

# Art in America

By Aleister Crowley

"Nay, start not at the word! America!"  
—SHELLEY.

HISTORY offers no parallel with the situation of Art in America. In the very flower-tide of English literature out go the Pilgrim Fathers with the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and John Bunyan, into a country whose natural beauties and whose natural rigours seem as if they would force art from out the veriest savages. The history of American development, one might hastily assert, offers every inducement to art in every form.

And yet the result is relative sterility. If we except Poe and Whitman in literature, Whistler and Sargent in painting, these remarks on Art in America seem likely to be as few as those on Snakes in Ireland.

Do we find anything that even aspires to be of the first rank? Poe is not in any sense a local bard: he is, of course, universal; yet he seems almost anti-local; most of his stories are drawn from the Old World, or might just as well have happened there. Whistler and Sargent never worked in America at all. The astounding inspiration of much of American scenery, ranging from the cliffs of Yosemite and Niagara to the plains of Texas and the Mississippi, fails to inspire the native. I have at my tongue's tip a dozen superb nature-pictures of their country—God's country! no empty boasting that!—and every one of them was written by an Irishman or a Scot.

Why could not Whistler have painted in the Yellowstone? The nearest he ever got to it was Valparaiso.

I think the truth of the matter lies in this, that where life is so abundant only the eldest souls can even begin to turn themselves to that quintessentialising of it which is the secret of art, and that such souls, overwhelmed by its immensity, or lacking in the youth of genius, have failed.