

for their books, will find their revenue appreciably diminished. Nor will the embargo on unrestricted paper-importation into England profit us in America to any perceptible extent, since already the domestic demand is in excess of the domestic supply.

COMMUNICATIONS.

MR. DREISER.

(To the Editor of THE DIAL.)

The winsome, elephantine condemnation of America, her life and art, by Mr. Theodore Dreiser in the "Seven Arts" was almost amusing. It was for all the world like the effervescent talk of an elder brother, now returned to Warsaw, his native village, after a generation of exile in the city. Imagine him on a hoosier holiday accosting Little Brother, whom he left years before in the straitened precincts of a Catholic home in the heart of Puritan-ridden America. He, Big Brother, has breathed the freer airs of the metropolis. He is possessed with the idea that, while he has been breaking moulds of custom, Little Brother and Warsaw are still set in the frigid forms of Puritanism. We may conceive Theodore discoursing in this wise:

"Alas, alas for art in America, since you, Little Brother, don't believe in birth control."

"But I do, Theodore, I do, and all Warsaw practises it."

"And American colleges are defunct."

"Even a few professors are beginning to suspect that."

"And there are no houses of prostitution in Warsaw."

"No, but the Ancient Woman plies her trade."

"And Anthony Comstockism thrives."

"Only in little old New York. Even I have read 'Homo Sapiens,' and your 'Genius' is discussed by Ethel and Grace at the high school."

"And the nude, the nude—"

"Is never so alluring as when properly covered."

"Women are too much respected."

"But not always too respectable."

"The constitution of the United States is an idealistic fiasco, framed to line the pockets of privilege."

"Why, so Beard remarked, I believe, before I kicked myself out of college."

By this time Theodore is frothy.

"Men still believe in God."

"It's an ancient failing. Do they serve Him?"

Thereupon Big Brother turns away in disgust at the puerile complacency of his provincial brother. Theodore has forgotten that, in this age of intercommunication, our lives and communities are inseparably tangled, and that the spirit of change is pervasive. Warsaw, too, has her broken moulds, and vibrates to the same iron string of revolution as New York.

And so I was almost amused at the confidence with which Mr. Dreiser made himself the spokesman of his provincial constituents, and announced his anti-Victorianism with the unctious of novelty.

I found myself, as Little Brother, in accord with nearly all he said, but I somehow could not accept its spirit. There are two underlying delusions in Mr. Dreiser's condemnation.

Mr. Dreiser has been called an elemental force. He accepts the epithet. If there is any one belief shadowed in his works, it is the pagan belief in a "vast compulsion which has nothing to do with the individual desires or tastes or impulses of individuals." He reduces life to this force and to unguided inner desire. He desires to tear away illusions and make America see these elements only. Would he have society reorganized about these elements? Does he mean society to be pagan by imitating the ruthless force; should society be amorphous; should the prostitute be honored, made a public benefactor? Would art advance more rapidly under these than under present conditions?

And again, is it more natural to be polygamous than monogamous? Were the greatest artists polygamous? Is it elemental to regard the vast compulsion as a ruthless force?

The first delusion that I wish Mr. Dreiser had destroyed for us is the delusion that he is elemental, therefore simple, therefore clear. As a matter of fact, he is not elemental, but unutterably complex. He is so complex that he has been unable to guide his impulses into some clear, understandable, workable scheme of action; which is the office of genius, I take it. He blasts away (while all of us stand by and applaud) the old conventions, customs, and illusions which no longer need blasting, and he offers in their place—what? A fancied belief that he has found the elements of life in vast compulsion and unguided inner desire. I assert that the provincial masses of America, whom Mr. Dreiser derides, have come as near to finding the naked truths of life as he himself.

The other delusion which is everywhere implied in Mr. Dreiser's paper is that American art—in particular American literature—is inferior to European because it is different. I regret that Mr. Dreiser falls into this too-common error. He does well to rage against England's intellectual colonization of America—Emerson and Lowell did that before him. But would he substitute Russian and German colonization? He seems to think Emerson inferior to his disciple Nietzsche. He seems to think William James inferior to Schopenhauer. By what standard can Dreiser place Nietzsche and Schopenhauer above Emerson and James? By no standard but the European. Does Dreiser, in his ardent Americanism, try America and find her wanting according to European standards alone? There is no greater fallacy than to judge one race's art by standards created from another race's art. America's art is too English? Yes. But can America's art become American by adhering to German standards? Art is a race's unfolding from within, not a grafting of adventitious growths from without. Suppose America's genius were moral, and suppose the greatest art should be the art of morality, would Mr. Dreiser have the good grace to be chagrined?

Beloit, Wis., April 9, 1917. M. H. HEDGES.