

of destructive criticism must not be pushed too far—it tends to render a man unfit to build.”⁸ If ever there is to be an authentic American literature such as Whitman demanded, criticism must approach the works of aspiring contemporaries in the spirit of discerning appreciation and unprejudiced sympathy rather than with the air of suspicious and antagonistic superiority as is the habit among our literary augurs now. Then, maybe, there will be found creative geniuses, and a public ready to listen to them, who give artistic expression to the ideals of national independence and super-national good will; who courageously proclaim the eternal values of justice, freedom, and love for all peoples and races on earth. Then Whitman’s terrible query will be answered in the affirmative: “American literature—is there distinctively any such thing, or can there ever be?”

OUT OF THE TWILIGHT.

BY T. SWANN HARDING.

AS Alan Seeger has reminded us, there is a perspective one can get only at Death’s door; and this holds true whether that death be in war or at peace. Here is a vision of reality, a clear revealing view of naked life for once brushed free of the encumbering excrescences which normally render it obscure and very often make it into a rude caricature. There, in a peaceful, pleasant condition, in the twilight zone, neither Life nor Death—we can look down the long vista of the past or peer dimly through the dissolving veil that hides eternal reality. And the fruits of this experience are revelations otherwise utterly impossible.

This wonderful possibility counterbalances the cruel pains of a hundred illnesses, and he that has undergone this walks the earth ever after a man apart. Second only to this personal experience is the passing of one held really dear; and when these two circumstances occur simultaneously, the effect is tremendous.

The actual, close-range contemplation of death has about it little indeed of unpleasantness, certainly nothing of terror; for with the emergency comes the strength to meet it, although in close proximity it becomes less a challenge and more “a consummation devoutly to be wished.” One discovers all in a flash that the shadow-world of Plato’s Ideas is after all this side of the threshold to the unknown; that the pleasures and satisfactions of this life

⁸ *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Vol. III, p. 39.

melt into a misty haze of insignificance, while we retain only the strong, potent memory of love, ideals, and good. Reality becomes a concept only dimly outlined here; it is seen to be but the promise of that positive Reality beyond.

And, returning to what seems a changed world, possessing a revaluation of all values, one walks apart and marvels at the persistent earnestness of men about the veriest trifles. The poignant realization comes that the real victors—those truly rewarded and decorated for bravery—are not the returning veterans of a world war, but are those fortunate beings whose shattered and discarded clay lies scattered in the God's acres of Flanders. Formerly a pang of regret seized us when we considered all those who strove but from whom Death snatched the reward. How could we have been so blind as to ignore the fact that the culminating event of death was the transition of all these wholesome spirits to some sphere of greater usefulness for which earth's training-school had triumphantly fitted them?

We return convinced believers in cosmic justice; convinced that disasters by sea and by land, the apparent partialities of fate, the shattered illusions of broken lives—these all fit into the rational scheme of things. For sin and remorse are ultimately relative matters; we do not progress far when we judge the relationship of pain to pleasure in a life by a process of what can be at best but superficial analysis. I am convinced that could every life be subjected to a truly searching analysis, could be plainly read as an open book, we should discover but one thing in all cases—prevailing justice. "As thy days so shall thy strength be." The greater the pain, the greater the fortitude vouchsafed, the greater the character builded. Many the man who carries within a perfect physique a mental pain more onerous and intolerable than any happy-dispositioned cripple could know. And how agonizing, though intangible, such pain can be! Violent death, holocaust, disaster, tragedy, war—the fearful things which tempt us to the apathic philosophy of Omar Khayyam—we find an assurance that these things have no terror and no unfitness. Remembering the quiet self-possession of a Frohman smilingly embarking upon "the great adventure," we should be slow to condemn a world system which, while it tests with fire, certainly produces much fine gold. And we may well stop and think of the disadvantages a pain-free universe would certainly possess. Verily these things become small in the light of eternal reality.

We live to discover that life in many cases brings eventually

an inordinate boredom, a veritable, semi-mystic nostalgia; a vague but intense yearning homesickness; a half-revealed aspiration for something this world cannot give. One comes, indeed, to wonder why the tired Man of Nazareth prayed "Let this Cup pass," meaning death—when death was for him, and is so often for all of us, the way of rest, repose, contentment, ease.

Death the easy way; life the gaunt hard road—does this seem impossible? Ah, though it may appear a strange and incomprehensible language to ears deafened by the howling din of mundane affairs, when moments of deep insight occur and the underlying realities of existence are revealed, we discover in surprise that nothing is sweeter or more to be desired than the dear, still slumber which men call Death and which angels understand as Birth; that nothing is more unsatisfying and positively difficult than the tear-obstructed pathway men call Life. Death in due time, peacefully, quietly or violently for some ideal cherished more than life; nothing is nobler, nothing more contenting, nothing more natural.

We must remember that life here and There is one; that there "is no death, what seems so is transition." This means that here are tasks that must be done; here is latent cowardice that must be suppressed; here is attainment that must be reached. Without the revelation its nearness produces, death has appeared hard to men. And when we consider those who have almost gaily faced it, we should be of poor stuff indeed to retire from the struggle simply because an obstacle presented itself. If life be a trial, it is nevertheless one to be bravely borne that our destiny may be achieved.

But as we go ahead, after having gained the death-bed perspective, we find many stones rolled away, many problems magically solved for us. The experience of having undergone some really great trouble instantly cures many habits of petty irritability and indulgence without conscious effort on our part. It seems that the soul, having seen the smallness of so many things, but the greatness of a certain few, can no longer stoop to quick temper over trivialities.

All things appear in their true relation to one another and to ultimate ends. Whatever hopes achieved, whatever ideals unattained; whatever pleasures enjoyed, whatever pains endured; whatever knowledge gained, whatever ignorance deplored—these are all of passing, but purely relative, importance. The swirling eddies of the stream do not so much matter as its general trend. It does not so much matter where one happens to be as in what direction one

is heading. Erratic old David, with all his backslidings, his very disreputable doings and his often shameful indulgences—though he frequently stumbled and fell frightfully—yet had an upward urge; a surging aspiration Godward which the Father of all could not but bless.

And this is not to preach the shallow comforts of other-wordliness with its self-complacency. It merely means that we who have returned from the twilight zone endeavor to focus our attention principally upon the direction of the stream of life; we mean to see to it that we have an ideal which ever whispers "Upward! Onward!" and that the potency of that living ideal shall be the sign by which we almost automatically conquer.

Lastly, the very fact that the individual soul inevitably emerges from the most staggering misfortune with a trust in the ultimate Good renewed, a faith in God intensified, and a hope of immortality aroused, furnishes the most effective rebuke to those who, having suffered little, yet deplore the mad unreason of the universe. Winifred Kirkland's *The New Death* wonderfully attests this in the light of the battlefield.

And unless when the shades gather, the tongue thickens, the mist obscures our vision, and science stands impotent with folded hands, there comes suddenly into those dimming eyes a look which sees beyond earth's shadows; there appears on that wan face an expression incredulous, half of wonder, half of sheer joy—and we can softly say "Gladly I come for rest—may there be no sadness of farewell"—all—All has been lost. Erudition, wealth, power, acclaim, achievement—these mean nothing at such times. And the simplest maid who trusting passes on is more to be envied than a fitful king in a cloak of purple.

THE HINDU VIEW OF LIFE.

BY BENOY KUMAR SARKAR.

IT has often been said that Europeans and Americans cannot understand the Hindu or the Asian mind. Oriental view-points and ideals are supposed to be fundamentally different from Occidental.

But what is the characteristic Oriental way of looking at things? Is it mysticism or the cult of the Eternal and Hereafter? There have been in Europe also mystics or "seers" of the Infinite, as many