

A CASE STUDY OF BOOTH TARKINGTON
AS A NOVELIST

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This is to certify that the

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A CASE STUDY OF BOOTH TARKINGTON AS A NOVELIST

By

Keith J. ^{HN}Fennimore

A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Michigan
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AN ABSTRACT

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Approved

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. B. Nye", is written over a horizontal line.

Throughout the major portion of the past half-century one of the most successful novelists in American letters was Booth Tarkington. As inheritor of the Howells-James-Wharton tradition of realism, he adhered to a literary code which the emergent school of Naturalism condemned as romantic and sentimental. With the early call of Naturalism for artistic truth Tarkington was in sympathy, but he soon deplored its stylistic excesses and thematic liberties. He likewise opposed its cynical tone and pessimistic attitudes; in particular he eschewed the human degradation and violence which mark so many Naturalistic novels.

By temperament Tarkington was an optimistic progressivist with an abiding confidence in his fellow men and their ability to direct change into improvement. Beyond the turmoil of recurrent militarism and economic distress he envisioned a paternalistic capitalism which he considered America's supreme endowment to posterity. As a formative influence he felt that the novel offers the widest opportunities for social service in the hands of a sincerely motivated writer.

The principal objectives of this case study thus become: (1) an analysis of Tarkington's social doctrine, (2) his placement in the literary scene during his career, (3) the codification of his principles as a craftsman, and (4) a clarification of his literary ideals. No attempt at a critical biography is made; no chronological history of his literary development is projected. Whereas stylistic growth is indicated for expository purposes in some phases of the investigation, the discussion generally centers upon the mature novelist.

Although Tarkington himself was proud of his preëminent position among the popular writers of his profession, literary scholars are more prone to belittle him for that very popularity. They cannot wholly ignore

him in their histories of contemporary American literature, but they maintain a discreet silence about him in their academic journals. As a result the student of Tarkington must go outside his usual resources for much of his material. Thus he resorts frequently to household magazines, he cites opinions from newspapers, he quotes from interviews, and employs other evidence of a similar nature.

This problem of evidence is especially complicated in the case of Tarkington because of his reticence in appearing in the role of critic. Only rarely did he make pronouncements of a critical nature on the art of fiction, and these lie scattered among a miscellany of brief articles, prefaces, autobiographical fragments, and short stories. Nowhere is a coherent or comprehensive expression of his philosophy of literature. One therefore must construct a somewhat unadorned frame of reference from Tarkington sources, then embellish it with illustrations from his works or comments from kindred authors who expressed themselves more volubly. This latter expedient is not as dangerous as it may seem, for the student of Tarkington soon learns the basic tenets of his subject's literary idealism from both the positive and the negative evidence of the writings themselves and needs only to supply their interpretation.

The further one penetrates the Tarkington concept of literature and its role in society, the more one discovers for these critical times. It was his belief that the sincere novelist is a creative artist who owes it to the society which bred him to produce literary works which demonstrate the humanity of man, his courage, his faith. Evil the novelist cannot ignore, but good he must likewise portray; he should neither exploit the sordid nor eliminate the hopeful. There is an honest realism advocated

by Tarkington which finds romance beyond the wedding vows and sentiment in us all. Most of his words may soon be forgotten, but his broad idealism stands forth as a worthy example for the inheritors of tomorrow.

FOREWORD

The student of English literature may be likened to a harvester upon a multi-acred farmstead. About him he sees broad ranges of fertile fields, rich with Nature's plenty. The student in American letters is more like a horticulturalist at an experiment station. He works in small plots upon developmental projects for which the harvest is limited in quantity, ~~even~~ in quality. Thus the cultivator of English literary fields can usually concentrate upon one crop. He can specialize. His American fellow, however, must often branch off into complementary areas in order to augment the yield from his labors.

Fortunately for the scholar this more generalized approach need not be considered calamitous. Bernard DeVoto, indeed, rejoices that "in American literature the opportunities for archaeology and philology are limited, [hence] the scholar is encouraged, even forced, to deal at first hand with esthetics and history...The American scholar today is a social historian, and taps the vitality of his own social inheritance." For DeVoto the proper figure for research in American letters is a man "...whose thought and emotions are played upon by many forces of the age in which he lived, whose life is intricately affected by the social and economic and intellectual experiences of his time, whose books record something of the process by which the mind acts on the substance of history, whose literary significance cannot be isolated from his social significance."¹

Newton Booth Tarkington represents an almost ideal figure to set into DeVoto's frame. Born but four years after the Civil War, he spent his childhood in the difficult years of the Reconstruction, his boyhood in the "Gilded Age," and his early manhood in what a forgetful posterity still calls the "Gay Nineties." His mature years felt the cataclysms of two World Wars, a major Depression, and the birth of the Atomic Age. Most of what we today label the marks of "progress" in such areas as communication, transportation, and manufacture, he witnessed in every stage of development. Most of what we today call "modern," in such fields as art, music, literature--even in morals and mores, he watched in its growth. He did more than watch: he recorded nearly all the above in one way or another in his writings. As James Woodress, his recent biographer, comments, "He pursued life intensively as long as his health permitted and observed it acutely after he was forced to the sidelines."² And Arthur Hobson Quinn opens his critical estimate of Tarkington with the suggestive remark, "Aside from his personal achievement, Booth Tarkington is significant because he illustrates the constant conflict which during the end of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries, was being waged among both the creators and the critics of American fiction."³

Such statements introduce the first objective in this case study of Tarkington, namely, to present the novelist as a serio-comic student of his beloved America at several stages of several ages. As we shall see, in the constricted scale of portraiture "...the truth and the mystery of human nature, and how most clearly to tell about that truth and that mystery, have been his chief concern."⁴ The delightful detail of his unfinished autobiographical chapters As I Seem to Me gives proof of his

phenomenal memory, the authentic ring to juvenile jargon and to "darky" dialect bespeaks his sensitive ear, and his consummate skill in the art of description belies his persistent eye trouble. His portrayal of the young over seven and under seventeen preserves its verity across disparate times, and his insight into womanly wiles is little short of devastating. On a broader canvas, however, we must examine his gentle satire of the American scene as it is sketched against the background of triumphant industrialism, crass materialism, and emergent liberalism. The social function of such a novelist is obvious, since "we judge our contemporaries by their predecessors, however recent... And that is the way it must be, for literature, however much it reflects the particular time in which it was created, is a continuing thing, and its full appreciation depends upon a frame of reference that is both past and present."⁵ To cite a single example from Tarkington, it is significant in this respect that both Henry Steele Commager in a recent article on "The Rise of the City"⁶ and Lewis Atherton in a work entitled Main Street on the Middle Border⁷ use The Magnificent Ambersons as their point of reference in discussing the urban development of the Midwest.

The second of our objectives is similar to the first in that it too is a concomitant to Tarkington's artistic acuity. Herein shall be considered Tarkington the writer, the penman. Although under the pressure of correspondence or interview our novelist did turn into critic, the transformations are relatively brief and extended critical exposition from him is rare. His literary ideals and ideas we shall let him express whenever possible; more frequently, however, we must allow example or illustration to speak for him. The wide range of his friendships within the world of

letters is ample testimony to his professional status among his peers; his generosity in critical advice to Kenneth Roberts when he began writing fiction is typical. In fact, as Woodress says, "Without Tarkington's repeated encouragement and infinitely patient editorial assistance Roberts might never have written any novels."⁸ Tarkington's unfailing cordiality to eager youth or jaded age has become legend, and his severest critics find him "generous to a fault." To the last his standards tended toward the conservative, the traditional; his latest biographer concluded his list of personalizing categories "an old-fashioned gentleman." He himself was a lifelong admirer of William Dean Howells, and several critics today identify him as the last exponent of the Howells-James-Wharton school of realism. Since in particulars we shall view him in action, no further apology will be raised hereafter for frequent quotation. Tarkington was an artist with words, but they must be seen for fullest appreciation. James Branch Cabell (not a Tarkington enthusiast, by the way) concluded one outburst with the grudging admission, "No living manipulator of English employs the contents of his dictionary more artfully or, in the general hackneyed and misleading phrase, has a better style."⁹ Such a statement breeds analysis.

The third aspect of our investigation is more difficult to define. It lacks the distinctions of style or the precision of theory. It invades the upper reaches of the abstract to venture into the realm of social philosophy. Although perhaps the most provocative of the three divisions, it will be designed to suggest rather than state, to push back the foliage from fresh paths rather than to blaze a full new highway. It is also intended in part to provide a reconciliation first of the frequent charges

of out-moded romanticism, sentimentalism, and optimism which persist in Tarkington criticism; second, what Joseph Wood Krutch has labeled "The modern temper"; and finally, what the late H. G. Wells once called "the shape of things to come."

Booth Tarkington, it should be mentioned, is the victim par excellence of that favorite sport among critics of ~~damning~~ a man who refuses to behave as they would like him to behave. To Carl Van Doren and Vernon Louis Parrington he remained "the perennial sophomore," since he persisted in probing the juvenile mind even in his maturity. The "Sophisticates," as Tarkington called the younger element of malcontents who castigated the forepart of our century as the desiccated repository of obsolete virtues, occasionally used him as a pitiful example of intransigent decadence, although their more frequent attitude is manifested in the aloof silence accorded his writings. When the historical romance and the regional novel of his early period gave way to growing realism, Tarkington kept pace. When the realism of the forepart of the century yield to an insurgent naturalism, Tarkington continued quietly in the Howells tradition of realistic fiction. The new frankness left him unmoved; its new freedoms held no allurements. Soon the old gentility of tone, the old artistic restraint was relabeled. It became prudery, Menckonian puritanism; perhaps hypocrisy; even timidity. The "sunshine aspects of life" were derided as old-fashioned, passé. Life was discovered to be really real, really earnest. Woe to the bearer of good tidings!

This is still the prevailing reputation of Tarkington within the academic circle. The verdict of a passing generation is the simplest one accessible to those either too indifferent to care or too preoccupied to

learn better--hence the inexorable turn of Fortune's wheel. As a man, Tarkington lived a long, full life; as an author, he lived too long--or at least he continued to write across too many years. At every intellectual level the public is a fickle creature, and the age of popularity accorded any novelist is limited. As Charles Wertenbaker remarked in a tribute to "the Dean of American letters" on his seventy-fifth birthday, "Every career has its zenith," and Tarkington wrote with phenomenal success for nearly two generations. His neglect today holds no more mystery than that of Sinclair Lewis or Thornton Wilder.

In all fairness, the historian should add that a peculiar pathos touches the comments of many a critic as he turns to Tarkington. A genuine affection tinges even the most acidulous remarks. In tones of lament one hears again and again, "That man Tarkington is a real genius, but...", "What a book he could do, if...", "He might become a true artist, except...." Obviously this harks back to an earlier point--yet there is a difference. Personality may play a minor role here, but the major is essentially impersonal. It is a rankling suspicion that the best should be used for something better. The implications of this attitude will constitute a large part of the conclusion to our investigation.

The title of this analysis begins with the phrase "a case study." This deliberate choice of words is designed to imply a comprehensive treatment of our subject, but only within selected areas. In other words, this is not a forced bid to elevate Booth Tarkington to some unsuspected literary eminence, nor is it a critical biography in the usual sense. Rather it is an intensive scrutiny of those enduring aspects of a peculiarly American author who has made definite contributions to our national literary heritage.

Perhaps one motive for our project might be to learn respect for partial perfection, for variant virtues.

There is no dearth of encouragement for a reinterpretation of Booth Tarkington and his works. Richard Crowley, literary critic for America, wrote only last year an appreciative tribute to Tarkington in which he declared, "All in all, there seems to be justification for the belief that Tarkington is at the moment undergoing a rather prolonged period of neglect. It is to be hoped that before too much longer his works will be dusted off, his pages opened and something in the nature of a revival begun. For if this author does not reach the occasional heights of a Melville or a James, he does have his place in American letters. It is time," he concluded, "some sort of serious attempt were made to evaluate that position."¹⁰ Sinclair Lewis, with whom Tarkington has frequently found comparison (and with whom he once refused to sit at the same table) even wrote upon one occasion that he considered Tarkington "...one of the [few] American talents which are not merely agreeable but worth the most exact study."¹¹ The Library Chronicle of Princeton University, Tarkington's alma mater and subsequent donor of two honorary degrees, devoted a recent (Winter, 1955) issue solely to "Tarkingtonia." Among the articles is one by Woodress which states without qualification, "A close examination of the Tarkington papers convinces this writer that Tarkington's achievement is badly in need of revaluation and restudy. His novels of the Midwestern growth have written a permanent page in American social and economic history....His best novels...are artistic accomplishments of a superb and well-disciplined talent, and his stories of boys and adolescents...are minor classics of their genre, still in print and likely to be read for years to come."¹²

In conclusion, it might be added that several Tarkington projects have been consummated within very recent years. Professor Carl D. Bennett of Emory University contributed an excellent history of The Literary Development of Booth Tarkington in 1944 which follows a general chronological pattern in its thematic study and plot analyses. In 1949 Dorothy R. Russo and Thelma L. Sullivan, under the auspices of the Indiana Historical Society, prepared a comprehensive Bibliography of Booth Tarkington, 1869-1946. Most recently, in April, 1955, appeared Booth Tarkington: Gentleman from Indiana, a sympathetic biography by Dr. James Woodress of Butler University. It is the sincere hope of the present writer that his efforts too may add their bit to the ultimate placement of Tarkington within the matrix of American literature.

THE CULTURAL SETTING
OF THE
NEW CENTURY

Any analysis of Booth Tarkington as a novelist must take into consideration the historical and cultural conditions which evoked his literary creations. A detailed panorama need not be drawn, but a quick sketch should aid in orienting him within his proper environment. It was Tarkington's lot to live through a pivotal period in our national history, seventy-seven years which carried him from the Reconstruction Age after the Civil War to the Atomic Age impelled by World War II. No small part of his contribution to our literary heritage consists of the remarkable accuracy of his observations on the passing scenes across this period, as well as his artistry in depicting them.

Indeed, it is probable that Tarkington's niche in American literature will be superscribed "Social Critic," despite his extensive forays into divergent areas; and his mature works abound with gentle satire upon the human comedy he so dearly loved. As E. S. Martin observed in his comments on Tarkington's The World Does Move, "The attraction of Mr. Tarkington's remarks in this book and of his books in general is that while he is full of humor and ministers to entertainment and is a story-teller and sees to it that his stories are readable, in the back of his mind he is a serious man, examining life with a deeper comprehension of its processes and proceedings than any other American writer now [1928] successfully implicated in the production of works of fiction. That is why one cares to listen to him

speculating about the purpose and the probable outcome of what is going on."¹

Only familiarity with a goodly number of the products from Tarkington's prolific pen can serve to acquaint the reader with the full scope of his concerns. Many of the pages to come will seek to relate him to such diverse issues as culture in the United States, sexual license in literature, moral disintegration among our youth, and the artist's role in society. Wisely, no doubt, he made no effort to penetrate every nook of life, either at home or abroad, either in the present or the past. Nevertheless he was bold in experimentation during nearly a half century of creative effort, and a full catalog of his writings must necessarily include a wide range of literary types, themes, and styles.

Such variety makes for problems when one seeks to categorize his subject under an appropriate label. Setting to one side the purely literary for the moment, let us consider Tarkington in his broader relationship to the American social scene. Here perhaps the fairest label one might affix to him is "practical idealist." His is a spirit redolent of America. His own career exemplifies a deliberate compromise between the pragmatic materialist and the esthetic artist.

It is a nice problem in critical appraisal to distinguish between a public figure as a "representative man" on the one hand, and a "typical man" on the other. Our dual label above, "practical idealist," is helpful provided we use it judiciously. Too often, perhaps, various critical fulcrums are thrust between the two terms and an imbalance results; but, when practicalism and idealism interact equably amid conditions prevailingly amenable to both material and spiritual content, a product results which most

Americans would accept as a wholly satisfactory "culture." Such a concept transcends "things," although conceding their necessity; such a concept transcends "dollars," although admitting their convenience. As a combination of a financial success, a popular success, yet a generous "humanist" and a "patron of the arts," Tarkington embodies a species of American not uncommon in our national culture--in spite of oft-repeated "traditions" respecting our American deficiency in this area.

In fact, it was on this very subject that Tarkington commented, "Pleasant traditions are difficult to establish and unpleasant ones are more difficult to destroy."² So early as 1830 Alexis de Toqueville, in Democracy in America, "...concluded that few civilized nations were as lacking in great artists, fine poets, and celebrated writers as was America." His explanation at that time was simply that, "While Americans were a very old and a very enlightened people, coming as they did from European backgrounds, they found a new and physically rich empire, which won their attention. In submitting this bountiful land, Americans became eager for knowledge of the practical applications of arts and sciences, but were willing to leave theoretical study to England and Europe."³ De Toqueville's analysis is by no means extinct even now. Almost a century after his pronouncement the British scholar G. Lowes Dickinson expressed much the same idea through his peripatetic journalist, Arthur Ellis, in A Modern Symposium. Ellis explains, "While forming themselves into the image of the new world, the Americans have not disdained to make use of such acquisitions of the Past as might be useful to them in the task that lay before them. They have rejected our ideals and our standards, but they have borrowed our capital and inventions...On the material results they have

thus far been able to achieve it is less than necessary...to dilate, that they keep us so fully informed of themselves."⁴

Such an attitude toward the United States, of course, has become almost a cliché among its critics, both native and foreign. And whether one explains it away as "sour grapes" from less fortunate vineyards abroad, as only a querulous plaint from a few malcontents at home, or as an unavoidable precursor to ultimate heights in every culture, the historical fact remains that even today our yardstick of success tends to be marked off by dollar signs. Back in 1888 Hjalmar Boyesen, from the vantage point of an immigrant, wrote an article on what he called "Philistinism in America." The label he borrowed from Matthew Arnold, of course, and later one finds other social critics employing the expression as well. As Boyesen defines the term, "A Philistine...is a dweller in Grub Street, a person who has no interests beyond his material welfare, whose mental horizon is circumscribed, the wings of whose fancy rarely rise above bread and butter. No divine discontent, no aspiration, no torturing doubts trouble the Philistine bosom. As long as his ledgers balance and his digestion is unimpaired he is satisfied with the universe, satisfied with himself, and pities the poor fool who worries about problems in a world that is provided with so many good things to eat and drink."⁵ This fetching portrait of the standardized American business man introduces one as well to the Babbitt-Dodsworth clan of a generation later, for the breed proved hardy. The inimitable Tinker of Tarkington's The Plutocrat is cousin-german to them all. Indeed, the fantastic story of American capitalism, as told in The Robber Barons, for example, is an inescapable chapter in our family history; and the materialism which always poses a threat to

"the higher things" was blatantly triumphant when Tarkington emerged upon the literary scene. Professor Floyd Stovall sums it thus: By the end of the nineteenth century "the political and economic division between North and South was at last effectively bridged and even the differences between East and West rapidly disappeared as the country developed; but there was another division in American life, a subtle one of long standing, and which became wider as the century progressed. This was the old dichotomy of idealism and materialism which since the time of Edwards and Franklin has given a dual aspect to the American character."⁶ The ramifications of this perennial issue far transcend the objectives of the present investigation, intriguing though they may be. The particular relation to Tarkington, however, is strikingly intimate, and that we must now explore.

An early Tarkington article by James Woodress bears the promising title, "Booth Tarkington's Attack on American Materialism." Selecting most of his ammunition from The Turmoil, the author describes Tarkington's thematic treatment of the urbanization of a "once relaxed and friendly" Midlands town into the "grimy maze" of an industrial city. Somewhat to the detriment of his argument, however, by some strange linguistic algebra Woodress equates commercialism, expansionism, and industrialism with the materialism of his title. Admittedly close interrelationships do exist among these four terms, but surely they are not synonymous. The materialism identified with America is an identification of quantity with quality, a preference for tinsel above sterling. It is the Empire State building versus the spires of Oxford, the Jones' TV versus the Louvre. The "Bigness" of The Turmoil is a part of it; the "Boost, Don't Knock!" of The Magnificent Ambersons is a part of it. Even more so is a national "prosperity" based

on a "standard of living" measured solely in the materialistic terms of telephones, of automatic washers, of automobiles-per-capita. But basically this materialism in the United States is a more subtle force than all these. It is that complacency which makes no distinction between the timely and the timeless, between the mundane and the ethereal, between matter and mind. It is this stultifying satisfaction with externals which prompts the occasional articles which query: If these United States, under God, should be wiped out tomorrow, for what would we be most remembered?

This is the breed of materialism which Tarkington deplored. The tremendous wave of expansion which carried the war-battered nation of his youth upon the upsurge of unparalleled industrial growth to the utmost crest in world power bore with it the emergent novelist. When he was in his first year, the golden spike was driven to celebrate the transcontinental linking by rail of East and West. While he was yet but a grade-schooler, a massive tide of emigrants from the Allegheny and Ohio valleys flooded the Great Plains, and shortly the Northwest would open its virgin resources to exploitation. The belated harvest from the Industrial Revolution in England reached American shores, and the Machine Age began to repattern a rural culture. Small wonder that by 1911, after eight years of "expatriation and wandering," Tarkington looked about his new-old hometown and became "disenchanted." "No longer could he appraise Indiana uncritically as he had done in his first novel, The Gentleman from Indiana, for he saw with alarm that everywhere about him people worshipped materialism, bigness, and speed. The sedate, well-mannered, and self-contained society that he remembered...had crumbled before the irresistible force of big business and the vast complexities of an industrial democracy."⁷ This "rise of the city,"

as Henry Steele Commager phrases it, was to provide Tarkington with his central theme for The Turmoil (1914), for him a germinal novel which bred that powerful trilogy he later called Growth (1924). We shall see that the opening of this literary vein marks a positive phase in the development of Tarkington as a novelist. It places him early "...in the main stream of literary protest with other significant authors of the twentieth century."⁸ With respect to time, Tarkington was thus indicting American materialism a full decade before Sinclair Lewis and Henry L. Mencken.

The critical reception of these books and their ultimate position in the body of Tarkington's works we must reserve for a later division in our study. Some of their further relationships to this central problem of American materialism, however, demand attention. One poser crops up every year: What is the role of the artist in a democratic society? The Jamestown tradition of "no work, no food" is endemic in the American spirit; hence the parasitical poet, painter, sculptor finds a poor reception among the proletariat. Some three decades ago Dickinson declared that our American system was still inimical to culture: "Literature and Art do not exist across the Atlantic...Americans write books and paint pictures. But their books are not Literature nor their pictures Art, except in so far as they represent a faint adumbration of the European tradition. The true spirit of America has no use for such activities."⁹

This "true spirit of America" incorporates a fatal "leveling process" which automatically eliminates that upper stratum in which "true culture" flourishes. In Europe, of course, this elite class had been just as automatically perpetuated by the time-honored peerage system. As a natural consequence, Dickinson concluded: "Europe is the home of class, America of

democracy. By democracy I mean the mental attitude that implies and engenders Indistinction...Politically, as well as socially, America is a plutocracy; and its essence is, the denial of all superiorities save that of wealth."¹⁰ R. Ellis Roberts, another Britisher writing at the same time, held similar doubts about the fate of culture in America. With honesty he admitted that "false standards of success, of money" existed in England too, but his Tory tradition caused him to add "but not among the people who matter." Over here, he implies, we abjure any intellectual aristocracy; we pay homage to brawn, not brain. "In the States the men who should rule the world become slaves to it. The poet is humble before the plutocrat, and does not think that he is doing wrong."¹¹ Roberts' specific reference is to Bibbs Sheridan, the wan poet of The Turmoil, who sacrificed a charred sheaf of dreams upon the altar of Bigness to become an acolyte to his father, "the high priest of Bigness." In "the temple of the money-changers" his father rejoiced in his son's arrival into the sacred realm of common sense. "Why, a year from now," he exulted, "I'll bet you he won't know there ever was such a thing as poetry!"¹²

For Bibbs, this was a true prophecy. The pent repression of thwarted genius was released into the frenetic drive of business. His conversion seems complete--to the casual reader, and Tarkington was branded traitor by more than one artistic soul. The wiser critics, like Howells, knew better. Their longer vision "that sees beyond the years" detected the adumbration of that same vision which shines through the later trilogy, Growth, and even irradiates Alice Adams. It is the revelation, again, of the practical idealism which Tarkington advanced across half a century. His artistic temper could never wholly resign even that vestige of culture

symbolized by the dubious "poetry" of a Bibbs Sheridan without some affirmation for tomorrow. Sustained by sturdy optimism and guided by an abiding faith in tradition, Tarkington ever retained his confidence in the continuum of culture. Like several of his fellows, he cherished a nostalgic love for the golden past; he found two World Wars and a major Depression uncondusive to the warmest regard for his present; yet he never lost faith in a brighter future. The very progressivism of his native land, as well as its determination not to be outdone, he considered highly promising for the culture of the America to be. To his way of thinking: "A living and growing culture, eager to discern and appreciate the kinds of culture other than its own, has the vigor and generosity that will keep it from self-worship; for self-worship means stagnation. American culture is still moving, and more than ever appreciative of other culture; it has not crystallized into rigidity or turned back upon itself to become decadent. It lives and is safe even from its defenders."¹³

Closely akin to this question of the artist's role in a democratic society is another perennial problem. In the mid-nineteenth century one popular explanation for the low cultural level of the United States was that "native culture" is inconsistent with our "democracy of the common man." Culturizing the masses has been something of a problem for every time and olime, and current agitation¹⁴ suggests a full solution is still remote. Since the "revolt of the masses" (to borrow a phrase from Ortega y Gasset), the issue has become increasingly urgent. So long ago as June, 1852, a cynical Matthew Arnold wrote to Arthur Clough, "I am more and more convinced that the world tends to become more comfortable for the mass, and more uncomfortable for those of any natural gift or distinction." In a mood of

despondency the idealist despaired, "I am sure that in the air of the present time il nous manque d'aliment, and that we deteriorate in spite of our struggles--like a gifted Roman falling on the uninervigating atmosphere of the decline of the Empire." One should add that the resilient Arnold did conclude, "Still nothing can absolve us from the duty of doing all we can to keep alive our courage and activity."¹⁵ Such sentiments might quite as well have been voiced by Tarkington half a century later as he tasted the bitter fruits of popular success, suffered in the canyons of the City, then basked under the blue skies of Capri, only to return at last to the sooty atmosphere of a transformed Indianapolis.

Wise novelist that he was, Tarkington offered no specific program to remedy this cultural decadence lamented so loudly on all sides. In novel upon novel he hints the need, but prescribes no Five-Year Plan. Like old Cethru, the lantern-bearer in Galsworthy's "A Novelist's Allegory," he would have said, "'Tis na my business." Tarkington was a warm advocate for culture in every sense of the word--he led subscription drives for civic symphonies, he took pride in his portrait gallery, he crusaded for art museums, and he cherished a deep love for fine literature. Yet he knew, "The kiln must be fired before the vase is glazed." As Woodress affirms, "Though Tarkington pulled no punches in attacking the scramble for wealth and its attendant ugliness, he believed that the problems of twentieth-century industrialization eventually would be solved."¹⁶

As a matter of fact, the mature Tarkington became convinced that the contributions of this machine age to an amelioration of American cultural standards far surpass whatever losses may have been suffered. In a spirited defence of "Rotarians," those magnates of Big Business much maligned by the

"Sophisticates," Tarkington was quick to point out that "this satirized American business man has done more important things than to feed, clothe, house, transport and give light, heat, and reading to his critics."¹⁷ He has provided the vision to throw up a vast complex of cities and facilities to make America foremost in worldwide economy, authority, and (in many areas) prestige. Moreover, Tarkington asserted, "The American business man is responsible for more than the incalculable material progress of the country. The very seats of learning where his critics acquire scholarship exist principally by means of his gifts and endowments; so do the great institutions for scientific and hygienic research, so do countless hospitals and benevolences of every kind, so do libraries, museums, the great collections of masterpieces in art, schools for the study of the arts, crafts and professions." In fact, the novelist concluded, "If these rebellious young critics could only realize it,...if it weren't for the business man and his gifts and endowments the institutions would not exist at all."¹⁸ With typical disdain toward the "critical intelligentsia" (sic) Tarkington defended business men as the purveyors of essentials even to the "sophisticates," supplying them with "more than material for their wit." If the truth be told, he hinted darkly, were it not for the mundane functions of these lowbrow worldlings, our hypercritical aesthetes might well be "naked, thirsty, dirty and starving and, like civilization, would perish from the earth."¹⁹

Most of the foregoing pronouncements were uttered from the Midasian heights of Coolidge prosperity at the turn of 1928. It was a propitious period for exultant Republicans, and Tarkington was ever a loyal supporter

of the G.O.P. World War I was already dim in the public memory, a minor "recession" had given way to heady inflation, and few could see the handwriting on the Stock Exchange wall. The "returned exiles" so well delineated by Malcolm Cowley had roundly castigated America in toto, yet to many others this period of the Big Boom seemed the final vindication of Big Business. "The critics have said everything they can," wrote Tarkington in March, 1929, "yet all they've made is a little sharp scratching, a little defacement. They have built nothing, while he whom they call the 'Rotarian' has built everything. The critics' scratching is the end of their power; the American business man is but at the beginning of his."²⁰ That next October came the Crash...

Tarkington by no means stands alone in his stalwart defense of the business man. In an age when private patronage is virtually dead, when subsidy by governmental agency is frowned upon by rugged-individual Americans, the ironical truth is that this traditional bête noire of culture has more and more assumed the role of savior. Industry is now one of the strongest props the artist has. Paul Meadows, in a provocative work entitled The Culture of the Industrial Man, speaks strongly upon this unorthodox viewpoint. "In the twentieth century, so we have been frequently reminded, a native American culture cannot survive in a machine civilization which also has the dubious honor of maintaining a bourgeois plutocracy."²¹ It is quite as Meadows suggests: we are persistently berated for the ineptitude, the futility of machine-age art by that highly vocal coterie of critics reminiscent of Dr. Holmes' Mutual Admiration Society which Tarkington lumped together as the "sophisticates." Such a clan wields influence far beyond logical bounds, and it perpetuates abortive attitudes toward

change in any territory in the public domain where invasion seems a threat. Specifically, for our consideration here, "Contempt [for machine-age art] dies hard because it is constantly receiving blood transfusions from an avant-garde group of artists and dilettanti alienated from their native culture. It is culture in which they have never been at home... These artists and their fellow-travelers are actually motivated by a complete and probably incurable revolt against industrialism."²² With sentiments like these Tarkington was in full agreement. As a close companion of moneyed men, even as a modest capitalist in his own right, he was a staunch defender of the American business man--and a reviler of the petty critics who led the attacks against them. To his mind, these "esthetic Cassandras" were making a negative approach in the analysis of contemporary culture in their refusal to recognize the positive contributions already made by Big Business to the "American way of life." He deplored their unbalanced destructive criticism, their vociferous disloyalty to hearth and homeland. "To me," he said, "the new sophisticates seem virulent. They mock; they attack; they ridicule; always they seem to look down from a great height, disliking the stupid and petty creature whom they have labeled Rotarian [shades of Lewis and Lardner!]. . . [He] appears in the satirist's joke as the incarnation of all that is pretentious, blatant, cheap and fraudulent. He is the reiteration of endless buncombe; his vocabulary consists of pinchbeck; his patriotism is a telling selfishness; he is a noisy 'go-getter'; he has no virtues, no worth to the world; all in all, he has nothing but his offensiveness."²³ Soon we shall meet Tinker, the Plutocrat; Dan Oliphant, the Booster; Eugene Morgan, the Promoter. It should prove interesting to see what our novelist makes of them.

The Roosevelt years of Recovery, then the crucial years of World War II, combined to transform almost beyond recognition this species of the American business man which quivered from the barbs of a quarter-century ago. The pattern of prestige among the key figures of a nation is a fascinating study in perpetual motion, and the American industrialist affords one a most rewarding subject in such a survey. On account of a complex of many factors, he has become an increasingly prominent element in our national society, hence his gradual emergence since the turn of the century into a similar literary prominence. In this year 1955 he enjoys a very pleasant prestige, complacent in another era of Republican prosperity and reassured on every hand of his essential function.

Even more important, current trends in the business world seem to be fulfilling Tarkington's confidence a quarter-century ago in an enlightened capitalistic system. At that time he maintained, "in his powerful progress, with the inevitable enlargement of his own mind, he has perceived and made practically useful, important truths that have advanced and are advancing."²⁴ To the question, What are these truths? Tarkington had ready answers. "Among these," he said, "is the fact that a moral law is usually an economic law, and it is due to his scrutiny that nowadays a statesman must at least pretend to be an economist as well. For 'good government' has become part of the business man's business."²⁵ Tarkington also pointed out that an enlightened capitalism was beginning to recognize the interresponsibilities between management and labor, the profit motive was becoming humanized, and gradually the grave conflict between owner and worker was subsiding into scattered skirmishes on a minor scale and arbitration on a major scale.

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Today it would appear that Tarkington was a good prophet. Upon excellent authority we are now told that under the aegis of corporate capitalism our country is developing, economically at least, into "the City of God." Adolph Berle states confidently in a recent exposition of the "new look" in Big Business that, "despite the absence of clear mandate, in broadest outline we are plotting the course by which the twentieth century in America is expected to produce an evolving economic Utopia, and, apparently, the potential actually exists, bringing that dangerous and thrilling adventure within human reach for the first time in recorded history."²⁶ In the long view of history, it would be moronic to assume that an elevated culture is the inevitable concomitant of ameliorated creature conditions. It is just as simple-minded to argue that freedom from want, an increased leisure, a stable economy cannot bring about a more cultivated populace. Hjalmar Boyesen averred long ago, "There is, to be sure, such a thing as educating your public; but the process is slow and expensive."²⁷ Surely the product is worth the price.

The implications of the statement by Berle are tremendous. Essentially it means that the corporate capitalism staunchly defended by Tarkington now promises to provide the means to lead men out of the wilderness. It is up to the rest of us now to provide the method, to map out the itinerary. The evidence is overwhelming that industry is eager to help here too. Ironically enough, its enthusiasm is yet to be matched by the very ones who bemoan "machine-age culture." This sad little chapter in academic history is now in the composition stage; before the type-cases are locked, let us hope a goodly number of textual emendations will be made.

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its contribution to the main stream of our thought. After all, the common concept of the American industrialist, either at home or abroad, was none too flattering during Tarkington's time. Nor did the rising tide of annual pilgrimages to Europe made by these nouveaux riches improve his reputation. Contemporary accounts tell all too plainly of his lamentable lack of the social graces, his noisiness and bluster, his extravagance, and his cultural ignorance. It was not long before a tradition was established which the American tourist still finds embarrassing.

Tarkington's acute understanding of the problems involved in this long-standing tradition is apparent from an array of remarks from which we need not quote, and its unhappy reflection upon overseas attitudes toward culture in the United States brought him keen dismay. Late in his life he confessed, "The European and British tradition that America is the land of the Almighty Dollar, and of no culture, still prevails abroad, not only among the unlearned and untraveled, but also among the sophisticated; undoubtedly it will prevail for a long time to come."²⁸ Cosmopolitan that he was, he knew well the injustice of a caricature of the few which so widely signified the whole. It was his contention that "we are less simple and infinitely less of a pattern than foreigners suppose; and to aid our [own] tolerance we should recall that critics and defenders are often betrayed into generalizations and conclusions by Americans who are not representative of America, but exceptions."²⁹ Tarkington spent a goodly segment of his early years abroad, and he knew his subject. Glimpses of less objectionable Americans afield are visible in the autobiographical pages of The World Does Move, an absurd short novel entitled The Beautiful Lady, and especially in that delightful collection of travel letters, Your

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Amiable Uncle. (A prime contender for the world's worst representation of young America abroad is another short novel called His Own People. This is not Tarkington's strongest work--unless it be in odeur.) The Plutocrat, by the way, is based on a similar trip taken by the author; in several spots the myth lapses into verdant stretches of local color and the symbols aboard the Dunmivir merge into real tourists.

The unforgivable sin committed by these gross materialists who shopped Europe like Macy's bargain basement was the possession of a boundless supply of American dollars. Most people can measure "success" in many ways; even "wealth" offers a variety of interpretations: that is, by implication, anyone can but an American. It was obvious to the world at large, as the Victorian Age bowed out, that most Americans appraised these assets (along with happiness, security, prestige, and a few other minor items) the same way that they appraised a business concern or a market report. John Brakine once made the remark that "even the cultured American is interested in culture only for what it will avail him tomorrow";³⁰ what he would say of the "hard-headed business man" scarce needs to be expressed. This is a touch of pragmatism not all might admit, yet it holds truth. Thomas Hart Benton, the artist, admitted both on lecture tours and in his autobiography, An Artist in America, that he was "bothered by the cult of the immediately useful and practical which still [1907] dominated country towns. He had an uneasy feeling in respectable society which...would be recognized by every artist who came from families devoted to law [Tarkington's father was long a lawyer, later a judge], politics [his uncle Newton Booth was onetime governor of California, later United States senator], or business, in which shrewd connivance and acute attention to a course of action were emphasized."³¹ In fact, as Benton said, right on into our own century

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Benton's text for his chapter in the history of culture at this period is "an artist in America." By implication, at least, the United States was a solitary black sheep cropping greenbacks in a pasturage remote from the rest of the flock. In reality this was not wholly the situation. Genius may have had its struggle for expression here; it likewise had its trials abroad. Biographical pages in foreign arts are laden with the same issues that distressed a Bibbs Sheridan. The rising tide of merchantilism, especially in England, brought with it much the same utilitarian spirit already descried in America, and certainly the burgeoning bourgeoisie were not ones to promote the arts above business. Among the aristocracy, as Sir Leslie Stephen pointed out in The English Utilitarians, there were three approved careers open to scions of the peerage: law, government service, or the church. Literary genius did emerge, despite the handicaps, but it was usually a side issue. The Continental story, too, is generally one of artistic repression more often than expression. Materialism, whatever its efflorescence in the United States, also had its British and European counterparts.

So far as that is concerned, so recently as 1941 Miss N. Elizabeth Monroe, in a perceptive analysis of decadence in the modern novel, was forced to conclude: "It is true that our present bourgeois society has crippled the artist. A society based on the profit motive to the exclusion of almost everything else has little respect for the artist as an artist... Our age offers neither encouragement nor escape--it surrounds the writer with conditions inimical to the selfless activity of art and offer him only

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It would appear from the record that the parents of Booth Tarkington were amazingly liberal. When their youngster surreptitiously left some "melancholy verses of thirteen-year-old Weltschmerz entitled "The Trees" in open view for them to find, "not only did the family exult in his talent, but they also sent off copies of the opus to kinfolk far and near."³⁴ They encouraged his sketching, they subsidized his forays into drama, and they suffered through a prolonged period of literary apprenticeship. His father, John Tarkington, had his moments of skepticism, but he rallied at every crisis. When young Tark was bundled off to Princeton by a determined mother, he wrote in an advance notice to a cousin who lived there: "I write in the interest of our boy, Newton Booth Tarkington, who is destined by his mother to go to the College of N. J. the coming year...before devoting himself to journalistic Art, or something of that in-definite procedure to the poor house."³⁵ After their son returned from college, "with neither profession or a job," the Tarkingtons adjusted their household during five years while the young man pursued a home career as free-lance

writer and illustrator which netted him exactly twenty-two dollars and fifty cents. His recent biographer, James Woodress, confesses that during this period "his parents were embarrassed by their son's unproductive existence," although they waited with exemplary patience for the dubious harvest until even the neighbors became indignant over their "indulging their son."

Such patience, such indulgence with one bent on an artistic career, be it letters or music or painting, was hardly the ordinary attitude in that era of "mammonism." Edith Wharton might record in her autobiographic book, A Backward Glance, that among the members of her genteel society "one of the first rules of conversation was the one early instilled in me by my mother: 'Never talk about money, and think about it as little as possible'."³⁶ But this was a second-generation attitude, the attitude of a leisure class which had inherited a comfortable fortune from the money-grubbers whom they generously forgot or forgave for their lack of culture. This was typical in the social world presented by Mrs. Wharton in such a novel as The Age of Innocence. It smacks of the "Four Hundred" of New York society, the native counterpart to that baffling clique which confounded Newman in his quest for the Countess Claire de Bellegarde in James's The American. Something of this tradition remains in the conflict between "high society" Lena McMillan and her bourgeois husband, Dan Oliphant, in Tarkington's The Midlander. Yet none of these reflects the bitter drive for money which marks novels like The Titan of Dreiser or The Octopus by Norris. In A Story Teller's Story, Sherwood Anderson relates how in his youth "a new kind of hero, tarnished somewhat later, filled the popular eye. As we boys

went about in the main street of our town,...everyone was singing a new little song: 'Get on. Make money. Get to the top. A penny saved is a penny earned. Money makes the mare go.'"³⁷

This is the theme song of the Philistine, for "a Philistine is a worshipper of Mammon." It was Van Wyck Brooks who declared some two decades ago that he could find little else as the true basis of Americanism. Among such giants as Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, and Hawthorne he could discover "not one, or all of them" who had the power to "move the soul of America from the accumulation of dollars."³⁸ In their pioneer study of "Middletown" a quarter-century ago the Lynds reported: "For both working and business class no other accompaniment to getting a living approaches in importance the money received for their work. It is more this future, instrumental aspect of work, rather than the intrinsic satisfactions involved, that keeps Middletown working so hard as more and more of the activities of living are coming to be strained through the bars of the dollar sign."³⁹ Wilderness voices still decry the "lust for lucre"--their effect is not too apparent upon our national economy. After all, there is another aspect to this money matter. Mary Evelyn, weary wife to the struggling mountain preacher in Ellen Glasgow's Vein of Iron, saw but too well what the lack of money can do to a good man. "That mortgage was wearing him out. If only they had a little money. Not much, just enough to keep out of debt. When she thought of the power of money to ruin lives a dull resentment against life, against society, against religion, woke in her heart. For there was no sorrow greater than living in the shadow of poverty, watching that shadow spread darker and deeper over everything that one loved."⁴⁰

The "proper" attitude toward mere money would require a volume itself,

provided the project were left to the kindly care of our idealistic philosophers. In summary, their solution might sound something like selected lines from "I've Got Plenty of Nothin'." Looked at from another direction, the opposite school of practical philosophers might advocate an attitude toward liquid assets not far from that of Grandpa Vanderhof in Kaufman and Hart's play, You Can't Take It With You. Part of the picture, of course, harks back to the motives behind the accumulation of pecuniary fortune. In a stirring social novel, The Web of Life by Robert Herrick, appears Dr. Sommers, a troubled young man so foolish as to think at times. Speaking of raw Chicago, beset by labor crises at the turn of the century, he reflects upon one occasion; "It isn't this house or that, this man's millions or that man's; it's the whole thing... Life is based on getting something others haven't--as much as you can and as fast as you can."⁴¹ This is a theme which Tarkington used often. In his hands it is always the motif for tragedy. It is the situation which killed Booster Dan Oliphant in The Midlander, it brought on the death of hustler Jim Sheridan in The Turmoil, it forced the suicide of Harry Aldrich in The Heritage of Hatcher Ide, it caused Valentine Corliss to be shot in ignominious defeat in The Flirt. Gloss it as one will, the word is still spelled g-r-e-e-d. Through the centuries greed has been stamped a Deadly Sin, and so Tarkington regarded it. In each case but one above, another motive appears--the self-justification of ambitious plans with Dan, economizing of family funds with Jim, protection of home and reputation with Harry. Only Valentine is straight villain. Yet none of the former is worthy in Tarkington's eye; none merits final approbation.

Early in the new century the conviction grew within Brander Matthews that "the passion of American life was not so much the use of money as a

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delight in the conquest of it...It is the process he enjoys rather than the result...Merely to have money does not greatly delight him--altho (sic) he would regret not having it; but what does delight him unceasingly is the fun of making it."⁴² One thinks immediately of Newman in James's The American who, "commercial" though he is and as ingenuous a tourist as ever trod the Champs Élysées, remains "the most sympathetic hero" James ever created. Or one thinks of a later Babbitt and his eternal "deals." Or perhaps one thinks of Frank Cowperwood in The Titan and his sadistic glee over catastrophic machinations. But one searches the Tarkington shelf in vain for the vicious creatures of a Theodore Dreiser, a Frank Norris, an Upton Sinclair, a Jack London, or a Robert Herrick. Sheridan Senior, "founder and president of the Pump Works," is the ecstatic worshipper of Bigness; his life and his business are one, but the tragedies he precipitates arise from blindness or stubbornness, not from calculated malice. He exults in the throbbing rhythm of his foundry, he savors the very soot upon his tongue; he is the ideal prototype described by Matthews: the actual money is relatively unimportant to him, although he reveres making it." It is a game of wits, of skill, sometimes of cunning. As he learns, for some the stakes are too great and the payoff is dear; but always he holds high hopes for a new hand, a new partner.

Much of this same "thrill of the chase" underlies the momentum of the Growth trilogy. The Morgan Automobile Company of The Magnificent Ambersons is the personal achievement of another "president and founder"; the theme of its development is the glory of private enterprise, not the bitter enmity between repressive capitalism and rebellious labor. A mild dig at the impersonality of Big Business methods does appear in Young Mrs. Greeley,

although the point is not driven deeply. In this later novel one meets Mr. Milton Cooper, to his subordinates "the master of their destinies, the disperser of fortune, the center of hope and the cause of fear."⁴³ Cooper is the modern executive: "at fifty he had no gray hair, no dubious teeth; he spent more time upon a horse's back than in a motor car, was broad at the shoulders, flat at the waist." Most vital of all, for one of his exalted position, "...from his tanned dark face the enthusiast's bright eyes projected the sparkle of a fanaticism still vehement. The N.K.U. [The National Kitchen Utensils Company] was his deity as it had been that of his father, the founder, before him."⁴⁴ Through his instigation, a "New Policy" of "Promotion Marks" is inaugurated throughout N.K.U. whereby every employee is constantly under the surveillance of his superiors, and promotions or demotions are made solely on the basis of his record on an achievement sheet. As Mr. Cooper explains, "You see what a splendid vista of success is thus opened to the ambition of every man who employs his best brains and energy toward the forwarding of this great industrial institution."⁴⁵ For that "splendid new factory manager," Bill Greeley (strictly an upstart), the plan is out to order; to Henry Hedge, that drone of the Warwicke Armes beehive (his wife's inspired simile), it is rapid transit back to the "jay town." Termagant Aurelia Hedge is shrilly critical of the whole system; her "thin, patient Henry" can only say, "...They think I was [slipping], and when they think so that's all there is to it--a man's up against it."⁴⁶ Thus a slender blade of criticism pricks the tough hide of business, but the wounds are slight. Come the finale, it is "the young Mrs. Greeley" who gets her come-uppance, not the dashing Mr. Cooper. The implication is clear: Big Business is hard, but

it is fair; you may not get what you want, but you likely will get what you deserve.

Parenthetically it might be noted that the only persons who demonstrate "culture" in The Young Mrs. Greeley are the members of the upper echelon in industry or the professions. A native wit and an instinct for taste open the way for young Bill Greeley, but even he realizes the values in "reading a good book" and enjoying something other than the matinee at the neighborhood "movie palace." The sorry sight of Stella, his lovely but unlettered wife, at the Coopers' quiet dinner party amid an atmosphere of Bach and Matisse is an unforgettable object lesson for the humanities. Whatever is of "culture," here and in the majority of Tarkington novels, is closely tied to the healthy bankroll of business.

Not always is this true, of course. Those two arch-rivals in picture collecting of The Rumbin Galleries, Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins ("the crossiest millionaire in the United States") and Mr. Milton Wiltby (who preferred "Outstanding Masters"), have considerably more hard dollars than art sense--although the latter improves measurably under the expensive tutelage of Mr. Rumbin. In other of Tarkington's lighter novels (Mary's Neck is the prime example) there is frequent gentle raillery at "modern art," with the elder gentleman of means as the befuddled would-be connoisseur who "knows what he likes" and very often "doesn't like what he knows." Yet even these border cases are endowed with good intentions--and they do make progress in their understanding. There is still the strong suggestion that a check-book is a definite aid in acquiring culture.

Thus far we have suggested a wide range of interrelationships among culture, the arts, materialism, and mammonism. Both at home and abroad it

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is impossible to keep these areas segregated into tidy compartments, and successive pages will refer to them in various other connections. Since our central topic is an American figure among American letters, a misleading emphasis is placed upon the local scene. Compensatory material from other sources would carry our investigation beyond practical bounds, however, and we are driven to this restricted view. It is possible, too, that the relative youth of American culture leaves it particularly vulnerable to critical attack. At any rate, the general cultural level at this time cannot be described in exalted terms; indeed, it is open to question whether an appreciable difference existed between the home and the imported product.

To round out our sketch of the American scene at this period we should record that other motives beyond those we have mentioned do exist to explain the American drive for fortune, few of which can be termed flattering. The "mainsprings of human action," as Bertrand Russell phrases our inner drives, are nevertheless few and uncomplicated. Perhaps the ultimate in man is what some call "enlightened self-interest." The grosser aspect of this appears oftentimes in private philanthropy. An Andrew Carnegie scatters gratuities among a thousand worthy causes, the masses "rise up to call him blessed," and thus he obtains absolution for the connivings which brought him the wealth in the first place. Thus a Thomas Oaklin, in Tarkington's The Image of Josephine, devotes the graspings of a lifetime to the erection of an art museum and the establishment of a trust for maintaining a local symphony orchestra, engraves the family crest on everything pertaining to his projects, specifies his niece must administer all operations--and thereby perpetuates the family name into a grateful future. A question about the degree of "enlightenment" may well be raised in such cases.

The finer aspect of this motive is a different matter. It lacks the spectacle, the scope, the ballyhoo, which mark the other. No less dramatic, infinitely more moving, it plumbs the depths of the human soul. It is warm in unsung heroism, rich in untold feeling, deep in inexpressible satisfaction. It is man's closest approach to sainthood. Paradoxically, it is such a commonplace in life that it seems out of place in fiction. Every parent worthy the title makes his contribution; everyone, whatever his station, has his opportunities. Thus we may read in Tarkington of Mary McCullough, who subsisted on six dollars a month in order to send son Hector to Greenville College: "The truth is, she didn't have enough to eat, and you could see how happy it made her."⁴⁷ Or we may read, too, of the Honorable David Beasley (a merry mixture of James Whitcomb Riley, Tarkington's friend since childhood, and Newton Booth, his uncle), who gave unstintingly of himself to bring pleasure to an invalid waif.⁴⁸ Of course, some say such as these are sentimental; real life, we repeat, is really earnest.

Whatever the motives of our grandparents as Tarkington was struggling for literary recognition, social historians agree that our nostalgic picture of the romantic past holds "more poetry than truth," to invert a cliché. Part Two of the indecribable *mélange* by Thomas Beer entitled The Mauve Decade is aptly labeled "Wasted Land," and a sorry view of the shifting mores of the '90's that kaleidoscope does present. Frederick Lewis Pattee, who spanned the same period as Tarkington, comments upon "the yellow nineties" (the Wilde-Beardsley influence) that "ten years were indeed picturesque ..., but they were more: the decade was a culmination; it was the end of an era; it was an equinox between two creative periods, a moment of pause, of sterility, an Indian summer, silent, hectic with colors, dreamy with the past, yet alive with mighty gathering forces. The vital twentieth

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century was opening; in reality it began in the nineties."⁴⁹ From a distance of a decade or two the period has rarely lacked detractors. As Beer describes this prolonged cry, "A gorgeous materialism had made a cavern for voices of the nation and the noises blended into a roar." In reality these voices were raised in much the same strain as Matthew Arnold's in Victorian England a half century earlier. Irwin Edman admirably sums up what we have been saying about our immediate cultural past (or the lack thereof), as well as more recent reactions to the conditions. In 1929 he wrote:

In that wave of revealing introspection that has swept over American literature in the last few years, we have been discovered to ourselves by writers as different as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis that American life suffers from standardization, mediocrity, and externality. We have learned that the American scene offers no place or shelter for eternal and beautiful things, and what is worse, no stimulus or encouragement to the kind of life that flowers into art. We have been told till it hurts that we are lost in the morasses of mechanism, industrialism, and materialism. We have been convicted of wallowing in haste, waste, and greed. There has been comparative silence as an answer to the charges that there is nothing in our continent or in our civilization that gives a characteristic savor or meaning or loveliness to our lives.⁵⁰

Remembering the proximity of Edman to his subject, one cannot but admire the sweep and clarity of his perceptive summary.

Some aspects of the shifting socio-cultural scene at this time find only a dim reflection in the writings of Tarkington. His prolonged sojourn within the sheltering walls of home, "prep" school, Purdue University, Princeton University, then home again till recognition came (linked, of course, with a somewhat "genteel" family tradition which assumed the "professions" for its members) precluded intimacy with the appalling labor conditions during his most impressionable years. Yet those were tempestuous times. While Tarkington was yet in his late teens occurred the general

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strikes by the Knights of Labor in protest to the practices of the Gould railway system; the terrible anarchist riot at Haymarket Square in nearby Chicago occurred in 1886 when he was seventeen. The switch from Grover Cleveland to Benjamin Harrison in 1888 saw only the aggravation of old grievances, and violent labor dissension continued to the point where troops were called out in the West. Such stop-gap measures as the Sherman Anti-Trust Law, the Silver Purchase Act, and the McKinley Tariff Act to stabilize the national economy proved ineffectual; a rebel Populist Party sprang into being, but nothing seemed effective. In 1893 a desperate Chicago staged the flamboyant World Columbian Exposition in an effort to prove to itself just how wonderful we were. Then came the Gold Panic that same year, and the grim bonds of Depression tightened across the nation. Tarkington's quarter-century year, 1894, saw the spectacle of Cooey's Army marching on to Washington, and more troops were summoned to quell violence during the harrowing American Railway Union Strike. Not until the threat of a major war with a foreign power unified the national spirit and gave direction to its economy did even relative stability prevail. Tarkington was turning thirty when the Spanish-American War was waged; it left him no scars. The silence of his recent biographer upon affairs external to young Tarkington speaks eloquently of his relative isolation within a private world shaped both by protective parents and his own inclinations. Considering this extended removal from participation in the mercantilism about him during the nineties and his foreign travel or residence during most of the first decade of the new century, it is no wonder that the repatriated Tarkington surveyed the old hometown with "disenchantment." For nearly twenty years the closest he had been to active engagement in the

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affairs of his day was a brief term as State Representative, and even this was interrupted (permanently, as it proved) by a severe attack of typhoid fever which pared eighty pounds from a lanky frame and thrust him into an extended European vagabondage. Soon after his return to Indianapolis he began to record the results of these social upheavals in The Turmoil, but the whole story he could not tell.

Hence the record of labor trials, the revolt of the "proletariat," cannot be found in Tarkington. Like Edith Wharton, like Henry James, like Howells, if the truth be told, he was too remote from that subject for him to feel at home in it--or even for it to interest him as such. For that one must turn to Jack London and a work like The Iron Heel, to Frank Norris and a novel like The Pit, to Robert Herrick and The Web of Life, even to William Allen White and a tale like In the Heart of a Fool. The Ambersons and the Minafers of The Magnificent Ambersons slip painfully down the social scale (calibrated by dollar signs, of course), but their decline comes from misjudgments in investments enumbered by a refusal to accept change. A Depression novel like The Rumbin Galleries provides a hero complete with "outaway," and no tears are evoked by his having to walk to work. The Heritage of Hatcher Ide, perhaps the best of the later novels, is about as close as Tarkington ever gets to a full-length treatment of indigence--and most of it is in terms of a faded gentility, "property poor" but still far better off than the breadline drifters and apple peddlers he never knew. (Some of his friends never did forgive him for keeping his staff of eleven servants during the Depression period.) It is futile to condemn John Steinbeck for not writing novels on the birth of the Air Age; it is futile to condemn Tarkington for not writing social novels on the

revolt of American labor. It was simply not a congenial area for one of his station and temper.

Whereas Tarkington remained relatively undisturbed by the tumults of labor wars and economic crises, he was shaken to the core by the spreading agnosticism that the "new science" seemed to preach. The mechanistic explanation of the universe, respectfully regarded by the thoughtful of every age since classical antiquity, had received tremendous boosts from such stalwarts as Lyell, "the father of modern geology," Darwin and the theory of evolution, Herbert Spencer and his "synthetic philosophy," until agnosticism in one shade or another presented a serious challenge to the bulwarks of established religion. That Tarkington was well aware of this development is evident in a number of places, perhaps none better than toward the close of The Midlander. To the older generation, shocked by the atrocities of the first World War, all that had gone before suddenly seemed old now,

routed by a newer and more gorgeous materialism. The old still had its disciplines for the young and its general appearance of piety; bad children were still whipped sometimes, and the people of best reputation played no games on Sunday, but went to church and seemed to believe in God and the Bible with almost the faith of their fathers. But many of these went down with their falling houses (destroyed to make room for business); a new society swarming upward above the old surfaces, became dominant. It began to breed, among other things, a new critic who attacked every faith, and offered, instead of mysteries, full knowledge of all creation as merely a bit of easily comprehended mechanics.⁵¹

Again this is the voice of the traditionalist speaking. Tarkington was no religionist, but he was a profoundly religious man. His grandfather, Reverend Joseph Tarkington, had been a circuit rider during the "backwoods days" of Indiana, but Tarkington missionary zeal died with him. His parents were Presbyterians who "attended services regularly" and compelled their son

to sit through "interminable sermons" with them. "The boredom of those painful Sundays," he wrote much later, "has remained with me all my life."⁵² As a result, throughout his adult years Tarkington was a deeply religious man, but he never was a regular church-goer. According to his own wishes, his last rites consisted of a simple service held in his home.⁵³

Something of the mystic appears among several members of the Tarkington family. In Booth's father it is revealed in the latter's The Hermit of Capri (whose inspiration is amusingly described by his son in Your Amiable Uncle); and his aunt, Mrs. Mary Jameson Judah, was an enthusiastic devotee of "spiritism." (She once confided to Hamlin Garland, himself an investigator of psychic phenomena, that she attributed Tarkington's literary skill to spiritual guidance.) His sister "Hautie" demonstrated considerable prowess as an amateur medium, as Tarkington relates without apology in a later chapter of his autobiographical fragment, As I Seem to Me; and a young nephew seemingly inherited some of her sensitivity.

At the time of his sister's "mediumship," which lasted some three years, Tarkington was in only his early teens, but he was profoundly stirred. Although he never used "spiritism" as the lead theme for a full novel, as did both his good friends Garland and Howells,-- to say nothing of Henry James and Edith Wharton--something of the supernatural does occur in several spots. Most familiar is the incident in The Magnificent Ambersons when a bewildered Eugene Morgan, sturdy pioneer in the automobile industry, turns to a "trance-medium" for guidance at a crucial moment. The harpies who scavange over this passage declare it "melodrama"; one recent critic, Richard Crowley, said of the work, "This novel...might have been Tarkington's best book, were it not for a heavily contrived ending. As it stands, it is a

good illustration of the way in which Tarkington's two chief literary traits--his romanticism and his realism--could, if not kept distinct, work against each other."⁵⁴ In Crowley's estimation (and that of numerous others) a remarkably complete "illusion of reality" is badly wrenched at the close by Isabel Amberson's supernatural intervention on behalf of son George and Morgan's subsequent super-normal altruism. More kindly readers declare the episode a novel technique by which to suggest the continued influence of the departed upon those left to untangle the skein of life; moreover, it serves to close a study of decadence upon a heartening note of confident faith. To appreciate best Tarkington's artistic restraint in the stylistic treatment of a difficult theme, to say nothing of its logical function in the narrative, one has only to turn to Garland's Tyranny of the Dark. There he will find the outré depicted with as clumsy a manner and as cheap a sensationalism as the treatment of Tarkington is refined by contrast.

In an age of doubts Tarkington preserved perfect faith in a hereafter, and he suspected at times that the distance between life and death is not as bridgeless as it is usually conceived. Both family and friends shared similar views, and it is remarkable that they receive so little attention in his overall writing. It would be misleading to relate these views to "the new science," or to "the new psychology," or to the new anything else. His conclusions are his own, based largely on a broad belief in "continuance" on all levels, a simple faith in a loving Father who cares for the children of His family, plus an unexpressed feeling that, after all, some kind of supernal system for preserving "the great chain of being" is only "sensible." Like many another, it struck him as just "poor economics" to plant man among the marvels of creation for only his allotted three score years and

ten--and nothing more.

Shortly after the Armistice which closed the first World War, an article appeared in the old St. Nicholas Magazine which embraced most of these concepts. It was only a brief message of consolation to those bereft of loved ones by the ravages of war, but it reached even the late Barrett Wendell. In a letter to his old friend E. S. Martin, Wendell wrote, "Here is Tarkington's good, brave, honest paper...I cannot doubt that what he says will bring comfort to measureless grief and spiritual agony all about us."⁵⁵ It is helpful to remember that Wendell himself rebelled against the heavy orthodoxy of his youth; even at sixty-four he confessed, "I am not orthodox in subscription to any known creed."⁵⁶

Tarkington did express his own "intimations of immortality" in various ways and in various places. The incident in The Magnificent Ambersons, to which we have already referred, is the only place where "orthodox" spiritualism occurs. The death scene of Dan Oliphant, in The Midlander, holds a bare suggestion of the ultimate reunion of kindred souls which Tarkington considered a part of the Master Plan. At the final spark of life, "Dan had unexpectedly lifted himself almost half upright, but seeing neither his mother nor the nurse, there was a look of startled incredulity--the look of one who suddenly recognizes, to his utter astonishment, an old acquaintance long since disappeared but now abruptly returned."⁵⁷ Unlike his treatment of the immortality theme in trilogy, Tarkington here adds no explication. He records an act; that is all.

A slender volume of short stories, which bears an awkward string of incongruous titles for its own cognomen, affords the richest source in Tarkington's fiction for his philosophy on the continuity of life. Externally,

Mr. White, The Red Barn, Hell and Bridewater comprise as un-Tarkington-like a pack of tales as one could easily imagine. In the chatty Preface the author lists their themes: "one of hell after death and one of hell as a continuous condition in an unchanging state of mind."⁵⁸ Needless to say, this bare list is not too helpful. Frankly, the stories defy categorization--almost description. Each is a tour de force in its own peculiar way.

Even the Preface is a haunting piece of soul-searching. In simplest terms, it consists of several age-old questions of which the author said, "I couldn't find the answer by what we sometimes call 'philosophizing'."⁵⁹ Since his questions "concerned people," the democratic Mr. Tarkington decided "to look for a solution among them." And what were these issues? Well, one of them was a folksified version of what Arnold had called "divine discontent." A chat with a couple of neighbors, one covetous, the other ambitious, revealed to him one aspect of his problem. Since neither of these men was contented with even the satisfaction of his desires but both "went on seeking," Tarkington "had to conclude that we must apparently [from our natures and because of our destiny] seek to obtain an unobtainable feeling... This appears to be a law, and its wisdom is easily apparent, since if we could get what we want we should cease to progress."⁶⁰ There is something akin to a Hawthorne in such a meditation; and, indeed, all of these tales have a strongly Hawthorne touch in their moody air of mystery and their pervasive undercurrent of allegory. One thinks immediately of "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure," and "Ethen Brand," and even The House of Seven Gables. We shall note this touch of allegory elsewhere as we become better acquainted with the versatility of our author.

The truism expressed above concerning man's perpetual drive for the

unattainable was no more appealing to Tarkington than it is to any practical idealist. "It seemed to me," he mused, "to be a kind of folly in us and denial that we are thinking beings if we perpetually set our hearts upon getting a feeling that we can't get."⁶¹ Granted, it reflects that "typical American spirit" expressed in the Emersonian dictum of a century ago when that great spirit urged his compatriots to "hitch their wagon to a star." It even suggests a kindred admonition common among Protestant sects to place the life of Christ before one as the exemplar toward which to strive, though never to equal. Yet, in Tarkington, there lurked a suspicion that something more rewarding than an impossible goal must be awaiting the sincere seeker for content.

He didn't find it in a bachelor acquaintance who had never married because he was unable to "spoil the dream that's always in the future for an unmarried man."⁶² This man had repeatedly lost opportunities to have his heart's desire, "a home like other men's homes," because of a childish hope for some way whereby he "might have his cake and eat it." He had the idealism, but not the mature judgment to put it into practice. Upon him Tarkington spared neither time nor tears.

Nor did the seeker find the highroad to happiness in the traditional bliss of home life. Well he knew the transitory nature of such content. Alienated by divorce from his first partner, separated by death from his only child, Tarkington could fully appreciate how foolish it is to build your life's foundation upon the shifting sands of family relationships. His lighter novels, like Gentle Julia and The Fighting Littles, portray a clannish relationship among "the better families" which once was possible in some regions, although even there much of the tragedy arises from the

threat of interlopers in the shape of predatory males or cumulative years which presage eventual schisms within the family unit. Likewise, in every one of his more serious works, as it should be, much of the somber tone is struck by the impact of inevitable change. The Adams household, in Alice Adams, is shattered into four ragged chunks of humanity by the social aspirations of a termagant wife, the marital schemes of a designing daughter, the escapades of a rebellious son, and the futile gestures of a harried father. On a similar scale, the Madison family, in The Flirt, is wrecked upon the sandbar of change, impelled again by the machinations of a wilful daughter. Before a patched-up dénouement can be reached, the home is hit by the grave illness of Mr. Madison, the runaway marriage of Cora, the loss of a scanty nestegg, hostility between brother and sisters, and the weary sorrow of a helpless mother. The decline into obscurity of the Ambersons we have already seen, as well as the tragic shifts in the Sheridan household which thrust hapless Bibbs into the "temple of the money changers." Over and again the story is repeated, with always the incontrovertible conclusion which Tarkington reluctantly reached. "I saw that the feeling we should seek," he finally admitted, "could not be a happiness derived from the happy condition of those nearest us; it could not be the happiness, that is, of 'happy family life'; nor could it be any of the ordinary happinesses that people obtain, since all of these are dependent upon the maintenance of a status quo, which is impossible since everything continually changes."⁶³

Next he sought the secret from orthodox religion in the person of a retired minister of impeccable character. In either humility or honesty this old man declared, "No man is entitled to such a feeling [of happiness

from right living]. It can't be attained to. What one generation believes right another generation believes wrong."⁶⁴ The ineradicable element of change again--tied in with the conventional resignation to imperfectibility mentioned above. Tarkington lingered but a few moments with "the gentleman of the cloth."

He turned to still another logical "resource person." This time it was old Miss Gilly, who had spent a lifetime "in the slums helping stricken poor people." After seeking in vain the essence of happiness in the pursuit or possession of "things," the stronghold of home and family, or in the "everlasting arms" of religion, Tarkington tried the citadel of altruistic humanitarianism. But when he asked her whether happiness might be found in service to one's fellowmen, Miss Gilly replied, "No, I'm still distressed by the fact that there must continue to be infinitely more misery than such workers as I could hope to relieve. Only when there is no more disease and anguish in the world could I feel happy."⁶⁵ A moment's reflection indicated the improbability of his surviving till that hallelujah day, and he turned away sadly from the sere little woman. Over the years she had drained herself dry for a desert people, and still the parched acres unrolled beyond the sight. Her compassion had brought a temporary relief for many, some measure of satisfaction for herself, but lasting happiness for none.

At this point Tarkington gave up. His "resource persons" were exhausted; so was he. Then, quite by chance, he came upon an old immigrant worker, Willie Silver by name, "digging and singing in a ditch." His cheerfulness as he bent to his task reminded Tarkington of his recent quest. Again he rephrased the question: "What's the best feeling in the

world, Willie?"

The old man smiled up at him. "I dunno. Rich man, I guess he's got a good feeling. Young man that walks with his girl, I guess he's got a good feeling. Me, I got a good feeling no matter what I do. Shovel mud, I got a good feeling. I like mud because mud and me's all the same business. Tonight I'll look up at that moon when she's bright. 'Yes, you're a fine shiny moon, ' I'll say. 'All the same business as me and mud,' I'll say."⁶⁶

His questioner searched for more conventional words. "Do you mean you have a feeling that you are a part of everything, Willie?" The ditch digger smiled again. "I guess so...I tell you I'm religious, a very religious man. You remember when my boy die, t'ree years ago?...Well, that's all right whether he live or die. Him and me, we're all the same as mud and moon and sun and stars: alsays the same, always will be."⁶⁷ The conventional phrases come like a twisted echo; "He had the feeling that the universe was immortal, it seemed. Therefore every part of it was immortal and he and his dead son were immortal; there was no death, there was only change. He and every other part were 'the same thing', altering in shape but not in substance. Therefore he loved his neighbor as himself; for his neighbor was himself, whether his neighbor was the moon or a passer-by like me or even the mud he worked in."⁶⁸

To every literate person in our scienticized world community the elemental nature of all matter has become common knowledge, and the same science which developed an electron theory into the atom bomb can make its contribution to the commonality of man. The profound spirituality of a Dr. Pierre Lecomte du Nouy presages the magnificent offspring possible from the compatible marriage of science and religion. In Human Destiny, du Nouy builds an impressive case for the absolute acceptance of an Infinite Creator to whom alone can life itself be attributed, through whom alone can

purpose be envisioned, and in whom alone can immortality be conceived. In words strangely reminiscent of a Tarkington essay entitled "Stars in the Dust-Heap," du Nouy declares,

The destiny of Man is not limited to his existence on earth and he must never forget that fact. He exists less by the actions performed during his life than by the wake he leaves behind him like a shooting star. He may be unaware of it himself. He may think that his death is the end of his reality in this world. It may be the beginning of a greater and more significant reality.⁶⁹

This expression of hope was frequently echoed by the philosopher facet of the versatile Mr. Tarkington. It appears in the dialog-essays at which he was so adept, it is cast into allegory a number of times, and it crops up in his fiction occasionally. Like his friend Hamlin Garland, he preserved an open mind toward "psychic research" and noted that "of all the men professionally of science who have seriously and persistently investigated and studied the alleged phenomena of 'spiritualism', the overwhelming majority have drawn the conclusion...that there is personal survival after death."⁷⁰ With Tarkington such a conviction is essential if one is to attain that level of self-interest which makes for the highest happiness among mere mortals. He regarded the typical attitude of man, the "attitude of civilization," toward death as little less than "barbaric," "tribal." He deplored the common identification of death with "the ultimate in horror" or with some "by-product of man's instinct for self-preservation." Indeed, this mystery of survival after death he considered the major problem confronting man "before civilization can begin," and he hailed those who braved derision and danger in their efforts to "seek truth in the dust-heap." "To lift the burden of the unknown from the human soul--to destroy the great darkness: that is the

work that engages them. Man cannot be sane in the daylight until the night becomes knowable."⁷¹

This insistence upon a belief in "human survival" completes the tripartite philosophy which Tarkington nurtured throughout his years. Some pages back we began this break-down of his semi-religious "philosophy of life," and now the cycle is complete. Like many another before him, Tarkington held happiness the highest good in this life; happiness holds the focal spot in his human plan. In Looking Forward he revealed the inadequacy of the "eat, drink, and be merry" so popular in the Twenties when he denounced it. To the disciples of such a creed he posed the question: "Suppose you don't die?"⁷² Even amid the flimsy pages of The Two Vanrevels, that fantasy of double identities, Tarkington wove this recurring query. In a scene straight from Cyrano de Bergerac, Crailey Gray assumes the role of young Vanrevel and in a moon-washed garden plucks heartstrings with gay raillery. But Miss Betty turns pensive, a serious note is struck, and Gray muses,

We are haunted--you and I--by the wish to know all things, and by the question that lies under every thought we have: the agonizing Whither? Isn't it like that? It is really death that makes us think...You wish to know. Does God reign, or did it all happen? Sometimes it seems so deadly probable that the universe just was, no God to plan it, nothing but things; that we die as sparrows die, and the brain is all the soul we have, a thing that becomes clogged and stops one day. And is that all?⁷³

To such a query Tarkington returned a hearty No! over and again throughout his writings. Confirmation of a life after death, he felt, would add significance to the present, add meaning to every personal life, and give absolute proof of the existence of God. The implications are apparent. His belief in a continuum of culture, his acceptance of change as requisite

to progress, his concept of happiness which transcended material things, personal prestige, right living, social altruism, into a mystic identity of Self with the All--of the mortal with the immortal--each one of these stem from a belief in "human survival."

There is danger in laboring this point too long; one must ever guard against putting his own enthusiasms into the head of his subject. Too many literary critics remind one of Josh Billings's remark about the reputed blindness of love: "They say that love is blind, but I know a lot a fellers that kin see a heap more in their gal-friends than I kin." Yet this concept of Tarkington's is worth respectful attention, for the "perennial sophomore" is rarely conceded profundity in any area. When the final estimate is made later, the relevance of such a theme in the literature for our times must receive due notice.

One scarcely need point out the lonely position of Tarkington at this time occasioned by this affirmation of religious values. Professor Floyd Stovall, in his study of American idealism, points out that "religion depends upon idealism for its sustenance, as science upon materialism; consequently, science became dominant with the spread of materialism in the United States, whereas with the decline of idealism religion lost much of its moral force and hardened into competitive sectarian organizations. Eventually literature, which had been the voice of idealism in the first half of the [19th] century, was likewise divided, with the result that poetry adhered to idealistic modes of thought and feeling, while fiction increasingly adopted materialistic modes."⁷⁴ Typical of the new attitude toward religion is Dreiser's An American Tragedy. With careful symbolism Dreiser gives one full turn to the wheel of satire, with opening neatly

balanced against the close. For the little family of evangelists, self-righteous and shoddy, their religion proves futile in every emergency, shallow in meaning, stupid in application. Just as in Dreiser's own life, the unmarried sister of Clyde Griffith runs off with a man and is "lost" to her family. Even our young hero sensed that "there was something wrong about that, no doubt, for a girl anyhow," but the Bible-bound parents were momentarily confounded. Especially was it hard for the mother:

to get this straightened out, instantly at least. Although, as Clyde had come to know, it could be done eventually, of course. For in some blind, dualistic way both she and Asa insisted, as do all religionists, in disassociating God from harm and error and misery, while granting Him nevertheless supreme control. They would seek for something else--some malign, treacherous, deceiving power which, in the face of God's omniscience and omnipotence, still beguiles and betrays--and find it eventually in the error and perverseness of the human heart, which God had made, yet which He does not control, because He does not want to control it.⁷⁵

Thus Dreiser makes mockery of "makeshift" free will, of original sin, and all the other devices contrived across the centuries to "justify the ways of God to men." As the novel drags to a reluctant close, it becomes increasingly apparent that Clyde is largely the pawn of socio-economic forces which determine his fate despite his pious youth and prayerful parents.

The distaff side of authorhood likewise reflects this spirit of rebellion against the strictures of conventional religious ties. In Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, young Dorinda Oakley, though the product of Virginia soil "where doubt seldom resisted successfully the onslaught of orthodox dogma," has her moments of sharp doubt. "To this girl, with her intelligence and independence, many of her mother's convictions had become merely habits of speech; yet, after all, was not habit rather than belief the ruling principle of conduct?"⁷⁶ Early in her life she sensed "religion

had not been enough"; and after her fiance returned a week before their marriage with a substitute spouse, she coldly informs her patriarchal father, "I'm never coming to prayers again."⁷⁷ Her mother, aghast, implored Dorinda to re-embrace religion that she may be able to "stand things" like her late tragedy. A new woman stared back at the mother and stated, "I don't feel that way about religion"; then added quietly, "I want to be happy."⁷⁸ By dint of hard labor and rugged grit Dorinda gradually achieves a working semblance of resolute independence, yet to herself she expressed the essence of determinism: "Life makes us and breaks us. We don't make life. The best we can do is bear it."⁷⁹ Theodore Dreiser never said it half so well.

In Stephen Crane's early tale, Maggie: A Girl of the Street, appears Jimmie, the brother of the dubious heroine and a shrewd tenement philosopher who "studied human nature in the gutter, and found it no worse than he thought he had reason to believe it."⁸⁰ To him, religion is a humorous combination of carping ranters in dingy halls and grimy soup-tickets. Jimmie did have "religious" thoughts, it would seem: Heaven was a place to ask for "a million dollars and a bottle of beer," and various members of the celestial hierarchy lent frequent color to his speech. But above all things he despised "obvious Christians."⁸¹ Jimmie is the product of his environment: a wary rat as a child, a cheap wolf as a youth, a ruthless brute as a man. Such was his father before him; such will be his own litter, Crane makes plain.

His sister Maggie is even more the victim of "a world she never made." Toward the climax of this tragedy in miniature Maggie takes to the streets, still fanning ~~a~~ tiny spark of virtue and hope. Surely someone, somewhere,

must care for her, she thought. "She stopped once and asked aloud a question of herself: 'Who?'" Several males offer to answer her in a male way, but she stumbles on.

Suddenly she came upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of buttons reached from his chin to his knees. The girl had heard of the grace of God and she decided to approach this man. His beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kind-heartedness. His eyes shone goodwill. But as the girl timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving?⁸²

Crane gives us only the first part of the Biblical parable. His takes Maggie only to the end of a street, and there rolls a river. It is not the Jordan.

Dreiser rebelled against religion's hypocritical confines, Crane rejected religion's vapid promises, Jack London attacked its unrealistic attitudes toward social man. In The Iron Heel, the socialistic enthusiast, Ernest Everhard, treats kindly old Bishop Morehouse to a quick lesson in contemporary church history. Skillfully he ties the church to voracious capitalism, then illustrates the "pig-ethics" of capitalism with a kaleidoscope of vicious example. In telling blows Everhard traces the encroachments upon humanity since the swell of the Industrial Revolution, with its insidious division of labor, its exploitation of women and children--and the consequent growth of poverty and distress. Meanwhile, he asserts, the Church has drifted farther from the people, lost its wonted charity and its sense of social responsibility, till now "the Church is dumb--even to a Christ who said, 'Feed my lambs'."⁸³ Everhard, an early Nietzschean prototype popular with London, is a persuasive speaker...he converts the Bishop.

This schism between Church and People could be illustrated by countless excerpts from both literature and social history. A recent volume by Henry Seidel Canby entitled American Memoir expresses this deadly calm in religious fervor amid the frenetic tumult of scientific discovery and industrial advance at the turn of the century. According to Canby, "The most blatant...mechanist is more truly concerned with religion than was that static age where everything stood still or moved slowly except the rapid conquest of nature which we call progress. It was progress then, and perhaps there never was a time when the human race, or at least the Americans, seemed to have so little need of more than a conventional religion."⁸⁴ As Neil Bradley, the tragic lead in Sherwood Anderson's novel of frustration, Beyond Desire, wrote to a school friend, "Religion...was now an old gown, grown thin and all the colors washed out of it. People still wore the old gown but it did not warm them any more."⁸⁵

Among not a few the passivism of both the agnostic and the complacent conventionalist was rejected for a vigorous atheism. In his novel, In The Heart of a Fool, William Allen White introduces Tom Van Dorn, a young lawyer with his own philosophy: "The world is mine...In this life I shall take what I find I can get...I'm not going to be meek nor humble nor patient, nor forgiving and forbearing."⁸⁶ Since he speaks for so many of his ilk, let us hear him out:

"Watch me!" he cried. "I want the advantage of my strength in this world and I'm not going to go puling around, golden-ruling and bending my back to give the weak and worthless a ride. Let 'em walk. Let 'em fall. Let 'em rot for all I care. I'm not afraid of their God. There is no God [Psalms, 14:1]. There is nature. Up to the place where man put on trousers it's a battle of the jaw and teeth. And nature never intended pants to mark the line where she changes the order of things. And the servile, weaking, groveling, charitable, cowardly philosophy of Christ--It doesn't fool me...I'm a pagan and I want the advantage of all the force, all the power, that nature gave me, to live life to the full."⁸⁷

A hundred-odd pages later a still unchastened Tom declares to a would-be friend.

Doctor Jim, I'm afraid you can't jar me much with the fear of God. You have a God that sneaks in the back door of matter as a kind of divine immanence that makes for progress (the "modern" interpretation) and [my fellow lawyer] Joe Calvin [!] in there has a God with whiskers who sits on a throne and runs a sort of police court [the "traditional" concept]; but one's as impossible as the other. I have no God at all... There's nothing in your God theory. It doesn't work. My job [on earth] is to get the best out of myself possible...The fittest survive... and I propose to keep fit--to keep fit--and survive!⁸⁸

These are long quotations, but they are loaded. They strike at every vulnerable spot in the ganglion of religion at this pivotal period in American history. G. Lowes Dickinson once called religion in America "a parasite without roots." As a positive power in our culture, he asserted, religion in our nation has been literally "killed by kindness"--we have never had a crisis which put the real "fear of God" in our hearts. Instead we have settled for a psychologized-philosophized-physiologized hybrid which Dickinson labels "healthy-mindedness." Small wonder that Tarkington called for a rebirth of the "faith of our fathers." In 1926 he wrote, "Multitudes of people ask for confirmation of the old religious beliefs because they can no longer accept the faiths unless they find the confirmation. Science has slowly increased agnosticism, until now there is great bewilderment. The churches feel it, and seek to offer us the confirmation by altering the letters of the faith. That satisfies the objections of some people to the old letter of the faith, no doubt; yet the confirmation remains as lacking as before... [and many] have come to the conclusion that no confirmation is possible."⁸⁹ There is no hint of retrogression in this appeal for a revived confirmation of "the old religious beliefs." As a practical idealist, Tarkington advocated the retention of

of all that was good in any tradition; but he balanced this attitude with an open mind toward any change, disastrous though it might appear at the moment, provided that change promised eventual betterment. With Paul Burkholder he would have agreed, "Science never has and never will undermine the ethical concepts and truths of great religions, but it does repudiate antiquated dogmas of orthodox artificiality."⁹⁰ In the broadest sense, a convenient term we might attach to our subject at this point is "fundamentalist." Although unfettered by denominational commitments, Tarkington was devoutly religious. He proclaimed, by precept and example, that "The world does move," yet he anchored himself securely to the rock of Tradition. With a British essayist of a quarter-century ago he would have concurred: "My own belief--and there is some evidence for it--is that literature begins to go to the dogs as soon as earth becomes restive and declares its independence from heaven. In the great ages of literature, earth was, if not a suburb of heaven, a subject kingdom."⁹¹ We shall meet more of this conviction later when we examine more minutely the literary theories of Tarkington and their application to letters in our time.

The liberalism which we have just observed in the area of religion manifested itself also in an ever-widening range of other areas. It was, however, something of a delayed reaction. The "cult of respectability" with which one associates the Victorian Age dominated the social scene until late in the nineteenth century, even extending in certain regions well into the twentieth. The "Gay Nineties," pink Police Gazette and all, would seem tame indeed to the blase youth of today. Thomas Beer comments upon this period, "The decade became a little more liberal in conversation and

in print...[However] this liberalism did not extend to realism...Poor drabs faithfully presented were not what Americans craved."⁹² The truth of this last is especially apparent when one remembers that in 1893 a boyish Stephen Crane had to borrow money to have Maggie: A Girl of the Street printed because he could find no publisher, that in 1890 only a sympathetic Frank Norris (himself roundly damned a year earlier for the coarseness of McTeague) would accept the first novel of Theodore Dreiser (Sister Carrie), and that the best-sellers of the decade were by such sturdy romantics as Kipling, Conan Doyle, Stevenson, and Anthony Hope. The "realism" which did assail the bulwarks of literary tradition was still largely of the Howells variety which paid due homage to the feminine majority among novel readers and regarded letters as the sacred repository of manners and morals. The clamor of the insurgents was still muffled by the heavy robes of decorum. In fact, as Carl Van Doren remarked not long ago, "The lagging triumph of naturalism in [the literature of] the United States belongs as much to the history of public taste as to the history of the art of fiction."⁹³ The developmental period of Booth Tarkington, still ruled by the giants of the declining era, was predominantly one of artistic refinement and modest restraint. All of his literary peers were respected "gentlemen," and very few among them would even have acknowledged the "upstarts" who were rising against them. Still fewer knew then that their Brahmin world was doomed to become the legacy of the Bohemians. For "the twentieth century was being dovetailed into the nineteenth, and striding across the join was the new figure who was to own the new century--the Common Man. The social historian of our time will be much concerned with the social origins and backgrounds of its contributors, the intruders into the settled order of middle-class authorship."⁹⁴ One of the gravest blunders

committed by Tarkington consists of his choice of birthplace, parents, and upbringing. As Carl Bennett expatiated in an ironic mood,

Perhaps he ought not to have been born into such a comfortable, complacent atmosphere as that which once overhung the state of Indiana...Or, being born, he should not have been nursed through the best education middle-class prosperity could give him. Going to school he should never have succumbed to the immense personal popularity and under-graduate esteem--that shriveling bane upon personalities who otherwise might escape normality and enter the ranks of the seared souls. If only he had remained the kind of Socialist he thought he was in his youth, if during his apprenticeship he had only had the independence to desert a happy, safe home and starve those ...years in a musty garret somewhere. The trouble with Booth Tarkington was that...he was neither warped by his environment nor bruised by circumstance.⁹⁵

Under such handicaps until well into young manhood, it is little short of the marvelous that he did as well as he did. Later, of course, life dealt better with him--he teetered on the brink of alcoholism, he suffered an ignominious divorce, he lost his only child, his eyesight failed him, and other events of a similar nature prepared him to treat "real life." And, according to his own tenets, he did.

THE LITERARY SCENE

One might regard with a variety of attitudes this terminal decade of the century during which young Tarkington was trying his literary wings. The kindly historian may take the viewpoint of Pattee (vide ante, p.27) and accept it as a fallow spot in preparation for the spread of naturalism, the Poetic Renaissance, the cult of the New Humanists, the spawning of the "lost generation," or any other of the multifarious literary phenomena of the twentieth century. Such an attitude, of course, suggests a seminal quality to the period not conceded by all. The late F. O. Matthiessen, for example, stated flatly, "The emptiness of the literature of the late nineties cannot be exaggerated...It is perfectly quiet and harmless, for it's thoroughly dead."¹ This is an extremist view; unfortunately it contains much truth. Certainly there was no paucity of novels, plays, essays, poems across these years, but the overall level of merit did not make for lasting literary significance. Even from the brief analysis to follow, it will be evident that "...in quality [American literature] was at a low ebb."²

A plausible explanation for this decadence in our native letters might be to postulate the period as a "time of transition." During recent generations this expedient, familiar to all students, has been exploited to span any "awkward age" in a historical analysis. It is a resilient technique which can be stretched to a dangerous thinness; in this instance, nevertheless, it has irrefutable application. In a very real sense this decade begins the decline of the genteel tradition which had prevailed across the nineteenth century. To a certain extent it is true that, "dom-

inated by the mid-century Brahmins, the older order of literature unin-
vigorated by the new, still was in control,"³ but it was a token obedience
to the giants of the tradition. Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, Melville, Whit-
man, and others lived into the early nineties, but their creativity was
long spent. The expatriated Henry James was a source of more irritation
than emulation; his protégé, i.e. Edith Wharton, remains somewhat precious
in her appeal among Americans. "That amiable old maid Howells," as H. L.
Mencken called him, was left almost alone among our native great to usher
in the new century; his old crony, Mark Twain, was already lost amid aoid
clouds of pessimism, and such morning stars as Thomas Wentworth Higginson
and Thomas Bailey Aldrich faded prematurely into the twilight of mediocrity.
The roll call of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (founded in 1904
as a more "select" adjunct to the older National Institute of Arts and
Letters) provides a pathetic picture of the "literary scene." Although
the Academy was hardly a "representative" group, in the democratic sense
of the word, it did reflect but too well the schism which had broadened
between the "devitalized Brahminism" of the passing generation and the "cult
of the Common Man" which was gathering its forces.

The verdict of posterity upon this gradual cleavage is familiar to all
students of literature. The "restrained realism" of a Howells, transplanted
into a congenial nature, still suffices to condemn Tarkington in most crit-
ical circles; the "honest naturalism" of a Crane, et al., retains the firmer
grip upon the upper slopes. Yet the actual productivity of this early left-
ist movement was relatively slight. As Harland Hatcher expresses it, "The
last decade of the nineteenth century, important though it was, produced
more criticism and heated debate over the merits of realism than memorable

fiction in the realistic mode. Not many of the novels survived the extension of honesty and the greater surety of craftsmanship that were developed in the new century."⁴ This is but to say again that the turn of the century was a developmental period.

Were this a thorough sampling of the literary menu at this time in our literary history, the pattern of procedure from this point would be simple. One would turn to the critical writings of the principals of the period, quote extensively from such resources as Howells's "Realism and the American Novel" and Henry James's "The Art of Fiction"; supplement these with scattered remarks by such lesser lights as Lewis E. Gates, George E. Woodberry, even Edith Wharton; fill in with a few comments by miscellaneous historians like Malcolm Cowie, Carl Van Doren, Maxwell Geismar, and others appended in the bibliography; then, finally, attempt a synthesis of all these judgments from and upon the "old-line" school of realism. For present purposes, however, we need only acknowledge "...there is no question as to the influence of Howells upon the men of his generation. In the earlier part of our period [viz., the twentieth century], Howells's example both in criticism and in creative work assisted considerably in making realism the dominant mode."⁵ His major service was completed by the end of the eighties, although his influence ran well into the next century.

The relationship between Howells and Tarkington was largely that of mentor and pupil, due to their difference in age, but a cordial personal regard was shared by the novelists. It was Tarkington's high privilege, upon the death of the "Dean" in 1920, to frame the tribute published by his old journal, Harper's Magazine. In his essay the younger man stressed the artistry of Howells's style, his clarity of expression, the beauty of his

language; these are qualities that Tarkington appreciated as a fellow craftsman. In particular Tarkington could say of Howells, in full agreement with his own creative ideals, "His first demand, his whole great point for his own art, was that fiction should be lifelike; that the pictures it made should be truthful. Here was this bookman's real passion, after all--life, not books."⁶ To Tarkington, Howells was ever the arbiter in matters literary; he held a position of esteem unapproached by any of the new generation soon to sweep the field. Only a few years before Howells's death, Tarkington declared, "When Mr. Howells and the nation agree upon a matter of literature, the rest of us may as well consider that question officially settled."⁷ He admired Howells's "sweet reasonableness" toward the acceptance of gradual change for the sake of a greater good to come, for neither of these men was iconoclastic. Under wholly different circumstances from the Harper's article a mellow Tarkington once wrote, "Revolutions aren't good for art. Gentle artists die, or vanish; and the other kind tend to become propagandists."⁸ The history of contemporary letters is mute testimony to the truth of this observation.

In both his critical standards and literary products it is apparent that Tarkington preserved throughout his career a firm regard for Howells as the forthright "overturner of the false gods" of a decadent romanticism and the founder of an abiding realism. This very respect for the tenets of a departing generation has been sufficient in many quarters to relegate Tarkington to a quiet corner. As Irwin Edman pointed out somewhat wryly not long ago, "The business of a younger generation has long been conceived to be that of rebellion. The middle aged, by tradition, insist on the sacredness of the accredited table of the law; the younger men are char-

acteristically pictured in the operation of breaking them."⁹ (Soon thereafter he added, "But for us of this generation there is indeed very little left to do"...) By nature and association, however, Tarkington was a traditionalist. The Howells concept of realism provided ample leeway for the inclusion of romantic elements, it urged emphasis upon "the sunshine aspects of life," and it excluded the extremes of naturalism which Tarkington considered non-literary. In brief, it was so eminently congenial that he remained adamant in his abjuration of new literary developments.

Strangely enough, Howells himself was more aware of the shifting scene than young Tarkington. As we remarked earlier, his influence reached its zenith at the turn of the eighties, and by the end of the century he was well aware that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new." There is something of weariness in a letter which Howells wrote to Mark Twain in 1898, the same year a dogged Tarkington completed The Gentleman from Indiana. "Of course, I am tugging away at the old root," it reads in part. "I have just finished one novel, and am starting another. I suppose neither will convulse the world. I feel myself a very tiresome old story."¹⁰ This lament from Howells becomes more and more bitter as the century progresses, as new names assault his eminence, and as new titles compete with his on the market. In general, one may say with G. Harrison Orians that "...the polite, urbane life of the nineteenth century, which had been a world of leisure, was supplanted in the eyes of fictionists by a world of energy."¹¹

By far the most energetic movement in the world of letters was that philosophy of writing called naturalism. Its vociferous advocates provide a noisy contrast to the staid defenders of Howellsian realism or Hamlin Garland "veritism." Indeed theirs was a crusader's zeal, for this rising

generation (Pattee's "young rascals") took a militant stand against the time-honored creeds of literary tradition, infiltrated the publishing world with the rampant commercial spirit of the age, and led determined forays into other enemy camps. In America it was a movement young in spirit, young in leadership, but already mature in a literary tradition largely transplanted from abroad. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century "...in England the revolution [of naturalism] made headway even against the tides of Victorian conservatism...On the Continent too there was revolution, with strong literary leaders everywhere emergent: in Russia, Tolstoi and the 'realists'; in the north, Ibsen; in France, Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola; in Germany, Sudermann and Hauptmann; in Italy, d'Annunzio."¹²

From the catalog of foreign talent above it is apparent "the origins of the literary movement called Naturalism were European."¹³ By indirection, however, participation in the United States in this uprising was earlier and more extensive than many suspect. Ever since the triumphant tours of "the provinces" by Dickens at mid-century, the United States had become fair prey to impecunious lecturers who began spreading the new gospel. American magazines paid lavish prices for serial rights on overseas novels; even foreign articles for periodicals sold at a premium. In such ways, long before the "new liberalism" in literature became prominent in the home products, it had become well assimilated in America by means of extensive importation. "Thus America in the 90's became a part of the European tradition, but it furnished no revolutionists. The old line held: the youngsters might rage, but they were powerless to break through--powerless at least for a decade."¹⁴

Although the young Tarkington was by no means immune to literary influences from a variety of sources, the naturalist school was not one of them. Early in his career he decided upon an artistic code based upon imaginative truth rather than factual report. This philosophy is in sharp contrast to the preachments of Zola, "the father of naturalism," who maintained that in modern, scientific fiction "...imagination has no longer a place...You simply take the life study of a person or a group of persons, whose actions you faithfully depict. The work becomes a report, nothing more; it has but the merit of exact observation, of more or less profound penetration and analysis, of the logical connection of facts."¹⁵ The very term "naturalism" is based upon the cognate contention by Zola that "...you start from the point that nature is sufficient, that you must accept it as it is, without modification or pruning; it is grand enough, beautiful enough, to supply its own beginning, its middle and its end."¹⁶ Such dicta held small appeal for the artist in Tarkington, for it ignored those basic principles in art of selection and arrangement which he considered fundamental in both pictorial art and literature. To his mind, the creed of naturalism allowed nothing for that "alchemy of the artist" by which the thing observed is not merely reproduced by a clever reporter but interpreted by a peculiar genius in such a way as to reveal its inner significance.

It is patent that Tarkington numbered himself among the high majority of the "bourgeois gentility" to whom naturalism in literature meant "novels of low-life, of crime, drink and vice, or the debased animal instincts in man."¹⁷ Regardless of the original intention of its proponents to apply the study of environment and heredity through the methods of modern science to "the province of the arts" and in other areas to utilize such information

for the enhancement of literature and esthetics, the popular mind associated it with the extremes of the most radical. A perceptive essay by Irwin Edman contains the comment that:

the revolts against tradition have too often been explained away as the mere exhibitionism of literary eccentrics or of writers perversely weary of beautiful classic moulds. [On the contrary,] he continues, the desire for change [at this time] is far more plausibly explained by the rise of mechanical science, the spread of industry, and the sophistication of psychology, than by any merely personal foible of an abstract littérateur. The revolt against traditional patterns in thought and life [such as the revolution of our ideas concerning religion and sex, 'the most cosmic and the most personal of human experiences', and the 'mechanical inventions which have changed the range and the intimate detail of the lives of most denizens of the planet'].¹⁸

With this pronouncement Tarkington would have been in hearty agreement, although he might very likely have proposed an amendment. We mentioned earlier that Tarkington encouraged change toward an ultimate good as a normal concomitant of progress; what he deplored was undisciplined rebellion. As he expressed his own opinion on this matter, "The intelligent revolt against prettifying and too-sweet sweetness and sentimentality became in time indiscriminate, because continued rebellions always lose discrimination; and so it worked itself into a fury against whatever was pretty or sweet or had sentiment. Such a tumult, of course, couldn't sober down; but had to go on to its own extremes, which, naturally, have proclaimed the worthiness of almost anything formerly thought ugly or sour or meaningless or in bad taste."¹⁹ The acuity of Tarkington's perception in this regard we must recognize later when we assess his contributions to a lasting literary creed.

Our sketch of the literary scene during the pivotal period which closed the nineteenth century and opened the twentieth would indicate, at this

stage, that it consisted of only two components: the realism of Howells versus the naturalism of Zola. Such a picture is wholly misleading in terms of the prevalent literary activities of the time. Not every author declared himself a member of the realist school, and certainly "not every American writer in 1890 became a naturalist, participated in the tumult aroused by 'rugged individualism', resigned himself to laissez faire, and consented to the amputation from life of its illusions. Though harried from the earth by science, chivalry and beauty and honor contrived to thrive in history and fantasy; and nothing could prevent man from returning in imagination to the past, in order to be with these outlawed sentiments again."²⁰ In terms of popular acclaim, in terms of popular sale, in terms of all-round popularity, the novel of the hour was the historical romance.

It hardly needs stating that this appearance-disappearance-reappearance of the historical novel is a familiar phenomenon in our literary history. Both native products by Cooper and his kind, as well as imported titles by Scott and his, were perennial favorites through the last generation, although more recently the genre depends more upon Howells's "lively press" for The Egyptian or The Silver Chalice. Among the purists today the type is like opera to the die-hard musician--"neither fish nor fowl." Among the great mass of readers this snobbery is of absolutely no consequence; they like its accent on plot, its colorful characters, its dramatic movement and high romance. Such a tale offers "escape" from whatever is drab or forbidding in a real present and transports the reader through time and space to some never-never land of derring-do. "As has been shrewdly remarked, the themes of the general run of historical romances are so remote, and ideas about them exist so nebulously in the popular mind that the writer can use

any distortions that will pamper the fancy, and above all he can play on that extraordinary notion that human nature was different 'in those days', and that the good old times were 'pretty', and governed by fates sentimentally just."²¹ Incidentally, a historical romance like Forever Amber may also claim a quaint justification for moral liberties among the freer atmosphere of another day or another place--although this was the discovery of a more recent period than the one we are now discussing.

At any rate, every study of popular reading taste reveals the upsurge of the historical romance at the turn of the century. An informal report a few years ago in the "Trade Winds" column of the Saturday Review, edited by the omnipresent Bennett Cerf, lists one batch of "most popular" novels selected on the basis of library demand. Beginning with 1897, one finds Quo Vadis, by Henryk Sienkiewicz; for 1898, Hugh Wynne, by S. Weir Mitchell; for 1899, Richard Carvel, by Winston Churchill; for 1900, To Have and to Hold, by Mary Johnston; for 1901, Graustark, by George Barr McCutcheon; and for 1902, The Virginian, by Owen Wister.²² (Penrod for 1914, by the way.) Certainly one could hardly wish for a tidier illustration of a point than this list provides. A similar line-up, supplemented by such favorites as John Fox, Jr., Zane Grey, Harold Bell Wright, and Gene Stratton Porter, may be found in Frank Luther Mott's pioneer study Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States. There too, during the same period as our previous group, appear Quo Vadis, Richard Carvel, The Virginian, Hugh Wynne, and To Have and to Hold; among the "better sellers" for 1899 one finds Tarkington's The Gentleman from Indiana (as well as Penrod as an "over-all best seller" for 1914, The Turmoil in 1915 and Seventeen in 1916 among the "better sellers").²³ These references may offer sufficient evidence for our

case on behalf of the popularity of the historical novel, although other clues are easily available. Such a constant emphasis on one form was bound to be fatal. Orians states simply, "The movement for appropriating historical material for fiction died of its own plethora... The year 1907 sounded the knell for the school, although as a craze it was at an end in 1903."²⁴

For Tarkington it was a congenial area. Even as a small child he was fond of books--history books, and nearly every day his mother would read to him in the afternoon or his father in the evening. Woodress relates, "One book that he particularly enjoyed with his father was Scott's Tales of a Grandfather. History also provided the fare for the most memorable hours of his mother's reading, and during the summer he was nine he gladly cut short his play each day to listen to Guizot's History of France. For the Midwestern child Guizot's people came alive...[as] the makers of French history passed vividly through the boy's imagination."²⁵ Even so young the debonair barber-prince must have cast a dancing shadow upon the boyish fancy, and many of his student pieces bespeak this early love for bygone days.

In the light of the bare statistics given above, it is small wonder that a youthful Booth Tarkington devoted many of his post-Princeton nights to the creation of historical fiction. At first he merely sought congenial literary models for deliberate emulation. Frequently, as Walter Schmauch informs us, "the eighteenth century writers, particularly the French School, were the patterns for Tarkington's earlier works. Even today [1938] he is partial to Balzac, Daudet and Dumas."²⁶ Of a similar era in

English letters the story is told of a delightful pasticcio entitled "Mr. Brooke" which was given Tarkington's neighbor James Whitcomb Riley for critical reactions. The reactions were immediate--and violent. A purblind Riley, wholly mistaking the artificial style, fired back the manuscript with an explosion on the final sheet to the effect that it was "pure Goldsmith," that the careful archaisms of 1760 were "affectations," and that even young Tarkington "should know better."²⁷ Another of his experimental pieces is a short novel called simply Cherry, which Joseph Collins ranks as "one of Tarkington's most artistic tales."²⁸ This little masterpiece was laid away in the literary crypt at McClure's, not to be exhumed until two years after the author's popularity had been established by The Gentleman from Indiana and Monsieur Beaucaire. Cherry is a delicious burlesque of the historical romance so popular at the time of its inception, and its satire of priggish human nature is virtually unique. But perverse editors and an equally perverse public quite missed the spoofery; as its author declared ruefully years after its quiet death, "No one ever saw what I was up to!"²⁹

Despite such trials of authorship, it was obvious even to a remote Midlander that historical romance was still the surest bet on the literary market. Growing ever hungrier for even a modicum of editorial attention, Tarkington concentrated his energies in this field upon Monsieur Beaucaire. Although the time came when he himself thought lightly of such "trifles," "by more than one critic 'Monsieur Beaucaire' has been rated as one of the most brilliant short stories of its period."³⁰ Arthur Quinn says of it, "Sheer romance as it is, the form is remarkable for a first book; the con-

versation is direct and the situations almost perfect of their kind."³¹ Subsequent adaptations of the tale, first as a hit play (starring Richard Mansfield, Beaucaire ran three seasons) and eventually as a smash motion picture (featuring Rudolph Valentino), did no harm to the mounting Tarkington exchequer.

Something of Tarkington's later attitude toward the frippery of the historical romance is revealed in the hilarious self-satire of a quite forgotten short story entitled "Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction." Would space permit, the temptation is great to quote ad libitum from the tale, for the style is highly quotable and the autobiographical references delectable to the initiated. The negligible plot revolves about one "Kistle Simmons," the young writer of a first novel called The Heart of Alastair, the sudden popularity of which "astounded everybody acquainted with the young author except himself."³² Then follows a droll sketch of Tarkington the novice at a publisher's reception, the home town pride in the local product, the father who "stopped business men on the street" to regale them with clippings about his son's book, complete even to the "journalistic visitors who wrote 'Chats With Our Authors in Their Homes'," (inspired, no doubt, by his own appearance in Francis Halsey's Authors of Our Day in Their Homes).

The Heart of Alastair itself is a riot of personal allusions to family, foes, and friends. Its hero, John Trevelyian (of. Booth's father, John Tarkington), is a "straight, clean-limbed, smooth-shaven American" who has "travelled much, seen much--and suffered much." Returning from "hunting with the Arundel hounds," John is hailed by Alastair Boleyn, "cozily en-

sooned in an embowering oak in the midst of a shadowy, old-world garden, ...with a rare old book with a deeply tooled binding held carelessly in her hand."³³ They exchange witticisms in mock-heroic dialogue "for several chapters," she vanishes into a suspenseful anonymity (A favorite Tarkington plot--The Two Vanrevels is built entirely around such a device), and a series of absurd events ensues which delightfully burlesque the asininites of the Graustark species. Thus, by means of the elaborate hyperbole of description peculiar to the style, a fustian caricature of the incredible dialogue, a ludicrous turnabout of the extravagant plotting, and a resounding deflation of his own alter ego, Tarkington mercilessly flayed the whole genre, its progenitors,--and himself. This satire, of course, is highly reminiscent of the "condensed novels" of Bret Harte and the "frenzied fiction" of Stephen Leacock, although more elaborate than either of these latter and redolent of self-satire. To anyone familiar with Tarkington and the hysterical romances of that era, it is a hilarious piece.

The historical novel of this period was a derivative of the local-color movement which burgeoned in the seventies and eighties, then blossomed into regionalism early in the new century. This latter activity was by no means peculiar to American literature. "Fiction was everywhere seeking new materials to exploit; and local areas of Europe, as well as the United States, were ready to supply them in the richest abundance."³⁴ In 1894 Hamlin Garland, that "son of the middle border," had issued a manifesto under the title Crumbling Idols which called for a fresh severance from Continental literary ties, renewed determination to express the "infinite of native themes that are crying to be written." Over and over he asserted

our unlimited literary potential--and deplored the conventional emphasis on English models whereby the aspirant American writer is "everywhere turned away from the very material which he could best handle, which he knows most about, and which he really loves most--material which would make him individual, and fill him with hope and energy."³⁵

Although crying from the wilderness of the Middle West, the voice of Garland was not unheard. Looking about him, he saw possibilities in the lumbering communities of the Great Lakes region; so did Stewart Edward White. He noted the immigrant problems in the Northwest; one of "the best of all immigrant novels in the United States,"³⁶ Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth, emerged from this area, to say nothing of superb tales by Ruth Suokow and Edna Ferber. Garland urged the depiction of his own plains people, and immediately one thinks of Willa Cather and Zona Gale. Certainly a bumper harvest of vitally American literature has been reaped from the fertile imagination of Garland and others like him.

In their proximity to the current scene few realized that this would be the final opportunity here in America to create a distinctly local literature. As Malcolm Cowley points out, "Sectional and local influences were relatively unchanging during the years before 1900, and were therefore more important than they later became."³⁷ Indeed, Gohdes comments in this regard, "The awareness of sections [toward the latter portion of the nineteenth century] can hardly be understood today, for the conflict with Spain in 1898 and the two World Wars have served so effectively to unite the country in opposition to a common enemy that the sectional feeling which now survives is pallid by comparison."³⁸ The mass migrations occasioned by

troop movements during the wars, the frequent cross-marriages of persons from widely separated states, the great labor shifts necessitated by military demands, all these contributed to the severance of regional ties. "The world does move," as Tarkington was fond of saying. Soon the automobile was to shatter the provincialism of most of our citizenry, the airplane would shrink the breadth of our nation into hours, and the electronic miracles of radio and television would reduce the transmission of sound and sight to fractions of seconds. Supplement these with such contributive factors as American "tourism" and the exploitation of "retirement areas" like Florida and California, and it is no marvel that so little is left today of the sectional loyalties which bred the local-color movement three-quarters of a century ago and encouraged the regionalism shortly thereafter.

An integral part of local literature at the birth of the new century was a strong spirit of provincial pride on the part of the author for the unique virtues of his own area. Some twenty years ago Frederick Lewis Allen made a superficial study of best-sellers in America since the turn of the century (based upon Publisher's Weekly reports). From the analysis of his investigation Allen concluded, "Even the most cautious scholar...might see...signs of a mingling of two popular predilections: one, for picturesque romance, preferably historical; the other, for homely sentiment, rural simplicity and virtue, and homely humor."³⁹ Not far back we noted Tarkington's awareness of the first part of this appraisal and his reactions to it in terms of Monsieur Beaucaire and Cherry. His second novel in terms of composition, his first novel in terms of publication, is a direct reflection of the latter portion of Allen's statement. For surely The Gentleman from Indiana is well laden with "homely sentiment," it gained its real

popularity from the "manly virtues" of the hero, and it overflows with "the beautiful people" of the Midlands. Tarkington would be the first to confess that the "...novel was inspired by a genuine desire to extol the virtues of his native state."⁴⁰ He would also maintain that native pride, artistically controlled, is valid motivation for a national literature. Echoes from Crumbling Idols return; for in The Gentleman from Indiana Tarkington certainly did employ "material he knew most about" and could "handle the best," material which he "really loved most" (supra, p.66).

To Tarkington there was nothing mawkish about regional pride. In 1902, warm upon the charges of sentimentality in his first work of native consequence, he wrote a friendly defense of the Ohio Valley and its inhabitants. These Midlanders, he asserted, "are pleasant people to know; easy-going, yet not happy-go-lucky; possessing energy without rush, and gayety without extravagance."⁴¹ With easy humor and frequent anecdote he describes their "way of being hospitable without exertion," their lack of snobbishness, their "large quantity of small gossip" but relative freedom from "real scandal." He is free to admit that "life is exceedingly dull at times," but underneath one senses that basic love for Midwestern society which permeates so many of his stories.⁴² Garland contended, "The real utterance of a city or a locality can only come when a writer is born out of its intimate heart. To such a one, nothing will be 'strange' or 'picturesque', all will be familiar, and full of significance or beauty."⁴³ The native Hoosier in Tarkington writing of his own Indianapolis, the native Midwesterner writing of his own Marshall, Illinois, conform neatly to Garland's dictum. The practical Mr. Tarkington also added, "I had no real success until I struck Indiana subjects."⁴⁴

Tarkington made his appearance in regional writing at a time when one can detect a distinct trifurcation of the parent stream. Down one tributary flowed an ever-widening mass of localized novels, rich with romance, verdant with sentiment, heavy with melodrama. These one may as well label "romantic." They belong to that variety which professional critics condemn for those qualities just enumerated; also they belong to that variety which the unprofessional critic, viz the general public, acclaims for the same reasons. Among the horde of examples in this category which thronged the bookstalls of the nineties and the opening decade of the new century might be mentioned the works of such authors as Opie Read, Edward Westcott, John Fox, Jr., Gene Stratton Porter, and Harold Bell Wright. The contribution each made to the simple pleasure of an expanding reading public is beyond the estimate of even a Frank Luther Mott, although their writing will never attain the status of "literature" among the academic.

Down the other tributary, narrow and tortuous, another body of letters struggled through the cross-currents and dangerous shoals of "naturalism." As Melville liked to say, this was "an Anacharsis Clootz deputation" of multi-shaded determinists, Freudians, and satirists who united in a throaty chorus of condemnation of everything rural or rustic. Like Alexandra, that sturdy daughter of the soil in Willa Cather's O Pioneers, they bewailed the lack of mental stimulus, the dearth of culture on the farmstead; with Dorothy Dondore, author of The Prairie and the Making of Middle America, they contended, "...how much more pronounced must be that lack in the small town or village..., combining the ugliness of premature decay with the

vulgar rawness of the new. But whatever the stunting of their growth, it is as nothing compared to their mental stagnation."⁴⁵ It was convictions like these that bred the nasty satire of an Edgar Lee Masters in A Spoon River Anthology; that stirred the libido of a Sherwood Anderson into a Winesburg, Ohio; that shortly provoked the scathing denunciation of a Sinclair Lewis in Main Street. Carl Van Doren refers to this trend as "the revolt from the village," and that is not an inept phrase. Certainly it is true "the physical limitations of the prairie village in the past have restricted much of its life; its leisure class, mainly retired farmers, are not such as easily to solve its social problems...Even the good-natured laughter of Booth Tarkington at the uneventfulness of life in Plattville (see his Gentleman from Indiana), although he gives credit to its population for a customarily unrecognized kindness of spirit, intensifies rather than conceals a multiple spiritual tragedy."⁴⁶ (By coincidence, 1899 marks the date of another village story quite different from Tarkington's. This one bears the title "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg.")

Despite the inadvertent reference to Tarkington in the preceding paragraph, it should be obvious that he was only a transient there among the defamers of kindly regionalism. For Tarkington belongs well toward the center of the parent stream, serene in the placidity of a selective realism which eschewed both the high romance of the first tributary or the turgid veracity of the other. Even as we have noted elsewhere in our case study, the strong pull of tradition generally kept him safe during his own time. Posterity, however, has a way of seeking originality by reversing the judgments of an earlier generation. Ima Herron, for example, attributes a

goodly part of the current neglect of Tarkington (and William Allen White) to this element of kindness in the depiction of the small town a generation or two ago.

As writers of the little town both White and Tarkington illustrate what has happened to many an extoller of folksiness. Each, using what one critic has called nice pinks and yellows, began with glorification of late nineteenth-century village life. Finally, each, having watched the small town of the Midlands change with the growth of industry, turned to more realistic treatments of the industrialized town and small city. Both, however, have retained earlier traits and, in spite of the appearance of new problems in American fiction, have staunchly defended small town ways and middle-class thinking.⁴⁷

The impact of this later judgment we cannot evade, but it must be postponed. Until the new century was well on its way, however, and the young rebels had seized the literary reins, the regional romantics could still prolong, in their individual ways, whatever nostalgic strains had earlier been raised by the local colorists. Omitting the massive implications of this topic on a national scale, let us simply state that "the growing antagonism of certain young intellectuals to Puritanism and the Victorian ideals of a smug middle class gradually increased in intensity, but writers like James Whitcomb Riley (Hoosier poet of the bucolic West), Meredith Nicholson, with his elaborate defense of the village in The Making of Democracy, William Allen White, Booth Tarkington, Zona Gale, and others continued idealizing the Midwestern community."⁴⁸ Indeed, it was well into the second decade before the tributary of naturalism in American letters threatened to absorb the parent stream. As Herron suggests, Tarkington himself did feel the tug, hence the savagery of The Turmoil, the bitterness of Alice Adams, but he was never drawn to the depths of the extremists.

In tracing the emergence of Tarkington upon the literary scene at the close of the century, one further aspect does demand at least honorable mention. After a peek at the international scene, a closer survey of the national situation, and a glance at the Midwestern locale, it is only fitting to narrow our final focus to the State of Indiana. Since the advent of The Hoosier School-Master by Edward Eggleston in 1871, something like a "Hoosier School" of writers had been developing. It is not even a minor objective of our study to delineate in detail the "Hoosier Golden Age," as Woodress labels it, to analyze its inception, or to note its decline. The story has been traced a number of times by capable hands and needs no amplification here.⁴⁹ In briefest terms, "just at the turn of the century, [the Hoosier movement] blossomed. There was hardly a literate soul in the country who was not reading one or more of the sudden outpourings by Indiana authors. Their sales ran into thousands, their titles headed the lists: Charles Major's When Knighthood Was in Flower; Meredith Nicholson's The House of A Thousand Candles; Gene Stratton Porter's The Song of the Cardinal; George Barr McCutcheon's Graustark; George Ade's Fables in Slang;...even Riley's An Old Sweetheart of Mine sold more copies than any other single poem ever had. And, although very few people found copies to read, at the same time came Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie. All of them published practically at once, within a year or so."⁵⁰ The three dots toward the end of this excerpt from an article a decade ago by Heath Bowman indicate an omission: Booth Tarkington and The Gentleman from Indiana. For it was amid the healthy competition of these "fellow statesmen," to say nothing of the Ausländer outside that favored spot, that our

incipient novelist tested his mettle. Tarkington, of course, is a relative late-comer to this Indiana literary renaissance: General Lew Wallace, author of such favorites as Ben-Hur and The Prince of India, was forty-two years his senior, Eggleston was thirty-two, even his friend Riley was sixteen years older. In fact, by the time Tarkington had reached his majority in letters the localized movement had subsided and a new generation regarded state boundaries as little more than convenient lines on a national map.

In actuality, this literary situation in Indiana toward the end of the previous century held more encouragement for an aspiring author than what one might call inspiration. As a second glance at that long list of runaway favorites suggests, these are the products of successful writers principally if one measures that success in terms of pecuniary gain. Not one of those popular titles, including Tarkington's, will ever be enshrined as an American classic; not one is "deathless prose"--or poetry, in Riley's case. The major consideration here is the undeniable fact that the "Big Three" among Hoosier authors before the hey-day of Tarkington, namely, Eggleston, Wallace, and Riley, form a triumvirate of local celebrities who had proved resoundingly that "writing could make you not only respectable but respected...because you could make money at it."⁵¹ As we remarked some pages ago, to all good Americans at that time this ability to translate talent into currency was a lovely synonym for success.

"Money"... "success"... "author"... "artist": thus the cast is set for tragicomedy in the best tradition. It was the besetting sin of the American tourist to possess money, ergo--he lacked culture. It was the unforgivable sin of Tarkington to make money, ergo--he was no artist. His

damnation is trebly profound because he made a lot of money. It is no idle rumor that Tarkington died a millionaire. His activities in the novel, the short story, drama, motion pictures, and radio netted him perhaps the top income in American writing history. "From the six hundred dollars that McClure paid in 1899 for the serialization of The Gentleman from Indiana Tarkington's rates climbed to sixty thousand dollars for Mirthful Haven from The Saturday Evening Post in 1930."⁵² Tales are told, true and apocryphal, of his products being hawked on the market like "brand names" at the local supermarket--still in their cartons, unpacked, even unprocessed in some cases.

Thus opens wide an age-old siege which bids fair never to be settled. Unfortunately the issue is fought in print largely by the extremists. The esoteric critic, aloof in his ivory tower or beachcomber shanty, knows perfectly well that any "artist" worthy the name is absolutely unaware of agents, contracts, royalties, television rights, or whatever else savors of money. The professional writers, who turn out 99 44/100% of the world's words, know quite as well that man is mortal, that he also is human, and that by nature he has a variety of appetites which a comfortable income helps to appease. Between these two camps lies a troubled no-man's land occupied by a battered contingent who struggle individually to make peace with their critics, their consumers, and their consciences.

But after all, "No writer produces a manuscript for himself alone. When the last word has been written, he has to secure publication...in order that it may reach as wide a section of the public as possible. Whether he likes to think of it in this way or not, at this stage the writer has produced a commodity."⁵³ The weight of evidence strongly favors at least

moderate attention (be it aye or nay) if the artist is ever to flower. The long apprenticeship, the keen despair, the near-poverty of a Hawthorne need no expansion here; yet, as Matthiessen points out, "Hawthorne's one period of great productivity, coming in his late forties, seems to have been due more than to anything else to the stimulus of finding, with the publication of The Scarlet Letter, that he had at last a sufficient audience to serve as a challenge to his fullest energies."⁵⁴ Mr. Matthiessen is modest; the "sufficient audience" purchased "an initial printing of four thousand copies in ten days; its second printing was sold out before it was ready for delivery; and, stimulated by a lively 'press', it kept up a good sale for many months."⁵⁵ In fact, The Scarlet Letter is listed by Mott as a "best-seller" for the year 1850 and The House of Seven Gables the succeeding year.⁵⁶ History does not record that Hawthorne's artistry disintegrated, that his morality crumbled, or that his soul was desecrated by this successful competition with "those damned female scribblers" (to quote Hawthorne) who dominated the book market in what Pattee has labeled "the feminine fifties."

Dean Howells compiled a five-foot shelf of Americana all by himself. "One stands in awe at the sheer bulk of the man's work...The reason for the mass is economic. Not once did Howells strike into the best-seller class, and the scale of living which the age demanded of a family of his sort--trips to Europe, a summer home in Maine [a Tarkington touch!!--was such that ample funds were needed."⁵⁷ In 1900 Howells was the Grand Old Man of American letters at sixty-three. Although freed from editorial duties, he was committed to an expensive way of life; and he was understandably irked by the sales of the historical romances and sentimental family novels which

sky-rocketed past his own novels. In a letter written in mid-July of that year he confessed, "I should like for once to see a book of mine thoroughly put before the public, instead of being left to grope its way. Of course one is more or less corrupted by the spectacle of the immense successes around one, and it galls me that I should sell only as many thousands as the gilded youth of both sexes are selling hundred-thousands."⁵⁸ (No names mentioned, but 1900 is the era of Tarkington's The Gentleman from Indiana and Monsieur Beaucaire, of Mary Johnston's To Have and to Hold.) Howells was frank in that letter: he said "put before the public," he measured success by the "hundred-thousands," he admitted he wanted his works to "sell." Do such phrases make him ambitious...or avaricious? Even Tarkington affirmed the eminence of Howells, proclaiming both his popularity with the general public and "the other thing for the few."⁵⁹ Apparently, he was still not satisfied.

Frankly, it is impossible to avoid completely this mercenary motive in writing. In his gracious, urbane style H. L. Mencken once remarked, "Nine-tenths of the literary gents I know...are hotter for the dollar than any Babbitt ever heard of. Their talk is not about what they write, but what they get for it."⁶⁰ Much the same admission comes from Albert Guérard, who offers, albeit apologetically, "But even among writers we must recognize, the mercenary element is not wanting. We find it plain and unashamed, in the literary trade, or, as New York prefers to call it, the literary racket. This line of business was not invented on our shores and in our days; there always have been pens for hire as well as swords."⁶¹ Certainly the publishing world is well populated with respectable "hacks" whose daily job

is to string words together in meaningful sequence--and who do it well, quite unmoved by creative impulse or artistic drive. Regardless of the money involved, the "success" of such writers in a literary sense must be considered negligible, nor can such writers achieve any consideration as "artists," in the better signification of that word.

On the lowest scale, then, are those authorial citizens from Grub Street to Park Avenue who, for the sake of money, turn out work which they themselves despise. The author of an article, "Tripe, Inc.," in the Saturday Review of Literature a few years back was one of this ilk. Encouraged by the modest sale of his first novel, he produced three more solid, serious works of fiction which were "praised, dramatized on the radio, but not bought." Almost in desperation he dashed off a short story for a "slick" magazine, was handsomely rewarded, and thus made the disturbing discovery that "a slick story, written in a few days, made as much as one of [his] novels which had taken every spare moment for a year. Half a dozen sales would keep the wolf at a very respectful distance from the door."⁶² Gilbert Seldes describes the situation tidily: "There are artists who can turn out commercially acceptable stuff at two or more levels--pulp and slicks and magazines, and so on. And there are some who stop doing good work, after it has begun to give them a decent living, to do poor work which pays them more."⁶³ Out of this bad situation, Seldes continues, a worse one may develop. "Perhaps the most disastrous effect of popularity on a writer is that he is encouraged to stick to the form, or formula, which first caught the public fancy... The writer in such a case is asked not to grow; not even to grow old. But the only way to stop growth

is to die; and some writers do this, while they continue to write."⁶⁴ Thus when the author of "Tripe, Inc." returned to "the big task," unsuspected misgivings arose: Where was the line now between emotion and sentiment? What was the real function of presumptuous minor figures? Might he not spread his social gospel further by utilizing his highly saleable "slick" style than by reverting to his normal urbanity?

Our anonymous writer was not sure of the answers, but his critics were. One of them, John Schaffner, himself a former fiction editor of a "slick" periodical now turned literary agent, wrote a spirited response entitled "Notes from Inside a Glass House," in which he ably defended the functions of popular magazines and castigated the hypocrisy of "Anonymous." With Sherwood Anderson, Schaffner would declare, "Writing is both a trade and an art." Anderson, by the way, once commented further on this matter, "The men who write popular stories and plays should respect their own trade. Most of them...spend too much time apologizing. Or they brag too much, which is but another form of apology. They should be more self-respecting. It is perhaps as important for people to be amused and excited by the popular methods as it is that they be moved more deeply."⁶⁵ Again it is a matter of attitude that seems to be involved, a spirit of critical condemnation which denounces only the mercenary motive behind the production of writing.

Occasionally a glint of honesty relieves the drabness of the situation above. A younger William Faulkner, for instance, opened his "Introduction" to a new Modern Library edition of Sanctuary with the statement, "This book was written three years ago. To me it is a cheap idea,

because it was deliberately conceived to make money. I had been writing books for about five years, which got published and not bought."⁶⁶ So, he goes on to tell, he "began to think of books in terms of possible money." Sanctuary, that fetid blob of Mississippi mud, was his solution--"the most horrific tale I could imagine [which] I wrote in about three weeks." Neither accepted nor rejected, the story was forgotten by Faulkner, who thereupon "told Faulkner, 'you're damned. You'll have to work now and then for the rest of your life.'"⁶⁷ Ultimately it was set up and the galleys sent to the author. He was appalled by the poor quality of the piece and completely rewrote it. In the end Faulkner explains, "It had already been set up once, so I had to pay for the privilege of rewriting it...and I made a fair job and I hope you will buy it and tell your friends and I hope they will buy it too."⁶⁸ There is ironic humor in this account, tossed off in 1932, for only eighteen years later this same novelist was to address the dignitaries gathered at Stockholm to bestow upon him the Nobel Prize: "I feel that this award was not made to me as a man but to my work--a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit,"⁶⁹ but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before."⁷⁰ These are modest words; many of the others in the brief speech are brave words. The problem for the student of Faulkner is to reconcile such pronouncements with the man and his works.

The earliest biographer of Booth Tarkington, Robert Coates Holliday, was most impressed by the sincerity and integrity of his subject. Toward the close of his study he pondered this same matter of motivation. Even

in 1918 Tarkington was a "popular" writer, yet Holliday sensed he was something more. Above all, Holliday was convinced that Tarkington had never betrayed his artistic conscience by pandering to the money mart. "For Mr. Tarkington deliberately to have set himself to produce an unbroken series of purely popular books,--nothing, one cannot fail to perceive in his talk, could have been more utterly impossible than his doing such a thing."⁷¹ Many years later, upon the eve of his seventieth birthday in July, 1939, to be exact, Tarkington had this bit of advice for aspiring writers. "Fiction, to be excellent, must come from a depth of feeling and be done without thought of any financial reward. It is necessary to concentrate on a job properly done and let the price to be obtained be a secondary matter."⁷² One does not expect such comments from a distressingly "successful" novelist, yet they could be multiplied manifold over Tarkington's creative years. Holliday reported "at mid-season" what seems to have a preponderance of simple truth: "As he sees it himself, popularity has always been an accident with him, and so has unpopularity: both 'just happened', so far, he says, as his own intentions have been concerned."⁷³

It has become standardized critical practice to berate Tarkington for utilizing certain literary commodities in many of his novels which probably do not discourage sales. Consciously or unconsciously, the author seems to manipulate his materials in such a way as to "contrive" a happy ending, a melodramatic effect, or a fortuitous solution to an awkward situation. Again, the "standard" examples are the final union of George Min-afer and Lady Morgan in The Magnificent Ambersons, the same for Bibbs Sheridan and Mary Vertrees in The Turmoil, the promise of reconciliation



between hero and heroine in such different tales as Ramsey Mibholland and The Image of Josephine, the "mistaken identity" device in The Gentleman from Indiana and The Two Vanrevels, the coincidence in The Flirt of the meeting of international detective Mr. Pryor and international confidence man Valentine Corliss in a little Midwestern city, plus perhaps a few more. The list is imposing--and revealing. Tarkington's own explanation is supplied by Mr. Holliday in his report of an interview on just these counts. Taking his subject at his own words, the biographer recorded, "He has never ...'played the goat to entertain anybody'. If there are 'devices' here and there in his books which have an air for popular favor,...they are there not because of a crafty motive of the author's, but because he didn't know any...[other] better way of bringing out what he had in mind to bring out. That he put them in to please an editor or a book buyer: 'Really, I'd as soon have forged a check'."⁷⁴ This assertion was made in 1918; as we shall see, it was not wholly true at that time, certainly it was not true later. Editorial policies governing periodical publications did cause occasional retrenchments, although eventually they also brought about an inadvertent stiffening of the moral fibre. Sufficient to say at this point, Tarkington seems perfectly sincere in his declaration of independence. Whatever the explanation for his indubitable popular success, it cannot be laid to a cheap truckling to comic-book taste. "Commercialism is the savage of the world," he once wrote a friend, and with him this applied to matters of art as well as business.

To many a literary critic a seeming inconsistency creeps in at this juncture, for Tarkington himself was proud of his status as a "professional"

writer. He conceded nothing derogatory to the classification; indeed, he considered it a distinction. Like no other penman of his generation, he was known and beloved by literally millions of readers and he rejoiced in that fame. Charles Wertenbaker paid him a timely tribute in Life magazine midway between his seventieth birthday on July 29, 1939, and the fortieth anniversary of The Gentleman from Indiana on October 14. In his article Wertenbaker hailed Tarkington, not only as our only double winner of the Pulitzer Prize and one of only three (along with William Dean Howells and Edith Wharton) to receive the gold medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, but also as the "dean of American writers" and our "No.1 professional."⁷⁵ With journalistic oversimplification, perhaps, Wertenbaker breaks down writers in the United States into three categories: 1. the neurotics (those self-expressionists who write for such egotistical reasons as emotional release or personal fame), 2. the pulp writers (those hucksters who provide pure escape for mass amusement), and 3. the professionals (the "solid center" of contemporary writers, of whom he ranked Tarkington tops). Tarkington himself declared, "Writing is a trade, and like any other trade, it must be learned."⁷⁶ Part of this learning process must be directed toward the reading of popular taste. Frank Norris once made the comment,

It is all very well to jeer at the People and at the People's misunderstanding of the arts, but the fact is indisputable that no art that is not in the end understood by the People can live or ever did live a single generation. In the larger view, in the last analysis, the People pronounce the final judgment. The People, despised of the artist, hooted, caricatured and vilified, are after all, and in the main, the real seekers after Truth.⁷⁷

Although this is Comrade Norris of the Socialist Party speaking, he sounds

suspiciously like Brother Tarkington of the G.O.P. For Tarkington was a strong believer in the ultimate integrity and taste of a cultivated "proletariat." In an affectionate memorial to the late Riley, "the people's poet," Tarkington wrote, "The laurel is bestowed by the people. Not even the king can make a laureate; the laurel is always bestowed by the people."⁷⁸

Not all persons hold this opinion, by any means, for it is a common conviction that a "passionate few," rather than "the People," preserve the finest in our literary heritage and are the most concerned about maintaining a creative environment conducive to cultural advancement. This, however, was not Tarkington's view. Recent support to his position comes from Walter Kerr, drama critic for the New York Herald Tribune. In the field of theater, Kerr declares, the past three-quarters of a century has witnessed a decline which, if not checked, may go on until "the theater as we know it may cease to function entirely."⁷⁹ Ever since the advent of Ibsenian drama "of photographic realism and socially significant content directed at an audience of intellectuals," the audience has received less and less concern until now "theme, plot, character development and language -- the things that gave the theater popular appeal" are gone. This divorce of drama and audience may well prove fatal, Kerr warns; "no great play has ever come from what might be called a minority theater...The presence of the uncultivated mass...is an indispensable prerequisite for drama of genuine stature...At worst, the popular theater holds the fort; at best, it finds its way to Hamlet."⁸⁰ Were Tarkington here today, he would have written a Foreword, gratis, to How Not to Write a Play.

Wertenbaker had this to add upon Tarkington's relation to the general reading public: "Like all professionals, regardless of private income,

Tarkington has always written for the market.... Being dependent on the public, or on editors who buy for the public, he has tempered his writing to the taste of reasonably polite and intelligent people; but as a shrewd and honest observer of the people he writes for, he has mixed a good deal of sharp social criticism with his entertainment. Such a professional attitude often produces great literature, and Tarkington's best books have been praised by the best critics."⁸¹ Particularly after the belletristic early efforts like Monsieur Beaucaire and Cherry, Tarkington worked ever deeper into that vein of "sharp social criticism" until today it forms the major portion of his literary reputation. Like Charles Dickens nearly a century before him, an author whose social message underlies volume after volume, Tarkington was convinced that one of his primary responsibilities as a novelist was to dramatize basic social truths in a style and form, not only comprehensible, but also palatable to his readers. As an artist he practiced the niceties of his medium; as a citizen he set forth ideas and ideals which he deemed significant. He held a limited regard for the esoteric contributors to the "little magazines," since their efforts seemed dissipated in a rarefied atmosphere too thin for salubrious existence. With Van Wyck Brooks, he would have been inclined to say, "After all, popular writing amuses a good many people, while abortive 'serious' writing has no value whatever."⁸² Despite his own genteel background, despite his college training, despite a lifetime among the cultivated society of his day, Tarkington remained, as Holliday put it, "very much like most people." In one of the warmest tributes one author could pay a fellow, the eminent John P. Marquand said of Tarkington at a still productive seventy-two, "By

his own unvarying standards and good taste [he] has proved that literature can be produced outside of an ivory tower and sold in the market place."⁸³

It is abundantly evident that Tarkington was an active player in the game of life. Even when physical incapacity forced him to the sidelines, he was an energetic spectator. Withdrawal from life, for him, was a close synonym for death itself. Although the isolation peculiar to a college campus kept low this consuming fire as a youth and extended absence from the home scene prolonged its somnolence into manhood, it burst into full flame soon after he resumed residence at 1100 N. Pennsylvania Street in 1911. One possible reason for his aversion to the psychological novels so popular in recent years may lie in their seeming emphasis on the individual to the resultant neglect of the social theme. At any rate, in his mature years he became convinced that it was impossible to divorce art and life; to devote part of one's time and energy in one area, then to redirect them deliberately into another. The anonymous author of "Tripe, Inc." learned the folly of trying to blend writing for the "slicks" at one time and for Wertenbaker's "neurotics" at another. Albert Guérard still urges today that "Absolute disinterestedness [to mercenary matters] remains the ideal of art...Let the artist be financially independent of his art. Let him adopt a simple mode of life, and do some plain work in order to support himself. Having paid his way, he may sing for the joy of it, without caring whether his song helps pay the rent."⁸⁴

Such a solution to the "plight of the artist" would never occur to the practical, progressive, workaday Tarkington. It smacks too much of the monastic retirement of old, which, as he saw it, served mainly to perpetuate

among a few a limited store of fixed knowledge across a trying period. And certainly it is a selfish expedient. It is one man's way of hoarding an almost antisocial isolation from his fellows. From The Turmoil Bibbs Sheridan again comes to mind. With new health he is returned to a shop job typical in its mechanized monotony. Love speeds his fingers; soon he too is a machine. Even as he labors, his thoughts soar freely and he feels a peculiar independence. One evening he comes home and writes in his notebook: "Manual labor is best. Your heart can sing and your mind can dream while your hands are working. You could not have a singing heart and a dreaming mind all day if you had to scheme out dollars, or if you had to add columns of figures. Those things take your attention."⁸⁵ This is sheer heresy to Sheridan, Senior, "founder and president of the Pump Works," and a crisis develops. Eventually Tarkington makes it clear that Bibbs, artist and esthete, is still smaller than the issues confronting him--and Bibbs is drawn into the "temple of the money-changers." Thus he becomes a single sacrifice to a principle higher than any individual, despite his poetic temperament which even the anti-sentimentalists demand preserving. Ars longa, vita brevis: the cultural growth of the public is a slow process; each must make his contribution in his own way. As even Bibbs confessed, "I've never written anything worth printing, and I never shall." His friend Mary Vertrees protests, "But I know you could! Ah, it's a pity life won't let you!" The young man doesn't hesitate. "It isn't," said Bibbs honestly. "I never could."⁸⁶ An economical Tarkington then takes this mediocre poet and transforms him into a dynamic executive. The implication is clear: Bibbs Sheridan has found his assigned role in the greater scheme. It is quite as Woodress says, "The transformation of Bibbs from poet to indust-

rialist, is not tragic, for Tarkington has no tragic sense, and in addition sees his character as fulfilling a historic role in capitalistic society."⁸⁷

In simple truth, this relationship between money and art does possess its peculiar aspects. As Hilbert Seldes remarked not long ago, "The position of the writer in the United States is an odd one. He is both a businessman and an artist; he has to be, because he has a living to make; his only patron is the public, acting through editors and publishing houses. Yet it is considered unfortunate, or downright treasonable, if the writer writes for money."⁸⁸ As we have observed, such an attitude is especially prevalent among the esthetical critics or the critical esthetes, but occasionally "this feeling is shared by writers themselves; they frequently denounce their ill-gotten gains and threaten to write something for themselves alone; sometimes they even carry out their threats."⁸⁹ "Sometimes"--but not often. Among our contemporaries William Saroyan may come to mind. In 1939, for example, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama for The Time of Your Life, but refused the thousand dollars because he "already had \$1000 at that time, and because commerce has no right to patronize art." Even more recently (May, 1955) Saroyan reiterated this declaration of financial independence. With Thoreauvian aplomb he states, "I have never been subsidized, I have never accepted money connected with a literary prize or award, I have never been endowed, and I have never received a grant or fellowship."⁹⁰ Of course, he admits, "I owe so much in back taxes that it is very nearly impossible arithmetically to even the score by writing, and I have acquired other personal, moral, and financial responsibilities... I am head over heels in debt. [But] I expect to get out of debt by writing, or not at all."⁹¹

One hardly needs to add that this attitude by Saroyan is atypical. Another contemporary novelist, also an individualist in other ways, is Ernest Hemingway. In November, 1954, it was announced that his novella, The Old Man and the Sea, had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature-- as well as the thirty-four thousand dollars that went with it. The Life magazine correspondent waggishly reported that the cash was "a very good thing because, when the wire came, he was \$8000 in debt."⁹² From his centuries-old Spanish house near Havana a jovial Hemingway warned the Cuban TV audience, "This will notify any friends planning to put the bite on me that the money hasn't arrived from Stockholm yet."⁹³ Whereas one must not place too much emphasis upon such frippery as this Hemingway wisecrack, it is still indicative of that other attitude at the opposite pole from that of Saroyan. Above money, Saroyan knows he is a word-artist; solvent again, Hemingway thinks he is.

Best-sellers...Pulitzer Prizes... Nobel Prizes--they all speak of success. Whether it be monetary or honorary, success ofttimes has a vital effect upon the recipient. So far away as 1912 that loyal Hoosier, Meredith Nicholson, declared that "the compilation of such statistics on best-sellers as found in the Bookman lists at that period is quite as injurious as it is helpful to authors."⁹⁴ Nearly half a century later the comment is still true. Thanks to the vigorous sales campaign given a promising commodity, many a young scrivener has seen his first efforts over-inflated, has had his head turned by injudicious flattery--and then has been thrust aside at the next harvest time for a new name, a fresh talent. M. Georges Duhamel wrote recently,

If one of my sons were to decide to try his luck as a writer, and were to ask my counsel..., I should give him only one piece of advice: 'Beware of success.' And in saying this I should think first of success in our time, what I am tempted to call 'American success', that monstrous phenomenon, brutal and unbridled as an assassination, which seizes a man, uproots him and tears him to pieces, then lets him fall to earth again three-quarters dead, to rot and perish in obscurity.⁹⁵

It would be downright falsehood to describe magazine editor S. S. McClure in the language used by Duhamel. The long life of the McClure's magazine attests to his editorial acumen, and certainly his reception of young Tarkington was both courteous and cordial. With vigorous admiration for The Gentleman from Indiana he greeted the embarrassed Hoosier, assuring him "it was most extraordinary [he] should have written this book--remarkable that a new fellow should turn up with a book like this." Then, in rapid order, he informed Tarkington that he was "the only man we'll publish along with Kipling as a serialist--but we are turning down a serial by Anthony Hope⁹⁶ to put in this of yours."⁹⁷ Tarkington found a most unexpected friendliness in McClure when the editor assured him, "We are going to push you and make you known everywhere--you are to be the greatest of the new generation, and we'll help you to be."⁹⁸ As the new author confessed, when McClure led him up to Ida M. Tarbell and announced, "Miss Tarbell, this is to be the most famous young man in America," he "felt like a large gray Ass!--and looked like it."⁹⁹

The Tarkington parents had not been too happy to pack their young hopeful off to the big city all by himself. They were certain he was being led straight into the wolves' den, and for some time it strained the persuasive talents of their son across several letters to convince them that he was being fed, that his wallet was intact, that he was covered at night,

that he was "all right!" For McClure offered him the hospitality of his home while the rambling novel was being out "from a letter to a cablegram," escorted him to various clubs in and about New York, and introduced him to such literary figures as Doubleday the publisher, Kipling, Bliss Perry, Ernest Thompson Seton, Bok of the Ladies' Home Journal, and others. It was a thrilling time for the lanky Midwesterner, and it is a near miracle he was not sadly spoiled by the attention he received from all sides.

The whole account of the "discovery of Tarkington" is full of human interest--and humor. Julian Street, long a boon companion of Tarkington at home and abroad and an able henchman on many a prank, contributed to the Saturday Evening Post an amusing series of anecdotes centering around his old friend. Regarding the mythical discoverer of Tarkington, he wrote,

The honor of having discovered Tarkington is variously claimed. S. S. McClure, who published Tarkington's first stories in the old McClure's Magazine is one discoverer; another is Miss Viola Roseboro, who was a reader on McClure's, and a very gifted one. Miss Roseboro was emotional over good work, and Miss Ida M. Tarbell, who was on the staff at McClure's in its golden days, has told me how Miss Roseboro strode into an editorial conference with a mass of typed sheets clutched to her bosom and tears in her eyes. 'Here,' she proclaimed, 'is a serial sent by the Lord God Almighty for McClure's Magazine!'¹⁰⁰

Even Hamlin Garland, already a veteran novelist and critic reader for McClure's Magazine, scanned the manuscript and immediately sent the young man a cordial note which concluded: "You are a novelist!"

Instance upon instance could be cited from this early chapter in Tarkington's career as it was expanded by his ever-widening circle of associates. The author's own account forms one of the most charming sections of the voluminous Tarkington Papers now preserved in the Princeton University Library.¹⁰¹ It is no little temptation to quote in extenso

from these enthusiastic notes in the inimitable Tarkington style, for they are not only entertaining but enlightening. A sharp cameo of publication methods is cut by the naive comments from the fledgling, and fascinating sidelights upon contemporary literary personalities lure one from page to page.

Suffice it to say, the new novelist was royally received upon his arrival, and it is obvious that everyone associated with his "discovery" went far out of his way to be kind to the shy Indianan. Indeed, the whole episode is illustrative of the peculiar charm about Tarkington from youth to old age. Even S. S. McClure, who had built up an income of \$100,000 from exactly nothing ten years earlier, was so impressed by the young man that he invited Tarkington to spend the next summer with his family at their habitation d'été in southern France and virtually offered him an editorial post on the magazine staff. (Interestingly enough, Tarkington wrote home at this time, "I wouldn't take it if I could...[for] it would be an end to writing and Golden Goose would lay no more eggs."¹⁰² Time certainly justified his judgment, though the temptation must have been great.)

It is obvious that Tarkington was sipping with delight the heady liquor of success. To his credit may it be said that its intoxication was fatal in only one respect--it fixed his determination to be a writer. One is much reminded of the publishing experiences of Sinclair Lewis. Like Tarkington, Lewis devoted much of his efforts throughout half a dozen years (1908-1914) to the semi-autobiographical Our Mr. Wrenn, his first "actually completed novel." In Lewis's own words, "The book sold well enough--perhaps 3000 copies--and even had two or three cordial reviews.

That, naturally, was enough to make the ⁵³idsease chronic and incurable."¹⁰³ After a hectic session of alternating labor and levity preparing an abbreviated Gentleman from Indiana for serialization, it was a jubilant Tarkington who finally boarded the train for Indianapolis and home. The apprenticeship was over: he was an author.

There are two cartoons of the young man at this moment in his career. One was sketched by the errant son himself in response to the paternal plea: "Come home. 'The voice of the turtle is heard in the land.'" The text of the reply is not extensive--"Dear Father: All right--pretty soon. Affectionately, Booth."¹⁰⁴ Across the rest of the page an oddly paunchy, honestly homely Booth is shown, valise in hand, tripping amongst the flowers of spring. To one side a turtle, genus Chelonia, waves his flippers in friendly salute and warbles his greeting (in harmony) on a four-line staff. Beneath the Tarkington "roamin'" nose a long smile extends nearly to the high stiff collar tucked cozily under an elephantine ear. There is almost an air of, shall we say, smugness about the sketch...

The other picture appeared over a hilarious self-caricature in prose which was published in Cosmopolitan some five years after his career was launched. The forepart of this parable about "Lukens of Colestown" (a thinly veiled Newton of coal-smudged Indianapolis) is strongly autobiographical, for it tells of a consecrated scribbler who, like Tarkington, wrote a novel about the home folks. The work is a hit and Lukens comes home to be greeted by an editorial which urges the local citizenry, "Treat him With Silent Contempt or a Brick." In this sketch our hero perches atop the world, arms folded across a high-blown chest, knees crossed decisively,

nose well elevated, eyes a-droop with disdain; a ribbon encircles his lofty brow. Manuscript sheets are flying everywhere; an ink-pot sits at his feet, pen in readiness. To his right hangs a shield emblazoned with the laurel leaf; to his left hangs an identical shield with a moneybag inscribed upon it. Over the tale appears the heading: "Temptations of a Young Author," and as the story proceeds these become only too evident. Finally his kindly publisher takes him to one side and tells him the "facts of life." "You'll have a great many [temptations]," he said, "and the greatest of all you'll never yield to. There will be times when your best friends will wish you could, but you'll never be able to give in to it."

"What's that?" asked the young man anxiously.

"To stop writing."¹⁰⁵

So far as his own case is concerned, Tarkington never wrote truer words. For a generation and a half this gentleman from Indiana turned out a steady stream of short stories, novels, plays, and articles. Neither domestic dissension, the death of Laurel, his only child, incipient alcoholism, nor the threat of blindness kept him long from the drawing-board at which he wrote in pencil. Even when advanced years and partial vision necessitated the dictation of his tales to an amanuensis, he persevered in the technique until he made it his own. For such persistence comes that ancient query: Why do writers write? H. L. Mencken once remarked, in a cynical bit of self-revelation, "An author... is a man in whom the normal vanity of all men is so vastly exaggerated that he finds it a sheer impossibility to hold it in. His overpowering impulse is to gyrate before his fellow men, flapping his wings and emitting defiant yells. This being

forbidden by the Polizei of all civilized countries, he takes it out by putting his yells on paper. Such is the thing called self-expression."¹⁰⁶ Of all Tarkington's authorial sins, garrulous immodesty is not one of them. Mencken is an astute observer on the Mencken complex, but he did not know the Tarkington type. Jean-Paul Sarte, the ebullient father of Existentialism, asked this same question, Why write?, in a recent work entitled What Is Literature? Among a provocative array of responses to his own query he declared, "One of the chief motives of artistic creation is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world."¹⁰⁷ As we have already glimpsed in part, and as we shall examine in more detail later, this comes close to the Tarkington motivation behind writing. His close friend and neighbor, Kenneth Roberts, reports that Tarkington once explained to him,

The natural writer...can hardly tell you why he writes. He just writes. A painter, while he's painting, paints for himself, though he hopes and expects his painting to be seen. The same is true of a writer--the critic in him edits what he writes; it is in his mind that somebody besides himself is going to read it, or else he wouldn't edit his writing. Therefore he not only writes for himself but hopes to communicate--to present to somebody else his interpretation of life.¹⁰⁸

Here, in small compass, is the core of Tarkington's literary creed:

Living letters are created by a man of natural talent who writes from an irrepressible drive to the best of his ability for an altruistic purpose he may barely perceive.

Although it is difficult from a distance for an investigator to make an absolute statement, certainly every evidence substantiates this basic modesty of our subject. James Woodress describes the Tarkington Collection now housed in the Princeton University Library as "certainly one of the

most completely preserved records of any significant American author"; then hastens to add, "The accumulation and preservation of the Tarkington Collection, however, owes very little to the subject himself. Although naturally acquisitive, Tarkington was extremely modest, completely unpretentious, and had no passion at all for documenting his own career."¹⁰⁹ Thirty-seven years earlier a pioneering Holliday wrote of Tarkington's "hatred for sham, egoism, conceit;" later Grant Overton likewise emphasized the "innate modesty and gracious charm" of the novelist; and James Branch Cabell added a third part to the harmony. The acute insight of the true critical genius so often displayed by Van Wyck Brooks illuminates this matter quite perfectly. In one analysis of author popularity Brooks stated, "I am sure of this: it is modesty that lies behind the 'best-seller'; and there is an aspect in which the spectacle of writers regarding themselves as humble tradesfolk has a certain charm."¹¹⁰ We have already noted Tarkington's admission, nay, his boast that he was a "professional" writer, one to whom popularity brought satisfaction, even pleasure. In speaking of his beloved portraits, the mature novelist once observed, "It isn't conceit, it is humility that wants a 'flattering' portrait."¹¹¹ With himself, it was not conceit which craved public approval, critical acclaim; rather it was an abiding humility which yearned for honest esteem among his fellow men. Even in the self-satire of such pieces as "Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction," "Temptations of a Young Author," and The World Does Move, one senses this inner modesty. With almost embarrassing exposure Tarkington once made the comment, "Self-mockery is usually the self-defensive pose of a sensitive man."¹¹² Surely this is not the reflection of a con-

ceited man.

Modesty, by the way, is not the first attribute one associates with a public figure. More often one is inclined to agree with a shrewd tidbit from Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth: "...Inner vanity is generally in proportion to the outer self-deprecation."¹¹³ For a job well done, if the protests are carried overlong, one is inclined to mutter, "Methinks the fellow doth protest too much." This variety of "modesty" is especially common among writers, and literary biographies are studded with illustrative anecdotes. We shall allow Henry James, whom Thomas Beer referred to in his biography of Stephen Crane as an author whose "motives were mercenary and his egotism astonishing," to provide us with a single example. It is Hamlin Garland who tells the tale of James at a dinner in December, 1904, at the Metropolitan Club in New York. A Mr. George Harvey gave the banquet in honor of James, to which he invited the literati of the moment. Among such luminaries as Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James flickered the young Tarkington. In one little conversational exchange, as Garland relates the incident, "Several other writers drew near and we all talked, naturally, of James' books. Booth Tarkington asked a question concerning one of his [James'] short stories and James replied, 'Oh, have you read those rubbishy little tales?'"¹¹⁴ It was an unfortunate comment. An abashed Tarkington soon withdrew from the group, none too impressed by the attitude of "the Master." Reinforced was his own determination to be sincere in his modesty, frank in discussing even his own works, and, above all, civil to his fellows. Attestations to his success crop up among a bewildering array of witnesses. Desmond MacCarthy remarked upon James that

he was always "on his guard against being gratified by appreciation from any quarter. He liked it--everybody does, but he was exceedingly skeptical about its value. I doubt if he believed that anybody thoroughly understood what, as an artist, he was after, or how skilfully he had manipulated his themes."¹¹⁵ Such consummate egotism was quite beyond the capacity of Tarkington; not only did he value constructive criticism from any quarter, but he had no sympathy for a stylistic obscurity which hinted of le précieux.

All in all, one must admit that Tarkington took a sane, level-headed attitude toward his sudden success. Mencken once noted, "It is a characteristic American phenomenon for a young writer to score a success with novel and meritorious work, and then to yield himself to the best-seller fever, and so disappear down the sewers....The pull is genuinely powerful. Above lies not only isolation, but also a dogged and malignant sort of opposition. Below...there is the place at Aiken [or Kennebunkport], the motor-car, babies, money in the bank, and the dignity of an important man."¹¹⁶ To many of the unperceiving, the latter is the Tarkington tale in one sentence. Certainly he never joined "the Lost Generation"; Malcolm Cowley did not mention him in Exiles' Return: ergo, he is not one of the elect. On the other hand, he is not one of that innumerable legion of "escape-artists" like Ralph Connor and James Oliver Curwood or that corral-full of Western glamorizers like Zane Grey who monopolized the popular market soon after the decline of the historical romances. After his earliest publications, he walked circumspectly along a middle path of his own choosing. Hence one aspect of the dilemma in finding his proper category.

Diana Trilling offers one worthwhile suggestion on this score. In a thoughtful essay titled "Fiction: Mass vs. Mind" she discusses this issue

of author-audience relationship in an effort to answer the question whether modern novels must be "either 'highbrow' and unreadable or 'lowbrow' and not worth reading." The central premise of her argument is that now the "separation between our intellectual classes" is markedly greater than it was less than a century ago until "there probably never was a time when the line between our 'serious' and our 'popular' writing was as sharply drawn as it is today."¹¹⁷ It is her contention that to even "a highly literate Mark Twain" there was never a doubt in his mind that there might be a "contradiction between his own educated tastes and popular success." Today, she continues, our whole social mechanism has become too complex, too unwieldy for political leaders in general to know theirs, and "in literature there is no longer any natural association between writer and audience."¹¹⁸

Tarkington most certainly sensed this trend, although he struggled to deny it. His own genteel background, coupled with a liberal arts education, imbued him with a strong sympathy for the "old-fashioned virtues," and he was well saturated with the democratic idealism of the nineteenth century. Throughout a major portion of his works he both consciously and unconsciously adhered to social traditions which "the rebel generation" of the new century conscientiously labored to discredit. Rather soon it was evident to him that he had to make a choice--and he made it. According to Miss Trilling, in such a situation, "the writer is faced with a sad choice. Either he can fabricate a tie with his fellow-citizens by dropping the marks of the intellectual caste...and establish a commonality of nondiscrimination...Or else, he can give up all hope of general communication; he can choose to address only his own small circle of like-minded friends--

in which case he becomes parochial."¹¹⁹ According to Tarkington, a compromise is the obvious answer: "Have the generosity to imagine that [your] unknown public is of a kind to whom it is worth talking and for whom the best of which you are capable is none too good."¹²⁰ After all, he would argue, "It should be admitted that, if the quest for success is dangerous for the soul, success unsought is an accident, not a crime. Large sales cannot be used as an infallible sign of worthlessness; to be understood is not necessarily to be vulgarized."¹²¹ Assume an intelligent (if not intellectual) audience, grant it at least a modicum of virtue, concede it some social conscience, and pay it the compliment of your best in style and subject matter. Again, this practical idealist could find neither profit or progress in catering to the comic-book crowd nor in casting one's literary gems only among the lapidaries. As Thomas Bailey Aldrich said, "There is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity. In every generation the least cultivated taste has the largest appetite. There is ragtime literature as well as ragtime music for the many."¹²² And as Booth Tarkington did not say, "That is unfortunately true. Therefore it is part of the task of the sincere artist to elevate this taste by whatever means are at his command. To quote Diana Trilling, 'Only so - by rising, as individuals, above our times--do we earn the right to think of ourselves either as true opinion-formers or abiding artists'."¹²³

There is reason to believe that here lies one reason for Tarkington's lifetime association with periodical publishing, namely, to elevate popular taste. Certainly he must have been aware that appearance in a household magazine was tantamount to literary perjury in his day--and in ours.

Such substantial authors as Somerset Maugham and John P. Marquand have suffered the same calumny absorbed by Tarkington for their contributing to popular periodicals. The full story of the role of periodicals in contemporary letters is yet to be written, although numerous chapters have been completed. Since all but one of Tarkington's novels (The Show Piece, published posthumously) first appeared in magazine form, it is highly desirable that we pause here to consider some of the ramifications of this fact. For purposes of organization it seems wisest to approach this subject from the conventional standpoints of theme, form, and style.

Several of the themes we have already met in connection with other matters: the impact of industrialism in a novel like The Turmoil, the decline of gentility in The Magnificent Ambersons, the search for absolutes in Mr. White, etc., and the conflict of commercialism and estheticism, again in The Turmoil. Sometimes they are announced with bold capitals and vehement punctuation; more often they emerge gradually as the story unfolds. In other works one finds a variety of additional themes: the problems of youth in an adult world in tales like Penrod, Seventeen, Little Orvie, and Ramsey Milholland; the infinite facets of femininity in novels like Alice Adams, Claire Ambler, Young Mrs. Greeley, and Kate Fennigate; the eternal vexations in mating preliminaries in such stories as The Flirt, Women, Gentle Julia, or The Two Venrevels; the consequences of social stratification in novels like Mirthful Haven and The Midlander; gentle thrusts at "antiquery", at "modern art," at relaxed morality in such books as Mary's Neck, The Plutocrat, and The World Does Move.

But these are all "positive" themes, equally adaptable to serial publication in family magazines or as bound volumes for the "trade." Except by omission, perhaps, they do not hint at the complementary list of "negative" themes which were taboo for periodical dissemination during Tarkington's productive period (and largely remain so today). Even were it possible, there would be little profit in listing them all here. The extremes of human degradation, the physiology of sex, the psychology of perversion,--none of these appealed to his artistic instinct. Vulgarity, obscenity, pornography,--none seemed necessary to exploit for mass titillation so far as he was concerned. As Albert D. Van Nostrand comments, "The inhibitions of the magazines with respect to relating the physical details of sex or sin coincide with the author's own restrictions on what he believed to be the legitimate scope of fictional representation."¹²⁴ This coincidence between the demands upon popular fiction and Tarkington's own literary creed provides an intriguing point of departure in the study of his novels. Eventually the issue would seem to resolve itself into a hydra-headed question: How much of the similarity in viewpoints is genuinely coincidental, how much is deliberate conformity on the part of Tarkington, how much is sincere effort on the part of the publishers to protect public morality, how much is canny catering to the subscription list? The question may be rephrased ad infinitum; the answers are equally pliable. It is likely that a complete answer can never be obtained, for each analyst of the matter would be certain to shade his own convictions.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of this whole issue of the pressure of periodicals upon creative fiction can be ascertained with some surety.

For example, as Boyesen points out, the monthly magazine, so vital to literary history in many respects, was by no means as prominent nor as far developed in the European countries as it was in the United States. In 1894 this transplanted novelist and social historian could remark, "In all the countries of Europe (except England) the literary conditions are, in this respect, very different [from what exists here]."¹²⁵ In general, a much more limited circulation prevailed, and sharper lines of distinction were drawn between periodicals designed for general publication and those aimed at a more intellectually elite audience. In Germany, for instance, there was a popular group of magazines much like the household magazines in the United States, deliberately conceived for die Bürger and bound by much the same restrictions as the corresponding American periodicals. But there was also a goodly number of intellectual publications with definitely broader, more liberal standards which would print anything "as long as the literary excellence [was] sufficient to keep the tale or description on a high intellectual plane." France, for different reasons, was likewise liberal in its printing code. Never endowed with a large, prosperous middle-class, France at the close of the last century was "oversupplied with good fiction," but it had relatively few good magazines. Therefore, Boyesen points out, "the editorial opinion [of periodicals] exerts but a very slight influence upon the novelist, and the daily papers..., which regularly print fiction in their feuilletons, allow a man of recognized ability to say whatever he likes, if only he says it well."¹²⁶ Thus he accounts for the unrestrained style of George Sand, Daudet, Zola, and Claretie. In his native Scandinavia, by the way, "where the magazine only

exists in a primitive stage of development," he notes a similar tendency to encourage the novel as a "vehicle of advanced thought."

In England, of course, "the revolution had begun" under the guidance of such hands as Swinburne's and Pater's; then the "Yellow Book" era of Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardzley swept into the '90's. To young Tarkington at this time, "Civilization had gone about as far as possible; we had reached the summit of the peak and after us must come the decadence, which was, indeed, already setting in with Oscar Wilde's writings and the strange drawings of Aubrey Beardsley."¹²⁷ Thus he reflects the conservative genteel tradition in periodical publication which dominated the literary scene at the tip of the century. Pattee includes an interesting digression in The New American Literature on the oppressive influence of the established conservative magazines upon the fortunes of such avant garde "little magazines" as The Chap Book, Lark, Philistine. No fewer than fourteen of these "sprouted, bloomed, and withered" during the first half of 1897 alone.¹²⁸ As a result of this prevalent editorial attitude "original work was hard to do: all the strong influences were against it."¹²⁹ So successful was this coalition among the old standard periodicals à la fin de siècle that "there were no wilcoat magazines to publish the writings of the insurgent youngsters...[Such publications as Harper's, The Critic, Century, and Atlantio] were supported by a clientele of the old order. To offend this conservative group meant ruin to established business."¹³⁰

By and large, commentary upon editors and editorial policies of the periodical publications at that time is not exactly flattering. Through

the mid-'80's and early '90's "the editors of the great magazines were regarded with awe...They knew their power. Their bearing was king-like... They dwelt in the rarefied and chilly atmosphere of high levels...Never since the time of Samuel Johnson was the brow of literature so exalted and so serenely self-satisfied."¹³¹ In the face of this dual editorial policy of intellectualism and conservatism among the foremost magazines the young rebels resorted to other means in their efforts to find publication. Toward the turn of the century "it was soon discovered that the rascals were demanding books rather than magazines and that they had strange new manuscripts that they wanted made into books. To print them new wild-cat firms began to appear."¹³² It is not unlikely that this peculiar development in publishing history is the origin of the familiar condescension among Tarkington's "sophisticates" toward those who publish first (and especially last) in the periodicals. Until very recent times the magazine was regarded by any and all writers as the logical clearinghouse for their wares; today an odd sort of inverted snobbery pronounces such publication "popular" or "cheap."

The same editorial hierarchy which dominated the publishing business at the turn of the century shared a very sensitive Achilles' heel: timidity of the purse. Beer comments in one place, "This is the period in which Frank Stockton remarked that one letter of protest from some damned nobody would raise more hell in a magazine's office than ten letters of praise from intelligent people, and that remains quite true."¹³³ Edith Wharton passed much the same judgment:

Again and again in my literary life I have encountered the same kind of editorial timidity. I think it was Edwin Godkin...who said that the choice of articles published in American magazines was entirely determined by the fear of scandalizing a non-existent clergyman in the Mississippi Valley...A higher standard of taste in letters can be achieved only if authors will refuse to write down to the particular Mississippi Valley level of the day (for there is always a censorship of the same sort, though it is now at the other end of the moral register), and the greatest service a writer can render to letters is to follow his conscience.¹³⁴

Mrs. Wharton, by the way, speaks with the voice of experience. Since much of her fiction first saw print in magazines, she had frequent contacts with editors and their policies. In A Backward Glance she recounts a number of anecdotes relating to her own difficulties with various editors who decried an occasional heroine who eluded poetic justice, two wrongs which somehow made one right, a wayward male who escaped either detection or retribution. From the vantage point of seventy-two full years she wrote, "The poor novelists who were my contemporaries had to fight hard for the right to turn wooden dolls about which they were expected to make believe into struggling, suffering human beings." She added, with a note of warning to an uninhibited 1934, "But we have been avenged, and more than avenged, not only by life but by the novelists, and I hope the latter will see before long that it is as hard to get dramatic interest out of a mob of irresponsible criminals as out of the Puritan marionettes who formed our stock in trade. Authentic human nature lies somewhere between the two, and is always there for a new great novelist to rediscover."¹³⁵ As a proper graduate of the Howells-James-Wharton school of realism, Tarkington would certainly add a fervent "amen!" to her last sentence.

As Beer comments in a classic bit of understatement, "Young writers of the '90's were aware that life and the notions of editors clashed." He offers the example of one brave young thing who submitted to Scribner's a simple tale about two married folk who deserted their respective spouses in the enthusiasm of a sudden infatuation, spent a long weekend together, became disappointingly bored with one another, whereupon both went home and forgot the whole affair. The literary adviser for Scribner's advised the aspiring author that he would accept adultery only in its literary, or ideal, form, "ending in repentance, forgiveness, or double death, preferably by drowning."¹³⁶ Whereas this story does have its humor, it also reveals a wry truth. Even so reputable a magazine as Scribner's maintained a rigid "blue book" of literary decorum which a rising generation deemed childish and unrealistic. Right or wrong,

whatever there was of realism had to adjust itself to the taste of the middle-class of readers or it could receive no hearing in the magazines, for the editors guarded the sensibilities of their subscribers with the anxious attention of expert duennas, and the critics with few exceptions were determined that morals should not be undermined by traducing the idealization of character which had so long been approved by tradition. Villains were not to be made attractive; nor were heroines to have feet of too soluble clay.¹³⁷

With due apologies to the fair sex, it must be admitted that the women seem to have created the greatest problem in this matter. The Mauve Decade lists sample letters to the editors of Harper's, Century, and Lippencott's condemning these magazines because:

1. "A nice woman has been killed or failed of marrying the right man in some story."
2. "Liquor...has been drunk by otherwise respectable people or has been mentioned without assault."
3. "The story teaches nothing."
4. "The story has ungrammatical passages and contains coarse language unsuited to growing boys."
[Mark Twain heard this one, too.]

5. "The society maneuverings are an insult to Western womanhood."
6. "The words 'breast', 'belly', 'damn', 'vomit', and 'rape' are unfit for Christian women to read."¹³⁸

The whole first section of this fascinating kaleidoscope of America in the Naughty Nineties is labeled "The Titaness"--in this case the Middle Western woman who had quietly become a "terror to editors, the hope of missionary societies, and the prey of lecturers." She was soon to receive the full broadside of satire from such masters as Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Parker, but one may doubt whether even that threat would have deterred her. Even Howells could not escape their "insidious" influence. None knew better than he the important role they played in the history of the novel. In his critical essay, "Realism and the American Novel," he declared, "...The novel in our civilization now always addresses a mixed company, and...the vast majority of the company are ladies, and...very many, if not most, of these ladies are young girls."¹³⁹ In the light of this fact, he could never forget that most of his readers were female as well; therefore, if he wished to prosper, he must cater somewhat to their tastes. The mature Howells, however, sought more and more to sublimate love interest into "more socially constructive or creative channels." To his chagrin, "his female readers demanded love stories, though he himself had a diminishing sympathy with mere lovers and in 1892 expressed the determination never again to write another novel in which 'mating and marrying plays an important part.' But he did--many of them."¹⁴⁰ They strike the modern miss as "pretty tame stuff," it must be admitted, but they thrilled our grandmothers half a century ago.

That Tarkington was well aware of the preponderance of females among his readers is apparent even from a glance at his titles alone: Alice Adams, Claire Ambler, The Beautiful Lady, The Flirt, Women, to cite a few. Among the most avid of novel readers, he noted, are those who "seek to escape from life itself by the reading of romances." Such persons, overwhelmingly feminine, "love to repeat over and over vicariously in their reading the sensations of youthful love." Mainly for this reason, therefore, and for this loyal band of readers, there must be "a love affair with difficulties that have to be overcome and always must be overcome in the end of the book... She wants a novel to repeat for her and let her live for a time in the repetition of the romantic dreams of love and a lover that she had in her youth before she knew the disappointing kind of things that may have happened to her."¹⁴¹ This aspect of his fiction we must reserve for the section of our case study on characterization, but at least mention of his amazing insight into feminine nature may be given. His studies of ambitious women are shot with the most penetrating reflections upon this particular type, and his portraits of women in moments of jealousy, of anger, of frustration, are devastating in their accuracy. The casual reader of Tarkington remembers largely the sweet young things: Helen Sherwood in The Gentleman from Indiana, Mary Vertrees in The Turmoil, Ariel Tabor in The Conquest of Canaan, and tags all Tarkington heroines with the same label. By sheer statistics alone, quite the opposite is true. All of his female characters, "from the cradle to the grave," are worldly wise beyond any of their male counterfoils; many are cheap, shallow vixens; not a few are "designing women" in the commonest sense; and a sur-

prising number are downright repellent, shrewish, and disagreeable. The psychological phenomenon which makes either extremity of virtue or vice, of beauty or homeliness, or of other kindred pairs so attractive to so many is an associational process familiar to all. Certainly Tarkington must have been aware of its potentialities, for it is a favorite device cleverly employed in novel upon novel.

In addition to the factors pertaining to periodical publication which we have just been discussing, there are other matters which demand consideration. Our comments thus far in this area have been principally concerned with themes--those subjects, positive and negative, which were relevant to literary creativity as Tarkington emerged into the world of letters. We have now reached the place for us to examine, more briefly perhaps, some of the limitations on novelistic form imposed upon the author by magazines publication. It is assumed, of course, that in connection with novels this phrase has been synonymous, until very recently, with serial publication. The device is of honorable origin, and it remains to our day the normal procedure for publishing the bulk of our long fiction. More recent factors, such as an occasional Old Man and the Sea in Life magazine plus the phenomenal growth of paperbounds, complicate the computation somewhat; but the fact remains that the voracious appetite of countless magazines today consumes the majority of the current crop. Although battered by depressions and bruised by wars, periodical publication has marched onward into the public everyday and everywhere to a point which threatens the very foundations of the book houses. Million-copy circulation has become commonplace and every area of human existence has suffered invasion. So

long ago as 1925 the Lynds noted in their classic study, "Today the Middletown library offers 225 periodicals as against nineteen periodicals in 1890. Heavy, likewise, has been the increase in the number of magazines coming into Middletown homes."¹⁴² More recently Howard Mumford Jones confirmed this continued influence of periodical publication. In 1948 he suggested that, "with the existence in America of thirty-nine national magazines having a circulation of a million or more, the inference seems irresistible that the economics has now, and has had in the past, an important influence upon what gets written, printed, and sold."¹⁴³

With rare exception, the magazines which include fiction in their offerings employ the time-honored technique of serialization. This method of presenting a story automatically imposes certain formal restrictions. In the case of our novelist, "Magazine publication of Tarkington's novels imposed a uniformity, first of all, on their structure. Most of them can be partitioned into units (ranging from four to six in number) corresponding in length to the magazine installments."¹⁴⁴ This divisive expedient must be bridged by extensive exposition, particularly at the outset. Tarkington from the first possessed an unusual knack at this type of expository writing. One key to his success lies in the fullness of the opening installment, which almost always documents all the basic causes from which subsequent actions will flow. Well he realized that his major problem consisted of compassing a certain number of necessary impressions, in the form of names, places, and relationships, within a limited space in such a way that they would be sufficiently interesting to be remembered. This lesson he learned early in his writing career. Not long after the accept-

ance of The Gentleman from Indiana, the young novelist related in an interview his trials in reshaping a 110,000 word manuscript into a more flexible form for McClure's Magazine. It was a ruthless process, as he describes the revision: "I did not spare it, but slashed, condensed, and rewrote the book from beginning to end; always bearing in mind it was to be a serial, that each installment should in some way make reference to the past, and have an ending both satisfactory and [significant]."¹⁴⁵

The importance of an effective opening, by the way, was one of his most frequent admonitions to the many friends and strangers who plagued him persistently (and successfully) for free editorial advice. In his own case it appears but too often that he over-remembered the beginning and under-considered the denouement. A story like Mirthful Haven, for example, holds all the ingredients of another American Tragedy. Like Dreiser's tour de force, its theme is built around the old, old "rich boy-poor girl" situation (vice-versa in Dreiser's tale) with all its accompanying social implications. The opening scenes are masterly, the major figures are well drawn, and reader interest is firmly caught. Then gradually that interest wanes; valiant efforts at inappropriate humor and local color decline into the pure melodrama of a rum-runner chase; and the story peters out in an unconvincing anticlimax. What promised to be either a dramatic novel depicting the sorry friction of class distinctions, or a powerful study of the tragedy inherent in misplaced family loyalties winds up as an unbelievable domestic novel with neither the thematic significance of An American Tragedy nor the poignant impact of Ethan Frome. It must be conceded, however, that Tarkington never resorted to that Dickensian finale which

hopefully caught up the loose ends not included in the ending proper, then summarily disposed of miscellaneous minor figures by matrimony, consumption, a splendid appointment to a new position, an unsuspected kinship, or whatever else the Victorian novelist had not used of late. Nevertheless, the final twist to many a Tarkington tale is not the delicious revelation of what the reader should have guessed all along, but rather it becomes a painful wrenching of credibility well beyond the point of pleasurable thrill. When it approaches an affront to sheer reader intelligence, danger threatens.

Of course, it must be kept in mind that "for the sake of suspense in a serial, the pattern of complications is more important than the denoué-ment (sic). Although the action usually takes some definite turn two-thirds of the way through, it is often not resolved until the final paragraph."¹⁴⁶ Van Nostrand here considers the matter quantitatively, as is proper for our present emphasis upon the structural form of Tarkington's novels. It is merely another way of saying that in most of these stories a relatively simple situation is developed more or less schematically into a crisis, unimpeded by any other major plot interests; then this crisis is resolved quickly at the last.

If the climax of a novel requires neither a compendium of the contents, a roll-call of the characters, nor an explication of the theme, several conclusions seem plausible. The first is that Tarkington worked each novel with a limited cast moving within a limited space. Although The Plutocrat transports one from New York to North Africa, the same characters crop up at the same place chapter after chapter and the occasional rich descriptions supply only incidental color. There is nothing of the panoramic sweep of the John Dos Passos trilogy U.S.A. in the Tarkington trilogy Growth. Nor

is there in Tarkington's work the almost frenetic effort at simultaneity so evident in the former. As Robert Hillyer remarked, "Throughout his work Tarkington's genius was his realization of the importance of situations local in time and space, his discernment in the American present of 'the still, sad music of humanity'."¹⁴⁷ Also steady chronology determines every Tarkington novel, after several clumsy trials at backflashes had impeded the forward movement of The Gentleman from Indiana. He realized the static aspect of his artistic growth in this regard, but he was willing to sacrifice novelty and experimentation for clarity and coherence.

This stylistic proclivity led directly to what Howells called "intensive fiction." The expression came to him in his latter days, hence it never received full definition from its inventor. In the one essay devoted solely to this subject, Howells drew freely upon his literary store for illustration, but the ideal definition eluded him to the end. Suggesting the "divine Jane" Austen and her female cohorts as pioneers in the genre, he proceeded to list a number of British and Continental novelists as further examples, concluding patriotically with Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and The Marble Faun. By way of explanation, he went on to say, "None of these masterpieces, whether of women or men, tell a story, or invent a plot so much as divine the feelings and portray the character of one person in dramatic encounter with very few other persons. Out of the limited circumstances they gather a harvest richer than the many-acred yield of the vast and wandering field of romance."¹⁴⁸ Drawing last upon the current novels at the time of his writing (1916), Howells opined,

In later American fiction I think of no example so illustrative of the intensive method as Mr. Booth Tarkington's The Turmoil. There the action and its implications are kept wholly within two families and their few acquaintances, yet in this small area of character a world of social and psychological import is felt. The scene is always (in this novel) a Middle-Western manufacturing city such as twenty years ago, when polite people who were vainly striving against the greatness of Ibsen, would have been called provincial, but now, with all its qualities insistent, it must be recognized as of the same metropolitan value as Paris or London. The scene is ample for the most important human events and the passions stalk there as large as if they had the world for their theatre.¹⁴⁹

Like the "veritism" of Hamlin Garland, the term "intensivism" has never become a working part of our critical machinery. This reference is no plea for belated recognition; it is merely its application here in an appropriate situation. One embarrassment is that the word possesses no tidy definition. Perhaps, like not a few cogs in the complex mechanism of academic criticism, it is too hidden by other parts to permit exact description; it may even be too obvious to need definition. Howells labored over several attempts; finally he gave up in despair. Amid a confusion of negatives and vagaries he concluded,

[By intensive fiction] I do not mean a method which produces from a little space the effects of the largest extensive fiction, appreciable numerically, but perhaps a result in the reader which he could not compute as the sum of incidents or characters. It would be a method which should leave abidingly with him a sense of things far transcending things related. There is something not finally explicable in this, something mystical, something curiously subjective,¹⁵⁰ a sense of spaciousness which does not correspond with the facts.

To the reader of Tarkington these remarks by Howells have a familiar ring. It sounds most strongly in later novels like The Magnificent Ambersons and Alice Adams, where single families depict the lost gentility of another generation. In much the same form, however, the technique is visible in

the intimate family connections among the principals in his juvenile stories, the summer colony setting of Mary's Neck, the "bee-hive" of flats in The Lorenzo Bunch, "Les Trois Pigeons" inn of The Guest of Quesnay, and so on through virtually all the Tarkington titles.

There is a deceiving surface simplicity to the "intensive" approach which belies its actual complexity. In his "Auguries of Innocence" the mystic Blake once wrote:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

On a different scale and in his own way Tarkington sought a method whereby he might see his world in terms of representative families, trace their destinies across "a day and a night in His sight," and thus realize the potential microcosm inherent in the novel. By coincidence, perhaps, this "intensive" style was highly congenial to serialization. Across the week or month the reader had only a small group of interrelated characters to keep in mind, the setting remained comfortably stable, even the basic situation did not require much mental adjustment from part to part. Whether Tarkington constructed a single plot, chapter by chapter to an inevitable crisis, or whether he strung a loose series of episodes upon a slender strand of characters within a restricted area, the net result was equally convenient for serial publication.

It is no coincidence that this concept of "intensivism" bears a strong resemblance to Tarkington's general philosophy of art and his view of the artist's role in society. It is even reflected in his private collection of paintings (he was a connoisseur of portraits). In a contemplative mood

he once wrote,

Mankind's most important affair is to discover what itself is, why it exists and therefore where it is going. The universal mystery can't be solved by any one philosopher, scientist or artist; but whoever makes more comprehensible a part of life has helped that much, even if infinitesimally, toward the answer to the question ever within the consciousness of us all. 'The proper study of mankind is man', and the general audience is concerned [whether in paint or in print]. To us, the audience, there is one thing more important than art, and that is life. When art is the illuminating interpreter¹⁵¹ of a life, painting it memorably, we're given a great portrait.

The mature Tarkington demonstrated this creed in a long list of novels.

Always he sought the development of his themes through the interpretation of characters. As he himself phrased it, "An artist is a person who reveals bits of creation by recreating semblances of them in symbols."¹⁵² Even his book titles suggest this preponderant emphasis on symbolic characters: The Image of Josephine, The Fascinating Stranger, The Plutocrat.

In passing, one might insert that another influence upon the form of Tarkington's novels besides the demands of serialization might be suggested as a possible explanation for Tarkington's marked tendency toward this "intensive" style. This is his lifelong love for the theater. In 1955 it is difficult to remember that at several phases of his literary career Tarkington was far better known as a playwright than as a novelist. This is no place to trace his theatrical career, despite its many interconnections with his fiction. Our point of reference here is that "in the hands of a master the intensive fiction more nearly approaches the drama [than does the extensive], perhaps because its limit obliges it to be more explicit and direct."¹⁵³ A striking example of this relationship in the mind of Tarkington himself is Beauty and the Jacobin, which the author

aptly subtitled "An Interlude of the French Revolution." This bit of "closet drama," unpublished till 1912, is a holdover from "the romantic craze" a decade earlier; the quixotic Valsin is blood-brother to Beaucaire. A brief exordium states clearly that the piece was not designed for stage presentation: "The author makes his appearance, not now 'as a showman before his tent', nor to entreat his audience to be seated in an orderly manner, but to invite ~~any~~ who may be listening to come upon the very scene itself of this drama, which has nothing to do with the theater, and there, invisible, attend what follows."¹⁵⁴ And then the scene is set, the situation given, the cast introduced. Thenceforward, amid elaborate stage-directions a-burst with flowery description, the story unfolds in the exaggerated dialogue of a period play. As drama it is unpromising--static and "talky"; as a story it reads well--an ingenious situation involving an intriguing corps of characters. In the main, the world will not suffer from its continued neglect, but it does serve admirably to illustrate our point. Its dramatis personae number four, it requires one well-sketched set--and the inconsequential theme is wholly brought out by the dialogue. One must not labor the coincidence, but it would appear quite likely that Howells presented a logical point when he suggested a relationship between "intensive fiction" and drama. Certainly "it is the advantage of the intensive method of fiction that its scene is never cluttered, but when the interests are apparently the simplest and the events are the fewest, the stage is never empty."¹⁵⁵ As one can see, even the metaphors are appropriate.

The other side to this localized, simplified approach is a possible

over-emphasis on characterization or situation to the detriment of theme. This does occur in Tarkington. In fact, it is this imbalance of components which drops several promising stories onto second and third levels of achievement. Mention was made earlier of Mirthful Haven and its unhappy surrender of thematic substance for melodramatic "action" and maldirected "pathos." Much earlier, The Conquest of Canaan (1905) began as a brave exposé of smalltown politics, only to bog down in mid-tale with technical problems imposed by the plot and romantic problems created by a purblind Joe Loudens and an over-patient Ariel Tabbs. The Plutocrat (1928) oscillates between satirical allegory and outright romance so many times that even the author shuts it off with a farcical clinch-ending complete with manna from heaven. The list could be prolonged without much effort, for now we touch a vulnerable spot in the Tarkington body corporate.

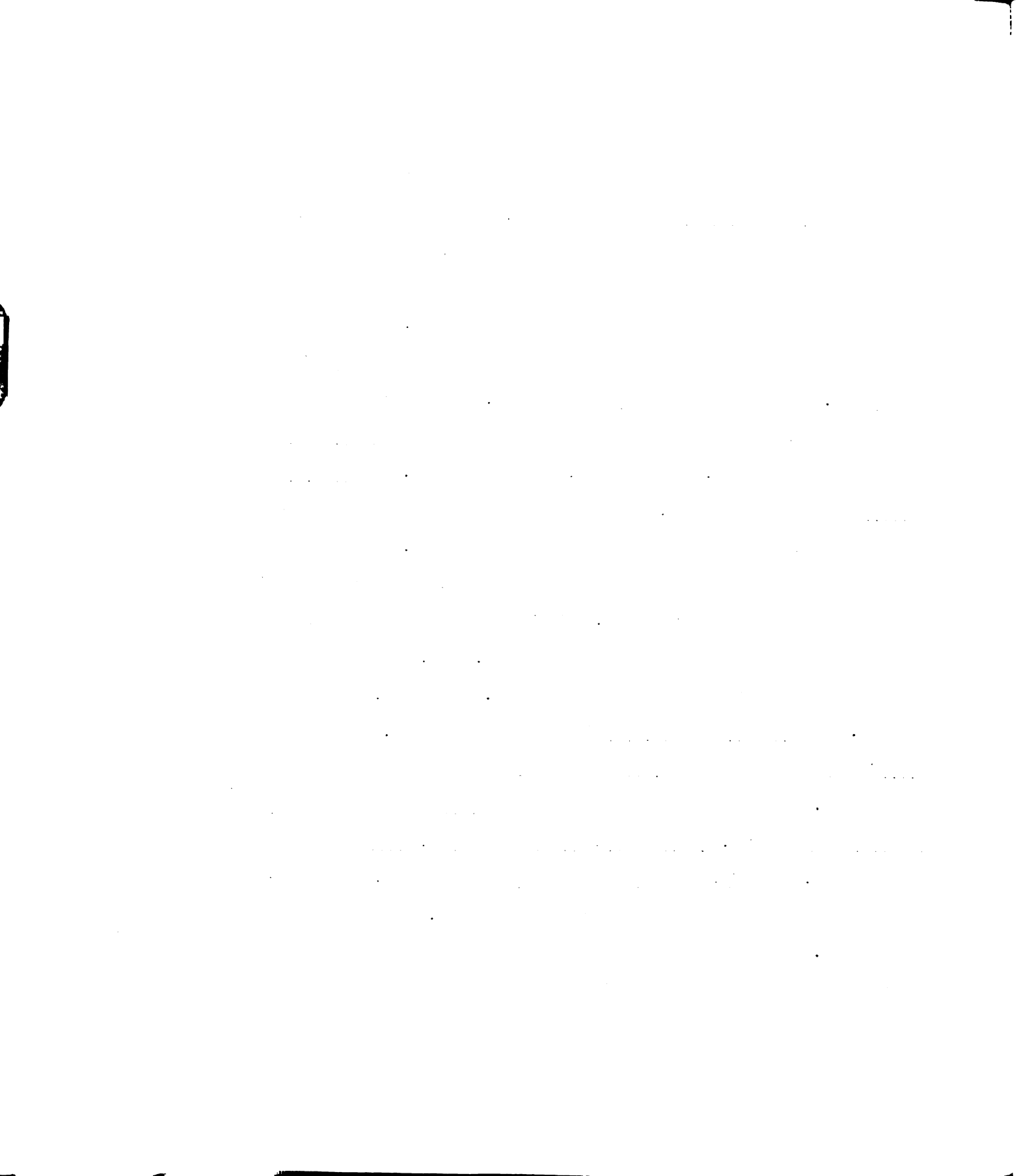
One restrictive limitation on the form of fiction imposed by serialization was mentioned earlier but not expanded. This is the extreme type of uniformity which creates little more than a series of unrelated episodes connected mainly by a single theme and a common group of characters who reappear in successive installments.¹⁵⁶ Like the picaresque novel of old, most of these episodic narratives are based upon the extended exploits of one particular figure. One is reminded at this point of the remarkable Dr. Kilgallen, that eminent authority on "antiquery" in Kenneth Roberts' hilarious burlesque entitled Antiquamania (illustrated and annotated by Tarkington). This work ostensibly was merely edited by Roberts, since "these notes [composing the book] could be pieced together because of the

Professor's rare skill at note-taking, which permitted any one note to be inserted between any two notes without impairing the continuity of the thought or narrative."¹⁵⁷ Likewise in these episodic tales nearly any single incident can be lifted out of position without being materially affected itself or without injuring the continuity of its neighbors. Indeed, as Van Nostrand points out, "in a few cases, the narrative continued in the magazine after the novel itself was published."¹⁵⁸

In addition to the undeniable influence of periodical publication upon a contributor's choice of themes and the obvious restrictions upon form imposed by serialization, magazine writing also had its stylistic requirements. These are more difficult to isolate and define than the casual reader might think. Especially is this true of a period a half century prior to the analyst's time. The magazines of the moment are familiar friends, his constant companions; those of yesteryear are comparative strangers which he sees but rarely, and then under unusual circumstances. Also these stylistic vary markedly among different magazines. Oddly enough, no formal system of categorizing magazines has yet been devised; therefore the commentator is forced to adopt the jargon of the trade and refer to them as "pulp," "slicks," and "quality" magazines. For present purposes, we may skip the "pulp"; our references to "quality" magazines must also be limited. As before mentioned, Tarkington was a top-notch professional writer, and most of his work first saw print in the "slick."

To cite a few suggestive figures in support of the preceding remarks,

let us glance briefly at the periodical listings for Tarkington in the recent Bibliography of Booth Tarkington (1949), edited by Dorothy Russo and Thelma Sullivan of the Indiana Historical Society. There one may discover that Tarkington contributed in some fashion to well over a hundred and fifty periodical publications of all shapes and sizes. Among the "quality" magazines of his day we find no listing given for Scribner's or the Century, one article to the Atlantic Monthly, but two brief bits in the old Bookman, only six references in the Saturday Review of Literature (two biographical pieces, three letters, and one mention).¹⁵⁹ Harper's Monthly lists some ten titles, but it is observable that these fall between 1901-1922 when the influence of Howells is apparent. Compared to the great mass of Tarkington titles among the "slicks," this group from the "quality" magazines is paltry indeed. Within a favored eight or nine "slicks" are listed nearly all his fiction (short, long, and medium) and a very considerable percentage of his biographical, expository, and critical articles. The Saturday Evening Post is the heaviest winner, with the Ladies' Home Journal and the Redbook Magazine running second and third respectively. Among the "also-rans" are Cosmopolitan (combined with Hearst's International in part), Metropolitan, American Magazine, McClure's (the early novels), McCall's, and Good Housekeeping in that order.¹⁶⁰ The remainder of the entries include scattered short stories, but none of the longer works. All of the bound volumes emerged in varying periods after their initial appearance in the "slick" with the exception of the unfinished



The Show Piece, which was published posthumously by his wife.

The stylistic influence of periodical publication, once again, has both its good and its bad aspects. Foremost among the good is the acknowledged fact that, generally speaking, much of the fiction published in the magazines, both past and present, reflects both artistic skill and literary merit. John Schaffner declared a few years back, "It simply isn't true that good writing doesn't appear in the popular periodical."¹⁶¹ As a literary agent, he has often observed that "such 'quality' magazines as Harper's and The Atlantic have pretty much to content themselves with seeing material only after it has gone the rounds of the bigger markets and been rejected...In fact," he asks, "if good writing doesn't appear in the popular magazines, where then does it appear?"¹⁶² As in any medium of popular entertainment, there is a distressingly high percentage of dross; as we quoted Bdyesen earlier, "Educating the public is a slow process." Nevertheless, the overall level of quality is kept fairly high because of the keen competition among authors to place their ware in the wide-circulation journals. Bernard DeVoto (himself a frequent contributor to an amazing variety of "slicks") made the comment recently, "Unlike the novelist, [the professional writer] is forced to master his medium. Serious fiction would be greatly improved if every novelist could be required to serve an apprenticeship as rigorous as the slick writer's."¹⁶³ Were Tarkington here today, he certainly would add his "aye" to DeVoto's statement. Long and arduous were the years of his own apprenticeship before he cracked the magazine market, and ever thereafter he labored to advance his style and proficiency to keep pace with the advances of the publications them-

selves. Even that dour prober of American haze and daze, Joseph Wood Krutch, confessed in one article that "magazine stories are often revolutionary in tone and admirable in execution," although he did deplore the frequent over-emphasis on materialism to the disparagement of spiritual values.¹⁶⁴

The detractor of popular periodical fiction usually terms this finish in style mere "surface sheen" and passes on to crack such old chestnuts as "writing to a formula," the "happy ending," the tone of optimism, patriotism, whatever the times demand, the "stock" characters and situations, and much more of a like nature which critics have been bemoaning since the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁵ As is ever the case, verse and chapter can always be quoted from one source or another at any period to verify these accusations, and a significant rebuttal involves labor and ingenuity forbidding to the most. It is simply impossible, in the scope of this study, to do more than indicate the complexity of the matter. The specific relevance of Tarkington to these, and similar problems, will be taken up in the next division of our case study, at which time we shall consider in appropriate detail the various facets of Tarkington's literary creed.

PART III

TARKINGTON AS A CRAFTSMAN

Although chronology may occasionally shape succeeding pages in this section of our case study, for the most part subject matter will determine our course.¹ Recent biographical studies preclude the need for the historical type of approach, despite the fact that a straightforward account of life and achievements of an author makes for clarity in organization and may well contribute to a certain climactic effect as a study of him draws to a close. Nevertheless, in this division illustrative material will be extracted freely from any stage of Tarkington's career; references will be made to any type of his writing. In this way we shall be able to consider Tarkington and his relation to specific areas in the craft of writing.

For Tarkington definitely considered writing a craft. His study of literature, both at Purdue and Princeton, served not only to familiarize him with the cultural heritage of the past, but also with the painful process of literary creation. In addition it taught him an abiding respect for those subtleties of style which elevate the artisan above the hucksters. As a determined traditionalist, he deplored the casual use of "artisan," "artist," "art" in critical commentary. "The words are flaccid with overexercise," he declared, "...being now part of our prattling of everything under the sun."² Through our present practice, he went on, we imply a distinction between the terms; "we speak of 'art and letters'--'art and letters', some artists being also men of letters, but not a great many

men of letters being also writers, or comprehending artists."³

Mention has already been made of Tarkington's lifelong interest in pictorial art, and it should be remembered that his initial ambition was to find a career in sketching. There is little question that this artistic facet of his creative talents contributed substantially to his descriptive prowess. Tarkington himself expressed it when he wrote, "Art is the language of a heart that knows how to speak, and a work of art is a beautiful interpretation of a truth."⁴ Even so brief a remark casts further illumination on his literary creed if one heeds the phraseology. The word "heart," for example, is indicative of the basic part feeling must play in an artistic work of human value; "knows how" bespeaks the conviction of the craftsman secure in his talent; "beautiful" speaks of his profound belief in an esthetics characterized by the love of beauty; and "interpretation" is a key word which reveals Tarkington's concept of the artist as a vital factor in and of life and not outside it.

Tarkington was always a conscious craftsman. In a nearly interview he affirmed,

We writers are here to discover and reveal things about life, and we seek the finest means of doing so--the most vivid means. We must make our words into colors and sounds, and the cheap old tricks and phrases won't do that. You've got to get living words out of yourself. Nobody else's words; the used word is stale.⁵

With this demand for originality Tarkington blended words of caution against succumbing to a current vogue in style which tended toward cheap novelty: "Fashion becomes a mob contagion; but at first, when the mob is small, we quicker parrots who hop into it feel ourselves to be brilliantly superior,

speaking a language that is code to the vulgar."⁶ Such a move he detected as merely one revolution of a vicious cycle which eventuates only in negotiations. "When in time the mob grows enormous we remove from it, call it a rabble, despise its taste and cackle of a new fashion, which may [well] be an old, old one that we exclusives unwittingly revive."⁷ In this century of "isms," the truth of his comment hardly needs verification. It was Charles Wertenbaker who said of him, "Booth Tarkington has too much respect for the language not to treat it with deference."⁸ The remark is significant, for it indicates again that Tarkington sought to be more than a casual purveyor of slick merchandise, pandering to popular taste.

Kenneth Roberts, long the confidant of his neighbor and literary mentor, reported of Tarkington in one article that

a person, he thinks, must develop an ear for the sort of English that ought to be written; and he must, too, be 'born with something'. Some people can't develop an ear for music; others can't develop an ear for writing. There's a cadence in prose, just as in verse; so the natural ear should always be developed--not only for the kind of words used but for balance in phrases and sentences.⁹

Tarkington as a young man tried his hand at poetry upon several occasions, although few of his efforts achieved publication. (Reference to "The Trees," his chef-d'oeuvre at thirteen, was made earlier in our study; very likely his most notorious piece is "Milady," an execrable love-lyric attributed to Willie Baxter in Seventeen.) Prose rhythm is a will-o'-the-wisp which we shall not pursue in these pages; indeed, in the sense of a Thomas Wolfe or a Marcel Proust, one would search the Tarkington canon in vain for the sonority of le grand style.

His esthetic sensitivity even involved "an affectionate comprehension of writing in its aspects as a visual art." From his student publication experiences at Phillips Exeter Academy, at Purdue University, and at Princeton University, he acquired an early appreciation for the make-up of a page; and his later assistance on the short-lived "art magazine," John O' Dreams, served to augment this feeling. This visualizing of his work often stood him in good stead during his publishing years. "In fact," he wrote in an article for a journalism periodical,

I have always...foreseen the wished-for look of the printed page as I worked upon manuscript, though never forgetting the sound of sentences; and, during the years when I was blind and deprived of the feel of a pencil and the sight of written words, I found myself 'seeing' in print the results of dictated phrases with even greater vividness. I have wished to make use of every visual aid to the conveyance of both sound and meaning--for example, by misspellings and by italicizing of words, or syllables within words, that would be stressed in actual dialogue.¹⁰

In regard to this, it is interesting to note that not even typography escaped his attention. It was his conviction that "type should conform to subject--that type should be to subject matter what an instrumental accompaniment is to the singing voice."¹¹ One could carry such a figure to a ridiculous extreme, of course, but Tarkington was again merely displaying his esthetic approach to his craft.

The Tarkington touch in matters of style is perhaps his single talent upon which critics concur. He himself said, "A master craftsman is of course not necessarily an artist,"¹² but the converse he would certainly affirm.¹³ Tarkington too maintained that stylistic competency is not simply a talent of the classroom. He affirmed that "writing...must be learned.

We must serve our apprenticeship; but we must work it out alone. There are no teachers. We must learn by failure and repeated efforts how the thing is done.¹⁴ These are not idle words. Even Pattee (no Tarkington admirer) admitted, "His apprenticeship was long and severe: seven years it was before work of merit from his diligent pen appeared in print."¹⁵ Asa Dickinson, author of an early biographical sketch, said much the same of his testing period:

These were indeed days and years of trial, and a mere shallow diletantism might have been expected from a brilliant young man, on whom rested no necessity of earning his bread and butter. But... he kept on writing and re-writing sundry stories which he tells us were 'rejected every time and for eight years'.¹⁶

The Tarkington legend is well laden with anecdotes, humorous and otherwise, about this section of the novelist's career, with tales of the young man-about-town, his scandalous working habits, his shame-faced family, and all the rest. They at least provide irrefutable proof of the determination and grit displayed throughout his lifetime. Except for one or two early sterile periods caused by interfering friends or family, Tarkington maintained steady creativity for nearly half a century. His aunt, Mrs. Mary Jameson Judah, once confided to Hamlin Garland,

He works all the time while here [in Indianapolis]. No one, not even his wife, is allowed to disturb him while he is writing. He sometimes works for several days without leaving his room. His meals are sent in to him. His literary tasks are put above all social duties whatsoever...He works, works, works!...His eyes trouble him greatly, but he keeps on working in spite of it all.¹⁷

In a postscript to this earlier entry in his literary log, Garland appended in 1934, "Tarkington like myself is now one of the 'Old Guard', but he is

still, as always, the fine workman."¹⁸ One cannot but admire this almost dedicated commitment to a literary career, in spite of adversity and prosperity; for Tarkington deliberately varied the pattern of his style, consciously experimented among diverse themes, and conscientiously endeavored to keep abreast of the social and literary currents of his time.

That he was gifted is beyond doubt. Indeed, this is the common refrain in every estimate of his work. James Branch Cabell waxes lyric in one tribute:

For if, as Stevenson declared, the fairies were tipsy at Mr. Kipling's christening, at Mr. Tarkington's they must have been in the last stage of maudlin generosity. Poetic insight they gave him; and the knack of story building; and all their own authentic elfin liveliness of fancy; and actually perceptive eyes, by virtue of which his more truly Tarkingtonian pages are enriched with countless happy little miracles of observation; and the dramatic gift, of contriving and causing to move convincingly a wide variety of puppets in nothing resembling the puppet-master; and the not uncommon desire to 'write', with just enough deficiency in common-sense to make him willing to put up with the laboriousness of writing fairly well.¹⁹

As Cabell intimates, one essential element in the literary artist is ein Sprachgefühl. Whereas "technique is the machinery of communication, and a machine is well designed when it fulfils its appointed function smoothly and without a hitch,"²⁰ every student of letters is aware that linguistic proficiency is no synonym for artistic creativity. It might be considered the penultimate in an author's list of attributes, but the ultimate partakes of what an embarrassed Holliday was forced to call "genius." Once again we approach dangerous deeps in which our subject might possibly flounder, but even the most dour critic must concede that Tarkington "had a way with words."

If one turns to his works, the force of his style is quickly felt, particularly in the drama of the commonplace. So familiar a stroke of nature as a thunderstorm assumes an almost poetic quality in the lyric sweep of his figurative language. In the early pages of Gentle Julia a summer storm arises:

Paunchy with wind and wetness, unmannerly clouds came smoking out of the blackened west. Rumbling, they drew on. Then from cloud to cloud dizzy amazements of white fire staggered, crackled and boomed on to the assault; the doors of the winds were opened; the tanks of deluge were unbottomed; and the storm took the town...Incredibly elastic, the shade-trees were practicing calisthenics, though now and then one outdid itself and lost a branch; thunder and lightning romped like loosed scandal; rain hissed upon the pavement and capered ankle-high. It was a storm that asked to be left to itself for a time, after giving fair warning that the request would be made.²¹

Even a cursory examination of this passage reveals a wide array of descriptive devices masterfully incorporated within small compass. Sensory appeals include sound as well as sight; figures of speech range through simile, metaphor, and personification; strong, active, "picture-making" verbs abound; connotative words like "staggered" and "deluge" are frequent; and over all hovers a whimsical "pathetic fallacy" which imparts an oddly personal touch to the storm--abetted by such "human" words as "doors," "calisthenics," "romped," "scandal," and "ankle-high."

Well along in The Midlander, Dan Olóphant takes his new bride to see Ornaby Addition, a suburban real-estate project he is developing. The moment of their arrival is not propitious, for "at the very moment when Dan stopped the funabout [a light buggy] and waved his hand in a proud semicircle of display, the first of the robust clouds passed over the sun

and Ornaby lay threatened in a monstrous shadow."²² Aside from the apparent symbolism of the act, the grey skies presage a downpout. In a matter of moments the pair is caught in another wet scene:

Above them hung what appeared to be a field of inverted grey haystacks, while from westward ragged, vast draperies advanced through a saffron light that suddenly lay upon all the land. A snort of wind tore at the road, carrying dust high aloft; then there was a curious silence throughout all the great space of the saffron light, and some large raindrops fell in a casual way, then stopped. Seconds later Satan fell from the sky in a demoniac swoop of lightning, carrying darkness with him.²³

Again one should note the striking imagery of "vast draperies," the nervous movement of "snorts of wind," the earthy language of "inverted haystacks." There is an authenticity to such a passage which rebuilds the scene in every reader's experience, a verisimilitude which vouches well for the author's keenness of observation. Also there is "the distinction of the writer as opposed to that of the mere literary man. About such prose clings the aroma of the classic. When a man writes with such charm and flavor as Mr. Tarkington does nearly everywhere, it is a safe conclusion that posterity will have something to say about him."²⁴

Some time ago Bernard DeVoto made the statement, "Novelists are among the least observant of human beings; they are practically impermeable by what goes on around them except as it can come through channels of personal reference."²⁵ What lay behind such a declaration would be difficult to tell; certainly it does not apply to Booth Tarkington. In volume upon volume he exhibited keen observation, sharp hearing, and sensitive perception; also he absorbed the historical heritage that was his legacy

through wide reading, frequent chats with folks of any age or race. To all of this he coupled a remarkable photographic memory which enabled him, at mid-years, to live again the hours of childhood. Henry Steele Commager recently said, "If you want to know what houses looked like, outside and inside; how men and women dressed; how they spoke; how they behaved; you can go to Tarkington. He had an eye for detail."²⁶ In much the same vein, Robert Coates Holliday commented, "Extraordinary among Mr. Tarkington's books for its length of years, The Magnificent Ambersons is extraordinary in American literature as a reference volume. It bridges the gulf in memory between an obsolete world and to-day."²⁷ Over the page he continued, "The rise, the flowering and the decay of a whole epoch in American civilization is mirrored in this chronicle of the splendor of the Ambersons which lasted throughout all the years that saw their Midland town spread and darken into a city."²⁸ To fellow-Hoosier Meredith Nicholson it was apparent that, "just as Eggleston and Riley left records of their respective generations, so Mr. Tarkington, arriving opportunely to preserve unbroken the apostolic succession, depicts his own day with the effect of contributing a third panel in a series of historical paintings."²⁹

One might remark in passing that these "period pieces" to which Commager and Holliday refer deal with a subject-matter area most awkward for the fictionist to handle. For the most part they pertain to a generation either just past or obsolescent. Since there is in them neither the comforting proximity of a familiar present or the pleasant security of a stable past, the novelist may feel a certain sense of isolation which can

reflect throughout his works. Tarkington did not find this a handicap; indeed, to him it became a definite strength. The immediate past in which he set some of his most poignant novels continued through his elder years to be the "Golden Age" discussed earlier in this study.

This keenness of observation, which prompted the admiration of Com-mager, is only a part of the artistry of the novelist. On this score Willa Cather remarked, "Every writer who is an artist knows that his 'power of observation', and his 'power of description', form but a low part of his equipment. He must have both, to be sure; but he knows that the most trivial writers often have a very good observation."³⁰ It will be re-called that Zola had earlier explained that the modern novel should be con-sidered fundamentally a "report" with only "the merit of exact observation."³¹ But mere reproduction of factual reality did not constitute literary art-istry, so far as Tarkington was concerned. To his way of thinking, not only the creative imagination of the author must be brought into play, but also a judicious selection of details is of far more importance than the conscientious inclusion of them all. It is as Prosper Mérimée remarked about Gogol: "L'art de choisir parmi les innombrable traits que nous offre la nature est, après tout, bien plus difficile que celui de les ob-server avec attention et de les rendre avec exactitude."³² As we shall see later, this principle of selection carries through in Tarkington's work, not only in respect to literary themes and descriptive details, but also to his treatment of subject matter in several other areas.

Unlike a number of his contemporaries at the turn of the century, Tark-ington was not an advocate of environmental determinism. His characters

are not the tragic victims of socio-economic forces over which they hold little control, like those of Dreiser, London, or Crane. As Dreiser, for example, looked about at man and his world, he came to the deterministic conclusion that "the most inartistic and discouraging phase of the visible scene, in so far as it relates to humanity, is its tendency to stratification, stagnation and rigidity."³³ Under such conditions, with such an attitude, rebellion is not unthinkable; rather it is unthinkable not to rebel. But with Tarkington rebellion means destruction; it leads to frustration, frenzy, violence. It leads to An American Tragedy.

Dreiser was the son of a poor German immigrant; Tarkington was the son of a substantial citizen. To the environmentalist, both shared a keen handicap, but the latter's was the keener. Sherwood Anderson declared,

Those who are to follow the arts should have a training in what is called poverty. Given a comfortable middle-class start in life, the artist is almost sure to end up by becoming a belly-acher, constantly complaining³⁴ because the public does not rush forward at once to proclaim him.

Frank Norris was fond of calling for "deep living," and Jack London bred the "Sea Wolf" to tilt with nature on all levels. In his way, Tarkington too was the product of his environment. As Grant Overton wrote some thirty years ago,

It seems an astonishing, unwarranted, and probably an impudent thing to suggest that this man has been to a deplorable extent the victim of circumstances (largely comfortable circumstances); and that, with a less winning personality...the chances are he would have been a much greater writer than, on his record, he is today.³⁵

The autobiographical element figures large in the works of every

fictionist, and Tarkington drew heavily from himself in all his novels. Like Somerset Maugham in The Summing Up, Tarkington could say, "In one way and another I have used in my writings whatever has happened to me in the course of my life."³⁶ It was his lot to escape the pangs of poverty or the body-blows of defeat. From post-Princeton years he had ample funds, a wealth of friends, and a loyal audience. His resilient spirit tided him across the quagmires of divorce, the death of his daughter, alcoholism, and blindness. He had no contact with life "on the other side of the tracks," and his inbred sense of decorum would have denied its suitability for literary adaptation. The stylistic and thematic limits of his realism are thus drawn principally by the dual forces of a secure middle-class environment and an idealistic temperament.

For better or for worse, there is little in Tarkington of the desperate "struggle against the elements" so popular in the hairy-chested school of our time. The forces of nature are ever present, but they work for good as well as ill. Summer sunshine lies warm upon many a Tarkington page (even Penrod throws no snowballs), and romance is wafted along on springtime zephyrs. A vacation air suffuses such episodic tales as Seventeen, Mary's Neck, and Claire Ambler. This aspect of "hammock reading," of course, has been sufficient to squelch any hope for reputation in the closed literary circles which proclaim anything "pretty or sweet or having sentiment" inappropriate in genuine writing.

Tarkington's use of nature in his fiction is often remindful of that old adage: "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." Quite literally this is the case in his last novel, The Show Piece. "As Mr. Tarkington

said while he was writing it, [it] might have been called The Egoist if George Meredith hadn't used that title."³⁷ Since The Show Piece is primarily a study of egoism, many of its plot incidents are designed to reveal this attribute in the personality of Irvie Pease, the title character. One of these is a sudden squall which turns into a "bolt." ("A bolt's ten times wuss'n a squall.") Irvie and two girls are rowing homeward from a becalmed sloop when the blow strikes. Quick wit on the part of one of the girls saves the trio, the localites proclaim Irvie a hero--and he accepts the honor. Tiny clues, planted along the way, grow soon into full-blown suspicion as to the true nature of "our hero" and his role in the near-tragedy; but, again, the incident is solely a story device to portray character. "Dat ol' debbil sea" bears no symbolic significance in an O'Neill sense; it is no cosmic force in the Melvillean strain. It is just a convenient vehicle by which to put across a point.

As a matter of fact, it is futile to seek symbolism in the conventional literary sense of the term in the works of Tarkington. As mentioned earlier, such a stylistic device would seem to partake of the obscurantism in letters which he deplored. Certainly the falling of the shadow over Ornaby Addition in The Midlander might well be imbued with prophetic significance. The knot of violets, gathered by Alice Adams among the raindrops, wilted and died at the dance; just as the lovely hopes of Alice likewise wilted and died. These examples, and others like them, serve but to indicate the limitations of the technique in Tarkington's hands. They lack the dimensions of Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, even The Old Man and the Sea--they were not designed according to a master plan of such magnitude.

Tarkington realized that few of his readers would recognize such subtleties, so again he sacrificed depth for clarity.

Even without symbolical significance, the external aspects of Tarkington's descriptive prowess merit some respect. Slight evidence of his skill at sketching a commonplace of nature has already been offered, and much more of like quality might be cited. But Tarkington displayed a deft touch with description in many more areas than the outdoors. Among all the components of a tale he liked best the actors, and upon them he lavished his greatest care. The centrality of character in Tarkington fiction is evident in even so obvious a clue as book titles themselves; a good three-quarters of his novels acquire their titles either directly from the name of a principal character (Penrod, Alice Adams, Kate Fennigate, etc.) or from a descriptive label (The Gentleman from Indiana, The Midlander, The Plutoocrat, etc.). But titles, of course, are only clues; proof positive is to be found from analysis of the works themselves.

Tarkington himself provides frequent assistance in making such analysis. Only a year before his death in 1946 he wrote a brief article explaining "how and why he had written a book of his called Image of Josephine."³⁸ Here one finds his most mature concept of the novel, and here one finds the fullest exposition of his phrase "investigatory novel." This expression, like "intensivism" and "veritism," has remained well on the periphery of critical terminology, yet it does have its utility. To Tarkington, this type of novel is a work of fiction "intended to investigate human beings and if possible to reveal something about them."³⁹ Thus the characters

must be drawn as closely as possible from life in order to give them a convincing lifelike quality which the reader can accept without hesitation. In other words, the verity of a novel is in direct proportion to the authenticity of its characters and their actions.

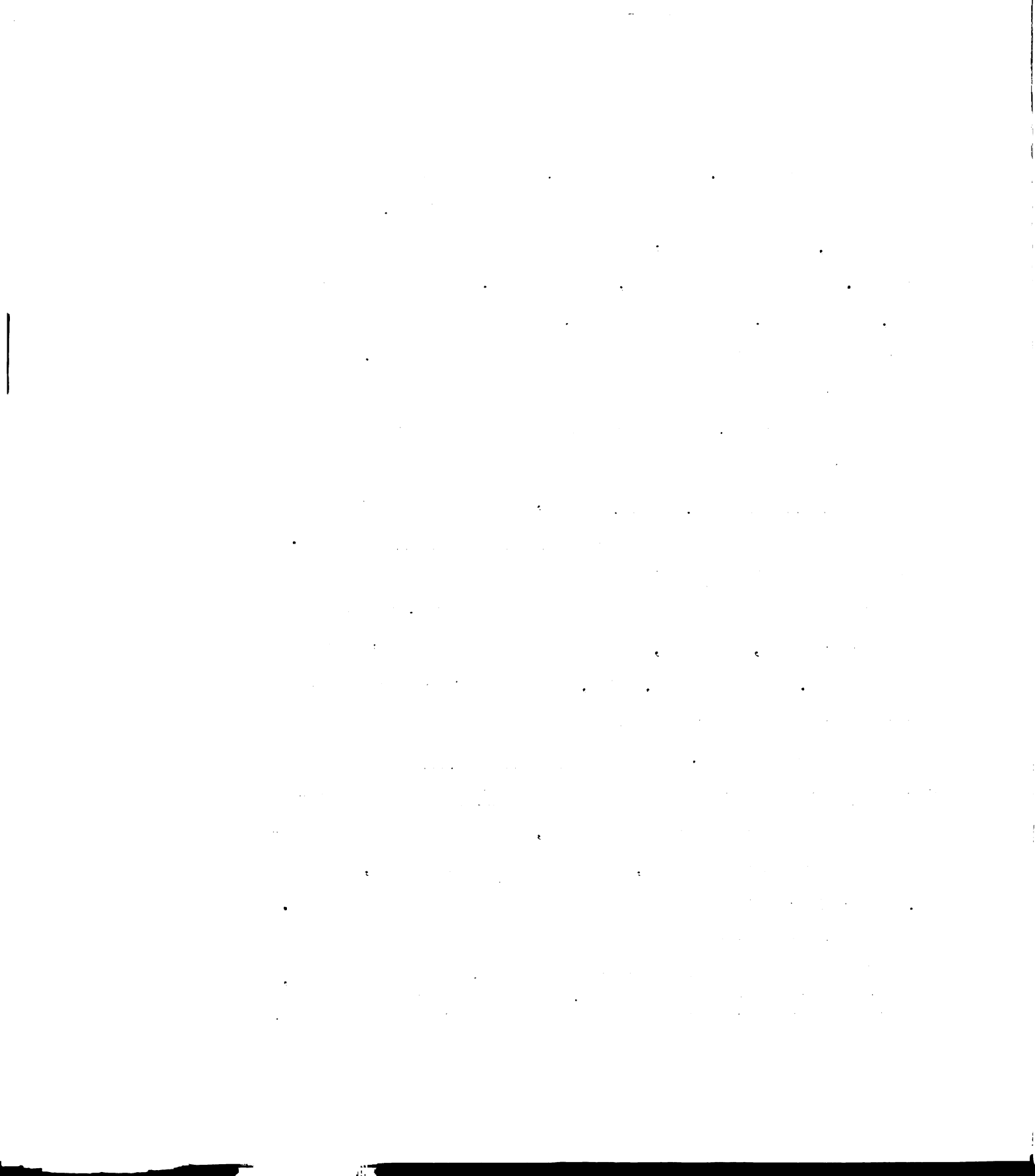
Particularly where characterization is concerned, this concept of a novel as an investigation of human beings demands that the figures in a work of fiction should approximate real people. Tarkington was by no means so naive as to conceive of human personality as a simple, transparent subject. Indeed, he wrote, "If for some moments the reader will think hard of his circle of friends and acquaintances he'll perceive that his thoughts are really roving among strangers."⁴⁰ How much greater, then, the problem becomes when an author seeks to breathe life into "the airy nothings" of his own imagination. The synthesis of personality is an intricate process demanding not only sharp observation and a retentive memory, but also a vivid imagination to see the full stature of one's creation and discrimination to select the details.

Still other factors complicate this process of creative characterization. Tarkington sensed that the more obvious, the more simple, the more consistent the persons in a story are portrayed, the less real they appear. "If the people in the book are to 'come alive' to the eye and ear of an observant reader, those people must not be easier to know all about than actual people."⁴¹ A frequent charge upon many a novelist is the criticism that his characters are "inconsistent," that they do not "conform" to their supposed personality. To these criticisms Tarkington would respond, "Neither

do you nor do your friends." In his opinion, the characters in a novel "must be people about whom the reader could change his opinion, as he does sometimes, of actual people; and his likes and dislikes may alter accordingly. The people of the book, to seem human, must be as inconsistent, for instance, as human beings are, and must inspire in one another as diverse opinions of themselves as all human beings do."⁴²

In this connection it may be well to remind the reader that this is the elder artist speaking. Earlier critics were quick to deride the unsullied purity of Helen Sherwood and the incredible virtue of John Harkless in The Gentleman from Indiana (1899), the devotion of Ariel Tabor and the resolute altruism of Joe Loudon in The Conquest of Canaan (1905). It was not until The Turmoil (1913) that Tarkington began his real emancipation from the "stock characters" of popular fiction; it was 1945 when he declared that, above all, the figures in a novel "mustn't fall into fiction patterns. What they feel, think, and do mustn't conform to the literary expectations of a reader more accommodatingly than do the actual creatures of flesh about him."⁴³ Between Monsieur Beaucaire (written prior to The Gentleman from Indiana) and The Show Piece (published posthumously in 1947) lie some three dozen novels, and no one would be so foolhardy as to deny that many of them, particularly the early works, contain flat, static figures who act and react in conventionally predictable ways. Cabell was once moved to remark on this score

His ventriloquism is startling in its excellence; but his marionettes, under the most life-like of exteriors, have either hearts of gold or entrails of sawdust; there is no medium: and as touches their behavior,



all the Tarkington puppets 'form themselves' after the example of the not unfamous young person who had a curl in the middle of her forehead.⁴⁴

But this is Cabell in early 1921. Alice Adams was yet to emerge, the Growth trilogy was yet unfinished, and most of Tarkington's mature writing lay ahead. Edwin Edgett, fiction editor for many years for the Boston Evening Transcript, commented more recently in a greatly different tone. With warm cordiality he expressed the popularity of Tarkington, mentioned the wide familiarity of such names as Penrod and Alice Adams, and stressed Tarkington's gift for creating living personalities. In Edgett's words

Despite their undeniable powers, none of Henry James's or Edith Wharton's characters equal his in their life-likeness...It is undeniably the peculiar and distinctive quality of Mr. Tarkington's humor, and of his fantasy...that help to hold his characters in mind. And while his analytical powers are scarcely less than [those of Shaw, Wells, Barrie, and Galsworthy], he touches them with a lightness and wit that causes us to overlook the fact that he is delving into the intricacies of human nature.⁴⁵

As important as the element of characterization is in our study of Tarkington as a literary craftsman, there remain two other aspects of the subject which demand our attention. The first of these concerns, indirectly, the problem of the popular writer versus the serious artist. Tarkington's comment above on avoiding "fiction patterns" suggests his own desire to be considered as something more than a provider of idle amusement. Similarly his point on eschewing mere "vicarious adventure" indicates much the same. In his own words

The author...mustn't work the reader into liking or disliking any of the people of the book. Such processes are appropriate to the

"vicarious adventure" and vicarious love-experience stories wherein the reader (probably the author, too) becomes in imagination one or more of the fictitious people and thus "escapes" from life and the cares of the day.⁴⁶

A similar attitude was expressed by him in Part II of our study in relation to the contemporary feminine demand for love stories in which women readers might "re-live their dreams," a point he also made in regard to historical romances which enable the reader to ride off on a white charger into another wish-world. Both of these types of fiction struck an older Tarkington as frivolous and ephemeral. A quarter-century ago the Lynds reported, "To Middletown adults, reading a book means overwhelmingly...the vicarious entry into other imagined kinds of living."⁴⁷ As one might expect, they add, "the social function of these forays into the realm of fancy demands that the experiences thus...shared be happy or valorous ones."⁴⁸ To Tarkington, "Merely to produce entertainment of this nature seemed to him the prostitution of an artistic trust, an insult to his reader, and an overt bow to the purse."⁴⁹ He was far too honest and intelligent to become merely a fabricator of vehicles of escape. Despite a weather eye on the market, he maintained a steady flight along the upper levels of stylistic excellence and thematic challenge. "What kind of reader can a serious writer communicate with?" he once queried Kenneth Roberts. To his own question he replied, "He can fully communicate with those whose critical selves are most like his own most critical writing self."⁵⁰ That is to say, there is a direct relationship between author and reader: "Write down" for whatever reason and your audience level declines accordingly.

This relationship is apparent in another way. Tarkington insisted that the author "mustn't work the reader into liking or disliking any of the people of the book." Here, of course, his main consideration is the ultimate attitude of the reader toward the novelist's creations. In another place Tarkington allied this subject with the author's relations to his characters, declaring, "I think the detached point of view is best. Let the author be a sort of god on a Mt. Olympus, neither hating any character nor liking him too much, but just telling what happened."⁵¹

This, once again, is the well-aged Tarkington speaking. At seventy he may have arrived at that conviction, but his works belie his words. Both his fiction and his personal papers illustrate again and again how absorbed he became in his stories. All the juvenile tales are interlarded with his homely philosophy and homespun psychology, and every adult novel is interrupted for commentary whenever the need seemed to present itself. During most of the period when his novels emerged in print, this practice evoked protests from the critics. Whereas such interference in Tarkington never approached the Trollopean excess, the reportorial style of naturalism excluded such intimacies. At present the practice is acquiring a certain respectability which tends to justify the device in Tarkington's novels.⁵²

In addition to the foregoing discussion of reader-character relationships and author-character relationships, there is one more aspect to Tarkington's treatment of characterization in general to be treated before we pass on to more limited approaches to the subject. This is his favorite technique of setting up two characters in marked contrast to one another.

The device never descends to the comic-book level of "good guys" and "bad guys", for that type of demarcation is not Tarkington's intent. Rather it is a more subtle problem of relativity. This contrast technique appears in novel after novel, although nowhere more transparently than in The Midlander. In this story one meets the two Oliphant brothers, Dan and Harlan. Only a year apart in age, they are a world apart in disposition:

It was the fashion to say of them that never were two brothers so alike yet so unlike; and although both were tall, with blue eyes, brown hair, and features of pleasant contour decisively outlined in what is called a family likeness, people who knew them well found it a satisfying and insoluble puzzle that they were the off-spring of the same mother and father.⁵³

Although a year Harlan's senior, Dan never achieved his brother's aloof self-sufficiency. He is "the democrat; the simple-minded hustler and mixer, the fellow everybody likes and smiles at for his artless enthusiasms." Harlan, on the other hand, is totally different from Dan; he is quiet, studious, "a patrician, an aesthete, a snob." Needless to say, the two have nothing in common; indeed, "at some time in their early childhood the brothers had made the discovery that they were uncongenial."⁵⁴

Quite unsuspected by the guileless Dan, the two women who figure in his life are likewise complete contrasts, mismatched by his stubborn imperception. Right next door to the Oliphants lives Martha Shelby, "handsome, graceful, intelligent"--and since girlhood in love with Dan. Then comes their separation with finishing school and college. On a vacation spree Dan becomes infatuated with Lena McMillan, a "French doll" from the Four Hundred of New York, slightly shopworn but irresistible to a native Midlander. Thus the Fates, assisted by an unsuspecting Dan, bring together

these two contrasts in femininity: Martha, warm, loyal, solid, dependable; Lena, cold, selfish, shrewish, unfaithful. To complicate things even more, Tarkington injects a further love element on the part of Harlan for Martha, together with a cordial dislike for Lena. The outcome could hardly be expected to be happy, nor is it. Lena succeeds in wrecking her own marriage, steals the affection of an only son, pushes through a shabby divorce, and Dan dies a broken man. Harlan then marries a pensive Martha, but it is an alliance of friendship, not love.

All in all, The Midlander is a study in contrasts, not only in the personalities of the leading characters, but in other ways as well. It is a dramatization of the contrast between East and Midwest, the synthetic socialite from the Big City and the genuine product from Plainville. It is an exposition of the contrast between Booster Dan, the builder of tomorrow, and Scholar Harlan, the student of the past. Above all it is a study of the contrast between yesterday and tomorrow. Like Tarkington himself, the Oliphant brothers graduate, "in that day which the newspapers were beginning to call fin de siecle", and Harlan lives on into a world in which already one perceives hints of "beauty to come."

In the hands of the inept this technique of contrasts lead into pitfalls: over-simple characterization, mechanically static personalities, extremes in protagonist and antagonist, angularities in relationships. Mention was made earlier that the emergent Tarkington was inclined to make his whites too white, to tone his darks too black. Closer control of his medium in more mature years eliminated much of this melodramatic tendency, and thereby his characters gain in human stature. The use of contrast in

the delineation of characters can be a highly rewarding technique, but one must hold a firm grip on the plausible, even while supplying bits of the near-incredible for dramatic effect.⁵⁵

Whereas Tarkington displayed skill in his juxtaposition of contrasting personalities, an even greater finesse is apparent in his depiction of individual characters. Preëminent among his gallery of portraits are his paintings of women. Tradition, founded upon the glib repetition of first judgments, persists in making Tarkington the father of a brood of beautiful damsels whose main accomplishments are baby-talk, dancing, porch-swing chit-chat, and flirting. If one considered only such novels as Seventeen, Gentle Julia, or even Claire Ambler, the tradition would be warranted. If one includes the entire Tarkington assemblage of feminine characters, however, he discovers a somewhat different situation. Contrary to popular opinion, the majority of Tarkington heroines and their feminine foils are by no means admirable characters. A goodly number are frankly "designing women," and their wiles are none too flattering to the sex. As Quinn comments, "In Women [1925] Tarkington's uncanny knowledge of feminine nature is revealed more than once. The devices by which a young woman takes a man away from a much finer rival are almost blood-curdling in their realism."⁵⁶

The reference above is to a Miss Sally Ealing, whose "devices" are "always some absolutely silly little mystery she makes up about [her current target]--and almost her whole stock in trade is that she's heard something about 'em, or thought something curious about 'em, or dreamed about 'em."⁵⁷ Her latest victim, Anne Cromwell, is a local belle who loses her

heart's desire to this cheap flirt. In her bitterness she cries, "Any girl or woman--the very stupidest--can see [her tricks]...so why doesn't the cleverest man? Are men all just idiots?"⁵⁸ Her mother can only respond, "Yes, dear,...they are. It's a truth we have to find out, and the younger we are when we find out, the better for us. We have to learn to forgive them for it and to respect them for the intelligence they show in other ways--but about Sallie Ealings and what we used to call 'women's wiles', we have to face the fact that men are--well, yes, just idiots!"⁵⁹

This conversation is quoted at some length because it is so revelatory of Tarkington's insight into women and their ways. It is reminiscent of the peculiarly feminine touches which aroused the controversy about the authorship of Kitty Foyle some years ago until a very male Christopher Morley established the identity beyond doubt. A logical question at this point might well be, Where did Tarkington discover so much about the finer workings of the feminine mind? Did his perception come from wide reading in world literature, from a long series of romantic entanglements, or did it come from a dash of femininity in his own personality? Fellow author Henry James is frequently cited for his insight into womanly ways--despite his bachelorhood. A James intimate, E. S. Nadal, made the comment, "James... seemed to look at women rather as women look at them. Women look at women as persons; men look at them as women."⁶⁰ This type of kinship bears no relation to Tarkington; there is nothing of effeminacy about his nature. Dickinson, Holliday, Wooddress--all his biographers attest to his maleness. He had the usual boyhood affairs, a summer romance led him to Purdue, his vacations from Princeton are well sprinkled with girl-friends, and a pleas-

ant percentage of his apprentice days was devoted to "falling in and out of love." Eventually he married, was divorced, and remarried. His second marriage more than compensated for the disappointments in the first. All told, his relationships with the female sex seem normal in every respect.

The other side of the picture is equally unclouded. As fellow Hoosier R. E. Banta observes, "Tarkington was happy in his choice of male associates throughout his life."⁶¹ With no difficulty whatsoever a whole chapter could be constructed from the testimonials of affectionate esteem from an astounding array of men from every walk of life. Carl D. Bennett, pioneer academic critic of Tarkington, spent one summer on a Carnegie grant doing field work among former Tarkington associates. Nothing struck him more forcibly than the broad popularity of the man. "Everywhere," reported Bennett, "at Princeton University, in Maine, at Phillips Exeter Academy, at Purdue University, and particularly in Indianapolis, the name of Booth Tarkington was open sesame."⁶² After examination of the Tarkington Papers James Woodress observed, "Tarkington's interests were broad, his friends varied; and his letters went to writers, artists, statesmen, and businessmen, who discussed with him everything from old paintings to the atomic bomb."⁶³ Not only did he make new friends easily, but he held the old ones. Every evidence points to his possessing a remarkable personality which endeared him to a veritable host of admirers--and the male element bulks large.

The full story of the novelist's resources in his studies of "women's wiles" will likely never be told. In all probability he drew from practically any situation within his wide range of experiences, any personality

within the broad scope of his acquaintance.⁶⁴ As Joseph Collins declared,

There is no denying that he learned women's minds from keen observation, and he knows how to make them stand out in a background of familiar environment...His women act, talk, think, and suffer much as women do in real life; they have hysterics and sharp tongues like many women, and they are done with the fine end of a pen dipped in subtle ink. By going from one house to another, raising roofs and looking in, Mr. Tarkington had done a gallery of feminine pictures which reveal him as a serious student and painter of character.⁶⁵

Parenthetically, one might add, at times a novelist succeeds but too well in sketching a realistic figure and an embarrassing situation may arise. Tarkington tells of one instance of this self-identification by an acquaintance which occurred midway in his writing career. Shortly after the emergence of Alice Adams "an old friend" wrote him, wailing, "How could you? I always knew that you knew; but how could you bring yourself to do this to me?" In all honesty Tarkington adds, "Of course I'd never thought of her, and Alice Adams as I wrote it had nothing to do with her."⁶⁶ Incidents like this are frequent in literary history, and the situation may arise from a number of causes. Nearly always, however, the author is innocent of malice aforethought, despite the temperature of the accusations leveled at him.

It may be of interest to note two somewhat digressive matters before we resume our central theme. The first of these harks back to the critical remarks by Mr. Collins on the previous page. There he implies that Tarkington is a serious "student of character" primarily because he incorporates "hysterics and sharp tongues" in his depictions of women. This seems typical of the prevailing critical temper: Praise a writer most when he reveals the worst; condemn him the heaviest when he dares to be pleasant.

It will be observed that Mr. Collins says nothing about the fine, upright women who brighten Tarkington's pages. Nor do the other critics--except in derision of them as figments of an over-optimistic imagination. The heroines of his first novels are romanticised; even Tarkington conceded that. That a petite Helen Sherwood, heroine of The Gentleman from Indiana, should take upon herself the editing of a newspaper (to say nothing of conducting a senatorial campaign for an absentee candidate) is little short of the incredible. That a demure Ariel Tabor, heroine of The Conquest of Canaan, should take upon herself the resurrection of a besotted Joe Loudon (and spark a civic clean-up campaign at the same time) does stretch one's credulity also. One may say with Holliday, "Most of the women in Mr. Tarkington's earlier books...are not so much actual women as the embodiment of romantic and chivalrous dreams of women."⁶⁷ But these are his firstborn and his enthusiasms ran away with themselves. Admittedly this female domination of the young novelist is apparent in Tarkington's early works, nor did it even completely lose its control. Kate Fennigate, for example, retained her mastery of the novel bearing her name (1942) even above the objections of Wesley Stout, then editor of the Saturday Evening Post, who complained that "the husband got pushed around too much by his wife."⁶⁸

It would be misleading to imply at this point that Tarkington devoted his principal talent to portraying domineering women, but he did contribute several sketches of the type. The aforementioned Kate Fennigate is a worthy example, and of her origin we know several enlightening details. In Some Old Portraits appears a rich study in oils of one Sarah Jennings,

painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller. Tarkington's commentary about her is a nutshell description of Kate: "She's a woman natively gifted with the talent we call executive ability; and she knows she has it and her use of it is intuitive. Thus her decisions are instantaneous; and she must govern or nothing...She couldn't understand your honestly and intelligently holding a view different from her own; she would think you either bad or silly."⁶⁹ When the Post suggested that Tarkington "write a story about a woman who is responsible for her husband's business,"⁷⁰ he merely lifted his concept of Sarah Jennings from her frame on his study wall and fitted it into the frame of a novel which he called Kate Fennigate. Significantly, he began the second paragraph of the opening page, "This portrait of her..." Here is an excellent example of the creative ingenuity of Tarkington at work. To his knowledge of the historical Sarah Jennings he added details from a fertile imagination. In this way he took a picture by a late seventeenth century painter, re-dressed it in modern garb, and made of it a contemporary figure in a wholly different yet not incongruous setting. A re-incarnated Sarah Jennings might find difficulty in adjusting to her new environment, but she would slip comfortably into the personality of Kate Fennigate.

Other females with "executive ability" appear in various Tarkington tales, but more often their role is that of a termagant or a shrew. Tarkington was never completely persuaded that equality of the sexes is part of the social balance, and usually these domineering women are depicted as disruptive elements. Laila Capper, the "contrast character" to Kate in Kate Fennigate, is a striking example. At fifteen Laila was fully aware of men

and her attraction for them. And she had a philosophy of marriage too: "Oh, I'll not be in any hurry [to marry]. I'm going to have lots and lots of fun first, and afterwards too if I want to, because that's really the only way clever women get their share out of this life...I'm going to be a bird in a gilded cage; but the cage isn't going to have any top on it."⁷¹ Her determination to pursue this creed motivates a good part of the activity in this vigorous novel--as well as several of Tarkington's most suggestive lines. Her diabolical machinations work tragedy in the lives of all she affects, but her coup de grace is deflected so skillfully by Kate that Laila herself is out low. This pattern is followed in other Tarkington novels as a part of the "come-uppance" philosophy he used upon several occasions. It underlies the cheap connivings of Aurelia Hedge and Stella Greeley in Young Mrs. Greeley; it sparks the tawdry affair between Irene Foot and Gillespie Ives in The Lorenzo Bunch. In Claire Ambler it leads to the ambush of Arturo Liana, and it breeds disastrous deceit in the family of Alice Adams.

Much of the foregoing is closely related to another familiar Tarkington character--la femme fatale. She appears first in The Flirt in the person of Cora Madison, but she belongs to a hardy species. Like the Elizabethan drama device of mistaken identity, like the Restoration convention of a double standard, she is most often an uncomplicated stock character whom the reader accepts on faith. The history of the novel includes the full gamut, from Pamela Johnson to Scarlett O'Hara. Tarkington provides two varieties equipped with varying degrees of allure. The less significant of these is Continental, represented best by the svelte Mme. Momoro, "femme

du monde parfaitement et parfaitement Parisienne!"⁷² who so enthralls Tinker, Ogle, and the other males aboard the Duumviir in The Plutoocrat. Since this story partakes more of allegory than novel, she is not to be taken too seriously as a woman. She is the "woman of mystery" so dear to melodrama, and Tarkington makes no effort to bring her solidly down upon the deck. In a similar category is Mme. Hélène de Vaurigard, the delectable come-on in league with the card-sharps in His Own People.

But if these French specimens are unimportant, the native variety is another matter. The American girls are no types--each is an individual in her own right. From Kate Fennigate we met Laila Capper. Like the Sallie Ealing of Women, she knows every trick by which to make "idiots" out of men. Her sex appeal blooms young, and she revels in her female powers. Blithely she accepts male favors before, during, and after marriage; and blithely she skips down the path to her own destruction. Laila is a woman; she is no "female type." She grows into her role, she builds up her part, and she plays it to a sad finish. But she preserves her identity; always she will be Laila Capper, not just "the other woman" in Kate Fennigate.

In much the same way both Claire Ambler and Cora Madison achieve individuality. This pair add two dimensions to the figure of Laila Capper. In the first place, both Claire and Cora, conscious of their every move, are deliberate hypocrites who shape every speech for a calculated result and rehearse each movement for a preconceived effect. They lead sham lives of selfish pretense and shallow feeling; their ultimate tragedy comes with the realization of their self-deception. Claire "thus reached the bottom

of despair. 'No wonder I do such harm!' she thought. 'My very soul is artificial--and hideous!'"⁷³ Second, both are so obsessed with their irresistible charms that they fall victims to Narcissism. They brush their lips with their own fingers, coquette with themselves at their toilet, cuddle themselves to sleep on their own soft arms. Thus Cora, seated before her mirror, re-lives the earlier hours of the evening she had shared with Valentine Corliss. Suffused with memories

she leaned very closely closer and yet closer to the mirror; a rich colour spread over her; her eyes, gazing into themselves, became dreamy, inexpressibly wistful, cloudily sweet; her breath was tumultuous...Then, in the final moment..., as her face almost touched the glass, she forgot how and what she had looked to Corliss;...she forgot him utterly: she leaped to her feet and kissed the mirrored lips with...passion. 'You darling!' she cried."⁷⁴

With the most un-Freudian candor Tarkington adds, "Cora's christening had been unimaginative, for the name means only 'maiden'. She should have been called Narcissa."⁷⁵

"Cora Madison...is the first of those remarkable pictures of women which have elicited the admiration and even wonder of their own sex at Tarkington's insight."⁷⁶ She is by no means the last, for he painted many a memorable portrait of the fairer sex (in appearance only, Tarkington would add) in the three decades following The Flirt (1913).

One may feel, as he leafs over the last few pages, that undue attention has been drawn to the unpleasant persons in the Tarkington ménage of women. It is unfortunately true that his disagreeable vixens, egoistical flirts, and calculating schemers hold greater dramatic appeal than do their prim and proper sisters. Tarkington sensed this also, and in several instances it is obvious that he had quite a struggle to whet his own interest

in the "right" girl.⁷⁷ By and large, however, it should have been Tarkington (instead of Hjalmar Boyesen) who commented, "I have always sympathized with the perverter of Pope who declared that the noblest study of mankind is woman; and of all womankind no variety better repays sympathetic and discriminating study than the American."⁷⁸

Before we leave the distaff side of our discussion of Tarkington and characterization, it might be well to consider briefly the question why he devoted so much talent and time to his female characters. Of course, there is always the retort that as a man he quite naturally was attracted to the subject. This is not as flippant a remark as it may seem at first reading, for many of our greatest male authors have found their keenest challenge in exploring the infinite mysteries of womankind. Generally speaking, it is also true that emphasis upon the feminine side of life tends to minimize the grosser aspects conventionally associated with men as the winner of the livelihood, the keeper of the exchequer, the protector of the hearth, the initiator of sexual relationships, and the like. Such considerations as these are especially relevant to the life and principles of Tarkington, as we have implied before.

The likeliest reason, however, is neither stylistic nor esthetic. It is practical. Early in his writing career he discovered his knack for the depiction of women characters, and he capitalized on it. We observed long ago that Tarkington knew full well the high percentage of women among his potential readers. Since he reasoned "in every portrait of a woman all other women must find at least a bit of themselves,"⁷⁹ it is obvious that he could draw the conclusion from this premise that the more portraits he supplied, the more women would find "a bit of themselves" in his stories,

and the more novels he would sell. Nevertheless, with this artistic perjury, he sought to combine sufficient thematic body and stylistic excellence to elevate his works above the level of mere vicarious entertainment. As he asserted at the close of his career, "though almost any book, or almost any work of art can possibly be used as 'escape', the investigatory novel isn't meant that way."⁸⁰ This is his definition of his own work: His novels are character studies of verisimilar personalities designed to illuminate human nature and stimulate sympathetic understanding.

The relative silence among critics regarding Tarkington's male creations is indicative of an inescapable fact: Whereas Tarkington excelled in his portraits of women, most of his men are quite ordinary daubs. They are neither glaringly deficient in execution nor outstandingly superior. When one remembers Tarkington's galaxy of masculine friends, one is at a loss to explain this hiatus in his achievements, for certainly opportunity was never lacking for the analytical observation of men of all kinds. Yet none of his adult male creations can bear comparison to a bristling handful from the pen of Sinclair Lewis, although the latter's feminine characters are often correspondingly weak. Numerically speaking, a good third of Tarkington's novels appear man-centered, but the statistics are misleading. Even a superficial survey reveals that most of these works are not personality studies in the deeper sense of the term so much as they are various other fictional types employing male characters. In rough thematic order, let us take a quick overview of these novels.

In the first place, we might glance at Tarkington's early regional romances. Certainly no one could defend either The Gentleman from Indiana

or The Conquest of Canaan as character studies. In the former, John Harkless is as unabashedly idealized a hero as we found Helen Sherwood, its heroine. As R. Ellis Roberts comments on the latter novel, "It has a strong flavor of the fairy tale,...full of generous hope and pleasant make-believe."⁸¹ The optimistic theme of dedicated altruism which underlies both novels so dominates every element that little character development is possible. The John Harkless who steps off the train at Plattville at the close of Tarkington's first novel is the same man who stepped off the same train in chapter one; he has "come home," he has won a wife, he has "entered the political arena," but he is unaltered in any profound sense. Similarly, the youthful Joe Loudon of The Conquest of Canaan is buffeted about by fitful gusts of melodrama, but he too conquers in the end, embraces a blushing Ariel,--and holds fast the same virtues which drew him back to a hometown determined to deny him.

A second variety of Tarkington story likewise offers little potentiality for significant characterization. It is a rare occasion when the author of historical romance produces a penetrating study of a personality within the fabric of his story. The figures in such novels are stereotyped by convention, and the heightened action is designed to capitalize on the expected virtues of heroic types. Monsieur Beaucaire, exquisite though it be in stylistic artistry, is "sheer romance."⁸² The gallant Frenchman doffs his role as "Monsieur le Duc de Chateaurien" when the pageant is over, but as "His Highness, Prince Louis-Philippe de Valois, et al." he is quite the same blade we met at the first. In Cherry, "not attempting to describe life as it is, or as it should be, he [Tarkington]

simply relates a dream, in the Beaucaire manner, with a smile in his pen and a song in his heart."⁸³ This novelette is pure pastiche, a rare work of comic restraint, but far removed from sober character analysis. Even Wanton Mally, a belated return to the genre, is mainly a plot fabrication--and its central figure is a woman. One anonymous reviewer of this Jacobean tale was so lost for terms that he opened his remarks by calling it "a novel rather than a romance," then concluded by labeling it a "fable." Like the rest of Tarkington's historical novels, it cannot be ranked among character studies on any level.

In a third category one might turn to the contemporary romances for a more serious treatment of male characterization, but the harvest is small. The Two Vanrevels (vaguely mid-nineteenth century) is an inconsequential fantasy based on the worn mistaken-identity device. Amid the heavy atmosphere of suspense around a mysterious figure, there is little opportunity for character analysis of any consequence; it is a story of plot, such as it is. A later novel remotely akin to The Two Vanrevels is The Guest of Quesnay, a psychologized account of an amnesiac vaguely reminiscent of the James Hilton story, Random Harvest. In theme, The Guest of Quesnay is a fictionalization of Locke's theory of the tabula rasa, but the slight treatment of the theme never fulfills the magnitude of the plan. Although an entertaining piece of fiction, it remains a plot-heavy novel of limited analytical depth which descends eventually into pure melodrama.

For our fourth group we could investigate the realm of lighter fiction with a humorous cast at which Tarkington was a master. Here is a gallery of rogues who constitute one of Tarkington's most delightful contributions

to literary entertainment, but the novels in this category are even more remote than our earlier listings in significant character portrayal. This is to make a definitely un-Tarkington assumption regarding the relative merit of the serious versus the comic in terms of artistic worth, but this matter need not concern us. In terms of analytical study, in terms of Tarkington's own phrase "the investigatory novel," none of these approach the status of permanent letters. It is indicative of their superficial nature that all of these men are cast in episodic novels which depend mainly on incidental plot interest for reader appeal rather than the minute examination of moves and motives within a social matrix. Here should be mentioned such works as The Rumbin Galleries, the hilarious sketch of a wily art dealer; The Fighting Littles, with its not-quite-profane "job-jamming" father; and Mary's Neck, with the long-suffering Mr. Massey, his antique-huntress wife, and two stunning daughters. Each of these books makes amusing reading, but it would be folly to claim for them more than entertainment.

For distinctly different reasons, one cannot consider other sharp personalities of a serio-comic nature. Tinker, the "Barbarian" of The Plutocrat, provides a case in point. He is like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress: The reader is with him so long that he almost forgets the allegorical basis of the character amid the story details. Yet he and the other principals aboard the Dumviir are but personifications--Tinker himself, the essence of plutocratic provincialism; Ogle, the "sophisticated" author of a cynical comedy; Mme. Momoro, la femme fatale to make "idiots" of the males involved; Macklyn, the avant garde poet who "tries to make

people notice him by using no punctuation and omitting capital letters"; Jones, the unappreciated modernist artist who "creates for the few"; even Olivia Tinker, a "wholesome American type" who comes in handy to pair off with Ogle at the close. This element of symbolism in The Plutoocrat complicated earlier critical reactions to the work, and it remains an unassimilated component in the novel. Naturally enough, the first tendency is to regard these people as conventional characters in a conventional novel. Soon the impossibility of doing so manifests itself--and the reader may bog down. Ogle, the supposed "hero," reveals himself as an "insignificant snob" whom only a few concede remotely capable of producing his "intelligent" play. Tinker looms ever larger as a caricaturized Babbitt. Indeed, as Lawrence Morris suggests, "Neither Ogle nor the plutoocrat ever becomes a three-dimensional individual."⁸⁴

The truth of the matter is that The Plutoocrat falls between the two stools of romance and satire. Read one way the novel is a thin travel story involving some nice young Americans, a French adventuress, a stock fiction family complete with hen-pecked father, a termagant wife, and an inexplicably lovely offspring, plus a sprinkling of colorful "natives." Misread this way, The Plutoocrat is the most unpromising child of Mr. Tarkington's mind. If one reads the novel as the author intended, it becomes a delicious satire on what Tarkington would call the "pinchbeck" intellectualism of the day, the absurdities, the stereotypes of American abroad. In particular it is a defense of the American business tycoon, a lusty swing at the literary snipers of the preceding two decades who had pilloried the industrialist as the epitome of provincial naïveté, cultural crudity,

and raw power. And finally, interpreted as a satirical gesture at the naturalistic novel, even the preposterously contrived finale makes excellent sense. That so many misread The Plutocrat is indicative of stylistic weakness somewhere however; again, no one could defend the work as a character study in the usual sense of the term.

Even as one turns to the Growth trilogy for thematic significance, so he must resort to these three novels for the most powerful figures among Tarkington's men: Bibbs Sheridan of The Turmoil, George Minafer of The Magnificent Ambersons, Dan Oliphant of The Midlander. Not only is industrial growth reflected by this trio; there is growth of character in each of them as his story unfolds. For that matter, there is a scope in time alone to these novels which makes for an organic growth in characterization, most apparent in The Magnificent Ambersons, less so in The Midlander, and least in The Turmoil. The direct chronology which shapes these stories is well adapted to depicting developmental matter like character growth, provided the span of time is large enough. Unfortunately the favorite Sinclair Lewis technique of tracing his heroes from late boyhood well into adulthood (apparent from The Trail of the Hawk through works like Arrowsmith and Elmer Gantry) found only limited application by Tarkington. George Minafer, from pony rider to truck driver, integrates the solid substance of The Magnificent Ambersons, as does no other member of the triumvirate--and remains today the most valid of all Tarkington men.

This is not to imply complete success in male characterization even among Tarkington masterpieces, for he rarely exhibits absolute control over his subjects. R. Ellis Roberts reflects, apropos of the hero of The Mag-

nificent Ambersons, "I am not sure whether Mr. Tarkington knows how really horrid George is. He spares him not at all; but he seems to expect the reader to forgive him, and that is too difficult. He is sincere--he expresses himself, in the cant of the day: but self-expression is not enough."⁸⁵ The reference here is to Tarkington's creation of an absolute heel who is converted in the last chapter to a gentleman worthy the forgiveness of a wronged Eugene Morgan and the hand of his faithful daughter Lucy. Roberts is but one of many critics who find our novelist suspiciously inconsistent in his portrayal of George Minafer. None of these deny the vitality of the figure, nor the "illusion of reality" which imparts the breath of life into his being; yet a solid majority find their credulity over-stretched as the novel draws to its close. These critics concur in their suspicion that the creator lost contact with his creation, that ultimately the author did forget "just how horrid George is."

A similar weakness of grasp is suggested in a review of The Midlander (1923) by Arthur S. Pier. Pier declared about Tarkington's depiction of Dan Oliphant, "In trying to present an engaging, hearty, whole-souled, and resolute hero, he has actually drawn a willing sponger, a fearsome bore, a noisy booster, a Babbitt of inferior mentality."⁸⁶ The implication of such a statement is obvious: Tarkington had so dim a mental concept of his character that he could not describe him with consistent accuracy. Whereas justification for portions of this criticism may be found, it would be hard to prove in its entirety. Dan is engaging, hearty, "whole-souled." Being a quite human individual without funds, he does welcome family assistance at moments of crisis (and is more appreciative of it than many a man); being

over his ears in debt on a one-shot project, he is a noisy booster--exactly like thousands of miscellaneous salesmen like him. If one means college grades and academic achievement, Dan is of "inferior mentality"; but if one includes as a part of "mentality" the vision of progress, the courage of convictions, the ambition of achievement, he may regard "Dan Oliphant as a fine hero...[who] wrestled with the disillusionments of life but...was undefeated."⁸⁷

Bibbs Sheridan of The Turmoil received extensive treatment somewhat earlier in our study, so there is little need to rehearse his case. Certainly he is an excellent example of the misunderstood Tarkington male. Again the criticism comes from the seeming inconsistency in characterization here, between Bibbs the poet at the beginning of the book and Bibbs the executive at the end. With Tarkington this turnabout in personality is designed to give realism, to lend a human touch to the character. The difference between critical acceptance of change and the deliberate employment of change as a creative device is a relative matter, but it figures prominently in an appraisal of Tarkington's literary artistry. In some respects, this is another case of critical pessimism on the one side and personal optimism on the other. The former is a part of the temper of the times; the latter is a part of the nature of the novelist.

In a quite different respect, this problem in characterization may be considered in another light. Mention was made in the Foreword that one value from our study might well be "the appreciation of partial perfections." That is to say, Tarkington demonstrates in such a trio as these protagonists from Growth his capacity to create sentient beings. He also illustrates

the stylistic deficiencies which may emerge the moment artistic restraints are surrendered to personal whims or public pressure. To the last Tarkington himself maintained that he "wrote what he wrote [because] that was the way he had to." A sentiment like this last suggests a possible lack of control over his "puppets," as Cabell called them, which enabled them to twine themselves about their maker. Call it inconsistency, call it optimism, call it romanticism, the fact remains that only too often something appears at the psychological moment to ease the shock of the inevitable or to patch up a possible. Even Alice Adams, by far the most generally acclaimed of all his mature studies because of its "submission to truth," leaves its heroine climbing symbolically upward: "Half-way up the shadows were heaviest, but after that the place began to seem brighter. There was an open window overhead, somewhere, she found, and the steps at the top were gay with sunshine."⁸⁸ In Part IV of our study we shall have more to say on this point.

After foraging upon the scanty herbage of Tarkington's male characters, it is pleasant to see before one the lush field of juvenile creations. To the average reader today, a generation after his heyday, Tarkington is the author of "those Penrod stories" and probably Seventeen. There is a touch of sadness in this admission, for Tarkington himself looked upon this type of story as relaxation for himself and recreation of youth for his readers. Unlike the restricted scope of the "investigatory novel" upon which he staked his principal claim, he realized the panorama of lasting juvenile literature must be broad enough for every reader to fit himself into it. In his words, "In the childhood of the subject of the picture, there must

[be] something of all other children."⁸⁹ In acknowledgment of his success, Carl Van Doren long ago tagged Tarkington "the glass of adolescence," and the expression is apt. Penrod appeared in 1914, over four decades ago, Penrod and Sam two years later; both stories have constantly been in print since their initial publication. Penrod, it was noted earlier, was a runaway best-seller upon publication; subsequently it has been adapted for both the stage and motion pictures.

The foregoing remarks are not designed to make Tarkington a pioneer in American juvenile fiction, for he had venerable predecessors. This is not the place to trace the history of this segment of our national letters, but it is worth noting that William Lyon Phelps ranked Tarkington along with Mark Twain and Stephen Crane as one of our three greatest names in this category. To some, of course, this is a dubious distinction. Van Wyok Brooks recently remarked in The Writer in America, "It has often been said that our literature is a literature for boys, or one might better say that Cooper, Irving, Longfellow, Dana...have largely survived as classics for adolescents." Mentioning no names, Brooks goes on to say, "...Many writers of more recent years have suggested overgrown exuberant boys."⁹⁰ This is the Tarkington theme for many a lament raised by the critic chorus. It was Vernon Louis Parrington who fixed upon him the title "perennial sophomore"⁹¹ over a quarter-century ago, a catch-phrase originated by Van Doren in his comment, "In contemporary American fiction Mr. Tarkington is the perennial sophomore."⁹² Cabell has his variation to the theme, but the refrain is the same. In Beyond Life (1921) he asserted, "The fact remains that out of forty-nine years of living Mr. Tarkington has thus far

given us only Seventeen."⁹³ As pointed out before, both of these last two judgments antedate Tarkington's more mature works like Alice Adams or The Midlander. They voice the same attitude as that of Grant Overton, writing at the same time:

Even those who declare the creation of Penrod and William Sylvanus Baker, Jr. to be 'great work'--and they are numerous and their opinion is respectable--will feel perhaps, as they contemplate the prolonged attack of Penroditis that this adolescent in literature gave his fashioner a distinct setback."⁹⁴

All of these remarks suggest a general feeling that juvenile themes are frivolous time-passers or cheap potboilers. It is certainly true, as Edith Wyatt says, "Those who possess any technique here have commanded... little appreciation for it."⁹⁵ Yet, when one glances down the list of perennial favorites in this category, he is struck by two things: one, the brevity of the list; two, the quality of the authors on it. Apparently the capacity to tell a lasting tale of this type is restricted to a favored few. At best it displays a strange dualistic insight by which the gifted can peer into youthful minds. "It is as if the author had a device in his head like the plumbing giving hot and cold water to a bath-tub, and as if he could at will turn off the stream of mature thinking and turn on the boy thinking."⁹⁶ This is no mean ability, as Holliday intimates. "To recapture the sensations of twelve or of seventeen is exactly what the normal adult mind cannot do...For the production of...[Tarkington's] boy stories something else was required [beyond stylistic skill], something [like genius]."⁹⁷

Assuredly this "genius" is not passed out indiscriminately to authors. Among the contemporaries of the young Tarkington one would have to look no farther than Henry James or Edith Wharton to find marked contrast in this

capacity to create believable youth. The James legend is dotted with anecdotes and commentaries concerning his helplessness among children. Mrs. Humphry Ward once said of him, "...Mr. James was [not] an indiscriminate lover of children; he was not normally much at home with them, though always good to them."⁹⁸ Randolph C. Miller, that precocious brat in Daisy Miller, is James juvenility at its best, but Randolph is remote from Tarkington small fry. James's protégée, Mrs. Wharton, fared little better. Not one memorable child romps through her decorous pages; even The Children ("that worried novel," as Van Doren describes it)⁹⁹ relates an incredible pilgrimage by a fantastic family. Far closer to warm reality are the Whilomville Stories of Stephen Crane, although there any comparison to Tarkington tales must cease. In this last instance, an odd discrepancy in critical attitudes merits our attention. Derogatory remarks crop up every now and then accusing Tarkington of making too "adult" an approach to adolescence. At the same time praise has been accorded Crane for his "mature" treatment. The real nub of the argument, however, is not a matter of style; it is subject matter, for the greater part, together with what one might call "tone" for the remainder.

At the risk of digression, let us explore this issue briefly. As sincere respecters of truth in their writings, both Crane and Tarkington were compelled by a similar motivation in their delineation of youth: Both aspired to write about "real boys" doing "real things." William Lyon Phelps remarks in his Introduction to the Whilomville Stories, "Stephen Crane [exercised] the same art on boys and girls that he displayed in dealing with soldiers or with the vagabonds in city slums. There is the same

remorseless and uncompromising love of truth."¹⁰⁰ Tarkington, too, "had firm ideas of what boy life really was like and relegated most stories of children to the limbo of claptrappery."¹⁰¹ Interestingly enough, Whilomville Stories is one of the few juvenile works, beyond those of Mark Twain, for which Tarkington professed admiration...up to a certain point. This point of departure is the same issue in miniature which Tarkington fought all his life with the naturalist school of fiction. To his mind, Crane and his brothers upset the balance of reality one way; Tarkington himself has perennially been accused of pushing it too far the other. Since we must wage a major campaign on this matter in the concluding division of our study, we need not enter the fray quite yet. If Penrod and Seventeen are not the earthy case histories of Whilomville Stories or Winesburg, Ohio, many still feel they supply a real need in adolescent reading experience. Richard Crowley expatiated on this score, "Critics in the past have refused to take these works [by Tarkington] seriously, considering them 'superficial', and accusing Tarkington of deliberately avoiding the 'real' problems of the teen-ager, such as growing sex awareness [and other of the 'grimmer aspects of adolescence']". This attitude seems to me," Crowley avers, "to be simply critical snobbishness. Penrod and Willie Baxter are no more superficial than Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn or, for that matter, David Copperfield." After all, this critic adds, "there is as much sunshine as gloom in the adolescent life, and there is no reason why a writer should have to examine this age group with the depressing detachment of an Albert Moravia in order to have his work taken seriously. The problems that beset

Tarkington's youths are the same problems that harass normal young men everywhere. Their romantic escapades should continue to be read with a kindred understanding and sympathy as long as there are normal young men to read about them."¹⁰² The implications of these comments by Crowley are apparent.

The discovery of Tarkington's talent for writing juvenile stories came about in exactly the same way that the genius of James Fenimore Cooper was revealed--through the intermediation of his wife. Susanah Tarkington, "the rewarding progenitor of the whole,"¹⁰³ returned her husband's criticism of a British juvenile work for which she had professed admiration with a challenge for him to write a better. Tarkington's response was the introductory "pageant episode" to Penrod, and thus was born one of the most familiar figures in American literature. In 1913 the first installments of Penrod began their run in Everybody's Magazine, to be bound into book form the moment they ceased in the periodical. Penrod and Sam came two years later in 1916--a banner year, for Seventeen emerged then too. Young Georgie Minafer monopolized a sizable piece of The Magnificent Ambersons in 1918; then in 1919 Ramsey Milholland made its bow. In later years an aging Tarkington returned every now and then to his early love for juveniles with such stories as Gentle Julia (1922), Penrod Jashber (1929), and Little Orvie (1934).

There is small need to explore in detail the reasons behind this prolonged activity in the field of juveniles. It was aboundingly lucrative, in the first place. (Tarkington nicknamed his palatial summer home at

Kennebunkport, Maine, "The House that Penrod Built.") For over four decades royalties have never stopped from his tireless effort, and several of the others have done nearly as well. In the second place, Tarkington found them both pleasant and easy to write. He "actually had been preparing all his life to write the Penrod stories. An abundance of usable material was stored up within him, and all he needed was the time and place for concentrated effort to precipitate his experience."¹⁰⁴ A wealth of family anecdotes reveals the origins of practically all the situations in Tarkington's episodic tales of youth, for they come from either the author's own memories of childhood or observation of his three Jameson nephews. Much of the local color of his boyhood in the middle western town which Indianapolis used to be is reflected in his tales of adolescence, and his summer visits to Marshall, Illinois, are also reduplicated in these stories. An elaborate chart could be drawn between incident upon incident in every one of his juvenile works and the biographical details recorded by Tarkington himself in As I Seem to Me, The World Does Move, and a miscellany of periodical articles; the biographical material supplied by such writers as Woodruss, Holliday, and Bennett; plus supplemental reminiscences of men like Julian Street, Kenneth Roberts, George Ade, Alexander Woolcott, and Hamlin Garland. An observation by DeVoto is especially relevant to Tarkington on this matter:

Novelists seem to find it easier to write about childhood than about maturity, as if their own adult life had proved less important than the enchanted years, or as if a compulsion lingering on from childhood were stronger than their adult will...There is no such thing as a complete delivery from childhood--especially for an artist who, as all criticism recognizes, is invariably a person in whom the child he once was lives on concurrently with his mature self.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, it has become almost a cliché to say, "There is something of Penrod in every man, and much of Tarkington in Penrod."¹⁰⁶ For present purposes, however, we must pass over the entertaining possibilities within the latter portion of this comment in order to examine the deeper potential within the former part. There can be no question that such works as Penrod and Seventeen do contain certain indefinable elements which give them that agelessness reserved for the classics. A canny Tarkington took such deliberate pains to minimize the clues which localized these tales in either place or time that even after four hectic decades the reader is but vaguely aware of their Midlands setting in a by-gone era. Tarkington himself maintained that any man could get back his boyhood from Penrod "unless he lived in the east side of New York or went yachting out of Newport."¹⁰⁷ This is not literally true, of course; but for many thousands of urban folk since Penrod's conception, at least until recently, it is an accurate statement. Here Tarkington may have labored better than he knew; for to him, even in 1931, Penrod was still the story of "a boy's doings in the days when the stable was empty but not yet rebuilt into a garage."¹⁰⁸

No little of the perennial appeal to these stories of childhood through adolescence is due to another Tarkington dictum. "I began to see," he wrote in later years regarding the development of the juvenile theme in his fiction, "that, just as in his embryo man reproduces the history of his development upward from the mire into man, so does he in his childhood and his boyhood and his youth reproduce the onward history of his race, from the most ancient man to the most modern."¹⁰⁹ In other words, the

child re-lives the entire story of mankind in his growth from infancy to maturity. Like the story of Genesis, this is best interpreted in figurative rather than literal terms. Thus interpreted, one discovers the implication in his concept that men in general undergo a chain of experiences which have at their core those same origins which motivated primeval man-- and which persist to this day. In this way Tarkington found the explanation for infantile selfishness, for childish cruelty, for adolescent passions. Here, in part, is his justification for "inconsistency" in his characterization, for he sensed that people do change, that change is a part of growth.

The "Penrod period" he considered particularly revealing. As he expressed it, "From eight to fourteen is a period of life piquantly interesting to the congenial observer; for in studying it he may perceive unconcealed in the boy not only what is later to be found coated over in the man but something also of the history of all mankind."¹¹⁰ During these formative years children dash through the full gamut of emotions, muddle through a wide catalog of social experiences, slip and slide from childhood to adolescence.

Contrary to many a critic, Tarkington held no illusions about this stage in life. "Childhood is not the Golden Age," he declared; "happiness is unmitigated and flawless while it lasts, but so is grief."¹¹¹ It is a time of disillusionment, of false securities. "Bright-browed youth has the illusion that it lives among certainties, seeing solids all round about it; whereas it's like a complacent cocooned creature blown from its twig and unaware that it's being tossed vagrantly through underbrush in the dark."¹¹² Awakening to stern realities can be a cruel experience, as

Tarkington well knew, and with him this constitutes one of the major tragedies of youth. "The child," he said, "lives almost as much in his dreams of what will happen as the very aged man does in his dreams of what has happened...Moreover, there are sharper pains for the child in his period of adjustment for life,...and the child has less ability to bear pain."¹¹³

Here is the ideal spot to insert a few paragraphs on Tarkington's use of that Thurberian escape mechanism known as reverie. "The author's gift in the expression of daydreams," as Edith Wyatt expressed it, gains him some of his finest effects in characterization. Some three decades ago Elmer Adams was one of the first to identify the device in Tarkington for critical recognition. At that time Adams wrote,

One of Tarkington's special gifts is in the use of reverie...[These] monstrous, unbridled imaginings of youth...Tarkington has shown...in all their grotesqueness, and in their relation to what may be called the higher reasoning faculties of the individual and his character and actions...And whereas others use the method of psychoanalysis to reveal people's innate baseness, Tarkington uses it to bring out the unsophistication and innocence of certain types, and to get his choicest humorous effects.¹¹⁴

Adams's remarks are most appropriate to our discussion. For one thing, they express a favorite Tarkington practice of allowing his adult-repressed youngsters to indulge in typical William Steig "dreams of glory." When introducing his most familiar episode of this sort in Penrod, Tarkington observed, "Maturity forgets the marvellous realness of a boy's day-dreams, how colourful they glow, rosy and living, and how opaque the curtain closing down between the dreamer and the actual world."¹¹⁵ To poor Penrod it was opaque indeed, for only too closely was he wrapped in the treacherous folds of reverie as he "soared" with the delicious ease of Sam Small, the "Flying

Yorkshireman" created by Eric Knight, high above the confines of school-room, high above the gaping city throngs--but well in the view of "Marjorie Jones of the amber curls and the golden voice." His "come-downance" is near-tragedy, and only a ready imagination (augmented by ill-gotten gains) saves him from that abattoir, the principal's office. Nor should one overlook that wondrous saga of the sawdust box, "HAROLD RAMOREZ THE ROADAGENT OR WILD LIFE AMONG THE ROCKY MTS." There in his hide-out, safe from grown-ups' eyes, the other Penrod rules the range with a code of justice far superior to adult concepts of law and order. Beguiled by the subtle chemistry of hayseed cigarettes, his alter ego asserts itself, "vile oaths soil his lips" ("you-seven dashes-mules you!"), and mother-repressions defile every page. But, as Adams says, the net result is not baseness, but innocence; not morbidity, but humor.

Penrod is the direct linear descendant of another Tarkington creation, Hedrick Madison, l'enfant terrible of The Flirt (1913). Hedrick too had an imagination: at the turn of a doorknob from library to hall

he found himself at the foot of a flight of unilluminated back stairs, where his manner underwent a swift alteration, for here was an adventure to be gone about with ceremony. 'Ventre St. Gris!' he muttered hoarsely, and loosened the long rapier in the shabby sheath at his side. For, with the closing of the door, he had become a Huguenot gentleman, over forty and a little grizzled perhaps, but modest and unassuming, wiry, alert, lightning-quick, with a wrist of steel and a heart of gold; and he was about to ascend the stairs of an unknown house at Blois in total darkness.¹¹⁶

One detects a Mark Twain touch here (the love of "ceremony" also being prominent in Tom Sawyer), but in the main this is a personalized mixture of Stevenson, Dumas, and the other romantics who delighted the youthful Tark.

Hedrick and Penrod demonstrate the infection of reverie among the

twelve-year-olds; Willie Baxter illustrates that the virus also affects the seventeen-year-old. Benumbed by the vision of Lola Pratt and her poodle Flopit, Willie falls "into a kind of stupor." As he ponders ways of meeting this "phantom of delight,"

vague, beautiful pictures [rise] before him, the one least blurred being of himself, on horseback, sweeping between Flopit and a racing automobile. And then, having restored the little animal to its mistress, William sat carelessly in the saddle (he had the Guardsman's seat) while the perfectly trained steed wheeled about, forelegs in the air, preparing to go. 'But shall I not see you again, to thank you more properly?' she cried, pleading. 'Some other day--perhaps', he answered. And left her in a cloud of dust.¹¹⁷

Fate, in the form of Willie's mother, dictates a pitiful substitute for his roseate vision of nonchalant heroics, but such is life when one is seventeen.

Even the next stage in "the seven ages of man" is not without its dreams. In Gentle Julia, that "summer comedy peopled with vanity and folly and frivolity and the odd visions of youth,"¹¹⁸ one encounters a trio of belligerent males contesting for the favors of one Miss Julia Atwater, whose only flaw is "a heart kinder than most." Among these is Mr. Noble Dill, whose case of love-sickness shares most of the worst symptoms of fifteenth-century courtly love. Not without reason, Julia's father is scornful of both Noble's esprit de coeur and his salary; herein Mr. Atwater suspects that Noble is too cautious for his own good. One day it came to Noble how

he could prove how reckless he was...A vision formed before him: he saw Julia and her father standing spell-bound at a crossing while a smiling youth stood directly between the rails in the middle of the street and let a charging trolley-car destroy him--not instantly, for he would live long enough to whisper, as the stricken pair bent over him: 'Now, Julia, which do you believe: your father or me?' And then

with a slight, dying snort: 'Well, Mr. Atwater, is this reckless enough to suit you?'¹¹⁹

Seen in isolation these fleeting fragments lose much of their function in the stories themselves. There they not only evoke a wistful humor, but also aid greatly in describing their youthful creators. The humor derived from these flights of fancy is largely an adult reaction; the very life-and-death quality about them evokes a perverted adult sense of humor. Yet they reflect the special appeal that most Tarkington children hold: like real youngsters, they are no angels. In fact, if an inventory were to be made, one would search in vain for a sympathetic representation of a Lord Fauntleroy or an Elsie Dinsmore among the whole assemblage.

It was Tarkington's belief that most children possess an altogether too complete catalog of human drives; much of the tragi-comedy of youth comes from the efforts of adults to check and direct these primitive impulses. One should quickly add that this concept of barbaric youth was tempered with a genial attitude that this is a normal stage in the evolution from infant to adult. With typical whimsy, gently tintured with satire, Tarkington wrote an article for the American Magazine entitled "That I Have Learned About Boys." In mock gratitude for the modern child psychology which proclaims that "man is natively criminal," he asserts the convenience of this discovery since "here we have expert opinion agreeing with the ancient lament, 'We are all miserable sinners'; and with many a badgered spinster's complaint that there never was a boy who didn't have the Old Harry in him."¹²⁰

Other aspects of the "new psychology" a generation ago which advocated "complete expression of the individual" and "absolute freedom from adult repressions" also come in for mild criticism. In view of these new, "scientific" discoveries Tarkington concluded, "Our fond and romantic fancies about children must be reformed and all the tender idealism of childhood stored in our older literature and art abandoned."¹²¹ From personal experience alone Tarkington marvelled that he turned out as un-anti-social as he did. Well he recalled how he was repressed as a child (he wanted to own a candy store); and after all, according to the experts, just such a frustrating experience might easily have had traumatic repercussions and brought about "adult crime, nervous disorder, morbid brooding, and insanity." This is not to imply that Tarkington was an "old fogey" about the ways to rear children or a complete disparager of progressive ideas, but it does suggest his attitude of tempered conservatism. And in human relationships, such as those between parent and child, he was inclined to prefer the rules of common sense and experience to the preachments of office-chair theorists.

Throughout his juvenile works it was the custom of Tarkington to toss in frequent psychological tidbits. Carl Van Doren regards these with a somewhat jaundiced eye. "Those knowing asides which accompany these juvenile records," he maintains, "have been mistaken too often for shrewd, even for profound, analyses of human nature. Actually they are only knowing, as sophomores are knowing with respect to their juniors by a few years."¹²² What Van Doren refuses to concede is respect for the capacity of a person in one generation to comprehend the inner nature of those in

another (particularly a younger) generation. Other critics take the opposite viewpoint and acclaim Tarkington as a unique artist in his ability to recapture those quirks of youth which age remembers only upon prompting. These latter concur with Pattee that "his 'little monsters' [are] the amusing, spontaneous, and genuine creations of one who knew both the humor and the tragedy of adolescence in a mainstreet Western town."¹²³ Even Grant C. Knight, a rider on the bandwagon which condemns Tarkington's adult novels as being too "100% American," did admit, "In one respect at least Mr. Tarkington excels. His portraits of adolescent boys and girls are inimitable. It is true that they contain not a little exaggeration, but they are essentially right."¹²⁴

It would be simplicity itself to fill several pages with variant critical opinions on Tarkington as an interpreter of youth. In all justice it should be noted that the preponderance of viewpoints are to his credit, and the overwhelming popularity of his juvenile writings with the general public would indicate some measure of agreement with his pronouncements of homespun child psychology. Perhaps one reason for their widespread palatability is a folksy, epigrammatic style which imparts to them a specious authenticity which forbids judicious analysis. There is often a gently chiding quality to the "Maturity forgets that once..." or "The grown man has lost..." which likewise discourages critical judgments lest the judge himself be accused.

These side remarks by Tarkington offer irrefutable evidence that the wily novelist was directing his tales at a double audience--adults as well as children. Other indications attest the same goal. The language in Penrod, for instance, is beyond many a twelve-year-old. A mongrel Duke,

Penrod's "wistful dog," is described in person as "obviously the result of a singular series of mésalliances."¹²⁵ Penrod is spanked by his father; however, the text reads: "Mr. Schofield came and, shortly thereafter, there was put into practice an old patriarchal custom. It is a custom of inconceivable antiquity: probably primordial, certainly prehistoric, but still in vogue in some remaining citadels of the ancient simplicities of the Republic."¹²⁶ Penrod buys some gumdrops; this delicacy is described as "consisting for the most part of the heavily flavoured hoofs of horned cattle, but undeniably substantial and so generously capable of resisting solution that the purchaser must needs be avaricious beyond reason who did not realize his money's worth."¹²⁷ These are samples selected at random from the opening pages of one work, and they could be continued ad libitum. It is clear that these by no means typify "children's literature" in the customary sense of the term. Tarkington had mature readers in mind when he framed such circumlocutions as above and used foreign words like "mésalliances" and "ennui" on the same page.

Despite the verbal difficulties, youngsters for four decades have enjoyed Penrod and the other Tarkington tales of youth. With reference to Penrod himself, Arthur Quinn asserts,

...Penrod is a natural mischievous, adventurous boy, and the book is frankly humorous...The most striking quality is his imagination; he secures the reader's sympathy because of his efforts to write a romance, and through such flights of fancy as his dream at school that he is flying through the air. All imaginative children have such dreams, and Tarkington knew instinctively that Penrod would never tell his teacher of the dream, for the dread of being laughed at is the inalienable sign of the boy like Penrod.¹²⁸

Another classic figure in American juvenile literature comes to mind, for Tom Sawyer had an imagination too. Yet Penrod is no slavish imitation of

a Mark Twain prototype; he is a real person with his own individualities. Penrod is just as "all boy" as Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn. He swears fluently (under his breath), smokes his cigarettes (home-rolled brown paper and hayseed), he fights, he lies; he hates pretty boys and he loves pretty girls (at a safe distance); he can be mean, he can be selfish, he can even be cruel. Nevertheless he is basically a likable boy; for he does try to be "good" (against appalling adult odds), he has a resilient disposition that rebounds from the hardest blows, and his forgiving nature soon mends the bloodiest brawls.

Because of this human duality of good and bad in the Penrod makeup he takes on life, he becomes a real boy. Little Orvie, twenty years later, was a relative failure. Tarkington made the mistake of selecting too young a boy (Orvie is only seven). More important, he is too consistently disagreeable. "The poisonous child is not interesting in himself, and the humor of Little Orvie falls flat compared with that of Penrod."¹²⁹ Reading Little Orvie is like absorbing "The Complete Dennis the Menace" at one sitting--the single theme becomes wearisome, the lopsided personality irksome, and the chain of repetitious episodes boresome.

Earlier in this section we emphasized the marked success which Tarkington achieved in his portrayal of women and the relative mediocrity of his masculine creations. In his juvenile writings this situation is reversed. Among all his studies of youth only two under-teenage girls of any consequence figure in the stories...and these, perforce, are tomboys. Little Janie Baxter, the brat of Seventeen, is one of these; Florence Atwater of Gentle Julia is the other. Nevertheless this pair of hoydens are

two of Tarkington's most amusing concoctions. Their behavior in the most ingenious situations and the marvelous dialogue in which they engage present a rare picture of young American girlhood. Janie, the snoopy kid sister, has become a standard figure. It is obvious to the reader that Florence is an unprincipled little imp, although in her own eyes she is all sweetness and light; the clever way in which the artisan leads her skipping and dancing through life after life is a joy to the craftsman. In her case especially it is hilariously demonstrated that "in Tarkington's fictional world, as in life itself, all characters are involved in the lives of each other, and 'no man is an island entire of itself.'"130 In her own mysterious way Florence manages to bring things about exactly as she wants. With more truth than she knew, she told one of Julia's suitors, "I kind of run the house to suit myself. I guess if the truth had to be told, I just about run the whole Atwater family!"131 Florence is the sorrest trial to those she loves the most, but she wins the affection of the reader because of her well-intended muddling and her plight as female underdog amid a heartless lot of male brutes.

As one ranges higher in the age bracket among Tarkington's young ladies in late adolescence, he runs into the same complication which life itself presents: The girl at this stage is already wise in worldly ways, quite aware of feminine wiles, self-confident and superior; whereas the boy of the same age is still--a boy. He has none of the girl's wisdom, he holds the Willie Baxter concept of love ("Love is the most sacred thing there is...Love is something nobody can ever have but one time in their lives, and if they don't have it then, why prob'ly they never will."132), woman was created for male worship, babies arrive at least two years old

and fully equipped with speech, mobility, and nurses. In other words, Tarkington capitalized on the familiar fact that the female of the species matures more rapidly than the male and is prepared, physically and psychologically, for the role of adult long before her male counterpart is ready. In his hands this sociological phenomenon may work for a sort of pathetic humor, as in the case of Willie Baxter; it may lead to the near-tragedy of premature engagement, as in Ramsey Milholland; it may cause the anguish from desecrated devotion, as in Claire Ambler; it may corrode the foundations of morality, as in Kate Fennigate. Would time and space permit, one could draw full sketches of these situations and their casts, but here it is sufficient merely to say that Tarkington realized the problems of adolescent age differentials and saw in them more than the dubious humor of calf-love.

In fact, as Professor Orians says about Tarkington's juvenile writing as a whole, "While these all have a fine sense of fun, they are not without satirical thrusts at contemporary civilization."¹³³ To a certain extent, therefore, the true degree of appreciation for these studies of youth depends somewhat upon the intellectual level at which they are read. Holliday suggests, "Seventeen...may be read as 'a clever caricature', a 'rattling good story', a 'gay analysis' of calf-love', a serious study in adolescent psychology, or a remarkable picture of small-town American life."¹³⁴ Much the same might be said of the others. Any youngster can read the tales simply because they are "rattling good stories," but any parent would certainly find in them sage counsel in understanding his own offspring. Many a lesson in parent-child relationship is dramatized by his puppetry, many an exemplum in the multifarious concerns of youth is narrated

through these episodic tales. Despite his lightness of touch, his fresh humor, his prevailing optimism, there is a substance to most of his juvenile stories which assures them literary recognition for years to come.

Thus far in the investigation of Tarkington as a craftsman in the field of juvenile literature we have confined our remarks principally to characterization. When we turn to the consideration of plot structure, we have two alternatives: Either we can agree with Blanche Colton Williams that "his stories lack plot"¹³⁵ and drop the subject, or we can attempt to justify the charge. There is no point in trying to refute her accusation, for it is undeniable that plot, in the conventional sense of the term, is the weakest element in Tarkington's juvenile works. The author designed them that way. As a professional writer he was aware that even the better books for children have their flash of glory, then die in obscurity. Surveying the field, he noted especially the early death of topical adventure stories based on current events, glamorous inventions, or contemporary figures. It was obvious to him that any narrative deliberately overwritten for the thrills of a sensational plot and underwritten in literary style and thematic substance was doomed to a brief life. It was apparent, too, that such plot-heavy novels are limited in reader appeal largely to the comic-book crowd, since few adults would find their simple story sufficiently challenging to merit their attention. He therefore sacrificed "plot" with such accouterments as climax and anti-climax, contributory subplots, prolonged suspense, and elaborate complications, for other considerations which he deemed more important.

Instead of plot, the story element in his juvenile tales can best be described as what some critics call "linear narration." According to this

technique, normal chronology controls the sequence of events, each incident evolves in a direct, reportorial fashion, and the conclusion is merely the termination of the action. Each event is complete within itself, although some centralizing feature (like the courtship theme in Gentle Julia) may give a surface unity to the story. Not only is this transparent construction eminently suitable for young readers and the demands of serial publication; it also conforms to a basic Tarkington theory concerning juvenile literature. To his mind, young people lack not only the capacity but the volition to take "the long view" implicit in the full-blown novel. For them life is a succession of presents, each full and absorbing. He observed that "to the eye of youth, time is not really fleeting; time is long--so long that for practical uses the present appears to be permanent."¹³⁶ Therefore his youngsters pass from one escapade to another, yesterday forgotten in the urgency of today, tomorrow but an uneasy cloud on a distant horizon. As a rule, Tarkington noted, a child's life is elemental, simple--the adult world about him makes it so. A fictional account of that life becomes unreal the moment an artificial complexity is concocted by an author. Tarkington sought to do no more than evoke a realistic American childhood by creating ordinary characters who do ordinary things--in extraordinary ways, of course. He was quite aware that whatever appeal his stories might have lay elsewhere than in sheer story. When a runaway Penrod was under consideration for dramatization, its author was skeptical of its stage possibilities. "The detail--not plot--is what has made it [a best-seller],"¹³⁷ he wrote George Tyler, who was urging its play adaptation. Although Penrod and several of the other juveniles did

"hit the boards" (and subsequently were made into motion pictures), the relationship between these dramatized versions and their forebears is rarely more than first cousin. A wholly extraneous situation had to be devised for each into which Tarkington's characters and incidents were fitted more as accessories than principals.

The Tarkington formula for each of these episodes in his juvenile works is deceptively simple. Take the commonest of household ingredients, mix them together (literally) in a sociable sort of way, toss in a pinch or two of homemade seasoning, simmer under a hot sun--and see what happens. Then, after the inevitable reaction, write up the notes on the experiment--and there's a chapter. That is, it is a chapter if it is a Tarkington who is conducting the experiment. For it requires a special talent, an artistic knack for selection, arrangement, and presentation of details which only the few possess. Holliday was driven to the word "genius" when he came to this subject ("though that is a deuce of a word to have to use," he complained¹³⁸). Still, he went on, "the author of *Penrod* and *Willie Baxter* certainly is not as other men; he commands some occult power."¹³⁹ Holliday was half-facetious in his remark, but the fact remains that Tarkington did have a remarkable ability to transfer kaleidoscopic details from a retentive memory onto the printed page.

Until this point in Part III of this case study we have been concerned mainly with the leading characters, the dominant stylistic devices, and similar subject matter of major significance in evaluating Tarkington as a literary craftsman. To round out this section it remains for us to consider in varying detail some of the contributory factors which make Tarkington

fiction worthy of our critical analysis. One of these is his skill at creating minor characters. There is something of a Charles Dickens in his ability to hit upon the right quirks to make these figures distinctive. With some it is a peculiarity of speech--Verman, the tongue-tied colored boy in Penrod; Ripley Little, the "jobjammedest" swearer ever heard on paper; Lola Pratt, the "Baby-Talk Girl" of Seventeen; "Miz" Kitty Silver, the ovate colored maid with the persistent mispronunciations in Gentle Julia; Mme. Momoro, the svelte French adventuress with the faint lisp in The Plutocrat; and others too numerous to mention. With others it is an eccentricity of behavior--the shunning of society by Long Harry Pelter in Mirthful Haven, the window-side vigils of Grandma Savage in The Midlander, the fly-brushing of waitress Cynthia in The Gentleman from Indiana, the chain-smoking of Noble Dill in Gentle Julia, and more of a similar nature.

Such lists might be extended indefinitely of these lesser folk and their individual identifications who add so much to the color and charm of Tarkington's novels. There is a peculiar skill involved here whereby the artist sketches the full figure with only a few telling strokes of his pen. The usual result of such a sketch is the exaggeration of caricature; in Tarkington this does occur, but often a distinct personality is created. When partial failure in minor characterization does occur, it is usually because the author succumbed to the lure of the type. It is observable that a stock character seems to emerge in one or the other (or the combination) of two situations: first, an adopted environment in which the author remained merely an interested spectator or, second, a frivolous situation in which serious portraiture would be incongruous. In the first category one finds such New England types as bluff old Captain Embury, the octogenarian

who salvages the soul of the lorn heroine of Mirthful Haven, and Ananias Smeetmus, the garrulous gardener of Mary's Neck. Or one notes foreign types like Amédée, "the most henlike waiter in France," whom one meets at "Les Trois Pigeons" in The Guest of Quesnay. Each of these is skillfully compounded of conventional ingredients according to old recipes; to each Tarkington adds his own condiments, but the basic dishes are familiar. The other situation, often humorous, breeds such familiar personalities as Professor Bartet, the distraught dancing-master of Penrod infamy; Henrietta Pellar, southermost of all southern belles; and Mr. Baxter, the hapless father in Seventeen who has now become a staple feature in every radio-television domestic comedy. These are all friends of long standing in the world of fiction whom Tarkington adopted freely wherever needed by more important characters. They are little more than convenient vehicles for brief bits of situation comedy and require no more than this passing notice.

One class of minor characters does merit somewhat more of our attention. These are the colored folk who populate many of the Tarkington novels. The devotion of old Uncle Zenophon to John Harkless in The Gentleman from Indiana began a notable collection of what Phelps described as "permanent drawings in black and white."¹⁴⁰ One would search Tarkington pages in vain, however, for symptoms of the insurgent Negro, for in his stories they are always menials--childish, happy-go-lucky, and improvident. There is every indication that Tarkington loved the colored people, but none that he welcomed them as his equals. His was a generation which still regarded the Negro as a servant, a domestic appliance to mow grass, clean house, cook food--then wash the dishes. There is nothing of racism in his attitude; it is merely typical of his social class in his time. Every person of color

in a Tarkington novel is a happy addition to the cast of characters, but he knows his supporting role--and glories in it.

This is not to imply that Tarkington had no sympathy for the Negro. Even in Penrod there is shrewd constructive satire on a social philosophy which permitted Sherman and Verman to gain prestige in a white man's world largely because their father "out a man wif a pitchfawk." Joe Loudon, the lawyer protagonist of The Conquest of Canaan, devotes a goodly share of his early energy to the defense of the colored people banished by their white neighbors to the slums of Beaver Beach. But nowhere is there the impelling drive for human betterment, for racial equalitarianism, for social acceptance which marks even a Kingsblood Royal. Tarkington's fiction reflects a genuine affection for his Negro friends, but it is a feeling not wholly free of inherited condescension.

His affection for colored people makes for some of the most ingratiating of his lesser character sketches. Few readers of Seventeen will forget Genesis, the odd-job man for the Baxters. Both Genesis and his dog Clematis wander in and out of William's life, to the crimson mortification of the latter; and his "too-democratic" ways add little to his young employer's spirit of social justice. Still, Genesis is an affable sort of fellow who follows the kindest philosophy of life and manages to have a grand time doing it. His infectious laughter and unquenchable good spirits add much to the overall humor of this perennial favorite.

Mention was made previously of the rotund Kitty Silver, housekeeper for the Atwater family in Gentle Julia. She is truly a black pearl among Tarkington's ladies of color. In her capacious way she embraces tag ends of

voodoo superstition, "mammy" love for children and loyalty to their parents, and the darky's flair for show. Aunt Kitty is the source of high amusement in this book. Her experiences in chaperoning the various fauna bestowed upon her mistress by sundry suitors (including "that ole live alligatuh whut I foun' lookin' at me over the aidge o' my kitchen sink") culminate in the hilarious chapters when she becomes acquainted with Gamin, a French poodle modeled upon Tarkington's own dog of the same name. Some of Tarkington's finest dialect passages may be found among her comments upon Julia's boy-friends, her monologues with Gamin, and her artless prattle with the neighbor youngsters. Truly her ample form looms large among Tarkington colored folk.

A full catalogue of these delightful characters cannot be given here, for they appear in almost every story. In their individual ways they provide the humor of Genesis and Kitty Silver, the quiet tone of respect embodied in Nimbus in The Midlander, the instinctive sympathy for family distress personified by Old Sam in The Magnificent Ambersons, the gentle understanding of human frailty by the coachman in Kate Fennigate. The honor role is long, for none of these persons betrays the egotism, the cupidity, or the lust for power which sully the careers of the whites about them. Though their position is humble and they lack the divine unrest of progress, they reflect an enviable attitude of amused toleration toward the world and its inhabitants which many a principal in these novels would do well to emulate.

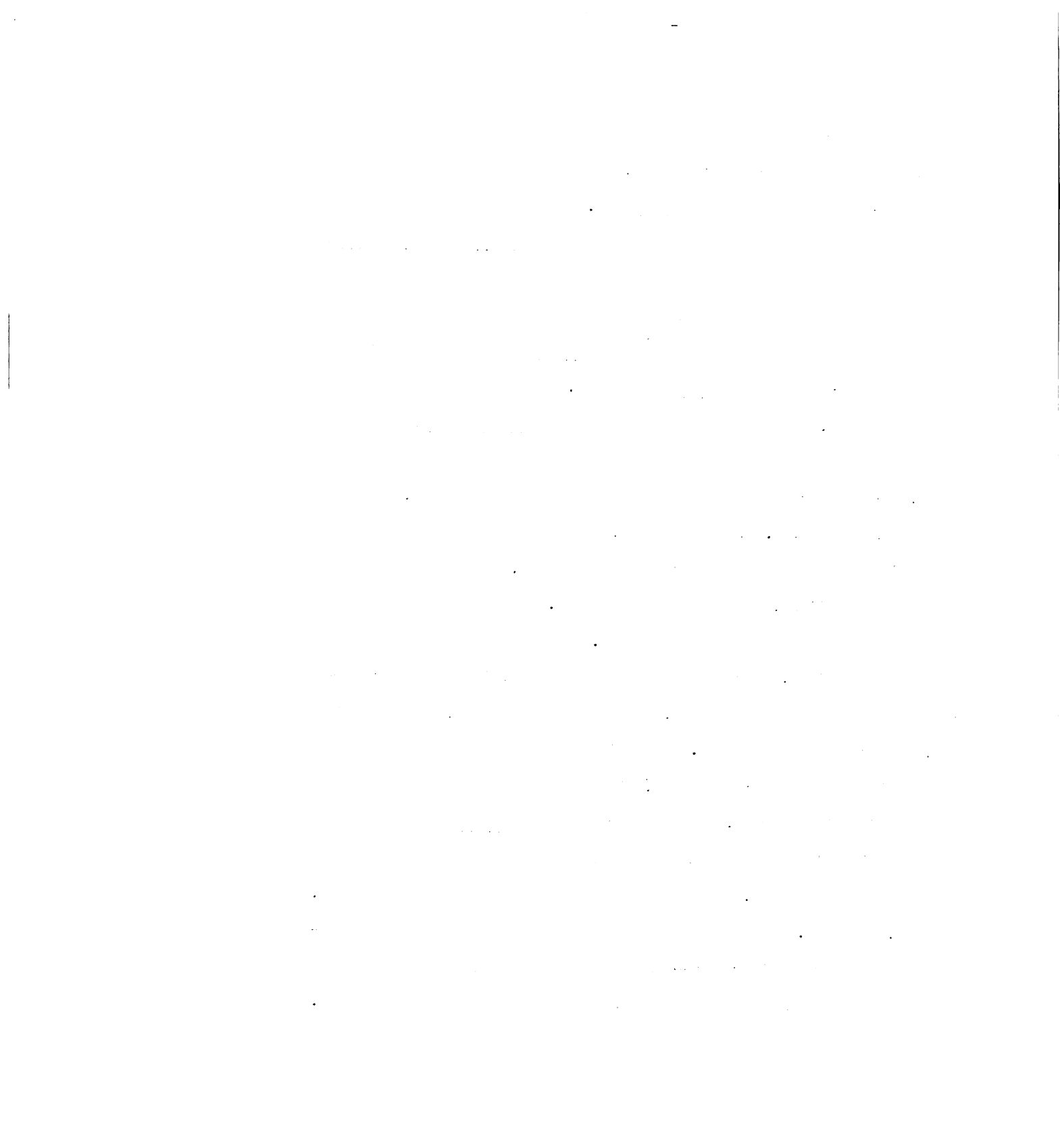
One might mention in passing that Tarkington employed occasional foreign immigrants to personify not only these traits we have just seen

among his Negroes, but also to add others of a different nature. Whether these persons originate in bright Italy, in bleak Scandinavia, in rustic Ireland, or in a populous Germany, they blend into a composite of loyal patriotism, civic responsibility, and personal integrity. There is a lack of discrimination apparent in such a wholesale acceptance of transplanted virtues among our newer citizens which sociological evidence might disprove, although it likewise can be argued that Tarkington thus displayed a broadness of mind and an optimistic attitude toward these adopted citizens which many of us might well practice. After all, the Up From Slavery of a Booker T. Washington and The Americanization of Edward Bok are both chapters in that American story in which we pride ourselves. Tarkington was a staunch patriot; as Harrison Smith proclaimed editorially not long ago in the Saturday Review, he believed that the United States should "let the eagle scream." He therefore defended her treatment of the Negro even as he sought for better; he depicted happy, successful immigrants even though he realized his was only one side of the story. In his closing years he was free to admit that he tended to express the romantic view of a time when "board, keep, and pin money" were deemed sufficient for a household drudge. As Woodress affirms in his biography of Tarkington, his own treatment of servants was always marked by consideration and generosity. He was too much the gentleman to do otherwise, in either his personal life or his fiction.

It would seem remiss in the student of Tarkington as a creator of notable characters were he not to devote at least a paragraph to dogs. Throughout his prolific career scarcely a Tarkington novel reaches an end before some breed of canine romps in. No gentleman keeps a cat in the

Tarkington stories--and dogs are generally reserved for (1) small boys like Penrod with his long-suffering Duke, (2) colored men like Genesis and the "rather boundlike" Clematis in Seventeen, and single males like Joe Loudon with his grizzled mongrel Respectability in The Conquest of Canaan. Occasionally a girl acquires something which apparently possesses canine characteristics of a limited order, but this is usually a silly muff of a white poodle like Miss Pratt's Flopit (in Seventeen) or Goody Little's irascible chow Wu-Wu (in The Fighting Littles). Miss Julia does claim ownership to Gamin, the beguiling French poodle in Gentle Julia, but it is obvious that the dog is much more the property of her father and her niece Florence. Gamin is rather an exception among Tarkington canines, for his dogs rarely have an A. K. C. registration. Yet they more than compensate for their lack of pedigree in their wistful patience, their unquestioning loyalty, their drollery, and their canine wisdom.

With this portion of our investigation, we reach the end of the third part of our case study. Herein we have considered Tarkington the craftsman: the depicter of nature scenes, the portrayer of women, the sketcher of men, the artist with children. We analyzed the plot construction of representative adult works; we studied his compensations for the absence of plot in the juvenile stories. We considered last a mélange of minor matters consisting primarily of the treatment of lesser figures in his novels and his identifying techniques, then concluded with a brief mention of Negroes, immigrants, and dogs. Now it is time for us to consider the place of Tarkington in contemporary literature--in current literature, one might better say. His death in 1946 came upon the second anniversary of the Atomic Age.



In the decade since that time much of world import has surged to the forefront in waves of increasing magnitude. What lies ahead man can determine, provided he makes the right choices. The study of literature is one way for him to learn how to make those choices. William Faulkner, upon receiving the Nobel Prize in 1950, concluded his address by reminding his listeners,

[Man] is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.¹⁴¹

Although these are the words of Faulkner, they are the sentiments of Tarkington. In his own works, more than in those of the speaker, Tarkington expressed "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths" of which Faulkner spoke. It is these which remain for our final consideration.

PART IV

THE LITERARY IDEALISM OF TARKINGTON

The ultimate problem of an analytical study is that of organization. In the present instance it seems wisest to discuss the literary idealism of Tarkington first by constructing a referential framework of his critical concepts; then, by placing him within that framework, to determine his literary dimensions according to his own measurements. Although much more the practicing artisan than the theorizing arbiter, Tarkington held definite opinions concerning the essentials of lasting literature at every stage of composition, and it is these stylistic details which we shall consider first. Tarkington also maintained strong convictions concerning the role of literature in society, and with those ethical and spiritual ideals we shall close our study.

Tarkington considered sincerity of motivation of primary concern in the creation of lasting letters. Why write? is a perennial issue that transcends complete analysis in the present work, but certain aspects of it do demand our attention. H.L. Mencken disposes of the matter very quickly; so far as he is concerned, "far ahead of [all motives] comes the yearning to make money. And after the yearning to make money is the yearning to make a noise."¹ The mercenary motive of the first part of this sally the mature Tarkington disposed of when he considered the impact of commercialism upon the creative artist. The septuagenarian declared upon the eve of his birthday, "Fiction, to be excellent, must come from a depth of feeling and be done without thought of any financial reward."² That he had prospered

from his writing he was abundantly aware, but he chose to regard his monetary success as the normal result of a special talent sincerely applied.

With Hamlin Garland he would have said,

The insincerity [of false enthusiasms and shallow imitation] is fatal to any great work of art. A man must be moved by something higher than money, by something higher than hope of praise; he must have a sleepless love in his heart urging him to re-create in the image the life he has loved.³

Here in his friend's words is expressed the core of Tarkington's literary creed. So far as he was concerned,

To write convincingly...it is surely essential to be sincere. If the writer can't sincerely write about the tribulations of a young girl's romance or take a deep personal interest in the progress of his characters to a happy, satisfying conclusion, he might just as well put down his pen and turn to more congenial, if less profitable, subjects.⁴

As we have seen, this absorption of the author into the personalities of his fictional offspring can reach a point of diminishing returns. Like every other aspect of producing a literary work of lasting worth, it demands a nice balance between sentimental subjectivity and artistic objectivity. In the case of Tarkington, the novel Alice Adams might be cited for illustration. To the majority of his critics this Pulitzer Prize-winning account of Smalltown, U.S.A., constitutes his supreme achievement in the art of storytelling. Carl Van Doren explains why: "...In the career of Alice Adams [Tarkington] kept his conscience honest to the last and has produced a masterpiece...."⁵ That is to say, in Alice Adams, Tarkington created a reprehensible character who gets in the end exactly what is coming to her. Despite her basic integrity, despite the author's latent partiality, he permits her to muddle through to a sorry outcome in which her every dream is blasted. As a result, in the words of Edith Wyatt,

In the mid-western scene which Mr. Tarkington presents to us so admirably, Alice Adams herself, what she is, what spiritual materials she has for making her life, become known to us with a pathos, a reality and subtlety that belong to the last excellence of craftsmanship.

It would be pleasant to report that this critical attitude toward the creative integrity of Tarkington is typical of the reviews of his novels, but it cannot be. By far the majority of his other works are damned for their apparent submission to the formulas of happy endings and romanticized characters. As we noted earlier, Tarkington himself did not admit this seeming defection from his own ideals. According to his way of thinking, people are quite capable of drastic change across the time range of a novel; therefore to demand consistency in a fictional personality, to borrow a phrase from Emerson, is "the hobgoblin of a little mind." Likewise he observed that a kindly fate, more often than not, ultimately contrives to "work things out right." After the early historical fantasies, which were deliberately romantic, Tarkington more and more sought to portray the everyday in his novels. Among his later works, such titles as The Lorenzo Bunch (with strictly lower middle-class folks to the last detail) and Young Mrs. Greeley (which deals with similar people) are illustrative of his determination to "investigate" the drives and desires of ordinary personalities in ordinary situations.

To many a person familiar with the Tarkington of later years, rich in popular acclaim, wealthy in dollars, but impoverished in eyesight, there came the question why he persevered in his writing. In 1930, even as he was undergoing a long series of delicate operations to salvage his vision, Alfred Dennis queried, "Why now, having achieved fame and fortune, does he not take a little rest? What goads him on? There is no answer unless it

be the creative instinct of the artist, the instinctive urge to produce something that will live afterward."⁷

Rightly interpreted there is no doubt a great deal of truth in this conclusion drawn by Tarkington's old Princeton classmate. Tarkington himself once commented, "Egotism, fertilized early from without, is one of humanity's necessities."⁸ Every artist is something of an egomaniac; he must be if he is ever to reach the place where he deems the products of his genius worth sharing with men at large. Also there must be recognition that external forces likewise play their parts in even so highly individualized a process as artistic creation. No author can work in a vacuum, as Tarkington well knew. Aside from the hours he spent at actual composition, therefore, he epitomized man as a social being. Family and friends were never far away; there was nothing of the recluse in his personality. He appreciated the interest of others, respected their judgment, and relied upon their taste. Most of all he labored to create fictional studies embodying those essentials of a lasting literature which would justify not only his own "instinctive urge to produce something that will live afterward," but even more so to justify the faith of those about him who believed in his artistic talent. As Sartre exclaims, "It is not true that one writes for oneself"; and in the language of pictorial art Tarkington expressed much the same opinion.

In the painting of a portrait [he said], three are concerned--the painter, the sitter, and the subsequent beholder. If the portrait is notable this subsequent beholder, or spectator, can become a multitude and so may be spoken of as the audience. That is, the audience consists of all of us who look at the picture after it has been finished, and, in regard to our right to be thought the third party to the transaction, we point to the fact that the painter had an audience in mind while he worked.⁹

The application of such a comment to literary art is so transparent that one hardly needs the substitution of terms.

It is Sartre again who suggests that "one of the chief motives of artistic creation is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world."¹⁰ Misinterpreted, such a motive would seem to partake of the less admirable aspects of the egomania mentioned above. On the contrary, the proper approach strikes close to the finest in motivation. By an impulse which may even be outside his conscious realm, the sincere author is beset by a conviction that he has something of value which he, and he alone, can give to his fellows. As Alan Pryce-Jones explains, "Novels get written, not because some writer has a tale to tell, but because he is plagued by the elusive nature of truth...It is the undemonstrable which offers a challenge to literature...Some vision of the truth has been nagging at [him] and in order to exorcise it [he has] suddenly found [himself] writing a novel."¹¹ Many a novelist has pondered the question of "truth" and labored long in search of an answer. In view of his persistent efforts in the field of letters and his constant determination to reflect his age, it is apparent that Tarkington too considered often this ageless issue. The kindest critic cannot but wish that he had searched more deeply, pondered more deliberately his truths. Whether anyone can achieve the absolute in his quest for truth is a moot matter. The point here is that Tarkington might have gone further in his pursuit of truth had he abandoned the "novel a year" schedule to which he felt himself bound and had tarried longer in any one of several bypaths which he explored.

It is surely obvious by now that Tarkington was a strong individualist

in literary matters, more inclined to depend upon his own good taste and the common sense of his public than he was to cater to ephemeral literary trends. Especially was he convinced that the sincere writer must preserve his own integrity, even to the point of seeming apostasy. Graham Greene, himself a liberal British Catholic, expresses the issue thus:

Perhaps the greatest pressure on the writer comes from the society within society: his political or his religious group, even it may be his university or his employers...It does seem to me that one privilege he can claim...is that of disloyalty...But it is a privilege you will never get society to recognize. [In these days of totalitarian censorship and commercialized art] it is all the more necessary that we who can be disloyal with impunity should keep that ideal alive.¹²

These words of Greene express good Tarkington sentiments. Despite the duress of naturalism, he observed the boundaries of realism; despite the impact of mechanistic determinism, he preserved his faith in a spiritualized humanity; despite the pressure of a mounting fatalism, he maintained his ebullient optimism. By nature he was conservative in conduct, religious in spirit, optimistic in attitude; in the face of every deteriorative force, he held firm to what he felt was true, right, and good.

Even though an aspiring author might be impelled by sincere motivation to try his hand at the fictional representation of truth, Tarkington was further convinced that a writer must undergo certain preliminaries before he could hope to acquire status as a novelist. Of definite importance among these is formal education. With comical inconsistency he shrugged off the influences of his own liberal arts training, even while he reminisced about his beloved Princeton days and betrayed on every page the evidence of a sound classical education. The disciplined reading of academic study he considered its greatest value, hence his partiality for history and literature. Such formal study, however, should not be impeded by "creative

writing" courses, for Tarkington (like many of his fellows) did not admit that a synthetic classroom situation could "compel the divine afflatus." In his opinion, the campus was no substitute for the private study, although such extracurricular activities as work on college publications or participation in literary societies might prove helpful.

Of far greater importance to the neophyte novelist is his developmental period, after his academic days are but a happy memory. Tarkington, however, was not a member of the "dried herring in a garret" school. He saw no reason why the apprenticeship of a novelist should be one of hardship, penury, and pain. Van Wyck Brooks comments that "there are excellent authorities for those who feel that one should go to the devil if one's deepest convictions and impulses lead that way,"¹³ but Tarkington is not of those authorities. Not only did he consider such conduct personally reprehensible, but he also felt it to be unbecoming to the artiste, especially to the littérateur. Within reasonable limitations he conceded the desirability of some contacts with the "grim realities," for thus "...a good mind acquires more knowledge of the world, more experience of our human inwardness, than if sheltered within summer walls."¹⁴ This "more knowledge" and "more experience," however, are what come from living in an unhappy home environment, from experiencing the universal shock of a loved one's death, from witnessing the spiritual decay of unrequited love. In other words, Tarkington here does not have in mind the necessity of a budding author to plumb the depths of depravity in order that he may learn enough of "life" to write with meaning and significance. With him, "knowledge" gained from such "experience" would be non-literary in nature, hence unfit for fictional adaptation.

Tarkington did feel that during the apprentice period one should study and emulate accepted literary models. In his own case these were works from the eighteenth century, largely from French and English literature, but he admitted they were personal choices based on childhood associations. Slavish imitation was not the intent of this training device, but rather the familiarization of the writer with the variety of styles available to him. In theory, at least, the aspiring novelist would utilize the reading experiences of his academic days to assist in a search for his own style, out of which should develop those elements most congenial to his own talents. An older Tarkington stressed the formative function of such a procedure and emphasized its use primarily by beginners. It was his observation that once a solid start was made in any area, the writer of any capacity at all would persist in his pursuit of the perfect style for him amid themes of similar compatibility.

Not only did young Tarkington have the classic examples of earlier centuries as his guide; he also had contemporaries like Mark Twain, Howells, and Henry James to set before him as models. Tarkington admired keenly these literary giants of a generation previous to his own, and it was his good fortune to know each personally. Their influence on the emerging novelist was a determining factor in his career, and he cherished his regard for Howells in particular throughout his life. In his late work The Writer in America, Van Wyck Brooks discharges a volley of questions pertaining to this issue. "If American writers fail to develop," he asks, "if, so often, they fail to grow, is not this therefore a question that one ought to examine? Have these writers lacked models, or have they followed the wrong models, and in any case what is the reason for it?" For that matter, he

persists, "how many living American authors [1953] have grown up in a world that afforded no hint of a model for their emulation, so that in their youth they never saw a writer whom they would have 'cared to resemble' and scarcely heard of one in their region?"¹⁵ To Brooks this scarcity of literary men of heroic stature presented a grave situation, and Tarkington would heartily concur. He was a gregarious fellow himself, and his mature works exemplify his conviction as to the social function of literature. Too often, as Sinclair Lewis lamented, "the American novelist ...must work alone, in confusion, unassisted save by his own integrity."¹⁶ Certainly it is true, as Dixon Vector pointed out in his study The Hero in America, the literary man has rarely achieved the status of hero in the eyes of Americans. Unfortunate as this is for the people in general, how much more tragic it becomes for the molders of our national literature.

To Tarkington the subordinate rank of the writer in America seemed especially unfortunate, for he more and more realized the urgency for selecting significant themes with social implications if an author were to fulfill his ultimate obligation to society. "The great writer always expresses what Renan called 'the silent spirit of the collective masses'. For the great writer to exist, there must also exist a secret, unspoken understanding in the society from which he emerges. He responds to this understanding, he voices it, he feels that he is needed."¹⁷ In other words, there is an implicit interresponsibility between author and audience which must be kept in mind in both the consideration of fictional themes and the treatment of characters.

...By exposing the fact that the trials through which these characters have passed are an essential part of the whole social conflict, and by showing how the resolution of these difficulties lies simultaneously

on the personal and the social planes, the author is implicitly pointing the direction of social progress, and at the same time the individual's relation to it.¹⁸

It should be apparent that Tarkington's own works demonstrate this emphasis upon characterization within the matrix of a limited environment. Novel after novel returns to the Midlands setting he knew best. As Carl Van Doren remarks, "[In many ways] may he be said never to have outgrown Indiana." But he adds, "In any larger sense, of course, he has not needed to. A novelist does not require a universe in which to find the universe, which lies folded for the sufficiently perceptive eye, in any village."¹⁹ Beyond a doubt Tarkington's most powerful studies, novels like Alice Adams and the Growth trilogy, all deal with the limited locale of the home scene and the restricted personnel of his own acquaintances. There is no evidence that this "intensive" approach caused him any claustrophobic qualms. Indeed, he was free to admit that he "never arrived till he got to Indiana"; and even in his last years, when Maine and Kennebunkport grew ever more dear, the home town of Indianapolis remained "sort of a person--my uncle or somebody".²⁰ He was likewise free to admit that he by no means exhausted the literary potential of even that small area. "It is when we examine the history of literature from [the angle of total social experience] that we begin to realize how inadequately it covers the total awareness of a community. Writers have made only limited tracks across the fields of society. Much ground remains untrodden."²¹ Tarkington cultivated with the greatest success his own familiar acres, but he well knew that there were many more of equal fertility even in his own neighborhood.

Preëminent among the social themes which Tarkington deemed most worthy of novelistic treatment is that of change. As the Lynds observed in

Middletown, "It is a commonplace to say that an outstanding characteristic of the ways of living of any people at any given time is that they are in process of change, the rate and direction of change depending upon proximity to strong centers of cultural diffusion, the appearance of new inventions, migration, and other factors which alter the process."²² So early as The Flirt (1913), "as a perceptive observer of change, Tarkington noted with great interest the differences between the city of his young manhood and the Indiana capital of 1912,"²³ and he maintained this interest throughout his mature writing career. Such a theme, expressed through the medium of families like the Ambersons or the Oliphants, seemed to him a fit subject for the most ambitious novelist. Of a mid-career work John Farrar asserted in a publication review, "In Alice Adams he seems to me to have written what is a great and an enduring picture of a slice of American life in the present generation [1921]."²⁴ We remarked before that this process of change, with Tarkington, assumes ultimate progress as well, even though the change bears with it a cargo of tragedy and pain.

Such an approach to social themes bears a close relationship to the sincerity of motivation with which we opened this discussion of the essentials of lasting literature. Alexander Black comments in one essay, "The real scene of every creative work is the heart of the novelist; nothing is real to him until he has found it there; which is to say that the ultimate need of the artist is not merely that he should 'know his subject' and express a place. It is that he should...know himself and express humanity."²⁵ Throughout our study we have seen Tarkington's frank acceptance of feeling as a legitimate component of the literary genius, and to feeling he coupled the intellectual capacity to interpret the social temper in a constructive

fashion. With N. Elizabeth Monroe he would declare, "The novelist must have an adequate philosophy of life or must absorb values of universal validity from his environment if he is to tell the story of man."²⁶ The mature Tarkington was firmly convinced that a significant theme was uppermost in importance when constructing a novel, with the characters little more than auxiliaries in acting out the theme, and with the plot nothing more than whatever actions seem consonant with the personalities of the actors.

Important though study, experience, and judgment may be in the formation of a novelist, Tarkington also believed that "the 'what' and the 'how' are inseparable elements in an artist's significance."²⁷ As we demonstrated in Part III of our study, Tarkington was a meticulous artisan throughout his writing career. After his lonely years of trial he suffered no delusions about the arduous nature of the craft. In the "Milestones" column of Time magazine at the time of his death appeared the statement, "Tarkington on writing: 'A very painful job--much worse than having measles'."²⁸ Though typically facetious in tone, Tarkington was telling straight truth. Despite his own undeniable gifts, he found the composition of creditable fiction a taxing chore. "There is no short-cut to authorship," he was fond of saying; one must go through the literary mill. Of course, he cautioned, "a master craftsman is...not necessarily an artist."²⁹ There must be substance as well as finish if a work is going to survive. In his words, "An artist cannot be a great one unless he 'says something'; yet his significance isn't all contained in his intended message. In what his work expresses to us, he, himself, becomes a part of his meaning; he

is apparent to us in the quality of his manner."³⁰ Tarkington was ever the advocate of le mot juste; as his manuscripts in the Tarkington Papers at the Princeton University Library attest, he revised his work with painstaking attention to the nuances of words, their multishaded meanings. As a result "he wrote with a happy grace that has no precise counterpart in American letters."³¹ There is no need to add example upon example of critical encomiums in this area of Tarkington's fiction, for their number is legion. What we are here seeking to establish is Tarkington's own conviction that any author aspiring to the creation of a lasting literature must subject his writing to the rigorous discipline of stylistic excellence as well as thematic significance.

The position of Tarkington with respect to linguistic standards is relatively transparent compared to his attitudes concerning problems of form. Indeed, it might be simplest to admit at the outset that form was the least of his worries. Like Edith Wharton, he was inclined to feel that "every short story (and novel too)...like every other work of art, contains within itself the germ of its own particular form and dimensions, and ab ovo is the artist's only rule."³² As a result, like Mrs. Wharton and also Henry James, Tarkington frequently found his tales playing themselves out at virtually any point along the range between the "long short story" and the full-blown novel. In his first phase of publication, both Monsieur Beaucaire and Cherry were of awkward length for periodical publication since they were just a bit long for complete printing in one issue and too short for serialization. The Gentleman from Indiana, at manuscript stage, was half again too lengthy for conventional installment publication, and its author spent a hectic month cutting it down to "cablegram" size.

Tarkington would appear to have learned nothing from these experiences, for he continued to publish his stories at whatever length he saw fit. Some individual titles attain the status of novels only by the grace of a generous printer and an ambitious illustrator. Beauty and the Jacobin, for example, barely makes page one hundred, due largely to the broad margins and deep indentations of a closet drama. Beasley's Christmas Party just makes the same number of pages, but many are eked out by ornate initials and frequent sketches. His Own People and The Beautiful Lady approximate a hundred and fifty pages each, Ramsey Milholland plods through two hundred, and so the list might go on to the five hundred pages of Alice Adams. Numerical length, it is clear, had little to do with Tarkington's concept of a novel. Hatch the story ab ovo, nurture it across its normal life cycle, then let it die naturally. Eschew plot transfusions, beware melodramatic forced feedings; better to cut off a story in full vigor than prolong the climax with pap.

Both external and internal evidence makes clear that Tarkington himself had frequent difficulty in following his own precepts in this regard. In an early version of The Gentleman from Indiana Tarkington found himself stymied when he "took the lovers for a walk and couldn't get them back." The Guest of Quesnay suffered a severe manhandling before it reached its final form. Edith Wharton once remarked, "My last page is always latent in my first, but the intervening windings of the way become clear only as I write."³³ Tarkington could never make even so modest a claim.

So far as the organization of story incidents is concerned, Tarkington practiced the simplest method. Like an impressive majority of novelists, until very recent years, he felt that direct chronology sufficed to set

the pattern of events. In his works one finds none of the tortuous devices of a Dos Passos or James Farrell to create the illusion of simultaneity, nothing of the fantastic maze of a James Joyce laboring for an illusion of entity, none of the back or side-flashes of a William Faulkner. He did employ something akin to a Thurberish stream-of-consciousness at rare intervals, but it is far remote from the involutions of a Marcel Proust or Thomas Wolfe. The traditionalist in him rebelled at the struggle for "originality" he observed among the "Sophisticates"; to him, the formlessness and indirection of their writings were symptomatic of a dangerous disintegrative temper which seems to permeate modern art in general. In Mary's Neck³⁴ one finds his gently railling comments on "Biljor" (obviously "bilge--or something close to it"), an avant garde "book containing a play" which sadly confuses the provincial Mr. Massey because of its weird construction, distressing subject matter, pathological cast, and absence of punctuation. His daughter defends the "great Work" as "brutal beauty," "abysmal reality," "stark elemental actualism," but her father remains unconvinced. It is plain that Tarkington is too.

In fact, in one way or another Tarkington makes it clear that permanent literature is conformist literature. In the field of letters he saw little merit in change merely for the sake of change. In his own case he supplied the market with historical novels, romances, and social fiction, but these shifts paralleled similar trends in current writing and never exceeded in style or structure the bounds of convention or decorum. In view of his liberal attitude towards change in many another area, it is something of a surprise to find him so adamant in his own field. To all appearances, Tarkington framed a fairly substantial literary creed during

the gestation period of his apprenticeship. Woodress states without equivocation, "It is clear that most of his tastes, attitudes, and preoccupations already were fixed by the time his first novel appeared."³⁵ Whereas he made a fetish of none of these, he did preserve the substance of them throughout his career.

One perceptible drift in his literary philosophy was the gradual emergence of characterization above the early domination of plot. As we have seen, the challenges of novel forms touched him not at all, and even the organizational requirements of an elaborate plot were his "stumbling block and curse for years." After completing The Flirt, the first novel in his later manner, he recalled that he had overladen his previous works with plot--and "every time it was the big flaw." In his subsequent mature novels he demonstrates over and again his dictum: "Think of [characters] in their relation to one another and that's all the plot you should have. Your struggle should be against everything extraneous. It's unusual poignancy that makes a book unusual, not unusual plot."³⁶ Thus the copybook definition that "plot is what happens to the characters" is revised by Tarkington into something more nearly "plot is a subordinate element in fiction which helps integrate the interrelationships of the characters." Edwin Edgett, former literary editor of the Boston Evening Transcript, once commented, "Human nature is invariably Mr. Tarkington's text, or rather it provides him with a series of texts."³⁷ In Part III of our study we observed the spacious gallery of his fictional portraits and emphasized too their domination over the action of the story.

It is interesting to speculate where Tarkington picked up the germ for

this technique. Conceivably it might have been from William Dean Howells, to whom he owed so much in other ways. In 1903 Howells published a slender volume entitled Criticism and Fiction. In one reference to the honest portrayal of true situations Howells declared, "In the whole range of fiction we know of no true picture of life--that is, of human nature--which is not also a masterpiece of literature...If the book is true to what men and women know of one another's souls it will be true enough, and it will be great and beautiful."³⁸ So far as that is concerned, centrality of character is as old as Homer, and it would be folly to present Booth Tarkington as the innovator of the technique. Our whole point here is to indicate its place in Tarkington's development as a novelist, to emphasize its importance in the mature works of a successful craftsman, and to present it as one facet of his literary creed. There is no question but what he considered emphasis upon the human personality of paramount interest in the art of fiction, for it forms the basis of the "investigatory novels" upon which he relied for a niche in our national letter. To all sincere fictionists Tarkington would recommend this maxim from E.B. White: "Don't write about Man, write about a man."³⁹ And he would add, "Don't fret overmuch about the rest of your story; human nature will take care of that."

In close connection with this emphasis on characterization we should first remind the reader of a point discussed in detail earlier in this study. This is Tarkington's inclusion of only a working minimum of characters, in all his mature works, to produce what we have called "intensive fiction." In this type of novel all the actions and ideas of a story hinge directly on only a few closely associated persons who move within a

restricted area. By skillful selection of character types he often achieved the "microcosm" effect of The Lorenzo Bunch and The Heritage of Hatcher Ide.

Now we must pause a bit longer to discuss three related matters. Foremost among these is a sore subject with Mr. Tarkington--the "escape clauses" in his author-reader contracts. One of these we have noted is his tendency to soften the endings of his tales with the ray of optimism in Alice Adams, the promise of romance in The Image of Josephine, the recouping of lost fortune in His Own People, and any one of a dozen others of a similar nature. Carl Van Doren declares, "According to all the codes of the more serious kinds of fiction, the unwillingness--or the inability--to conduct a plot to its legitimate ending implies some weakness in the artistic character; and this weakness has been Mr. Tarkington's principal defect."⁴⁰ The charge is serious, and it is sound. With deceptive simplicity Joseph Wood Krutch states, "All works of art which deserve their name have a happy ending." Taken in isolation, what misconstructions this might produce! But we need the rest of the quotation: "Whatever the character of the events, fortunate or unfortunate, which they recount, they so mold or arrange or interpret them that we accept gladly the conclusion which they reach and would not have it otherwise."⁴¹ The implications of this Tarkington either could not see or he rejected. Some critics might suggest that he was not too sure of the "we" in Krutch's remark.

Another of Tarkington's "escape" devices is his repeated use of distance as the solution for almost any of life's complications. In an oversimplification of reality he resorts to mere miles whenever it seems expedient to remove an obstreperous character or whenever a vexatious situation arises in which he has limited interest. In The Flirt, shaken by

the sorry tangle she has made of the lives about her, Cora Madison throws herself upon a rejected suitor with the proposition, "If you'll take me away to-day, I'll marry you to-day!"⁴² In Kate Fennigate, when Laila Capper fails to seduce her husband's employer, both she and her besotted spouse are shipped off for a new start in New York City. In Young Mrs. Greeley, when marital complications develop in the Greeley family because of the meddling of a cinema-minded neighbor, Tarkington's solution is the removal of the interference by deporting her husband to a distant branch office. Too many examples of this superficial device exist in Tarkington's novels. As with the contrived endings, this dependence upon separation or departure, this ostrich philosophy of "out of sight, out of mind" tends to appear cowardly. There is a seeming rejection of reality which suggests the over-soft heart...or head.

The last of these three issues is part and parcel of the other two in its relation to Tarkington's professed "detached point of view" concerning the movements of his characters. This is the peculiar role which coincidence persists in playing in a fairly high percentage of his novels. "It may be that strained coincidence was one of the techniques that Tarkington saw and admired in Thomas Hardy,"⁴³ Carl Bennett conjectured in an earlier study, but his evidence is slight. It seems more likely that Tarkington used the device quite unconsciously for the most part. Like the delight of a well-planned campaign, the novelist may easily fall victim to a peculiar exaltation from seeing the fragments of his imagination take shape before him. Small wonder, then, if he speed the process by fitting a piece or two himself.

Instances of this infraction of his own counsel are only too fre-

quent in Tarkington's novels. They begin where he began, with The Gentleman from Indiana, and they crop up here and there to his last effort, The Show Piece. In The Gentleman from Indiana, for example, it is a most convenient coincidence which brings together a battered John Harkless and his college chum Tom Meredith through the unwitting intermediation of Helen Sherwood, sweetheart to the one and cousin to the other. Claire Ambler offers another instance of strained probability. At Raona, "that ancient Mediterranean town on a cliff halfway to the sky," Claire is intrigued by an invalid Britisher named Charles Orbison but lacks the proper entfée. Then one night both attend a moonlit concert in an amphitheater nearby, she with an Italian gentleman and he with his sister. Midway in the program she asks her escort, "Do you suppose they'll play the Pastorale? I've learned it, and if they play it I'm afraid I couldn't help singing it."⁴⁴ Two paragraphs below, "Down in the deep semicircular shadow of the amphitheatre they began to play the Pastorale"⁴⁵...and Claire sings. This remarkably obliging incident was all that she and Mr. Tarkington needed to spur a lagging romance. So late a novel as Young Mrs. Greeley might also be mentioned for a touch of far-fetched coincidence. This novel is constructed around a trumped-up triangle involving Bill Greeley, his wife Stella, and his employer Milton Cooper. At the close, the young couple, seeking reconciliation in a new home, look up at the crucial moment to see Cooper canter by on his horse. There are Bill and Stella, just feeling their way toward reunion; by a terrific wrench of probability the villain appears--and a melodramatic moment is born.

Such moments are not numerous in Tarkington's novels, but they do

appear. In accordance with his own principle, he sought to permit his characters to work themselves in and out of situations in as normal a fashion as a detached viewpoint would allow. Theoretically such a procedure would minimize the lure of contrived endings, the threats of melodrama, and the temptations of coincidence. Tarkington the theorizer was quite right in his preachment; Tarkington the novelist was occasionally remiss in his practice.

An essential part of Tarkington's literary idealism which builds for a lasting literature harks back to the problem of artistic selection which we mentioned long ago in our consideration of his reaction to the reportorial style of Naturalism. With Willa Cather, it will be recalled, Tarkington would say, "If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art."⁴⁶ Ramifications of this position have entered our analysis in place after place, nor have we freed ourselves from its influence even yet. Only too often, Tarkington was convinced, the modern novelist "...puts in everything that the great writers left out, forgetting that the great writers left these things out because they were not worth putting in...The truth is, of course, that from the point of view of art, only those facts are worth printing that heighten our delight or touch our imagination."⁴⁷ In other words, the perceptive author may know every facet of life, but his finer sensibilities should tell him that certain aspects of human existence lie outside fictional treatment, that certain subject matter is simply non-literary.

Chief among those subjects which Tarkington considered unsuitable for the novel is the sexual liberalism which so obsessed the rising generation of the new century. It is doubtful whether any other single issue so monopolized the attention of both critics and writers during the first three decades of our century. After the leading-strings of Victorianism were finally cut, the battle over sex really began--nor has it ended yet. The campaign details extend far beyond the limitations of this study; in fact, even the Tarkington contributions will require severe pruning. It was Tarkington's lot to pass the forepart of his life amid "the cult of respectability" and to spend the latter portion among "the lost generations" of "the Roaring Twenties," the Depression-bound Thirties, and the war-torn Forties. Were one to trace in detail Tarkington's position relative to the shifting mores across the decades, he would have a fairly comprehensive story of the growth of "modernism" in general.

Upon Tarkington's literary scale "the lowest form of writer," he who requires "the least craftsmanship," is the panderer to sensual thrills.

All he needs to know how to do is to describe scenes of sexual excitement with a few gross details, and he immediately clutches the kind of reader he is after. No serious writer, of course, could belong to this class, and no serious reader who cares for writing could bear to read a book of this type. In order to excuse itself, this type of book calls itself realism, and so far as the actions of the lovers is concerned ends in tragedy. So it makes a pretense of being art for those who feel that only gloom is art.⁴⁸

This is very likely a backhanded slap at fellow-Hoosier Theodore Dreiser and his American Tragedy, although he strikes at a wide-spread pattern. In 1927 he wrote,

In this new age of 'frankness in art' the old-fashioned liberal discovers that he is a puzzled conservative protesting against what appears to him a prevailing tainted ugliness, anything but frank. The moment he does protest, however, he encounters hot defenders of the new frankness: they assail him in the sacred name of Realism, and are loftily scornful of him.⁴⁹

With Tarkington, one of the major issues in the treatment of sex in literature is the matter of taste. At sixty years of age the novelist declared, "There is not a thing that you cannot talk about in a novel if you have good manners and know how to talk about it without dragging in the livery stable and the dissecting room...Still, some of these young writers, fond of discussing in a book what is not good manners to discuss in conversation, feel they must outwrite the anatomical textbooks."⁵⁰ The basic gentleman in Tarkington refused to permit the verbal liberties which delighted "the new Realists" who swarmed over him. He confessed, "I suppose some of the ultra-moderns...consider me a complacent old gentleman who has about shot his bolt,"⁵¹ but he never stooped, in his estimation, to the gutter talk of a James Farrell or a Dos Passos. So far as he was concerned, there is an unwritten principle of literary decorum which applies both to the fictional representation of the body and to the allied themes of sex. With John Erskine he would agree that

the body is a fit subject for literature, but not in detail. Sex is a proper study for literature, so long as it is represented as a general force in life, and particular instances of it are decent so long as they illustrate that general force and turn our minds to it; but sexual actions are indecent when they cease to illustrate the general facts of sex, and are studied for their own sake.⁵²

The classic axiom of artistic restraint comes into play in this regard. Tarkington felt that an author could assume a certain degree of common sense in his readers, hence there was really no necessity for one to "go all the way" in his love scenes. To use his own figure, "If a person stood in a pouring rain for an hour, there is no need to say that he got wet." In The Flirt, for example, when the passionate voice of Cora Madison whispers

out of the darkness, "Kiss me! Kiss me!," Tarkington sensed no demand for anatomical surveys or psychological analyses. It is clear only too soon what was developing. In the rejection scene of Cora's paramour, he tells her in plain language, "You love to fool yourself, Cora, but the role of betrayed virtue doesn't suit you very well. You're young, but you're a pretty experienced woman for all that, and you haven't done anything you didn't want to."⁵³ A reader of any maturity can supply whatever details he may wish from his own imagination, yet they are not incorporated into the text possibly to lead a younger reader astray. This is the Tarkington formula for the treatment of sex in every instance when it manifests itself: Supply the setting, the actors, and the situation; leave the rest to a human nature familiar to all.

Examples of this "guilt by implication" technique are rife in Tarkington novels, for basically he was no prude. To the perceptive reader it is clear that Alice Adams is no better than she has to be; Laila Speer (née Capper) of Kate Fennigate is continually "on the make." Calling at the office of a married man whom she is striving to alienate from his wife, Laila tells him that her husband has bruised her but "...with the door open I'm afraid I can't show you my bare shoulder, dear."⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, Laila never does get a chance to display herself to Ames; most inconsiderately he happens to love his wife. This same loyalty to spouse breaks up a cosy houseparty in The Lorenzo Bunch, and in this case the disruptive factor is a "woman with a past" who admits her pre-marital laxity. At several points in this novel the way is wide open for the most salacious situations; in each instance are the fullest implications made, but Tarkington omits those gross details which he felt were "non-literary."

In the hands of the craftsman this use of suggestion can achieve a power transcending that of the directness practiced by the naturalists. Much in the manner of Tarkington, Dorothy Canfield Fisher portrays strength of character amid a powerful setting by the veriest beginnings of sensualism. In The Bent Twig, for example, the sensitive nature of Sylvia Marshall is ~~repelled~~ as thoroughly by the pressure of a bared arm upon her bare shoulder as the reader himself must be by the raw details of a Studs Lonigan. This story of a brave candleflame in a gusty world holds much of the Tarkington concept of high virtue shining through to a victorious re-beginning. In like manner the theme of love runs full and deep in Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, yet it quite escapes the anatomical or the clinical. Like Alice Adams, Dorinda knows her moments of bitterness, but she has the inner resources to lift herself above disappointment and disillusionment.

Not only did Tarkington's treatment of the sex theme coincide neatly with the editorial policies of most mass-circulation periodicals; it also would seem to reflect a bygone era in human relationships which the current generation finds hard to conceive.

Readers who discover in Lewis, Hecht, Anderson and their like something distinctively 'American' should not forget that here [in Gentle Julia, in this case] is something in a different vein as truly American as those. Probably in no other country could a book treat of young people so romantic and pure in their motives, or treat the whole subject of adolescence and 20-year-old love in a manner so free from suggestions of the tragic and morbid.⁵⁵

On this score we must satisfy ourselves with only a few remarks from Henry Seidel Canby's American Memoir, but other evidence abounds to support the Tarkington thesis that boy-girl relationships a generation or two ago were different from those of today. Speaking as a near contemporary of Tark-

ington, Canby declares that in his youth,

Of course, we grossly underestimated the sexual possibilities of the refined female, yet on the other hand, we did give the complete woman a better chance. Beauty we estimated much more highly than today... Comradeship we ranked high, and good spirits, and character, though if a girl were pretty enough she could dazzle us out of such sensible perceptions of the truth about women. But sex, naked and unashamed, was kept in its place, which was not friendship, not even the state of falling in love.⁵⁶

Canby's next comments are virtually plagiarism from the Tarkington creed of courtship as exemplified in novel upon novel of young love. In Canby's words,

The result was a free association of boys and girls in their teens and early twenties that perhaps never has existed on the same plane elsewhere in the history of the modern world. We had confidence in each other, and we were confided in..., falling in and out of love with never a crude pang of sex, though in a continuous amorous excitement which was sublimated from the grosser elements of love. It was unreal if it had lasted for life, it was unnatural if it were to be all, it was juvenile in the limits of its emotions, and yet there was a healthy tranquillity which served as the norm for our excitement, a free play of character and personality which still seems to me the best state for youth.⁵⁷

In American Memoir Canby expresses the identical sentiments which evoked not only Gentle Julia, but Seventeen, Claire Ambler, Mary's Neck, The Fighting Littles, and Ramsey Milholland; to say nothing of the early portions of works like The Conquest of Canaan, Alice Adams, and The Magnificent Ambersons.

Beyond the tragi-comedy of many a situation, Tarkington's stories of youth contain an ineffable air of bright cleanliness somehow lacking in current fiction. Perhaps those "dear dead days" are gone "beyond recall" for a later generation either to accept in the novels of a Tarkington or to reproduce in the novels of a new literary generation. For "there was

something attained then, fragile, light-blooded, impossible of long continuance, but in its way golden, romantic, and delectable."⁵⁸ Tarkington absorbed its essence in his own youth, and by the peculiar magic of his artistry persisted in perpetuating it even into an alien world.

One might remark in passing that Tarkington shrewdly equated much of the mounting liberalism in the fictional exploitation of sensual excitement with the same motivation that has often been attributed to his own work, namely, that of money. To his perennial dismay he noted that many a dramatic "hit" on Broadway and many a "best-seller" depended largely upon the lewdness of its sex and the crudeness of its language to guarantee it the popularity which also means financial success. He recognized these writers as clever artisans in their peculiar trade. Time and again, as Tarkington examined their products, he was drawn by their skillful manipulation of suggestive details within the framework of creditable style and theme up to the point where he was well primed for the acceptance of "sheer dirt." At just that point, Tarkington wrote in 1927, "immediately that hovering of art, that I had felt, was revealed to me as a temporary charitable illusion of mine, and I seemed to perceive instead the dexterous hand of a cunning salesman. For an artist will not suffer dirt, nor, though he may need and hope for regard, will he make anything with the mere motive of selling it."⁵⁹ There was no doubt in his mind that "...a thing is not art if a pinch of dirt is deliberately added to it to make it sell. That is to say, a thing may not be partly a work of art and partly dirt though dirt may be cunningly and skillfully used to LOOK like a work of art."⁶⁰ There is substance for an elaborate disquisition on the implications of the relation-

ships among art, sex, and money, but they lie well outside our present purpose. There is a grim sort of humor, however, to this critical merry-go-round on which Tarkington and the critics ride one another to the accompaniment of variations on the same tune.

One more point should be included. Several times we have stressed the temperate nature of Tarkington, his moderation, his restraint. In part his avoidance of torrid animalism bespeaks this same aspect of his nature. On every side the mature novelist observed the growing emphasis upon anatomized sex, and he saw also the erotic competition which sought to plunge ever deeper into the privacy of man. He sensed the de-spiritualization of something inexpressibly beautiful into a biological act of evanescent thrills. In short, Tarkington deplored the loss of that mysterious sweetness with which Western tradition has long enveloped the whole area of sex. He was reared in an atmosphere of refinement which taught that sex was a private matter which should be confined to the boudoir or the doctor's office. In his works he stressed the finer, the more spiritual aspects of sexual relations. He regarded them as universal drives which poets have sung since time immemorial, hence they possess not even the virtue of novelty. "Spring is always Spring and youth is always youth,"⁶¹ he observed, although some of "our more outspoken youth" seem convinced that sex has been discovered in their own time and by them. This new liberalism in attitudes toward sex could become socially beneficial, he concluded, but he felt strongly that the current tendencies toward the sordid and morbid would lead only to the denigration of a transcendently lovely theme.

Tarkington evinces much the same attitude toward a miscellany of other "non-literary" subjects which we need only mention. Among these are the

profanity and obscenity which bulk so large in the novels of men like James Joyce or Ernest Hemingway. He saw no necessity in belaboring the Anglo-Saxon monosyllables in what he considered a childish attempt to seem grownup. Like many of his readers, he felt such language unsuitable in the mixed company of a novel's audience; indeed, he suspected such devices aroused more disgust for the author and his product than some critics might admit. Ultimately, he hoped, this attitude of disapproval should operate as a corrective upon literary license. After all, "disgust is merely the other side of good taste, and without it we should never have had civilization or the arts, nor could we continue to enjoy them"⁶² Too many writers in recent times, he felt, have made a virtue of being disgusting, and their work has been praised by admirers as though it were extending the territories of literature. Such authors go on the assumption that nothing a man can do is not fit to be written about, hence they "guide their readers into every obscene nook and corner with a courageous indifference to everything that offends the senses, both physical and moral."⁶³ An attitude like this was anathema to "the gentleman from Indiana."

Therefore one turns the pages of Tarkington novels in vain for the assorted perversions, phobias, and complexes which constitute so much of contemporary fiction. He draws no sketches of "fallen women" like Crane's Maggie; there are no "kept women" in the Dreiser tradition. As Bennett says of the latter, "There are indications that he could have produced work at least as shocking as Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhart, or The Financier, and he most certainly would have done it with more literary art than

Theodore Dreiser displayed."⁶⁴ But the fact remains that Tarkington early set the bounds of his realism, and he never crossed them during almost half a century of authorship. His kindly eye saw ample materials for fictional adaptation in the human comedy within the range of the normal, the wholesome; his basic decency forbade him the inclusion of Faulkner aberrations and Fitzgerald amorality. It was his trust that "[an invisible censor] is constantly at the elbow of every man or woman who writes. An invisible, scarcely suspected of existing, he is much more active, much more solidly entrenched, than the legal censor whom the liberals detest."⁶⁵

The satirical short story "Truth Is Stranger than Fiction" is Tarkington's best expression of the stylistic limits which he imposed upon his own writing. That he understood the trends of current literature is evident from the satire he directs at the naturalistic writers at the very close of this whimsical fragment. It may be recalled that the major portion of "Truth Is Stranger than Fiction" is a delicious burlesque of the historical romance tradition (see Part II, p. 63) which centers upon one Kistle Simmons and "The Heart of Alastair." Toward the conclusion, poor Kistle, lover of the romantic in his opus primus and wooer of the romantic in his own life, is appalled by the ignominious outcome of a matrimonial venture and turns to "grim reality" in his next work. This book "was compared in corpuscles, virility, and the strength of its meat for strong men, to the novels of Zola, of Frank Norris, of Dostoiwski, of Theodore Dreiser--to the dramas of Strindberg and Brieux."⁶⁶ Its first chapter, "the pleasantest in the book," begins as follows:

Krug Hopjeece, the refuse contractor, sat in a ten-cent restaurant in a Pittsburg slum. Hopjeece breathed heavily as he ate, the exhalations of his breath gathering in a thick vapour on the window-pane. From upstairs came the shrieking of a child. It was being beaten. Hopjeece ate. With his horrible hairy hand he lifted the soup bone, dripping with grease, from the bowl, tearing the shreds of meat with his strong teeth and with his horrible and broken nails. A rat, half-stifled with bubonic germs, crawled across his feet. Hopjeece ate. The soup bone had been thrown away at the packing-house. Hopjeece ate.⁶⁷

Tarkington adds, "It was called 'Sewage'."

Although other references may have been implied, the identification of "Krug Hopjeece" as the brutish dentist McTeague conceived by Frank Norris, is unmistakable--complete to the "broken nails" of his "horrible hairy hands."⁶⁸ Surely no analysis of "Sewage" is necessary for the reader to catch the thrusts at the popular concept of naturalism. Despite the deliberate exaggeration which pushes it close to humor, this bit of burlesque makes its point. Tarkington's revulsion to sordid characters, squalid settings, and barren style is glaringly evident.

As its identification with Frank Norris and McTeague might suggest, "Sewage" is a relatively early protest against the degradation of literature as a fine art which the new movements in realism seemed to threaten. Only by the indirection of his own novels did Tarkington "fight the good fight" to any great extent. In part because of his own low opinion of literary critics in general, he never set himself up as an authority in literary matters, hence his published statements on issues of this nature are scanty. We did note a light cuffing of modernist trends in the "Biljor" episode in Mary's Neck, occasional articles like "When Is It Dirt?" and "Rotarians and Sophisticates" contain murmurs of disapproval, but nowhere does one find the full battery of his wit and wisdom leveled at the insur-

gents. As a practicing novelist he seemed convinced that his job was to show the way rather than announce it from the housetops. It is that very attitude in practice that we noted long ago in our discussion of Tarkington's concept of the artist's role in society.

Had Tarkington lifted his pen more vigorously on behalf of Howellsian realism, he might have discovered that there were not a few others who shared his convictions. Most of these were members of the old guard, however, who soon were labeled the unregenerated and relegated to the limbo of lost causes. Theirs were the early voices of the new century, but they were caught in the ebb-tide of conservatism and drowned in the upsurge of liberalism. A few survivors, like Tarkington, did manage in one way or another to buck the current, but the struggle exacted a heavy toll. Only in recent years have the tenets of naturalism suffered criticism of any consequence, and the full-scale battle has yet to begin. Not long ago a re-reading of James Farrell's Studs Lonigan trilogy set Henry Seidel Canby to musing. "I wonder," he said finally, "whether these naturalists...are not lagging behind the development of the other arts."⁶⁹ The stage, Canby pointed out, has long out-grown the drive for reproducing a real scene. On the other hand, "the novel, or at least the naturalistic novel, dealing frankly, honestly with the dirt, the disorder, the viciousness of low-class American life...depends upon massed description, upon every detail, to the color of the girl's drawers and the most minute indecency of a boy's conversation."⁷⁰ In reference to the glut of description in Studs Lonigan Canby declared, "There is too much of it. The feeling too current in our time that it is the duty of the novelist to tell it all, has got Mr. Farrell. His book would be terrific in its impact if it ran like a stripped car instead of a loaded truck."⁷¹

This, of course, is Tarkington's old demand for artistic selection cropping up in a new place. There is also an echo of the old, old cry that naturalism over-stresses "the dirt, the disorder, the viciousness of low-class American life." If reason suggests that Tarkington lingered too long in the sunshine, that same logic might indicate that the naturalists have skulked too long in the shadows. After all, "realism may or may not deal with the commonplace, because not all life is commonplace, it may or may not deal with what is unpleasant, because life has both its sordid and its noble aspects, both of which it is the business of the writer to record."⁷²

When Tarkington began to write, the idealistic treatment of fictional matter was in fashion, and he never completely lost his love of it. In subsequent years other impulses attracted him to the ranks of the realists. The publication review of Alice Adams (1921) in the Literary Digest expressed not only sorrow at the unhappy tone of the novel, but regret for the realism of its style. Glumly it reported, "The author has succumbed to the craze for detail to the great detriment of his work, and just in so far as he is photographic he is dull. The conversations between Alice and Russell may be literally true, but they are inexcusable in a work of fiction. For the first time Mr. Tarkington is occasionally tiresome."⁷³ One hardly needs add that these are not the wisest words prompted by this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. Much closer to our point are those of John Farrar, then editor of Bookman. He commented upon Alice Adams, "Mr. Tarkington seems to me, in this picture of family life in an American city, to have outplayed the year's crop of realists at every stroke. This is a well-considered realism, a balanced healthy vision, a sense of humor and tragedy skillfully interplaying."⁷⁴

Our emphasis here is upon Mr. Farrar's latter sentence, for it is revelatory of Tarkington's mature concept of the interbalance between the light and the dark which seemed to him the most honest representation of the whole life.

In all those works which are not deliberately juvenile or frivolous Tarkington searched for a congenial plateau somewhere between the sun-swept heights of romanticism and the murky dales of naturalism. To change the figure to that of Arthur Quinn, "He has steered a middle course between those who stripped life of its illusions and those who covered it with a layer of unreasoning optimism. That he was able to maintain the poise of an artist is the more to his credit since his gift for satire would have made the first path easy, but his fundamental belief in human nature has continued ~~over~~ since his first published novel."⁷⁵ Like the philosophers of old, Tarkington sought "the golden mean" toward literary security. There have been times when such a goal would have elicited high praise, but our modern temper has militated against it, proclaiming it easy escape or cowardly retreat. Toward the close of our study we shall return to this point when we consider more fully Tarkington's concept of the role of literature in society.

Before turning to this concluding portion we should remark that Tarkington was free to declare his stand for both romance and sentiment in fiction. With his friend William Allen White he would agree that "romance does not die in men when their trouserlegs fall below their knees; nor in women when they cease to fear abduction to the baronial castle and the donjon keep...The history of the battle of life in the sunlight is as full of sprightly adventure, of merry combat, of bitter pathos as the little

prologue to the battle-story in the moonlight."⁷⁶ That is to say, adult literature may well proceed beyond the eternal theme of courtship into those other realms of mature life which are likewise fraught with romance-- though of a different nature. White suggests, for example, "the bread-and-butter problem is as thrilling as the diagram of the corrugated course of true love."⁷⁷ This is the theme of Tarkington's The Midlander, of course, and "seldom has a half-accepted, half-rejected lover shown such persistence in convincing his lady"⁷⁸ than Dan Oliphant displayed in urging the charms of "Ornaby Addition." In each of Tarkington's mature novels there is something of challenge to whet suspense, to limn character, or to point the theme. Certainly to the reflective author the portrayal of the everyday offers a tremendous challenge. As Frank Norris put it, "To discover the real romance [of the everyday] means hard work and close study, not of books, but of people and actualities."⁷⁹ The further Tarkington dug in his "investigatory novels," the more convinced he became that here was one of the most significant contributions an author might make to a permanent literature, and that such "slices of life" offer fictional subject matter worthy the attention of the most ambitious artist. To an extraordinary degree this type of writing requires "that nameless sixth sense or sensibility...that is not genius...but is more akin to sincerity."⁸⁰ Thus it is likely to fulfill the first requirement we enumerated which Tarkington held essential to the creation of lasting letters.

To the majority of his critics it was evident that "sentiment was more deeply rooted in Mr. Tarkington than was romance."⁸¹ One may find a certain virtue in this judgment, provided he interprets the terms the right

way. The romantic is inclined to color his facts; indeed, he may even refuse to admit facts. The sentimentalist, on the other hand, is relatively unconcerned about facts as facts, for his principal concern is truth as it affects man, a sentient being. It is an error in criticism to confuse sincere sentiment with shallow sentimentality, and Tarkington has been victimized not infrequently by this loose interchange of terms. Emotional depth is a prerequisite to great writing, he maintained, and it would be far more remiss to evade this element in literary creativity than to give it fairly free range. Despite his academic background, Tarkington was ever suspicious of chilly intellectualism; he preferred the "old-fashioned" ideals and warm folksiness of ordinary people. Bennett comments in this regard, "In fact, throughout all his life Booth Tarkington was never ashamed of any honest sentiment--his faith rested in the homely virtues of love, generosity, and honor, and in the common people who respect such virtues and who in the main abide by them. If to celebrate these virtues and these people were sentimentality, felt Tarkington, let the critics make the most of it."⁸²

Unfortunately for Tarkington's literary position today, the critics have made a great deal of it. Van Doren comments on this score, "Whenever he comes to a crisis in the building of a plot or in the truthful representation of a character he sags down to the level of Indiana sentimentality."⁸³ So far as Van Doren is concerned (and this is true of other contemporary critics), Tarkington never outgrew "the good, dear people" of The Gentleman from Indiana. The truths in even Penrod are shrouded from these critics by the sunset hues of this early regional romance, for inev-

itably the current is viewed in light of the past. Tarkington insisted upon his definition of sentiment as the manifestation of higher, more refined feelings closely akin to that sensibility which evokes the finest in art. His detractors insisted upon interpreting his application of feeling in fiction as a weak emotionalism which gained but too often the better of reason.

As is often the case, both Tarkington and his critics have points in their favor. Among the three dozen Tarkington titles it is only too easy to isolate an impressive array of instances where emotionalism seems to overcome right reason. The very quantity of his writing, plus the peculiar pressure under which he preferred to work, would make for these spots which his longer view might have seen differently. On the other hand, it is as easy to build as good a case for Tarkington as a sensitive artist who cared deeply for the offspring of his imagination, believed in them as honest specimens of homo sensibilis, and defended them as the proponents of true virtues.

When one completes his investigation of Tarkington's attitude toward recognizing both the realistic and the idealistic in fiction, he discovers a basically sound and sensible position. By precept and example Tarkington demonstrated his advocacy for an artistic blend of these two vital elements in a lasting literature. The candor of the unabashed realist he would mitigate with the esthetic restraint of the artist. The impersonal reportage of the naturalist he would temper with whatever sentiments are proper to the characters and the situation. If the balance between good and evil must tip a bit for dramatic effect, Tarkington's optimistic faith in man urged a decision for the propitious and the constructive. William Allen White attests

to the success of Tarkington in following his own creed.

Tarkington's work has lacked no verisimilitude of reality because he idealized man. His heroes are not wax and plaster; they bleed even if they do wear trousers. His heroines lack no vitality because their sex appeal is subtle and crafty. The America of Tarkington's midlands is no less terrible because he believes it has a place in the orderly process of a divine plan only meagerly revealed. The flat spiritual sterility which characterizes the canvases of many of his younger contemporary novelists who think they are realistic when they are merely dirty, has never attracted Tarkington into any phase of imitation. He has held his banner high proclaiming his belief that man is fundamentally decent despite men's meannesses and weaknesses and that God is essentially good in spite of an occasional democratic (sic) victory or other holocaust.⁸⁴

Whereas these words reflect the attitudes of a kindred spirit, they likewise summarize well Tarkington's literary position in this area we have just been exploring.

In his avoidance of extremity in either romanticism or naturalism, it might be argued that "it was Booth Tarkington's sense of humor that saved him from both dangers."⁸⁵ Let it be said that this same sense of humor has also been a persistent stumbling-block in critical appraisals of our author. E.B. White said truly, "The world likes humor, but it treats it patronizingly. It decorates its serious writers with laurel, and its wags with Brussels sprouts."⁸⁶ Tarkington conceded the generality of the lowly position of the comic element in letters, but he himself never fully accepted it. In part because of this conventional manner of thinking, he treated humor in his own works with the same artistry that he devoted to the most serious of subjects. Comedy he regarded as a vital stabilizing factor among the vicissitudes which life brings to all. In his words, "Comedy is, so far, the only alleviation of life, except work and what is called faith. I should call it the third best thing in life."⁸⁷ Time and again, both in his own experiences and those he shared with others, he observed the healing effect

of humor, and early he became convinced that one of the supreme functions of the writer was to make the reader feel himself "full of courage and the capacity for happiness in a brightened world."⁸⁸ Thus, the comic element forms a significant part of the serious novelist's stock in trade, nor should it be relegated to the role of mere amusement. As he told Kenneth Roberts, "A writer who is sincerely, and often in the humorous manner, engaged in the interpretation of life doesn't edit his writing with the idea that he's offering entertainment, no matter if he be by nature and in manner a humorist."⁸⁹ In his estimation, the veriest tyro could wring tears from tragedy, but the finest effect of all literature is "a pathos which only master craftsmen attain...tears, not of sorrow, but of delight."⁹⁰

It is a part of the literary idealism of Tarkington to overstress, just a bit, this last comment on the nature of comic effect in fiction. Like fellow Hoosiers George Ade, Kin Hubbard (creator of Abe Martin of Brown County), and Riley, Tarkington based his humor upon a foundation of optimism. As a result there is an indefinable bonhomie to even his satire which minimizes offense to the most sensitive. To a remarkable degree he possessed "...that delightful power of producing through incongruity a humor infectious and unquenchable, and a steady eye which enabled him to send shafts of priceless satire into human pretense and weakness. It is perhaps to his credit that living in our time he refrained from placing poison on the shafts."⁹¹ Or, to quote from another critic, "He points out foibles but leaves no sting."⁹² Elmer Adams, late fiction editor for the Detroit News, was moved to remark of Tarkington in this regard,

"In humorous work of [this] particular kind he is approached by none. By no one is the great so gayly made small and the small so solemnly made great. By no one is actual truth drawn upon so consistently for

the materials of humor, so that we laugh not in derision but, knowing the truth our own, in tender sympathy for the whole so-called human race.⁹³

The works of Tarkington abound in good humor--and in good humored satire--but everywhere it bespeaks the genial nature of Tarkington himself. A full catalog of those subjects which felt the nip of his wit would range anywhere from "modernism" in art or music through the shifting mores of dating or drinking. Little escaped his keen glance, and friendly gibes at man's trials with man appear anywhere Tarkington could work them in.

In humor, then, as in the other elements of fiction which we have treated in this last portion of our discussion, Tarkington sought to preserve a sound sanity wholly in keeping with his over-all literary philosophy. Fastidiously he avoided the smut of Erskine Caldwell, the bitterness of Ring Lardner; with gentle persistence he continued the tradition of the early Mark Twain and the young Bret Harte. Here, again, Tarkington refused to keep step with those uncongenial literary trends which thrust him further and further into the quiet eddies of conservatism. Indeed, to Basil Davenport it seemed in 1932 that Tarkington, "for all his extreme Middle Westernism, seems curiously English in manner."⁹⁴ That is, a goodly portion of Tarkington humor lies in the drollery of the situations, the subtlety of the wit, the nuances of the word choices, rather than the crash of slapstick or the gasp of shocked risibility. Always the gentleman, Tarkington was careful of the company he encouraged. With Brander Matthews he would agree: "Show me what a man laughs at, and I will tell you what manner of man he is."⁹⁵ The conscientious artist, therefore, will exercise proper judgment in his choice of comic material lest his humor betray his

own lack of good taste.

The element of satire which tinges many a Tarkington page offers some indication of the role which our novelist felt literature ought to play in society. As Bennett puts it, even as a young man "he found that he was not exactly satisfied with things as they were. In his own way he began to criticize, and his method, invariably, was satire."⁹⁶ Soon, as a more mature style evolved and the "investigatory novel" came into its own, other ways of demonstrating the social responsibility of the creative artist began to assert themselves. As Howard Mumford Jones expressed it in a recent work, "literature is a social act," and every piece of literature "...is still meant for an audience living in time and space and sharing the social and cultural predilections of that space and time."⁹⁷ We noted before that Tarkington was no recluse himself, nor did he approve the esoteric literary groups which spring up around commanding figures like T. S. Eliot. With Jones, once again, Tarkington would declare,

We cannot escape responsibility for the conduct of literature in a democracy so sorely beset as our own...The problem of the American way of life has become a pressing need for the constant reinterpretation of American cultural values in terms that shall be at once simple enough to be understood and philosophic enough to stand up against pressure from without and reaction from within.⁹⁸

In other words, it is quite proper that creative writers express their own individual awarenesses to life through their works, but it is also true that they are producing social documents. So far as that is concerned, they are not only revealing the ideas, feelings, emotions, and judgments of the human beings they describe (including themselves), but they are also exhibiting for future readers what writers regarded as of vital importance in their day.

Oddly enough, one finds in the words of the recalcitrant Frank Norris a rather well-defined statement of Tarkington's own position concerning the interrelationship between author and audience. Declared Norris,

You may believe...that the novelist, of all workers, is independent--that he can write what he pleases, and that certainly...he should never 'write down to his readers'--that he should never consult them at all. On the contrary, I believe it can be proved that the successful novelist should be careful of what he says; more than all others...he should feel 'his public' and watch his every work, testing carefully his every utterance, weighing with the most relentless precision his every statement; in a word, possess a sense of his responsibilities.⁹⁹

To put it bluntly, Tarkington sincerely felt ~~that~~ the broad reading public should be considered the final arbiter in virtually all issues of literary taste. "Only the people can bestow the laurel" was his favorite way of expressing this conviction. In his tribute to the late William Dean Howells he asserted, "In the long run, the people recommend a work of art to the pompous critic; they sometimes take his recommendations temporarily; but for permanent use it is he who takes theirs, yet remains unaware that his pomposity is thus, after all, a meekness."¹⁰⁰ Or, in the metaphorical language of Cabell, "Posterity remains as the supreme tribunal: yet in very few cases does it reverse a judgment of the lower court."¹⁰¹ There is a dash of pioneer democracy in this reliance upon folk judgment which recent intellectualism has refused to accept. As we shall see shortly, however, the current direction of the critical pendulum seems to favor the Tarkington position.

Tarkington was aware, of course, that there are critics--and critics. The above reference to Howells may remind one of the earlier comment by Tarkington to the effect that "when Mr. Howells and the nation" pass a literary judgment, that matter is settled. But such a passage of respect for

a professional critic is rare with him, and even among those few he intimates that greater honesty and restraint come from those of proved ability. At least, he said, "Men who have done great work greet and hail the good work of others, but upon the bad work of others they usually are silent, except in extreme privacy."¹⁰²

Much more typical of Tarkington's attitude toward critics is the silence with which he accepted their pronouncements. Only once did he enter the lists, and that encounter ended in a draw between him and Heywood Brown on the issue of sex consciousness in juvenile fiction. Yet it is simply not true, as Wertenbaker claims, "for what the critics or posterity think, he does not care a hoot."¹⁰³ The evidence proves conclusively that he did care deeply about the judgments of both critics and posterity, but one can rest assured that he was far more concerned about the latter. Critics he came to accept as necessary evils in the publishing game, but he could generate little love for them. An incident in the autobiographical fragment As I Seem to Me he marks as the beginning of his long association with critics, and from the beginning it is not a happy tale. He was thirteen at the time, togged out in his first "longies," and buoyant in the incipient adulthood which surely was evident to all. But he met sharp comments upon his finery from a volunteer committee of critics, and these proved to be but the first of many. "The sensations I endured that afternoon," he recounts, "were to be many, many times undergone later in my life until what is called 'philosophy' should come to the rescue; for, though I then little suspected it, I was to follow one of those callings that of their very nature bring not one but a horde of critics, seemingly out of nowhere, to beset the path indignantly."¹⁰⁴

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It was those critics "seemingly out of nowhere" who particularly aroused his sense of injustice. Most of these he sensed to be either unkept promises or frustrated failures whom he labeled "mosquito-minded" because of their treacherous tactics. Tarkington would have enjoyed Sartre's explanation that "...most critics are men who have not had much luck and who, just about the time they were growing desperate, found a quiet little job as cemetery watchmen."¹⁰⁵ Much of the acridity of professional book reviewing Tarkington attributed to occupational jealousy. Early in his experience he discovered that "one of the most curious and ignominious things in human nature [is that] every man whose head seems lifted over the heads of his fellows knows that his elevation has made certain men and women, strangers to himself, into enemies. They hate him and pursue him slyly and malignantly, perhaps for years."¹⁰⁶

In addition to their apparent smallness of mind, Tarkington observed that frequently book critics devoted more space to the airing of their own activities or opinions than to the subject at hand. Such criticism he labeled "pompous" because of a certain air of condescension which usually marks it. Only too often, he commented, "[Pompous criticism] is no more...than the autobiography of critics, revealing their taste and education, each bit of it wearing forty masks and setting up to be the whole academy...[Early in their remarks] the innocent pretenders...will be at work telling us something about themselves."¹⁰⁷ Although Tarkington never developed his full philosophy on subjectivism in criticism, it would appear that he advocated the impersonalized approach. Earlier in the above reference he suggested that "criticism should be a science and not an art," but that is

as far as he went. His own adherence to literary conventions, his love for tradition, his abhorrence of novelty, all suggest confidence in some basic code, largely unwritten, to which every creative artist of lasting significance must owe allegiance. It is this master plan across the ages which has preserved in recognizable form the types of literature which persist to our day, and it is this same plan which keeps intact the literary heritage which is ours.

For whatever reasons, it must be admitted that Tarkington gave very little credit to academic criticism in this whole matter. We noted earlier his attitude toward "creative writing courses" in terms of composition, and the carry-over here is evident. He once wrote his college classmate Julian Street, "Professors don't know about writing. 'Literature' for them is a museum: they're curators and look after the dusting of classic curios...and when they try to make opinions...they just gesture with their dust-rag."¹⁰⁸ Their temporal isolation from the present he particularly deplored, for it struck him as a kind of perverted snobbery to look down one's nose so severely that the standing timber goes unobserved in the inventory of the out and dried lumber in the literary yards. "The man purely of letters," he wrote four decades ago, "will have his artists dead (or very foreign) before he so honors them as to chop them up into little laws for the living." Sinclair Lewis lamented the same academic removal from current life in his address before the Nobel Prize convocation:

To a true-blue professor of literature in an American university, literature is not something that a plain human being, living today, painfully sits down to produce. No; it is something dead; it is something magically produced by superhuman beings who must, if they are to

be regarded as artists at all, have died at least one hundred years before the diabolical invention of the typewriter...Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.¹⁰⁹

It is easy to pass off these remarks as mere "sour grapes," although a nagging suspicion may persist that there is provocation for such an attitude. One may detect a tendency in recent scholarly efforts to remedy this seeming imbalance in literary criticism. Lewis himself has been the focal point for numerous dissertations in recent years (several prior to his death in 1950); Tarkington has been the subject for four dissertations (including the present) since his death in 1946.

Not only was Tarkington skeptical about academic criticism of contemporary literature because of its obsession with the past; he also suspected it to be non-representative in judgment and over-sophisticated beyond any practical good. Rhetorically he queried,

Is a man's quality to be judged by all his work, or by his best, or by his worst? There's no law on the question--we may choose which course we'll take, and the one we do choose depends, with most of us, merely upon our own dispositions and congenialities--but people not harnessed to popular criticism...may enjoy unorthodox pleasures denied to others.¹¹⁰

Here again he displayed that energetic independence which marks his entire career. Rather than become enveloped in "the froth of the day," he urged, one should proceed according to his own preferences in the making of literary judgments. With Howard Mumford Jones, Tarkington would declare, "I think that books are made for men, not men for books; and that we read for direct pleasure, for simple statement; and that except in university reviews the human animal takes the printed page calmly and not as a problem in casuistry."¹¹¹ Both author and critic, Tarkington felt, would do well to bear in mind the broad audience which fiction must serve, therefore the less esoteric, the less pedantic the better, so far as literary opinions are concerned.

One final group of book reviewers aroused Tarkington's particular ire. This consists of those professional crêpe-hangers to whom nothing appeals, nothing seems praiseworthy. As he sifted the scene, it struck him that the higher the intellectual level of the magazine served by these "misguided Cassandras," the more prevalent the derogatory remarks. Newspapers and wide circulation periodicals commonly follow the principle, "Une main lave l'autre. Lavez la mienne, et je laverai la votre,"¹¹² but no such charity animates the upper echelon of critics. Indeed, the latest work of any mature author seems generally doomed among these harpies. As Cabell puts it, once a writer is solidly established upon the literary scene, all good critics "confront a matter of plain duty. We perceive that we owe it alike to our employers and to our own repute, as brisk fellows endowed with a pretty wit, here to achieve gusto by deriding in a sprightly and sophisticated way all the quaint failings of these over-widely appreciated authors, and to malign them brightly in mere justice to ourselves. We then do our duty."¹¹³ It is obvious in Cabell's half-facetious comment that neither author nor reader stands to profit from such an attitude; it is equally obvious that the critic himself is not over-concerned with much beyond his own interests. To Tarkington this condemnatory attitude embodies everything bad in criticism: it is hypercritical purely for the sake of destruction, it lacks the honesty of unbiased opinion, it proceeds from insecure premises, and it flaunts personal opinions above the eternal standards of literary decorum.

Of course, there is another side to this picture. Not infrequently there is a stretch in a writer's career where the momentum of his past successes will carry him along. That is the time, as Frank Moore Colby suggests,

"when the critic should do anything to wake him up--throw stones at him and make him pedal. It looks unfeeling, but it is really for his own good."¹¹⁴ Ideally speaking, the sole concern of criticism should be the welfare of literature itself. Indeed, it could easily be argued that for a critic to aid in the struggle of writers for recognition is actually a disservice to literature. As Van Wyck Brooks points out, "The important thing is that our best writers should become still better writers, that they should not be encouraged by the critics they respect to rest on their laurels and regard themselves as masters."¹¹⁵ But this function of literary criticism as a prod held scant appeal to Tarkington. Although he believed devoutly in working under pressure, he did not feel that one's best products were wrought with the twin hammers of anger and irritation. Quite to the contrary, he advocated the serenity of spirit and the depth of purpose which come from sincere motivation and judicious encouragement. As we have intimated, many of his kindest critics never ceased regretting that they aroused him so seldom, but the simple fact remains that Tarkington just did not respond to that kind of goading.

"Criticism ordinarily asks about literature one of three questions: 'Is it good?' 'Is it true?' 'Is it beautiful?'"¹¹⁶ A bit later in the same reference, "there is...a fourth dimension...which comes into the account when a critic asks about literature: 'Is it alive?' In a sense this query includes all the others and in a sense it transcends them."¹¹⁷ It is Carl Van Doren who poses these questions, but he speaks for Tarkington. Within them are encompassed the basic tenets held by Tarkington pertaining to the minimum essentials of a lasting literature. In the first group are reflected Tarkington the craftsman ('Is it good?'), Tarkington the idealist

('Is it true?'), Tarkington the esthete ('Is it beautiful?'). And in the last ('Is it alive?') is reflected Tarkington as a creator of living letters. As Van Doren suggests, this last question is a pervasive matter which partakes of all to achieve an entity in itself. Taken together, these points constitute a creed for critics which Tarkington could urge for all men for all times. Classical in simplicity, traditional in content, flexible in form, it provides the critic with everything requisite to critical judgments, yet precludes the intrusion of personalities or over-emphasis on any one aspect of the work.

One problem which long has vexed critics concerns the distinction which some feel between a literature to entertain and a literature to instruct. With Tarkington this is seldom an issue. From the first he placed a high premium on the entertainment quality of his fiction. He contended that any novel which failed to catch its reader by story appeal could never hope to hold him by social signification. Thus it is "that the best of his efforts are important social documents, that the lightest of them have a Mark Twain quality of surviving freshness and that they are all good entertainment."¹¹⁸ It was his conviction that, if the amusement value of a novel be sufficiently high, other elements can be added to give it the substance of lasting literature. Even into such juveniles as Penrod and Seventeen Tarkington inserted perceptive fragments of adolescent psychology, and a light novel like Mary's Neck is well armed with satirical thrusts at a variety of targets. The social implications of works like the Growth trilogy and his mature "investigatory" novels have already been discussed, yet few would question the basic entertainment appeal in these. As Wertenbaker reflected upon the eve of Tarkington's seventieth birthday, "But no matter

what his subject, Tarkington has never let himself go stale or out of style, and it is that which ranks him at the top of his profession as an entertainer.¹¹⁹ The practical side of his personality never let him forget that his first responsibility as a novelist was to provide amusement for paying customers. With Katherine Fullerton Gorould he would agree that "a good story should carry more than its own weight," but his primary consideration was still "a good story."

Most of the extra weight in truly fine fiction we have already discussed under a variety of headings, so that our final task is largely one of recapitulation. It would be the height of misrepresentation to imply that Tarkington conceived fiction's role in society to be little more than entertainment. We must now summarize those other functions of the novel, and then our study of Tarkington as a novelist will be complete. In this final analysis special effort will be made to apply these principles of Tarkington to the present literary scene in an effort to determine wherein he may serve us today.

One scarcely need state that Tarkington regarded fiction as a repository of traditions. As a "social document" the novel becomes the natural place wherein the present may entrust its ideas and ideals and whereto the future will turn for insight into what will then be the past. In the case of Tarkington one can discover not only his nostalgia for boyhood days, his concern for the impact of industrialism upon the American scene, and his reactions to the moral liberalism of the new century. Also one can find in his fiction a thinly veiled anti-feminism, for example, which gently questioned the twentieth century overturn of age-old male supremacy.^{119a} Into

his stories Tarkington frequently injected his passion for classical art, his faith in democracy, his regard for child welfare, and a host of similar matters. The light touch of humor is often evident even among such themes as these, but his satire "...is on the side of the established order. A certain soundness and rightness of feeling, a natural hearty democratic instinct...appears in his novels."¹²⁰ Tarkington once tagged himself "a liberal conservative," and the label is appropriate. As a social preservative, his concept of fiction partakes of both these elements of liberalism and conservatism.

Above almost everything else Tarkington believed that literature must exemplify a constructive philosophy of life. Throughout the greater portion of his writing career the deteriorative forces of agnosticism and pessimism, augmented by complicating factors like advancing industrialism and recurrent militarism, eroded the foundations of his spiritual heritage. In Parts I and II we attempted to fit Tarkington into the socio-cultural and literary scene at the turn of the century; to follow him, even decade by decade, across the succeeding half century would take us far outside the province of this study. Nevertheless it may prove of value to sketch the near-cycle of this one element in fiction during a hectic era.

A clue to one modus operandi in evaluating the philosophic content of literature during the past fifty years is provided by Maxwell Geismar in his survey of the American novel since the Civil War. In Rebels and Ancestors, he summarizes the period from 1890 to 1915 by calling them "The Years of Gain." That is, during this quarter century the cleansing tide of rising realism swept away the artificialities of synthetic romanticism

and the unnatural restrictions of an obsolescent genteelism. The next volume in his sequence, The Last of the Provincials, deals with the novel from 1915 to 1925. It is significant that Geismar labels this decade "The Years of Loss." Already the vitiating effects of literary excesses were manifesting themselves in the degraded themes and marginal characters which pervade American novels through the Thirties and into the Forties.

This latter period is covered by Geismar in a third volume entitled Writers in Crisis. This work centers upon "the lost Generation" which found itself first in the mael of a major Depression, then the cataclysm of a major war. "Gain" - "Loss" - "Crisis," three words signaling half a century of literary history. Under the threat of electronic control over nuclear armament, it is a nice question what the present generation will supply for the fourth word in Geismar's series. Certainly some division of energy, some shift in direction already seems apparent. To J. Isaacs, for one, "...it seems as though the first quarter of the century was a period of achievement, and the second quarter a period of conscious stock-taking, not so much of the facts of the achievement as of its inner and essential nature."¹²¹ Tarkington himself could read the signs. "Accumulating their own hordes," he observed, "the revolutionists now appear to be endangered by the very enthusiasm they roused; acquiring too many imitators frazzles the original hero. Our revolution grows old, and there are foreshadowings against it."¹²²

Throughout this whole period many a voice was lifted in protest against the seeming despiritualization of letters. Forty years ago Margaret Sherwood proclaimed,

We in America today need a Renaissance, a revival of literature for its own sake, for its large revelation of human life and human experience. We need that kind of intellectual awakening that can come in no way save through an awakened sense of the value of letters, of the wealth of our intellectual and spiritual inheritance from the past.¹²³

In words highly reminiscent of Norman Cousins or Bertrand Russell today, she declared in 1916, "If there is anything apparent in this great crash of war which, logically perhaps, marks the outcome of decades of triumphant material progress, it is our need of utilizing to the full our intellectual and spiritual resources, lest the race go back to savagery."¹²⁴ In early form, here is the now familiar lament that the "scientific," the physical, the material have outstripped the "philosophic," the ethical, the spiritual to the point where men have become neighbors before learning neighborliness.

A decade later, novelist Zona Gale was still awaiting the new day when a more rational literature might emerge. In her estimation

the chief concern of the American novel of tomorrow will be to uncover the beauty of essential commonplace living as the novel of today [1928] has triumphantly uncovered its ugliness...but first by accepting all of life, something which we in America have never been willing to do either in art or in life, and then by a new selectiveness. It is only after a broadly affirmative art that a really selective art becomes possible.¹²⁵

The Tarkington touches in such a statement are unmistakable; one should especially note the emphases on an "affirmative art" and a "really selective art." It is apparent that in 1928 we are still in "the years of loss."

After still another decade Percy Boynton sensed an even greater decline in spiritual affirmations in American fiction. "Up to now, he declared in 1940, "The people have always had something to believe in and from time to time someone to look to as an embodiment of that belief: the

the power of faith, the power of social efficiency, the power of manifest destiny, the power of a righteous existing order. A reading of representative American novelists reveals at length the quandry in which America finds itself."¹²⁶ Boynton, of course, was speaking upon the brink of another world war when the expediencies of German totalitarianism were making a mockery of Anglo-American democracy. The critical function of fiction had gained preeminence in another period of social crisis and the rigors of war called for the "realistic approach." N. Elizabeth Monroe wrote in 1941, "In our day the idea of poetry or fiction as a criticism of life has been narrowed down to a criticism of society, and a novel that does not bear a social message is frowned on heavily in many quarters."¹²⁷ As she implies, this is not a wholly desirable trend in literature.

Tarkington too, it will be recalled, felt that the novelist should feel under no obligation to change the world. As he interpreted the function of literature in society, the artist offered his keener vision and deeper insight, but the actual labor of social amelioration should be left to the people themselves. The novel "discharges its duty when it represents man and his society honestly and completely. It cannot be turned to the improvement of man and society in a direct fashion without becoming a mere handmaid to propaganda or science."¹²⁸ Only three years later J. Donald Adams, writing beneath the blackest clouds of World War II, confirmed the above attitude toward the responsibility of the artist for injecting a basically constructive philosophy in his writing. "I believe," he stated, "...that there rests now upon literature a particular obligation. As I conceive it, that obligation is to assist in restoring

the dignity of the human spirit. Man needs desperately to rediscover himself, to renew his faith in his destiny, to find something like a straight path in the complex maze of the modern world."¹²⁹

At this point, the student of Tarkington sorely misses affirmative expressions from his subject relative to the foregoing issues. The truth is that such statements by Tarkington simply do not exist. One can cite ample evidence of his patriotism, quotations abound which bespeak his idealism, everywhere lies proof of his optimism. In no place, however, did he proclaim a manifesto for American letters. In his latter years he became increasingly willing to let his novels speak for him; even his correspondence turned more and more from literary topics to current events. One searches vainly for a ringing call by a militant Tarkington, summoning the forces of artistic creativity to the shaping of a new and better tomorrow. The implications of his works are unmistakable, but in them alone did he commit himself on these matters. Since detailed analyses of these have already been made, there is no need for us to rehearse them here. In other areas, but two years before his death, he urged that "the lopsided progress...of scientific material advance achieved by nations underdeveloped in spirit, even in decent common sense."¹³⁰ will find its proper balance and a free world will go on to greater glories. But there is no comprehensive declaration from Tarkington for a revitalized literature to fortify a war generation in an Atomic Age. Upon the role of the novel in this vital process he was not permitted to speak.

Quite as Tarkington predicted, when the exigencies of life press man into desperate crises, he needs the moral uplift of a regenerating philosophy

rather than the depressing reiteration of human frailties; he needs the exemplification of human grandeur, not the dramatization of his degradation. In our own time this is especially important, but it is no simple matter. Current fiction seems distorted and formless to the traditionalist; it lacks direction and fulfillment. The honest critic says, "yes, that is true, but so does the world it depicts." In words of Edwin Burgum, "One of the chief sources of pleasure in reading fiction is this satisfaction of our desire to know more about ourselves as we function together in society. But, at the same time, in the process of surrendering this valid information, the modern novel suffers in its own way from our loss of basic integration."¹³¹ It is easy to carry over this argument into every branch of art, and no doubt there is validity in the reasoning behind it. The weird array of isms which have preoccupied contemporary artists bespeaks the desperate search for some principle, some form, some style which yields a satisfying sense of esthetic fulfillment.

Another symptom of artistic unrest is the disturbing frequency with which our current novelists equate the tragic element in life with brute violence. F. O. Matthiessen reported not long ago that the typical European concept of American literature is built around four authors--Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Caldwell. Of special relevance to our study he adds, "Despite all their differences in talent and significance, they do have something in common: a preoccupation with violence."¹³² Much the same interpretation of contemporary fiction is made by W.M. Frohock. In his analysis he divides the

major literary harvest of the past three decades into two parts. Into the first he places those novels "in which the slow grinding of time was an important factor, and which presented what happened to the characters as the work of time's erosion."¹³³ The deterministic element in this group is apparent, and the word "erosion" suffices to suggest the tragic tone. The dramatic "catastrophe" of classical tradition is inapplicable in such novels because it is "unrealistic"; individualism is engulfed in the relentless current of time and its only manifestations are momentary delusions of personal worth.

The other category envisioned by Frohock is scarcely less drastic. In these stories "time" is cast as a limitation to provide a dominant sense of urgency. By dramatic stages the suspense is built to an unbearable pitch until something violent is inevitable. "Time and again the hero finds himself in a predicament from which the only possible escape is the infliction of physical harm upon some other human being. In the infliction of harm, he also finds the way to his own destruction."¹³⁴ In the popular sense, at least, this second kind of novel is tragic also, for it ends in the destruction of character. Here is the theme of Dreiser's An American Tragedy, of Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle, of Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun, and countless others of recent vintage.

Whether such a division of modern fiction is indicative of decadence in the novel as a literary type, a reflection of the frustration and despair of our day, or any one of a number of pat interpretations is outside our purpose to determine in this study. What is relevant is the growing conviction that this negativism, this defeatism, can lead only to the destruction of all that

gives man the courage to cope with the present and the faith to meet the future. Although by no means blind to the exigencies of this twentieth century, Tarkington still urged a constructive literary philosophy reminding of the "Look up, lift up" motto which he learned in Sunday School days. As Burgum expresses it so well,

Men reconciled to living with error, so long as it does not predominate over the good, whose conflict is not with the angel but with that very error whose presence they accept as the inevitable limitation of human existence, will return to [the ultimate humanism of ancient tradition]. They will not be drawn into the indignity of pessimism by demands for a quixotic perfection. Continuing to associate human worth with right action, they will desire to stay at the side of those they love and respect in a world that is also to be loved and respected because we are all together in it; and prefer its possibilities of warm contact and immediate activity to however pure a state of personal ecstasy that is bought at the price of isolation.¹³⁵

Once again, one cannot but wish that these were the words of Tarkington, for they constitute a cogent synthesis of his own literary creed concerning the contributive function of the writer in the preservation of a constructive social philosophy. Reanalysis of the statement only confirms its happy application to our subject. Fundamental throughout are Tarkington's insistence upon a realistic acceptance of both the good and the evil in man which includes the tacit admission that the bad does not "predominate over the good," Tarkington's resolution in upholding the basic dignity of man amid the degenerative forces of maldirected naturalism, Tarkington's determination to portray a humane humanity bound by ties of sentiment and sympathy into a community of social beings. Add to these our earlier expression of Tarkington's emphasis on the stylistic artistry of the creative writer and his plea for the admission of the esthetic into true literature, and one may see in

full terms what he considered the essential elements in a literary tradition capable of playing a significant role in society.

In 1916 a youthful Van Wyck Brooks issued a critical essay entitled "Letters and Leadership." At that time he was scornful of the "systematic optimism" he perceived in America and demanded a new attitude of "honest appraisal" and realistic integrity." In 1953, appalled by current literary trends, he cried, "Why continue this mad obsession with death and violence? Why preach disillusion and pessimism?"¹³⁶ In despair he urged, "Let's read more of St. Francis and less of St. Augustine," let's return to the "curative writers" like Dickens and Balzac, let's read The Good Earth, "a universal book...which conveys...a sense of the basic integrities on which societies are built."¹³⁷ The mature Brooks expresses here a number of opinions which have more than a tinge of Tarkington in them. "I suggest," he goes on, "that we need above all at present those who can restore for us a feeling for the true aims of living, who can remind us of the goodness in men, bring back the joy of life and give one a sense of human hope."¹³⁸ Brooks even laments the plight of sentiment and strongly defends "...the words that stand for all we value most,--courage, love, tenderness, happiness, hope and trust."¹³⁹

If Heaven is as close to mortals as Tarkington suspected, surely he must have smiled benignly at these words from the mellowed pen of Brooks. It would have been difficult for Tarkington himself to express more perfectly his lifelong dedication to these very attributes. Throughout a long and productive career he clung to these "sunshine aspects of life," suffered

slight and obloquy, and died under suspicion of artistic treason. Even today, nearly a decade after his death, Tarkington is a popular subject for deep silence among the academicians. Brooks notes in The Writer in America, "Let the best writer cease to produce for a decade and he is as dead as mutton to the critical eye, for no one continues to cherish all the good work he may have done, no one respects the finest outmoded author."¹⁴⁰

There is a pound of truth in this confession, but one should not take it at full weight. Critical standards do change across the years; popular tastes may not take that long. As Tarkington himself commented, "By our own yardsticks we select and judge the great of the past, and every succeeding period builds up certain dead artists; kicks down certain others."¹⁴¹ It is not for us to conjecture what will be Tarkington's literary position in the critical histories of American literature to come. At the time of his death an anonymous columnist in the then Saturday Review of Literature observed, "Future literary historians will not set him among the titans, but they will not ignore him."¹⁴² Candor forces one to admit that they will ignore many, even most, of his individual works; a prolific penman must expect that. The controlling motive throughout the present study has been to analyze Tarkington as both a literary craftsman and a practical idealist, although we have pointed out those spots where one should qualify his enthusiasms. To his old friend and publisher Barton Currie,

Tarkington had and has a preëminent place among our moderns, and he should survive when most of the passionate pilgrims of the bludgeon and machine-gun school of realistic satirists are cast aside as

agonizing bores. Broadly human and lovable personalities who give out all of themselves in their art have a way of outliving for centuries the grouching geniuses who owe their ephemeral fame to the brilliance of their malice and their skill in using new explosives.¹⁴³

Currie admitted his prejudice, however, and it is open to question whether anyone else would accord Tarkington "a preëminent place" among contemporary American authors.

Yet with him did go something unique in our national spirit which would serve us in good stead among the complexities of this Atomic Age. Bennett reports that in his pioneer study of Tarkington he called upon the editor of a magazine that had published much of Tarkington's fiction. "At the mention of Tarkington's name, he exclaimed, 'May God rest his soul-- he was the last American!'"¹⁴⁴ That prompted this outburst involves a goodly portion of this dissertation; for Tarkington was indeed a representative figure of our national character. That he was able to read the mass mind of America is amply attested by his perennial popularity for over four decades, and it should be noted that this was accomplished without pandering to the "dirt" appeal of much in contemporary letters. Hardin Craig was speaking about Shakespeare in the following quotation, but the thought has infinite applications:

If in general, the writer falls in with the best or even with the most widely held opinions of his time, he will, if his art is adequate, be what is called popular. If his thought has currency after he is dead, he will live on in literature. To what extent refined skill alone will operate as a means of making his art live after him, it is not for us to say, except this, that perdurable art seems to depend, in some measure at least, on perdurable thought.¹⁴⁵

Tarkington too, it will be recalled, asserted that "a master craftsman is not necessarily an artist" and that "there is both the how and the what in great literature."

As is true so often, the literary significance of Tarkington among future generations should rest upon his ideas and ideals as well as upon his works. Unlike Somerset Maugham, however, Tarkington left no Summing Up as a final resting-place for his "wisdom of a lifetime." In the absence of direct statement, therefore, the analyst turns perforce to two resources: first, representative statements in the Tarkington vein by kindred personalities in the world of writing; second, the characteristics of style and the thematic range of the novels themselves. With reference to this latter point it is well to remember that "the novel has become the dominant form of modern literature. We therefore demand from it that interpretation of life and of the process of living which we have hitherto demanded from poetry and from drama. We demand from it a view of human destiny and of the human predicament, and even though the answer comes very rarely, some hint of a solution."¹⁴⁶ With this in mind we have striven to allow Tarkington to speak for himself on every issue, directly or indirectly, although not infrequently we have drawn upon others to express what he would but did not say. Despite possible indiscretions in some situations, this latter expedient has seemed justified in terms of results.

By way of conclusion, in terms of a practical idealism, in terms of a basic optimism, in terms of a broad esthetics, in terms of a sound morality, Tarkington the novelist has much to offer which a negligent posterity might well pause to consider. "If we really care for the conservation of our national resources, those that essentially matter, we shall have a more than ordinary concern for the welfare of American literature, in which largely lies whatever hope our civilization has."¹⁴⁷ Despite a certain intellectual lightness to many of his novels; occasional lapses into melo-

drama, sentimentality, or coincidence; despite some over-simplification in technique or theme; a few inconsistencies in plot denouement and character development; despite all his shortcomings in one place or another, the ~~averall~~ level of his accomplishment is higher than many of his critics are willing to concede. Though only a handful from some three dozen titles will retain their reading popularity, his literary principles and his literary peaks in achievement merit a comfortable niche among our national letters. In some ways he passed his mature years as a writer in an alien environment. With a clarity of insight unperceived by his peers he observed the near-complete turn of a literary cycle. Now, quite as he prophesied, "Our revolution grows old, and there are foreshadowings against it."¹⁴⁸ Today, as we proceed into the second half of this "Century of Promise," we find ourselves turning to those very ideals and principles which Tarkington personified in his own life and in his fiction. It is a tribute to Tarkington the man that these principles and ideals emphasize that which is ennobling, virtuous, compassionate, and hopeful; and it is a tribute to Tarkington the artist that they enunciate that which is esthetically rich and rewarding. When the new "literature of power," as De Quincy termed it, rises from the spiritual and moral unrest of today, it is certain that it will contain the essence of Tarkington's literary principles and his ethical ideals.

(FOREWORD)

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(PART III)

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39. Ibid., p. ix.
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54. Ibid., p. 5.
55. Here, at least, Tarkington would go along with Mencken: "In brief, [a first-rate novel] is always a character-sketch. It may be more than that, but at bottom it is always a character sketch, or, if the author is genuinely of the imperial line, a whole series of them. More, it is a character sketch of an individual not far removed from the norm of the race. He may have his flavor of oddity, but he is never fantastic; he never violates the common rules of human action; he never shows emotions that are impossible to the rest of us." From "Essay in Pedagogy." Prejudices: Fifth Series. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, p. 219.
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A number of Tarkington's novels appear in several editions with varying pagination, and it has been deemed wisest here to list those works in the particular edition used in the thesis. To date, there is no definitive edition of the Tarkington writings, hence the variety in the listing. Included in Part II of this bibliography are both the principal Tarkington bibliographies (those by Currie and Russo), as well as later material within the Woodress biography. Since the duplication of these efforts seemed of dubious value, no attempt has been made here to adhere either to the organization or the comprehensiveness of these works. The resultant selectiveness is based solely on the controlling purposes of this study.

I

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