The American Business Man

It is a commonplace that men are all agreed in using symbols, and all differ about the meaning of the symbols. It is obvious that a Russian republican might come to identify the eagle as a bird of empire and therefore a bird of prey. But when he ultimately escaped to the land of the free, he might find the same bird on the American coinage figuring as a bird of freedom. Doubtless, he might find many other things to surprise him in the land of the free, and many calculated to make him think that the bird, if not imperial, was at least rather imperious. But I am not discussing those exceptional details here. It is equally obvious that a Russian reactionary might cross the world with a vow of vengeance against the red flag. But that authoritarian might have some difficulties with the authorities, if he shot a man for using the red flag on the railway between Willesden and Clapham Junction.

But, of course, the difficulty about symbols is generally much more subtle than in these simple cases. I have remarked elsewhere that the first thing which a traveller should write about is the thing which he has not read about. It may be a small or secondary thing, but it is a thing that he has seen and not merely expected to see.

I gave the example of the great multitude of wooden houses in America; we might say of wooden towns and wooden cities. But after he has seen such things, his next duty is to see the meaning of them; and here a great deal of complication and controversy is possible. The thing probably does not mean what he first supposes it to mean on the face of it; but even on the face of it, it might mean many different and even opposite things.

For instance, a wooden house might suggest an almost savage solitude; a rude shanty put together by a pioneer in a forest; or it might mean a very recent and rapid solution of the housing problem, conducted cheaply and therefore on a very large scale. A wooden house might suggest the very newest thing in America or one of the very oldest things in England. It might mean a grey ruin at Stratford or a white exhibition at Earl's Court.

It is when we come to this interpretation of international symbols that we make most of the international mistakes. Without the smallest error of detail, I will promise to prove that Oriental women are independent because they wear trousers, or Oriental men subject because they wear skirts. Merely to apply it to this case, I will take the example of two very commonplace and trivial objects of modern life--a walking stick and a fur coat.

As it happened, I travelled about America with two sticks, like a Japanese nobleman with his two swords. I fear the simile is too stately. I bore more resemblance to a cripple with two crutches or a highly ineffectual version of the devil on two sticks. I carried them both because I valued them both, and did not wish to risk losing either of them in my erratic travels. One is a very plain grey stick from the woods of Buckinghamshire, but as I took it with me to Palestine it partakes of the character of a pilgrim's staff. When I can say that I have taken the same stick to Jerusalem and to Chicago, I think the stick and I may both have a rest. The other, which I value even more, was given me by the Knights of Columbus at Yale, and I wish I could think that their chivalric title allowed me to regard it as a sword.

Now, I do not know whether the Americans I met, struck by the fastidious foppery of my dress and appearance, concluded that it is the custom of elegant English dandies to carry two walking sticks. But I do know that it is much less common among Americans than among Englishmen to carry even one. The point, however, is not merely that more sticks are carried by Englishmen than by Americans; it is that the sticks which are carried by Americans stand for something entirely different.

In America a stick is commonly called a cane, and it has about it something of the atmosphere which the poet described as the nice conduct of the clouded cane. It would be an exaggeration to say that when the citizens of the United States see a man carrying a light stick, they deduce that if he does that he does nothing else. But there is about it a faint flavour of luxury and lounging, and most of the energetic citizens of this energetic society avoid it by instinct.

Now, in an Englishman like myself, carrying a stick may imply lounging, but it does not imply luxury, and I can say with some firmness that it does not imply dandyism. In a great many Englishmen it means the very opposite even of lounging. By one of those fantastic paradoxes which are the mystery of nationality, a walking stick often actually means walking. It frequently suggests the very reverse of the beau with his clouded cane; it does not suggest a town type, but rather specially a country type. It rather implies the kind of Englishman who tramps about in lanes and meadows and knocks the tops off thistles. It suggests the sort of man who has carried the stick through his native woods, and perhaps even cut it in his native woods.

There are plenty of these vigorous loungers, no doubt, in the rural parts of America, but the idea of a walking stick would not especially suggest them to Americans; it would not call up such figures like a fairy wand. It would be easy to trace back the difference to many English origins, possibly to aristocratic origins,

to the idea of the old squire, a man vigorous and even rustic, but trained to hold a useless staff rather than a useful tool. It might be suggested that American citizens do at least so far love freedom as to like to have their hands free. It might be suggested, on the other hand, that they keep their hands for the handles of many machines. And that the hand on a handle is less free than the hand on a stick or even a tool. But these again are controversial questions and I am only noting a fact.

If an Englishman wished to imagine more or less exactly what the impression is, and how misleading it is, he could find something like a parallel in what he himself feels about a fur coat. When I first found myself among the crowds on the main floor of a New York hotel, my rather exaggerated impression of the luxury of the place was largely produced by the number of men in fur coats, and what we should consider rather ostentatious fur coats, with all the fur outside.

Now an Englishman has a number of atmospheric but largely accidental associations in connection with a fur coat. I will not say that he thinks a man in a fur coat must be a wealthy and wicked man; but I do say that in his own ideal and perfect vision a wealthy and wicked man would wear a fur coat. Thus I had the sensation of standing in a surging mob of American millionaires, or even African millionaires; for the millionaires of Chicago must be like the Knights of the Round Table compared with the millionaires of Johannesburg.

But, as a matter of fact, the man in the fur coat was not even an American millionaire, but simply an American. It did not signify luxury, but rather necessity, and even a harsh and almost heroic necessity. Orson probably wore a fur coat; and he was brought up by bears, but not the bears of Wall Street. Eskimos are generally represented as a furry folk; but they are not necessarily engaged in delicate financial operations, even in the typical and appropriate occupation called freezing out. And if the American is not exactly an arctic traveller rushing from pole to pole, at least he is often literally fleeing from ice to ice. He has to make a very extreme distinction between outdoor and indoor clothing. He has to live in an icehouse outside and a hothouse inside; so hot that he may be said to construct an icehouse inside that. He turns himself into an icehouse and warms himself against the cold until he is warm enough to eat ices. But the point is that the same coat of fur which in England would indicate the sybarite life may here very well indicate the strenuous life; just as the same walking stick which would here suggest a lounger would in England suggest a plodder and almost a pilgrim.

And these two trifles are types which I should like to put, by way of proviso and apology, at the very beginning of any attempt at a record of any impressions of a foreign society. They serve merely to illustrate the most important impression of

all, the impression of how false all impressions may be. I suspect that most of the very false impressions have come from the careful record of very true facts. They have come from the fatal power of observing the facts without being able to observe the truth. They came from seeing the symbol with the most vivid clarity and being blind to all that it symbolises. It is as if a man who knew no Greek should imagine that he could read a Greek inscription because he took the Greek R for an English P or the Greek long E for an English H. I do not mention this merely as a criticism on other people's impressions of America, but as a criticism on my own. I wish it to be understood that I am well aware that all my views are subject to this sort of potential criticism, and that even when I am certain of the facts I do not profess to be certain of the deductions.

In this chapter I hope to point out how a misunderstanding of this kind affects the common impression, not altogether unfounded, that the Americans talk about dollars. But for the moment I am merely anxious to avoid a similar misunderstanding when I talk about Americans. About the dogmas of democracy, about the right of a people to its own symbols, whether they be coins or customs, I am convinced, and no longer to be shaken. But about the meaning of those symbols, in silver or other substances, I am always open to correction. That error is the price we pay for the great glory of nationality. And in this sense I am quite ready, at the start, to warn my own readers against my own opinions.

The fact without the truth is futile; indeed the fact without the truth is false. I have already noted that this is especially true touching our observations of a strange country; and it is certainly true touching one small fact which has swelled into a large fable. I mean the fable about America commonly summed up in the phrase about the Almighty Dollar. I do not think the dollar is almighty in America; I fancy many things are mightier, including many ideals and some rather insane ideals. But I think it might be maintained that the dollar has another of the attributes of deity. If it is not omnipotent it is in a sense omnipresent. Whatever Americans think about dollars, it is, I think, relatively true that they talk about dollars. If a mere mechanical record could be taken by the modern machinery of dictaphones and stenography, I do not think it probable that the mere word 'dollars' would occur more often in any given number of American conversations than the mere word 'pounds' or 'shillings' in a similar number of English conversations. And these statistics, like nearly all statistics, would be utterly useless and even fundamentally false. It is as if we should calculate that the word 'elephant' had been mentioned a certain number of times in a particular London street, or so many times more often than the word 'thunderbolt' had been used in Stoke Poges. Doubtless there are statisticians capable of carefully collecting those statistics also; and doubtless there are scientific social reformers capable of legislating on the basis of them. They would probably argue from the elephantine imagery of the London street that such and

such a percentage of the householders were megalomaniacs and required medical care and police coercion. And doubtless their calculations, like nearly all such calculations, would leave out the only important point; as that the street was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Zoo, or was yet more happily situated under the benignant shadow of the Elephant and Castle. And in the same way the mechanical calculation about the mention of dollars is entirely useless unless we have some moral understanding of why they are mentioned. It certainly does not mean merely a love of money; and if it did, a love of money may mean a great many very different and even contrary things. The love of money is very different in a peasant or in a pirate, in a miser or in a gambler, in a great financier or in a man doing some practical and productive work. Now this difference in the conversation of American and English business men arises, I think, from certain much deeper things in the American which are generally not understood by the Englishman. It also arises from much deeper things in the Englishman, of which the Englishman is even more ignorant.

To begin with, I fancy that the American, quite apart from any love of money, has a great love of measurement. He will mention the exact size or weight of things, in a way which appears to us as irrelevant. It is as if we were to say that a man came to see us carrying three feet of walking stick and four inches of cigar. It is so in cases that have no possible connection with any avarice or greed for gain. An American will praise the prodigal generosity of some other man in giving up his own estate for the good of the poor. But he will generally say that the philanthropist gave them a 200-acre park, where an Englishman would think it quite sufficient to say that he gave them a park. There is something about this precision which seems suitable to the American atmosphere; to the hard sunlight, and the cloudless skies, and the glittering detail of the architecture and the landscape; just as the vaguer English version is consonant to our mistier and more impressionist scenery. It is also connected perhaps with something more boyish about the younger civilisation; and corresponds to the passionate particularity with which a boy will distinguish the uniforms of regiments, the rigs of ships, or even the colours of tram tickets. It is a certain godlike appetite for things, as distinct from thoughts.

But there is also, of course, a much deeper cause of the difference; and it can easily be deduced by noting the real nature of the difference itself. When two business men in a train are talking about dollars I am not so foolish as to expect them to be talking about the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. But if they were two English business men I should not expect them to be talking about business. Probably it would be about some sport; and most probably some sport in which they themselves never dreamed of indulging. The approximate difference is that the American talks about his work and the Englishman about his holidays. His ideal is not labour but leisure. Like every other national characteristic, this is not

primarily a point for praise or blame; in essence it involves neither and in effect it involves both. It is certainly connected with that snobbishness which is the great sin of English society. The Englishman does love to conceive himself as a sort of country gentleman; and his castles in the air are all castles in Scotland rather than in Spain. For, as an ideal, a Scotch castle is as English as a Welsh rarebit or an Irish stew. And if he talks less about money I fear it is sometimes because in one sense he thinks more of it. Money is a mystery in the old and literal sense of something too sacred for speech. Gold is a god; and like the god of some agnostics has no name and is worshipped only in his works. It is true in a sense that the English gentleman wishes to have enough money to be able to forget it. But it may be questioned whether he does entirely forget it. As against this weakness the American has succeeded, at the price of a great deal of crudity and clatter, in making general a very real respect for work. He has partly disenchanted the dangerous glamour of the gentleman, and in that sense has achieved some degree of democracy; which is the most difficult achievement in the world.

On the other hand, there is a good side to the Englishman's day-dream of leisure, and one which the American spirit tends to miss. It may be expressed in the word 'holiday' or still better in the word 'hobby.' The Englishman, in his character of Robin Hood, really has got two strings to his bow. Indeed the Englishman really is well represented by Robin Hood; for there is always something about him that may literally be called outlawed, in the sense of being extra-legal or outside the rules. A Frenchman said of Browning that his centre was not in the middle; and it may be said of many an Englishman that his heart is not where his treasure is. Browning expressed a very English sentiment when he said:--

I like to know a butcher paints, A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints His soul with song, or haply mute
Blows out his brains upon the flute.

Stevenson touched on the same insular sentiment when he said that many men he knew, who were meat-salesmen to the outward eye, might in the life of contemplation sit with the saints. Now the extraordinary achievement of the American meat-salesman is that his poetic enthusiasm can really be for meat sales; not for money but for meat. An American commercial traveller asked me, with a religious fire in his eyes, whether I did not think that salesmanship could be an art. In England there are many salesmen who are sincerely fond of art; but seldom of the art of salesmanship. Art is with them a hobby; a thing of leisure and liberty. That is why the English traveller talks, if not of art, then of sport. That is why the two city men in the London train, if they are not talking about golf, may be talking about gardening. If they are not talking about dollars, or the equivalent of dollars, the reason lies much deeper than any superficial praise or

blame touching the desire for wealth. In the English case, at least, it lies very deep in the English spirit. Many of the greatest English things have had this lighter and looser character of a hobby or a holiday experiment. Even a masterpiece has often been a by-product. The works of Shakespeare come out so casually that they can be attributed to the most improbable people; even to Bacon. The sonnets of Shakespeare are picked up afterwards as if out of a wastepaper basket. The immortality of Dr. Johnson does not rest on the written leaves he collected, but entirely on the words he wasted, the words he scattered to the winds. So great a thing as Pickwick is almost a kind of accident; it began as something secondary and grew into something primary and pre-eminent. It began with mere words written to illustrate somebody else's pictures; and swelled like an epic expanded from an epigram. It might almost be said that in the case of Pickwick the author began as the servant of the artist. But, as in the same story of Pickwick, the servant became greater than the master. This incalculable and accidental quality, like all national qualities, has its strength and weakness; but it does represent a certain reserve fund of interests in the Englishman's life; and distinguishes him from the other extreme type, of the millionaire who works till he drops, or who drops because he stops working. It is the great achievement of American civilisation that in that country it really is not cant to talk about the dignity of labour. There is something that might almost be called the sanctity of labour; but it is subject to the profound law that when anything less than the highest becomes a sanctity, it tends also to become a superstition. When the candlestick-maker does not blow out his brains upon the flute there is always a danger that he may blow them out somewhere else, owing to depressed conditions in the candlestick market.

Now certainly one of the first impressions of America, or at any rate of New York, which is by no means the same thing as America, is that of a sort of mob of business men, behaving in many ways in a fashion very different from that of the swarms of London city men who go up every day to the city. They sit about in groups with Red-Indian gravity, as if passing the pipe of peace; though, in fact, most of them are smoking cigars and some of them are eating cigars. The latter strikes me as one of the most peculiar of transatlantic tastes, more peculiar than that of chewing gum. A man will sit for hours consuming a cigar as if it were a sugar-stick; but I should imagine it to be a very disagreeable sugar-stick. Why he attempts to enjoy a cigar without lighting it I do not know; whether it is a more economical way of carrying a mere symbol of commercial conversation; or whether something of the same queer outlandish morality that draws such a distinction between beer and ginger beer draws an equally ethical distinction between touching tobacco and lighting it. For the rest, it would be easy to make a merely external sketch full of things equally strange; for this can always be done in a strange country. I allow for the fact of all foreigners looking alike; but I fancy that all those hard-featured faces, with spectacles and shaven jaws, do look

rather alike, because they all like to make their faces hard. And with the mention of their mental attitude we realise the futility of any such external sketch. Unless we can see that these are something more than men smoking cigars and talking about dollars we had much better not see them at all.

It is customary to condemn the American as a materialist because of his worship of success. But indeed this very worship, like any worship, even devil-worship, proves him rather a mystic than a materialist. The Frenchman who retires from business when he has money enough to drink his wine and eat his omelette in peace might much more plausibly be called a materialist by those who do not prefer to call him a man of sense. But Americans do worship success in the abstract, as a sort of ideal vision. They follow success rather than money; they follow money rather than meat and drink. If their national life in one sense is a perpetual game of poker, they are playing excitedly for chips or counters as well as for coins. And by the ultimate test of material enjoyment, like the enjoyment of an omelette, even a coin is itself a counter. The Yankee cannot eat chips as the Frenchman can eat chipped potatoes; but neither can he swallow red cents as the Frenchman swallows red wine. Thus when people say of a Yankee that he worships the dollar, they pay a compliment to his fine spirituality more true and delicate than they imagine. The dollar is an idol because it is an image; but it is an image of success and not of enjoyment.

That this romance is also a religion is shown in the fact that there is a queer sort of morality attached to it. The nearest parallel to it is something like the sense of honour in the old duelling days. There is not a material but a distinctly moral savour about the implied obligation to collect dollars or to collect chips. We hear too much in England of the phrase about 'making good'; for no sensible Englishman favours the needless interlarding of English with scraps of foreign languages. But though it means nothing in English, it means something very particular in American. There is a fine shade of distinction between succeeding and making good, precisely because there must always be a sort of ethical echo in the word good. America does vaguely feel a man making good as something analogous to a man being good or a man doing good. It is connected with his serious self-respect and his sense of being worthy of those he loves. Nor is this curious crude idealism wholly insincere even when it drives him to what some of us would call stealing; any more than the duellist's honour was insincere when it drove him to what some would call murder. A very clever American play which I once saw acted contained a complete working model of this morality. A girl was loyal to, but distressed by, her engagement to a young man on whom there was a sort of cloud of humiliation. The atmosphere was exactly what it would have been in England if he had been accused of cowardice or card-sharping. And there was nothing whatever the matter with the poor young man except that some rotten mine or other in Arizona had not 'made good.' Now in England we should either

be below or above that ideal of good. If we were snobs, we should be content to know that he was a gentleman of good connections, perhaps too much accustomed to private means to be expected to be businesslike. If we were somewhat larger-minded people, we should know that he might be as wise as Socrates and as splendid as Bayard and yet be unfitted, perhaps one should say therefore be unfitted, for the dismal and dirty gambling of modern commerce. But whether we were snobbish enough to admire him for being an idler, or chivalrous enough to admire him for being an outlaw, in neither case should we ever really and in our hearts despise him for being a failure. For it is this inner verdict of instinctive idealism that is the point at issue. Of course there is nothing new, or peculiar to the new world, about a man's engagement practically failing through his financial failure. An English girl might easily drop a man because he was poor, or she might stick to him faithfully and defiantly although he was poor. The point is that this girl was faithful but she was not defiant; that is, she was not proud. The whole psychology of the situation was that she shared the weird worldly idealism of her family, and it was wounded as her patriotism would have been wounded if he had betrayed his country. To do them justice, there was nothing to show that they would have had any real respect for a royal duke who had inherited millions; what the simple barbarians wanted was a man who could 'make good.' That the process of making good would probably drag him through the mire of everything bad, that he would make good by bluffing, lying, swindling, and grinding the faces of the poor, did not seem to trouble them in the least. Against this fanaticism there is this shadow of truth even in the fiction of aristocracy; that a gentleman may at least be allowed to be good without being bothered to make it.

Another objection to the phrase about the almighty dollar is that it is an almighty phrase, and therefore an almighty nuisance. I mean that it is made to explain everything, and to explain everything much too well; that is, much too easily. It does not really help people to understand a foreign country; but it gives them the fatal illusion that they do understand it. Dollars stood for America as frogs stood for France; because it was necessary to connect particular foreigners with something, or it would be so easy to confuse a Moor with a Montenegrin or a Russian with a Red Indian. The only cure for this sort of satisfied familiarity is the shock of something really unfamiliar. When people can see nothing at all in American democracy except a Yankee running after a dollar, then the only thing to do is to trip them up as they run after the Yankee, or run away with their notion of the Yankee, by the obstacle of certain odd and obstinate facts that have no relation to that notion. And, as a matter of fact, there are a number of such obstacles to any such generalisation; a number of notable facts that have to be reconciled somehow to our previous notions. It does not matter for this purpose whether the facts are favourable or unfavourable, or whether the qualities are merits or defects; especially as we do not even understand them sufficiently to

say which they are. The point is that we are brought to a pause, and compelled to attempt to understand them rather better than we do. We have found the one thing that we did not expect; and therefore the one thing that we cannot explain. And we are moved to an effort, probably an unsuccessful effort, to explain it.

For instance, Americans are very unpunctual. That is the last thing that a critic expects who comes to condemn them for hustling and haggling and vulgar ambition. But it is almost the first fact that strikes the spectator on the spot. The chief difference between the humdrum English business man and the hustling American business man is that the hustling American business man is always late. Of course there is a great deal of difference between coming late and coming too late. But I noticed the fashion first in connection with my own lectures; touching which I could heartily recommend the habit of coming too late. I could easily understand a crowd of commercial Americans not coming to my lectures at all; but there was something odd about their coming in a crowd, and the crowd being expected to turn up some time after the appointed hour. The managers of these lectures (I continue to call them lectures out of courtesy to myself) often explained to me that it was quite useless to begin properly until about half an hour after time. Often people were still coming in three-quarters of an hour or even an hour after time. Not that I objected to that, as some lecturers are said to do; it seemed to me an agreeable break in the monotony; but as a characteristic of a people mostly engaged in practical business, it struck me as curious and interesting. I have grown accustomed to being the most unbusinesslike person in any given company; and it gave me a sort of dizzy exaltation to find I was not the most unpunctual person in that company. I was afterwards told by many Americans that my impression was quite correct; that American unpunctuality was really very prevalent, and extended to much more important things. But at least I was not content to lump this along with all sorts of contrary things that I did not happen to like, and call it America. I am not sure of what it really means, but I rather fancy that though it may seem the very reverse of the hustling, it has the same origin as the hustling. The American is not punctual because he is not punctilious. He is impulsive, and has an impulse to stay as well as an impulse to go. For, after all, punctuality belongs to the same order of ideas as punctuation; and there is no punctuation in telegrams. The order of clocks and set hours which English business has always observed is a good thing in its own way; indeed I think that in a larger sense it is better than the other way. But it is better because it is a protection against hustling, not a promotion of it. In other words, it is better because it is more civilised; as a great Venetian merchant prince clad in cloth of gold was more civilised; or an old English merchant drinking port in an oak-panelled room was more civilised; or a little French shopkeeper shutting up his shop to play dominoes is more civilised. And the reason is that the American has the romance of business and is monomaniac, while the Frenchman has the romance of life and is sane. But the romance of

business really is a romance, and the Americans are really romantic about it. And that romance, though it revolves round pork or petrol, is really like a love-affair in this; that it involves not only rushing but also lingering.

The American is too busy to have business habits. He is also too much in earnest to have business rules. If we wish to understand him, we must compare him not with the French shopkeeper when he plays dominoes, but with the same French shopkeeper when he works the guns or mans the trenches as a conscript soldier. Everybody used to the punctilious Prussian standard of uniform and parade has noticed the roughness and apparent laxity of the French soldier, the looseness of his clothes, the unsightliness of his heavy knapsack, in short his inferiority in every detail of the business of war except fighting. There he is much too swift to be smart. He is much too practical to be precise. By a strange illusion which can lift pork-packing almost to the level of patriotism, the American has the same free rhythm in his romance of business. He varies his conduct not to suit the clock but to suit the case. He gives more time to more important and less time to less important things; and he makes up his time-table as he goes along. Suppose he has three appointments; the first, let us say, is some mere trifle of erecting a tower twenty storeys high and exhibiting a sky-sign on the top of it; the second is a business discussion about the possibility of printing advertisements of soft drinks on the table-napkins at a restaurant; the third is attending a conference to decide how the populace can be prevented from using chewing-gum and the manufacturers can still manage to sell it. He will be content merely to glance at the sky-sign as he goes by in a trolley-car or an automobile; he will then settle down to the discussion with his partner about the table-napkins, each speaker indulging in long monologues in turn; a peculiarity of much American conversation. Now if in the middle of one of these monologues, he suddenly thinks that the vacant space of the waiter's shirt-front might also be utilised to advertise the Gee Whiz Ginger Champagne, he will instantly follow up the new idea in all its aspects and possibilities, in an even longer monologue; and will never think of looking at his watch while he is rapturously looking at his waiter. The consequence is that he will come late into the great social movement against chewing-gum, where an Englishman would probably have arrived at the proper hour. But though the Englishman's conduct is more proper, it need not be in all respects more practical. The Englishman's rules are better for the business of life, but not necessarily for the life of business. And it is true that for many of these Americans business is the business of life. It is really also, as I have said, the romance of life. We shall admire or deplore this spirit, accordingly as we are glad to see trade irradiated with so much poetry, or sorry to see so much poetry wasted on trade. But it does make many people happy, like any other hobby; and one is disposed to add that it does fill their imaginations like any other delusion. For the true criticism of all this commercial romance would involve a criticism of this historic phase of commerce. These people are building on the sand, though it

shines like gold, and for them like fairy gold; but the world will remember the legend about fairy gold. Half the financial operations they follow deal with things that do not even exist; for in that sense all finance is a fairy tale. Many of them are buying and selling things that do nothing but harm; but it does them good to buy and sell them. The claim of the romantic salesman is better justified than he realises. Business really is romance; for it is not reality.

There is one real advantage that America has over England, largely due to its livelier and more impressionable ideal. America does not think that stupidity is practical. It does not think that ideas are merely destructive things. It does not think that a genius is only a person to be told to go away and blow his brains out; rather it would open all its machinery to the genius and beg him to blow his brains in. It might attempt to use a natural force like Blake or Shelley for very ignoble purposes; it would be quite capable of asking Blake to take his tiger and his golden lions round as a sort of Barnum's Show, or Shelley to hang his stars and haloed clouds among the lights of Broadway. But it would not assume that a natural force is useless, any more than that Niagara is useless. And there is a very definite distinction here touching the intelligence of the trader, whatever we may think of either course touching the intelligence of the artist. It is one thing that Apollo should be employed by Admetus, although he is a god. It is quite another thing that Apollo should always be sacked by Admetus, because he is a god. Now in England, largely owing to the accident of a rivalry and therefore a comparison with France, there arose about the end of the eighteenth century an extraordinary notion that there was some sort of connection between dullness and success. What the Americans call a bonehead became what the English call a hard-headed man. The merchants of London evinced their contempt for the fantastic logicians of Paris by living in a permanent state of terror lest somebody should set the Thames on fire. In this as in much else it is much easier to understand the Americans if we connect them with the French who were their allies than with the English who were their enemies. There are a great many Franco-American resemblances which the practical Anglo-Saxons are of course too hard-headed (or boneheaded) to see. American history is haunted with the shadow of the Plebiscitary President; they have a tradition of classical architecture for public buildings. Their cities are planned upon the squares of Paris and not upon the labyrinth of London. They call their cities Corinth and Syracuse, as the French called their citizens Epaminondas and Timoleon. Their soldiers wore the French kepi; and they make coffee admirably, and do not make tea at all. But of all the French elements in America the most French is this real practicality. They know that at certain times the most businesslike of all qualities is 'l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.' The publisher may induce the poet to do a pot-boiler; but the publisher would cheerfully allow the poet to set the Mississippi on fire, if it would boil his particular pot. It is not so much that Englishmen are stupid as that they are afraid of being clever; and it is

not so much that Americans are clever as that they do not try to be any stupider than they are. The fire of French logic has burnt that out of America as it has burnt it out of Europe, and of almost every place except England. This is one of the few points on which English insularity really is a disadvantage. It is the fatal notion that the only sort of commonsense is to be found in compromise, and that the only sort of compromise is to be found in confusion. This must be clearly distinguished from the commonplace about the utilitarian world not rising to the invisible values of genius. Under this philosophy the utilitarian does not see the utility of genius, even when it is quite visible. He does not see it, not because he is a utilitarian, but because he is an idealist whose ideal is dullness. For some time the English aspired to be stupid, prayed and hoped with soaring spiritual ambition to be stupid. But with all their worship of success, they did not succeed in being stupid. The natural talents of a great and traditional nation were always breaking out in spite of them. In spite of the merchants of London, Turner did set the Thames on fire. In spite of our repeatedly explained preference for realism to romance, Europe persisted in resounding with the name of Byron. And just when we had made it perfectly clear to the French that we despised all their flamboyant tricks, that we were a plain prosaic people and there was no fantastic glory or chivalry about us, the very shaft we sent against them shone with the name of Nelson, a shooting and a falling star.