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adding of a new stroke to the picture, were bringing out more effectively the overtones which are so much of the poem. We were frankly fascinated as we watched the poem grow from week to week, and delayed publication in order to catch the full benefit of the process. Then, too, we wanted to be able to publish, together with the poem, the reaction of the London literary world to the first and, perhaps, cruder version. This we are now able to do.

As these columns of comment were going to press, the issue of "The Spectator" containing the first version of "In Praise of Johnny Appleseed" reached my desk. More space is given to this poem than "The Spectator" has ever given to a single poem, if my memory of its files is correct. In addition, the editor writes a long editorial on the poem. Not content with that recognition, the literary editor also writes a half-page article on the poem. I want to reproduce the major part of these London comments. The editor, discussing the function of the poem, says:



#### THE RODIN OF AMERICAN POETRY

**M**ORE than ordinary interest is attached to the publication of Mr. Vachel Lindsay's "In Praise of Johnny Appleseed" elsewhere in this issue of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE. Interest lies not only in the intrinsic importance of the poem, but in the circumstances surrounding its publication. Our first intention was to publish the poem simultaneously with its appearance in "The Spectator" of London; but Mr. Lindsay, as he read the poem to audiences from week to week, found it growing and perfecting itself. The alteration of a line here, the revamping of a phrase there, the

One of the most wonderful and most romantic episodes in modern history has never received its meed of fame. Its glory, its history, its fascination have almost perished. Up till now we have been compelled to say, "It had no poet and it died." This episode was the great migration westward in the twenties, thirties, and forties of the adventurers and pioneers of the Eastern States of America, supplemented by the wanderers of many lands and peoples. Then was seen what we know must have taken place before in many countries, but of which till the New England frontiersmen led the way across the Appalachians we have no certain record. A sudden impulse to drive onward to fresh woods,

new pastures, new hills, and a new horizon took men and women by the throat. Though there was no Pied Piper, they followed as if under a spell of power. As the movement was at its height in 1835 to 1845, it is within living memory. And yet the dull Old World and the equally dull and decorous "high-brows" of the New World seem very seldom to have realized what was going on at their doors. They sat stupid and bemused, strumming their little tinkling lyres to Adelaide and Mariana, "While there passed them a woman with the West in her eyes  
And a man with his back to the East."

None heeded, or, if they did, only in Statistics and Reports to Congress "on the increasing population in the Western Territories."

And after all these years comes a Homer to sing in adequate words with a poet's passion the great and strange revel of our race. Mr. Vachel Lindsay in a memorable poem, which we publish in our issue of to-day, takes one of the most curious incidents in the whole whirling story, and tells us how "Johnny Applesseed" went forth before the host, a sort of Roland of the Wild West, singing his songs and planting his apple orchards, for that was his special mission. He kept always ahead of the incomers in order to plant his Apple Trees so that those who followed him might enjoy the kindly fruits of the earth in due season. They sound pretty mad, these orchard oriflammes, but if they were mad they were of a piece with all else that was happening. Anyway, Mr. Vachel Lindsay in his poem makes us feel that it was all quite sane and natural.

But he does more than tell us the legend of "Johnny Applesseed." He makes us feel, as most of us have never felt before, the magic and the glory of the rush across the Appalachian ridges into the prairies of the West. Even his bees

go crazy and join the rabble rout. Walt Whitman would have loved the poem, for in his own verse we see that he understood what was happening. His "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" breathes the authentic air of the new Paradise. Mr. Vachel Lindsay has laid us all under a debt of gratitude. He has given us the first lay in the great Epic of the West. He must give us more and then weave it all into an organic whole. It is better to do that for oneself than wait seventy years for a Pisistratus who might never come or possibly turn out to be a publisher's hack, or an official assigned for special duty by an Education Board.

Elsewhere in the same issue of "The Spectator" the literary editor writes of this "new and in every sense memorable poem," and, discussing the form of the poem, says:

This new poem, . . . though perhaps not quite so finished a piece of work as "The Congo," is yet completely typical of Mr. Lindsay's work. Nothing is easier than to pick it as full of holes as a colander; it abounds with absurdities—"gastronomic calculations," "delirious flower-dressed fairies," "perorations"—these are too many to enumerate. But when we pick out these faults, staggering in their *naïveté* though they may seem to the more neat-minded of us, we commit the same fault as a man who should refuse to admire a piece of mediaeval wood-carving because of its anatomical inaccuracies, who should angrily reject the bucolic humour of the fox dressed as a monk preaching to the geese, or the tender passion of an "Adoration of the Magi" because one shows a brush or the other a great toe out of place. We can think of no other poem which produces the sense of spaces and of a progress that is less a procession than a migration as well as does this song.

In this country and in France in the figurative arts we are constantly trying

to recapture just such primitive grotesqueness; for example, Mr. Epstein's sculpture and very often M. Rodin's, too. But Mr. Vachel Lindsay's work is different. He has not acquired *naïveté* painfully in a Paris *atelier*, his work is primitive chiefly because the emotions which inspired it are perfectly direct and undervalued from any other literature. Ethically and spiritually, he represents the revolt against "the roller-top desk" side of American life, as those who have read that most delightful book, his *Handy Guide to Beggars*, well know.

Technically and aesthetically his work is, as we have said, full of the inaccuracy and vigour of mediæval English or modern Russian wood-carvings. Such works abound in mistakes, for the excellent reason that their contrivers knew no better and never so much as proposed to take the trouble to learn better because they were concerned with more vital affairs. To soften or improve away blemishes is to weaken the poem.

To those of us who may have been anxious about the arts, who feared that the primal sources of inspiration might have dried up (the present writer was never one of them), it will be more than

delightful to find this new welling up of the primitive, and, best of all, to find it in this most purely Anglo-Saxon temper and form. Art is like the Giant Antæus who fought with Herakles. Unless its strength is constantly renewed from the earth, from the primitive, it loses its vigour and ceases to be our champion and defence against materialism.

It will now appear to the reader why this editorial is given the title "The Rodin of American Poetry." It has been commented upon by certain readers that there is something inconsistent in calling this editorial department "The Tide of Affairs" and then including in its choice of subjects abstract ideas, books, art, poetry, and the like. This is done with the conviction that the character of our time is being shown as much by our literature, our philosophy, and our arts as by the actual incidents of politics and business. In giving this editorial space to Mr. Lindsay we are dealing with one of the significant forces of American affairs—a force making for a less materialistic America.



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