that our interference in the internal affairs of South American republics would end. He supported Wilson's Mexican policy up to a point.

Then came the World War. Like Bryan, a man of equal courage and conscience, he hated war. Like Bryan, he thought the arming of merchant vessels and the refusal to warn Americans against traveling on the ships of warring nations carrying munitions made our involvement inevitable. He opposed the declaration of war. War hysteria had swept over the country. Whatever may be said of his attitude, it was honest and supremely courageous. The hue and cry raised against him was not honest. When newspapers, and even the Associated Press, twisted what he said in St. Paul into something he did not say, the crusade against him went beyond decent limits. He was quoted as saying that we had "no grievance" against Germany when he actually had said the opposite. The press roared against the "traitor," and plans were made for his expulsion from the Senate. The beginning of libel suits brought speedy retractions. The Associated Press apologized. A little later, Rollin Kirby, whose fierce cartoon did infinite harm, wrote to express his admiration for a man who had made "a brave fight against an overwhelming tide of chauvinism and war hysteria."

One notes with mixed feelings the reason the expulsion plan was dropped—his vote was needed against the League of Nations. But the biographer's detailed intimate account of the attempt to stamp LaFollette as a "traitor" is one of the highlights of a fascinating and provocative book. It is a book Americans may well meditate upon in our own day when liberals are suspected and hysteria is making a mockery of the American way of life.

*New York City* Claude G. Bowers

*Letters of Sherwood Anderson.* Selected and edited with an introduction and notes by Howard Mumford Jones, in association with Walter Rideout. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953, pp. xxv, 479. Illustrations and index. $6.00.)

Professors Jones and Rideout have done a service for American literature in culling from the correspondence of

a prolific letter-writer some four hundred variously interesting communications by the Midwestern author whose *Winesburg, Ohio* touched off something of a literary revolution when it appeared in 1939. One value of this selection is that it helps make clear what the revolution was about. In 1916 Anderson described *Winesburg* to an editor in these words: "I made last year a series of intensive studies of my home town, Clyde, Ohio . . . . Some of the studies you may think pretty raw, and there is a sad note running through them. One or two of them get pretty closely down to ugly things of life. However, I put a good deal into the writing of them."

For his pains and honesty Anderson was assailed by genteel critics, who were shocked by what was then a startling candor about sex, and by formal critics, who objected to Anderson's experimental techniques and failed to perceive that his deeper purposes had overridden the bounds of the conventional short story with a neat plot and surprise ending. In numerous letters Anderson firmly laid down his principles. "I can accept no standard I have ever seen as to form," he wrote a friend. "What I want most is to be and remain always an experimenter, an adventurer." The form was simply content, and for Anderson, at least in his earlier writing, the content was essentially feeling.

For this concept Anderson was indebted to the great Russian writers. He discovered Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Turgenev, and Chekhov: "A door opened. I saw that the art of prose writing might spring into life directly out of an impulse of sympathy and understanding with the man beside you." There was in Anderson himself this Russian—and perhaps also Midwestern—ability to lose one's identity in a curious sense of communion with others. "On a recent day . . . when I walked in the streets, this actual physical feeling of being completely *en rapport* with every man, woman, and child along a street wherein I walked became so intense that I had to go hide myself, to rest a little." It was natural, then, for Anderson's literary subjects to be the underdog, the sexually frustrated or twisted, the Negro, the poor white, the mill girl. "Really," he wrote, "if I belong to anything, I do belong to the defeated people."

Despite his instinctive sympathies for groups of people, Anderson remained essentially an individualist. At the same

time he was sharply aware of the danger of extreme individualism, absorption in one's own ego. In perhaps a score of letters appears some such statement as this: "As for the end, I have often thought that when it comes, there will be a kind of real comfort in the fact that self will go then. There is some kind of universal thing we will pass into that will in any event give us escape from the disease of self." This "universal thing," about whose prime importance Anderson was so insistent, was simply love: "I believe . . . that it is this universal thing, scattered about in many people . . . the thing called love that we have to keep on trying to tap."

That this religious impulse underlay, or was fused with, Anderson's creative drive is made evident in a number of letters, and notably in this passage: "I have been to Nebraska, where the big engines are tearing the hills to pieces; over the low hills runs the promise of the corn. You wait, dear Brother; I shall bring God home to the sweaty men in the corn rows. My songs shall creep into their hearts and teach them the sacredness of the long aisles of growing things that lead to the throne of God." There is more than a suggestion here of literary messiahship, but the distastefulness of it is lessened by Anderson's genuine dedication to his art. There are frequent complaints about his financial difficulties as a writer, but he never seriously considered returning to the business world once he had finally left it. In his art he had found a new way of life, hard but uniquely rewarding. "There is and can be no moral balance like the long difficulty of an art," he wrote, later asserting that art is "the only way of life." Yet art did not bring happiness: "It is at the same time the most terrible way of life."

Art did, however, provide an avenue of escape from the disease of self, for in it lay the possibility of an impersonal love. At times, in the act of literary creation, Anderson seems to have experienced a kind of mystic liberation. "I think that all of the more beautiful and clear, the more plangent and radiant writing I have done, has all been done by a kind of secondary personality that at such times takes possession of me." He described one such experience thus: "I have begun working again and yesterday, for the 1st time in months, sat at my desk, here in this little country hotel, for hours with no consciousness of time passing, completely lost, the words and sentences with a fine rhy[th]mic flow, ideas coming like

flights of birds, for the time, at least, completely happy. No. Happiness is not the word. To be happy there must be consciousness of self as happy, and in this state there is no self."

Thus, much of the interest of the letters lies in these revelations of Anderson's creative psychology, his motives, and his values. But many of his literary stimuli came from the outside, and it is as a conscious Midwesterner that he must be seen in order to be fully understood. His attitude towards the Midwest was ambivalent; he was constantly drawn to its people and the fertile beauty of its land, and at the same time was painfully aware of its rawness and spiritual and cultural aridity. He attributed the latter in part to historical causes: the "enervating looseness of thinking that was here in Lincoln's time is still with us, but is made more intense and vulgar by the coming of industrialism." Yet Anderson could be susceptible to Midwestern chauvinism: "I live in a wide valley of cornfields and men and towns and strange, jangling sounds, and in spite of the curious perversion of life here, I have a feeling that the great basin of the Mississippi River, where I have always lived and moved about, is one day to be the seat of the culture of the universe." On another occasion, however, Anderson confessed that the idea of escape from the Midwest was always in the back of his mind; "in my inner self I have accepted my own Mid-America as a walled-in place." At other times he seemed merely reconciled to remaining where his roots were: "Mid-America is my land. Good or bad, it's all I'll ever have."

Anderson's intimate if uneasy relationship with the region which provided him with most of his literary themes also gave him insights into the minds of other Midwesterners: Lincoln with his "trenchant sadness," Twain with his "rather childlike pessimis[m]," Dreiser with his unyielding hatred of puritanism. The link was Anderson's sharing of what he regarded as the common experience of Midwestern barrenness and sense of futility. The stultifying quality of the culture was such that Anderson feared that he would inevitably be forced into "some grotesque sectional attitude and spend myself uselessly on that."

That he did not ultimately do so was perhaps due in part to fructifying qualities in the Midwestern culture and character. Despite his often-expressed weariness of spirit, Anderson could never for long withdraw from his society, as a

New Englander might, or gain from it a festering sense of tragedy, as a Southerner might. The literary consequences of the reaction were not consistently important—his enduring work may be only *Winesburg*, parts of his novels, and a few memorable short stories, such as "Death in the Woods" and "The Triumph of the Egg"—but the epistolary record of it is fascinating as Anderson sets down his responses to two and a half tumultuous decades, from 1916 to 1940. His letters reflect the shifting interests of the time, as does his writing, and his sensitive reactions to them often provide a commentary on the latter. And since Anderson knew and wrote to practically everyone of importance in the arts during this period, the record is a full one. Thus as *Winesburg* reflects the shattering of nineteenth century sexual taboos, so do Anderson's letters reveal him grappling with the same problem, protesting, for example, Van Wyck Brooks' labeling him "a phallic Chekhov." Anderson has captured the modern attitude to the point where he can write candidly—both in his fiction and his letters—about sex; at the same time some prudishness clings to him, so that occasionally he sniggers at it or is self-conscious about his advanced attitude.

By 1930 Anderson felt that his interest in sex as a literary theme had faded, to be replaced by industrialism. From Georgia he noted: "The Southern towns are full of little mill girls, living in mill villages in the shadow of cotton mills." He had already explored the South in his novels *Poor White* and *Dark Laughter*. He never channeled his concern with the effect of the machine on the human being into literary expression, but *Perhaps Women*, a long essay, was the outcome of his interest, and he never ceased to be aware that the social and political tremors of the twenties and thirties might be the forerunners of earth-shaking upheavals. It is indicative of his native shrewdness that, in a time when many intellectuals were turning to communism as a desperate remedy for desperate ills, he saw the movement for what it is. He believed that he had no political turn of mind, yet as early as 1931 he was writing that communism was "probably a new sort of Puritanism, more dreadful than any other sort because of having more power." But, though Anderson shied away from any pseudo-scientific solution for social problems, with his quick concern always for human values he did not lapse into despairing inaction; see, for example, his letter to Presi-

dent Hoover protesting the treatment given the Bonus Army in Washington, with its urgent questions going to the heart of the matter.

In short, Anderson had courage—including the courage to admit his frequent lack of it—and he had integrity and a great kindness. These letters reveal too his human failings, his quirks, his frequent contradictions, his occasional coarseness, his moodiness, his admitted immaturity, his delusions of literary grandeur. He was, in a word, himself; but without pretending to unravel the complexities of character and culture, I would like to suggest again that Anderson is best seen as a Midwestern writer fairly typical of his time and place, with many resemblances to Sandburg, Dreiser, and Vachel Lindsay. There is the same lack of formal education, the same combination of simplicity and shrewdness soaring at times to genius, the same readiness to experiment, the same independence of mind, the same deep sense of responsibility. Back of all these qualities lay, perhaps, a kind of latter-day Midwestern mysticism akin to Lincoln's, the religious impulse shorn of dogma but nonetheless impressive in its honesty, pure in its charity, and moving in its intensity.

Thus these letters are interesting on half a dozen counts. They are, moreover, illuminated by Howard Mumford Jones in an introduction which is a model of clarity, conciseness, and balanced judgment. A chronology and notes, complete enough for the least informed reader, are also provided.

*Indiana University* Parry E. Stroud

*Westward the Briton.* By Robert G. Athearn. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, pp. xiv, 208. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. $4.50.)

This refreshing frontier social history of the Rocky Mountain area, centering in Denver, is the result of an examination of the works of nearly three hundred British travelers who visited America between the close of the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century. Some were mere travelers observing America through a Pullman window; others gave their attention to a restricted subject such as hunting, stock-raising, or mining; but not a few came to stay and throw in their fortunes with the growing West. Taken in the aggregate, their comments form an excellent basis for a social history.