

MARY AUSTIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CULTURE
OF THE SOUTHWEST

APPROVED:

Floyd Stovall

Major Professor

Bessie Shook

Minor Professor

Floyd Stovall

Director of the Department of English

Jack Johnson

Dean of the Graduate Division

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OF THE SOUTHWEST

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By

Cora Mae Wilson, B. A.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	iv
Chapter	
I. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	1
II. NATURE	22
III. INTEREST IN PEOPLE	47
IV. SPANISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE AND THE INDIANS	69
V. MYSTICISM	97
VI. PROPHECY FOR THE SOUTHWEST.	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	133

INTRODUCTION

It was clear that I would write imaginatively, not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature, and that I would give myself intransigently to the quality of experience called Folk, and to the frame of behavior known as Mystical.¹

Thus wrote Mary Austin in the introduction to Earth Horizon, her autobiography.

Thanks to the American spirit of her family in migrating to the West when she was twenty, the "scene" came chiefly to mean the Southwest. Not that she would not have found a way of expressing her genius in any section of the country in which it might have been her destiny to live; and, as for fulfilling the rest of the pattern of her life, no place could have kept her from making a critical study of her inherited traditions and of the various forces of life about her.

This versatile author has a number of essays, novels, plays, and poems to her credit, dealing with such subjects as social criticism, religion, psychology, women's rights, folklore, literary criticism, nature, love, and Indian life. I have read each of her books; and I agree with

¹ Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. vii.

Carl Van Doren that "she nowhere else quite equals the success she reaches in those lovely luminous documents on the Southwest."² It was in the Southwest that she had her vision, and it was there she spent the greater part of her life. Though she had experiences in various cities, including New York and three great capitals of the world, she returned to the Southwest and chose Santa Fe as the place of her final residence.

It will be my problem in this study to examine Mrs. Austin's works and show wherein she has accomplished the pattern that she mapped out for her life. The first chapter is a sketch of Mary Austin's life. Chapter II treats of the "scene" as shown in her nature writings. Chapter III is concerned with the people of her acquaintance and those of her novels, plays, and short stories -- the people of whom she wrote "imaginatively." Chapter IV is devoted to "the quality of experience called Folk," which Mrs. Austin had with the Spanish-speaking people and the Indians. "The frame of behavior known as Mystical" is the topic of Chapter V, and Chapter VI gives Mrs. Austin's prophecy for the Southwest.

²
Carl Van Doren, "The American Rhythm: Mary Austin, Discoverer and Prophet," Century Magazine, Vol. CVII, (November, 1923), p.155.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

There was a question in Mary Austin's mind as to whether "genius has a life history of its own. . . going on more or less independently of its host."¹ It should be of interest to review her own "racial inheritance," a term which she defines as "the sum of capacities acquired by ancestors of the individual to which he has access in meeting the exigencies of his own life."² This task is made comparatively easy by Mrs. Austin, who considered it a "happy fortune to have been brought up intimately in touch with ancestral history," and who considered of no small importance the "factual realities of transmitted experience."³

Her father, George Hunter, came to America from England in 1851 at about eighteen years of age with his brother, William, who had made a previous trip three or four years before. All that she ever heard certainly of her father's family was that the Hunters of Yorkshire were originally of good yeoman stock, that her Grandfather Hunter had for part

¹ Mary Austin, Everyman's Genius, p. 289.

² Ibid., p. 14.

³ Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. viii.

of his life been a tailor; that her grandmother had been Jane Todd, a Scotch woman; and that the family had spent several years of George's youth in Rochester.

Settling first in Alton, Illinois, George Hunter moved on in a short time to Carlinville, where it was reported in 1852 that good land was still to be had for the taking. His residence there was not continuous, however, as he returned twice, when his means afforded, to Alton to study at Shurtliff College.

In 1855 George Hunter visited his father in England, bringing away with him on that occasion his sister, Mary. This sister remained in Alton in the dressmaking trade; William Hunter went farther west and was not heard of for years; and George, having read law in the office of John Rinaker, was admitted to the bar in 1858. He settled in Carlinville, a town where there was a number of English families, and set up a law practice. Those who knew him then remembered him for "his well-stored memory, his ready gift of words, and his flexible and argumentative turn of mind."⁴ Hardly had he established himself in his new law practice when he resigned it in 1861, and in the week's interval between the close of his three months of volunteer service and his enlistment as Captain of Company

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

K, Seventh Illinois, married Susanna Savilla Graham.

Mary Austin traced the maternal branch of her mother's family back to the founder, one Pierre Daguerre, who had accompanied the Marquis de Lafayette from France. The name had been Americanized, however, to be spelled "Dugger" by the time Polly McAdams, Mary Austin's great-grandmother, married Jarrot Dugger in 1811. Mrs. Austin attributed much of her own success to the fact that it had its roots in the saga of Folly McAdams Dugger, who

. . . came to 'Eellanoy' sitting on a bundle of pieced quilts and blankets of her own spinning, on the tail of an ox cart, and with an unrelinquished claim on all the sanctions of civilization and the preciousness of womanhood in her heart.⁵

This same Polly had been a girlhood acquaintance of Mrs. James K. Polk, who considered her one of her dearest friends.⁶ Polly McAdams Dugger was an enterprising person who persuaded her husband to build a water-wheel to which the spinning wheels of the neighbor women could be attached so their hands could go on with piecing and quilting. She invented a way to preserve fruit in wide-mouthed crocks and taught the women to make of arrow-root and native herbs an effective remedy for the cholera plague in 1851.

Mrs. Austin's grandmother, Hannah Dugger, Polly's

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

daughter who married Milo Graham, sustained the excellent good sense and courage of Polly. She, too, was often ahead of her times, as was shown by her being the first to wear a tailor-made dress in Carlinville, some forty years before it became the fashionable wear. When Milo Graham had his young wife pictured in the dress by a new French invention, the daguerreotype, she was promptly "disciplined" by the Methodist Church for the offense of vanity. This event in her grandmother's life might be called prophetic in that Mary Austin herself was read out of the Methodist Church in California because of some of her own progressive ideas.⁷

Hannah Graham died when her eldest daughter, Susan Savilla, Mrs. Austin's mother, was ten years of age. Susan graduated from Miss Richmond's High School and had three months at Montecello, a select academy for young ladies. At the time of her marriage to Captain George Hunter she was teaching school. During the years between her marriage and Captain Hunter's return to civilian life in 1864 a daughter and a son were born and buried. It was in Carlinville, where the Hunters had re-established themselves and built a little house on First Street, that a son, James Milo, was born in 1866. And on September 9, 1868, Mary Hunter was

⁷Ibid., p. 287.

born.

Mary Austin remembered the family's removal from First Street, when she was about two and one half years of age, to a place at the end of Flum Street, where her father was forced by his army heritage of ill health to spend a large part of his time out-of-doors. Even at that early date the child Mary possessed a talent for experiencing which was of much use to her later creative work. She had a habit of re-telling things she had heard about as if they were things she had seen, an achievement that her mother considered "storying;" and as "storying" was wicked, the child was often punished for it. Another thing for which she was punished was her habit of saying unaccountable, inexcusable things that annoyed visitors. The child explained her transgression by saying "it was like a little bird that hopped out of her mind, onto her tongue, before she could stop it;" and when she grew older she began to realize "that it was as if a hidden spring in her mind had been freed by something, a look, a tone, something so slight that before it could be named the spring was off"⁸ and she had said the thing that was going on in people's minds that they carefully weren't talking about.

These experiences and others told by Mrs. Austin in

⁸

Ibid., p. 45.

the early part of her autobiography make it one of the most fascinating parts of the whole book. Her early discovery of the distinction between what she called "I-Mary," her inner self, and "Mary-by-yourself;" her experience of finding God under the walnut tree when she was five and one half years old; her distorted ideas of the heaven of the Book of Revelation; her reading the Bible through when she was between the ages of nine and ten -- all these experiences make it easy for us to understand how Mary Austin grown up persisted in her writing in the "search for the norm of moral and spiritual adjustments."⁹

The events of Mary Austin's childhood resembled those that she had Olivia Lattimore, the heroine of A Woman of Genius, describe. Olivia enjoyed reading, admired her father, and felt a lack of sympathy on the part of her mother. As a child she indulged in story-telling and play-acting with her playmates and loved the out-of-doors. Her conversion and joining the church, as well as her resentment toward her brother, remind a person of Mary Austin's own experiences. In fact, most of Olivia's childhood experiences were those of Mary Austin's childhood, just as her later conflict between the social ideal of Taylorville

⁹ Ibid., p. 367.

and her genius for acting was Mary Austin's story of her own emancipation from small town prejudices. One feels when he is reading the above novel, as if he were re-reading parts of Earth Horizon, Mary Austin's autobiography.

Mary Austin was a sensitive child who longed for sympathy and affection from her mother, a woman already burdened down with the care of three or four other children, one of them sickly, and an invalid husband. It seems to me that Mrs. Austin made too much of an issue of what she thought was her mother's lack of appreciation of her talent. It may be that Mary Austin grew to be a commanding, self-assertive person because of a complex she developed from her early failure to establish her importance in the minds of the members of her family. On the other hand, it could be that as a child and youth she already possessed a knowledge of the importance of her own ideas; and as a result, it was difficult for the family to live with a person already restless to do something about those ideas. Whatever the case may be, the friction between the mother and the daughter continued to exist, and Mary Austin found comfort in the books that her father made available for her -- works of Scott, Longfellow, Whittier, Burns, Ben Jonson, and Ruskin. She also enjoyed reading such magazines as St. Nicholas, Scribner's, Harper's and The Century. "Nothing readable ever

came into the house on Plum Street that Mary did not take toll of it."¹⁰ It is probable, however, that Mary Austin exaggerated the debt that she owed to her father, who died when she was ten years old.

The "subtle alterations of adolescence" took Mary Austin hard and early. In the spring of 1879 the family moved to a house on Second South, leaving the house on Plum Street with its adjacent woods and pastures and the wide circle of activities tangent to it. She remembered vividly a visit to her aunt's in Kansas during the first summer after her father's death and one the next summer to Boston, a place that she was completely at home in because of her reading.

Of this period in her life Mary Austin said, "As to the determinant of adolescent thinking, the circumstance of being a Methodist and the lack of a Whatnot was much more menacing than anything that at that age could be described as sex experience."¹¹ She was a pragmatist in religion and failed to get anything out of the Methodist Church, which she joined when she was eleven, that even compared with her earlier experience of finding God under

¹⁰
Ibid., p. 77.

¹¹
Ibid., p. 114.

the walnut tree. Though she resented the fact that her mother made so much of her brother Jim's status as head of the family and despised his domineering interest in the propriety of her behavior, they got along as well as other young people. It was not until later years that their alienations became more acute.

After completing public school the Hunter brother and sister attended Blackburn College in Carlinville, Mary leaving after the first year to go to the State Normal School at Bloomington, where she could prepare to become a teacher. Her experiences there were not happy, and before the term was over she had to withdraw because of a nervous breakdown. After spending the summer of 1885 with an uncle in Missouri, she re-entered Blackburn the next year with the solemn promise that if her mother saw her through she wouldn't "throw it all away on some man."¹²

Science was Mary Hunter's major in Blackburn. She rejected English as a major on the ground that she could study it by herself. Nevertheless, she was literary editor of her college journal and was elected class poet. She had a manner of withdrawal which men were afraid of and which put her at a disadvantage in the social life at

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Ibid., p. 162.

college. The boys that she "went with" were ministerial students, whom she would not have thought of marrying. Besides, she had decided already that she wanted to teach, preferably natural science, and then to write novels and other books. Soon after her graduation in 1888, she, her mother, and her brother George went to California to join James Hunter, who had made a homestead claim there.

On the trip to California the Hunters stopped for some "visiting" with relatives and friends in Denver, a town which, except for its impressive back-drop, failed to differ markedly from other American cities that Mary Hunter had seen. She was, however, happily absorbed by the vast space and silence of the Great American Desert. What impressed her most in San Francisco was the colorful theater crowd, the Matinee Parade it was called, and the theater itself. At Los Angeles she was daunted by the wrack of the lately "busted" boom, but somewhat comforted by the warm traces of old Spanish settlement found there. It was during the family's last six or seven days of the hundred-mile journey to the San Joaquin Valley, Mary Hunter on horseback and the family in a wagon, that she was seized by the feeling that there was something in this land that she hadn't read about in books -- "an evasive Something, wistful, cruel, ardent. . . insistent on being noticed, that

fled from pursuit, and when you turned from it, leaped suddenly and fastened on your vitals."¹³

The Hunter homestead, along with five or six others, was situated in a dry, barren region below the thirty thousand acres of Rancho El Tejon, and about thirty miles from Bakersville. It turned out that they had made their venture at the very worst time, the dryness of the years of 1888 to 1890 proving to be the peak of desolation for that arid locality. By the time they had settled, Mary Hunter suffered a complete collapse caused by the emotional stress of breaking up a home, two years of exhausting college work, and the distress of malnutrition in a new and strange land. Never being a person to become a martyr to unsatisfactory conditions, she effected her own cure by an almost exclusive diet of wild grapes, at which her family remarked, "It was so like Mary to almost starve to death on a proper Christian diet and go and get well on something grubbed out of the woods."¹⁴

It was through the services of General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, the owner of Tejon Ranch, that Mary Hunter gained much information about the history of California. In addition to his personal reminiscences about his

¹³ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

experiences with Kearney and the Mexican Governors of the West, his carrying to Washington the official evidence of the discovery of gold in California, his experiences as the first Indian Commissioner, and his acquaintances with such people as Kit Carson and Old Bill Skinner, he also helped her secure government documents, old reports of military explorations, agricultural reports, and geological and botanical surveys. It was also through his courtesy that the Hunters moved in the summer of 1889 to Rose Station, an old stage station on the Tejon Ranch property. Though this was somewhat of an improvement over the first place they had lived, Susie Hunter felt a homesickness for her old home in Illinois. Her worries were increased by the feeling of insecurity in this new life and the fact that she had brought her daughter into a land where there were none of her sort to marry. She had been quite distressed when Mary had turned down a proposal of a young divinity student who had written that he could now afford an engagement.

In the fall of 1889 Mary Hunter was employed as teacher at Mountain View Dairy, where she gave half of her time to teaching the Pyle children and the rest of her time to traveling about the country-side in a cart to as many private pupils as she had time for. Such trips were a great help to her in getting to know the West, and during

the next two years she laid up much information concerning the intricate interrelations of land, water, crops, politics, and personal life in the great valley.

In the meantime, the Hunter family had moved to a small ranch about three miles from Bakersfield. There her mother had joined the church and was participating in the small town activities. More than ever the daughter was left out of the plans at the new place, because by this time she was engaged to be married, or as her mother put it, "was going out of the family."

During her engagement to Stafford Wallace Austin she had been entirely frank about her intention toward a writing career; she had not concealed the fact of her lack of physical robustness; and "she had said all that a high-minded young woman could say, and more than most of them dared to say on the subject of children and what she had herself to contribute in the way of inheritance."¹⁵ It is unfortunate that he was not as honest as she was in such matters.

At the time of their marriage, May 18, 1891, Mr. Austin was a vineyardist, but during the first year of their marriage Mrs. Austin discovered that he had no natural qualifications for that calling. As winter closed in there was

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Ibid., p. 220.

nothing to live on but the income from her private pupils, so she insisted on his going to San Francisco, a place which would offer a better advantage to her writing, and where he might join his brother in an irrigation scheme.

Mrs. Austin joined her husband in San Francisco in the spring of 1892. During the time that she was packing to leave the home in Panama District she wrote two short stories which she succeeded in getting published in the Overland Monthly. Though she spent only two months in San Francisco, she met Ina Coolbrith, a poet who had been associated with Bret Harte on the Overland. Now she felt that she was going to do more with her writing as she went happily, "secure in the traditional preciousness of the young wife and expectant mother," with her husband to his new job in Owens Valley.

It was at Lone Pine in the southern part of Owens Valley that the Austins were to live. Mr. Austin was to manage the construction of an irrigation ditch there. Mrs. Austin's business was to sit under the huge cloudy cottonwoods that hung above Lone Pine Hotel and take in the "strange wild beauty of the scene." This was not to last long, however, for one day when her husband disappeared soon after breakfast, and Mrs. Austin was returning from a walk, she found her trunk on the sidewalk and her room closed. Before night, however, the resourceful Mrs. Austin

had found a boarding house on the other edge of town where she helped with the cooking to provide room and board for the next few months.

Mary Austin returned to her mother in September and on October 30, 1892, her daughter Ruth was born. While she was there a new realization broke around her. She learned that everything relating to her marriage had been done on a credit basis, and that there were debts going back even farther than the time of their marriage. Her family was ready to take her back if she had chosen to put herself entirely in their hands, but she believed that the problem could be solved by application of intelligence. Early in the spring Wallace Austin was elected to fill out one of the district schools in Inyo; and with that assurance of food and shelter, Mary Austin set out with her baby in a market-basket to join him in Inyo by rail and stagecoach.

At George's Creek Mary Austin developed an interest in the wandering flocks as they passed to and from the summer pastures. At Lone Pine, where her husband taught the next year, there was less opportunity for her to keep up her interest in sheepherding; but there she had an opportunity of observing the "capitáns," or head shepherds when they stopped at Julien's supply store. She also had an opportunity to learn something of the true "Mexicans." That year the Austins took a homestead between Owens Lake

and the northern end of the Alabama hills.

Mrs. Austin visited her mother during the summers when she was at Inyo, and she remembered some strange adventures on those stage trips. Once a stranger halted the stage in the night and asked if there was someone aboard who could pray for a dying man. Mrs. Austin, the only woman passenger, clambered down in the dark, and, accompanied by two male passengers, went down the canyon wall to the camp where she prayed for the man.

On another occasion the stage driver became sick and passed out. Mrs. Austin and the only other passenger, an English mining expert, managed to put him on the front seat of the coach. The mining expert took care of the baby while Mrs. Austin strapped herself to the boot and drove the stage in to the next station.

It was about this time that Mrs. Hunter realized the unfortunate condition of Mrs. Austin's child, and she considered it a judgment sent upon her daughter. She did not live to find out the truth about the child's subnormality as Mrs. Austin did. Mrs. Austin learned, too late, that it was a tainted inheritance from her husband's family -- recessive traits on both sides of the house. Justifying himself for not telling her, he merely said, "We never talk of those things."¹⁶

In the autumn of 1895 Mrs. Austin took her daughter and settled in Bishop, California. There medical attention could be easily accessible for the child and Mrs. Austin was offered a teaching position in an academy. Of course, she was still trying to adjust herself to a marriage which had failed in almost every particular from the pattern to which her girlish expectation had been educated. She suffered criticism from her family and her husband's for her "unwomanly" manner of seeking her own way of life. But her husband not only had no business or profession; he appeared to have no leading in any direction which could have marked out a way of life for him. He was successful in teaching, but disliked it so much that he would make no use of his success to improve his advantage. He passed off any suggestion that she made with, "I'll get into something." By this time he had joined her in Bishop.

Susie Hunter died in 1896. Although Mrs. Austin was not with her mother at the time of her death, she described an appearance that her mother made to her in a kind of "vision" about the hour that she died. The fact that her last words were "Take care of Mary"¹⁷ made her feel that maybe, deep down, her mother understood her. Or did she?

In the fall of 1897 Mrs. Austin returned to Lone Pine to teach with her husband. By this time he was also County

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

Superintendent of Schools, and with the combined salaries they were able to get out of the worst of their debts. This adventure ended, however, in Mrs. Austin's overtaxing her physical capacity and having to go to the hospital. Another upsetting thing to her was Mr. Austin's leaving his unfinished term as County Superintendent in her hands and resigning his teaching position to take up office as the Registrar of the Desert Land Office. This position he had worked up secretly, and from Mrs. Austin's point of view the change was no improvement over his present position. The remuneration was no more and it involved living in a smaller town. Such instances as this make one think that Mr. Austin may have felt toward the Irrigation Problem much as Mrs. Austin felt about her writing. Mr. T.M. Pearce described that feeling as follows:

Inyo and its interests held him in a grip like that which held all the people in the stories of Lost Borders. He was drugged and dominated by the situation there: prospects of wealth in the hills, in the valley, and the powerful interests of the coast holding one, seizing the other. 18

After her trip to the hospital in San Francisco, where she met William James, Mrs. Austin joined her husband in Independence. It was there she was reprimanded by the ladies for presenting her Chinese wash boy with a cake, and

was read out of the Methodist Church for teaching the Higher Criticism to a Bible Class of adults and for organizing a community theater.

In the summer of 1899 Mrs. Austin went to Los Angeles to make herself a member of the writing group around Charles Lummis. Before she had been there long she was teaching in the Normal School, but Mr. Lummis did not take to her, or she to him. There she met Dr. Frederick Webb Hodge, the Indian specialist, who gave her some lasting advice on writing about tribal affairs. She also met Kate Douglas Wiggin. When her husband refused to join her there, she returned to him. Soon afterward she placed Ruth in a private institution at Santa Clara.

After settling back into Inyo Mrs. Austin built a house there, at Independence, "the brown house under the willow tree by the creek that came down from Kearsarge,"¹⁹ She continued to meet the kind of people she had wanted to know--writers like Charles Howard Shinn and Stewart Edward White. Then she met other people when she returned to Los Angeles for lectures. It was in Inyo that she wrote The Land of Little Rain. After its completion she revisited the Tejon Country and made a trip to Monterrey

and San Francisco. This trip brought her attention to the strange wild beach at Carmel, where her association with George Sterling, Jack London, and Jimay Hopper began. She built a house there, where she was to spend a great deal of time writing, finishing Isidro and beginning an Indian play. Mrs. Austin said of Carmel:

Much that got into the press about Carmel had no more fidelity to the fact than an item reported in a recent visitors' book to the effect that my house at Carmel had a cow's tail for a bell-pull. . . . This reduction of an authentic article of use and beauty to an absurdity is symbolic of the major misapprehension of America in general to the true inwardness of the artistic life. There were a good many 'cows' tails' hung upon the names that made Carmel-by-the-Sea an unforgettable experience.²⁰

Other members of the colony were Ambrose Bierce, Harry Leon Wilson and Charles Warren Stoddard.

Mrs. Austin became ill and the doctors gave her nine months to live. Thinking that Italy would be a nice place in which to die, she decided to take a trip there. After being there a while, she found that she was recovering. From Italy she went to France, and in the next spring she went to London. There she visited the Herbert Hoovers and met H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Bernard Shaw, Hilaire Belloc, and William Butler Yeats.

On her return to New York, her play The Arrow Maker

²⁰ Ibid., p. 301.

was produced at the New Theater. In the interim before settling at Carmel again, Mrs. Austin lectured in San Diego, where she met the former Mary Patchen, a sweetheart of her father's before his marriage. She told Mrs. Austin of a visit she had made to the Hunters before Mary Austin's birth, and showed her clippings that indicated her interest in George Hunter's daughter and which proved the devotion she had always felt for him. Back at Carmel, Mrs. Austin wrote another play, Fire, which was produced by the group there.

For the next few years she alternated her living between Carmel and New York. In New York she lived first on Riverside, two or three years at the National Arts Club, and at No. 10 Barrow Street. Now she was publishing one or two books each year. The events of World War I and the Feminist Movement composed the chief interests of this period.

In 1918 her daughter died, and in 1921 she returned to England, where she was a guest of the Fabian Society and a lecturer in their summer session. She was back in New York in 1922 and 1923. She made a visit to New Mexico, after which she wrote The Land of Journeys' Ending.

Her experiences in New Mexico led her to choose Santa Fe for her home. She lived there until her death in 1934. Of this period of her life and of her accomplishments there I shall have more to say in another chapter.

CHAPTER II

NATURE

Mary Austin's adventures of the wild began when she was a child playing in the vicinity of Rinaker's Hill. To her all places were beautiful and interesting as long as they were out of doors. It is not strange that her earliest experience with God was so closely related to an object of nature--a walnut tree. The child Mathew's experience in the delightful story "The Christmas Tree" in The Basket Woman is evidently similar to those she had as a child. The thoughts broadened in her mind as in Mathew's when he discovered that he might find "more in the forest than he had ever thought to find, now that he knew what to look for, since everything speaks of God in its own way and it is only a matter of understanding how."¹

In her youth she read Thoreau and Burroughs, and she always envied Charles Robertson, instructor in botany at Blackburn, when she saw him setting out on a field trip with an insect net and botany case or coming home with his boots mired, smelling of meadowsweet. She wrote of him,

¹ Mary Austin, The Basket Woman, p. 104.

"It was a thin little trail Charles Robertson showed her, broadening as it went, so that even yet her happiest relaxation from the world of human reality is to leave everything else and walk in it."²

When she was about twelve years of age she became interested in a course in geology that was offered by the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, and the first book that Mary Hunter ever bought for herself was Hugh Miller's Old Red Sandstone, a book on geology. She fulfilled her youthful mania for collecting by making a collection of fossil crinoids.

From the first glimpse she had of the West when her family moved to the San Joaquin Valley, Mary Austin had felt the need of being alone with the environment in order to understand it. Then, and ever afterward, "in the long dry washes and along the edges of the chaparral," she felt a pang for an experiential contact with this "beauty-in-the-wild, longing to be made human,"³ Though other responsibilities kept her from giving herself up wholly to the mystery she felt there, she spent much of the next fifteen years "peeking and prying" into it. In a letter

² Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 167.

³ Ibid., p. 187.

to her publishers while she was awaiting publication of The Land of Little Rain she wrote,

. . .I have just looked. . . .When I was too sick to do anything else I could lie out under the sagebrush and look, and when I was able to get about I went to look at other things, and by and by I got to know when and where looking was most worth while. Then I got so full of looking that I had to get rid of some of it to make room for more.⁴

The result, of course, was The Land of Little Rain, her first book, a book that settled unquestionably Mary Austin's qualifications as a writer.

The opening lines of the book set the tone and rhythm that is characteristic of the whole book. Mrs. Austin said that years later she discovered "the first paragraph striking without intention into the irregular tug and release of the four horse Mojave stage and of the eighteen-mule borax team."⁵

This statement aroused my attention to the extent that I re-read that paragraph and arranged it in poetic form instead of the prose form Mrs. Austin used. I am quoting here that arrangement for the first paragraph and the opening sentences of the second paragraph.

East away from the Sierras,
South from Panamint and Amargosa,
East and south

⁴Grant M. Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels, p.166.

⁵Mary Austin, The American Rhythm, p. 15.

Many an uncounted mile,
Is the country of Lost Borders.

Ute, Paiute, Mojave, and Shoshone
Inhabit its frontiers,
And as far into the heart of it
As men dare go.
Not the law
But the land ⁶
Sets the limit.

Rhythm there is here, I'll admit; and I'm willing to accept Mrs. Austin's opinion as to its resembling that of the Mojave stage.

From this beginning she proceeded to give an intimate description of the desert--the hills and plains full of intolerable sun glare, the dry lakes, the broad wastes open to wind and sand, the hot sink of Death Valley, the land of lost rivers--a land that once visited must be revisited inevitably. She considered the vegetation of the desert, whose whole duty is to flower and fruit, a challenge to its human offspring not "to try" but "to do." Before the reader finishes the first chapter he is caught up with the charm of the land and is as reluctant to leave off reading the rest of the book as the desert inhabitant is to leave the desert, once he is caught under its spell.

She was sure that her wanderings in the desert were worth while. She wrote;

For all the toll the desert takes of a man it gives compensations, deep breaths, deep sleep, and

the communication of the stars. It comes upon one with new force in the pauses of the night that the Chaldeans were a desert-bred people. It is hard to escape the sense of mastery as the stars move in the wide clear heavens to risings and settings unobscured. They look large and near and palpitant; as if they moved on some stately service not needful to declare. Wheeling to their stations in the sky, they make the poor world-fret of no account. Of no account you who lie out there watching, nor the lean coyote that stands off in the scrub from you and howls and howls.⁷

Along the water trails of the Carrizo she introduces us to the animal life in the desert. The coyote she calls a "true water witch" snuffing and pawing until he frees the blind water from the soil. Then you catch the mood of the trail as one by one she describes the animals that come for water at Lone Tree Spring--rabbit, fox, bobcat, maverick yearlings, rats, chipmunks, burrowing owls, field mice, quail, sparrows, road-runners, hawks, and eagles. She devotes a chapter to the scavengers of the desert, buzzards, ravens, vultures, and coyotes, that feed on the carrion; and she regrets that Nature has provided no scavenger to eat tin cans or take care of the other disfigurements that man makes upon the forest floor.

Some of the best descriptions are found in the chapter on "The Streets of the Mountains."

The shape of a new mountain is roughly pyramidal, running out into long shark-finned ridges that interfere and merge into other thunder-splintered sierras.

⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

You get the saw-tooth effect from a distance, but the near-by granite bulk glitters with the terrible keen polish of old glacial ages. I say terrible; so it seems. When those glossy domes swim into the alpenglow, wet after rain, you conceive how long and imperturbable are the purposes of God.⁸

Describing the grandeur of the cañons she wrote:

Nothing else in the streets of the mountains gives such a sense of pageantry as the conifers; other trees, if there are any, are home dwellers, like the tender fluttered, sisterhood of quaking asp.⁹

In discussing Mary Austin's treatment of Nature in The Land of Little Rain, D.W. Wynn says:

That wild nature is redolent of the spirit of God; that nature heals; that nature has a wisdom of her own; that minute observation of nature leads frequently to transcendental rapture--all these notes of the natural-history essay Mary Austin catches and holds with a firm grasp. As a whole, The Land of Little Rain shows power and originality in its 'reverential passion for wild nature.'¹⁰ And her desert is more wild, if by wild is meant non-human or forbidding, than Thoreau's woods or Muir's mountains. Mary Austin took Transcendentalism to the desert, showing thereby more self-reliance than Emerson himself perhaps would have been willing to undertake. 10

Mary Austin's next book of nature was The Flock, which was published in 1906. In the first chapter of the book she gives a brief history of the coming of the flocks to California. Two years of homesteading on the borders of Rancho El Tejon and fifteen more years in Inyo had made

⁸ Ibid., p. 186.

⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰

Dudley Taylor Wynn, A Critical Study of the Writings of Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934), p. 8.

her know the region--"its moods and the calendar of its shrubs and skies."¹¹ There was never an occasion lacking for her to know sheep. The bells jangling in the pines, flocks blethering in the meadows, and riots of shearings were commonplace to her.

In the second chapter of the book, called "The Sun in Aires", there is a good description of lambing and the ways of lambs and ewes. To quote Mr. H. C. Tracy,

There is more pure authentic science of behavior in it than you will find in many pages of heavier reading. There is in this, as in every other chapter, true natural history of the sheep, good natural history of the herder, and a naturism of the human observer that lifts it out of the dull category of information.¹² There is a realism that does not break our mood.

The chapter on "A Shearing" is typical of the shearings to be seen in those early days of California if one could follow the wool wagon and its shearing crews from town to town. The crew and the camp, where the herders compared their experiences, the shearing proper, the "baile" and the parting of the flocks are described; that is, the romance part of these activities is given. For the technical and business part of the shearing, Mrs. Austin commended the

¹¹ Mary Austin, The Flock, p. 12.

¹² Henry Chester Tracy, American Naturists, p. 245.

reader to Little Pete, one of the shepherds, whom she described along with several others in the next chapter.

On the "Long Trail" the hills presented themselves with white wonder as the shepherds turned south for lambings or sought the summer pastures. But it is a spectacle that makes one shudder when she describes the flock moving hopelessly northward during a dry year in a land that would not destroy its flocks, but would merely neglect them.

Passing on to the meadows of the open range which were to be reached by arduous climbing, she pictured the true beauty of the scene found there.

Here I heard at intervals the flute, sweet single notes as if the lucid air had dripped in sound. Awhile I heard it, and between, the slumberous roll of bells of the pines like falling water and water falling like the windy tones of pines; then the warble of the flute out of the flock murmur as I came over the back of the slip where it hollowed to let in a little meadow fresh and flowered.¹³

There is a chapter on the psychology of the flock, the "flock-mind" Mary Austin called it. Another related the part played by the dogs, which she called "the Go-Betweens." In addition to the personal strife between the herdsmen in the great game for the free pastures, the sheepherder had other troubles in the form of the "Liers-in-wait"--the coyote,

13

Mary Austin, The Flock, p. 106.

bobcat, and cougar--to say nothing of his troubles with the forest rangers on the government reserves.

In this book Mary Austin has preserved the leisurely ways and the picturesqueness of California before the clang of machinery overlaid it; and she wrote of it with love, humor, and knowledge. She incorporated her pleasant association of the flocks in her poem, "When I Am Dead."

When I am dead!

I shall take a high road where the flock scent lingers
 In the browsed sage and the blue, bush-lupin fingers,
 I shall find a by-road by the foot changes
 Till I come where the herders' fires
 Blossom in the dusk of the grape-colored ranges.
 And I shall sit by the bedding fires
 With the little, long armed men,
 Elehevarray and Little Pete and Narcisse Julienne--
 For what can come when sense decays
 They being even as I, and all of us being dead--
 And the dull flesh fails,
 But that man is one with his thought at last
 And the Wish prevails?

So it shall be when Balzar the Basque
 And the three Manxmen
 And Pete Giraud and my happy ghost
 Walk with the flocks again.¹⁴

Lands of the Sun is another book of California before the days when it was pre-empted and overrun by what is "probably the most impotent society that has yet got itself into any quarter of the United States."¹⁵ Mary Austin

¹⁴
 Mary Austin, "When I am Dead," New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. IV (August, 1934), 234-235.

¹⁵
 Mary Austin, Lands of the Sun, p. viii.

admitted that she was too easily persuaded to write about life out of doors, when a London publishing company requested her to write the text for a collection of water color paintings of California in 1914, under the title California: Lands of the Sun.¹⁶ In the second edition, which appeared in 1927 as Lands of the Sun, she did not pretend to know any more about the land than she had known when the first edition came out, but she felt that she knew more than anyone else did.

The title comes from a Spanish proverb, "The lands of the sun expand the soul;" and Mrs. Austin has competently rendered that sense of spiritual dilation that came to those who were fortunate enough to be exposed to it in those early days. The reader is enraptured by the descriptions of the land that the Spanish "frailles" found to be the witness of their faith--"the wax-berry bush from which they were to gather the thin coating of the berries into candles for their improvised altars. . . the glutinous-leaved herb of the Saints, given to them for healing. . . and the yucca, called 'The Candles of Our Lord.'"¹⁷

It was in those remote districts, back where the yucca

¹⁶ Ibid., p. v.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

began, that life went on very much as it did in the days of the Spanish.

The doves begin it, voicing the mesa dawn in notes of a cool blueness, then the sleek and stately quail moving down in twittering droves to the infrequent water holes. The rhythm of a flock in motion is like a great snake. After them the road-runner, 'corredor del camino,' the cock of the chaparral, crest down, rudder aslant, swifter than a horse, incarnate spirit of the hopeful dust through which he flirts and flits. Then the blueness is folded up, it lies packed in the cañons, the mountains flatten. High in his airy haunts the Sparrow Hawk sails, and the furry, frisk-tailed folk begin the day's affairs.¹⁸

Her descriptions of the "Mothering Mountains" make you understand how sometimes the mountain speaks directly to the soul--a Power, immanent and inescapable. Some of her best nature writing is found in the descriptions of the Sierra Madre Mountains, which reach out in motherly fashion to save the south from desertness, and deny men the one instrument, Rain, by which the desert could be mastered.

"The High Sierras," "The Sagebrush Country," and the "Coasts of Adventure," are distinctly pictured.

The romantic "Port of Monterrey" and the picturesque "Old Spanish Gardens" are reminders of the period of Spanish occupation.

A detailed picture of the tulares, the haunts of

water-birds, is given. Tulares means "place of the tules." The following example shows the fine detail that Mrs. Austin uses.

The tule is a round, leafless reed. It springs up along the tidelands or in the stagnant backwater of the rivers or by any least dribble of a desert spring. No condition daunts it but absolute dearth of water; far called, it travels on the wind over mountain ranges, over great wastes of waterless plain, to find the one absolute condition, a pool--white-rimmed with alkali or poisonous green with arsenic.¹⁹

Mrs. Austin could see the advantage of studying the mountains from the air, but the proper vehicle wasn't available for use in her day. Such a study might have been satisfying to her, but nothing could have improved on the observations she made on her personal trips into the "High Sierras." In her descriptions of them she brought out those aspects of line, mass, color, and intricate lovely detail of strange reactions which produce upon a person who looks at them an incitement to activity and a revealing of spiritual capacities which we recognize as the thing to be expected of mountains. The reader feels the effect of the "High Sierras," not only as the protector of lands and water, but as the source of that high confidence in his destiny and the purposeful friendliness of the Powers.

Another of her nature books was The Trail Book. Mrs. Austin meant for that book to be a book of prehistoric

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

trail stories, each one illustrating one of the pre-Columbian cultures.²⁰ It is classed as "juvenile" but Mr. Tracy suggests that only a gifted child or a precocious one could catch the inner drift of it.

There is an elemental force here that goes deeper than folk tale form and myth construction. The ancient world is felt, the primitive world of man and mammoth The grip of the old lost life is upon it.²¹

As literature he ranks it with Kipling's Jungle Books.

Mr. Wynn thinks that it is "too fanciful for good nature writing, too earnestly moralistic for good children's stories, and too much burdened with some of Mrs. Austin's dimly emerging theories of psychology and mysticism."²²

The animals and wax figures of a museum come alive for Oliver and Dorcas Jane, whose father runs the boilers for a great museum. A mastodon tells how a boy of pre-glacial times made friends with him and through his help triumphed over his enemy and gained the chieftainship left vacant by his father, whom the mastodon had killed. There are other narratives told by a coyote, a puma, a "road-runner," a condor, an Indian woman, and other animals and persons.

²⁰ Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 316.

²¹ H.C. Tracy, op. cit., p. 247.

²² D. T. Wynn, op. cit., p. 16.

In preparation for the writing of The Trail Book Mrs. Austin spent a great deal of time talking with the staff of the American Museum of Natural History. They let her go into the museum at night and take things out of the cases and wear them and told her things about them.²³ When the book was published, however, her publishers failed to understand it. A reader of these fanciful stories might do well to assume the attitude of Mona in Outland, who could "believe six impossible things before breakfast" if it suited her, and who could "understand the difference between a literary belief and a working certainty."²⁴

For The Land of Journeys' Ending, Mrs. Austin shifted the scene from the far West to the region between the Rio Colorado and the Rio Grande. In this book, as in her others, she shows immediately that strong feeling for the land itself, a feeling that had become an obsession with her. The historical events of the entry of Diego de Alcaráz in 1536, his meeting with the party of Cabeza de Vaca, the later expedition of Coronado in search of the seven cities of Cibola, the arrival of Fray Marcos de Niza in the wilderness of Arizona, and the coming of Oñate in 1595 are all pictured;

23

Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 331.

24

Mary Austin, Outland, p. 176.

but the spirit of the land is of more importance and of more lasting quality than those events. She wrote,

. . . There was nothing that betrayed its crop capacity to the untutored sense of the Amerind savage and the unlettered American pioneer. Both of these married the land because they loved it, and afterward made it bear. If more lines of natural development converged here, between the bracketing rivers, more streams of human energy came to rest than anywhere else within what is now the United States, it was because men felt here the nameless content of the creative spirit in the presence of its proper instrument. ²⁵

"Wind's Trail I am Seeking" is the poetic title of the second chapter, so named because the location of the forests of New Mexico and Arizona is a matter of force and of prevailing winds. The vastness of the region is shown in the following paragraph.

Both the grass and the trees run with the wind in patterns that on a European map would measure states and empires, reduced by the whole scale of the country to intimacy. Once you have accepted the scale, it is as easy to be familiar with a grass-plot the size of Rhode Island or a plantation of yellow pines half as big as Belgium, as with the posy-plots of your garden. ²⁶

You are made to feel the winds, rain, clouds, mists, and air rivers. She makes a tree strike freshly on your observation; and though you are a stranger in the vegetating world, she helps lift you to a "profounder level

²⁵ Mary Austin, The Land of Journeys' Ending, p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

of consciousness which uncloses and admits you to sentience of the mounting sap."²⁷ Before long you are imagining with her that you sense some of the manward yearnings of the vegetation.

Even I, saying that the best bows are made of juniper wood! when, in fact, before there could be a bent stick from which a pointed stick could be launched, there was the idea of the bow arching in the bough of the juniper, making itself known to man by springy branches, being drawn down and flying back, catapulting light weights; bending, not breaking. By even more subtle ways of catching his attention, of which, after long uninterrupted hours with it, I have a hint, the juniper got itself made into bows. By such direct, dark paths, lost and only occasionally recovered, the wild grass and the tree on the mountain yearned toward and made themselves evident in man.²⁸

Possibly the most unique device of style used in the book is that of using Indian "terms" and "phrases" for setting the mood, thus making the reader see the land, as Mrs. Austin did, from the Indian's approach. She believed that these native phrase-makers were more apt in their expressions than she; and they are most effective, I agree.

In his discussion of The Land of Journeys' Ending, Mr. Tracy says,

. . .the book lifts itself above other contemporary writing, goes below current and accustomed insights, carves out and grips a new segment of the nature experience. It is a new wholeness. See how it stands apart.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁸ H.C. Tracy, op. cit., p. 251-252.

. . .not aesthetic man, merely, appraising a world from which he has become detached and against which he stands opposed as critic;

. . .not inductive mind, with scientific procedures, explaining and exploring things that must presently be exploited;

. . .not emotional man, as poet, seeking in picture-patterns a literate enjoyment.

Something of all these, perhaps, but with another will, another center. It is the will for, or to, identification. Oneness. The self is to be made one with a profounder world. The sick conscious self is to be drawn both down and up into a valid unconscious one. There is health there. Man is felt as man-in-nature; no longer an ailing off-shoot, a detached product of greed and intellection. 29

Commenting on the above quotation, Dudley T. Wynn called Mr. Tracy a "world-weary mystic, sick, almost to a fury, of civilization and fancying that an experience of nature can cure him." He believed that Mr. Tracy "out-Austins Mrs. Austin."³⁰

Mr. Tracy may have been over-enthusiastic in his estimate of Mrs. Austin, but he is right about the quality of "oneness;" and we have to look no farther than the next chapter to find evidence of that. "The Days of Our Ancestors" gives the Zuñi's idea of Man's climb upward from the Mist-encompassed-Place, world by world, to the Middle Place. The Pit-House period and the Small-House period, which in archeologists' books form dull reading, are made

29

Ibid.

30

D. T. Wynn, op. cit., p. 13.

clear as you begin to see the relation between the experience of the past and the present. The following paragraph is typical of the way this relation is shown, and it also gives Mrs. Austin's idea of man at one with nature.

Whether or not the small house period began with corn, its economic and social and religious life revolved around it; for any people that lives by corn becomes bond-servant of all its ways. Corn is a town-builder, a maker of policies, mother of inventions. . . .

There is something inexpressibly stirring thus to happen, where all around is silence and the sun, on plants that have come down this long way with man, as though they gave off something of man's personality, absorbed through centuries of aspiration with him, up from the grass. The soul of the corn passes into the soul of the observer; the insistent beat of consciousness soothes to a murmur, faint as the wind in the corn, of godhead in man, to which the small-house people, giving ear, were moved like the corn in the wind. It is only in such passages that one realizes that the charm of Amerind life, for the modern American, is the absence of those strains and resistances that stiffen us against the wind forever blowing from some quarter of the universe across our souls.³¹

There is much in this chapter to depict the enchantment of mystery pervading this land of "our ancients." One is tempted to keep quoting selections like the one that follows:

Such magic is thrown about this period, by the wild splendor of the many-colored cliffs from which squared tops and ruined towers of the cliff villages peer down, that it is difficult to write it into any scheme of tribal evolution. Eagles mewing about the perilous footholds, great trees rooting where once the slender ladders clung! You walk in one of the winding canons of southern Utah or Colorado, threaded by a bright stream, half smothered in choke-cherry and cotton-wood,

³¹

Ibid., p. 72-73.

and suddenly, high and inaccessible in the canon wall, the sun picks out the little windows in the walls amid the smoke-blue shadows, and you brush your eyes once or twice to make sure you do not see half-naked men, deer- and antelope-laden, climbing up the banded cliffs, and sleek-haired women, bright with such colors as they knew how to wring out of herbs and berries, popping in and out of the T-shaped openings like parakeets.

Clear October afternoons, when the fleets of aspen, gold at the bottoms of the canons, set sail for the ruined balconies, and the gobble of the wild turkey sounds between the driving gusts, how can you be sure it does not come from the penned space behind the broken walls, how distinguish between the beat of your horse's hoofs and the 'plump-plump' of the mealing-stone, or the roll of the medicine drums from the kivas? ³²

In the chapter on the "Cactus Country," Mary Austin describes all varieties of cacti found in the Southwest. Starting with the prickly pear, the gypsy of the tribe, she describes them all up to the sahuaro, the giant cactus.

There is a singular charm of the sahuaro forest, a charm of elegance, as the wind, moving like royalty across the well-spaced intervalles, receives the courtesies of ironwood and ocotilla and palo-verde. It begins with the upright next-of-blood, with a stately rocking of the tall pillars on their roots, and a soft 'ss-ss-ss' of the wind along their spiny ridges. Suddenly the bright blossom-tips of the ocotilla take flight like flocks of scarlet birds, as the long wands bow and recover in the movement of the wind, and after an appreciable interval the thin-leaved ironwood rustles and wrestles with it, loth to let it go, until it drops with almost a sullen note to the stiff whisper of the palo-verde, while the creosote fairly casts its forehead to the ground.³³

³² Ibid., pp. 80-81.

³³ Ibid., p. 125.

"Papagueria" is a chapter on the land of the Papagos, a people that believes it owed "something of its preservation to its situation beside the five black hills on the top of which they made their own shrines." This country is located in Arizona, and every year the gathering of the sahuaro is an occasion for ceremony. Mrs. Austin also has a poem "In Papagueria," in which she speaks of the country longingly,

Would that I were there now,
 Gathering crimson sahuaro fruit
 For the syrup making,
 Drinking sahuaro wine with the old men,
 Prayer feathers fluttering.
 Would I might hear again
 The night-singing mocking bird
 Climbing up and down his ladder of sound.³⁴

"Pasc Por Aqui" is an account of the Indians, Spanish, and white men who have passed by Inscription Rock, located near the Zuñi Pueblo in New Mexico. She thinks that even as the Spanish inscriptions on the Rock show more plainly than the more modern print-cut names, that the quality the conquistadores wrote on the land will outlast the pattern stamped over it since 1848.

It is advisable to read "Down the Rio Grande" with a map at hand. After reading this chapter it is impossible

³⁴
 Mary Austin, The Children Sing in the Far West,
 p. 72.

ever to travel in that section of New Mexico without experiencing a "different" feeling. There is a fine blending of the events of its romantic past with its present splendor and beauty.

"The Sacred Mountains" she describes from the viewpoint of the Indian. To the Navajo, the Mountain is God. Their young men sing toward the source of their strength, which they call Reared-within-the-Mountain.

. . . Man felt God in the earth; lifted Him by the power of the up-thrust to a seat in the zenith, with the earth his altar; lifted Him to the vault above the Cherubim, where He still tarried for us long after the Tewa glimpsed Him as Opa, the Universe Man, the sum of everything that is. Here from the Sky of the World, where we lost Him, we lap back on the trail of the Navajo and know Him again as the sacred power of mountains.³⁵

In the "Rio Colorado" she traces the mighty river and its tributaries and describes the region through which it flows. She describes the Grand Cañon with precise and imaginative terms proportionate to its grandeur.

She closes the book with a prophecy that a new race will arise to establish a culture in the Southwest.

For new races are not made new out of the dust as the first man was. They are made out of old races by reactions to new environment. Race is the pattern of established adjustments between the within and the without of man. Where two or three racial strains are run together, as co-operative adventurers in the new scene,

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Ibid., p. 375.

or as conqueror grafting himself upon an earlier arrival, the land is the determining factor in the new design. By land, I mean all those things common to a given region, such as have been lightly or deeply touched upon in this book: the flow of prevailing winds, the succession of vegetal cover, the legend of ancient life; and the scene, above everything the magnificently shaped and colored scene. Operating subtly below all other types of adjustive experience, these are the things most quickly and surely passed from generation to generation, marked, in the face of all the daunting or neglectful things a land can do to its human inhabitants, by that purr of inward content, the index of race beginning.³⁶

It is not to be understood that the books I have discussed contain all of Mrs. Austin's writings of nature. The land forms the background for all her folk-stories and short stories; and her novels of the Southwest are all flavored with descriptions of the landscape and the environment in which her settings are laid. In fact, Outland might well be called a nature novel. Mrs. Austin describes it as "a romantic story of outdoors; a story of romantic Outlanders and Far-folk, struggle and treasure."³⁷ Mona, an English teacher turned writer, and her friend, Herman, a sociologist teacher, become captives of the Outliers; but they come away from the land with the best that the Outliers have to offer--a new outlook on life brought about by their experience with nature and by their contact with people who had learned the secret of living with nature.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 438.

³⁷ Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 332.

Santa Lucia has for its setting one of the communities described in Lands of the Sun. Isidro has its setting in the country of the Mission Fathers. In The Ford are found descriptions reminiscent of Mrs. Austin's life at Inyo. In her last novel, Starry Adventure, she portrays Gard Sitwell as having the feeling that there was a relation between himself and the landscape. One of the most fascinating parts of the book deals with his encounters with all the elements which go to make up his natural environment. Nowhere can be found more beautiful descriptions of the New Mexico scene.

Once it came when they were just walking, without looking for anything in particular, on the loma between Las Moras and the ciénaga. It was April and the aspens had come out at the top in green flames. Far down, the creek border was fleecy white with the wild plums. There were lilac-blue penstemons blooming in the sandy places between the rabbit brush and the young piñones. Painted cup flowered in dips and hollows of the loma; it was as if scarlet color detached itself and floated close to the ground. And between the penstemon and the painted cup, a glass bottle had been broken and lay in glittering fragments on the winking sand. It was clear like water, and yet faintly lilac-blue like the air that thickened in the middle sky. It was the color of the penstemons that sprang between the bright shattered edges of the glass. And suddenly the Something came. It was in him and in the broken bottle shards and in the blue penstemon flower; there was one thing together because of it. ³⁸

I have already quoted lines from two of Mrs. Austin's poems. In The Children Sing in the Far West there are many other poems of nature. On occasions when she read her

³⁸ Mary Austin, Starry Adventure, p. 70.

poetry publicly she often chose to read "Prayers to the Outdoor Saints," Santa Doucelina, San Isidro, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and San Francisco.³⁹ "At Carmel" is an example of poems typical of those found in this book.

There are people go to Carmel
To see the blue bay pass
Through green wave to white foam
Like snow on new grass,
But I go to hear the auklets crying
Like dark glass on glass.

I go to hear the herons talk
The way that herons have, half asleep,
As they come in past Carmel bar
With a slow wing sleep;
To hear the wood teams jingling up from Sur, 40
And the contented blether of the Mission sheep.

Mary Austin has enlarged the tradition of the "American Naturists." Henry Smith said that "she has increased the scale of nature-writing to the measure of the continent; she has taken the unisonal melody of a Muir and scored it for full orchestra."⁴¹

Mary Austin and John Muir ran into difficulties that other naturists didn't have. They undertook to establish

39

T. M. Pearce, "Mary Austin, 1868-1934," The New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. IV (August, 1934), p. 233.

40

Mary Austin, The Children Sing in the Far West, p.14.

41

Henry Smith, "The Feel of the Purposeful Earth," New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. I (February, 1931), p. 21.

a tradition of literary description of their "beloved lands." Of this difficulty Mrs. Austin wrote:

The plants, the birds, and animals had few of them any common names so that if the writers wished to speak of what they saw, they had to master the natural sciences of botany, zoology, geology, and topography, at least so far as the land was concerned. The land was imperfectly mapped. The very names which were available for description, such as 'barancas,' 'bajadas,' 'cumbres,' and 'sierras', were un-English or had no English equivalents. . . . I insist that John Muir and I have established a literary tradition for dealing with the American scene on the Western scale that will not soon be discarded.⁴²

The certainty that Mrs. Austin shows in that last statement is characteristic of the attitude she was to have about life as a whole. What she called her "in-knowing" had made her certain that life "taken by and large" is good, and man can have confidence in the universe.

42

Mary Austin, "Beyond the Hudson," The Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. VII (December 6, 1930), p. 432.

CHAPTER III

INTEREST IN PEOPLE

Though Mary Austin was often misunderstood by others, she had a genuine interest in people. She had a quick insight into the character of people. Her annoying habit of saying things about visitors when she was a child had made her mother remark, "I think the child is possessed."¹

Mrs. Keplinger, a neighbor in Carlinville, said, "She was always an oddity. She had two great braids of hair on top of her head and used to wander around the yard staring at everything." She had wanted to see down into Mary Austin, but never could.² Another neighbor of hers in Carlinville declared that she was the most disagreeable woman she had ever known.³

Mary Austin liked the people in Carlinville, but she didn't feel as if any of her contacts there could be called literary. Though the homesteading neighbors were not the sort that she had been accustomed to, she considered them "companionable, wholesome young people, immensely worth

¹ Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 45.

² T. M. Pearce, The Beloved House, p. 78.

³ Ibid., p. 193.

knowing,"⁴ And the interest that she had in people and in life about her increased as she grew older. In Experiences Facing Death she wrote:

But it is permissible to say that I like my friends, my work, and my house here on the loma; and the thought that I should never again see the wild plum blossoms storm the banks of Peña Blanca, never hear the drums of Keres calling up the He-rain with its wing hollows filled with evening blueness, smote me with an insupportable pang. I feel quite certain that, had I been forced to abandon this present level of consciousness at that moment, I should have haunted, not my house, but the familiar scene--morning headlands, the three Wind Rivers and the winding trails; I should have come back to the sound of the drums and the smell of the orchards.

Many of Mrs. Austin's oddities can be traced to pre-occupation with her work, as was the case in the story that Mr. T.M. Pearce tells about Mrs. Austin and Mrs. Ina Sizer Cassidy. Mrs. Cassidy had entertained Mrs. Austin at dinner in a New York hotel, and Mrs. Austin invited her to tea the next afternoon. On meeting Mrs. Cassidy in the hotel corridor the next morning, Mrs. Austin did not speak, but in the afternoon she again asked her to tea. When Mrs. Cassidy reproached her for her actions she said, "You must not take offense if I do it again. In the morning my thoughts shape themselves about whatever work I have at hand. I cannot make myself aware of anything else or the continuity of my thought

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Mary Austin, Experiences Facing Death, pp. 22-23.

is lost." She explained that she never spoke to anyone before four o'clock.⁶

Her friends learned to overlook her oddities. William Allen White wrote of her in his autobiography saying that he and his wife loved her and took her into their hearts. She was a familiar guest in their house for forty years. He had met Mrs. Austin at the National Arts Club in New York, where they often ate together. He was convinced that she had a tough-fibered brain. He declared her to be "vainer than a wilderness of gargantuan peacocks, a strong, overbearing woman." He remembered the gaudy shawls she wore and the "God-awful hats that made her look like a battleship."⁷

Mr. White might well have mentioned the high tortoise shell comb, a Spanish "peineta," that she wore when she didn't wear a hat. She probably wore the comb for effect to gain attention, or as a kind of fetish, such as she describes in Everyman's Genius--"an object which by association with the desired reaction, operates suggestively."⁸ In Mrs. Austin's case the "peineta" was symbolic of her interest in Pueblo culture and Spanish arts.

⁶ T. M. Pearce, op. cit., p. 201.

⁷ William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 370.

⁸ Mary Austin, Everyman's Genius, p. 218.

On the whole, Mr. White found Mrs. Austin a most interesting, stimulating, and lovable person. He said that he and his wife always left her presence feeling that their minds and hearts had been kindled with new energy.

The feeling that Mr. White had is similar to what Carl Van Doren experienced on hearing her speak. He admitted that some hearers were alienated by her forthright candor, mistaking it for egotism. Others disliked the boldness with which she drew general conclusions from her store of technical knowledge. Some resented her irony, which was almost her only form of humor. But those were only outward qualities of hers. He said that the hearer who disregarded those qualities found himself listening to words which had the "authority of something curiously first hand." He said, "She speaks as if she had just come back from the desert with fresh truth. But the desert from which she has come is not California; it is the clear country of the mind."⁹ She was a commanding person, and her friends respected her authority. At her last public appearance, five days before her death, she was introduced as "for years the boss of the crowd."¹⁰

⁹ Carl Van Doren, "The American Rhythm: Mary Austin, Discoverer and Prophet," Century Magazine, Vol. CVII (November, 1923), p.154.

¹⁰ T. M. Pearce, "Mary Austin, 1868-1934," New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. IV (August, 1934), p.233.

I mentioned, in Chapter I, a number of Mrs. Austin's literary acquaintances. Of course, there were many others. She gave as one of her reasons for returning to Santa Fe to make her home the fact that people of first rank of creative and intellectual achievement gathered there or visited there for longer or shorter durations. She mentioned such persons as A. V. Kidder, Sylvanus Morley, John Galsworthy, Carl Sandburg, Willa Cather, Witter Bynner, John Sloan, Dr. Robert Milliken, Paul Kellogg, and Sinclair Lewis.¹¹ A list of her acquaintances would include the names of prominent geologists, anthropologists, writers, publishers, artists, religious leaders, feminist leaders, psychologists, and educators.

It is easy to recognize in Mrs. Austin's novels and plays characters who are counterparts of Mrs. Austin as to personality and temperament. In A Woman of Genius, the most "real" character is her heroine, Olivia Lattimore. Her struggles, as I have already mentioned, were comparable to those in Mrs. Austin's own life. As we follow the girl through marriage, the birth of a son, his death in infancy, her struggle with her husband because of her gift for the stage, the breach between them, his death, and her

11

Mary Austin, "Why I Live in Santa Fe," Golden Book, Vol. XVI (October, 1932), p. 306.

struggles for success in Chicago, we find many similarities to the frustrations and obstacles that Mrs. Austin met on her own road to success. Olivia's life was an open revolt against the beliefs of the people of Taylorville, to whom it had never occurred that a woman might have "any preferred employment besides cushioning life for the males of her family." On the other hand, her girlhood friend, Pauline, grew up to be an example of their idea of the perfect wife, letting her husband run her life, even to the extent of telling her what she should read. Olivia's final struggle between her love for Helmeth Garrett and her "gift"--a struggle in which she gave up Helmeth for the "possession" that she had worked so hard to achieve--might well be compared with some of the sacrifices other women who pioneered for "women's rights" had to make. Though in the end she resorted to the saving commonness of everyday life, she had lived up to her definition of genius: that "it is a re-kneading of the bread of life until it nourishes us toward greater achievement."¹²

In The Arrow Maker, Mrs. Austin's best known play, the Chisera, or medicine woman, was the main character. She had fallen in love with Simwa, the arrow maker; and through her power, he had become War Leader of the tribe. After he

¹² Mary Austin, A Woman of Genius, p. 7.

married the chief's daughter, the Chisera withdrew her support and the Arrow Maker's leadership failed. The Chisera lost her gift, and tragedy came to the tribe. She tried to regain it by appealing to the Friend of the Soul of Man through singing and dancing. Simwa knew that the return of her power would mean his destruction, so he killed her with the charmed arrow she had given him. It was the old theme to which Mrs. Austin had given a great deal of thought--the conflict in a woman between a special endowment, which sets her apart from her kind, and the customary life of child bearing.

We hear the Chisera singing,

Come, O my power,
Indwelling spirit!
It is I that call.
Childless, unmated.¹³

When the chief asked if she was not respected above all women of the campody, she answered, "Ah--respect! What have I to do with respect? Am I not as other women that man should desire me?"

He told her that she was honored, and asked what more she would have. Her answer to that question was, "The dole of women. Love and sorrow and housekeeping; a husband to give me children, even though he beat me."¹⁴

¹³Mary Austin, The Arrow Maker, p. 157.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 148.

The Chisera's words remind one of Mrs. Austin's own admission when she wrote:

On a whole, what I regret is not the lack of a satisfying marriage, but the loss out of my life of the traditional protection, the certification of ladyhood. I have never been taken care of; and considering what that has meant to women in general, I feel a loss in the quality of charm and graciousness which I am unable to rationalize. The experience of being competent to myself has been immensely worth while to me. It gives clarity and poise. But without having had the experience of being taken care of, I am unable to realize the significance of that measure. I feel always a little at a loss. 15

In the novel Santa Lucia, which has its setting in a college town of California, Serena Lindley is the chief character. In the book Mrs. Austin makes an analysis of marriage through the experiences of three of her women characters. Serena marries Evan Lindley, the attorney for the college, who proves to be loyal, but not her equal intellectually. There are unhappy times, but she stays with him, even in the face of disgrace caused by his financial dishonesty. They solve their problems through their children and their mutual interest in Evan's work.

The marriage of Julia Maybury ends in tragedy. She marries Antrim Stairs, a biology professor, who tries to create some intellectual comradeship in her but fails. In the end she commits suicide for no reason except she is

restless because of her selection of a husband.

The marriage of William Caldwell, the only daughter of Dr. Caldwell, is a happy one. She marries a young doctor who comes to the town to take care of her father's practice during the older doctor's illness.

No. 26 Jayne Street, which Mrs. Austin believed to be her best novel, "aimed to uncover the sleazy quality of current radicalism."¹⁶ Neith Schuyler moves into an apartment away from her aunts in order to live her own life and pursue her own interests. She is represented as a person who does some serious thinking on problems facing pre-war America. Neith was interested in woman's part in such problems as follow: the matter of allegiance in time of war; the international drift toward communism and its relation to her as an individual; theoretical democracy as a possible basis for a reconstruction of personal relations.

Neith did not see woman's suffrage as a panacea for all troubles. In a letter to a friend of hers in the Air Service during the first World War she wrote:

I'm glad I never had any of that sore feeling about men as oppressors, the Kaisers of women. I can see where men and women have got themselves all wrong with one another, with a kind of wrongness that can't be changed too soon--I'm a Suffragist now, did I tell you? But it isn't going to be made right by

making them more like one another. There has been a lot said about giving women the vote so they can prevent wars. But I can see that unless women are going to keep on seeing how right and natural it is for you to have adventures, if only in science and in politics, you are just going to have to go on having wars to get a chance to be truly yourselves.¹⁷

One of the most serious personal problems that Neith had to solve, however, was the problem of breaking her engagement with Adam Frear. For years Rose Matlock and Adam Frear, both libertarian idealists, had been lovers. Frear withdrew from the relation to become engaged to Neith, who did not know of Frear's relation to Rose. Miss Matlock appealed to Neith to break off the engagement on the grounds that Frear's defection was based on his feelings alone and thus illustrated a reversion in his private life to the very principles of tyranny which he was pledged to destroy. Looking at the situation from Rose's viewpoint and thinking that it was the best solution for the interest of the "cause," Neith suspended her engagement. Neith was a believer in the idea that the hope of the future is based on man's ability to "act on the intrinsic merits of a situation, independently of his emotions."

Henry Smith had the following comment to make on No. 26 Jayne Street:

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Mary Austin, No. 26 Jayne Street, p. 264.

Its power lies, however, not in the story or the characters as such, but in the relation of the characters to ideas; and here also one often feels that the ideas are the more important to the author. . . . It is as if the author had left this commentary upon her experiences in New York, as if she had demonstrated her understanding of what the passionate young radicals are fighting for, had served her apprenticeship at politics and economics, and had assimilated Karl Marx, as well as Jesus, into the body of her meditation: with some personal interpretation, it should be said, of both, and with little orthodoxy of either the communist or the ecclesiastical variety.¹⁸

In The Ford Mrs. Austin carries her analysis of American society to California, where the problems of big business are paramount. Here again the characters suffer because of the author's interest in social forces.

The chief characters in the book were Anne Brent and her brother, Kenneth Brent, who had their share of troubles at the ranch, Las Palomitas. When they were children Stephen Brent, at his wife's insistence, sold the ranch and they went to Petrolia, where there was an oil boom. He organized the Homestead Development company, which failed when it could not compete with big business. Mrs. Brent was never able to get her husband's co-operation for his family's welfare, and about the time of the failure at Petrolia she died. Stephen Brent realized then, too late, what he had done to his wife; and in agony after her death, he told his son that men can't make a

18

Henry Smith, "The Feel of the Purposeful Earth. Mary Austin's Prophecy," New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. I (February, 1931), p. 21.

woman's life for her. He said to his son:

I thought I could make a life for your mother out of my life, a kind of hollow cell in it, where she should be perfectly happy inside of all the things I knew from the beginning she didn't like. . .but they got to her, boy, I brought them to her. You can't go to them without taking something, boy. It rides on your back. And then they leave you. You can't blame them for that. They've got to have their own life, Kenneth, they've got to make it themselves if you want them to stay in it.¹⁹

Anne Brent determined not ever to suffer the fate of her mother and set about becoming a business woman. She established a thriving real estate business; and when Mr. Rickart, the capitalist who had been responsible for the Petrolia failure, saw her efficiency, he helped her buy back Las Palomitas.

At Anne's suggestion, Kenneth got a job with Mr. Rickart in order to observe his methods of working; but he discovered that the game of big business was not for him. In the end, he returned to the land, taking up a claim and joining the other ranchers in their efforts to gain sufficient water for their needs. The ranchers, having escorted a land agent under the employment of Mr. Rickart out of the country with shotguns, were ready to make a concerted effort with Kenneth Brent in an irrigation project.

In the struggle between Capital and Labor, Virginia

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Mary Austin, The Ford, pp. 154-155.

Burke, a friend of the Brents and the daughter of a capitalist, appointed herself as the champion for the Labor class. She spent her energies to no avail, however, and practically ruined her own life. Not only was she a labor agitator; she revolted also against men. She flung out,

. . . liking--liking and respect! You think that's all that a woman needs. . . to be liked and respected, and to wait. . . wait. . . until some man gets done fussing about and finding what he likes, what he wants to do and can make of his life. . . and then comes and invites her into it! ²⁰

There is a feeling of incompleteness about most of Mrs. Austin's character portrayals. She seems to get so much interested in reform movements concerning suffrage, labor conditions, the new theater, and the political and economic systems of the world, that she fails to give enough attention to character development. Her characters get lost in the maze of their own emotional reactions.

Her women characters are always better drawn, however, than her men. The women of her books are always trying to find ways of proving their worth to society instead of being satisfied with their individual value in terms of their emotional relation to one man.

It is natural that Mrs. Austin should be so much interested in the feminist movement. She grew up during the age that was seeing the evolution of a new attitude toward

²⁰ Ibid., p. 263.

women's immemorial function. It seems that, regardless of what other problem was claiming Mrs. Austin's attention, she invariably found some way of putting in her ideas about women and their place in the scheme of things. She even wrote a textbook on the subject--The Young Woman Citizen--which was used as a handbook for study in classes held by the Young Women's Christian Association. If Mrs. Austin had done nothing else for which to make herself important, the work that she did in helping win the feminist battle would have been sufficient to bring her fame.

Possibly her own interest in feminism had its beginning with the incident of the "four-minute egg."²¹ Her brother, as head of the family, could see no point in his sister's demands that her egg be cooked longer than those for other members of the family. The resentment that she felt over this incident was typical of feelings of thousands of young American women at that moment--the feeling that the home "shouldn't be the place of the apotheosis of its male members."²² This incident was not the last time that Mary Austin was to provoke her brother's disapproval of her ideas. Later when she was speaking publicly on the idea of a Court of Domestic Relations he informed her that

²¹ Mary Austin, Earth Horison, p. 128.

²² Ibid., p. 129.

if she mentioned such ideas under her mother's roof, the doors of her mother's house would be forever closed to her. Happenings like these would naturally cause a person of Mary Austin's temperament to revolt; and it is natural that the same feeling of resentment would show up in the characters of her novels.

In the dialogue novel Love and the Soul Maker, Mrs. Austin makes an opportunity to express her thoughts about a number of things. I mention this book now, not because of any particular relation that it might have to a discussion of her characters, but because of its lack of characters. In the book Valda McNath is a victim of a love affair with a social reactionist who discovered that he did not love her as much as he thought. The book is written in the form of a dialogue between the author and Valda, with Mrs. Austin doing practically all of the talking. She expresses her opinion concerning men, women, love, marriage, divorce, and education; but there is really not much in this book that she hasn't expressed elsewhere. It is more like a summary of her ideas stated convincingly and sprinkled occasionally with irony.

The men of Mrs. Austin's novels never show up prominently, possibly because of the great emphasis she usually put on the role of women. Mrs. Austin herself was not happy with the men who should have counted most in her

life, her brothers and her husband. Neith Schuyler, in No. 26 Jayne Street, without a doubt expresses Mrs. Austin's feeling when she says, "Somehow, Madelon, all women that interest me most in America have been unhappy. With men I mean. Maybe it was so abroad . . . but I didn't notice it." ²³

Two of the men in her novels should be mentioned, however. Peter Weatherall was the hero of the story Lovely Lady. When he was a child he was haunted by the dragon Mortgage, which threatened twice yearly to come out of its lair in Lawyer Keplinger's office and eat up his mother and sister and the little house and farm. He determined to find out the secret of becoming rich; and he did. He then tried to purchase the satisfactions of life by wealth.

Mr. Weatherall's first love affair was a failure, when he aimed at a society marriage. His disappointment over that failure brought on a breakdown in his health which called for a trip to Italy. In Venice he met Savilla Dassenville, a girl from his home town, and married her. She was the Princess he had dreamed of, and the Lovely Lady who was to live in the House of the Shining Walls to be built by love and money!

Gardiner Sitwell is the main character in Starry Adventure, Mrs. Austin's last novel. He came to New Mexico

in boyhood, when his father, a college professor from the East, was forced to migrate there because of tuberculosis. He bore through life the conviction that he was cut out for some particular kind of adventure, a starry adventure. It turned out that, after searching everywhere, he found it in his own heart.

In his contacts with men, Gard's reactions were vague. In his various encounters with women, however, he had the situation well in hand. There were his mother, his sister, Jane, Ludora, and Rosita. Each one stood for something, and each one left a clear imprint on his life and soul. The story is crowded with details of New Mexico folk-lore and native customs, "but Gard Sitwell's adventure does not rise significantly above its setting."²⁴

One outstanding weakness of Mrs. Austin as an imaginative writer is her inability to present a full-length portrait of her characters. They seem invariably to become "types" rather than individuals. A. H. Quinn said, "The final impression of her work is one of irritation that a writer who could do some things so well could descend to weakness, even babality, in the conversations of her characters."²⁵

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Mabel Major and Others, Southwest Heritage, p.116.

²⁵

A.H. Quinn, American Fiction, an Historical and Critical Survey, p. 700.

For Mrs. Austin's best character portrayals we must turn to her snapshots of the humble folk, which she presents in her shorter stories and sketches. Here, against a significant landscape, the effect is two-fold--characters plus environment, men and women plus the desert.

Mrs. Austin was always interested in the mystery of common humanity. When she looked at the masterpieces in Italy she was dissatisfied with most of the Virgins as the artists had painted them, but she "began at least to understand how the most beloved of them should be the Madonna della Sedia, the wife of a peasant whose bambino came to her quite in the common way."²⁶

On her trips to the hills Mary Austin often came upon a unique person, the Pocket Hunter. A pocket was a small body of rich ore occurring by itself, or in a vein of poorer stuff. The Pocket Hunter, with his working outfit consisting of a shovel, a pick, a gold pan, and a pocket magnifier, went through the hills in search of such pockets. In spite of his queerness, Mrs. Austin found the Pocket Hunter acceptable because of his companionable talk. His life in the open, where he lived on a fare of beans, coffee, bread, and wild game, had hardened him for all kinds

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Mary Austin, Christ in Italy, p. 48.

of weather. The Pocket Hunter was the subject of a sketch in The Land of Little Rain. He disappeared once after one of his "big strikes" to make a grand tour of Europe, but his destiny drew him back to the hills. He appeared again in one of the stories of Lost Borders, one of the best stories of the book, in fact, "The Pocket Hunter's Story."

Other characters in the stories of Lost Borders are typical of people to be found in a country where "the borders of conscience break down, where there is no convention, and behavior is of little account except as it gets you your desire... where the boundary of soul and sense is as faint as a trail in a sand storm."²⁷

It was a country in which anybody believed any sort of story that had gold in it. Mrs. Austin describes the men as loving the country past all reasonableness. They neglect their families because of the "pulse and beat of a life laid bare to its thews and sinews." On the other hand, the women hate with implicitness the life, as well as the land.

In the story of "The Last Antelope" there is a shepherd similar to those described in The Flock. Little Pete was his name, and he was a shy, friendly man who summered his flocks each year in the hollow of the Ceriso. He loved his dogs as brothers and was near akin to the wild things. Communing

27

Mary Austin, Lost Borders, p. 3.

with the hills and holding intercourse with the stars, he said things to them in his heart that his tongue was not able to say. He humanized his sheep and knew them by name.

In his loneliness, Little Pete became attached to a lone antelope which grazed for years in the neighborhood where he kept his flock. When the antelope was killed by a homesteader, Little Pete suffered the torture of an extraordinary bereavement. This story also appears in Mrs. Austin's One Smoke Stories.

In "The Return of Mr. Wills," Mr. Wills is typical of the men who become fascinated with the stories of lost mines. The call of the wilderness lured his adventurous mind with glittering fragments of fortune and romance to the extent that he neglected his family. Despairing and hopeless, Mrs. Wills lost all her ambition of ever having a better life. However, when Mr. Wills did not return from one of his trips and she had given him up as being lost, she and her children began working, and a new spark of life returned to Mrs. Wills.

Finally, Mr. Wills returned and the old life returned with him. Yet, when the prospectors came along with reports of mines, Mrs. Wills brightened up, "her gaze wandering to the inscrutable grim spaces, not with the hate you might

suppose, but with something like hope in her eye." ²⁸ What she knew was that in time the insatiable spirit would reach out and take Mr. Wills again.

Other characters play their parts within that dim hot valley. There was Mr. Sanders, the health-seeking Englishman, who had trouble with his conscience when he was ready to return to England and was faced with the problem of what to do about his half-breed daughter. Mr. Sam Jeffries had his problem, too, which he solved by speaking his heart's longing to his wife after her death. The prostitute Mag and the Walking Woman had their stories. On closing the book, the reader has experienced "not only a climactic moment in the lives of these people as they have found the deepest moments of living in the wastelands," but also has "the mystic reassurance that life somehow is right despite the barren surface it may wear." ²⁹

Mrs. Austin was interested in the wholeness of human life, now, hour by hour. Her interest was not just theoretical, but it was practical and passionate, as the resource and the activity of the moment. She coordinated all her other interests with the interest that she had in

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Mary Austin, Lost Borders, p. 64.

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T. M. Pearce, The Beloved House, p. 169.

human personality as it actually exists. Her interest in people extended everywhere that she had traveled, but she was particularly interested in the people of the Southwest. This environment, after much experience in other places, seemed to her to be most fundamentally American.

CHAPTER IV

SPANISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE AND THE INDIANS

The two groups of people in the Southwest who held a major place in Mary Austin's attention were the Spanish-speaking people and the Indians. She found these folk to have a sounder, better rounded view of their group destiny than world-aware sophisticates. She could find her cultural home among the folk, who were still immune to the evils of the dominant American culture and whose qualities pointed a way for the whole American future. She thought that the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest, having taken over the whole economic complex of Indian life, developed in their folk product "an objective superiority" based on pictorial and plastic elements. Mrs. Austin's ideas about the folk and their possibilities are rather complex, but they do much to reveal Mary Austin. "Folk-ness" was central in her method of thinking, and led to all of her regional activities and to whatever regional philosophy she had.

Mary Austin's treatment of the Spanish-speaking element in the Southwest takes in practically every phase of it, from the arrival of the Spanish "conquistadores" to

the present day problem of bi-lingualism in New Mexico. Her interest in these people led her to study their history from its beginning. In The Land of Journeys' Ending, she gave a colorful summary of the Spanish conquest and the period of Spanish colonial history in New Mexico. The historical incidents are given in good story form that shows the relation between the present "hamlets" and "placitas" and the ancient settlements of the Spanish heyday.

She pictures the early "conquistadores," and the generations after them, who wasted themselves upon the Southwest without taking any measure of its vast material resources. Lured on by the promise of visible gold, they overlooked the real possibilities which the land had to offer.

We see Fray Marcos de Niza and the negro Estevánico arriving in the wilderness of Arizona. Like all lovers of the Southwest, Estevánico "translated his subconscious impression of the land into the certainty of success."¹ He did not count on the astuteness of the Indians of Zuñi, however, who did not like the boldness of his demands for turquoises and women. After Estevánico's death, Fray Marcos set up a wooden cross as token of discovery and returned to Mexico, where his reports stirred up the young Spanish bloods to further adventure.

¹ Mary Austin, The Land of Journeys' Ending, p. 12.

Mrs. Austin brings back to our minds all of the brilliant pageantry of Coronado's expedition--noble gentlemen with fine sounding names; "caballos" pranking in brilliant horse-cloths sweeping the ground; lances and long swords; coats of mail scarcely less shining than the gilded armor of the viceroy; many-colored Spanish sleeves and hose; visored head-pieces; crossbows for the footmen; war-clubs and bows and arrows for the Indians in the party. We see the expedition change its aspect as it makes its way, facing disappointment over not finding the gold and meeting other disasters. Discredit having been brought to its name when two hundred hostages were burned alive at Tiguex, the expedition is finally dissolved at Quivira, somewhere in Kansas.

Mrs. Austin tells of Espejo's unsuccessful attempt to colonize New Mexico and of the "entrada," in 1595, of Don Juan de Oñate, Adelantado and Captain General of New Mexico, as he came marching up the Rio Grande with banners and arquebuses, priests and a poet, and solid wheeled "carretas."

Things did not go well for the colonists or for the Indians during the first hundred years. With a complete consciousness of doing the admirable thing, the colonists pressed both Spanish Empire and Catholic observance upon New Mexico. There was also forced labor in the Spanish mines. Finally, in 1675, at the end of a long sequence of

missionary intolerances, four medicine men were hanged as wizards. This injustice led the pueblos to revolt in August, 1680. In Taos Valley all settlers died but two men. With the exception of the settlement of La Cañada, all died in Española Valley.

When Don Diego de Vargas came clanking back in 1692, armed for the re-conquest, he found the Indians not doing too well for themselves. They might have welcomed him back if he had not carried at the head of his expedition a figure of Our Lady, La Conquistadora, which is now housed in the Rosaria Chapel in Santa Fe. The Puebloños were opposed to anything that meant the "destruction of their own way of reconciling themselves to the universe."²

The Spaniards, however, had learned a great deal in the last hundred years. There was no more hanging of medicine men; and they professed themselves satisfied with baptism and reasonable attendance at mass. Nor was there forced labor at the mines.

Along the Rio Grande there were three types of Spanish settlers. The younger scions of noble houses were pure Castilian, as is witnessed by the appearance still among their descendants, of an occasional milk-white skin and dazzling Titian-colored hair. The artisans, for the most

²
Ibid., p. 195.

part, were immigrants direct from Spain. The peons, who were servants, soldiers, and small farmers, were pure Mexican or at best mestizos. The peons were, by far, the most numerous, and to the Pueblos, the most menacing. Some pueblos maintained a resistance against contamination of their blood, but in other pueblos, where there was no such resistance, the Indian strain was dissipated and mixed indistinguishably with the "paisanos" of the Rio Grande Valley.

When the "gringos,"Yankees, came, they despised the Spanish-speaking even more than the Indian. Mrs.Austin thought that the Protestant missionary, with the Indian Bureau behind him, has made a "dull, debasing smear over the lovely and aesthetic culture of the pueblos." Beside the terraced houses and the old Franciscan churches," the alien, inappropriate buildings of the Indian Bureau ate into the beauty of the landscape like a pox."³

Mrs.Austin described many of the activities and customs of the early Spanish settlers. One picturesque and memorable event of those early days was the annual "conducta" down the Rio Grande and over the Jornada del Muerto. The "conducta" was composed of men whose business was the management

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Ibid., p. 175.

of trade caravans between Mexico and the pueblos of New Mexico. Trail masters and armed escorts gathered at the rendezvous below Socorro. They were joined by trappers with mule loads of skins, buffalo hunters with sacks of buffalo meat, "hacienderos" going down to exchange bales of homespun blankets for blooded stallions to improve their stock, miners with ingots of smelted silver and bowl-shaped, government-stamped lumps of soft New Mexico gold, pueblo traders with turquoises, skins, and serapes.

The "conducta" went armed and cautiously along the Jornada del Muerto, because at the water holes in the Organos Mountains, they were certain to meet Apaches in ambush. Some weeks later, when the "conducta" returned with silk and cutlery, pineapples and carved leather, high Spanish combs, and brazil-wood, it was all to be risked over again. The "conducta" and the government supply trains drew bandits out of the mountains, which to this day are called "Los Ladrones."

Mary Austin also describes the religious customs of the Spanish-speaking people. She tells a very interesting story of the large bell that hangs in San Miguel Mission in New Mexico. It is the most mellow and the most musically toned bell in the world, and is thought to have been made in Spain in 1336, out of gold and silver ornaments vowed by a forgotten Christian city to San José' for help afforded in one

of their victorious encounters with the Moors. It is supposed to have been brought to New Mexico by a scion of Nicholas Ortez, called Niño Ladron de Guevar, because of a city he stole from the Moors. Ortez came to New Mexico with de Vargas during the re-conquest in 1692, bringing the seven hundred eighty pound bell with him.

Mary Austin believed that a person must begin with a study of these things, if he expects to understand the New Mexico of the Sangre de Cristo and the Rio Grande country. Unraveling backward from the Saints in New Mexico, she traced the submerged culture of the Spanish-speaking people to its origin. She found that it began as an overflow from the most vital phase of Spanish culture, that period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, called the "siglo de oro." It was in that period that the idea that history should concern itself with all manifestations of human life was born, and science made a symbolic turn by accepting the Copernican theory that the sun is the center of our planetary system. It was the period during which Cervantes, Velasquez, Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderón, and Juan de Herrera reached new heights of accomplishment in their various fields of art. It was about this time, too, that de Vargas and the thief of Guevara were plodding north with Our Lady in a covered wagon from Chihuahua.

Mrs. Austin said that the carved figures of "santos" that she found in various places in New Mexico always incited her to covetousness. Spanish funerals and weddings also held an interest for her.

The celebration of certain feast days in New Mexico is another matter of interest. Guadalupe Day brings the shepherders in from the mountains. Other feast days of importance are All Souls Day and "La Vespera de la Nochebuena." The latter takes place on Christmas Eve.

At this season a miracle-play of "Los Pastores" is performed. This play bears traces of its origin in the intertwined episodes of conflict between the "Powers of Light and Darkness as represented by Lucifer and The Angel, couched in literary language, and directed by the local great families."⁴ The properties are of the simplest; and the costumes are symbolic rather than realistic. Actors are brought up through the audience, or by means of simple open mechanisms, such as the letting down of the Archangel Michael by a rope from the rafters. For the star of Bethlehem, an oil lantern is pulled visibly along on another rope in front of the approaching shepherds. Of this performance Mrs. Austin says,

The gracious gift of sympathy, which informs all the manners and customs of the Spanish-speaking, makes

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Ibid., p. 333.

inimitable actors of them, so that if you never before believed the myth of the Borning, and in spite of knowing that by midday tomorrow the Archangel will be playing 'correr de gallo' and the head shepherd may be drunk, you believe in it, at least for 'la vespera de la Nochebuena.' 5

Sometimes the "Nacimiento" is a part of the play. If there is a church in the village it will be set out in the corner at the right of the high altar. The figures in this Nativity scene will be as near life-size as possible.

Mrs. Austin hoped in describing all of these things to make her reader understand the Spanish-speaking people in New Mexico as she knew them.

New Mexico is still a place in which the miraculous may happen. All myth, all miracle, is in the beginning a notice of a Borning in the deep-self; new ideas, new concepts of spiritual reality making their way to expression in whatever stuff is current in the mind of the locality. That this thin stream of the 'siglo de oro,' which poured out here, began at once to give rise to appearances, miraculous healings, to local songs and drama such as the yearly passion play of the 'penitentes,' is evidence of the sensitiveness of spirit which made possible such presentments of spiritual reactions. 6

A religious order that Mrs. Austin mentioned in several of her books is "Los Hermanos Penitentes." The manner in which this order keeps Lent makes them generally described as the whipping brotherhood; and their annual penance ends in the realistic, and sometimes fatal, crucifixion of one of their members.

5
Ibid., p. 334.

6
Ibid., p. 337.

This Order has now become a secret order incorporated under the laws of New Mexico. It became necessary to make it into a secret society because of the moral necessity of protecting its "penitentes" from spiritual pride by concealing their identity under the black bag which is still worn by "flagelantes" in all public processions.

Mrs. Austin set down far less than she knew of "Los Penitentes." She did tell us that their chapter house is called a "morada." Besides the "hermano mayor" there are three other officers. The "infermo" looks after the sick; the "resador" accompanies the penances of the members with the necessary prayers; the "pitero," with his flute, leads the processions on the Trail of Blood.

On the first day of Lent the funerals of the brothers are celebrated ceremonially. As Lent advances, processions can be heard issuing from the "moradas." In these midnight processions are figures of men clad only in white cotton underwear, naked to the waist, bare arms rising and falling as the penitente whip is laid on, first over one shoulder and then over the other. Often the crosses are so heavy that the bearer must be accompanied by a brother to ease the long beam to the ground when the "penitente" faints under it.

The formal Easter drama begins on Holy Tuesday, when the brothers receive the "seal of obligation." Ash

Wednesday is spent in prayers and confessions of private penances. From hour to hour on Holy Thursday processions go out to the "calvario." Gradually, as Holy Week advances, the whole community is swept into the fervor of atonement. The height of spiritual frenzy is reached by midnight on Holy Thursday, when the chosen Christ of the year, with head veiled for humbleness, staggers forth from the "morada." The direction of this midnight trail is never known to outsiders. Back he comes in the dawning, dragging his heavy cross, often in a fainting condition. After sunrise, preparation is made for the passion play, which formerly took place at the prescribed third hour in realistic detail. In the remoter villages the Christ is bound upon the cross with ropes so tightly drawn that the strongest man cannot safely endure it for more than about forty minutes. In more modern communities an effigy is substituted for the living Christ.

Mrs. Austin regretted the manner in which curiosity-mongers sometimes destroyed the seriousness of these proceedings.

In Experiences Facing Death Mrs. Austin described a colloquy that she had experienced when she was observing the Penitentes on the Trail of Blood. A colloquy is a type of mystical incident in which there is a "momentary

splitting of the facets of the deep-self between which interchanges take place in the form of dialogue, as it might be between Soul and Saint or Soul and Savior." ⁷ There she felt herself in a pale ring of diffused light, holding discourse between herself and another, not visualized but inwardly perceived within the shadow of the experience. This experience came when she was trying to get inside the group-mindedness of Spanish-speaking New Mexicans, which she found to present some interesting and unique features of group-amalgamation.

Mrs. Austin found still other things of interest among her Spanish-speaking friends. She showed how the tradition of an older, more colorful life in New Mexico goes on under the surface unsuspected by the rest of us. There is a whole list of native remedies for the stomach. But there is a longer list of "remedios" for the soul, such for instance as the crossed pins under the hem of her skirt which a maiden going to meet a youth makes as a protection against too ardent addresses. Then there is advice in such wise sayings, as, "When the moon is growing, sap is flowing, cut no crop then." ⁸ There is the warning not to drink water in the night when all water goes dead, lest the drinker die also.

⁷ Mary Austin, Experiences Facing Death, p. 227.

⁸ Mary Austin, The Land of Journeys' Ending, p. 340.

Mrs. Austin thought that these things were "straws which lie lightly on the surface of that life," but they show how the current eddies and "widens into a backwater which will give an unprecedented volume to the stream that is ready to swell the power of the Southwest the moment we give it free access to ours."⁹

Among the Spanish-speaking people today there is many a household story reminiscent of the great days of the Spanish occupation. The story may take the form of an account of how a lover was "given the squashes" when he failed to meet the requirements exacted of him by the girl he wanted to marry.

It may be about the wedding of the Lunas and Oteros, rich and powerful families. You hear of the beauty of the bride, of the trousseau made in Philadelphia and freighted across the plains, of the wagon-loads of provisions for the wedding festival, which lasted two weeks, and of how the bride was ferried over the Rio Grande, in a flower-garlanded boat, to the carriage with outriders which carried her to her new home.

You hear of how wandering players, drifted up to the Rio Grande, performing in the villas of Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Santa Cruz. It was the fashion for the players to

⁹ Ibid., pp. 340-341.

single out the handsomest women in the audience for their carefully prepared compliments, and the escort of the chosen lady rewarded the players with flung gold. So it became an expensive business to appear at the play as an avowed admirer of so lovely a lady as Eloisa Luna Otero, who was, and remained not only the most "beautiful" of the players' songs, but until her death, the most powerful lady of New Mexico.

There is also the story of Señora Doña Gertrudes Barcelo. She was born of the "gente principales," but was born also a gambler. Coming out of Taos with an American lover, she set herself up as "banquir" at the then fashionable game of four-card monte at La Villa Real, as Santa Fe continued to be called for some time after the whole of New Spain forsook all royalty forever. There were many stories told about Dona Gertrudes, but the most famous one is about her costly funeral. There was a bill duly made out to the bishop, who claimed eight hundred dollars for his services and fifty dollars for every time the coffin was set down on the way to the grave.

Mrs. Austin spent more of her time and study on the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico than on those of any other section of the Southwest. She incorporated a number of these Spanish customs in her last novel, Starry Adventure. The Spanish missions of California played a part in her first

novel, Asidro. The leisurely life of a Spanish village in California was portrayed in "The Little Town of the Grape Vines" in The Land of Little Rain. The life on the "ranchos" and "haciendas" at sheep-shearing time was shown in The Flock. "Old Spanish Gardens," in The Lands of the Sun, goes back to the romantic days of the Spanish occupation when the Castilian ladies wore black and the "mustacioed" gentlemen sunned themselves in the patios. The wine press, with the thick-walled adobes surrounding it, and the little private chapel on the grounds were surrounded by health-giving herbs of Doña Iná's Garden.

The Spanish people brought with them what they remembered of the art of Spain. They made things in the likeness of Old Spain, modified by what they found here among the Indians. For the first hundred years, they made very little. When they did begin, they made "santos" and "bultos" in the pattern of the holy images of the sixteenth century Spain. When they began to weave, it was in the pattern of southern Europe with a little suggestion from Mexico. They mixed with the Indians, the peon class, and brought into their blood an Indian strain, Indian capacity for making things, for design and color. The years of American influence had broken down much that they accomplished, and one of Mrs. Austin's activities while she lived in Santa Fe was the revival of the Spanish arts.

Mrs. Austin was interested in the present Mexico and New Mexico labor problem with the peon class. She thought that the quality of group-mindedness in the Mexicans was a disadvantage when it exposed them to political exploitation in our large industrial cities, where Mexican immigrant labor is in demand. On the other hand, she did not think it disadvantageous to an industrial civilization if the labor was under competent direction. She thought that even better results might be gained by this compact manner than in cases where a greater degree of individualism prevails.

She believed that the un-skilled Spanish-speaking laborers could become skilled by proper teaching, and that these workers could become specialized technicians of high capacity. She states the situation in a rather challenging manner:

If we ask from this mixed Spanish-Indian stock that they become the socially and intellectually inferior brand of standardized labor, that is what we will get. If we ask for a highly individualized artist* craftsmanship, we can have that. If we demand that they become average installment-plan, sub-rotarian middle class Americans, in the course of time, they will become as good at that as our other remotely alien immigrants.¹⁰

Mrs. Austin felt that the thing that is lacking in the

10

Mary Austin, "Mexicans and New Mexico," Survey, Vol. LXVI (May, 1931), p. 190.

Mexican is the capacity for rapid adjustment to working patterns, the motivation of which lies outside the worker's personality.

She had an appreciation not only for the artistry of their work, but of its human significance. The Spanish-speaking people knew she had that attitude and did not object to her collecting native literature. In fact, they gave her all the assistance possible.

Mrs. Austin carried her interest in Spanish-speaking people into Mexico itself. She studied the paintings of Diego Rivera and saw in them patterns that she had known, patterns in the American Rhythm--"patterns that come out in people responsively."¹¹ She was relieved "to discover that there was no Nordic taint in Diego Rivera." This may have meant that she was glad to find her own intuitions about American rhythms corroborated by someone of a different race. She was able to see in Diego Rivera and certain social movements in Mexico the village folk-ness and communal habits that she admired.

In the native communism of the Mexican village she thought she had discovered the very pattern of the indigenous American life and the hope of the future. This

11

Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 365.

folk-ness as a method of approach, a way of prophesying through intuition, often led Mrs. Ausin into concepts that did not readily fit together.

Another paramount interest in Mrs. Austin's life was her study of the Indians of the Southwest. There is a story told about an Indian in one of the Rio Grande pueblos who was being questioned by a tourist who had found points of disagreement in some books that he had been reading on Southwestern Indians. He was trying to find out from questioning the Indian what was true and what was false about the matter. The Indian finally became annoyed at some question that the tourist asked and said with brief irony, "Why don't you ask Mary Austin? She knows everything about Indians."¹²

There is much truth in the Indian's statement. Mrs. Austin made it her business to find out everything that was possible about Indians. She began to know Indians when she went to live in the California desert in 1888. She said that she became interested in them first because "there was literally nothing else human in my neighborhood to be interested in; and then because they were down trodden."¹³ She fought the missionaries and the Indian Bureau alike

¹²

T. M. Pearce, The Beloved House, p. 101.

¹³

Mary Austin, "How I Found the Thing Worth Waiting for," Survey, Vol. XLI (January 1, 1929), p. 434.

for a square deal for the Indians.

Mrs. Austin's first book on the Indians was The Basket Woman, which is really a children's book of Indian stories and myths. Before any reader finishes the book, he has caught some of Mrs. Austin's respect for Indian myths. She presents them with such dignity that never again will he think that Indian folk-lore pertains simply to juvenile literature.

The Basket Woman was an old Indian woman who washed for a white family. She carried wood for her fires in a huge basket, the size of which terrified the little boy of the household, whose mind was stored with vague ideas of Indian secrecy and cruelty. He became a friend of the Basket Woman, however, and learned much about Indians from her.

One of the best stories in the book is "Mahala Joe." This is a story of friendship and faithfulness on the part of an Indian boy for a white friend. In refusing to fight with his tribesmen against the whites because of a promise he had made to his childhood friend, Mahala Joe was punished by having to wear a woman's clothes, as a symbol of his cowardice--thus the name "Mahala," meaning woman. He endured the jeers of the tribe and had the courage to wear the badge of being afraid all of his life. His friend, having been sent away during the battle, never knew of Mahala Joe's sentence that resulted from keeping his vow of friendship.

Mrs. Austin visited the Indian villages, made friends with them, and found out much about them. Her experiences with the Indians were many and varied. One of her experiences was told to Mabel Major when Mrs. Austin visited in Fort Worth, in 1928. Mrs. Austin was reminded of it when she was offered a cigarette after dinner.

"Only lately, ' Mary Austin began, 'have I been able to endure tobacco smoke again. It was two years ago that I visited my people in one of the pueblos. I carry my own pneumatic mattress when I visit the Indians. This time I couldn't refuse the arrangements they had made for my comfort. When time came to go to bed, the entire pueblo accompanied me to the house specially prepared for my coming. The walls were newly plastered; the windows and doors gleamed with fresh new paint. An old army cot--a white man's bed was the only furniture. It was piled high with Indian blankets reeking with tobacco. At either side of the cot on the floor was a neat pile of blankets. Two nice old Indian gentlemen stepped out from the crowd, proud to be my protectors during the night. The other men, women, and children left for their homes. The two nice old Indian gentlemen carefully closed the one small window and the door to keep out evil spirits. They took half of the blankets from the bed and motioned for me to lie down. Like any self-respecting Indian, I went to bed with my clothes on. The two nice old Indian gentlemen covered me with the blankets, tucking each well under my feet and around my chin. They put out the torch, and lay down on the blanket piles on either side. The heat was suffocating; the tobacco odor was nauseating. I waited until I heard the two regularly breathing. Furtively, I pushed back the covers. Two pairs of bony hands in the dark pulled the blankets up over my shoulders and tucked them tightly under my chin. I resigned myself to an uncomfortable night. It is only lately that I can again enjoy my cigarette."¹⁴

Mrs. Austin learned much about the Indians through a

¹⁴ Mabel Major, "Mary Austin in Fort Worth," The New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. IV (November, 1934), pp.308-309.

study of their poetry, songs, and dances. The result of her study of Amerindian poetry is to be found in her book The American Rhythm. She had lectured on the subject and at a publisher's request, she organized her material for publication in a book. The general thesis of the book is to the effect that American verse will be fruitful only to the extent that it captures American rhythms. She believed those rhythms to be best preserved in Amerindian poetry. In the prefatory essay to her poems she says that she is setting out to find "a basis for a poetic quest, and for the establishment of a traditional poetic mode provocative of the maximum of well being."

She says further:

The rhythms which give pleasure are those into which the organism has naturally fallen in the satisfaction of the social urge, the ego urge, the mating urge. Where the path to such satisfactions is deeply graven, the poet falling into it will find the whole sum of sensory material enriched by association. Where by changed motor habits the initial association is obliterated, and only the swing remains, the old rhythm will arise, at the recurrence of a given stimulus, with sourceless connotations of authority to which we give the name of instinct when we observe them in others, and inspiration in ourselves.¹⁵

Such rhythms are not consciously discoverable, she thinks.

Mrs. Austin believed that almost anybody could have predicted the rise of a new verse form in America. And

15

Mary Austin, The American Rhythm, p. 6.

judging from the necessity of restating the national consciousness in terms of the burgeoning American outlook, a person should have been able to prophesy two or three things about it.

It would be a form as lacking in tradition as the American experiment itself. It would be democratic in the sense that it would be within the capacity of the democratically bred. . . . Finally, it would be a statement of life as for the first two or three hundred years, life presented itself on the western continent, in terms of things lived through rather than observed or studied.¹⁶

This book puts Mary Austin definitely in the class with literary critics; but here we are concerned chiefly with what she found out about Amerind poetry. She found that the Amerind made poetry because he believed it to be good for him, and because he believed it to be a contribution to the well-being of his group. He made poetry to put himself in sympathy with the "wakonda," or god-stuff, which he conceived to be to some degree in every created thing.

At the same time that the Amerind used his body as an instrument of rhythm, he used it also as an instrument for the realization of the desired result, moving it through the phases of mimetic gesture. Mrs. Austin compared this element to Aristotle's "imitation," which he regarded as the essential of poetry.¹⁷

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Ibid., p. 10.

17

Ibid., p. 35.

There were three essentials of Amerind verse; namely, external rhythm, internal rhythm, and subjective co-ordination of the rhythmic forms of the American scene. All Amerind poetry, even the most personal, presented itself as three-pliéd: movement, melody, and words.

The tribesmen used poetry as a means of raising the plane of group consciousness. Mrs. Austin gave several examples of native dances and songs, showing the complexity of the expression when the expression was communal. The Corn Dance was one that she gave. This dance is a fertility rite, designed to bring rain and good growing weather to sprouting crops. The dancers will number among the hundreds, according to the population of the community. The natural rhythm of their timing feet will run from the pound of the men's thick soles, through the softer shuffle of the women, to the patter of children. This gives the effect of a musical round, rising and falling and overlapping--bound together, but not necessarily synchronized by the beat of the tomses, steady and quick like the "heart of the sun beating." In and out of these primary rhythms play the body accents, knee rattle and arm rattle of deer's hoofs or tortoise case. From point to point, like the rush of summer rain, runs the roll of the prisoned pebbles in the hand-held gourds. All the dancers sing, moving deftly in their places. Out and aside the elders sing,

prayerfully, inviting the co-operation of the people of the Middle Heaven in rhythms that are not necessarily temporally synchronous, though they are subjectively co-ordinated with the song of the dancers.

The essay as a whole shows Mrs. Austin's characteristic attitude toward art. She believed art not to be an end in itself, but a means and a mode of spiritual existence.

Mrs. Austin often expounded her theories of the origin of verse at educational meetings, at meetings of women's clubs, and in college lecture courses. It was her habit to chant Indian poetry with her eyes half closed while someone thumped out the heartbeat of the universe on a drum or on another musical instrument.

Mrs. Austin found in her study of the Indians the pattern that she was to use in her own folk-stories. She found that the Indians have two kinds of stories. Myth stories are patterned after the Indians' notion of how the invisible life forces are supposed to work. The realistic tales relate things that really happen.

The Piutes, from whom Mrs. Austin learned about the real stories, called such stories One Smoke Stories. This name came from the fact that these tales are told around the fire in the intervals between ceremonial rituals, while the company relaxes itself with the little cornhusk cigarettes filled with native tabac. One tells while the rest smoke,

and then the next one in the circle leaves off smoking and tells another, short and explicit.

Mrs. Austin learned that in the folk-story, "the environment had absolutely to disappear into the story."¹⁸ There should also be a sparing use of names. When a teller is a character in the tale, he is kept in a state of nearly complete detachment. The aboriginal never begins a story with the attitude of the teller to the tale.

It was after the Indian fashion that Mrs. Austin wrote most of her One Smoke Stories. She felt that one of the factors which work unconsciously in the mind to hasten the use of the native American folk tale is the felt need of generically American expressiveness--"figures, and illustrations for the native quality in our national life which shall have an intrinsically American significance."¹⁹

As in everything else that Mrs. Austin undertook to understand, she went to the beginnings in her study of the Indian. She traced him from the Dawn period on through the Pit-house period and the Small-house period. She made herself acquainted with the peculiarities of the various tribes of the Southwest, noting the similarities and differences in them.

¹⁸ Mary Austin, "The Folk Story in America," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. XXXIII (January, 1934), p. 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

She describes the living conditions at the time Spain found them as follows:

The pueblos, at the time Spain found them had no rich, no poor, no paupers, no prisons, no red-light district, no criminal classes, no institutionalized orphans, no mothers of dependent children penalized by their widowhood, no one pining for a mate, who wished to be married. All this is so much a part of their manner of living together in communities, that three centuries of Christian contact have not quite cured them of their superior achievement. By breaking down Indian custom marriage, the missionaries have contrived to increase the number of unsatisfactory settlements, and added to the irregularities, formerly at a minimum for their populations.²⁰

Among the Zuñi every creature is thought of as having his share of "wokonda," the essential spirit of things. Out of this primary belief grows a society quite simply and literally founded on the idea that the chief consideration of its members is to increase the amount of god-power in themselves. To this end, every rite and every important social or personal function is directed. Mrs. Austin felt that a knowledge of this belief was necessary before anyone could understand the Amerind's art or his literature. The "happy ending" of a Pueblo tale is not the marrying of a particular woman, nor the adding of a certain feather to the war-bonnet, but the attainment of magical power.

Mrs. Austin also made a study of the Amerind method of

20

Mary Austin, The Land of Journeys' Ending, p. 244.

prayer, which she described in her book Can Prayer Be Answered? She found that the Indians do not pray to god, but to a "principle existing in all created life, accessible to man, responsive to him, workable."²¹ The scientific side of her mind made her ready to accept the aboriginal prayer systems, which meant more than mere emotional appeal and depended for their efficacy upon explicit activities of the individual mind. She approved of the gestures they made in prayer, believing that through constructive gestures a person can come nearer to making an act take place. She herself became fairly expert in making the "Indian prayer gesture, which consists in setting up in your inner self a motion carefully tuned and timed with the motion of the universe in the field in which you hope to be effective."²²

There was no phase of Indian life that Mrs. Austin did not examine. She bowed to nobody in respect for Indian culture and in comprehension of the wholeness and beauty of the Indian way of life. She believed, however, that, of all folk groups in America, the Indian was the one which most needed to be encouraged in keeping its integrity. She could see that the concrete pattern of Indian life would

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Mary Austin, Can Prayer Be Answered?, p. 3.

²²

Ibid., p. 12.

ultimately be broken, and the religious and esoteric meanings of the poetry, decorative design, and dance-drama lost. That was why, she felt, the Indian must be encouraged in his arts before all was lost.

CHAPTER V

MYSTICISM

"The frame of behavior known as Mystical" and "the quality of experience called Folk" are very closely related in meaning. Mrs. Austin has a great deal to say about mysticism. She defines mystical knowledge as "knowledge which arrives at the threshold of consciousness by processes recognizably different from the familiar sense perceptions."¹ It was this kind of knowledge that Mary Austin had experienced when, as a child, she recognized the difference between I-Mary and Mary-by-herself. When she was I-Mary, she could see Mary-by-herself as a part of the picture and make her do things that otherwise she could not have done at all; such as walking a log high over the creek, which gave Mary-by-herself "cold prickles even to think about."²

It was a similar experience that sustained her when she was writing her first two stories in the face of

¹ Mary Austin, Everyman's Genius, p. 151.

² Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 74.

almost insurmountable difficulties. She described it as a stream of knowingness that she felt going on in her, supplying deficiencies, affording criteria of judgment, and creating certainties for which no warrant was to be found in her ordinary performances.

The strange psychic, intuitive awareness that she had toward the meanings of her environment led Mrs. Austin to describe herself as a Maverick to the "man-herd."³ It was as if she had drunk of the waters of Hassayampa, that river which flows round and about Lost Borders. "It flows and sinks and rises again in unnamed cañons, loops about desert ranges and is lost in the sand. Only Indians know where to find it with certainty."

The trail that leads to Hassayampa is described as leading far and opening on incredible sights:

sunk rivers, crawling dunes, also many delectable meadows under high, unappeasable, glacier-polished Sierras. Wild things walked in it: deer shifting their feeding ground, bobcats, coyotes and furry, rat-tailed things whose moonlight friskings made lacy patterns on the sand,⁴ shepherders, pocket hunters, Indians and Gods.

People passing through the country had drunk of it, not knowing it themselves; but their friends knew of it because of the change that came over their minds.

³ Mary Austin, Christ in Italy, p. xii.

⁴ Ibid., p. x.

What happens to you if you have drunk Hassayampa is that all place and time dissolve, so that if you should see, for example a young girl with the shadow of dreaming in her eyes, working purple roses on center pieces and making embroidered pillow shams, you would see much more besides: maidens spinning and spreading flax upon the grass, Indian women weaving baskets; savage women beating fibre from the palm, wild birds that gather down,--sea birds that take it from their breasts, and mothering ewes that tread out grassy hollows; lift and urge of the world. . . . It is to find no things inconsiderable or mean and few things ridiculous. This is to drink Hassayampa; but, if you are sensible you do not always speak of it.⁵

Mrs. Austin devotes an entire chapter of Everyman's Genius to the subject of mysticism. She says that a kind of mystical experience goes on in the mind of any creative artist. When a writer creates a character and he becomes identified with the powers and virtues of the person he is creating, in order to make those qualities more accessible, he has already advanced upon the Mystical Way.

Mrs. Austin claimed her own mysticism to be "wholly accidental in being an attempt to master the Here and Now, and not to escape it."⁶

The Christian mystic renounced, for the time being, all aids from the immediate self--learning, talent, intelligence--and retired into the deepest room of the deep-self, where he came into direct contact with God. She

⁵ Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

⁶ Mary Austin, Everyman's Genius, p. 153.

thinks that if a person substitutes for God, absolute reality, ultimate truth, or any other notion he might have of the Great Spirit, Christian mysticism becomes practically identical with all systems of mysticism. Having once reached the source of all spiritual power, a person brings away with him some of the characteristics of universal Spirit.

She says that the average person stumbles upon one or another mystical method and naturally tends to re-invite those states which he finds helpful in his business. The whole art of mysticism consists in going on deliberately from this point to uncover and make intelligent use of states of consciousness more rarely, but not less certainly and naturally, showing themselves.

One judges, from the detailed explanation that Mrs. Austin gave of how to attain a mystical experience, that her own mystical powers did not come easy. For her the process was a long one, requiring both learning and discipline. She believed that any one could become a mystic. Most geniuses are mystics, she thought, but a man may become a mystic without any genius whatever.

Mrs. Austin believed that the beginning of all mystical adventure lay in acquiring early the art of meditation. There was a sharp distinction between the type of meditation that she prescribed and reverie; nor was it to be

associated with the familiar process of "thinking things over."

Her first requisite to successful meditation called for an uninterrupted session of time. There should be a regular time for meditation, a time when the body is in "natural equilibrium, neither tired nor eager for activity, neither full nor fasting."⁷ She believed there was nothing to be gained by thwarting normal appetites and that there was a possibility of harm in unnecessarily interrupting natural physical rhythms. When she was younger, she used every year to "make a retreat," retiring to some place where the re-collective process could go on under the most advantageous circumstances. As she grew older, however, she often went three or four years without any interruptions to her regular spiritual routines.

The next step after securing the necessary environment for meditation was to clear the consciousness and hold it in a state of suspended attention. This state, in true meditation, is different from concentration; for here intelligence and the emotions are in abeyance. In her own practice Mrs. Austin often found it helpful to precede a meditation with a relaxing exercise which she called self-contemplation, a process that she used along with her creative work. She would let a stream of phantasy go by unobstructed until it fell naturally into a tempo that

⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

permitted of easy sweeping aside. After the space was cleared for meditation this stream could still be felt flowing around its borders until the meditation grew more profound and the phantasy entirely disappeared. Sometimes she felt her immediate self to be in such a turbulent state that the attempt had to be abandoned for that time and undertaken later under more favorable conditions.

The object of all her meditation, of course, was illumination, seeking light on some subject the essential truth of which was hidden from her. She was a born pragmatist and radical, she said, never believing anything that was told her but always wishing to bring belief into line with innate moral sense. This unhurried and reflective manner of hers seems a contrast to the amazing activity that all her accomplishments would suggest. But her ability for such meditation is responsible for her being able to fill out the pattern that she felt was set for her life.

The test of the success of meditation is "that you actually know more of the subject meditated upon than you knew before, and can use what you know."⁸ In her own case, Mrs. Austin always knew clearly what she wanted to do in her life and work; and wanting to do so little else,

⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

she would not have stopped until she did achieve success in her meditations.

During her studies on mysticism Mrs. Austin began a study of mysticism in the life of Jesus, which resulted in her writing A Small Town Man, first published under the title of The Man Jesus. Following the technique and method of the folklorist, she approached the research for this book as she would have approached any other collection of hero tales, looking for the plain man who was the vehicle of his revelation.

She pictures the events in the life of Jesus, coloring them with her own interpretations. She does not see in his experiences in the wilderness much that is different from experiences other mystics have had in seeking the truth. He laid himself open to the sense the desert gives of being possessed, of being held and occupied by personality and power. He went into the desert a carpenter with the word of God in his consciousness; he came out of it a prophet and teacher.

She declares Jesus to be the greatest of mystics, "for what he perceived, he could tell--in so far as people were able to hear it--and what he knew, he could do. He had a genius for mysticism."⁹ His mysticism was of the inner

⁹ Mary Austin, A Small Town Man, p. 190.

life of the spirit.

More than any man before or since, Jesus came teaching that the mystical is the practical. All those high moods which had been the exclusive prerogative of saints and prophets, he meant to make part of the common use and possession. Mind, Spirit, whatever it is constituting the fundamental likeness of God and man, he established as the daily instrument, accessible alike to the learned and the unlearned.¹⁰

Mrs. Austin says that Jesus had no moral program. When a moral question was propounded to him, he met it with reference to his mystical teaching, or he exemplified his mystical teaching with some reference to the moral situation of his hearers.

She concludes the book by saying that Jesus was a mystic whose lamp of illumination turned inward, lighting the secret places of the heart. She did not believe it to be of a social nature, in the sense that it illumined or prescribed for the complex outer ring of all nations. Furthermore, she thought that people of the twentieth century were at the end of all reasonable pretension in thinking that in the teaching of Jesus we have either a pattern or a technique of social perfection. She says that when we speak, as it is our fashion to do, of the failure of Christianity, we are either referring to the failure of an organized complex of ideas of which Jesus never heard--the

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Ibid., pp. 200-201.

Scheme of Salvation, the Redemption by his blood, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, the Trinity--or we are speaking of an unwarranted expectation, unwarranted by anything he ever said, that in his teaching as it stands we should find the technique by which the God-in-man should become manifest in group relations.

She found nothing in his teachings from which we might find an adequate frame and technique of group relationship. That hope is disappointed chiefly because of our refusal to accept the knowledge of the incompleteness of his revelation. He himself knew that his revelation was incomplete and taught that there was more to come. Mrs. Austin believed that nothing so makes for the validity of what he did teach, as this clear certainty that his teaching was not only incompletely communicated, but that it was in itself uncompleted. The last sentence in the book is impressive, "For two thousand years it has been overlooked that the recorded life of Jesus ended, not on the cross but on the mountain."¹¹

In the introduction of the book, Mrs. Austin excused herself from littering up the book with footnotes and references on the grounds that such procedure is a courtesy of male scholarship. Of course, one would not expect Mrs. Austin to resort to anything that might suggest male thought,

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Ibid., p. 230.

but one wonders where she could have found references to some of the ideas advanced in the book. By the time that a person has read several of Mrs. Austin's books, however, he has learned to blame that "frame of behavior known as "mystical" for a number of inaccurate and fantastic ideas found in her thought.

Mrs. Austin said that she had to write Experiences Facing Death. Perhaps she realized that such a book was needed to round out and complete her total view of life. The book does form another segment in that total span, helping us to get a clearer view of Mrs. Austin's philosophy. The partial view that she presents in this book is possibly another effort on her part to make the total view that she has striven for in herself also the property of her readers.

When Mrs. Austin faced the thought of dying, she regretted the "narrow and repressive moralities" in which she had been brought up, if they had been in any way responsible for her having lived any less intensively than she might otherwise have lived. She did not regret her hates; she had always hated lying, cowardice, and war. She did not want to leave the beauty of this life--the reality of natural things--which had been for her the most spiritualizing influence in life.

In Experiences Facing Death, she clarifies her ideas

of God. To her God was "the experienceable quality in the universe," the "Universal Consciousness," out of which her own consciousness stemmed--"never a person, only faintly described in the unknowing core of perception as Being."¹²

She describes her first experience with God, when as a child of five or six she walked in the orchard alone. There after a moment of quietness, "earth and sky and tree and wind-blown grass came alive together with a pulsing light of consciousness." She felt an awareness of the flowers and of the insects, which enclosed her in a feeling of livingness. She wrote,

I remember the child looking everywhere for the source of this happy wonder, and at last she questioned-- 'God?--because it was the only awesome word she knew. Deep inside, like the murmurous swinging of a bell, she heard the answer, 'God, God.' . . . 13

This experiences, Mrs. Austin said, had been the one abiding reality of her life, unalterable except in the abounding fullness and frequency of its occurrence. It seemed often to "float like a bubble beside her," enclosing her with "ineffable warmth and light." On occasions it seemed like a Voice telling her to wait or go forward. It came nearest when it arrived in the midst of her

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Mary Austin, Experiences Facing Death, p. 24.

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Ibid., p. 25.

work, like a tall white Presence, never taking a personal shape. It was a force, a source of energy. Mrs. Austin called the bodily location of this experience her "Sacred Middle," a term taught to her by the Indians.

The fact that she had experienced the Presence of God in this life kept her from looking forward to death with the expectancy with which many people look forward to it. She had experienced God with her "Middle" just as she had experienced Beauty, "which is the sensuous aspect of God," with her ears and her eyes. She asked, "How was I to be sure of re-experiencing either of the, lacking the essential instrument?"¹⁴ Yet she believed death to be of the nature of a link in experience rather than its unavoidable end.

After all her meditations on the subject of death, she was more or less consoled by the secret apprehension that she once had about coming to the end of her adventures. She was quite certain that the experience has nothing to do with pale ghosts that gibber in the dark. Nor did she think that the outcome would result in "rapt souls that stand forever in ecstasy over a distant gleam or spark." She believed that "there will be things to be done, and the stuff that we work with will be the utterly

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Ibid., p. 301.

familiar and still mysterious and exciting stuff of ourselves."¹⁵

Judged from Mrs. Austin's definition of "mystical," even The Land of Little Rain and The Land of Journeys' Ending would fall into the category of mystic writings. They are books on nature to be sure; but the capture and expression of the rhythm of the region is more than just nature writing. You cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or touch the rhythm of an environment. Such a knowledge must be acquired by other means than through the senses, or through any combination of sensory experiences.

In The Trail Book one story treats of the struggles of an Indian lad in the wilderness to find the Vision, to get in touch with the Powers. In other stories of that book there is an implication of Mrs. Austin's effort to feel out modern man's link with the past-- a fanciful mystical idea with a grain of historical or anthropological truth. To be sure there is something about Mrs. Austin's keen understanding of the flock-mind in The Flock that is mystical.

In Starry Adventure, Gard Sitwell had an experience in New Mexico, which was similar to the one Mary Austin had as a child in Illinois. At the opening of the book Gard and his sister, Laura, were sitting on the "banco" eating

¹⁵
Ibid., p. 301.

their supper out-of-doors, after which they were to play their favorite game of "seeing things in the clouds." Watching the cloud-bank below the crest of Jemez and the mysterious streakings of the Jemez-blue on the horizon was always a fascinating pastime for Gard. On this particular occasion, while his sister had gone to return the dishes to the kitchen, Gard was contemplating the beauty of the scene, when he experienced a wonderful picture in the clouds in the mist above the aspen trees.

The edges of the banked clouds were brightly gilt, the torn films flushed crimson, the gleaming cumuli behind them came hurrying; heaping and wheeling. Great sword-like beams of light slashed between them. . . the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. . . the chariots and the horsemen thereof. ¹⁶

When Laura came back, Gard announced to her that he had seen God in the aspens.

The Vision, the Voice, and other psychic illuminations showed up in Peter Weatherall's experiences in The Lovely Lady. In talking to Savilla Dassonville about the unmatched wonder and beauty of the love they had found in Italy, he compared it to his experiences in one of those places where he used to go in his youth--a place "where you go in your mind when you don't like the place where you are." ¹⁷ He called the place in his dreams the House of

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Mary Austin, Starry Adventure, p. 4.

17

Mary Austin, The Lovely Lady, p. 197.

Shining Walls; and it was there that he caught glimpses of success, unmarred by poverty, which he thought to be the crown of his life.

Some of Mrs. Austin's mystic feelings can be traced in the thoughts of Kenneth Brent in The Ford. He spent long hours roaming the hills, where he would meet shepherds feeding their flocks. The boy knew a few words of the "lingo" of the French, Basque, and Mexican herders, and would often persuade them to let him look after their herds. The work of herding furnished a relief to his mind from bitter thoughts of a struggle at Las Palomitas.

He had room then to attend to the vague prickings of his instincts, sending up from below the plane of his consciousness, where they worked, vague, pleasing intimations, starts and warm floodings that mixed with the suggestion of presence that waits upon men in the vast open country.¹⁸

Kenneth did not quite understand his feelings about the land and his instinct. It produced glimmers of a dream he had of setting out across the hills for an unnamed adventure. This experience would set him to plaiting the tops of the sage together as he had seen the herders do, "widening his shelter for the invisible, unshaped companion."¹⁹

Mrs. Austin carried her mystical attitude even into the

¹⁸
Mary Austin, The Ford, p. 135.

¹⁹
Ibid., p. 136.

interpretation of the progress of industry and business in America. She saw in the era from 1926-1929 a fine cultural movement led by the Saturday Evening Post and men with a "good medicine for things." She believed that the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs in their cultivation of a state of mind toward business were "good medicine." The efforts of such organizations she believed were resulting in the spiritualization of business. By spiritual she meant,

exactly what physical science is demonstrating, namely: that material processes--matter itself--are primarily manifestations of invisible energy. Good business is at last being understood as the result of a mystical--that is to say, a widely experienced but little understood--co-operation between a man's immediate self and his deep self. ²⁰

Mrs. Austin's suggestion for economic maladjustment was to take all the chains off and let men like Henry Ford and Herbert Hoover, who have a genius for business, exercise their "medicine." They were not to divide the heap but were to increase it, everybody getting a larger share and admitting the rights of leaders to inordinately large shares. Such an arrangement meant for her a new spiritual insight for America.

Mary Austin's mystical experiences were probably no greater than those of many other people, but the way in which she presented them made them sound more authentic.

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Mary Austin, "How I Found the Thing Worth Waiting For," Survey, Vol. LXI (January 1, 1929), p. 437.

She admitted that mystics, as a rule were either right or ridiculous; sometimes both. She believed all approach to truth to be mystical when it is in the stage in which truth is deeply felt and not yet successfully formulated. She was always a person who believed nothing until she had proved it for herself. Sometimes it seemed that she didn't know exactly where to look for knowledge, but she kept searching for it, looking deeply within and observantly around. Then when she found what she believed, she presented it as being so original that her ideas always had power.

There would naturally grow out of a discussion of mysticism the question of Mary Austin's religious faith. She was born a Methodist, but never felt anything of what the Methodists call "Joy of the Lord." She never did give genuine intellectual acceptance to the Methodist doctrine of salvation. This rebellion that she felt against the Methodist Church led her to spend the rest of her life seeking out of experience, an answer to her religious problem.

At times she was attracted by the wisdom and beauty of Catholicism, and she made a serious study of some of its beliefs. In fact, she studied all great religions. She was particularly impressed by folk faiths of Egypt and of the recent Southwest. After her unsatisfactory attempt at being a Methodist, she was never affiliated with another

faith. The general idea that a person gets of her belief is that if a religious faith brought results of harmony in humanity and nature, it was satisfactory.

Most of Mary Austin's books might be said to have religious themes. Mr. Pearce says that familiarity with those books will show "how much her mysticism was drawn to the way of human betterment, and how many of her works for human betterment were directed by the mystical ideals of perfection which her Earth Horizon encircles."²¹

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T.M.Pearce, The Beloved House, p. 77.

CHAPTER VI

PROPHECY FOR THE SOUTHWEST

In addition to calling Mary Austin's nature books purely books of nature, one may also call them books of prophecy. She laid claim to this title in the preface of The Land of Journeys' Ending. She expects in her reader a certain appreciation of the ritualistic approach and declares that "the function of all prophecy is to discern truth and declare it, and the only restriction on the prophet is that his means shall be at all points capable of sustaining what he discovers."¹

She was a prophet in the sense that she was gifted with a certain amount of insight into her tribe. Of course, any foreknowledge of the future that she might have had is based on the fact that insight into the present situation inevitably brings a certainty of where the deep trends will lead. In moving to California she was caught up in the westward drive of the American tribe. She finally deliberately chose as her habitation the land which she believed most characteristically American and most fertile of

¹ Mary Austin, The Land of Journeys' Ending, p. vii.

the rhythms of the future of the race.

Henry Smith thinks that her interest in the lands and people of the West is significant. He says:

The passionate eagerness with which Mrs. Austin has studied the land and the people of the West--those lands and peoples which least resemble the parts of Europe from which most settlers in America came--is full of meaning. It is a preparation for living in America. She performs a symbolic act, and in part she experiences for the race the acts of acquaintance necessary to the taking up of a permanent abode here. In the Europe, which thought into our occidental memory most of the higher reaches of our philosophy and art, this process of acquaintance with the terrain had gone long before--had taken place slowly, by means of mythologies which had grown antiquated before printing. For the Greeks, and perhaps for the Norse, primitive religions which we now call mythologies established and preserved that contact with the environment which is the basis of a racial art. But in America there has not been time for the growth of such a mythology, and besides, the sophisticated cultures of the immigrants who settled here made them little inclined to see any value in myths.²

Mrs. Austin felt that in the intramontane states of the Colorado River drainage basin, time and topographical integration afforded the sort of traditional basis for a regional culture that might carry the lift of the next great period in the history of the English-speaking people. In her opinion, the first World War showed that all phases of English-speaking experience had been clearly dominated by the cultural complex of England. She saw in the new era

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Henry Smith, "The Feel of the Purposeful Earth, Mary Austin's Prophecy," New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. I (February 1, 1931), pp. 29-30.

after the war the possibilities of a new culture; and "if in America at all, where so likely as in the one location where there is still comparatively a clear field?"³

She thought that the topographical factors, the beauty, variety, and fertility of the natural background, were singularly well conditioned for the establishment of such a culture. Besides, the combination of racial elements was peculiarly fortunate. To her, the combination of the Nordic elements with the traces of aboriginal and exotic found in the region seemed similar to the qualities that characterized the beginnings of great cultures of the past.

In The Land of Journeys' Ending she extended her prophecy to reach the Rio Grande, taking in all the territory to the Rio Colorado. She could see a culture beginning with the aboriginal top-soil culture, rich in the florescence of assimilation, to which was added the overflow of the golden century of Spain, melting and mixing with the native stream to the point of producing a distinctive, if not a final, pattern before it received its second contribution from the American East.

By the Nordic race, she meant that type that, when its

³ Mary Austin, "The Colorado River Project and the Culture of the Southwest," Southwest Review, Vol. XIII (October, 1927), p. 113.

early representatives reached the land of its journey's ending, across the incredible adventure of the Santa Fe Trail, was already established in a sense of race, a sense at least, of reliance upon some deeply fleshed sinew of a common adaptive experience. It knew what it wanted and moved instinctively by the shortest cuts to a generically Western accomplishment.

For the first hundred years not many people reached the Southwest who were not already partly assimilated to it by their natures. She thought that the first evidence of cultural evolution was the voiceless rhythm of acceptance... "land...my land."⁴ Between this realization and the beginning of cultural expression there lies a period, sometimes prolonged for generations. The length of that period depends upon the adoption of native symbols for experiences intimate and peculiar to that land.

Such symbols must be generic, image and super-
 scription of the land's true regnancy. We can no more
 produce, in any section of the United States, a quick
 and characteristic culture with the worn out currency
 of classicism and Christianity, than we can do business
 with the coinage of imperial Rome.⁵

She believed that in New Mexico and Arizona we approach nearest, in the New World, to the cultural beginnings which produced the glory that was Greece. Here

⁵
Ibid., p. 441.

the Spanish serves chiefly to mollify temperamentally the aboriginal strain.

This idea had been in Mrs. Austin's mind for some time; and as early as 1908, when her novel Santa Lucia was published, she had said of California,

The whole country here is sentient with something-- I hardly know what--but it cannot be shadowed forth in Greek imaginings, they are not big enough. If we had a mythology here, it would be full of tall flame-colored creatures that fill the heavens with their shiny wings. Do you know, we pride ourselves in the West on our material excellences; but it seems to me that there is a hint all through of the great fancies that make the beginnings of new religions and new arts.... The things I have in mind must come from the children born here, the children's children.⁶

Mrs. Austin's hopes for this region's being the seat of a new culture received a set-back with the development of the Colorado River Project, however. She was a representative from New Mexico to the Seven States Conference and she wrote several articles voicing her opinion on

Boulder Dam and the Colorado River Project. She felt that some of the states, Arizona in particular, were not treated fairly in the allocation of waters. California was demanding a larger share than she was entitled to, simply on the grounds that she could use those waters, and the power from them, "in her business, and use them now."⁷

⁶ Mary Austin, Santa Lucia, pp.33-34.

⁷ Mary Austin, "The Colorado River Project and the Culture of the Southwest," Southwest Review, Vol. XIII (October, 1927), p. 111.

She saw the region that she loved threatened. She protested against the wrongness of one region's stealing water from another region for its own immediate and reckless gain. The culture that she had dreamed of as rising out of a gradual industrialization of the country could not be hoped for in the quick change and immediate industrial service that was to grow out of this gigantic engineering enterprise. At the natural pace of the land itself, much could be done toward establishing the desired culture. At a booster's pace the race was lost before it was begun. One of the greatest evils in American life, as she saw it, was that such hordes of people "benefit by, without understanding the mechanistic basis of modern society."⁸

Mrs. Austin felt that this incident marked the first failure for her prophetic gift.

The resentment that Mrs. Austin had over the city of Los Angeles taking the water of Owens Valley is reflected in her novel The Ford. She could never stand to go back to the desolateness of Inyo. She wanted to keep the memory of the once prospering farms throughout the valley and the little towns of Lone Pine, Inyo, Bishop, and Independence, that had once looked forward to growth and future development.

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Ibid., p. 115.

Mr. Henry Smith had some very illuminating remarks to make on Mrs. Austin as a prophet, and a summary of what he had to say about her views will be helpful at this point. He felt that in trying to create a mythology for the American race Mrs. Austin was undertaking a hard task. It would take generations to do that, and modern skepticism toward it made an obstacle. He admitted, however, that she had seen the problem and made it clear.

Hers was a hard doctrine, and not easy to understand, but then we do not always understand poets. To say that Mrs. Austin was a prophet implies considerable passing of judgment on many things in American life, past and present. It implies in the first place the acceptance of a sort of primitivism: a recognition of efforts to imitate Europe in America as the natural desire of the infant to return to the womb, to reject the necessity of beginning life. This would mean that a great deal of American literature is unimportant because it is imitative. It means that American education is mainly wrong because it is trying to pass on the wrong tradition. It implies the recognition of the fact that American education does not educate because European tradition does not intimately correspond to the American environment. To the custodians of traditions, such a rejection of standards and return to primitivism means chaos. To a New Humanist, talk of

regional cultures sounds Rousseauistic (and therefore evil) or naive (and therefore ridiculous). Mr. Smith draws analogies from the development of other cultures, however, which do not make Mrs. Austin's ideas seem either ridiculous or evil. For one thing, perhaps we do not realize the length of time which must go to the creation of a civilization; but the machinery may have accelerated all processes just as oxygen speeds up all metabolisms of the single organism.

At any rate, he thinks, here lies the positive implication of Mrs. Austin's prophecy.

She, and the others who have spoken before her, and those who shall speak after, impose upon Americans the task of becoming a tribe, of building a civilization. There is no alternative: it is the cosmic cycle of life renewing itself through birth, which is not only painful in itself (the child also suffers) but also involves the assumption of functions continually beyond the strength and understanding of the new organism. So it is in America. It is not a time to be at ease in Zion. No man can see fully within the seeds of time, but all must see somewhat or listen to those who can. The only other way is dilettantism, cynicism, sterility, the refusal of life; which is, of course, the death of the spirit.⁹

Mr. Dudley Wynn found many paradoxes in Mrs. Austin's activities. He suggested in an article in The Virginia Quarterly Review that a person would hardly expect a regionalist whose philosophy was, to a great extent, founded upon primitivism to be a worker in progressivist causes as

⁹ Henry Smith, op. cit., p. 32.

Mary Austin was. He did not expect a regionalist to be a pure primitivist and against all that world-aware sophisticates stand for. But he did believe that, in the light of her pronouncements on the impenetrability of the folk, her tirades against intellectuals and her other progressivist activities were inconsistent, to say the least.¹⁰

He found that some of the inconsistencies could be explained away by chronology, but they could never be made simple because of the back-trackings and reversions that Mrs. Austin made down the line. He saw her evolving from a progressivist, a radical, an intellectual problem-solver, to a regionalist whose faith was in the folk. He saw her motive change from a general desire to change America by lecturing to it, to an obsession that it had to find its roots by a poetic and mystical absorption in some elements of the past. He said:

Such a straddling of the gap between the universalizing tendency of radical intellectualism and the localizing tendency of out-and-out regionalism, leaves no room for any argument. Mrs. Austin stands everywhere, mystically divining. Her Folk-ness, therefore, was not altogether primitivism, or escapism, or a systematized regionalism, or anything that can be labeled. She is valuable not for giving a system but for making us more aware, for extending the range of our consciousness of our environment and our social possibilities.¹¹

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Dudley Wynn, "Mary Austin, Woman Alone," Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. XIII (April, 1937), p. 255.

11

Ibid., p. 256.

As a prophet Mrs. Austin can stand even the vulgar test of being asked which of her prophecies have come true. One that is probably most evident and most closely related to our everyday life is Mary Austin's prophecy of the role that women were to play in the new world forming about us now.

A decade before the newer forms of verse came into fashion, she had forecast them and practised them. She derived her methods from those primitive Americans near whom she lived.

She recalled that when The Mercury began publishing her One Smoke Stories other magazines were not long in following with the short, short story, which is the "true Indian genre."¹²

Her interpretations of various movements of opinion and sentiment about religion, forms of society, and education, were far enough ahead of the times to have the element of prophecy in them.

The set-back that she experienced in not realizing her prophecy of an American culture in California was only a delay for her. It was not a defeat. She merely changed her scene of endeavor to New Mexico. During the last

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Mary Austin, "The Folk Story in America," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. XXXIII (January, 1934), p. 19.

years of her life she directed her efforts not so much to speculation about regionalism as to finding out all that she could about Indian and Spanish-American folk-ness. Santa Fe formed an ideal setting for her to pursue such a study. Here she could exercise her "genius for beginnings." Her approach at this time was more from the standpoint of collecting than from prophecy, however.

To her home in Santa Fe, located on El Camino del Sol, she gave the Spanish name, "Casa Querida." That name means "Beloved House," and it was so named because she meant to bring there cherished things from her life adventure. It served as a laboratory from which she could direct her work, and it was a frequent meeting place for members of the Indian Defense Association and friends of Spanish arts. It was built after the pattern of Spanish architecture, and was situated in a place where Mrs. Austin had a good view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Mrs. Austin, with the help of Frank Applegate, himself an artist in many mediums, formed the Spanish Arts Society. Mr. Applegate had begun to collect old works of Spanish colonial arts, "santos," "bultos," old furniture, and tin work. He also bought an old Spanish house and began to restore it. In the meantime, Mrs. Austin was collecting folk literature, plays, legends, and songs. They began their work of revival by starting a Spanish market, and an

exhibition with prizes. It grew to be an annual "fiesta" at Santa Fe, which was attended by the natives, but not very successfully. There was a tendency to divert it to tourist uses, which grew to be an offense to the artists. The result was that Witter Bynner, John Sloan, and several other artists set about to create a "fiesta" that should be Spanish. They persuaded the natives and finally the rest of the community so that it grew to be notable, and thoroughly native.

Later, Mrs. Austin managed to buy an old private chapel north of Santa Fe. She was away from home lecturing at Yale when Mr. Applegate wired her that the family who owned the chapel was about to sell it to a curio dealer. Mrs. Austin could not bear to think of losing this last of little private Spanish chapels, furnished forth with treasures, carved and painted "santos," and rare old prints. Its being sold to a curio dealer, who would break it up for private sale, seemed to her a loss irreparable to those people who loved the old things, "reredos," "corbels," altar paintings, carved confessionals, and saints innumerable. In her book Can Prayer Be answered? she tells of how she appealed to a man whom she scarcely knew at all for help. Within two days he had obtained from a person who wished to remain unknown the six thousand dollars necessary for the purchase of the chapel. The "sanctuario" was presented to New Mexico

as a religious memorial.

In a like manner, Mrs. Austin received money for purchasing the pick of Frank Applegate's collection of "santos" after he died. Mrs. Austin's work is living now in the work of the Society for the Revival of the Spanish Arts. She felt, even in the short time that she lived to work with it, that it was broadening and extending itself. She felt a sense of accomplishment in the fact that Spanish arts had shaken off the dust of generations of neglect and had established themselves in public esteem.

Another of her interests was an organization called the Indian Art Fund. It began with a few pieces of jewelry, paintings, blankets, and embroideries. The town of Santa Fe was asked to provide a museum in which to store the rapidly growing collection, which by this time contained objects of Indian pottery. After a protest with the Indian Bureau, over its wanting to put an end to the Indian dances, the group finally realized its desire. John D. Rockefeller became interested in their collection, and furnished the needed museum. Finally, the Indian arts reached a point where they have become fixed in the attention of the government.

Mrs. Austin's accomplishments in the revival of Spanish arts and Indian culture are evidences that her prophecy for an American culture to grow up out of the

Southwest may be, at some distant date, at least partially realized. Before she died, she had somewhat altered her prophecy. She had decided that Americans in general were interested in being "cultured" rather than in creating cultures.¹³ She was still encouraged by the progress made so far. She said that people who studied music intimately were seeing developed a mode of musical expression which is recognizably American. She believed that a type of American architecture was being created, beginning with the architectural pattern developed among our Indian pueblos, and adding steel and adapting it to our urban conditions. In literature we are approaching forms that are natively expressive.

Mrs. Austin believed that by the time all of these things are developed to the point at which they are instinctive, and complement one another in a genetic relation to American life, we will have an American culture. The Southwest has everything to offer out of which competent regional cultures are built--a magnificent landscape and a rich and appealing tradition. But she could see things that would retard its development. She wrote:

But I see everywhere too much disposition to overlay the tradition with complacencies of the present hour and disregard the subtleties of the scene for imitations of what has been conspicuously praised everywhere, to feel confident of an immediate rise of cultural response. The business of interpreting the West in wise and suitable ways of living will

13

Mary Austin, "Points of View," The Southwest Review, Vol. XIV (1929), p. 475.

be studious and long and only the humble are likely to succeed. 14

No one would deny that the Southwest has the things to offer that Mrs. Austin mentioned. The material has been pretty well displayed, classified, and presented to the world. What is needed now is interpretation. If Mrs. Austin's prophecy is ever realized, some disciples will have to arise with something of her strong assured voice to interpret and to encourage the acceptance of the values that inhere in the two pre-Anglo cultures of New Mexico.

I think, since making a careful study of Mary Austin, that my own presentation of the Heritage of New Mexico to my classes in the future can not help but be colored by some of the enthusiasms that Mrs. Austin felt for the land and the people there. I wonder if I shall not constantly be looking for potential disciples who can carry on the study that Mrs. Austin began.

Earth Horizon, Mrs. Austin's autobiography, was published in 1932. In June of 1933 Mrs. Austin was made honorary Doctor of Letters by the faculty of the University of New Mexico.¹⁵ Mr. Pearce described the occasion

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 477.

¹⁵ She held this title by an earlier honoring on the part of Blackburn College in Carlinville, Illinois.

as a memorable one for those who knew her. After the degree was conferred, Mrs. Austin, answered President Zimmerman's request by speaking briefly to the class of graduates. She said, "I have always been a learner. If the honors which come to me are in any way deserved, it is because through my life I have gone on learning. I do not intend to leave off the process even with death."¹⁶

Mrs. Austin died on August 13, 1934, of coronary thrombosis, after an illness of several months. Nothing of state ceremony attended her funeral rites. Prayers were read by the minister of the Episcopal Church. Two poems were repeated which Mary Austin had written when her imagination looked forward to this hour, "Going West" and "When I Am Dead." There was no music. A temporary interment was made in the vault of the Catron family.

A memorial service was held by her friends in the week following the entombment. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Alelena Otero Warren, Ernest Thompson Seton, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Ina Sizer Cassidy talked on various interests of her life. Poems in memoriam were read by John Gould Fletcher, Loren Eiseley, and Witter Bynner.¹⁷

The arrangement for Mary Austin's burial was left in

¹⁶ T. M. Pearce, The Beloved House, p. 190.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 213-216.

the hands of the trustees of her estate, and strange circumstances beset the path of her affairs before they were settled in Santa Fe. After remaining in the Catron vault for two years, the body was remanded to the mortuary for incineration. Ernest Seton Thompson offered a site for her grave on the hills near Seton Village. The trustees considered burying it on the grounds of "Casa Querida," but the neighbors objected to that. Another suggestion was to keep her ashes in an urn in the assembly room of her house. When the mortuary after keeping the remains a year had to vacate its properties, the trustees finally acted, and her ashes were carried to the peak of Mount Picacho in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, where they were sealed in a sarcophagus of native stone.

In a tribute to Mary Austin after her death T. M. Pearce wrote:

Death came in her sleep in the afternoon in an unguarded moment, though the watch had been kept constantly for many months. One has the feeling that waking Dr. Mary could have faced it and won. Her will had conquered before. Now she entered into a new world of experience which she has drawn near at other times. And she will write a greater book than she has written before, a book which celebrates not the earth horizon, but the "blue-cloud" horizon.¹⁸

Mary Austin said that when she completed her autobiography, she felt as if she had "ordered her hearse." The closing lines

18

T. M. Pearce, "Mary Austin, 1868-1934," The New Mexico Quarterly, Vol. IV. (August, 1934), pp. 233-234.

of that book are fitting lines to sum up her life's activities.

I have known, to some extent, what the Earth Horizon has been thinking about. Measurably, its people and its thoughts have come to me. I have seen that the American achievement is made up of two splendors: the splendor of individual relationships of power, the power to make and do rather than merely to possess, the aristocracy of creativeness; and that other splendor of realizing that in the deepest layers of ourselves we are incurably collective. At the core of our Amerindian life we are consummated in the dash and color of collectivity. It is not that we work upon the Cosmos, but it works in us. I suffer because I achieve so little in this relation, and rejoice that I have felt so much. As much as I am able, I celebrate the Earth Horizon.¹⁹

19

Mary Austin, Earth Horizon, p. 368.

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