

THE GIBSON GIRL ANALYZED BY HER ORIGINATOR

Artist Whose Delineation of the Young American Woman Made Him Famous Tells How the Type Came Into Existence and What Her Mission Is.

By EDWARD MARSHALL.

HERE is what Charles Dana Gibson, famous artist, thinks of the American girl, American man, American art, America in general. He has been credited with creating the Gibson type. It may be because he is a splendid type himself. I saw him first almost twenty years ago. Just how I happened to go to him for an interview I do not remember, but he was the first man I had ever tried to interview, and the operation scared me stiff. The whole world knows perfectly why I went again to interview him last week. Friday. The other night he told me that I had been the first man who had ever interviewed him and that the episode had frightened him almost into a catalepsy. He was twenty-three at that time, and his scrawling backhand signature, at the bottom of the little sketch of a small dog, howling, (the only picture he had sold up to that time), bearing under it the line "The Moon and I," did not have great financial value. That signature to-day is like the water-mark on paper, the hall-mark, or the "sterling" stamp on silver, the name McCutcheon, Hitchens, or Churchill on a book of fiction. He is today under contract, I am told, with Life and Collier's Weekly, two of the most successful publications in the world, and that they pay him two of the most successful salaries the world has ever known. "Gibson Girl" is, probably, the most famous art creation of this century, or any century, and her fame is quite legitimate, for, verily, she is exceeding good. "How much did you get for that first picture?" I asked, the other night. "Four dollars," he said promptly. "That check made me feel like a new millionaire."

For some reason I recalled the sketch in every detail. "Could you reproduce it now?" I asked. "Let me take your pencil and paper." I gave them to him and there grew beneath his hand the little picture of the small dog baying at the moon which is reproduced herewith. It is a little rougher than the first one was. He dabbled over it, made the lines tenderly. Having finished it, as he supposed, he reached it out toward me. I held my hand to take it. "Hold on," said he, and drew his hand back, making other little strokes. He had remembered three more lines. It was quite plain that he loved the memory of that first accepted sketch. "What that meant to me!" said he. "Will you make a head for me?" I asked. "A Gibson Girl's head, please!" He tried it, but in a moment stopped work on it.



"He tried to draw a 'Gibson Girl' as we sat talking, but could not make a quick sketch which satisfied him, and, finally, stopped trying."

"I give it up," said he. "I never could work that way. I always am astounded, and perhaps a little envious, when I see chaps, at a dinner, for example, scratching pretty heads off on menu cards while they are talking. I can't do it. I must work carefully and slowly and from models." "Then the stories of the models," I said eagerly, "the models for the Gibson girl, are?" He sighed wearily. "Please don't," he said. "The 'Gibson Girl' does not exist. She has been as the grains of sand in number. I imagine that folks must recognize 'United States' in her, and that it's that which makes them think she's all, or nearly all, the same. She isn't really." His mind turned to that bygone interview. "I was staying at the Alpine Apartments," he said, reminiscently. "I was one of the two first tenants. The other was a barber. I had just signed my lease and felt exceedingly mature." "When, with the barber, you started out on your career, what training had you had?" I asked. "Oh, not much. Two years at the Art Students' League. But schooling doesn't really matter. Study matters; taking lessons doesn't. Even masters don't, very much. The man who wins at drawing must himself be his own master. It is not the criticism of instructors which counts, really; it is the criticism of the man himself. The man who tears most sketches up, at first, will be the man who gets most sketches printed, later on." We dropped this line of conversation for a moment and went back to talking of the "Gibson Girl." This was not because he wished it; it was because I forced it. A passing bell-hop saw him looking bored and glanced at me resentfully. Gibson is the sort of chap who quickly makes all

creatures, even bell-hops, fall in worship. "If there really is no 'Gibson Girl,'" (the thing was in my head and bothered me) "how did the name originate?"

"The first time the name was used was in a story which The Century gave me to illustrate. It dealt with a certain type of girl, and in the manuscript, when it came to me, this type was called, I think, the 'Goodrich Girl.' I noticed that the word was written over an erasure in the manuscript wherever it occurred, but that did not impress me. Later, when—that 'Gibson' took the place of 'Goodrich' on the printed page—I saw what had been really done, I blushed. I have been blushing ever since. Let's drop the 'Gibson Girl.' I don't want to feel uncomfortable to-night."

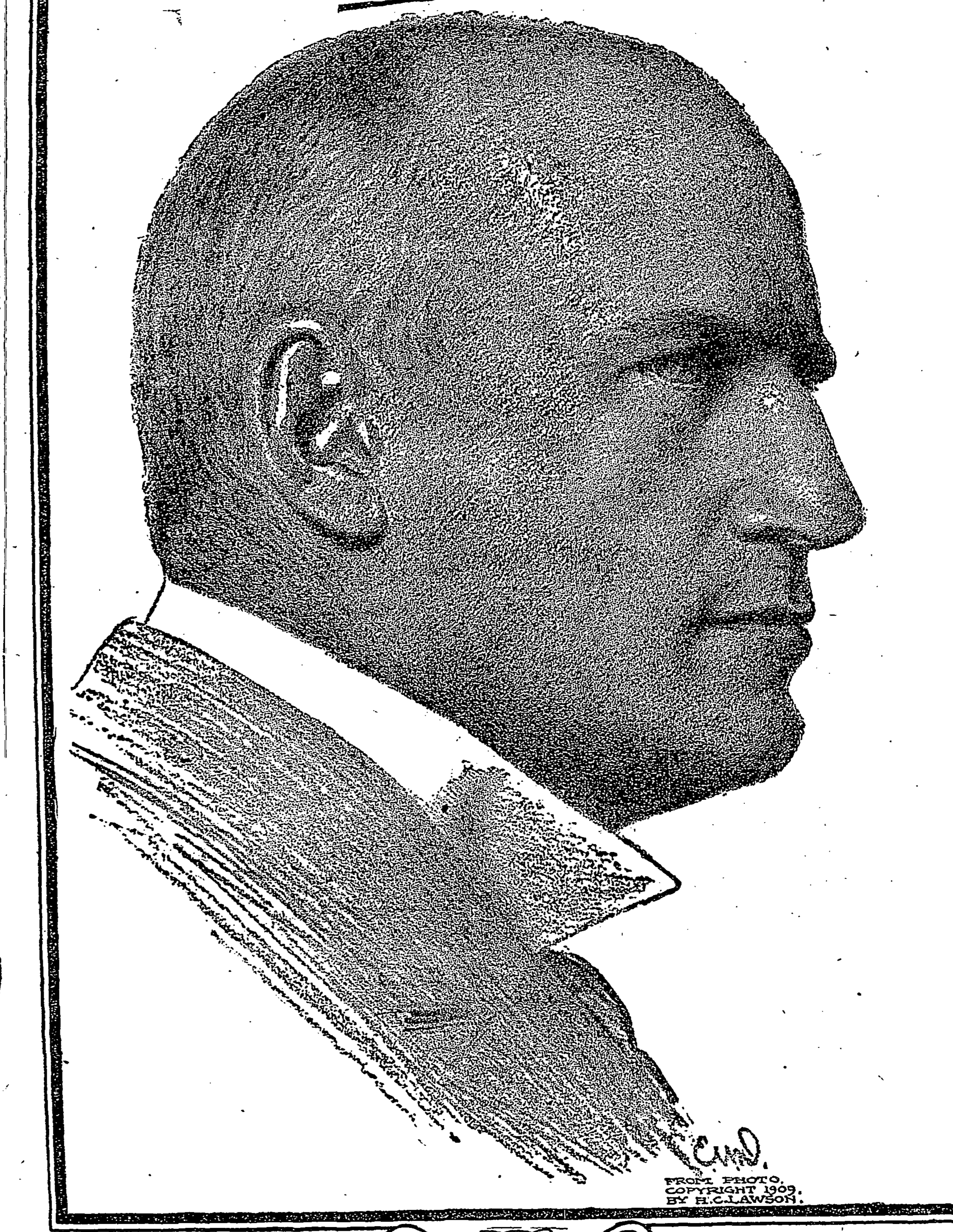
"I haven't really created a distinctive type," he went on, more comfortably, having recovered from his embarrassment, "the nation made the type. What Zangwill calls the 'Melting Pot of Races' has really done it. A certain character, who should it not also have turned out a certain type of face? If I have done anything it has been to put on paper some fair examples of that type with very great, with minute, care. There isn't any 'Gibson Girl,' but there are many thousands of American girls, and for that let us all thank God."

"They are beyond question the loveliest of all their sex. Evolution has selected the best things for preservation as the man and woman have climbed up from the monkey. In the body, as it always is in battle, it has been the fittest which has survived. Men are stronger, braver than the savages from which they sprang. Why should they not be handsomer? Why should women not be beautiful increasingly? Why should it not be the fittest in the form and features, as well as in the mind and muscle, which survives? And where should that fittest be in evidence most strikingly? In the United States, of course, where natural selection has been going on, as elsewhere, and where, much more than elsewhere, there has been a great variety to choose from. The eventual American woman will be even more beautiful than the woman of to-day. Her claims to that distinction will result from a fine combination of the best points of all those many races which have helped to make our population."

"The best part of her beauty will and has come from the nation of our origin—Great Britain. In England are to-day the most beautiful of European women. That does not seem to be quite understood. Englishwomen are credited with being stronger than their sisters of the continent, but really they are better looking, too. Nowhere in the world, except in the United States, is there such grace of carriage among men and women, such fine

statements are irreconcilable, but that does not affect their truth.

"America is the only place," he said, reflectively. Then suddenly: "I'll tell you how I got what you have called the 'Gibson Girl.' I saw her on the streets, I saw her at the theatres, I saw her in the churches, I saw her everywhere and doing everything. I saw her idling on Fifth Avenue and at work behind the counters of the stores. From hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, I formed my ideal. In starting out in life, each man worth while has his ideal of womanhood. A poet may, perhaps, create his wholly from his fancy. I guess I'm not a poet. I got mine from the crowd. If there is any similarity between the women in my pictures, it is for the same reason that there is a similarity between

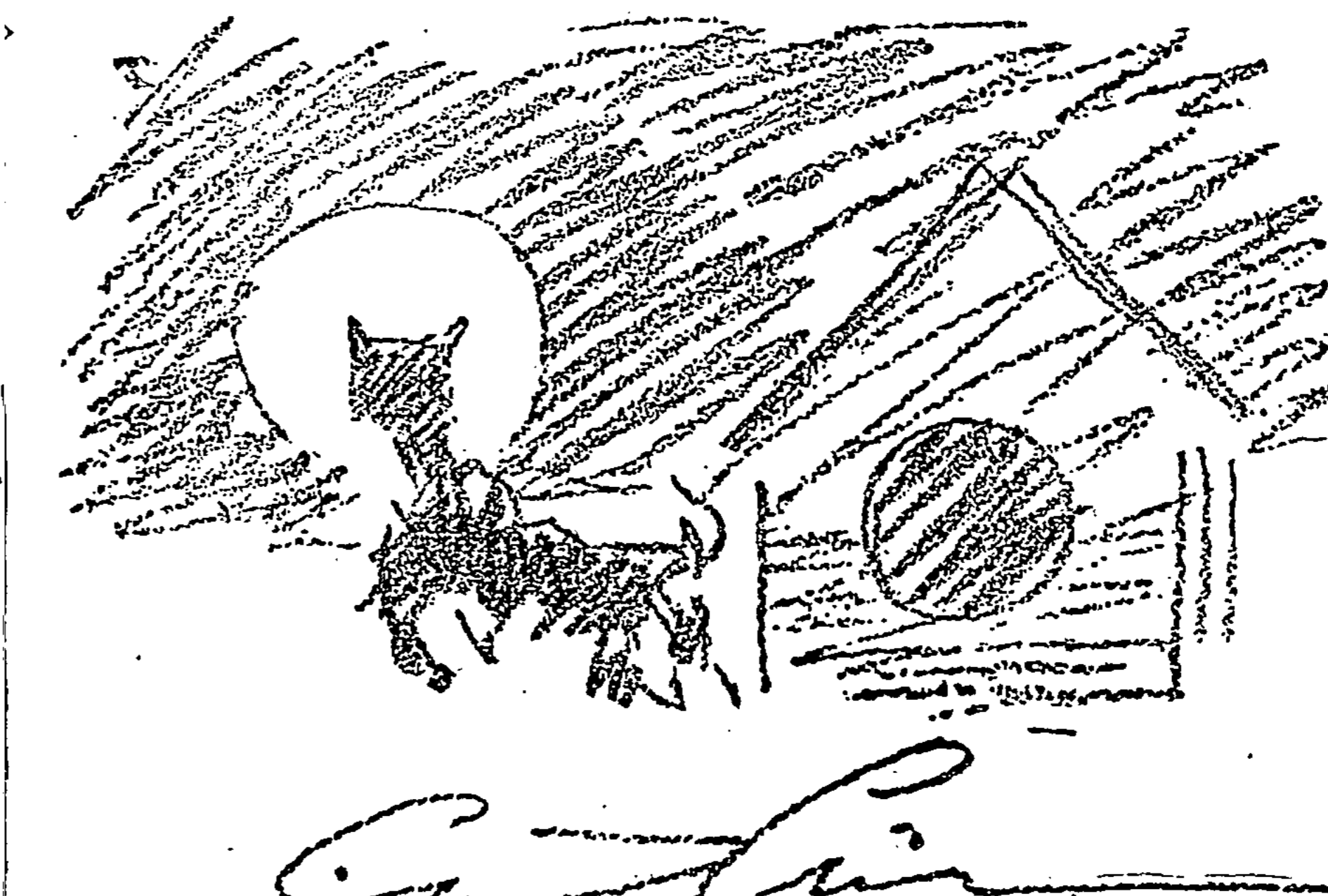


CHARLES DANA GIBSON.

the women in a writer's novels. It really is not in the subject; it is in the handling. The lines that form the faces, rather than the faces which are formed, have the same individuality. An artist who drew always the same girl would very quickly get to be monotonous. "American and English women are, I think, far more beautiful than any others. I suppose the Frenchman thinks the same of the Frenchwomen, and so on through all the races. But there is really, I believe, a reason why the woman of America has reached a higher type of beauty, just as she has undoubtedly reached a higher mental plane, than any other woman in the world. It has been the attitude of men toward her. And in American pictures woman has been notable because the artist has approached and treated her with an innate respect—with gallantry, if you care to use the term; but with no more than she deserves. American men pay homage to their women—actual homage. That is true and to their credit, but, sadly enough, makes them distinctive. Women interest American men in right and proper ways. Perhaps because American women are the finest women in the world, perhaps because our men are the world's best, more likely because they are both absolutely leaders. It shows plainly in the women's faces—it has had a lot to do with the development of beauty. It shows plainly, but less plainly in the men. Among

animals the male has all the best of it; more strength, more fun, more beauty. The lion is a finer creature than the lioness, the cock-pheasant is a gorgeous bird, the hen, a brown thing, insignificant and humble. Animals show their females small consideration, savages treat them without much respect. The Indians did not use their pigments in painting pictures of their squaws upon their wigwams; they put buffalo and bob-cats there. "You won't find any courtship episodes depicted in the crude endeavors of the primitive Apaches, you'll find hunting scenes. Yet, surely these men pictured what to them seemed beautiful. And women are not seen among the things they pictured. The savage does not think his woman beautiful. He thinks

them useful like his other beasts of burden. "Respect for women is really quite American, and in that lies the secret—on at least a good big part of it—of the undoubted fact that we are looming large in the artistic world. Americans are doing wonders in the European schools and exhibitions and it is owing, largely, to their real respect for women. You can see it in their pictures, just as you see lack of it in some French pictures. Most of the old fellows did not have it. Take some of the Dutch masters, for example. They were great painters but they did not picture women as American painters of ability now picture them, because they lacked respect for them. They had been taught from childhood up that it was the woman's place to wait upon the man. They painted wondrous pictures of Dutch men, but they never made a picture of a woman that made you want to climb in the frame and sit down in the picture by her side. None of the old chaps did that, except the British, none of the new chaps do it except Americans and Englishmen. The art of these two nations is, in consequence, in the ascendancy, at last, and will remain in the ascendancy. Setting gallantry aside, it has that quality of fairness which will win. It is not, really, too worshipful of women; it is only fair to women. Our women are beautiful and good and our artists see that. It is a good thing for the artists that they do. "It is a heritage from British ancestors, we must give them credit. We have developed what they gave us to begin with. Gainsborough could paint women, although he would not always paint men well. He was among the first, if not the first, to realize that women—ordinary, real, good, pure women, not draped angels—were more beautiful than men. Early in his life he was hard up and some one sent him to a man named Thickness, who it was believed could get some orders for him if he painted well. Thickness fitted his own name, for he was very gross and short and fat. Gainsborough could not bring himself to paint him. He painted on the other hand a very handsome picture of Mrs. Thickness, the wife, which is to-day a notable example of his work, but the man he gave up utterly and finally they separated, although Thickness could have been most useful to him. He was reaching after finer things; he wanted beauty as an inspiration. He found it in the woman. "Americans have found it in the woman, too—and it's a good thing for them both. The idea of the old time European artist, and of many new time artists on the other side, is that women can be just two things—mere toys or mere machines. The Englishman and the American—more notably, of course, the American—see that they are the biggest and best part of life and treat them with regard and wonder. It is this appreciation that has helped our art, more than any other one thing has. The men who harness women up with dogs will not advance much in their art; the men who place them where they rightfully belong, will really progress. It's all in the conception. Women are most beautiful of all created things—not women sitting on a cloud, idealized, but honest, living, helping, actual women—women such as we have here in the United States. "Americans are making a fine showing in the European schools. Go through the Paris Salon catalogue and you will find so many good old Yankee names that it will make you feel as if you might be reading lists of chaps invited to a party in, say, Buffalo, New York. This comforted me, continually, while I lived abroad. It gives a fellow a warm feeling in his heart to know that his young countrymen Brown, Jones and Smith are keeping up their end. Our women students, too, are doing big things over there—least as big things as the women painters of any other country; I think bigger things than any other women painters. There was a time, perhaps, when there was a prejudice against



The Moon and I. This is a Memory of the First Drawing C. D. Gibson Ever Sold. He Made It as an Illustration for This Article.

Americans at European exhibitions, but the sheer merit of their work has put an end to that. I cannot say that a French professor would be pleased to find Americans in a majority among his classes; naturally they love their countrymen too well; but the American with palette on his thumb, a paint smear on his nose, and half-a-dozen brushes in his hand, commands respect and actual admiration as he never did before, abroad. "I tried, here, to get Gibson to name some specific instances, but he balked; at that. There are certain details of the average artistic temperament which he clearly understands. "Er—er—I don't remember well enough to mention names," said he. He was visibly embarrassed. "But there were many there, and next year there will be more and more. Our boys and girls are doing wonders." "Is there anything you want to say, especially, to the young American aspirant?" "Again the hesitancy. "Er—not by mail," said Mr. Gibson. "I have, already, spoken of the value of self-criticism. Is it the locust that occasionally leaves its shell and then goes back to it again? Some creature does well, let the young man or young woman who is trying hard to paint, do that. Let them get out of their shells and then look at their work impersonally, critically. The criticism of the greatest master in the world will not help them so much as that of their own eyes if they are honest with themselves. If they can't see their faults, then no one else can point them out to them effectively. Tell them to stand digging for the weak points in their pictures, omitting admiration of the strong points just as far as possible. The good points will remain without too much appreciation and the bad points will not disappear without a good deal of self-criticism. Until a man gets so that he can rise, stand back of his own chaps, look over his own shoulder and tell himself exactly what is punk in his own work, he cannot really expect to win success. It is the youthful aspirants for fame and fun and fortune by the brush route, to lean just a little as may be upon the mauled sticks of their teachers. That compound word, 'self-criticism,' is the compound secret of success. One is quite as necessary as the other to the real development of art here in America. "So many who do not appear to know this, waste their time and waste the time of those to whom they send their work. Sometimes they send me and other chaps whose work is sometimes printed, specimens of drawings, asking my advice and criticism. But so many of them do not criticize themselves before they ask another's criticism that about the only thing that can be said to them is to tell them, I authorize you to tell nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine out of a thousand that the best thing they can do is to stop drawing. Still, there is the one who does fair work—the one out of the thousand. To him or her it can be said, 'If you keep on pounding, there is a chance of great success for you.' Work, work, work! That is the thing, and self-criticism is the biggest part of that. The man who operates a mine and opens up material worth five dollars to the ton is better off than his next neighbor who opens up material worth twice as much, if the first man keeps on digging, digging, and the second man gets lazy. There are hundreds with ability who have failed through indolence. I have seen men sit at a table, making sketches upon menu cards and feeling proud of them, who, if they had worked when they were young, might have really had reason to be proud, but who had idled, and, in consequence, could find no more useful outlet for their real ability than sketching upon menu cards. That always makes me feel a little sorry. Work! "Americans are doing really big things with brush and pencil. Yes; let the eagle scream! I think they lead the world as illustrators. But—" Indignation crept into the face of the big artist. "Well, what is the 'but'?" "There is an exhibition of the really good work of American illustrators now traveling about the country. It is in Pittsburg now, and later on will be shown in most of the important cities, all the way to San Francisco. Everybody ought to go to see it; but—I was disgusted when I found that there is not a place in New York City provided for such things. The work is of a character superior to any I have ever seen exhibited in any country; but New York stands a chance of losing opportunity to look at it. Such things make me very weary. I'm trying, now, to find a place where the pictures may be shown, when they get back from San Francisco, but I may, before I get one, have to choose a barber shop." "A barber shop in the Alpine at the same time you did," I suggested. "Perhaps—" "Perhaps I may be able to find out where he is now and get his shop," said Gibson. "Well, there you are. There is a volume in this episode. Americans are showing marvelous ability as painters and as illustrators—those of them who can draw. But are they getting quite encouragement enough? Remember that exhibition may be forced to show in New York City in a barber shop." Copyright 1910 by C. J. Mar, Publishers Press.