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The Feel of the Purposeful Earth

Mary Austin's Prophecy

By Henry Smith

After her first books had established her as a writer of promise, Mary Austin laid the foundations for her future work by a series of novels clarifying her attitude toward the society of contemporary America. Although here, as in the earlier Land of Little Rain (Boston, 1908), and The Flock (Boston, 1906), the deep positive trends of her thinking were manifest and important, she was also engaged in a critical study of her inherited traditions and the various forces of the life about her. She had apparently come out of her dozen years in the desert convinced of her vocation and concerned to take stock of the country to which she felt herself called to speak. In A Woman of Genius, (Garden City, 1912), particularly, she worked out her emancipation from the small-townness of the Middle West from which she came. And in The Ford (Boston, 1917), and No. 26 Jayne Street (Boston, 1920), she touched other aspects of the American scene,—turbulent New York and the California of development companies and irrigation projects and oil fields.

This should be kept in mind in any estimate of Mary Austin, because it is important. Critics who tend to think of her as a sort of recluse in the Western deserts should remember this critical work, closely in contact with a wide variety of environments and widely diverse characters: members of the Missionary Society in a small Indiana town, promoters in the ruthless development of California, theatrical people and labor-agitators in New York. Years before Sinclair Lewis she seized and conveyed the deadliness of all that is confining in the rural Middle West and in the well-ordered life of the wealthy middle class in
the cities. The conflict in *A Woman of Genius* is between the imperious surge of genius within the actress-heroine, and the superficial patterns of a society determined not to admit to itself the truth about anything. The book, by the way, is a document for the well-known thesis that American respectability has either made every great American artist a pariah or clipped his wings somewhat to the measure of its own littleness. But I am concerned only to make it plain that Mrs. Austin knows Main Street and does not love it.

Yet she has spent her energies for many years in working out the implications of a deep promise back of American life. She has turned for nourishment to the tradition of Thoreau, Burroughs, Muir—a tradition based on an absorbing love of the American land. She has developed this tradition upon an unprecedented scale, and has integrated it with the main drives of modern society. She has applied it, for instance, to explain the relation of the rhythms of a genuine literature to the patterns of the American scene (*The American Rhythm*, New York, 1923). She has made herself familiar with the civilization of the American Indian, not as an antiquarian pastime, but as a definite source of power in the art and culture of the future. She has been the leading figure in the development of regional cultures in the West, and has given constant aid and encouragement to young writers and artists who are reaching out to find America. In short, she has a confidence in American life and art entirely distinct from flag waving and fireworks, and the childish conceit of our tremendous industrial intellects; but more certain than any of these.

This confidence she has expressed variously in her score or so of books, from *The Land of Little Rain*, in 1903, to *The Land of Journey’s Ending*, in 1924; and will no doubt make even more explicit in two new books (one of them her autobiography) announced for publication this season. But the reader of any of Mary Austin’s published work (I have read only half of it), however impressed he
may be with its import, will put down the books at the end with a feeling that Mary Austin herself is more significant than what she has written. She is the author of essays, novels, plays, and poetry; but she is not merely an artist. Her pen does not drain the essence of her onto paper; her work is important not in and for itself, but as a more or less clear indication of a personality back of it—a personality essentially American. Yet I realize at once that this too is an inaccurate statement, for Mrs. Austin is anything but preoccupied with herself, and her books are written with a clear eye fastened upon the object of contemplation. One must not be deceived by her honest opinion of the importance of her own ideas; it is the obeisance the mind pays to knowledge felt as given, as originating elsewhere than in the mind itself; and is in fact a sort of humility (which is of course a thing far removed from self-deprecation).

No: Mary Austin is not a romantic with a "genius" frenzy. I think one has finally to say that her books are the expression of a peculiarly impersonal personality, a mind polarized, made to be in harmony with itself and with its environment, freed at last from conflicts and doubt, opened as a channel for the free passage of intuitions rising now in the race memory, now in the underlying mind of the universe; if in fact, as Mrs. Austin seems to think, these two sources are not ultimately one. As a person and as a writer Mary Austin gives an impression of solidity, of poise. She is one of the few persons now living in North America, who have become acclimated to the environment, physical and spiritual, of the American continent. She is an advance-notice of the formation of an American race, an early member of the society of the future, that "group of people having a common blood stream and societal relation, who [shall] have subjected themselves to a common environment and a common experience long enough to take on reactive capacities such as [will be] the recognized index of their association" (Everyman's Genius; Indianapolis, 1925, p.14).
II

If I may make use of one of her own distinctions, Mary Austin has talent for writing fiction, but her genius tends in another direction. She is too much interested in ideas to be able to give herself up to the almost a-moral mirror-passion of the great dramatist or novelist—the instinctive love of the fleeting moment for itself alone, the delight in presenting a vision of life unqualified by the opinion and thought of the artist. In Lost Borders (New York, 1909), for instance, while there are at least two stories (“The Pocket-Hunter’s Story” and “The House of Offence”) of superlative merit as stories, the main impulse is always dual: characters plus environment, men and women plus the desert; and the study of the influence of the desert, as might be expected in a book by the author of The Land of Little Rain, is the dominant theme. A Woman of Genius is a powerful book of social criticism, but of all its characters only the heroine seems real: for in her mind are worked out the analyses of American society and the psychology of genius. The Ford (New York, 1917) extends the analysis to California in the hands of the openly Scythian big-business of the beginning of the century, but the characters suffer because of the author’s interests in social forces.

No. 26 Jayne Street (Boston, 1920), again, is a novel of genuine importance, with a plot moving strongly along authentic lines of human motivation and characters definitely conceived and clearly presented. The reading of the book is an emotional and intellectual impact. 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. Mrs. Austin continues in this novel to work on the most serious problems of the twentieth century: the matter of allegiance in time of war; the international drift toward communism which everyone must confront and relate to himself; theoretical democracy as a possible basis
for a reconstruction of personal relations. 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.

In short, although these books of fiction are anything but negligible, and for a less versatile writer might make a respectable reputation, one feels that Mrs. Austin has not come home until she returns to the manner-of her earliest books (The Land of Little Rain and The Flock) and addresses herself to the composition of The Land of Journey’s Ending. In this field of writing (it has no accepted name, and the term “nature literature” proposed by Henry Chester Tracy, is open to all the ambiguities of the word “nature”) she has done something of transcendent meaning, definitive if not yet definable. She has enlarged the tradition of the “American Naturists”; 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. Thus:

... the march of the tall trees is with the wind along the trend of the tall mountains striking diagonally across from the turn of the Río Grande to the Grand Cañon, with scattered patches wher-

1. The Man Jesus, New York, 1915; later republished as A Small Town Man, (New York, 1923) is a biography which represents Mrs. Austin’s assimilation of modern critical study of the New Testament and her definition of an attitude toward Jesus. Containing, as it does, almost the only explicit exposition of her personal religion and philosophy, the book is highly important as a key to Mrs. Austin’s other works, particularly in its remarks upon genius and mysticism. But proper discussion of the book as a whole has seemed to me to belong somewhere else, and to require a reviewer more versed in theology. It should be said, at least, that Mrs. Austin is Unitarian in tendency, that she thinks a kernel of historical truth can be discerned amid much legend and homiletic distortion in the Gospels, and that she believes healing power is an accessible resource of everyday life.

ever the cumbres are high enough to drag down the clouds as snow, and hold it as a mulch for the pines.

A little to the west of the continental divide, from the Fort Apache Reservation to the country of the Hualapai along the Colorado, the land drops off in broken ranges, along the Rim of the Mogollon Mesa. North of the Rim it lifts in alternate patches of grassland and forest which exhibit the wide spacing and monotony characteristic of arid regions. 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. (*Land of Journey's Ending*, p. 34).

Or you walk among the junipers:

... first one and then another pricks itself on your attention. As if all the vitality of the tree, which during the winter had been withdrawn to the seat of the life processes underground, had run up and shouted, "Here I am." Not one of all the ways by which a tree strikes freshly on your observation,—with a greener flush, with stiffened needles, or slight alterations of the axis of the growing shoots, accounts for this flash of mutual awareness. You walk a stranger in a vegetating world; then with an inward click the shutter of some profounder level of consciousness uncloses and admits you to sentience of the mounting sap. (*ibid.*, pp. 39-40).

Here are suggested the two characteristics of Mrs. Austin's writing about the American continent—largeness of scale and inwardness of intuition:—avenues by which she is apparently seeking to discover "some common ground for the American philosopher and artist to stand on." (Van Doren, Carl: *Many Minds*, New York, 1924. p. 5).
I have mentioned Henry Chester Tracy's placing of Mary Austin in the tradition of Thoreau, Muir, Burroughs, as a "naturist." If such classification and comparison clarifies her meaning or bolsters her admirers in their estimate of her, I have no objection to it. But between Mary Austin and any of these there is this important difference, that her interest in the environment (must one call it this, or, worse, "nature"?) is, in the real sense, ethical, and thus political. She is seeking not a retreat from men, cities, and society, but a real avenue of approach to them. She dwells in no ivory tower, but at the meeting of all the highways of modern life.

It is not always so with naturists. In speaking of one of William Beebe's books, Mr. Tracy says:

For, after all, the world which is [in these pages] being spun for us into fresh reality is not a world of dismal human plots and contortions but one of nature into which all sorts of things are harmonized—death even—without those tragic grimaces which the man-sort are wont to make when the spectre faces them. It is a naturists' world. (Tracy, op. cit., p. 218).

And from the same author Mr. Tracy quotes:

It came upon me during early nights, again and again, that this was Now, and that into the hourglass of Now was headed a maelstrom of untold riches of the Future—minutes and hours and sapphire days ahead—a Now which was wholly unconcerned with leagues and liquor, with strikes and salaries. (quoted in Tracy, op.cit., p. 221, from The Edge of the Jungle, p. 22).

Now this contains the germ of an escape-romanticism: you can fly from a troubling reality as well through the eyepiece of a microscope as on the viewless wings of poesy. But Mrs. Austin is above all things realistic which is to say, she is not thinking of "nature" as an escape. She is not trying to get away from any of the bewildering complexities of modern life. She is a little un-American, perhaps, in her humility, but she is American in her optimism.
Whatever else her inknowing has taught her, it has made her certain that life—taken by and large—is good, and that man can have confidence in the universe. Here and there in her work one is aware of the basis of her thinking—a view of things, for the most part complete, fundamental, untroubled, even though aware of the ruinous slowness and imperfection of the ways life takes toward its realization. She has a religion deeper than organized churches, a politics beyond parties and governmental machinery, an ethics untrammled by the letter of codes, and a confidence in America independent of the bitter froth or the childish self-sufficiency of the moment.

We are familiar with the notion that every train of investigation, followed rigorously, leads back to general principles of wide significance. But in effect, particularized research, because human energies and the span of human life are limited, has settled into an acquiescence in particularity: it has sought to make a total view of life (if it makes one at all) out of the aggregate of partial views. Mrs. Austin is more practical. She sees that the total view is of no use if it exists hypothetically, not as the property of any individual person. Therefore she has striven for a total view in herself: and she has also tried to set down what she has discovered. Here is the unity back of an apparently heterogeneous series of studies. Mrs. Austin is interested in the wholeness and the harmony of human life, now, hour by hour, not theoretically but practically and passionately, as the resource and the activity of the moment, the day, the year. She is interested in botany, geology, archaeology, the psychology of genius, history, anthropology, literary history, sociology, prose fiction, regional culture, religion, and verse for children; but all because, and to the extent that, she is impelled toward the integration of the human personality as it actually exists, everywhere in some specific environment, and particularly in America in the environment which has seemed to her, after long experience of many others, most fundamentally American: the West, ultimately
the Southwest. It is this unity of Mrs. Austin's thought, rather than any unity in her artistic impulse, which grows upon the student of her writings; for to her, art is the handmaiden of life, ministering to the fullness thereof, and else of no account. The purpose of art, she has one of her characters say, is "its re-kneading of the bread of life until it nourishes us toward greater achievement" (A Woman of Genius, p. 7). It is impossible to call her lifelong quest scholarship, politics, science, or art: it is all these, by turns or simultaneously, but at bottom it is a quest for the fullness of life. Mary Austin brands herself as an Occidental: she is a mystic, to be sure, but her beatific vision embraces experience instead of fleeing from it; her criteria are pragmatic, not speculative.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in The American Rhythm, a book which stands on library shelves as literary criticism. The thesis—to the effect that American verse will be fruitful only to the extent that it captures American rhythms, preserved best at present in Amerindian poetry—seemed twenty years ago, perhaps seems even now, fantastic enough; I shall not labor it here. The interesting thing about the book is the fact that it shows Mrs. Austin's characteristic attitude toward art: not as an end in itself, but as a means and a mode of spiritual existence. She is engaged, she says, to find "a basis for the poetic quest, and for the establishment of a traditional poetic mode; provocative of the maximum of well-being"; that is, of the fullness of life. These two—poetry and well-being—go hand in hand; for "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." (The American Rhythm, p. 6). Not that such rhythms are consciously discoverable: "the suggestibility of the human organism in the direction of rhythmic response is so generous that the rhythmic forms to which the environment gives rise, seem to pass through the autonomic system, into and out of the subconscious without our having once become in-
tellectually aware of them. Rhythm, then, in so far as it affects our poetic mode, has nothing to do without intellec-
tual life.” (ibid., p. 4). But if not with our intellectual life, certainly with our subconscious: rhythm has much to do with environment. There are two variables in the equation, the poet and the milieu; and they must be harmonized be-
fore poetry becomes a release for the race and a servant of life. “Given a new earth to live on, new attacks on the
mastery of time and space, and a whole new scale of motor
impulses is built into the subconscious structure of the in-
dividual.” And the progress of art necessarily follows
these impulses: “Almost anybody might have predicted the
rise of a new verse form in America.” (ibid., p. 9). This
is not absolute biological determinism. It deals only with the
form of poetry: “Poignancy is of the poet’s soul, perhaps,
but rhythm is always in his sense.” (ibid., p. 14). And
rhythm as an adjustment to environment is important only
because it rises out of “the profound desire of man to as-
similate himself to the Allness as it is displayed to him in all
the peacock splendor of the American continent.” (ibid.,
pp. 18-19). Poetry has a vital use: therein lies Mrs. Austin’s concern with it.

III

IN THIS book, as in her others, even her novels, Mary
Austin is unmistakably a mystic. Just here, I think, lies
the reason why in the academies and coteries she is under-
estimated. For it is certainly not the fashion now to be-
lieve very strongly in a spiritual continuum back of the uni-
iverse, of which individual minds are but incompletely iso-
lated parts: and if the philosophers would go this far, few
of them would admit that man can have

Power to describe and locate objects concealed from sensory observation.
Power to diagnose disease under the same condi-
tions.
Power to describe places, persons, or events removed in space.
Power to describe the same when removed in time.
Power to describe the same when removed both in time and space.
Power to arrive at truth, the rational path to which has not yet been cleared. (Everyman’s Genius, pp. 196-7).

But Mrs. Austin’s whole work depends upon knowledge thus acquired. It seems to me certain, for instance, that the importance of such books as The Land of Journeys Ending and The Flock lies not in minute descriptions of flora and fauna, or of topographical features; but in the capture and expression of what Mrs. Austin calls the rhythm of the region. Here is the crux. You cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or touch the rhythm of an environment. Knowledge of it must be acquired otherwise than through the senses, or through any combination of sensory experiences.

Mrs. Austin so defines mystical knowledge. It is “knowledge which arrives at the threshold of consciousness by processes recognizably different from the familiar sense perceptions.” (Everyman’s Genius, p. 151). This knowledge may make use of the minutiae of geology and botany and zoology, but it uses them, not as facts but as symbols, as avenues of meditation. For the expression of knowledge so acquired, none of the usual forms of prose is satisfactory, and Mrs. Austin has never shown an inclination to use a Wordsworthian blank verse or ballad stanza because so much of what she has to say consists of detailed bits of information out of which the total effect is gradually built up; she does not strive for an immediate statement like that, say, of “Tintern Abbey.” Hence the use of such a form as that of The Land of Little Rain, The Flock, and The Land of Journey’s Ending. These books are only incidentally “nature-writing”; rather are they books of prophesy.

Mrs. Austin lays claim to this title in the preface to The Land of Journey’s Ending. “The function of all prophecy,” she continues, “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.” (The Land of Journey’s Ending, vii). Let us define the term more explicitly. By a prophet let us understand a person gifted with a certain amount of insight into the present situation of his tribe: not a philosopher, for he is not speculative; not a preacher, for he does not appeal to a revelation or promulgate moral codes; not an artist, for he speaks directly, with little of the impersonal and ununderstandable compulsion of the artist to display the appearances of things for their own sake; not any of these things: a prophet. The connotation of mysterious foreknowledge of future events which the word has received is due, of course, to the fact that insight into the present situation—into its complexities and beyond them, by a vision which can only be described (without any implication of mere praise) as mystical—inevitably brings a certainty of where the deep trends will lead. Mrs. Austin claims for herself this specific function with relation to the development of the American poetry revival of fifteen years ago. But however such a performance may impress the multitude eager for a sign, it is not important. The important thing about a prophet is that he has insight into the state of his tribe, and out of that insight speaks thoughts needful to be heard by his fellows.

It is in this sense that Mrs. Austin’s most characteristic works are prophetic writings. The immediate state of her tribe is somewhat as follows: Fragments of European races have undertaken to live together on a new continent. This implies the construction of a form of government and the carrying on of all the necessary functions of life: in other words, the formation of a civilization. But civilization is nothing if it is not the relation between a given group of men integrated into a tribe or race, and a specific environ-

3. Sat. Rev. of Lit., Dec. 6, 1930, p. 432; cf Van Doren, op. cit., p. 12, and Tracy, op. cit., p. 15; Mrs. Austin has “a prophetic quality ... which is a mark of naturiša of the first rank.”
The integration of various racial elements into a new race is closely dependent upon the environment of its formation (though once the race is formed and the culture built, both may persist, albeit short of satisfactorily, without a common environment, as witness the Jews). Thus the importance of the American environment for the formation of the American race, and for the course of American civilization, is enormous. That Americans have, perhaps without realizing it, felt this need to know the environment, that we have constantly been sending out as feelers, as spies to survey the land, a long succession of "nature writers," is admirably demonstrated by Henry S. Canby in his essay, "Back to Nature."

To this need of the race to know its habitation many prophets have spoken—greater or lesser possessors of the peculiar prophetic gift necessary at this stage of the tribal history. Mary Austin belongs to this prophetic succession, and she is not least among them. She has lived in her own life the moth-like westward drive of the American tribe: and finally, after reaching the Western ocean and living for a time at the extreme point of possible migration, she has deliberately chosen as her habitation the terrain which has seemed to her most characteristically American, most fertile of the rhythms of the future of the race.

Thus 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. Yet the growth of a national art depends upon some accommodation to the soil. Mrs. Austin is trying to do for the American race what myths did for the Greeks and for other European peoples. Modern skepticism makes this task hard; she has explored the mythology and the folk-lore of the Indians and the early Spanish settlers, but she has been forced in the end to express her meaning in philosophical terms and through the traditional form of nature-writing. Of course she has not been able to create an American mythology—it takes generations to do that. But she has seen the problem, and made it clear.

To say so much means both less and more than it might seem. It does not mean that Mrs. Austin's insight is immediately available for all the tribe: I, for one, find it hard doctrine and not easy to understand. But even without full understanding one can recognize a prophet and respect his vocation: surely this is possible, else how listen to a poet? On the other hand, to say that Mrs. Austin is a prophet implies a considerable passing of judgements 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 means that a good deal of American literature—perhaps the most finished of it—is unimportant because it is imitative. It means in particular that American education, conceived as the imparting of tradition to
successive generations of the young of the tribe, is mainly wrong because it is trying to pass on the wrong tradition—a tradition, that is, which does not belong to those who are trying to pass it on. It is no childish chauvinism from which this judgment springs: it is simply a recognition of the fact that American education does not educate, does not induct the young into a harmonious plan of life within the tribe, and that this is necessarily so because the European tradition does not intimately correspond to the American environment.

The custodians of tradition in the form of standards—critical, educational, moral—cry at once that to reject the European tradition, the heritage of Greece and Rome, of France and Germany and England—is to reject the only standards we have: primitivism, they point out, means chaos. They are partly right. To a New Humanist or to a Young Intellectual grown up into a position of authority, talk of regional cultures sounds either Rousseauistic (and therefore evil) or naïve (and therefore ridiculous). So, to a Boethius, no doubt seemed the inarticulate inner drives of the barbarians. But the barbarians could not be civilized by the ministrations of Rome; and yet the future of culture lay north of the Alps, not south. It must have been with a sort of bewilderment that the Latin scholars and artists of the Silver Age perceived the impotence of their obviously superior civilization to mould the bursting rawness of the invaders. No one can explain it, even yet: the discussion moves at once to a mystical terminology and is spent in conjecture. But somehow the center of gravity was destined to move west and north: from Rome to Paris, as it had moved from Athens to Rome; and from Asia to Athens. Why could not the architects of the ninth century learn from Roman treatises and Roman examples? It can be doubted whether even the climax of the Gothic style surpassed the achievements of Greece and Rome: certainly the first crude efforts were far inferior to what even uninspired
copying of Roman models ought to have achieved. The answer is perhaps that the architects of the Middle Ages had to express a different spirit from that of the Romans: that medieval spirit which was not the Christianity of the Synoptic Gospels (the Middle Ages, it is admitted, created their own religion, and owed to Palestine a bare handful of names); it was neither better nor worse than the best of pagan antiquity: it was simply different, and to compare the two is like comparing C with G in a chord, or one woman with another to ask, "Which is the more charming?" when that in each which we call charming is unique.

To use such analogies in speaking of America has the advantage of recognizing the barbarity of the race; it has the disadvantage of lending itself to a sort of "manifest destiny" view of the development of the nation. For one thing, perhaps we do not realize the length of time which must go to the creation of a civilization. But the machine may have accelerated all processes: by very multiplication of platitudes such as jazz radio programs and moving-picture films it may be that the machine hurries all developments as oxygen speeds up all metabolisms of the single organism.

At any rate, here lies the positive implication of Mrs. Austin's prophesy. 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 diletantism, cynicism, sterility, the refusal of life; which is, of course, the death of the spirit.
Often in the history of human thought the important thinkers have been those who have been able to see the problems. Once they are perceived and clearly stated, journeyman thinkers can cooperate to solve them. The distinction of Mrs. Austin’s writings is that they shed problems from almost every page. She seems to live at that outer fringe of the spotlight of accepted knowledge where most trains of thought emerge quickly from the light and lead out into the penumbra. These are the lines of advance. She has spent many years marking these trails at the point where they enter the shadow, and some she has followed a greater or a smaller way herself.

IV

These are some of the meanings which I get from Mrs. Austin’s work. They are not the whole story; but perhaps they will suggest to Southwesterners the importance of this citizen of Santa Fé. From her adobe house on a hill overlooking the town, and giving also on the Sangre de Cristo mountains, she surveys most of the impulses which are vital in the region. She interests herself in the Boulder Dam controversy; in the reform of the Indian Service, in the censorship rider on the last tariff bill, in the recovery and preservation of Spanish colonial folk-songs and folk drama; or she goes East in the winter to lecture on primitive drama at Yale. To the casual visitor she seems a little disturbing in her poise and the certainty of her attitudes; but for every one who can catch a glimmer of the promise she sees in the future of regional life she has endless encouragement. She is connected with almost every enterprise which shows any tendency to enrich and deepen the life of the West. But more than any writer of comparable achievement, she has gone almost unrewarded by and almost unknown to the people for whom her prophesy is important.