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the Salute. They all fit in somehow and together afford an ocular and intellectual demonstration of the eternal and God-given *fact* of Beauty.

So Venice consolidated the gains won through Palermo. It was to be architecture for the future if place could somehow be found for a temporary rene-gade, and it was now just a matter of getting back to Boston and first principles, and making that place in one way or another. Funds for maintenance were entirely gone and the sources hitherto relied upon for loans had ruthlessly shut down. I tried to think they were in league with destiny.

By way of Verona and the Brenner Pass to Innsbruck with its valley castles, in one of which, Schloss Matzen, there was found the wide and genial hospitality of the *hochwohlgeboren*, and so to Switzerland and the through-train for the Calais-Dover boat. This was the end of apprenticeship; in some way architecture as a profession would have to be accomplished.

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( 1935-36 )

Irving Babbitt, Undergraduate

W. F. GIESE

IT WAS at the end of our freshman year at Harvard that I first met Irving Babbitt. I had seen him during the preceding months from time to time in a class in Greek, but only at a distance, as he boldly exposed himself in the front-row outposts, while I prudently dug in in the more populous rear rows where there was a supposed safety in numbers. Seated in solitary prominence, bent over his desk and book, he would every now and then look up suddenly to propound some recondite question to the new-fledged doctor who presided, and who was not yet sufficiently panned in philologic omniscience to answer as many questions as an ingenious undergraduate, bent on mischief, could ask and, to the tutor's manifest discomfiture, could even contrive by subtle indirection to answer for him. I was more favourably impressed by Babbitt's learning than by the use he made of it. Out of sympathy for the baited pedagogue, I had dubbed this over-helpful freshman "Assistant Professor Babbitt", and he was so known in the back rows.

One afternoon, quite unexpectedly, he dropped in at my room. Tall, handsome, athletic in build, but with a marked stoop that hinted of bookish pursuits, very blond, with a roseate complexion that a girl (in those days) might have envied, he was an arresting apparition. He had a preoccupied and earnest expression that was distinctively his own, a certain nonchalant gait, and a visible unconcern with any dandia-

cal pretensions. A foe to Bohemianism even at that date, he nevertheless half-unconsciously steered pretty close to the coast of Bohemia. A defender of form and convention in the name of decorum, he was apt to be a bit elastic in his observance of them, for his innate love of independence always wrought mightily in him. This was an unacknowledged concession to temperament, for in theory he always maintained that it was only by observing the petty conventions that one could earn, and that hardly, the right to reconsider the great ones. He was an original figure, even at first sight a little outside any current category of undergraduate individualism, visibly intent on an inner life of his own and undistracted by the merely temporal and local.

He came upon a little group of us chatting about the usual nothings of the hour. The conversation, however, soon lost all trace of conventional tameness. Propositions such as usually go unquestioned, or meet with mild assent or short-lived scrutiny, were stared into with startling penetration and decisiveness, as if the essential nature of things were a matter of vital importance even to freshmen. It was evident that a lover of truth — and of analysis — had descended upon us. Superficial remarks were convicted of futility; more serious ventures, of inadequacy; and as usual with Babbitt, the loose peripheral threads of discourse were inexorably drawn together to converge on problems of life and conduct. For Babbitt, as for Matthew Arnold, conduct was always three-fourths of life — in fact, so very nearly four-fourths that I am persuaded that the disaffected among his readers have for the most part risen in revolt not so

much against his ideas as against a seriousness that concedes so little margin for the unrenounced frivolity of human nature. The conversation ranged over a wide field of thought, ancient and modern, and shunned neither the heights nor the depths — I remember translating for the benefit of my guest one or two poems of Leopardi and exciting his admiration for the poet's dream of immersion in the infinite,

*M'è dolce naufragar in questo mare.*

On this occasion, as always, he was quick to exhibit the irrepressible militancy which a callow sentimentalist, steeped in Rousseau, was bound to provoke in any encounter with such a hard-headed apostle of the rational and the superrational. I was in the period of exuberant immaturity when one is waiting to be tried out for a part in the human drama, while he had been cast for his and was already playing it with a power that makes it a little hard to distinguish the débutant from the master that he was to become.

The conversation left me vaguely overwhelmed, profoundly impressed, and at the same time a bit disquieted, as a naïve and unfledged ephebe might have been after enjoying the painful pleasure of having his little stock of conventional ideas subjected to analysis by Babbitt's great model, that merciless dialectician who haunted the Athenian market-place and amused himself by insidiously removing the underpinning from the random philosophies by which insufficiently inquiring minds professed to live and die. The experience must have been very similar, except that Babbitt was even more intent on convicting as well as convincing his interlocutor.

This first experience was to be almost daily renewed during the two years that we spent together as sophomores and seniors. What he said has been, except in the most general outlines, obliterated by nearly half a century of time, but how vividly I recall his downrightness of manner, the uncompromising directness of his ever-recurrent *argumentum ad hominem*, the destructiveness of his polemic, and his staunch refusal to make any charitable concessions to that weakness of human nature which makes us cling to even our most demonstrably false or fragile notions as infinitely precious simply because they are our own. For Babbitt opinions were no more individual goods and chattels than light or air. This argumentative fervour did not make for diplomacy. I once heard him, when an instructor in French, say to the chairman of his department that French was only a cheap and nasty substitute for Latin. Such outspokenness often obfuscated interlocutors at first encounter. "I am not thin-skinned," he used to say, "and I do not readily adjust myself to people who are."

It has always remained a riddle to me why this unshorn individualism should ever have troubled anybody after the first salutary shock — the whole-souled innocence behind even its most drastic operations was so obvious. It lay in that superior openness of nature, that remoteness from all malice, that magnanimity which was Babbitt's central trait, and which made his homage to truth so purely and so fascinatingly impersonal. This detachment could by no means be confounded with that light-hearted indifference which so readily usurps its place. It was really the animating principle of his thought, whose guiding

spirit was a constant moderation. This has not been commonly noted even by his avowed disciples, yet no one can overpraise this quality which gives to all his writing, in spite of its practical and almost hortatory trend, such a stamp of authority and dignity. It is noteworthy that even the most exasperating misinterpretations of unsympathetic reviewers never elicited personal retort from him — his concern was solely with ideas and their application. He was from the start essentially a philosopher, I am tempted to say a born philosopher — if I dared use so deterministic an expression to characterize one so hostile to deterministic formulas.

Such was the impression he made in those early days, quite as distinctly as later. He seemed to have achieved maturity at a bound, without needing to go through a maturing process. Some of the great intellectualists that he studied, such as Taine and Renan, were apt at the same age to reveal their immaturity by an unreasonable idolatry of reason and a canonization of mere learning under the name of a "sacred curiosity". One of my most distinct recollections is of his reiterated attacks on the omnivorous reading incident to the first lively contact with the things of the mind. He would emit startling maxims such as this: "The function of books is to teach us to despise them." That has an obscurantist ring, but the maxim was evidently interpreted in a soundly conservative fashion by one who renewed his contempt for books by daily and hourly contact with them, though always on a markedly selective basis.

He would elaborate no less startling arguments as to the limitations of the intellect and the vanity of

what he mockingly called the attempt to bottle the infinite. This indictment he brought particularly against ontologic and cosmologic theories: they were only illicit prying of the inquisitive mind into the unknowable, intellectually pompous rather than edifying. He would fortify his argument by dilating on Buddha's proscription of the "unthinkables", about which mere speculation was bound to prove eternally sterile. He was already deeply immersed in Buddhism, and its influence in shaping his thought is so plain from the start that other influences (barring Aristotle) need hardly be invoked except as enriching tributaries. The ultimate convictions behind his humanism (which seemed then only an emerging aspect of his philosophy) are to be fully understood only in this Oriental light, however Aristotelian his analytic method. Buddhism preaches the extinction of all desire, and is thus radically anti-romantic. When I ventured to cast a doubt on the moral efficacy of such un-European doctrines, he humorously exclaimed: "What! You don't think Buddhism a good religion — a religion that has fourteen hells!" When, as a new-made bachelor of arts, he applied for a post as teacher (under a certain Dr. Fell!) he jestingly consulted me as to the propriety of setting himself down as a Unitarian or a Buddhist.

He had already laid down the main lines of his thought, and with such sureness that what one might call its orthodox canon was already implicit in its earliest formulations. I never had the sensation later of finding any real discontinuity or marked reversal of opinion on any large matter of doctrine. There were, however, some things that tended to recede in

later days into a discreet background, which, possibly because of my stubborn recalcitrance, seemed then to be emphasized overmuch. Though my scepticism could win no recognition except that of confutation, I offered a convenient compendium of what he then and always set down as the two main fallacies of the typical modern. I had, like most aspiring freshmen, what is flatteringly called an open mind — what more truthfully should be called an empty mind, one that exchanges salutation and converse with any ideas that move up and down the main-travelled road. In those late Victorian days there were, especially prominent, two such wayfarers, the naturalism that leaned on Darwin, and the sentimentalism that derived from Rousseau. I thus furnished the perfect strawman for gladiatorial practice. Naturalism and supernaturalism, free-will and determinism, innovation and tradition, romanticism and good sense, these formed the recurrent matter of argument. During these two years of unbroken intercourse, our serious conversation circled a hundred times about these themes. We would set out in the early evening for a long walk, as often as not three hours in duration, the stretch between Harvard Square and Arlington being all too short to span the interval between premise and conclusion.

This course in peripatetic philosophy would usually wind up with an epilogue of half an hour at my doorstep, where I was left at last, driven in from all my outposts and in complete retreat all along the line. But the transformation of fixed prejudices is a notably slow process. Overnight the tightly drawn threads of persuasion would mysteriously unravel, and the very

next evening the old argument, emerging from some new angle, would start all over again. The naturalistic Will to Sleep imposed by healthy adolescence, and the fatigue of a prolonged walk, must account for my failure to jot down in their freshness these earliest expositions of Babbitt's philosophy. So far as I know, he never met with a Boswell, and all one can do is to extol, without reproducing it, that golden flow of talk which, with all the variety and substance of his writing, had a lightness of touch and an effervescent play of wit that might well incline one to prefer these spontaneous outpourings to their more formal embodiment.

It must not be inferred, however, that he had any need of the spur of opposition to draw out his powers. They were always at his command and did not wait on occasion. He created his own occasions. The stream of his talk was borne in easeful and swelling volume down from its high mountain-cradle in Pamere (I mean from the soaring heights of Brahminic or Buddhistic speculation), to circle around any casual theme, and the majestic river floated on through unobstructing areas of tributary silence, winding its way through the most richly varied intellectual landscape till it immersed itself at last in some far-seen and all-embracing philosophic conclusion. This Oriental strain in him seemed then even more pronounced than later when the practical trend of his teaching imposed on it a more subdued and modernized exterior. In this mood he would talk for hours on some freshly read volume of Spence Hardy or Rhys Davids or Oldenburg, or on this or that aspect of the ethical absolutism and the abysmal psychologic insight

of the East. Whole evenings would go to Apollonius of Tyana, to Plotinus, or to Porphyry, whom he was studying in the huge and forbidding octavos of the Didot edition. Or deserting his specially favoured fields, he would discourse with equal zest and readiness on Japanese art, or Greek tragedy, or Goethe's *Faust*, or Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, or, digressing yet farther, he would hold forth for an hour or two on a volume of Eliphas Lévi (of all men!) and move on from this to a disquisition on the precarious basis of our modern scientific orthodoxy, or from the analysis of such a book as Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* to an excursus on the psychology of the latter-day American — without prejudice to a tribute in passing to the real talent of Whitman for prose (although he found this talent even more unmistakably revealed in his verse than in his prose).

But I must beware of dilating too much on Babbitt's extraordinary conversations, though I am convinced that he deserves a high rank among the great practitioners of the art. An enthusiastic eulogy of mine, when repeated to him, elicited the dry comment, "Hum! he makes me out a sort of talking-machine!" Let us return to the substance of his talk.

The supernatural he defended to the last ditch. Dogmatic denial of it he overruled even more peremptorily than Dr. Johnson overruled the sceptical lady who scoffed at serious consideration of ghosts: "Madam, this is a question which, after five thousand years, is yet undecided; a question, whether in theology or philosophy, one of the most important that can come before the human understanding." To Babbitt it seemed at any rate less undecided. He had been

immersed in childhood in an atmosphere of spiritualism, and had absolutely none of the common inhibitions as to belief in what transcends ordinary experience. He would talk in the most matter-of-fact manner of having seen tables, nay, even pianos, float in the air, and used to laugh away my doubts of Madam Blavatsky's power of levitating herself piano-fashion into space. He professed himself so inured to the idea of supernatural apparitions as to be quite prepared to see, any night, without the slightest tremor of surprise, a ghost standing at his bedside. In order to give me a "healthy shock", he even took me on a personally conducted tour to a celebrated medium who had favoured the New York preacher, Dr. Parkhurst, with spectral manifestations. Unfortunately, her husband was unwilling to have her subject herself to the strain of evoking spirits from the vasty deep for the edification of two such obscure pilgrims through eternity, and so I remained without the shock. Babbitt was quite as uncompromising in vindicating the possibility of miracles, rejecting as purely empirical the argument from individual experience (or rather, non-experience).

This startlingly crude supernaturalism was, I suspected, in great part a dialectical challenge to a naturalism unable to refute it. Confucius refused to talk about spiritual beings. In later years, Babbitt emulated this reticence. Thanks to Buddhistic influences, rather than to modern rationalism, the last vestige of theology was eliminated from his reasoning. In the later formulations of his thought he gave to the supernatural so little prominence that many, in fact most, of his readers fail to note that it still sub-

sists as a mist-enshrouded Ultima Thule on the far edge of his humanism. There remained always his faith in a higher will, his mystic concept of an inner check, which was for him one of the primary data of experience. But beyond this, in the direction of dogma, he refused to go. Emerson's dictum that the man who makes immortality a dogma is already fallen was one of Babbitt's commonest quotations in those early days.

Determinism was the kindred heresy which drew his nightly fires. It spurred him into making the most uncompromising assertions of the freedom of the will. He was undeniably given to pushing this to its last reaches. He even seemed to believe in an absolute hegemony of the soul over the body: if the coursers ran away with the rider, the fault was never to be imputed to equine perversity. There was lack not of skill but of will. Again and again he repeated the un-Platonic couplet,

*Der Mensch in seinem dunkeln Drange  
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst.*

If concrete examples of what might seem the ineluctable malice of nature were propounded, they were incontinently brushed aside as unprofitable mysteries not to be explained and still less to be dwelt on. The persistence of this attitude is notable: in all his work Babbitt seems nowhere to take cognizance of nature's unhappy trick of thrusting a spoke into the psychic wheels. He would listen to no physiological explanations for spiritual waywardness. He inclined to sympathize with the stoical extremists who held that a philosopher may be so patient with the toothache as

to disarm it of its pain. He would even, when he thought it was time for another healthy shock, cite strange and bewildering examples from his beloved Indian saints, Brahminic and Buddhistic, who took up their residence between bonfires, or held their arms horizontally outstretched for a twelvemonth at a time, or had themselves buried alive only to reissue from the earth a week later as much alive as before and holier than ever. The unquestioned free will was the most sacred tenet of his ethical creed. The determinist was for him a lost soul. The invoking of hereditary limitations as a brake on aspiration and enterprise, and the "indolent inbreeding of temperamental bias" he roundly denounced. "We never know what we can do till we try," he used to repeat.

His creed was nothing if not strenuous. He was always pleading a cause, and all his excursions led back to a definite point of view. He deprecated that intellectual ardour which bristles into activity at any random challenge. He had in this respect little resemblance to his lifelong favourite, Dr. Johnson, who was "equally able and willing to maintain the system of Newton or Descartes, and who sometimes exalted vegetables to sense and sometimes degraded animals to mechanism" in order to feed an argument. I used to rally him on his admiration for his burly Tory, so full of intemperate and paradoxical sallies, who in scorn of logic demolished Berkeley by kicking a stone, who professed not to care half-a-guinea what government he lived under, and who yawned over *Lycidas*! Babbitt's defence of Johnson brushed aside such irrelevancies and rested on his fundamental good sense which steered clear of every form of romantic

illusion, on the firm and reverent grasp of first principles which routed all the fallacies of self-love. Babbitt always measured men by character more than by intellectual prowess and brilliancy; and in respect of will and character he claimed for the American, at least for the New Englander, a certain superiority to the more intellectual European. He seemed vaguely to feel that there was something wrong about me, and at last hit upon the cause: I was fundamentally European — a pure intellectualist, he added damningly. Being only a sophomore, I found this somehow soothing. Originality for originality's sake he looked askance at, and virtuosity was with him almost a term of reproach, a sort of juggling dexterity in tossing up three or four ideas in the air at the same time. For him the really original thinkers of the past were those who have accredited the commonplaces by which men live and have given these a patent of nobility.

He was by no means oblivious of the fact that this miracle is hardly to be operated even by the greatest thinkers except through the magic of style; but in his secret heart he seemed to suspect in this, as Renan did, something of frivolity. He scented a questionable dilettanteism in the artist's love of expression for expression's sake, of words for their music or their remote suggestiveness. He enjoyed these fine flavours of literature, but incidentally and in eschewing the audible ecstasies of the literary epicure. He was little given to discussing style, imagery, technique, and the allurements of art as such; and he was from the first so committed to the classic ideal that he gave short shrift to any kind of romantic overflow or decorative opulence. He carried, stored away in his capacious

memory, many examples of curious felicity in style; but more commonly it was substance, not manner, that interested him. The variety and the aptness of his quotations are, I think, without parallel. They fit so inevitably into the structure of his thought that they seem to have been originally conceived to serve his purposes. The art of quotation — if it be an acquired art — might be learned from him. His aim was to put the universal experience of mankind, its collective wisdom, behind his ideas, and to make his ideas formulations and summaries of it. His use of other men's thoughts thus represents a research as strenuous as thinking itself.

His own manner of speech was of the substantial order, straightforward, unadorned, unimaged, owing its flashes of colour either to quotations artfully woven or to the antics of a playful humour, which in lighter vein regaled itself by caricaturing and distorting any illogical statement or any lapse from good sense in one's hurried interjections. He had, in dialoguing, a mischievous fondness for playing out the game of argument to a finish and inflicting a sudden and disastrous checkmate on any unwary advances of his opponent — a process not always relished by those whose sense of humour was less active than his own.

This scorn of ornament, of what he disdainfully called *fioritura*, was evident in his college theme-writing: it carried not a whit more of superfluous epithet or wordy magnificence than his published work, in which the ideas are so closed-packed that some readers seem to overlook them. This exclusive cult of the strenuous style that never stoops from

work to play, involved undoubtedly a certain unacknowledged feud with the graces. It has even led some, who read Shelley and Blake with more discerning eyes than they turn on Babbitt, to assume that he read the poets only professionally and in a harshly Puritanic spirit. The frequency and the aptness of his verse quotations are enough to prove that he read the poets much more sympathetically than any unimaginative person would consent to do. One might more plausibly assume that it was the prose writers that he read professionally. The truth is that he read verse with delight as well as edification. A specialist in the poetry of solitude, I found myself much put to it to hold my own when we drifted one evening into the frivolous sport of capping verses on this theme. Babbitt was in those days rapturously (though with a decorously intellectual rapture) reading *Faust* for the first time, and innumerable bits of Goethean flotsam came to intermingle in his talk with bits of Lucretius, and of Arnold whom he greatly affected — far more than those idols of the age, Tennyson and Browning. On the other hand, Byron's superb power then and always seduced him more than such a strenuously anti-romantic moralist should, in good logic, have allowed. The spiritual unrest, the morbid melancholy, and even the note of revolt, in these poets, he seemed to find just a little more sympathetic or significant than he did after he had grown more completely a stranger to even the vicarious visitations of such dangerous guests.

Any casual chat would recall pertinent passages or apposite stanzas or resplendent lines from some well-thumbed and ruthlessly penciled volume on his shelves,



and when the arena of conversation had been transferred from the outdoor world to the study, the next step was to turn to the source and drink from the fountain-head. In this way he was forever pulling down the wit and wisdom of the ages from his shelves. He was not so ready to put it back again; and table, chairs, and floor were thickly littered with volumes, not a few of them eloquently open. This great lover of order was catholic enough to love disorder as well. He was fond of quoting the subtle saying of Charles Eliot Norton, that selfishness, driven out from the central stronghold, is apt to take refuge on the surface. With Babbitt, order, on the contrary, remained confined to the central stronghold. His "goody", incapable of such fine distinctions, reproachfully told him that his room looked as if it had been struck by a cyclone.

Very much alive to experience and to its significance, Babbitt always looked askance at the cloistered virtues that are invested with such peculiar sanctity among the worshippers of learning. He was not loath to work hard to learn their recondite secrets, but he inclined to treat his possession of these as one secret more. It was particularly the philologists that we met at first hand, and it was their exaggerated emphasis on research and their neglect of humane purpose and ideas that made him rebel against their *strengwissenschaftliche Methode*. At Paris he astonished the *savants* with whom he studied at the *Ecole des Langues Orientales* by devouring with breakneck speed page after page of the Sanskrit writings instead of blasting his way into them by slow grammatical mining and sapping. They respected his accomplish-

ments, however, for he formed life-long friendships with several of the most distinguished among them, and was even urged, before his year of study was over, to devote himself to Oriental languages in the expectation of finding a place in the school. But his allegiance to the Greeks and Greek humanism prevailed.

Like most original minds he did not consent to owe any major debts to minds that were not original, and he consequently did not so much pass through the hands of his professors at Harvard as slip through them. Norton, whom he knew only later, was of course the exception. Harvard had at that time a shining galaxy of classical scholars, but they were in general specialists of that straiter sect which the prestige of Germany had set in the high places. Babbitt was to speak of them and their colleagues in the modern field as the Philological Syndicate. While never refusing to pay high tribute to their scholarship, the exacting standards of which he emulated, he took their pedagogy half humorously and half satirically. He especially rallied the professional tone of awe with which they discussed their learned mysteries and the contented narrowness of vision which confinement in didactic grooves is so apt to generate. He was perpetually girding at their pedantry — though he consented to suffer from it as little as was humanly possible. They accordingly viewed him with suspicion. When I once ventured to extol his Latinity to one of these learned pundits, I was silenced by the tart rejoinder: "I know nothing of it — he elected my course, and he has not attended above two or three times during the whole year." I fear this was

mathematically exact, and not many of the professor's colleagues could have boasted of being better treated. Babbitt was warned by the registrar that he had more cuts than any man in Harvard. He received this certification of non-attendance with a visible satisfaction that hardly suggested the future advocate of convention and discipline. It was the one honorific distinction of his college career that he seemed to wear without due humility.

To us tame villatic fowl who religiously conformed with prescription he used to say: "We receive two educations, the one that is given us and the one that we give ourselves." He did not propose to let the former unduly crowd the latter. He thus had the appearance of being indolent. It was only an appearance. More than once, on dropping into his room, I found him lying on the floor, flat on his stomach and kicking up his heels in the air, his head propped on alternating hands, poring over Plato in the Greek, without notes. On a later occasion, during a hurried business trip across the continent he read eight hundred pages of Plato in transit. The prescribed tasks of the college routine he executed perfunctorily, though well. Sophomore English themes were due at a fixed hour. Babbitt usually made a mad rush to get his lucubration into the box (the ink barely dried) during the last five minutes. One day — it was at the end of our senior year — he asked me "to lend him my moral support" by accompanying him to Professor Goodwin's house. It was a matter of unusual urgency — a "forensic" on Aristotle, overdue! The great Hellenist calmly rebuffed the apologetic disciple: "My vacation began yesterday, Mr. Babbitt."

"But my graduation depends on this!" "I can't help that, Mr. Babbitt — your paper should have been handed in on time." Alas! the convinced apostle of discipline had encountered that not always agreeable thing — a convinced disciplinarian. The faculty, happily, was less convinced, and Babbitt was graduated, over Aristotle's dead body, with high honours.

His attitude toward the hierarchy of professors was on the whole one of aloofness — his interests were different from theirs. How did he regard his fellow-students? He was not a recluse. Very human (as becomes a humanist) and intensely alive (as becomes everybody), he always exalted the active and stirring qualities that go to make the accomplished citizen of the world. *L'honnête homme qui ne se pique de rien* was his ideal. Yet, though he picked up a fair number of casual acquaintances at college, he formed few ties. He was deeply impressed with the sense of man's ineluctable aloneness in the universe. The phrase of Arnold's that he quoted most frequently was "the imperious lonely thinking power". He put the social virtues on a lower plane than the virtues of the inner life, and he saw in the common inversion of this scale of values a main source of the growing superficiality of the American temper. Graces and charm, chivalry and sentiment, he held, should be taken for granted rather than magnified by dwelling on them, lest the external refinements replace what they pretend to adorn. The social instinct was not for him a wholly self-justifying one. He scorned mere gregariousness as much as Thoreau himself; he felt no need of rubbing noses to keep socially conscious.

He was the most even-tempered of mortals, never

out of humour, never bored, never craving change or diversion, or company except on his own terms, those of intellectual companionship. His high spirits, combined with his philosophic imperturbability, absolutely excluded those ups and downs of mood and those moping melancholies by which youth contrives to set off a too insistent enjoyment of its own riches. He needed no such cordials or contrasts. He found life as he led it, calmly and contemplatively, a sufficiently varied, adventure, and could see a windfall in any random experience. He was far too active inwardly to need outside activities. He joined no clubs or societies; and he took no part in any sport, though here I suspected him of repressed inclinations. He was no theatre-goer. Above all he was intensely averse to sentimental fervours. When he found a score of George Sand's novels lined up on my shelves, he hinted grave doubts as to my future, and, as regards the novels, he was ready to echo George III on Shakespeare: "Sad stuff, eh! sad stuff!" So, a dozen years later, when he found among his wedding presents a set of the Browning Letters, he exclaimed: "Good God! how can anybody think I am going to wade through all that slush!"

He saw in our novel-writing and novel-reading a symptom of decadence, a narcotic for stilling thought, a cheap device for the vicarious enjoyment of emotion, "erotic, neurotic, and tommyrotic". I never knew him to buy a novel but once: when we had been tramping for a month in the Green Mountains, he added to the meagre store of Greek texts that we carried in our knapsacks a copy of his favourite *Pendennis*, which he preferred to reread rather than

break new ground. His references to the novel are few and far between, and his taste was decidedly for the masculine kind. In his work Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, are not once mentioned. It is true Dickens is mentioned but once, and Meredith and Trollope and Conrad and Turgenieff not at all. If he made a place for the literature of recreation, he made none for the literature of relaxation. Why relax, for example, by reading detective stories? Why not meditate — like Buddha under the bo-tree? Yet he too would relax, perhaps once in a twelvemonth, and then his meditation insensibly turned to revery: he heard the temple-bells of Mandalay and actually dreamed of an Arcadia, a hermitage in Buddhistic Burma, on the banks of the Irrawaddy. Alas! though he urged me month after month to join him in a tramp through Europe, and accused me of "quiet obstinacy" because I perforce refused, he never invited me to share his hut in Burma. Was this because I had confessed that Buddhism, for all its fourteen hells, left me cold?

Woman, the heroine of fiction and the not uncommon idol of undergraduate hearts (as *Pendennis* proves), had no shrine in his. To one who could linger delighted over the long-drawn sweetness of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, he seemed like a reincarnation of the Hippolytus of Euripides. He took a perverse pleasure in playing the part. At any unguarded display of Occidental softness, he would quote a *sloka* from some Oriental ascetic, denouncing woman as a lure, a diabolic temptress, a perambulating illusion, a bag of bones — but enough! The Orient can wag a naughtier tongue than we against woman. If we

chanced in our peregrinations to run across some extra-studious looking girl, let loose from the Radcliffe Annex, he would indulge in unflattering animadversions, which were easily stretched to include the New England woman and even woman in general. He did not foresee that he was destined to teach the Radcliffe girls for forty years (with emphatic appreciation of their studious turn), or that a kindly fate should lead him to select from among them the devoted helpmate and companion of his after life. He justified these ungallant attacks on the fair sex on the principle of the "healthy shock", and held that long exposure to the infectious atmosphere of George Sand's romances demanded allopathic treatment.

In short, though not unsociable, he was, as regards sentiment, himself very much a New Englander. Kindly, courteous, and practically helpful he was, but reserved to a degree that sometimes led the uninitiated to think him shy. As to friendship, he, though only on rare occasions, expressed himself with something more of romantic warmth; he was even capable, in a letter, at a safe distance (from Spain), and after an inexcusably prolonged silence, of apologising for not writing with more expansiveness; after which perilous approximation toward Rousseauism, he recoiled into objectivity and discreet picturing of local colour and customs, and the letter would end — to be followed by another in three months, or maybe six. "A frightful amount of time," he used to say, "is wasted in frivolous letter-writing." It is true he pushed his concessions to sentiment so far as to send me a copy of Espronceda, the most frenetic of romantic poets.

His notion of friendship was exalted to the level of antique magnanimity, as one learned on putting it to the test, but it was severe rather than indulgent. He eschewed flattery, even eulogy (save of the absent), and maintained a sometimes tantalizing detachment. He would point out one's faults and blunders with a fine acumen; but one's virtues, he felt, would sufficiently mirror themselves in consciousness without extraneous help. He would shake hands with athletic emphasis; but he never slapped you on the back or called you *old man* — which is perhaps a defect in a sophomore. But in so sage a sophomore, this was, when properly comprehended, a kind of virtue: you could take all his tenders for true pay. The offices of friendship constituted for him the essence of friendship, and if he so rarely translated his good-will into words, this was because he took it so magnificently for granted. He was to his intimates, in the trite words of the old dictum, a guide and philosopher as well as friend; and a friend, he was fond of repeating, should be a thorn in the side of his friends. He played this part with more vigour than abandonment; with a little provocation he could even be a thorn in both sides. His critical faculty made it an easy task, while his sharp-edged wit and aptness at retort made reciprocity anything but easy.

Yet as a serious moralist, he treasured up really edifying observations for future consideration. They had to be pushed, however, with some gallantry, past his outer defenses, which were always in good order. Once I ventured to suggest that his carriage was increasingly stooping: "Not at all," he interrupted, "but I have to stoop when I talk to a little runt like you",

and his seventy-odd inches rose like a tower above my sixty-seven. Again when I diplomatically remarked that *our* handwriting fell a little short of the Spencerian standard, he epigrammatically reminded me that modesty, like charity, begins at home. He did not by any means belong to the race of those who are, in Sainte-Beuve's words, *nés disciples*: he was a born leader. You speedily felt that you were in his hands — he never consciously delivered himself into yours. Nature — and a very efficacious grace super-vening upon nature — had decreed that he should be Kung-fu-tze and you only Hui or Yu; you might even be Yuan Zang, whom the master once kicked in the shins for a breach of decorum.

The temptation to turn the studious life into the sedentary life did not exist for him. I doubt if any one that knew Babbitt ever thought of him as sitting down: he seemed to be always standing or moving. For a half-dozen hours indoors he always made amends by an hour or two out of doors. He remained an indefatigable walker, as Cambridge and all its environs could attest. He even, to economize time, became a runner, and for years took his exercise in this strenuous form of super-pedestrianism. In Paris, at the midnight hour, the police about the Luxembourg Gardens mistook for a robber pursued by his victim what proved to be Babbitt and his gymnastic convert, the Norwegian mathematician Palmblad, circling the park at full speed. At Cambridge, a good three decades later, a startled Irishman, spying over the top of a trench a rapidly flying figure, was told by a better-posted comrade, "It's only that damned professor!"

A devotee of the outdoor life, Babbitt was also a

lover of nature — and of the primitive! He might decry the primitivism of the sophisticated modern, the *rusticus in urbe* who fabricates it calmly seated at his desk; he cherished a more genuine and rugged primitivism of his own. He might in the winter season of lectures and conferences fulminate against Rousseau's return to nature, but when summer with its larger liberty came again, he invariably returned to nature himself, and made the New England lakes and mountains his fair-weather friends. He loved nature, not in the naturalist's minutely observant fashion, for which he had little gift, but in a large, acceptant, and joyous manner, that had in it a touch of the Homeric. He had a relish for spirited contact with primeval mountain and forest and sea. A hint of danger too did not come amiss. When I took him to task for swimming straight seaward in defiance of currents and undertow, he pleaded guilty to one form — though only one — of romanticism, the romanticism of adventure. It was this, no doubt, along with the more potent desire to know at first hand the cities and minds of men, that led him to spend his junior year tramping with a classmate from Havre to Gibraltar (in the blouse of an *ouvrier français*) and from Naples to the North Sea.

It should be apparent that Babbitt tempered with a constant infusion of humour a philosophy that viewed with suspicion any wayward indulgence of the play-instinct in art or in life. His sense of humour was so alert that it enlivened even his most intellectual conversation and filled all the interstices in the business of life. With him humour was the spice of life just as decidedly as gravity was its substance. Both

remained intact to the end. Under the learned professor the eternal adolescent with his keen relish for the comic was perpetually reappearing, as lively as he had been even in that remoter past than the one known to me, when he wrote a funny column for *Texas Siftings*, or when he mingled on terms of equality, fraternity, and brutality with New York street-arabs and gave with zest and received with sage unconcern the inevitable black eyes and bloody noses, or when, turned cowboy on his uncle's ranch, he amused himself by pulling a retiring rattlesnake out of its hole by the tail and whirling it around his head. Evidently the romanticism of adventure is not without dangers, almost as great as falling in love or plunging into revery. To be complete, let me add that the learned professor pre-existed in the adolescent. When still in the High School, Babbitt was reading Sophocles and Horace and dreaming of the philosophic life while scrawling over the margins of his text-books the Horatian maxim *Sapere aude*, and even carried his audacity so far as to plan a new version of the *Iliad*.

His lively humour was not merely awake to the impress of wry and risible comicalities, but was actively open to their appeal, ready to extract them perforce from the most unpromising materials or to inject them into what seemed altogether hopeless ones. This was one of his minor modes of using that imagination which he made such a central power in human nature. I remember with uncomfortable qualms how he one evening lured me into Boston to hear a certain Hiram Erastus Butler hold forth on I know not what subvariety of Oriental mysticism. The sage failed to turn up, but the audience, voluble

as such exotic groups always are, grew vocal on its own account, and the air was soon thick with theosophy. One troubled soul, baffled by this display of intensive familiarity with the arcana of deity, blankly asked: "How do you people define God, anyway?" Such a lapse into the merely elementary instantly brought to their feet half a score of God-intoxicated adepts, open-mouthed and vociferous. Babbitt, with laughter shaking both his sides, nudged me in the ribs, and whispered (audibly, I fear): "Ten people who can define God!" His recurrent and violent relapses into laughter punctuated all the rest of the programme. Luckily the defining of God proved so absorbing that our indecorous behaviour did not entail expulsion from this paradise of mystics. The episode had a sequel. I can still recall Babbitt's ironic demeanour when next day he brought me a clipping from the morning *Herald*, which explained the absence of Hiram Erastus from the theosophic conciliabulum: he had decamped with the cash-box! I hope that I reminded Babbitt of his oft-repeated doctrine that mystics usually have a keen sense of the practical.

The situation repeated itself a few years later when we were in Paris together, and visited the oral examination of a brilliant young *agrégé*. His well-nigh perfect English accent made his few lapses only the more striking. In particular, he pronounced *all* as *ole*. "Anglo-Saxon," he recited, "has three genders: masculine for *ole* male beings, feminine for *ole* female beings, and neuter for *ole* things without any sex." It was an appropriate moment for observing Dante's precept, "*Guarda, e passa*". But Babbitt was at once convulsed

with ill-suffocated laughter (not incommunicable), and regained his composure so intermittently and withal so unsuccessfully that our immunity from ejection can only be ascribed to French politeness. The frowning examiners (Beljame was one of them), in view of Babbitt's blond floridity, probably set us down, in this atmosphere of Anglo-Saxonism, as atavistic Anglo-Saxons, void of decorum and not amenable to discipline.

Babbitt was even capable (though not without a fair measure of provocation) of laughing at himself as well as at others. At one time he became interested in the genealogy of his family — the Earl of Shaftesbury was reputed to be in the ancestral line. Babbitt related with much hilarity how instead of such escutcheoned progenitors, he had traced a prosaic line of respectable burgesses, varied only by the unexpected apparition of the tragedienne Charlotte Cushman, of an early settler who had been killed by the Indians while hiding up a tree with his dog barking at the foot of it, and of yet another ancestor who was held up in his epitaph as a warning example of churlish miserliness. The genealogical researches were dropped at this point. But in general he was, like most of us, more ready to laugh at others — on occasion even at his own father, though this did not prevent him from endorsing Confucius on filial piety. When I mischievously contrasted his realistic judgments of human nature with his socialistic father's amiable *omnium gatherum* expansiveness, he unduly remarked: "You can't size up these eueptic lovers of mankind in this off-hand fashion — you should see my father working his way through the

crowd to get a seat in the Elevated!" I never did; but I remember vividly how one evening Doctor Babbitt reported that he had just met a very remarkable man, a man with a very remarkable scheme — for doing away with money! "Bah! I've met a lot of men who know how to do away with money," rejoined his son dryly — and the conversation dried up too. If Babbitt ever dreamed of Utopias, it must have been in his cradle. He was, at the age of twenty, a realist of long standing.

This realism is the core of his thinking. Its whole aim is to lay bare the residue of truth essential to wise living from the parasitic growths under which the lust of knowledge, of power, and of sensation have hidden it. Only a deep and earnest nature with a fixed ethical centre illumined by the insight of genius could disengage and embody it in such monumental form. It is thus that he conceived life, and it is thus that he lived. His whole career is unified by this singleness of purpose. Despite his clear understanding of human nature and its always half-hearted response to such high summons, he fought off disillusion and discouragement and strove to the very end with splendid gallantry to impress his strenuous ideals on an Epicurean and sensation-hunting age. He was absorbed in his task to a rare point of self-forgetfulness. When I saw him for the last time, only a few weeks before his death, we had hardly been together a quarter-hour before he was extolling, with serene detachment from present circumstance, the luminous qualities of an article on Marcel Proust by the most intellectually sympathetic and the nearest to his heart of all his friends and companions in arms. And all

around him on his bed lay the scattered blue-books and reports of his graduate students, which he made it a matter of professional honour to read, though he could do so only in broken snatches. To my remonstrances he characteristically replied: "When a man has been hired to do a job, it's only decent to stick to it to the end."

## "My Public"

AUSTIN WARREN

THE young writer, like the young mechanic or the young banker, is likely to have been born in a village, or in suburbia. His first effusion, whether novel or epic, appears to him *sui generis*, and his "genius" marks him as apart from his fellows. He feels alone, "different", not understood, a freak and a sport amongst his relatives and his schoolmates. That he is or may be the voice of Gleasondale does not occur to him; he wants, so far as he is conscious of his enviroing society, to satirize or to censure it. The object of his desire for *expression* is *himself*, apprehended as the part of him which lies alien to the interests of other men, the part he does not share.

He writes for himself, condescending to read his product to a few sympathetic, middle-aged women who, themselves, have written verses, and who offer to his youth and temperament the homage he accepts as the due of his talent. Surreptitiously he sends his outpourings to the *Atlantic* or some equally impressive repository known to the teacher of English at his high school. It is returned, the world not yet being prepared for his work. He comforts himself: great poets must create the audiences which are to appreciate them; anyway (this, defiantly) I don't write for the *public* but for myself! Brave words but dishonest.

Translated to the university or to the city, he discovers himself not the unique being he had supposed. In the Writers' Club, at the "Y", on the Hill or in