general adoption of adultery

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— in fact or suggestion — as the most worthy and attractive motive of fictitious narrative, is of late doing much to bring London up to the plane of Paris as a fictitious ideal and making comparison with the lower types of the country life more frequent.

x
x x

The English "international" novel has ~~usually~~ drawn its depreciated types, however, wholly from abroad. Wherever, and whenever, ~~the~~ an English type was compared with a foreign one, it was, as a matter of course, represented as inferior in excellence and attractiveness, and its unlovelinesis or comparative excellence, was in precise ratio to its resemblance to the ~~or assimilation or~~ English ideal. In the English "international" novel of the period preceding the developemental

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

of its American namesake, the American was of ~~three~~ several types; the coarse aggressive vulgar ignorances of Dickens; the feeble self-complacent ~~Anglian caricature~~ caricature of Anglian perfection of Thackery, and the common, silly-cute, simple-wit, bragga-docio Brother Jonathan scene-shifter of the lesser English novelists.

It is perhaps, too much to say that no modern English novelist has been just to any foreign type, but it will at once occur to the experienced novel-reader, that outside of George Eliot's pages it will be very hard to find in modern English fiction a case of contrasted ~~[illegible]~~ national ~~[illegible]~~ characteristics in which the excellence of the foreign type is not made to depend almost entirely on its approximation ~~to the~~ English ideal. This is in fact, only another illustration of the fact that methods and types in fiction depend upon environment and the impress of popular though. None but a strong, self-centered people ever produce a striking ~~[illegible]~~ ~~an~~ distinction and enduring literature or art and such literature will not be universal

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

a cosmopolitan in character, but will have the unmistakable watermarks of the national life and strength upon it. Literature divides itself never so strongly or clearly ~~in each case~~ along the lines of method or by the boundaries of epochs as by the mark and impress of nationality. Think what a flood rolls between Greek and Roman thought! What a stern rugged island in the sea of Time is Hebrew literature! French? There is not a novelist or poet in all the history of her literature who is not first of all things Gallic, even when when the curious rage for classicism, like our modern theory of "cosmopolitanism" and "realism", hung like a millstone on the genius of her writers. Russian literature, that strange phosphorescent tide which ~~sometimes~~ shines out

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2015

in the darkness of Northern thought and which many have unwisely praised for cosmopolitan breadth and all it distinctive quality all its charm and all its power, to its mongrel Russianism of thought sentiment and environment. The first pre= requisite of a strong literature is a strong people and the unmistakable proof of strength in a people is the unconscious subordina= tion of other national types in comparis= on with themselves.

x
x x

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2018

x
x x

The American "international" novel was not by any means an invention, then, in its con=
contrast of different national types. It was an inven=
tion only in the sense that it compared our own
national ~~types~~ or assumed national characteris=
tics always unfavorably with ~~the~~ foreign types,
for the entertainment of the American people. It was
a flood of self=depreciation combined with a
singular tendency to extol and idealize with unhesitating
indiscriminateness all foreign types. All the
unpleasant ~~p~~ phases of foreign life were eliminated
or hidden by a golden haze of comparative loveli=
ness while the homely virtues and unrefined
manliness of the unfortunate "native" were
emphasized with unremitting assiduity, until
their contemplation brought a flush of shame.
The Frenchman's hollowness, the German's gruff=
ness, the Englishman's arrogance, ~~the Russian's~~
— all these were admirable; but American

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

naivete', ~~American~~ the American belief in woman's virtue and man's truth, — came to seem a very old-fashioned, unbecoming, behind-the-age affair. The comparison was in all respects unfair. The worse or less cultivated elements of American life were compared always with the best types of the European. The appearance rather than the real qualities of each were noted, and the garishness which is exceptional in our American character was represented as almost universal; while the sensitiveness which is so abundant, was pictured simply as awkward timidity. Redeeming features are found only in its worse types. The Old-world reader of American novels was painted in them with true Parisian relish, her bizarre qualities serving only to heighten the flavor of her daring achievements. ~~She~~ Indeed, Judged by the Amer-

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

sian international novel, indeed, one would think that the ~~American~~ adventuress was the only type of American life worth being considered in comparison with the exquisite products of the old-world civilization.

x
x x

It is amusing to note how in this incipient "realism", the less attractive types of foreign life are idealized and the worthier elements of Americanism ignored. Morals are ignored; motives misrepresented and honest purpose and real refinement made to seem ridiculous while shame and insincerity are depicted as admirable. The lower types of foreign life on the contrary are idealized beyond the verge of recognition; the servants; the peasantry; even the officials and lazzaroni are painted as exquisite types of old world savoir faire as poetic products of harmonizing conditions.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2015

As the ~~product~~ work of a group of foreign writers the ~~one~~ American "international" novel would have been only a fair exercise of satiric caricature. That a Frenchman or an Englishman, should estimate American life as the "international" novel portrayed and assume that the foreign types were as they pictured them to be, would hardly be unnatural. The strange unnatural and only really remarkable thing about it is that American life should have prepared any considerable group of writers to accept this view of the contrasted types and a very large group of readers to admit its correctness. It is perhaps only paralleled in the history of nations and of literature by that epoch which marked the beginning of the end of Roman greatness when the Roman counted it the very acme of desirability to be mistaken for a Greek in manners, morals and culture; but there is probably no

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2014

instance in which the steady and persistent ridicule of a people's ideas and a continuous caricature of its own types, is conjoined with a labored glorification of the self-chosen types & the self-chosen ideals of other peoples, was accepted as the true and proper measure of national character. The American "international" novel depicted the American in contrast with the Frenchman as the Frenchman established him; in contrast with the Englishman as the Englishman desired to regard him; but in each case, he depicted the foreign type according to his own ideal. He painted a Frenchman's American or an Englishman's ideal of what an American might to be; but never is always the French ideal of the Frenchman and John Bull's estimate of his own good

ities.

x
x x

Was this "international" novel a fashion of the times? ~~Thought~~, — the outgrowth of popular conditions? Undoubtedly. There were several elements which contributed to determine its character. It must be remembered that this new form of fiction appeared just at the close of our great civil war. The American people had emerged ~~thoughtful~~ full of tragedy. For a generation, almost, the public thought North and South had been wrought up to the highest pitch of intensity in regard to the most engrossing ~~question~~ ~~and~~ theme of our national life. The conflict between liberty and slavery had colored not only our politics but our religion and our literature as well. This had been followed by a prolonged and bloody warfare which while it impoverished the South left the successful section, the North,

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2012

richer and more prosperous than ever before.

When the war was over all those engrossing questions of the past became not only stale and dead, but whatever touched upon or revived the memories of those times was unpleasant. And the soldier kind had enough of war. Peace and the delights of peace were the only thoughts that charmed his soul. So too, it became necessary to touch gingerly upon those subjects, incidents and types which were involved in the conflict. The south was then a dangerous field for the most tender-footed novelist to enter. Some of the most realistic pictures of southern life are almost contemporary with the earlier specimens of the "international" but they did not catch the public

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - 2015

The Country had lost interest both in De Forest's fire-eaters and his poor-whites, though neither were badly drawn. They came, however, both too late and too soon. We wanted to forget the war and the South and all that was connected with this national episode. For a while the wild west furnished that set of quaint bizarre pictures, which diverted attention and allowed the popular pulse to grow quiet.

* * *

Then, when we had fed on trifles for a while the national tendency to self-depreciation broke forth. The American has always enjoyed laughing at himself, sometimes in earnest but more often in jest. Our most serious purposes are akin to burlesque; "Yankee Doodle," the echo of an enemy's mockery, became with us a national anthem. "Dixie" which the South transformed into a battle hymn, was a negro melody which perhaps had its birth on the Coast. "John Brown" the weird melody under which the North had marched and fought, was an indefinable medley of absurdities.

As the American could not find any subject to enlist his sympathies and aspirations when the war ended, he turned his wit upon himself. There was little for him to ridicule except his manners and his virtues. For a century he had wrought miracles. He had conquered a continent and duplicated the world's accumulations. His chief misfortune lay in the fact that he had no professionally unemployed class. The "dude" came afterwards and largely as a consequence. The old world had been brought within a week's journey and a heavy hail of the new. Brother Jonathan

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

with full pockets and a complacent spirit
crossed over the sea to examine for him-
self the land from which his fathers came
and measure himself with the cousins
from whom he had been separated for two
hundred years. He was strong and vigorous
and had not always taken time to fur-
bish his manners nor make an artistic
study of his apparel. He had that conscious-
ness of power which comes only from actual
accomplishment and that unconscious-
ness of manner which results from dislike
of in a higher type an unworthier ideal. They
were not always up in artistic slang and had
little idea of the Parisian ~~worship~~ worship
of lubricity. They had American ideas of virtue and
honor and worth — strange new-world notions

that did not fit and cannot be made to fit with old-world ideas of the desirable.

x
x x

This tide of common, unpresuming new-world life, not altogether good and by no means of good form according to the old-world ideal, to which makes the loiterer the only type of perfection and the toiler an inferior — this refluent tide of American enterprize and prosperity crossed the path of the few professional loiterers which the country up to that time had produced, of the denationalized Americans, who prided themselves upon approximation to European ideals as a matter of distinction among their countrymen; they attracted the attention of those curious American colonies who swarmed and buzzed in ~~clung to London and~~ Paris and other

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

European capitals, during the momentous years of war, either actively sympathetic with the nation's enemies or ~~mildly~~ more or less regretfully deprecatory of events which were the richest fruits of American manhood ~~a~~ and the substantial basis of American glory. To such this tide of new-world toilers – honest architects of honest fortunes, ~~a~~ ~~[illegible]~~ ~~were~~ appeared as the relative who has given more attention to ~~a~~ thought and achievement than to dress and manner, always appears to the professional loiterer. A slip of the tongue hid all merit of achievement. Their unconsciousness of another ideal was ~~to~~ simple boorishness. ~~[illegible]~~ So with cheeks flushed with ~~an~~ irritation these callow censors of a ~~[illegible]~~ people whose life they were unable to apprehend and ~~whose~~ greatness itself was an

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

offence to their old-world ideas of due subordination on the part of the ~~raw~~ raw, unformed and provincial ~~ideas of~~ masses of ~~on~~ the mushroom occident, ~~the~~ set themselves to correct the ideals and reform the tendencies of American life through the medium of what has come to be known as the "American" "international" novel, which is, in fact, only the idea which the American literary loafer has of the types and ideals to which American ~~prosperi~~ independence, prosperity and glory are due. It was the first step in that transformation which the ~~"Thunderer"~~ London Times recorded, when it declared that "the American novel is being shaped along the lines of English ~~thought and life~~".

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013