EDITED BY

E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS

Culture and Its Modern Aspects

A Series of Essays

E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS
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FOREWORD

For an editor in the strategic position of E. Haldeman-Julius, with his liberal attitude toward the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes pitiful, but always fascinating and withal exciting cosmorama spread out before his very practical and logical gaze, there are but two or three major lines of interest—definite groupings which all of his thoughts may be said to fall into with ready acquiescence. One of these must be the general state of culture in this modern life of ours. The form of life that seems worthiest, to the individualistic and rationalistic tendencies, or rather, I suppose, convictions, of E. Haldeman-Julius, is the cultured life. He can therefore be expected to give vent to his feelings, his opinions, and his notions about it—for what man hasn’t all three about any of his interests?—in characteristic fashion. And he does, or has done—as these pages amply show.

It is dangerous to attempt a definition of culture. What it includes, probably first of all, is a comprehensive view of life, both historical and contemporary. It implies, in that comprehensive view, a tolerant honesty. Between two cultured men, let us say, there will be disagreements (I should hope so!); but between two cultured men there is never any throat-cutting,—no, not even fisticuffs. Each, you see, grants the other the right to think as he sees fit: it is a state of mutual tolerance, but not, you understand, of indifference; no, never indifference. The cultured man looks on life actively, and endeavors to see it wholly, and judge it, where it may need judgment, with intellectual and emotional fairness. Culture carries no banner of infallibility, but it does labor earnestly for the know-all-and-pardon-all of the French epigram. It necessitates a high degree of education, so to speak, and presupposes a certain degree of esthetic appreciation. But, like good old Socrates, the truly cultured person is more than likely to subscribe to the precept that he is wisest who realizes that he knows nothing. "It’s a long and winding shore," he says, meditatively, "and I’m dashed if I think I’m the only pebble on its beach."

LLOYD E. SMITH.
LET THERE BE CULTURE!

Culture has always been the toy of the minority—an exclusive club, an ultra-aristocratic thing intended to be used to stamp a few as being away from the herd. No one has ever seriously questioned this notion that culture, that education and beauty shall belong only to a small, insignificant minority. It is time to question it. Culture is the hope of the world—it is the only answer to religious domination, to conspiring churchmen, to pious frauds. Culture is the only real liberator. And so long as it is the toy of the few, the people will remain cogs in the theological machine. Bring culture to the people; it will make the world a civilized place of abode; it will make superstition and mental slavery things of the past. And the quickest and best way to begin is with the printing press—not one press, but hundreds; not thousands of books, but billions!
YOU have a duty to yourself. You hear endless talk about your duty to others, your duty to society, your duty to posterity, your duty to everything under the shining sun. But how rarely do you hear about your duty to yourself. You have a duty to yourself, if you want to develop your character and broaden your life. Not a small, selfish, sordid duty of self-indulgence. Not a petty avariciousness. Not a cunning foraging for little and useless trifles. Your duty to yourself is not a simple, obvious duty. It is a subtle thing, vague and dim. But it is there. You must grope and find that little candle in your soul—and you must apply the light of truth to it. Your duty to yourself is selfish in a sense—divinely selfish. It is the selfishness that does nothing but good. It is the selfishness that absorbs things of beauty. That is not selfishness as we understand it. The man or woman who absorbs beauty becomes beautiful and a thing of beauty is a blessing to the world. So that the performance of your duty to yourself really means the performance of a greater duty to your fellow man. Your duty to yourself is to add to the treasures of your soul. It is your duty to explore the worlds of thought, looking in here and there in the search for truth. It is your duty to become acquainted with the great souls who went before you—men and women who developed their own characters, their minds, their hearts, their wills—to study them and become their friends. They have big open hearts and they will take you in, if only you want their friendship.

He serves the world best who serves himself intelligently. He who meddles with the souls and minds of others dims the light in his own soul. He who strives to improve those around him without seeking out his own dark corners becomes nothing but a social nuisance. The ideal reformer is one who has his eyes turned to himself. Your duty to yourself is a real one. By performing it you gain the best treasures that life can give. By building character and intelligence and feeling you do the only kind of reforming that is certain to help the world. Stop worrying about your neighbors. Think about yourself. Ask yourself frankly: Have I been absorbing new viewpoints? Have I a curiosity about great ideas and philosophies? Do I appreciate and understand things of beauty in poetry, art, music, life? Have I stopped adding to my store of knowledge merely because I have enough intelligence to make a living and therefore know enough to “get by”? Have I stopped thinking? Have I closed the doors of my mind? Are my ideas old and stale and soggy? Does it tire me to think? Take such an inventory, and you will see how clear and obvious is your duty to yourself. Your duty to yourself is not something outside yourself. You cannot improve your character by some happy little trick. You cannot build a bigger life through some clever “stunt.” A “stunt” will help you in business but it won’t help you in performing your duty to yourself. A man can be dishonest with the world, but he cannot be dishonest with himself. A rogue deceives the world; a fool deceives himself. Preserve thyself—Know thyself—Build thyself—Help thyself—Instruct thyself.
CULTURE: THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

We are learning as we go ahead—learning to undo our mistakes, turn seeing eyes into our own lives, make calm confessions of errors, discover new paths that we may escape the fatuous. We thought, at one time, that men could move forward by the simple process of depositing a piece of paper at a polling place, but we know better now, having realized at last that political action is a simple, limited thing and that its powers have been unreasonably exaggerated. Politicians have told us that voting for their sets of catch-words will change the world. A political platform is an impressive-looking document, but it is, after all, just a piece of paper, and men are neither made nor remade by pieces of paper written by politicians, whether the office-seekers be cunning conservatives or naive radicals.

The best and most perfect man in the world, given limitless power in the White House, could do nothing if the men and women who put him there were unseeing, unthinking, addle-brained, superstitious-worshipping slantheads, as most voters are. Nor is it of supreme importance that the symbol of our State be a giant figure. A wooden Indian would do as well, but that is unthinkable, so we will let it pass. We elect men to office who promise to use the government to "our" advantage, who promise many strange and questionable gifts, as though we were inmates of an orphanage.

We must learn to expect nothing from a government. Governments are machines intended to govern, to preserve order, protect life and property, keep enemies from disarranging our lives, and punish those who break simple and sensible laws. It is not the purpose of government to run factories, operate railroads, drill for oil, regulate the private lives of individuals, or boss a man's trade or business or profession.

Government should be as simple as possible, and as the people grow in intelligence it should become less and less significant, for with growth of general intelligence it becomes less necessary to govern. The government's business being to govern, and being essentially unproductive, it must exploit the people in order to pay its bills. At best, government is always a liability, never an asset. But politicians, who seek jobs and salaries, promise the voters everything under the sun in order to get votes—and in this matter our radical friends are a thousand times worse than the conservatives. The radical politician would use government not to govern but as a magical means for providing board and lodging to humanity. We are supposed to supply our own board, our own lodging, our own tickets to the movies, our own sticks of gum, shaves and haircuts, which is as it should be. The government should never be looked upon as a means for escape from having to make one's living.

The vote should be used sparingly, to elect as few politicians as possible who are to raise as little revenue as possible and pass as few laws as possible. The vote should be used to let government govern and
do nothing more. Then, beginning at the very bottom, we work on ourselves, improving ourselves with our own sweat and blood, with our work and trades and professions and not with our votes. The man who improves himself improves the race; the man who neglects himself and talks about improving life with his vote and the votes of others is a deluded fool. I vote, but that is the least of my concerns. I think about my own character, my mind, my body, my work, my knowledge, my understanding of life. These are the important things to me. How I vote once a year is nothing compared to how I live all year. It is a fool’s chase to get excited about one’s vote, expecting impossible things from it—a free entrance ticket to some sort of a millennial lunatic asylum.

The vote is taken seriously by lazy and slovenly men and women who would get values from it that they cannot get from life itself because they are inferior, incapable, incompetent, stupid and ignorant. Let us face the facts frankly. We have poverty and suffering because we have ignorance, the root of all evil.

Culture—not the vote—is the hope of the world. If men were interested in themselves—in their minds, in their understanding of the great thoughts of the great seers, in the beauty of art and literature, in the liltting ecstasy of creative genius, in the sheer thrill of living intelligently, they would find means of escaping the evils of poverty and suffering. Thinking people can make a living easily, because this world, after all, is tremendously productive, with possibilities for wealth beyond our powers even to imagine. And the best way to improve our lives is not by voting for one set of politicians against another set, but by digging down into our own selves, rooting out the bunk, the superstitions, the hypocrisies, the laziness, the unwillingness to think, and the inability to see clearly.

The whole issue, as I see it, is simply one of getting back to the man. We have been thinking too long in terms of men. Now let us consider the man—the individual. Improve him—and by that I mean, improve yourself. Make yourself more civilized, more tolerant to the ideas of others, more open-minded, more curious about life, more receptive to beauty and thought. And, above all, make your own living from your own efforts and not from the state or the community.

It is a good thing to be defeated in politics. The disappointment is bitter, but the results are for the best. A defeated candidate, who leaves the soft political jobs to others and returns to himself, is really victorious. If he has a full set of brains, he may return to his neglected self. To my way of looking, the ideal President is a perfect blank—a quiet and silent fool who says nothing, does less, and who is so satisfied with his soft job that he doesn’t want to bother anything or anybody in the whole wide world. Such a President will let us alone while we go out into the world to earn our livings, to make our characters, to build our personalities, to taste of life and knowledge and culture. We should get down on our knees and thank the Holy Ghost when we have such a President in the White House. It is ideal to have a blank in the White House; we are stripped of our delusions; we cease expecting the
government, by some mysterious hocus-pocus, to make us paragons of virtue, arbiters of taste, receivers of manna from heaven. If you can't have a perfect blank at the head of the State then by all means have a monarchy such as the English enjoy so wholesomely, for over there the Prince of Wales is not expected to make a living for his subjects, but merely to decide on how their coats shall be shaped, how many buttons on the vest and whether there shall be a flower in the lapel or colored handkerchief in the outside coat pocket. That is as it should be. A prince of the people who decides such matters serves nobly for the funds put into his pockets; it is absurd to have a Prince who might think differently about his job. If only all government heads were made that way! But no, they must "save" humanity, fill breadbaskets with hot air, make paupers and beggars of men.

This is individualism, and I believe in it whole-heartedly. Better a crust of bread that I earned than a fairy loaf handed down by a politician. The cultured man is, after all, the simple man. He has simple wants and tastes, is not vulgarly wasteful, unbearably acquisitive; he does not measure a man by the amount of his money but by the sureness of his thought, his character, his knowledge of life, its history, its poetic and romantic past, its painful steps from blind bigotry to intellectual freedom, from savagery to civilization. A cultured man cannot live for money alone, but he can work to make the money that will enable him to live beautifully and wholesomely and independently.

Culture—there is the hope of the world. Culture is an individual problem, not a mass problem. Culture means a man must improve himself, make himself more sensitive to thought, to nerve sensations, to beauty, to philosophy, to music, poetry, architecture, sculpture. Culture always begins with the man, never with the mass. But if a sufficient number of individuals were to become cultured, were to become educated in the more civilized sense, then obviously its effect on the mob would be direct and immediate, with the consequence that the mob would eventually cease to exist. Culture is the only answer to mob-rule, mob passions, mob reactions to life, pauperism, delusions, superstitions and servile acceptance of standards.

Culture is the only hope of the world, and its blessing is immediate. It rescues a man from the mob NOW—not the day after election, but today, this very moment. It rewards one in proportion to the energy with which one disciplines himself. Discipline is the first step towards culture, and the best discipline is that which a man imposes upon himself, not which men impose upon one another.

It is folly to go to an ignorant, superstitious, brutal mob and expect it to bring utopia by the use of the ballot. A million monkeys voting for one super-monkey would still be a million monkeys and the super-monkey, after all, would still be only a super-monkey. We have millions of individuals, and no self-disciplined men. We have men, but we rarely see a man. Men have deluded themselves into believing they can go forward by sitting down by the roadside and voting to allow someone else to go forward for them. It cannot be done that easily. Each man must go forward for himself—each man, mark you, not elected officials.

Suppose we were to establish utopia. What will it avail us if the
men and women who are to live in that utopia are ignorant and foolish
and lazy and worthless? We will have to start over again, beginning
with each individual. So, why not begin now? Let each man find his
own utopia. Culture can make each life beautiful and noble today. And
today is the important day for us; tomorrow we die. We live too
briefly. We cannot pin our faith in some political miracle that will work
a hundred years from now. We must live today. Granting there is much
wrong with the world, let us try our best to get the most out of life that
we possibly can, despite the world's wrongs. If a sufficient number of
men were to become civilized, cultured, understanding—if they were to
become individuals instead of cogs, the world would improve in propor-
tion to the forward steps they took as individuals. Meanwhile, we should
be enjoying life, living with the truly great, the noble poets and philoso-
phers, and thinkers, and discoverers; with the inspired leaders, with the
gay wits and the happy lovers. Life is to be lived today, not in some
remote utopia. Live it now—to the full. And the best way to live it
completely is through culture. Culture is the answer to the man who
would enjoy this life. Culture is the enemy of superstition, of arrogance,
of egotism. Culture develops egoism and softens egotism.

I am not a reformer, nor an upliftor, nor a philanthropist; I am a
man who loves to work, for work is one of the joys of culture. And
my work is with ideas, with great men and women, with noble lives
and with beauty. I love to create beauty in print and pass it on, suc-
cessfully I believe. But I do not tell my readers there is an easy way to
acquire culture when there is no easy road. Each man must walk it
himself. At best, I can merely place culture within reach. Each man
must take it himself. I cannot put it into his head and heart. I can
give him ideas but I cannot give him understanding. Each individual
must discipline himself—now, not in some distant happy day when a
sufficient number of men and women shall have voted the same "right"
way. And that is why I am working now. I am not saying it should
be done in some future happy day; instead, I am making my attempt
today, while others are talking about the paradise to come.

Education, to mean anything to us, must come now, not a hundred
and fifty years hence. Culture must be brought into our lives, and it
can be done—it is being done. Hundreds of thousands of men, women,
boys and girls are getting their first taste of genuine and lasting culture.
It is new and many are dazed, but they are responding in precisely the
right spirit. They are curious about life, about thought, about history,
about great men. They are reading the masterpieces of every age and
land. They are broadening their horizons. They are beginning to see
beyond their own four walls. Men are being freed, but it is only the
merest beginning. There is a tremendous work still to be done, and
I need men to help in this work—first, by improving themselves, as I
endlessly strive to improve myself, and then by enabling their younger
friends to catch a glimpse of better things.

I have no delusions about uplift. It is a job—just a job, but one
that I enjoy doing. And every man who can pick a work that he enjoys
is happy. Others can do it. I have been given no secret power. I am
just a man, a thinking individual, a working individual, alive with life
and happy to be permitted to express himself today—in this life—and worrying little about the life to come in the beyond.

Every man for himself, I say. Every man for his own development. Culture is not to be handed down on a platter. We have to make our own platter and put our sweet morsels on it with our own hands. That is the beautiful thing about culture—it is never a make-shift.

So I say, forget about how the masses vote. It matters little. Were they to vote for some other set of politicians, there would still be no vital difference. The fools would still be fools and the politicians would still be politicians. Your escape from the commonplace, and the deadening and the stultifying, lies within your own heart. You are the master and it is for you to decide, if you are not too lazy.

My work is to bring culture to many individuals. I cannot bring it to the masses, for that is manifestly impossible. I can bring it to millions of individuals, but not to the herd. I hope I have made the difference clear. And I do not mean to give the idea that I possess culture. I have never posed as a discoverer of truth, as the holder of righteousness, as the man free of everything false and deceiving.

I am not free, but I am trying to free myself. I am not a self-appointed leader of the mob. I admit frankly and openly that I am learning as I go along, freeing myself step by step, picking up crumbs of understanding here and there, touching life as I see it, tasting of its beauty and its joy. But as I go along I express myself, I write what I think, what I feel, what I see, and I pass it on to others for what it is worth. Perhaps I am on the wrong road, deluding myself, but at the least I am striving, honestly and without fears. My motive is not one of "uplift" for others; rather is it "uplift" for myself. I am living this life of mine today, and I am trying to get as much as I can out of it for myself, and honesty forces me to admit that passing it on, or rather making it accessible for others, is merely a part of my work in this funny world. I can give you nothing, except that I give myself something in the first place. I am not a dispenser of Pollyanna joy and Boy Scout helpfulness. I am building my own character and understanding and cannot do the same for you should I even want to, which I don't. You must do the work yourself.

This is my after-election sermon: To thine own self be true. Be intelligently selfish. Develop yourself. Live today. Try to see the wings of truth and perhaps, at the end, you, like the poet Olive Schreiner wrote about, may die with one of its feathers in your hand.

**FIGHTING WINDMILLS**

If we sought one thing to stamp a great part of the American people as being culturally inferior, we would not have to go farther than the senseless war that is being waged on the evolutionists. What a spectacle! Meetings of dignified slanneads resoluting against ideas! One can disagree with an idea, one can argue against it or for it, one can say it is all right or all wrong, but resolving to expunge it from the record, voting to make it illegal to include it in the courses of institutions of learning—that is the last proof of stupidity and ineffectualness. If an idea is right, it will stand even though its
enemies blow themselves to atoms in fighting it. If it is wrong, its own weakness will defeat it. So why get excited? Evolution can be discussed and accepted, or discussed and rejected. Intelligent people don’t fight theories of science with policemen’s clubs. Making a teacher of evolution a potential lawbreaker is going to make it uncomfortable for the scientist, but in time the truths he is spreading, if they are truths, will prevail. Thought should be free. All honest people believe in free thought.

CROWDS

Crowds degrade and belittle the spirit of man. It is only when a man stands out, by himself, as One—as You or I—that mankind appears very different from the cattle in the fields. The possibilities of human life are clearly and hopefully seen in the rare individual, and are lost sight of in man when he forms a crowd. The crowd flock[s] to the show, the fair, the picnic, the athletic contest—or it assembles hurriedly to view an episode in the street—and always one sees a dead level of taste, the cheapest and most vulgar things admitted, the old trite comments forthcoming: it can hardly be otherwise, as the crowd appeal must adjust itself to the average, the common denominator, of interest and understanding. The crowd is never subtle; it never discriminates; it craves either the obvious or the flashy melodramatic spectacle. The crowd is easily led. The war drums throb: the orators thunder in pompous, perfervid style; and the crowd is stampeded by this noise into a bloody, senseless strife. The crowd is full of passions and prejudices—and the skilled charlatan, playing upon these facile herd emotions, will ever be certain of a livelihood and that prestige which the crowd hastens to bestow upon the man who dramatizes its mediocrity and gilds its follies with rhetoric. The crowd rushes about, always going somewhere, and never knowing where, and hard is the lot of the man who shall presume to halt the crowd and ask it: Where are you going? Why are you going there and not elsewhere? What will you do when you get there? The crowd is little accustomed to thought, having indeed a marked aversion to exercise of the intellect. Its patriotism is a hypnotic mass response to the shouting of the orator. Its religion is a stupid thing: a wish that reeks not the verification of thought, that seorns the effort and the adventure of thought: or a frenzy of holy rolling that is aroused by the evangelist. The crowd runs; it gasps; it shouts. It is impatient of the leisurely, critical taste of life; it never carefully observes; it is never quiet. The crowd is man robbed of all superior identity.

THE CULTURAL RAGE IN AMERICA

What of the cultural rage in America today? This furore is remarkable. The magic word, Culture, leaps in large letters from the page of nearly every magazine, attracting the eye to various simple, admirably perfected schemes for obtaining this desideratum. Never was there a more clamant and confusing variety of solutions offered to the man of little leisure who wishes to enrich his life by broadening his mental horizon. This great national interest
in culture is, at bottom, the fruit of a worthy impulse. The desire for knowledge is quite evidently one that should be encouraged. The fact that hundreds of thousands of American folks are hungry for mental food above the quality of the fare furnished by their daily papers is a circumstance that should fill us with joy. But one's joy is dampened, one shakes one's head sadly, when one sees the pitiful ways in which these eager masses are misled in their search for culture; for it is pitiful that the quest for culture, for light and learning, should be led blindly into ways that are vain. The basic fallacy that disfigures most of these cut-and-dried cultural courses is that true learning can be reduced to a mechanical formula. This robs culture of the spirit of genuineness that informs and justifies it. If such schemes were faithfully followed, they would make a pedant or a prig, but not a truly cultured person. You cannot learn culture as you would a problem in arithmetic; you cannot put yourself in tune with the wisdom and beauty of life as you would "tune in" with a radio set.

One of the most conspicuous violations of the true spirit of culture is the scheme of reading a quantity of mere excerpts from the great masters of literature, with a "reading guide" that will enable you to snatch the quintessence of culture in a few volumes and a few minutes devoted to them each day. Of such a scheme one can appropriately quote the famous wise line of Pope: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." But this is worse. Here we have not merely a little knowledge, but incomplete knowledge. Such a course of culture might cover an immense territory, but it scratches only the surface and one, after such a running jump through the field of literature, will carry almost nothing away. No matter how carefully and intelligently such excerpts may be selected, no matter how admirable the system to which they conform, they are vain and delusive to one who is seeking culture. They violate the first rule of knowledge, one that is indeed obvious: Be thorough. It is far better to read only one good book, to read it completely and absorb it into your mind and personality, than to gulp down a hundred excerpts, however wise their choice and wide their range. You can learn infinitely more of Shakespeare by reading Hamlet than you can by reading a collection of excerpts in which all of Shakespeare's plays are represented by passages torn from the context, divorced from the drama, devoid of color and coherent meaning. If you were forced to choose between reading only one novel of Balzac and a set of many volumes filled with leaves taken from the pages of a hundred great novelists, you would learn more of the greatness of fiction, obtain more of genuine culture, by reading thoroughly the one novel of Balzac. If you wish to know the power and brilliance of the essay, to wander in strange delightful fields of the mind, read Lamb, or DeQuincey, or Hazlitt, but do not bolt a flavorless stew of Lamb-DeQuincey-Hazlitt cut into bits. When one comes to history, philosophy and science, this vivisection is grotesque. How can one possibly obtain any useful or clear knowledge of these subjects from mere cuttings and slashings? These branches of knowledge, above all, require thoroughness. A history, a volume of philosophy, a work of science—each must be seen as a clear and coherent whole, or the whole thing is obscure and meaningless.

Fortunately, one is not forced to the dilemma of reading a few
books or many excerpts. One’s reading can be widely varied and at the same time thorough and complete. You can read all of the masters, stroll with a leisurely and particular observation the whole field of culture; and, if your desire for knowledge is real and persistent, you can do this in the twenty minutes a day that you would spend unprofitably on the imposture of a row of scrap-books. But why confine oneself to twenty minutes a day?—that seemingly magic modicum of time that the “culture” advertisements emphasize. The business of acquiring culture should not be relegated to such a trifling place in one’s life. There is a great deal of wasted time in everyone’s life, and once one begins to devote this time to intelligent, interesting reading, one is amazed by one’s unsuspected wealth of leisure. Interesting—this is an important word, the key to many things. Anyone who really desires culture is, I am convinced, prepared to give more than twenty minutes a day to this aim. But he will sadly lose enthusiasm, and will quickly cease to devote even twenty minutes a day to the business, if he sets out to laboriously digest a set of excerpts. Excerpts are not interesting, and they kill the desire for knowledge in its infancy. From the viewpoint of interest alone, no one can be expected to plod through such a “stale, flat and unprofitable” field; and when the final results are considered, the thing is a grim and ghastly deception.

WHAT IS GENIUS?

It has been said quite often that genius is simply hard work; and I have observed that this specious statement usually emanates from writers who have little or no claim to genius. In spite of the obvious fact that great work in any field can hardly be the product of lazy minds, one cannot agree to regard industry and genius as synonymous. It is entirely possible for industry of the most intense and conscientious kind to fail in producing brilliant results. The most prodigious effort may have a very feeble issue, as in the case of the mountain that labored and brought forth only a mouse. I recall a description of the methods of a popular novelist (who was, if he is not still, America’s most popular novelist), who requires a couple of years to produce a very tepid, flabby, utterly characterless type of novel—I say “type” advisedly for they are all alike, there is no individual distinction. This novelist has a fearsomely elaborate system of making notes about his “characters” and the action of a story; he is most patient, painstaking—and puerile. Now I note a statement regarding the industry of another popular novelist, who has written a story of life in America and France in the period of the French Revolution. This story is running serially in one of the leading magazines, and the editor of the magazine informs his readers that the novelist read fifteen hundred volumes in preparing for his latest fictional effort. Tremendous feat. Such industry is appalling. And what are its results? Accuracy in small details—no anachronisms, no violations of historical fact—in short, correctness of costume! But no great story—no living characters—no truly dramatic and convincing background. Fifteen thousand volumes could not give a story these qualities. Industry without genius is—merely industry.
AN EPISODE

THE other day I made one of those sudden acquaintances that at once strangely stimulate one and fill one with a sense of the essential loneliness of man. The beginning of it was rather inauspicious. Between salutation and simulation (a cryptic phrase: it should be explained: I contend that no sooner do men greet one another than they begin to deceive one another) we plunged into an argument about pacifism. Now I am by no means one of those curious creatures—a pacifist. I abhor and oppose war, to be sure. What civilized man does not? War, if the very least be said, is not a thing to contemplate with serenity. And what I object to chiefly in war is not the obvious though horrible murder of human beings, the actual sacrifice of visible life, so much as the destruction of all those cultural values that have been so hardly and precariously acquired by the race—those elements of graciousness that make life liveable—those qualities, tacit but profound, that distinguish man from the more crudely vigorous but less refined and reflective vertebrates. In other words, it is not that war kills men, but that it drives men mad with that incredible and monstrously baffling madness of the herd—this is the heart of my objection to war. Pacifism does not go deeply enough into the question—is a merely superficial and more or less futile idea, indeed.

Nevertheless, to return circuitously to my subject, what involved me in argument with this chance acquaintance was not his denunciation of pacifism per se, but the grounds of that denunciation. Philosophic or skeptical opposition to the ethics of pacifism I could have understood and intellectually sympathized with; but my friend—although, truth to tell, he was not my friend—spoke the customary and banal arguments against pacifism. He simply sneered at it. He was, indeed, Virtuously and fatuously indignant. He was not a philosopher, but a patriot.

So it was that we disputed. From pacifism we went on to other questions that have to do with the basic features of our American life—the industrial and political features particularly—and it seemed as if I were fated to disagree with this man. All along it was not so much his ideas that stung me to denial as the ill-fitting ethical garments in which he clothed those ideas.

I was due for a surprise—truly an astonishing thing. *Apropos* of prohibition he mentioned Mencken and *The American Mercury* (prohibition, you know, is one of Mencken's *horribilia*, and indeed I think Mencken is the logical "wet" candidate for President) and I opened my eyes. It was, in fact, incredible. Could it be that this man was familiar with Mencken, that he read the writings of this man that are so filled with trenchant criticisms of American life, and yet could entertain such puerile opinions on popular issues? My surprise quickly grew to amazement. Lo! this man spoke of Dreiser and there was no doubt that he had read the man almost completely, and not without a certain enthusiasm, a genuine gusto, for his intensely emotional, yet restlessly intellectual, skeptical, versatile, penetrative views of life. *Sister Carrie* he acclaimed, waving his cigarette, as an American classic. *A Hoosier Holiday*, said he, was the very accent and gesture and visage of Mid-America.
So he talked. And who would not be astonished? Here was a man who uttered the cheap, catch-penny convictions of the daily papers, yet was an undoubted and more than casual reader of Dreiser. Dreiser, who is so un-American, yet truly and profoundly American—who is, on all planes, so antagonistic to articulate American ideas yet so interpretive of the vast formless, inarticulate, real spirit of America. That this man had read Dreiser, yet could wax virtuously indignant about a League to Prevent War! That he had read *Twelve Men*, that book of significant portraits—or that he had read that tragic and illuminating study of character, the story of George Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*—and yet see Harding as a great American. What has Hurstwood to do with Harding? Nothing directly, yet much indirectly. The point is that this man could have read this story yet come from it without, apparently, any valid conception of character values. Having seen the very soul of Hurstwood, he still could not penetrate, of his own mind, below the meretricious surface of character. So it went, and perplexity waxed and grew dizzy.

The man spoke of Frank Harris—and here was another critic, not only of American life, but of all things banal and impertinent. Surely the inevitable fruit of a reading of Frank Harris was an alert, all-embracing skepticism, an attitude of intelligent inquiry! But no! this man had read Harris, yet he was perversely patriotic! he was officiously moral! he was crassly obvious! he was fatuously writhed about issues that merited no more than a robust skeptical disdain! He was—and this is the paradoxical truth—a Babbit with the reading of a Felix Fay. The shock was yet to come. This man (for the sake of verisimilitude, I should mention that he was a salesman—and, comically enough yet not inappropriately, a salesman of corsets) had been an intimate of William Marion Reedy. He had for a number of years been employed in St. Louis, and a penchant for convivial associations, together with a more or less humorous and alert cast of mind, had drawn Reedy to him. He “had” Reedy, as one might say—fat, unperturbed, and gustatorily, gregariously and Gargantuanly appreciative and avid of life—the Falstaffian type with a noble mixture of Hamlet. Of Reedy’s history he related much, and he was privy to some secret and interesting chapters. He fully understood, too, the significant role of Reedy in the literary careers of such modern writers as Edgar Lee Masters and Zoe Aikens. He told one amusing anecdote of Reedy—a real if slight touch of humor. He and Reedy, one afternoon in summertime, sat in front of a saloon. They were comfortably full of beer. Clouds appeared in the sky. Reedy remarked: “It looks as if there would be rain—followed by mud.”

Here is a hint as to how there might be produced a really entertaining, while accurate, weather column, in the manner once suggested by F. P. A.

I tell about this man simply because he is an interesting experience; he furnishes a passing and curious note on the peculiarities and paradoxes of character. No large and guiding conclusions are to be drawn from his story—at least, if such conclusions are possible they are for the Freudian adept, not for me. The man is not significant. He is a conspicuous and very strange exception. The man who reads good books is, nine times out of ten—logically and well-nigh inescapably—a thoroughly and actively and contemporaneously intelligent man. He sees life with clear, restless, penetrating eyes. Not for him the simple
views and the angry ethics of the man in the street. By comparison—the most universal and dependable talisman of culture—he knows what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is false, what is profound and what is shallow. More especially, he has that admirable tendency of mind which hesitates to brand as good or bad, true or false, profound or shallow, any idea or attitude toward life. He is essentially an inquirer. So I say this story is told simply because it is interesting. Nobody can build a system of philosophy upon it.

SOUND WAVES AND IDIOCY

BEGIN to understand why we have so many idiots in the world. It has always puzzled me why humanity takes naturally to imbecility. Let an individual alone and the chances are 999 to 1 that he will soon degenerate into a perfect specimen of moron. I believe I know why. I may be wrong; I usually am, but here goes. Do not take it too literally, however. Your radio engineers will tell you that nature loses nothing. Make a sound—let us say a click of this typewriter I am pounding here in my library. That sound is soon lost to my ears, but nature carries it on, just how far I know not, but far it must be. These waves of sound miss nothing. As I write here I am surrounded by tens and hundreds of billions of sounds. That I do not hear them means nothing. That is not nature's fault. The radio proves that we can catch certain sound waves, even though they may originate thousands of miles away. Some day we may have instruments to catch all sound waves. It isn't at all impossible. But to return to my argument. The world is full of sound and fury. Millions and billions of silly words, idiotic ideas, childish music, wrong conceptions, crazy notions, hughouse theories, cracked nuts, verbal vaporings, superstitious gibberish—each person, from the very moment of his birth, and even before his birth, is surrounded by these billions of lunatic asylum sound waves. They are around us by night as we sleep and by day as we work. They are about us when we pray and when we think, when we play and when we rest. Always these billions of moron waves—and they work quietly. The broadcaster of truth doesn't have a chance. He is lost in the rush. He is one in ten million. The millions of idiotic waves predominate, and the result is that the people are buried unconsciously in this orgy of tommyrot. Only the exception can escape this endless onrush of sound waves. It's probably an absurd theory, but it sounds good. There may be something in it. I do not care to copyright it, and should you quote it please forget to mention my name.

THE DANGER OF TOO MANY THINKERS

HERE is resistance against the idea of having a large percentage of people become thinkers. It isn't an obvious objection, nor is it ever expressed in just so many words. Rather is it an unconscious feeling. This has struck me on many occasions, and always has left me puzzled. I believe I have something of a notion on the subject that may tend to explain it somewhat. Let us put it this way: Thinking people are undesirable because they do not become ex-
cessive users of commodities. Let me explain a little. Here is a man who lives a quiet, orderly life, who minds his own business and lets the other fellow tend his; he is curious about education; he likes history, philosophy, poetry, biography, good fiction. He is a reader—an excellent one. He is a thinker. What is the result? Living sanely, and improving his mind endlessly, he has neither time nor inclination for wasteful habits. He does not drive around aimlessly, burning up gasoline and wearing out tires. He does not join silly lodges and wear expensive and idiotic uniforms or support pompous parasites with high-sounding names. He does not belong to needless social clubs. He dresses sensibly and not according to the advertisements in the Saturday Evening Post. He is slow about buying a lot of trash that unthinking people seem to consider essentials. It is cheap to improve one's mind. It is expensive to cut a dash in a town or city. Non-reflecting people show off by the material things they own. They ask to be judged by their make of car, their mahogany veneer furniture, their snappy clothes, their over-fed wives and spoiled children. A non-reflecting person is usually a good customer. Business unconsciously grasps the subtle fact that thinking people are too busy improving their minds to make good customers, or, to put it differently, good consumers. So things “high-brow” are sneered at—not because “highbrow” things are despicable but because they are bad for business. A thinking person becomes, quite naturally, a simple person, with simple tastes. It is bad for business for too many people to have simple tastes. This commercial age wants consumers of goods, not thinkers who consume wisdom and knowledge that cost practically nothing. This is a go-getter age—the salesman's paradise—the day of selling people things they really should not have because they do not need them. An unthinking people buys, buys, buys; a thinking people stops, reflects, eliminates the senseless, the vain, the useless. Business instinctively knows its friends.

TOADYING TO THE MOB

The greatest and most popular sport is toadying to the mob. Your common run of journalists, politicians, priests, preachers, university presidents all appeal to the mob, seeking its favors and good will. Those who would be leaders of the mob study its impulses, its prejudices, its superstitions and its hatreds, currying to all in order to win votes, circulation and “converts.” Another great game is to think up new things to “sell” to the mob—things like the Ku Klux Klan, new lodges, new religions, new hooch pocus. And the mob responds generously if it feels its “leaders” are “delivering the goods.” How the mob loves its Billy Sunday, its Billy Bryan, its Dr. (of Dentistry) Evans, its new movie star, its new baseball “hero”! The mob is quick to recognize alien spirits, and its punishment is direct and merciless. It wants its hokum pure and unadulterated. Those who are not with it are against it. They are cut off completely from everything, which, after a fashion, is most fortunate, for it is better to be ostracized than to be assimilated by such a rabble. Better their indignities, oppressions, petty spites and secret injuries than their respect for playing to them with shoddy religions, shoddy politics, shoddy journalism and shoddy education.
RED TIES AND GREEN VESTS

BEHOLD this gem of social thought "A man may wear a red necktie, a green vest and bell-bottom trousers, and still be a gentleman." This may be true, my friends, if by "gentleman" is meant one who has elegant social connections and an income to match. But if the word is used regarding a man of taste, then we'll have to demur to the opinion of this writer and assert that the sartorial combination he defends will not bedeck the gentleman. What is or is not a gentleman is not really a question that vexes me greatly. I suppose I use that word less than any word in the language. It never occurs to me as useful or important in classifying my fellow men. It is more of a tribute to call a man a "good fellow." What interests me in that sentence, however, is the rotten logic employed: the failure to understand the true significance of the red necktie, green vest and trousers waist-wide in each leg. It is not that these absurdities of clothing are the causes of a man's lack of gentlemanliness or good taste. Objectively offensive as they are, a red tie and a green vest will not actually wreck a man's intelligence or character, if you can imagine a man of genuineness wearing them. I believe I could wear a flaming tie without ceasing to be my gay, original self; but I wouldn't, and there's the subtly determining fact. Such colors and cut are simply the effects of poor taste. They but advertise the man, and do not make him. And the old proverb that "Clothes make the man" would be much truer, far nearer the essential mark, if it were changed to read that clothes reveal the man. Now that we've had this little lesson on that familiar and irrepressible type, the well-dressed man, we can forget it; seeking only to remember that the trick of confusing cause and effect lies ever in wait for the unwary reasoner. Red ties and green vests are effects, not causes, of gaudy, cheaply colored minds.

NEW YORK AT A PLAY

It might be supposed that New York audiences, who are never at a loss for a play or a concert and who know the opera as well as Kansas City audiences know vaudeville, are far more sophisticated than the folks away out in the wild, uncouth interior. Such an opinion, however, presupposes that New Yorkers are a precious, distinctive class of people—that as a rule they flock to the theater for some purpose higher than that of mere distraction from the daily routine—and that they intelligently and uniformly bestow their suffrage upon superior plays, animated by art for art's sake. As a matter of cold, unromantic fact, several thousand people assembled together in the midst of the bright, incomparable, never-extinguished lights of Broadway are remarkably similar to multiplications of the human unit on Main Street anywhere. And farther down and remote from the garish illuminations and febrile activities of commerce—in the proudly shabby Bohemian quarter of Greenwich Village that abuts upon the peaceful Washington Square of mellow aristocratic memories—it is possible to stroll in upon an audience that reminds you strikingly of your neighbors in the old home town. No matter how far East you go,
you will still find people: and New York is undoubtedly populated in
the good, old-fashioned way.

There is the Provincetown Playhouse, which is a shrine of dramatic
art. It is a very simple place: no immense, glaring electric sign nor
electric letters flaunting their challenge across an entire block front:
an obscure little hole in the wall that you might pass by unsuspectingly,
did not your eyes happen to note the plain, painted, little sign, or did you
not seek it with deliberate foreknowledge. Within is a short, narrow
room—very intimate contact between actors and audience—a little stage
that admits of sheer drama, uncluttered by excessive scenery, emphasizing
the human rather than the mechanical element, and down either side are
ordinary wooden benches with just enough upholstering to be com-
fortable but not sufficiently elegant to enervate the mind—in short, this
is a theater which is constructed and conducted solely for the purpose
of the drama, and quite rightly, too. There is only one feature of
neglect in this subordination of accessories to the main interest of the
play itself. The Provincetown management errs in distributing pro-
grams that do fully as fine credit to the printer’s art as those of any
up-town theater, and that indeed represent more artistic “job work.”
I love good printing, and I am not remiss in appreciation of the Prov-
incetown playbills. Yet this has its bad side. It happens that the lady
who sits on the bench back of me exclaims over the lovely program.
“Don’t they have nice programs?” she twitters. No doubt she had it framed. This enthusiasm is perhaps artistic—of course, it is that—but
somehow it doesn’t accord with the scene nor with the play we have
come to see, which is Eugene O’Neill’s overpoweringly tragic drama,
“All God’s Chillun Got Wings.” This flutter of one of God’s chillun’s
wings disquiets me a little. I long for the beating of braver wings. This
is an artistic audience, however. I can detect that easily. Its selectness
is denoted not simply by the fact that it is a well-dressed audience, but
by the right, light little note of carelessness and bonhomie in its apparel
as well as in its attitudes. The curtain rises, and an earnest young man
announces that a permit has not been received from the mayor’s office
for the acting of children in the opening scene: he explains the moral of
the scene—that “the color line does not cross childhood.” The little
white children and the little black children laugh and play together with-
out suspecting the deeper tragedies of race. The young man reads the
scene—very well, too—and a party of two, entering late, inquires what
it has missed, and on being told, says with relief: “Oh, then we haven’t
missed anything.” On the other hand, there is remark that this reading
is delightful because it is “so different.” Which is right? I really
haven’t time to decide, as I am by now absorbed in this play, which
reduces the tragedy of two human beings, one black and the other white,
to its simplest, soul-wracking elements. Jim is the young Negro who is
much perplexed by this strange business of race, who thinks of the
similarity of souls under skins, and who is consumed by ambition; but
although he studies faithfully and hard, he always fails in the examina-
tions: the white faces around him confuse, mock and terrify him: he
knows his books better than the rest, but everything escapes him at the
critical time. Ella, the white girl, has been Jim’s sweetheart when they
played as boy and girl in this motley slum district of old New York:
but she has grown up and far away from him, is seduced by the
glamor of the local John L. Sullivan, and disdainfully repels Jim when
he seeks to interfere with her infatuated ride to ruin: Jim grown is
Jim a “nigger,” while Ella grown is a white girl, thank you, albeit a
very foolish white girl. The old story repeats itself and Ella, cast off
and in the depths, is drawn inevitably to the faithful, great-hearted Jim,
who is her only friend, whiter than all the rest, she fervently avows.
Jim throws himself at her feet in a very passion of disinterestedness, of
altruistic self-sacrifice: he has two ambitions—to be admitted to the
bar and to see that Ella is protected and made happy. He asks nothing
and offers all. They are married, not as white and black, but as two
souls united in misery, swept together in the tide of human passion
and error and longing. This is not a social experiment, but an inescapa-
able human situation.

The two cross the ocean, to “the kind side, the side where Christ
was born,” there to build a new, free life. In France they are simply
two human beings, who go and come without invidious paintings and
peerings. But in time Ella becomes restless, nervous, and cannot hear
to mingle with people: the feeling of race asserts itself within her, poss-
sesses her more and more and at length dominates her in a terrible way.
Her distress is such that the couple return to America, thinking that
to face the issue bravely will be to conquer this turmoil of the spirit.
Back in the old neighborhood the situation runs swiftly on toward trag-
edy. It is the very stuff of tragedy and terror and stress of soul. Jim
renews his patient, almost hopeless studying for the bar, and when he is
not tending the sick and distraught Ella, he sits with pathetic determina-
tion over a pile of law books. He is applying himself in order that he
may find supreme justification in Ella’s eyes, in his own eyes, in the
eyes of all, black and white. But Ella resents this ambition. As an
individual she is inferior to Jim, but she is obsessed by the feeling of
the racial superiority of the white: and Jim’s diligence of self-improve-
ment is felt by her as a challenge to this superior feeling, to which she
clings as a drowning man clings to a plank. She exerts her ingenuity
to distract him from his studies so that he will not pass his examinations.
She hopes and prays that he will not pass. She is delirious and insanity
tightens its grip upon her. She calls Jim a “dirty nigger.” There is a
Congo mask in the home (which has been the home of Jim’s colored
parents, who have prospered modestly in the world) and Ella stands
before this mask, jeering at it and defying it as a symbol of the race that
she despises—and fears—in her heart. There is a portrait of the elder
Harris, Jim’s father, dressed in the regalia of a Negro lodge. She laughs
at it—“They can’t help it. It’s the ‘nigger’ in them.” As Jim sits
before his law books, she steals behind him; he turns just as she has
raised the knife to strike him.

At length comes the day when Jim learns the futile result of his
midnight labors over the books. He has failed again. Ella is insanely
hysterical in her joy over this vindication of her race. The true situa-
tion is terribly, heart-breakingly plain to Jim, who has refused to face the
truth—who has borne all things with a simple patience, love, loyalty and
determination to make everything nobly right in the end. But now
Ella is quite insane. Tearing the Congo mask from the wall, she
thrusts a knife through it, with an exclamation of mad triumph. She’s
“got” it at last. She is white and superior and victorious. Her mind
reverting to the conventional roles of race, Ella pleads with Jim to be
“her old Uncle Jim” or her little playmate Jim as in the old days: and
Jim—loyal and loving to the last, rising nobly to the occasion—thanks
God for the child he has been given in place of the woman, and cries
out in ecstatic resignation that he will play with her “right up to the
gates of Heaven.” As children, they can again be two souls, not white
and black in accidental, impossible, tragic union.

A play of deep feeling is “All God’s Chillun”—“the heart of life
. . . laid bare in the agony and exultation of dreadful acts.” The
spectator—myself certainly—is dominated by pure and terrible and lofty
emotion. I do not think of race problems, but of the poignant, bleeding
case of this one man and one woman. I don’t wish to think, to argue, to
solve, to exchange platitudes or social philosophy—I surrender myself
to simple feeling. What are words and formulas? They are an imperti-
nence. But next to me are two dear ladies who, throughout the play,
have been audibly “solving” this matter of race. Their refrain from the
beginning has been that “It can’t be” and “Of course, it’s improbable—
couldn’t happen in real life.” They are wise, too, about this sex urge.
When Jim first offers, humbly, his protecting love to Ella, one of the
commentators nods wisely and remarks to her companion: “It’s Service
now, but you’ll see, later on it’ll be Something More.” And: “There’s
something intimate about the sex relation that is bound to separate white
and black—that you can’t get away from.” Yet the other lady is some-
what of an emancipated soul—born and bred in old Kentucky, too, as I
overhear her confession. But in little old cosmopolitan New York she
has surprisingly outgrown a number of her earlier prejudices. She still
draws a line, to be sure—no nonsense, you understand. But she has
need of occasional help with her housework and, “You know”—this
rather apologetically—“there’s no help, really, like colored help.” Sarah
is a good maid, and her employess from Kentucky, being in New York
where all the thousand and one human streams freely converge, shares
luncheon with her. They sit at table together, just as if they weren’t
different in color as night and day, not to speak of social station. She
was a good, simple girl—so I hear—a perfect jewel of a maid. And,
mind you, she knew her place. She realized perfectly well that there
was condescension on the lady’s part, and she accepted this mark of
humanity in exactly the right, humble, grateful spirit. Not for her to
presume upon a merely benevolent gesture, nor attempt to use it as a
basis for an intimate, more seriously friendly demeanor. It was just
mistress and maid—white mistress and black maid. All this I had to
hear while the play bore me along on a tide of purely human feeling:
and this colloquy aroused in me a faintly perverse, comic spirit that was
not quite adapted to O’Neill’s great, harrowing theme. These ladies were
no doubt quite correct in their attitude toward the sex problem and
the race problem and the domestic problem; certainly I was in no mood
to gainsay them, though I should have unsaid them with some violence
had it been polite, easy and safe to do so: but confound them, swore
my soul, with their chatter of etiquette and eugenics and the petty
passion—and all passions are petty with such as them, I vow. Hap-
pily, the Supreme Architect of the Universe has so arranged it that the mind of man can be more or less engaged with two or several streams of thought at once, so while I was giving almost my whole mind and heart to the tragedy of Jim and Ella, I was also mentally mocking the loquacious ladies on my left.

And on my right there sat a gentleman who had a word or two to say. He talked little, and his silence was apparently due to sheer bopuzzlement. This play was kind of queer to him, and I doubt if at the end he knew clearly what it was all about. I gathered this impression from his remark in the intermission, "Well," he said, "this is surely an unusual play!" He shook his head slowly, with the dawn of a puzzled smile on his face. Unusual, indeed! And the unusual, we all know, is apt to be a sore puzzle and a tribulation of the spirit, when it does not give rise merely to a trifle of surprise and vaguely lit curiosity. I had still better evidence that this poor fellow was a little behind the play and rather at sea. When the curtain fell after the last act and there was a movement of departure among the crowd, my neighbor sat with the obvious posture of the man who expects to see more: I might have thought, perhaps, that he was simply overwhelmed by his emotions, that this was a fine tribute to the power of the drama. But even as the crowd began to move toward the door, and while the actors were making their prescribed "Good-night" bow, and as I stood up and waited for him to precede me or let me pass, the man suddenly roused himself, looked at me in a more lost manner than ever and declared: "Is that all? Well, now, isn't that a funny way for a play to end?" I hadn't thought it funny, or queer, but intensely and inevitably right. But I thought indeed that the gentleman was funny. And the ladies, whom God has blessed with the old, old equivocal equivalent of bliss. And the "artistic" lady who was in raptures of esthetic delight over the "nice" program.

The Provincetown Playhouse is a noble place, with notable and noble plays. Go there the first thing when you are in New York. I was in the right theater, all right, but I chose the wrong bench:

And as I left this fine little theater, at the end of this session of greatly conceived drama and unintentional comedy, I read on the program—the "nice" program—this quotation from John Masefield: "The truth and rapture of man are holy things not lightly to be scorned. A carelessness of life and beauty marks the glutton, the idler, and the fool in their deadly path across history."

A NOTE ON TOLERANCE

A venture, one would say that tolerance should be the simplest possible attitude of mind. What can be easier than letting the other fellow think according to his notion? It demands no effort of one. It asks nothing of one. It reserves to one the full right to one's own ideas. Yet despite the apparent ease of toleration, there is an effort—to the man whose disposition leans toward tolerance. Experience would show that it is the hardest thing in the world for the average man to be tolerant. He resents nothing so much as ideas opposed to his own. He resents a physical injury less than he does a mental difference. And think of the trouble to which people put
themselves in the practice of intolerance. It keeps them in hot water, day and night. It interrupts their work. It plays the devil with their digestion. It robs them of righteous sleep. And just pause to consider how much more time a man would have to improve and extend his own ideas if he were less concerned about playing the spy and the little tin tyrant with the other fellow's idea. The poor devil who sits up until a late hour shuddering over the wreck and ruin that is bound to ensue because his neighbor believes thus and so—this victim of his own intolerance could read several Little Blue Books during the hours thus feverishly wasted. He could read Voltaire, and thus be rescued from himself. If The Age of Reason scares him to death ("reason" is the most dreadful, sinful-sounding word to the churchly intolerant), he might read Common Sense and learn that Thomas Paine did something else besides writing atheistical books. He would learn how much the noble Paine contributed to the American Revolution. The intolerant man could learn many things if he were soundly disposed. All he needs is the desire to learn. All he needs is toleration.

A DISCUSSION OF "HOPE"

IT all depends on what we mean by "hope." A blind faith in miracles, in salvation, in heavenly reward for virtue, and in hellish suffering for sinners—such manifestations of faith cannot be called "hope," to my way of looking, though it may be something of a spiritual and mental crutch to others. I cannot speak for others. Cripples need crutches, of course, and so do mental misfits. And you can call it "hope," if that sounds better to you. But it doesn't mean hope to me—it means mental and spiritual decay. Thus do we see how two persons can view the same thing, one getting supreme joy out of it and the other (myself, for example), getting a fine sense of disgust. Hope, to me, means desire to live this life to the full, to think freely and as completely as my powers will allow, to taste of the wisdom of my own set of gods, to be able to do the work I love to do, to meet the people I feel I should know. It is my hope that I shall spend my life working, creating, building, laughing, living, thinking, feeling, tasting, resting and working, working and working. What becomes of these old bones of mine when I breathe my last I know not, nor does anyone else. I care, but that doesn't help any. I do not know, I never shall know, and hope, under such conditions, is idle and futile. I am a realist in metaphysical questions, which makes me irritatingly impossible among those who believe that man should have hope about the hereafter even though he has nothing substantial upon which to rest that hope.

What is Mr. Mencken's hope and purpose? I do not know. Mr. Mencken might care to answer that question. Perhaps he feels that life is a great show and that he is going to see all he possibly can. Perhaps he feels his purpose is to work, seek wisdom, understanding and discrimination. Perhaps he hopes to find new follies to laugh over, new stupidities to ridicule, new fads to sweat, new shams to explode. Perhaps he loves to finish the jobs he has at hand, write more books, more articles and edit more magazines as good and sound as The
American Mercury. Perhaps he wants to read and think and fight and enjoy friends and hate new and interesting enemies. Perhaps these are his hopes and purposes. I do not know.

A philosopher does not strike in the dark "like a blind adder or rattler." A philosopher strives to strike into the dark with a ray of light, perhaps a feeble and waver ing light, but the strongest he knows how to make. A philosopher must love truth if he is to be a philosopher, and truth is light. Live this life, my friend, live it to the last, gasping second. Taste of its joys and try to avoid many of its pains. Seek yourself a comfortable bed and a good, big couch. Surround yourself with good books and the words of sages. Laugh with Rabelais and groan with Schopenhauer. Seek honesty of, thought with Voltaire and feel the warm heart of life with Shakespeare. Look into the heart of tragedy with Sophocles and Euripides and Aeschylus. Eat good food and have plenty of money in your pockets. Live and learn, live and laugh, live and let live. Don't worry about the evils of other mortals. Let them alone. Don't weep over the evils of this old world. You did not make the world. The world made you. This world was a going concern before ever you opened your eyes. And don't try to reform a world, when you had nothing to do with the forming of it. Don't shed unnecessary tears over the suffering masses. Remember, you didn't make the masses. There were masses—and asses—before ever you popped your head into this world. If you must see the asses, laugh over their folly and wish them well, bidding them a friendly good-morrow and going on to new clowns in the great circus of life. Remember, life is warm, and amusing, and swift. It is here and presto! it is gone. Use the minutes that will never come again. Do not worship gold, for that is folly, but get some of it anyway, because in this life gold is of use, helping to smooth away the frowns, soften the loads, ease the way. So I say, get yourself some money. An ideal world would be one in which everybody had millions and in which everybody would work. With millionaires at every corner money would become unimportant. But we are not building ideal communities. We are living our lives—today, not a century from now. And if there are millions who cannot do anything but work at monotonous tasks, remember, my friends, that the Holy Ghost, or the Virgin Mary, or St. Peter, perhaps, made them as they are, and neither you nor I will change them. They were made without color, without purpose, without character, without the ability to see or think—and it is good sense to take them as one finds them, using them for what they are worth, which, to put it badly, is to harness them to the necessary jobs of the world. Do not shed sentimental, greasy tears over them. They are like the machines that have certain, limited tasks to perform. Let them do those things, for it would be a mistake to want them to be "free" to do something else, which would result in nothing but endless botches and nuisances. All men are not born equal. All men are not equal at any time in their lives. Be selfish about your life, your individuality, the development of your mind, your character, your humor, your knowledge. Intelligent selfishness will do more for the world than self-sacrifice. Selfishness, on a vast enough scale, becomes the essence of social helpfulness, because society being, after all, composed only of individuals, if each
individual were to develop himself to the very limit of his powers would not society improve as the measure of each individual’s usefulness and intelligence increased? So I say to you: Keep your eye on yourself, line your pockets with money so that you will never have to appeal to others for self-sacrifice, or charity, or mutual aid, or whatever you care to call it. Money is a curse—when you are without it. Use money for purposes of life, not merely to add one dollar to another dollar. Do not become a mere money-grabber. Give enough time and thought to the problem of money, in order to have the weapons with which to pry from life the things you need and deserve in order to be happy in this life. Think of the great men and women—let them become real to you. Talk to them through the gateways of your imagination. Learn to know the great men of the past and the truly great men of our day. Let them be your “saints.” They will help make life full. Don’t lie awake nights worrying about the state of your soul. Your soul belongs to you, not you to your soul. When you die your soul will die with you. The precious something that we call the soul belongs to life, and we pass it on to our children who take charge of the world after we are gone. There is continuation of soul consciousness; not in the hereafter, but in the here-and-now. The world is our yesterday, today and tomorrow; it is all we know and ever shall know; it is our heaven, earth and hell all rolled into one; it is our home and our goal and our beginning and our end. Today is the flower of all the yesterdays and the beginning of all the tomorrows. So, I say, live today and worry not about the days that are to come after we are put under the sod. God is not as bad as our Christian friends paint him. He isn’t worried about what we think, or what we do. He doesn’t care whether we go to church on Sunday or go to a Movie. He lets us alone, thank God. So I say, let Him alone. He doesn’t want to be bothered with our worries. And if there is a little “hope” in this message, use it; and if there isn’t forget about it.

WISDOM AND THE FEAR OF GOD

Of all silly things, what seems at this moment silliest to me is the mouthful of humbug that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Fear doesn’t produce wisdom. Fear is produced by ignorance, and ignorance thrives upon fear. Can a man who bow in terror before an unknown God, who is afraid to call his mind his own, who feels that he must believe on pain of hell-fire notions uttered by witch-doctors thousands of years before he was born—can such a man, I ask, be regarded as a wise man? No: the man whose head simply aches with fear, whose heart sinks to his boots when a thought not branded with Bible buncombe gets near him, who considers that the incredible agony of damnation are wrapped up in a little mental exercise—this man is a long, long way from the beginning of wisdom. He is no wiser than the savage whose mind is held in a similar, deadly grip by fear of the unknown. If fear were a sign of wisdom, what a wonderfully wise world this would be: as fear is a stupidly and sickening common emotion among men, most of whom go through life loaded with a bundle of fears and chiefly the fear that sends them blanched and whining and groveling to a god—a god that is but the shadow cast by their fear.
AN INTELLIGENT MAN DEFINED

ASK any man whether he would rather be ignorant or intelligent, and he will doubtless reply, with a considerable show of surprise and indignation, that of course he would rather be intelligent. He will set you down as a fool for putting such an absurd, useless question. He will let you know, too, that he considers himself an intelligent man. Yet, as a matter of fact, is not the attitude of many people that of choosing ignorance, loving and embracing ignorance, jealously protecting their ignorance from any possibility of disillusionment? This is quite simply the attitude of the man who sedulously refrains from reading anything that does not agree with his beliefs. The love of ignorance is undoubtedly the determining element in the minds of one who shuts his mind to all reason, who is continually fearful of thought, who runs in a panic when he sees an idea coming his way. The man who gets a set of notions and then is content to go through life with them, standing guard over them as if they were valuable property, is a man who feels, without perhaps consciously reflecting, that ignorance is bliss. The man who is willing to come by his opinions accidentally, who is willing to accept his opinions readymade from others, who believes what everyone else believes—in short, the man who is not willing to investigate, study, think and form his own beliefs—that man does not want to be intelligent. Again, when a man is pushed hard in defending a belief and, unable to maintain a show of reason for it, insists that after all it is a nice and comforting belief or a hopeful belief—what can one say but that such a man prefers at all odds to be ignorant? This attitude is often found among religious people. They will declare that, whether or not it is a true belief, a belief in God and all the catalogue of wild wonders is a consoling belief. And this attitude of disregard for truth and reason, of unwillingness to test one’s beliefs, is nothing more nor less than the attitude of ignorance. The man who wants to be intelligent is not afraid to think. He is always seeking the truth. He will not cling to an opinion simply because it is comfortable: the moment he begins to doubt the reasonableness of that belief, it becomes uncomfortable to him. There is nothing that he regards as sacred and beyond discussion. He will read every side of a question that interests him; he will listen readily to any man with ideas; he will be prepared to examine his belief, and put it to the test, at any moment. In short, the man who really wants to be intelligent will always demand a good seat, and bear himself with a very open, attentive air, at every intelligent performance.

LYNCHING IN AMÉRICA

THE lynching record in the United States continues encouragingly to dwindle. According to the report of Tuskegee Institute, 1924 was the lightest year to date that Judge Lynch has known. There were only sixteen victims—seventeen less than the number in 1923. Excepting one in Illinois and one in Missouri, the victims were in the “solid South.” The face of the record, however, is not quite accurate in reflecting the decay of the lynching spirit. We
are told that: "There were forty-five instances in which officers of the law prevented lynchings. Two women, one white and one colored, were among those thus saved. Eight of these preventions of lynchings were in Northern States and thirty-seven in Southern States. In thirty-six of the cases the prisoners were removed or the guards augmented or other precautions taken. In nine other instances, armed force was used to repel the would-be lynchers. In four instances during the year persons charged with being connected with lynching mobs were indicted. Of the nineteen persons thus before the courts only five were indicted. These were given jail sentences." Thus we see that the reduced number of lynchings is not entirely due to the cessation of mob activity; and there is evidence, in the few and light penalties for this form of lawlessness, that the evil is not yet regarded as seriously as it should be. Yet the signs, on the whole, are good—very good. When one notes that the 1924 record is forty-one less than the 1922 record, one concludes that there is a real tendency toward more civilized ways. Officers of the law less seldom fill a complaisant role, conniving with the lynchers. Lynching is a more precarious pastime than it was in other and not remote days, and the day may come when a lynching will be received as big and startling news. However, we are still in the age when an annual lynching record is a familiar branch of American statistics.

THE SINCERITY OF ART

GREAT art is sincere. A Balzac or a Shakespeare is full of his creative vision and we cannot imagine such a one, from any central view of the picture, in a trifling or fooling or superficially, unconcernedly brilliant role. They are intense; they sound the depths; they lavish broad strokes; they are rich in creativeness. When they play, they are merely enjoying rest from greater things. Yet I do not believe that art is entirely dependent upon sincerity, as men usually see it. (The artist may be sincere in a love for trifles: he may put skill and joy into the treatment of ephemera: a great deal of art, after all, is but a highly cultivated form of play.) An Oscar Wilde, for example, is careless of eternity and recks only of the moment. He would rather decorate and arrange than create; and it cannot be denied that he is able to produce beautiful, astonishing effects. He is a showman indeed in a superior sense. And one can say for him that he puts on a show that intelligent men appreciate. It is not invinicious to Wilde to declare that he was not a Plato nor a Goethe nor a Voltaire. On the other hand, none of these men was a Wilde. If Wilde was not a great thinker, shall we therefore be ungrateful to him for his ability to delightfully stimulate our minds? He delighted in the play of words: well, we can admit his skill and share his delight. He had greater love for an epigram than for a system of philosophy—and we can at least say that epigrams live while systems die. He wanted to be charming rather than true. He saw life as a plaything more than as a problem. So it is that we can enjoy Wilde, regardless of a theory of life. Many of the errors of literary criticism are due to the insistence that one artist shall be as another artist is, and to the unwillingness to judge an artist in his own peculiar sphere. Why can we not accept what a Dumas offers us without demanding unreasonably that he show us the gifts of a Balzac?
THE LIFE-HAS-A-PURPOSE BUNK

The plain ingredients of bunk are to be discerned in the belief that life has a purpose. The fallacy of the "far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves" is a common delusion of mankind, which cannot bear to see that life is a pack of tricks that are not (as yet) very clearly understood and whose upshot in the dim onward of time is only a matter for speculation. Yet talk of life's purpose, in terms of the race and of eternity, is imagination—illusion—and nothing else. So far as we know, life has no purpose, no goal, no powerful, eventual triumph of ideology. Long ago the thinkers exploded the notion that God or Nature was working surely, and within the grasp of man's understanding, toward some blissful, perfectly wise, all-justifying end. We know the past (imperfectly indeed) and we have only a little idea of the future. This whole human scheme of thing may come to smash ten thousand years from now. Art, science, philosophy may end in futility. The last man may curse the folly of Einstein, bothering himself about relativity, as he sees life deserting this temporary planet. God, in some future of cold destruction, may appear as a cosmic trickster, one who condemned man to live only that he might die. Yet there is no reason why we should throw up our hands and cease all effort simply because we cannot see what is marked on the cards of eternity. Each of us realizes that he must die, yet each man busies himself and goes through the serious motions of living regardless of the grave that yawns at the end. The realist may accomplish big things in life, while remaining indifferent to any notions of teleology: the art and moment of creation, the thrill of activity and all seeking, the present robust and intrepid reality of being, are sufficient. The man who erects his optimism on the belief that God will at last take care of the race is trusting in a very poor foundation, one that may slip from him at any minute. When he suddenly awakes, one fine day, to the thought of an indifferent fate—when, that is, he realizes the limits of his knowledge and the little bit of time that he can answer for—then will he be lost if he prove unequal to the heroic task of readjustment on a saner basis. To be and to do—to live each day to the full—should satisfy us as a rough measure of hope and success in life. The man who worries always that he must die simply neglects the years when it is possible for him to live. As a matter of fact, not one man in a thousand is really estopped from the activities of life by the prospect of individual death: yet there are persons who tell us that, without belief in the "divine event," we may as well quit the struggle right now: that, if we cannot persuade ourselves that we know everything, there is no use in knowing or doing anything.

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN AND AMERICAN TASTE

Mr. Brown, who is not an esthete nor an accessory before the fact in the matter of hygiene nor a practitioner of the art of life a la Oscar Wilde, dropped into a drug store in quest of certain articles which had acquired over him the hold and pull of custom. A quite ordinary fellow (a good fellow too) is Mr. Brown, a man who in many of the pleasures and pursuits of life simply knows,
very sensibly, "what he likes" and who, if the matter were put to him, could not explain his habits in the light of a philosophy of taste. As a good citizen his ballot is always ready to serve the party of freedom-on-the-Fourth-of-July; and so too, being a decent man who knows what is proper for one in this station of life, Mr. Brown patronizes the druggist as follows: He buys a tube of tooth paste, and the same of shaving cream—one of several best, mind; and a half-dozen cakes of a popular kind of face soap, reputed to be delicately pure and uplifting; and a bottle of (a nine-letter word, beginning with "List" and ending with "e") to gargoyle in defiance of that great enemy of respectable American life, halitosis; and (shall we say it?) a roll of Scott's Tissue—not precisely because it is "soft as old linen" or indeed because Mr. Brown wishes to approximate linen in this department of modern utilitarian aesthetics, but because it's the best, by reliable rumor, and this householder is in the habit of getting the best. Leaving, he pauses at the grocer's to order certain brands of canned vegetables—recognized, standard, very good brands, mentioned in the magazines; and he does not forget to include in the order several cans of a well-known tomato soup—and in this he is not consciously guided by a knowledge that is "Just the good of the tomato strained to a smooth puree enriched with golden butter fresh from the country," such a thing as a "smooth puree" being indeed rather vague to him; also, while he is about it, our friend bespeaks a desire for oranges—Sunkist, of course, for who would want moonkist oranges? Needing a new hat, and having put off its purchase long enough, Mr. Brown turns into the local clothing emporium and there he is led before an assortment of very good, very tasteful, very well-made hats, and out of the lot he picks one that seems not unsuitable. Then it occurs to Mr. Brown that he needs a new smoking stand (oh, yes, he is not so far behind the procession of modern taste that he would be without one) and at Kirkpatrick's—nice young fellows, "the kind of people that make a town"—he finds, as one might expect, a variety of stands no one of which could be remarked as in bad taste. And so home and to dinner, a very well-satisfied man, a man who has acquitted himself conformably in certain proper and ineluctable matters.

All this, by the way, is a reminder that I wish to elaborate a phase of the subject of American taste, brought timely to our attention by Mr. H. L. Mencken in a talk with an inquisitive reporter. I suggested by way of one of my publications that this American taste is the result of highly developed, very efficient, and tirelessly acquisitive American industry, and that this taste has been brought to the people, forced upon them indeed, by ingenious men of skill and taste who have advanced standards throughout the land, and pushed sales of every article after the best manner of its kind, with an eye to profit. There was a day, not so remote, when many comforts and luxuries, many precise and exquisite things, were unknown in American life; and it is not on record that the American people, in the role of sovereigns equal to the proudest monarchs, arose in a conscious and concerted revolution of taste and demanded that these requisites of health, beauty and all-round satisfaction be added unto life. Machines sprang up like magic in the land, and there was a great to-do of making and selling; and with the progress of this industrialism, this commercialism, Americans, including our Mr.
Brown, were introduced perforce to many things that had not been dreamed of in their habit or philosophy; and at length there bloomed that flower of American commercialism, the art of advertising; and after that Mr. Brown and his compatriots were doomed to enjoy, and incapable of failing to select, the very best.

I open a magazine, and I believe I discover why Americans have such good taste—why indeed they can't help it. (And first let me say that this magazine is a highly tasteful and agreeable specimen of the art of printing, an art which is not understood by Mr. Brown, and that Mr. Brown and his friends, who do not know "p" from "q" in this matter, are pleased to buy (and must inevitably buy) the best kind of printed matter in the way of magazines.) I note, after this observation, an ad for Campbell's Tomato Soup—that "smooth puree" that Mr. Brown will have for dinner this evening; thus Americans, who some years ago even scorned the tomato itself as a deadly-poisonous plant, today—urged by advertising, aided by "poetry"—have reached the refined level of "that delicious and famous soup." Turning a page, I am told (and the suggestion appears widely and persistently throughout America) that no modern, self-respecting, American housewife can, or will even try, to run the home without Fels-Naptha—a soap that is "so gentle to clothes"; and, appealed to in season and out on the score of gentleness (which means of course gentility) in soap, what American housewife would be without it? There are soaps and soaps—what a sweep there is to this theme of soap, and how artistically, how with an eye to the very triumph of taste, is it presented! Woodbury's Facial Soap, you understand, is not merely useful in the matter of cleanliness—it does not merely follow the cut-and-dried purpose of soap; but it enables fair women to keep the charm of "A Skin You Love to Touch"—and it happens therefore that American women are very sensitive regarding tasteful-touchable skins. Cold Cream—what American woman, be she shopgirl or society favorite, would be without from a half-dozen to infinite varieties; the reason being that this plenitude of varieties is advertised in all of the best magazines, and one of them indeed is recommended by no less a personage of pure taste than Lady Diana Manners, "the most beautiful woman of English aristocracy." There is taste for both male and female, and as men smoke and chew more vigorously than women, here is an ad for pipe tobacco and plug-cut, and what is the slogan that rears itself conspicuously on top of the ad? "It suits me, and I'm hard to please," is the bold statement, a challenge to every man of smoking taste. Is he hard to please? No so very; once he smoked Old Hillsides constantly with great enjoyment; now, however, he has been "converted" and the line of least resistance—celebrated, inescapable old line!—has led him to Edgeworth. Teeth are important to man, woman and child; and even so, it has not been so long that Americans have been solicitous of their teeth; now they are urged on every hand to take care, to beware, to use for health's and beauty's and politeness' sake this or that kind of tooth paste; and this warning resounds throughout the length and breadth of the land: "Look, mother, for film on your child's teeth"; and the American people, reading more commercially and educationally (and in that order of purpose, too, for here, so to speak, the flag has followed trade) about teeth, have the cleanest, best
cared-for teeth in the world. Then we approach, on another page, the homely subject of yeast. The last, fine, tasteful, all-important use of yeast has come with its advertisement as a preventative of constipation—"invigorating the whole system." Good men and true, in all these States, being urged without let-up to "Dissolve one cake in a glass of water" twice a day, gird up their loins in an effort of taste and go and do it.

In short, the message of taste is carried to Americans, via advertising, in every habit and circumstance of life: and there are preparations for the hair, and for the fingers, and for the toes, and for the ruthless suppression of odors that lurk under the arm; and there are suggestions, repeated with great verve and clothed in the enticing language of art and philosophy, regarding the proper furniture that should adorn the home; and the millions of car owners have no excuse for neglecting to buy the best cars they can afford and equipping their cars with the most tasteful, efficient, modern accessories. And in capitalized Culture, there is no lack of subtle, forceful and continuous appeal. What a home is without music is a question to which every American householder of as much as modest means can make only one discouraging reply. There is the lure of jazz in the picture of the young folks dancing around the lovely Brunswick, and there is artistic appeal in the groups of famous singers who are observed standing in picturesque costumes, and with all the force of numbers, around the gay party Victrola. And as to Literature (also insinuatingly and impressively capitalized), there is the Five-Foot Shelf and the Fifteen Minutes a Day that will induct the tired young clerk into some of the superficial secrets of the old masters, and that will supply him with matter for learned and diverting discourse at parties, teas and tête-à-têtes with his inamorata. What young man indeed could fail to acquire the rudiments of taste, could resist grasping at any straw of Culture, when confronted with this pathetic example of the disadvantages of not being able to quote a paragraph from Bacon's Novum Organum: "I must be going now," said the young man in the foreground of this picture. "Immediately he was taken at his word! He is hard-working and sincere—but he is dull and tiresome, a wet blanket at every social occasion he attends." Suppose, however, the young man, fortified by dips into a finger-bowl filled from the Pierian spring, were to exclaim to the young lady, "Oh! let's sit out this dance. Let's talk about Thomas a Kempis' Imitation of Christ." Then indeed there would be a different tale for the neighbors.

And so the moral is plain, and need not be urged. Americans have good taste, and let any man escape it who can!

THE EMPTINESS OF WORDS

They had been talking about words—at that dinner table where conversation never lagged, and quickly ran into discussion, and then into argument as intense as it was futile; and as every subject was waylaid and manhandled, over and over, and invariably with identical results, this company knew indeed what to expect from talk and from words; especially as they loved to deal with ultimates, and to generalize about life, they realized (in moments of reflection after
talk) the uselessness of attempting to explain the unknowable. For the unknowable, however stuck o'er with titles and phrases, remains the unknowable still; and a mystery cannot be stated in any way that will reduce its quality of mystification; the only clearness one can achieve is a frank recognition of the mystery. After all, it should be plain to every man that he who says "I don't know" is wiser than he who deceives himself with words that mean nothing—that simply quiet his fears or tickle his vanity.

It was when A, although a skeptic and not too serious in the matter, referred to the pretty notion that all life is one, that there is an essential and unbreakable unity of things—then it was that B called upon all to behold how, under the illusion of thought, man plays with words: being certain that the game is worth, not only the candle, but the sun, moon and stars.

"These are but words," said he, "and they are as unsatisfactory as an echo in a vast solitude. You utter them, and they are simple enough—too simple. We know what you mean; and yet we know, too, that really you mean nothing. The trouble is that we don't know what life means; it's a word most commonly in use, accepted in all kinds of roles without much thought, and yet a word that nobody can define—although a word that a thousand men can define in a thousand different ways. So when you say that all life is one, we understand your 'one' but not your 'life.' Suppose you say that God is one, or that he is three—three-in-one, as the Christians believe—how does that aid us to comprehend in any practical way this notion of a God? One man's monism may be another man's dualism. I could not possibly intoxicate myself with a group of phrases so that the notion of oneness would appear to me as real. True it may be, but it is meaningless; so all I can do is stand aside and marvel at the ingenuity of the human mind which can thus put words to the uses of philosophy. Take any religion, any system of philosophy, any idea that is expanded to cover the whole life—and it is only an illusion that is produced by the magic of words; a something that can satisfy only one who desires greatly to believe it, who insists upon having some explanation of life, and who perforce learns by rote, and repeats glibly on all occasions, an explanation that does not explain. Words are interesting; they are useful for certain purposes; but we demand too much of them—just as we demand too much of humanity, too much of life."

C spoke eagerly: "You are unfair. The meaning of words depends upon the truthfulness of the idea they express. You have used for illustration an idea that is false and therefore meaningless. Of course life is not one, and so the talk of unity will not bear examination. It is based upon nothing real, is indeed a contradiction of life, and so the realist can favor the words only with a blank stare. On the contrary, life is diverse; many, not one. There you have words that are real, an idea that is demonstrable, a view of life that is a view and not a fabrication."

"I repeat that I can understand your 'many' but not your 'life.' And this diversity—is it not simply another way of saying that the meaning of life, so immense and full of variety, is bound to escape us? We can indeed express in words the limitations of knowledge;
but not ultimate, all-satisfying knowledge itself. And when you speak of the diversity of life, you are but saying that you are unable to grasp the many contradictory things of life so that they will mean one clear thing. We can see that life is a play of many ideas, many interests, many individuals. And then we have simply to turn away from life—as an abstraction that can be stated but not explained—and deal with the individual, the idea, the interest that confronts us."

"Oh, well—. We don't understand life. What of it? We can still find a real use for words."

"Who will deny it? Words are better than useful; they are lovely, sublime, creative. And I do not mean that words should express only what is true. Poetry is seldom true, in a literal sense. Indeed it has been contended that poetry—all poetry—depends for its charm upon the beautiful statement of falsehood, which, if presented in plain prose, would not be accepted by anyone. Words have an emotional value, an esthetic appeal; they lend a vivid air to common experience, and make even ugliness and terror and despair serve the purposes of art; we are able to feel more intensely when we speak or write, and we can enjoy in words a spectacle that reflects life and yet is apart from it. Words may be used as weapons—as a Voltaire uses them. They can be used to explode fallacies that we can detect, even without the aid of ultimate truth—that represent a spirit of obscuring rather than seeking the truth. They can strike at evils that are flagrant, and that would not be good whatever religion or system of philosophy might be true. At least man is so constituted that, if he is intelligent and especially if he is a victim, he can see no good in the kind of bigotry and bloody intolerance that aroused the fighting spirit of Voltaire.

"Words are useful in arranging thought, provided we remember always that what we express is not finally true; that thoughts are mere tentative valuations, and not revelations. And the simpler a thought is, the more we should guard ourselves against deception; for behind that seeming simplicity is a complexity that we have not touched, that we have indeed tried to cover with a veil of naive words. For example, what could be simpler than the notion that a Supreme Being created and runs the universe? Oh! how very simple, and appealing with a certain plausibility even to the man who is far removed from superstition, who laughs at theology. Yet, when you reflect, what meaning is there in this notion of a Supreme Being? Is it anything more than an attempt, by a gesture of simple belief, to hide the true and infinite complexity of all that man does not know? It is simple enough to express the notion that we live, personally, forever (though where is not so simple) but, after all, we must confess that this is a mere playing with words; and that when the poet tells us that we come 'trailling clouds of glory,' he gives us a pretty image and no more. There are jeers for the agnostic when he says, 'I do not know'; but surely it cannot be denied that here is a clear and honest use of words. It would be easy for the agnostic to say, 'I do know'—and repeat a wordy creed; but this would hardly be proof of wisdom.

"In short, I would say that words are clear—that they mean something—in the proportion that they limit what they try to express. Thus the skeptic uses words with a much better sense of values than does a
divine. A reader can understand the words of a genius, a sane and luminous thinker like Voltaire, but would find himself lost in the maze of words that fills an ordinary book of theology. A first-rate mind is simpler, clearer, far more practical in the employment of words than is a tenth-rate mind. The wise man limits himself; the fool reports a conversation with God. If words could solve the mystery of life, we should have ceased to bother about it long ago; we should long ago have reached the sublime peace of certainty—or the stagnation, the boredom, of certainty, as it might well be. Everything has been solved—on paper; if you seek words that presume to set forth, with admirable logic and rhetoric, the first and last secrets of life, go you to the nearest library and you can enjoy your fill of such words. For that matter, you need not struggle through the pages of the philosophers; you need not wrestle with the difficult concepts of the makers of great systems; all you need do is read the simple, all too simple-mindedly simple In His Image of W. J. Bryan—and, in words of demagogic finality, in words that you can understand, you will find the story of the beginning and the meaning and the end of life. That is to say, you will find words, words, words; and the only certain thing you will find is a revelation of the mentality of William Jennings Bryan.

"Words—we can't, of course, escape them. Even when we discuss words, the confusion and deception of words, we perforce employ words for the purpose. Thus we perhaps fall into some confusion, with all our skeptical and realistic intent. We perhaps mean less than we think, and mistake an agreeable mental exercise for a perception of philosophic truth.

"What is life? Go to the philosophers, and they will tell you. Go to the preachers, and they will tell you. Go to the idealists, and they too will tell you what life is and what it ought to be. Yet after all who, however ingenious his vocabulary, has more clearly defined life than in the well-chosen, practical, significant words, 'Life is just one damned thing after another'?"

HIGH PROMISE IN THE MOVIES

RECALL a movie scene which is a hint of what the picture-play can do. It was in Old Wives for New, based on the better than popular novel by David Graham Phillips. The plutocrat of hedonistic bent is enjoying a quiet evening of wine, philandering and jazz music with his mistress; although the peace of the cozily luxurious little apartment is threatened by a trifling quarrel about money, the root of all evil. Miss Gold Digger, probably with psychologic intent, puts a barney-googlish record on the Victrola, leaving the lid up—a point to remember. Then comes the fatal moment of melodrama, when Miss G. D. stabs to the heart the wealthy roué, who is not faithless but too careful of his purse-strings. He falls back into the chair, blood spreading over his shirt front; the girl is transfixed, absolutely arrested in action by this excess of evil action; and meanwhile one sees the jazz record on the Victrola, spinning merrily and madly round and round, regardless of this little tragedy that has interrupted a scene of apparent revelry. That, as I remember it, was the scene. It had ele-
ments, plainly, of melodrama; and it might have been that and nothing more, had it not been lifted into the atmosphere of real drama by that very little but most significant touch of the unheeded, whirling record. There was simple, acute contrast. There, unassumingly but irresistibly, was the right note of that something which men call fate. It was the only worth-while moment in the picture, and was worth all the rest. The artistic field of the movies is in just such little touches, such visual elements of contrast, nice and restrained emphasis and subtle bit of play. A story, even a good one at bottom, requires comment and characterization, but the movies have little of either; and by comment I do not mean that the story should be explained in any obvious way, but that its inner significance should be helped to reveal itself by those effects (which to the careless reader may seem trivial) that the artist in words knows so well how to create. The movies must not depend upon captions for these effects, but must produce them in movie language. Then, with good stories to work on, the movies will be worth seeing.

INTOLERANCE OF RACE

It is easy to say that one race is superior to another, and to point as an example to the variations of individuals within a race—this assertion of superiority is what a member of any race may naturally be expected to make—but I do not believe it is true in any absolute or final sense, and surely not true for the purposes of our present argument. What may be true of individuals is not necessarily true of races. You can indict an individual—public opinion and the law are constantly doing it—but you cannot indict a whole race, people, or nation. Individuals may be insane, criminal, hopeless. Can this be said, on a larger scale, of any race?

There are a number of theories of race, but most of them are foolish and the most foolish of all is the Nordic theory. I believe the trend of science has been to minimize the importance of races, and to make broader distinctions. We have many false ideas about race. We used to hold that the Chinese were a very inferior, insignificant people in everything but sheer numbers. But recently Bertrand Russell, the great English scientist and social philosopher,Jarred us out of our smug, uninformed assumptions by showing us that the Chinese are really a great people and are destined to play an important role in the future of mankind. Mighty and rich and beautiful civilizations were created in the past by so-called races that are today far below their ancient glory. Spain was once supreme in the Western World. One does not see today “the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.” Ancient Egypt was greater than modern Egypt. A wonderful civilization flourished thousands of years ago in China. So we see that races may be strong and become weak; highly cultured and lapse to ordinary in their intellectual and social life; superior, so to speak, and fall into a position of inferiority. Other conditions, besides inherent racial virtue, produce such transformations. The barbarians who swarmed into Italy were, in many ways—in civilized ways—inferior to the Romans. They had greater strength, however—and the Romans were weakened by abuse of power and wealth and leisure—and the
barbarians upset that proud empire. There have been important Negro civilizations, too; and today new states of black folks are growing in Africa—where the black man is not being exterminated as was the Indian in America.

I have not contended that the Negro race, as a whole, is equal in attainments to the white race. I do not believe there is anywhere near the disparity (proportionately to numbers) in virtue and ability and intelligence, that too boastful whites often allege. It is enough to say, however, that the Negro has not possessed the advantages of the white man: and this lack of advantages may be traced chiefly to denial by the white race. What I do say is that the Negro, individually and racially, has potentialities (and they are fast becoming realities, appearing more plainly every day) that are in no sense below those of the white race. Finally, I ask, why oppress the Negro, why treat him markedly and meanly as an inferior—why stand off from him as if contact were unwholesome—simply because one holds that he is not equally developed with the white race? Why shouldn't the white race, nobility and generosity being the better part of strength, be glad to permit—indeed, to invite—the Negroes to share in their culture? And why, too, should not the dominant race be sensible enough to avail itself of the peculiar culture, unique and valuable, that belongs to the Negro? The biological mixing of the race is not the question—and, if it were, the guilty party in the process is the white man. And it is especially in the Negro-hating South that one is struck by the visible admixture of the races—the white man, for all his talk of racial purity, having been the aggressor. The question we have primarily to consider is, not whether the Negro is equal to the white man in prowess or culture, but whether he shall be equal as to rights, social consideration, all the opportunities of life that the white man enjoys. And, speaking of the "skin deep" phase of the matter, I do say that it is prejudice against his black skin that is responsible for our persistence in excluding the Negro from full participation in the social life of America; and this prejudice against black skins is derived from American traditions of black slavery. Let the Negro be as free, as respected, as unassailed by discrimination as the white man—and let him show, under fair consideration, whether he is as able as the white man.

DAMNED!

He had been well started in life, had not made too big a fool of himself, and now in his prime he was by every common rule a man who should be happy. He had money—neither too much nor too little; and he earned his money by interesting and not grinding activity. He was able to get a moderate, necessary leisure and he knew how to crowd that leisure with pleasant things. He had a very simple way of living, unvexed by complexities and too many vague yearnings and fierce inner struggles. He was a sort of unconscious philosopher, without being very much of a thinker; he was not "sicklired o'er with the pale cast of thought." He was intelligent enough to get along in life without wanting to know too much. He had that greatest of blessings: good health. The worst thing in his life was a sneaking
belief in God, which both comforted and worried him at times. It was a comfort to reflect that he might be saved. It was a worry to reflect that he might be damned. Had he never believed in God, he would have been perfectly happy. As it was, the safest thing in his favor was that he had never really thought in a large, daring, God-defying way. One day a friend visited him, and he was struck by the man's unwonted air and countenance. It was not melancholy. It was not sadness. It was the look of one who, utterly despairing, stares full in the face of doom. "My God!" exclaimed the friend. "What is wrong?" The unhappy man replied: "I am damned. I have just lost my immortal soul—yes, I felt it leave me, almost as a physical pain. I have just had a fatal attack of reason—a killing dose of thought—a real, honest, unmistakable idea. What a life! into which man is born only to reason and to die!"

INSTILLING A SWOLLEN PRIDE OF COUNTRY

Our schools are making narrow patriots of children, says Prof. Carlton J. H. Hayes of Columbia University, New York City. They instill a swollen pride of country that may easily be fanned into a flaming catastrophic war spirit. The most unintelligent praise is bestowed upon American heroes, American customs, American institutions: and, conversely, there is a tendency to produce a low or unfair estimate of other countries. The youth who gets his conception of his country and the world from the school textbooks, and who does not later correct such cheap, false impressions, by studies in real history and literature, is in the way of making a very bad citizen: bad, not from the viewpoint of politicians who find him a useful tool, but in the light of a thoughtful regard for the best interests of his country and the world. He is not capable of reason as between his own country and another: and he sees fancied issues of hostility, falsely presented by injudicious or unscrupulous leaders, when none exists. His country is always right, other countries always wrong. Being ignorant of foreigners, this miseducated patriot is suspicious of them and ready to denounce them on every occasion—usually in response to the artfully belligerent suggestions of statesmen. Thus the term "foreigners" becomes a general reproach. And certain foreigners—the Italians, the Japanese, the Germans, the Russians—are especially to be damned by Americans who know little or nothing of their national characteristics, their culture and their history. The evil lies far deeper than a political or commercial nationalism.

The trouble, at bottom, is a lack of knowledge, and consequently a lack of sympathy, with foreign cultures. He who has lived much in the country of the mind, which is universal, or in the immense, unbounded country of art is less apt to be impressed by a petty, fractional nationalism. He cannot hate Germans, when he has communed with the spirits of Goethe, Heine, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche. He cannot hate Frenchmen, when he has shared the bountiful riches of Voltaire, Moliere, Renan, Anatole France. He cannot hate Russians, having been stirred to the depths by Turgenev, Gorky, Chekhov, Dostojevsky. This is a tremendous, vital sense in which culture is the hope of the world: and I believe that a diffusion of real culture among the people will modify,
if not destroy, the spirit of nationalism. But it is only recently that America has begun to realize the cultures of other countries, and meanwhile nationalism is rife, the “war against war” having increased the militaristic and pseudo-patriotic tendency of this country. “The nationalism which alone made possible the almost universal participation in the last great war,” says Prof. Hayes, “is still with us, militating against reconciliation and reconstruction, confirming ignorance and prejudice, poisoning international relations and even now preparing another and vaster and more horrible war for the next generation.” It is not, of course, the fault of the schools alone. The schools, perhaps, are the least culpable. The press, the church, the state—a hundred public agencies—are engaged, openly or insidiously, in confirming the habit of thinking narrowly in terms of America rather than in terms of the world. And it is not America only that is a victim of this habit. Other countries are equally under the spell of nationalism—and Germany was and is no worse than the rest. It is our duty, being Americans, to accuse the folly of our own country. It is the duty of men of culture and conscience in all countries to encourage the international habit of mind, and in bringing world culture to their own countrymen, endeavor to save the next generation from a “vaster and more terrible war.”

HINTS ON ACHIEVING HAPPINESS

I BELIEVE it is a fallacy to say that an unhappy tendency is in knowledge and, conversely, a happy tendency in ignorance or lack of thought. Happiness is due to quite other causes. It is, to begin with, a question of temperament. One whose disposition is to be happy will not be less so because of culture and reflection: this will simply result in a wider sphere of happy living, and in a more complex and subtle kind of happiness. It will bring, too, the kind of happiness that endures; for it is plain that happiness based upon intellectual and artistic interests, happiness derived from the thoughtful contemplation of life, will last beyond a purely animal satisfaction in living. When the body is satiated, or tired, or bored—when food and sex and the youthful adventures of action have lost the keen edge of their appeal—then the mind can still function with unimpaired vitality and joy. The way to assure oneself a happy old age is to cultivate a number of interests, and not restrict one’s life to a few simple physical motions. After temperament, one’s situation in life determines one’s happiness. He who enjoys prosperity, good health, and interesting work will be happier than he who is denied this material basis for happiness. The ignorant man to whom life is a struggle is certainly not happier than the intelligent man to whom life is a pleasant, successful adventure. Again, happiness is subject to moods; none of us feels happy or unhappy, day after day, without change; the unhappy man has his moments of cheerfulness, of curiosity, of keen desire—and the happiest man will fall into a mood of sadness.

We have read so often that “Ignorance is bliss,” and heard so often that the fool has nothing to worry him, that we have come to
regard it as an axiom. A little observation will prove this to be untrue. Ignorant people often have a sad or tragic habit of mind. Brooding on life is not the peculiar habit of the thinker, who may indeed accept life quite simply and philosophically: the fool broods and is melancholy and sees life as not worth living—not all fools, but many. As a rule, too, ignorant people are poor (which is not to say that all the poor are ignorant, nor that the very intelligent only are successful) and this condition of poverty does not inaffably make for that happiness which is supposed to distinguish and bless those of inferior mentality. On the other hand, thought can be happy—art can be thrilling—wisdom can unfold serene and joyous aspects of life that are missed by the ignorant. It depends upon the individual: if you have a happy kind of mind, you will probably be happy, whether that mind is active or dull, filled or empty, high or low in quality. The truth is, seemingly, even more paradoxical—for it is quite possible for a man to hold a pessimistic philosophy of life and still enjoy life—to hold that, philosophically, life is not worth living and yet, personally, to live with considerable gusto. The cynic, contrary to common belief, usually has a pretty good time. One who believes that life is more pain than pleasure may do his best to beat the game, and try, by cultivating the art of pleasure, to strike a fairer balance. And optimists, by your leave, are not always to be rated by the extent of their cheerful—often professionally and too self-consciously cheerful—talk. The optimist may go from one fit of the blues into another—and his optimism may be largely a sort of whistling to keep up his courage.

**EVIL SPIRITS**

The bigots of olden times were not entirely wrong in their theory of evil spirits. They were right in the belief that a bad, devilish spirit could wriggle itself into a man’s belly and prompt him to strange, accursed ways. The only error of the bigots was in locating the evil spirits, which were inside the bigots rather than inside the victims of the bigots. We read of all sorts of demons that were terribly and picturesquely busy in those days, but the worst of the demons were not the subjects of crazy, pious nightmares but those of actual record: the churchmen who whipped, strangled, tore and burned the flesh of heretics. We have passed belief in demonology, and only a few Christians are left who cling to that cruel notion, but we have evil spirits today no less surely than in the days when God was supposed to turn them loose in multitudes. The evil spirits of Ignorance and Intolerance are rampant, crawling inside the bigots, reverend and lay; and from the union of these evil spirits are born a host of others, all of them fanatically eager to persecute men and women who are free of demons. The spirits can’t work quite the material harm they could in other days. They can’t kill outright. They can, however, strike other blows at a free, intelligent life. They can fill people with hate; blind them with false, petty, mean notions; paralyze them with superstition, or give them blind staggerers of prejudice, or lead them into shambles produced by their own terror and
stupidity. We have too few intelligent persons: intelligence is too little effective in life. We must rescue the mass from their false, evil leaders. We must drive out of them the evil spirits of Ignorance and Intolerance.

CULTURAL READING

The cultured man is always reading. There is always a new door to open. But he must open the right one, and the guide must be loyal. At one time I thought it wise to include in the Little Blue Books some of the so-called "self-improvement" books. I have killed them all off, seventy of them, representing a small fortune. For I saw what a vicious thing it was for me to start a young reader on Plato, for example, teach him to trust my judgment, and then have him in good faith accept from me The Science of Developing a Pleasing Personality, or the like. You can't at the same time teach a man to be a commercial success and a spiritual success. Therefore I now put no emphasis whatever in my series on political, social or material success. I do not emphasize in biography the great generals, the Napoleons, the captains of industry, but the great poets, scientists, philosophers, dramatists. Who knows today who was the great profiteer while Aristophanes was holding his thousands? Who cares who made a fortune out of supplying Caesar's army with helmets and chariot wheels? What value a hundred years from now is the story of how an office boy rose to be president of the greatest commercial success in his field? I want to let people know who is thinking, who is writing good plays, composing great symphonies, who is creating beauty. For there is no time limit on culture.

PASSING THE BUCK

Every bird has its decoy," says Goethe, "and every man is led or misled in a way peculiar to himself." It is a reflection that is really wiser than any distinction of good and bad handed to us by the moralist; and, if men were less vain and less self-deceptive and more appreciative of wisdom, Goethe's reflection would give pause to the easy, meaningless, and never quite true judgment of one's neighbors. It remains, however, to be noted, as a curious though common phenomenon of human nature, that the world is full of people who believe that they are good—and that others, being misled in different ways, are bad. Our own weakness seems a trifle—may even be regarded as a mark of strength. The other fellow's peculiar trait or habit, that serves as a decoy to him in this life whose many paths cannot be clearly foreseen to the end, is bad and weak with little or no qualification; and 'tis a pity, we reflect, that he is not misled as virtuously, as agreeably, or as unnoticeably as we are. Even when a man admits to himself that he is misled, he flatters himself that he is not led so far off the right path as someone else; that his habit is not as bad as another's; that, let us say, if he is cutting ten years from his life by one kind of
wrong living, he is doing better than his neighbor who is throwing away twenty years of his life in—well, of course, in dissipation. The man who is simply a glutton reassures himself: "Well, I am not a smoker nor a drinker." The smoker, perhaps, tells himself: "I am careful about my eating, and I don't drink as some men do"; and he may argue that smoking is really good as it keeps down the appetite and ergo the bodily weight. The drinker is emphatic as to his self-righteousness in stopping short of the dope habit. And the dope-taker may congratulate himself in that he has never killed any one; that he has only taken morphine and has at least abjured cocaine; and probably he reminds himself that, with it all, he has not lost his belief in God. One man (or woman) is misled by greed; another by ambition; another by sex; another by superstition; another by an elegant and discreet hedonism. And none can see why another is led or misled in his own peculiar way. There is plenty of opportunity for legitimate judgment in this world. It is not found, however, in judging others; but in judging oneself. And if it cannot be said that you can, with the best of intentions, judge yourself truthfully; at least you are certain to judge yourself more fairly than you would judge another.

THE NECESSITY OF LITERATURE

What shall we do to be educated? is the question that is being asked in many quarters as it is being recognized that the system of education now in vogue is failing somehow to produce really cultured men and women. The student who comes out of college with no perceptible change in his mental life, without the quickened spirit and broadened outlook that are the signs of true education, is being more and more regarded as a rebuke to the educational system. One cannot, in a short sketch, thoroughly survey the situation. But there is a vital spot which can be pointed out readily enough. I do not claim originality in saying that one of the causes of this educational deficiency is the neglect of literature, not as mere "filling," but as a basic and motivating force in the life of the individual. Contact with great books is recognized by the thoughtful everywhere as the most stimulating intellectual influence. Culture, to use a broader yet not very different term, is realized as the point where modern education fails most conspicuously and most deplorably. The vocational tendency in education, while within reasonable bounds it has possibilities of great benefit, is turning the efforts of the schools too much away from the development of well-rounded personalities (which, after all, is the true aim of education) and toward the mere fitting of men and women for the economic struggle. The student is educated narrowly for a trade instead of broadly for life. The emphasis is placed rather upon a life's profession than upon the profession of life itself. One great state university—the University of Missouri—announced with its opening one year a more pronounced turning toward the vocational idea. Other schools have long encouraged the idea. So far as it may be considered a revolt against a stuffy classicism, which was itself
superficial, this tendency is a healthy one. But it seems to be going
to an extreme, or rather in an altogether wrong direction. Instead of
turning from dead to living knowledge, it is substituting what is
merely a glorified form of apprenticeship. Training for professions
is all very well, and it should have its place; but it should not be
called education, nor should it be made the whole aim of the schools.

What, then, should we do to be educated? H. G. Wells, in a
recent article, declares that, among other things, it is absolutely
essential to a good education that one should have a thorough knowl-
dge of the great adventure of the human race, as told in history,
biography, science and (a term that includes the other) literature.
Wells declares what is an obvious yet neglected truth, that the future
of mankind depends plainly upon the degree to which society edu-
cates its citizens. A race of men that knows nothing of its past is
not likely to make a very brilliant future for itself. Progress without
culture is impossible. Another writer, John Jay Chapman, writing in
the New York Evening Post, discusses more directly the phase of
this question of education that interests me particularly. He points
out how amazingly the schools have allowed the teaching of liter-
ature to lapse into a mere perfunctory process. Today one finds
the higher schools doing what was formerly the work of the lower
schools—teaching the simple rudiments of English, teaching students,
how to speak and write correctly. As to literature, it is not taught
but merely taught at. It suffers from general neglect; it is no longer
considered of first importance. Quite obviously, it is of first impor-
tance. There is a vast gap in the education of anyone who is not at
least fairly conversant with the literature of his race. He should, of
course, be familiar with the great writers of all races and all ages.
I make bold to say that in no other way can a broader, more vital
education be more quickly gained than through the right sort of con-
tact with great literature. Here, indeed, the wisdom of the human
race is set down for whomsoever will read. One is almost startled
when Mr. Chapman tells of primary teaching abroad that is far
superior to a great deal of college teaching in America. Let me
quote:

"Some years before the war a schoolmaster friend of mine went
abroad to study French methods in primary education. At Tours
he spent an hour in a classroom where French literature was being
taught. A middle aged professor of the highest competency and
learning was talking to children of 8 or 10 about one of La Fontaine's
fables. The fable was turned over and discussed from every point of
view: linguistic, historical; as poetry, as wit and humor; as a national
classic; and all was expressed in a manner and in language that chil-
dren could understand and enjoy. These urchins were getting their
first glimpse into the art of writing. You may call it a glimpse into
literature and scholarship if you prefer."

One would have to go far to find boys and girls of twice this
age receiving this splendid type of instruction in America. One
instance where the modern schools in this country fall down, says
Mr. Chapman, is in their departure from the literary tradition estab-
lished by the old school readers. Through these readers, filled with
well-chosen passages from the classics, the stripling of a former day was stimulated by the influence of great thought and speech. The leading emphasis was placed upon the study of English. Mr. Chapman points to Hamlin Garland's epic of the pioneer West, *A Son of the Middle Border*, in which there is paid a lofty tribute to the literary service performed by these old school readers. "What was the secret of these old readers?" asks Mr. Chapman. "They were edited by men who had love and reverence for the great books of humanity, both the ancient and the modern classics. The men were not themselves sages, but rather the vessels of a sacred tradition. . . ."

One should not forget that the great books of humanity were the only school that many of the world's greatest men ever attended. The supreme importance of literature is shown by the fact that, while there can be no true education without a knowledge of literature, a knowledge of literature often serves as a fine, full education within itself. He who reads widely and wisely cannot fail to educate himself. He reaches the heart of culture. Of the things to be found in books there is no end; literature reveals life in all its phases. If we give more attention to the great books of humanity, we shall have more true education. We shall have men and women who are really fitted for the great adventure of life.

**LACK OF ART IN THE MOVIES**

Among the most remarkable of the mechanical achievements of our age is the motion picture. It is without doubt the most colorful and marvelous and, in a sense, realistic invention through which man has transcended the material limitations of Nature. To be able to give us these lifelike moving figures on the screen—this is indeed a triumph of science. But of art? That is a different matter. The realism of the movies is merely mechanical. You see real people, moving amid real objects—and that is all. Even the scenery is mostly imitation. Here is a great invention, a stupendous mechanical creation, yet it has become symbolic of the lowest level of mentality. The movies, as everyone knows, pander to the very crudest passions and most banal sentimentalities of the crowd. Cheap and vulgar taste is what one invariably expects to observe on the screen. Many of the most popular cinema spectacles are indeed the apotheosis of wild, impossible, blood-curdling melodrama; or of the most inane and inept variety of sob stuff. I have seen fairly good pictures, that sinned against art and life less conspicuously than the average; but I have yet to see a really great motion picture. Charlie Chaplin, in some of his inimitable pictures, has come the nearest to greatness. As for scenery and stage-setting, these have been developed to a very high degree. There have been some really magnificent productions, so far as scenic equipment and mere theatrical effects go. In acting there is less room for praise.

But the vital defect of the movies is that they lack art. They tell no really great stories. There is, in this respect, hardly any distinction among pictures. There are not, as in literature, degrees from
worst to best. There is no best. Almost without exception, the movie world suffers from an utter degradation of taste, an absolute absence of artistic standards. The appeal is frankly to the most undiscriminating public. What happens as a rule is that those popular brands of fiction that are not worth the paper they are printed on are at once caught up by the movies and, added to the deluge of worthless printed matter, there is this second deluge, so that the popular mind is completely engulfed by mediocrity gilded with sensationalism. The movies, for the most part, merely reflect what is worst in the current "literature" of the day. Stories specially written for the screen are worse, if possible, than these adaptations of the trashy tales that are for the moment in the general eye. One need not deny the possibility of a real artistic development through the scenario; but it must be admitted sadly that such an art does not seem to be developing very rapidly. Of course, the movies do not have to depend upon any art of their own. If they can't be creative, they can at least copy intelligently, they can adapt the best in literature to the purposes of the screen. The great novelists have left an endless variety of material that the movies could take for their own. This source has been touched surprisingly little; the "best sellers" of the day are usually preferred. In view of what the movies have done when they have appropriated the great masters of literature, we can be thankful they have spared these masters a more extensive distortion. A masterpiece of fiction, transferred to the screen, appears in the guise of the most glaring melodrama. All the art is taken out, sensationalism and sentimentality put in its place. A brave, truthful, fateful rendering of life seems to be impossible on the screen. A really fine, tragic drama, in its original literary form, becomes a shoddy, formless thing, a very mockery, when placed upon the screen. The most commonplace scenario writer and the most illiterate director, with their eyes on the tear-wringing and heart-thumping close-up, feel qualified to slash recklessly the work of Dickens or Balzac or Hugo and to patch up the gaps with their own gaudy, meretricious designs. Truly, the movies have far to go. Even when they develop artistic purpose, when they really try to tell a great story, there is the problem of effective realistic means to impress their audience profoundly. They are denied the magic of words, the vivid instrument of language, with which to communicate the tragic and comic aspects of life. What is a play of Shakespeare's without the passion and poetry, the rich and varied imagery, and the consummate careful effects of Shakespeare's language? What would a story by Dickens be without the picturesque charm, the imaginative intensity, of Dickens' style? The spoken drama has this support of language, it can invest itself with a true sense of life through this magic of words. The screen cannot. It must depend solely upon gesture, facial expression, stage-settings and the most effective arrangement of incident. Out of these it must develop a great artistic medium. Possibly it will evolve a new medium, from which it can derive some of the strength and color that the artist gets from the magic of words. But before anything else, the screen must have artistic purpose; it must set itself to reflect life truthfully and powerfully, to tell a great story.
LOVELESS FICTION

ONE can surely be excused for longing, now and then, to strike a trail of fiction that is far away from the course of true love; in which the several and not inconsiderable interests of life that are outside of and not specially dependent upon the sex interest are brought candidly to the fore; and in which we observe that the winning of a woman is not the only pursuit in which man is accustomed to engage. I, for one, could sympathize with Bernard Shaw's protest, in a good Shawian preface of some years ago, against the dominant, exclusive and all-absorbing sex interest in fiction. Scornfully he pointed out the absurdity of a sociological tale of Utopia (Looking Backward by the almost forgotten Bellamy) in which the hero turned aside from his investigations, and from listening to long expositions of economics, to beseech, lover-like, that the heroine don the fluffy skirts of the capitalistic era. And too, declared G. B. S., it was not a little curious to see H. G. Wells, in one of his early semi-scientific romances, representing the hero as working to save the earth from destruction by the invading hordes from another planet—all for the sake of one sweet girl graduate. It is a relief, I say, to get away occasionally from the sighs and suspenses, and the old, old stuff of courtship. We should have greater art if writers were free from the unreasonable tyranny of the sex theme.

It is worth noting that the two really powerful works of fiction that came out of the American Civil War are absolutely devoid of love interest. They are Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage and Ambrose Bierce's Tales of Soldiers and Civilians. These are tales to read twice and again; tales in which war is shown in vast and in little, episodically and universally, with a sense of immense and striking fate that (particularly in the case of Crane) is relieved by a sense of humor shot through with irony. The Red Badge of Courage is one of the finest studies in psychology that I know of, and it certainly stands out among the few lonely peaks of achievement in American fiction; it is a great, true war story, although Crane had never seen a battle when he wrote it; and Crane, too, was so little bothered by the tricks of his trade that he left his characters nameless, they being not the less real for the omission of such identification marks. Both Crane and Bierce show the futility, the unpatriotic actualities of war, and eke of man, proud man: Crane, I believe, more subtly and humorously, with a nicer regard for all the elements; and Bierce more sharply, with scarcely a note of humor or any kind of relief, with forthright, terrible gestures. Yet the two men remain to this day unappreciated save by a few who are not content to be guided in their reading simply by popular press notices: and who can assimilate a strong tale that gives no hostages to happiness, sentimentality and love. The work of Crane, and of Bierce, is unpleasant reading for the general. Whether it is their lack of love interest, or their indifference on the whole to the happy ending, they contain the stuff that frightens away those readers who cannot bear any sort of tragedy greater than that involved in the murder of time. Crane was, for his day at least, singularly unromantic. He could not
bring himself to round out a tale with a superfluous and banal kiss. Once he talked of writing a play in collaboration with Clyde Fitch—and Fitch, the conventional although clever dramatist, would make the plot revolve around the familiar way of a man with a maid. Crane, wholly the artist, insisted that the story did not call for love, that it offered absolutely no reason for this tender-heart stuff. Oh! he was quite naive, that is to say quite the artist, was Crane; if a story wasn't about love, if it was decidedly about something else than love, why drag love into it by daintily slipped heels?

Besides Crane and Bierce, many other writers have turned to the Civil War for the material of fiction, and generally of the sentimental-romantic pattern. For many years the war dominated American popular fiction—the bookstalls are still full of these old tales—and on what a dreary, dead level they are. There is almost nothing of the real war, nothing at all of man, the clear, recognizable, authentic figure in a drama, and very much of love whose course invariably runs crooked until the last smooth chapter. The plot seldom varies: a man of the North meets and loves a maid of the South, or vice versa, and through vicissitudes that are not quite so original that they astonish one, love finally conquers patriotism and prejudice—the Blue and the Gray unite in two hearts that beat as one. The drama of a divided nation, and the greater study of human nature, is thrust into a trifling and scarcely perceptible position while trite, unconvincing, individual romance holds the center of the stage. The human records of the Civil War, unfortunately, are to be found chiefly in the reminiscences of military leaders who knew better how to fight than how to write: and these books today have a thick coating of dust and are read by none.

The charge that is often brought against Stevenson—that he could not portray a passable heroine—has never lowered R. L. S. in my eyes. The charge is true enough. And doubtless Stevenson realized his weakness, as he played down the interest of women in his tales. And for that I am rather grateful to him. Do we not have a plenty of heroines, and to spare, in our fiction? Can we not find place for a little art now and then that has the sexless note, that has, if not the note of great character, at least the note of adventure in its own right and of romance that is not simply the rustle of skirts? How delightful it is to plunge into the excitements of Treasure Island! We revel in the taste of rum, the fatal clinking of old coins of all lands, collected by the bold industry of pirates and hidden on that island out of the track of honest ships. What though the adventure be, so to say, obvious? 'Tis a thumping tale, well told: piracy and adventure and buried treasure gathered up into a definite tale by the hand of a master craftsman. And lovely woman is left entirely out of it! We feel a fast pulse, but it is quickened by oaths and shots and quite rough masculine intrigues, and not by the plea of a lover for his lady's favor. And we prefer Long John Silver to any pretty, putty heroine whom Stevenson might have fashioned. Love songs are delightful, with an appeal that needs not to be defended nor too repeatedly urged. But so too can we thrill to that eerie, infamous refrain:

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"
THE HERD

ONE can hardly deny that the mass of human beings does indeed resemble a herd, not simply in the mechanics of social life, but in its reaction to standardized, automatic thoughts and impulses. We are bound to agree that men and women are not cattle, but we are equally compelled to admit that they act and think like cattle all too frequently. Nobody quarrels with people for living and working together; and no one can gainsay the evils and follies that arise out of blind mass thinking and the surrender to mass emotions. Of course the herd is misled—the herdlike quality of men is put to bad use by shrewd persons and minorities; the herd is unenlightened, untrained in the business of free thinking—and obviously it is this lack of enlightenment, of the clarity and independence of individual thought, that makes it a herd. One may feel pity or contempt for the herd, and it is quite natural that one should be moved by both of these feelings on occasions: the fact that one condemns does not mean that one is without sympathy. In fact, men of intelligence wish the herd to be emancipated from its mental servility. They wish it quite selfishly, as the herd is plainly a menace to the life of freedom and culture. The herd stamps upon the individual. Its stupid fist is destructive of fine, wise values. Whether the human race will ever cease to be a herd is a question that may give one pause. Our vision is not godlike, and prophecy ever mocks the bold words of certitude that are uttered by the prophet. Yet there can be no two opinions of the importance of developing individuals—and every man who can be brought out of the herd, who can be persuaded to use his own mind and develop his own powers, represents a civilized gain. We don't use the word "herd" as a joke or an unkind cut or a mere word-play. We use it to point out a condition that is bad and—that must be hit at, whether with great or small results, by all thinking men and women. It is a true word, an exact word, a useful word: then why not use it? The harm is not in the word, but in the condition that the word describes.

THE BEST ROAD TO EDUCATION

WHAT is the best way to get an education? Not to pile up information, to memorize certain data, to be able to repeat what someone tells one—but to really educate oneself. The reader knows what my own answer will be. As a bookman—not only a producer but a reader and intense lover of books—I say: Read good books and you will not fail to imbibe the true stuff of wisdom; your interests, your receptivity, your quality of appreciation, your whole outlook will be enriched, multiplied, broadened; you will think, grow, reach out for greater things, become a different man or woman. Yet, if it is I who say it, there are others who confirm it; and indeed no intelligent person has ever disputed it. Any man who knows true education, and who desires faithfully to promote it, puts first of all the counsel to get the habit of good reading.
The other day Herbert S. Hadley, chancellor of Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., addressed the student body; and I could not put the case for literary self-education more strongly than did Mr. Hadley. He said: “If you could get but one result out of your university course I would rather you would get a love for and a habit of reading good books than any other. With such a feeling and habit you will become educated and cultured men and women, and without them there is little if any chance of your doing so.” These are words of deep meaning, when you reflect that here are young men and women with all the opportunities of a great modern university at their command, right in the midst of scholarship abundantly equipped and organized with every facility of learning and technique, ample courses of instruction before them and highly trained professors ready to serve them—and these students are told in plain, unqualified language that the best single thing they can get in this big little world of learning is “a love for and a habit of reading good books.” And the encouraging reflection that follows is that anyone with a sufficient desire, whether in college or out, can be self-educated on these terms. Anyone can read good books—not fifteen minutes a day, not according to stiff and lifeless courses of reading that turn into a job what should be a joy, not through a lot of extracts and pages torn willy-nilly from the works of the masters, not with any sterile motive of accumulating “learned lumber”; but by following the pleasant stimulating ways of literature as the spirit impels you, reading gladly and eagerly, and reading what you will, as you will, so it be the good, sound product of artists and thinkers.

It is a fallacy all too widely accepted that one can be educated without changing one’s personality, one’s mind, one’s attitude toward life; that a man can go through an educational mill, acting as a kind of human fly-paper to facts and systems and all the material of text-books, and emerge from the process with the inner, essential man unchanged, and yet be educated. You will indeed observe a great many persons who have sped or plodded through college, shoveling great loads of knowledge into their heads, showing the proper grades and diplomas and various outward signs of culture; yet they have no true culture, no real education, no genuine marks of superiority to the herd—the pseudo-cultured or the uncultured herd. One man may know more than another in the sense of being able to reel off lessons learned parrot-wise, but not really learned in the sense of being made a vital part of himself; another man, apparently knowing less, but thinking more, standing out as more of an individual, with an alert, lively, personal attitude toward things, will be recognized as the more soundly, really educated of the two. A man may go to school and miss getting an education; and fifteen-minutes-a-day and five-foot-shelves and short-order sandwich-style culture will not by any chance lead him to the heights or into the broad ways of intelligent, aspiring, fully realized life; but one who reads good books, who associates with greatness, cannot possibly fail to become an educated person. I know that many a college professor has a sense of futility as he sees the hundreds of young men and women leaving the classic, scholarly shades with a fly-paper “culture,” stuck o’er with formulas, texts and diplomas; persons who go out to mingle with the herd, as good members of the herd, echoing thoughtlessly the
beliefs of the herd, prey to every stupid influence of life. On the other hand, it is a pleasure of the profoundest kind to me when I reflect that no reader of good books will be left in the rut. There is no "royal road" to learning: but the best, the surest, and the pleasantest way to get an education is to read good books.

A NOTE ON "RADICAL"

PEOPLE use words carelessly. I have realized this more clearly since carefully considering the word "toleration." "Radical," for example, is a word that is misused by nearly everyone. People use it in the sense of freakish, stubborn, extreme, etc. It is, in the general view, a very bad thing to say about a man. The truth is that the word is complimentary in its correct sense. A radical is one who puts his mind to the fundamentals of any problem of life. He is a man who tries to get down to first principles, and to cause and effect. The word does not, properly speaking, have a political use only: it may apply to any field of thought. Voltaire was radical in that he struck at the very heart of superstition and intolerance. He didn't just hit lightly or on the surface. A fanatic is the opposite of a true radical. The fanatic is superficial: he has the partial, shallow view: if he were at all profound, he could not possibly be a fanatic.

FACTS

WE can't know the truth. "Truth," says Bertrand Russell (and hundred wise men have said it in their fashion), "is for the gods." But we can be truthful. We can investigate. We can have respect for evidence. We can read, as Bacon long ago advised his fellows, "not to believe or contradict, but to weigh and consider." Above all, we can keep open minds. We can be ready for any bit of truth that comes our way. We can recognize a fact, and try to relate ourselves to it and make sensible use of it, instead of quarreling with it and getting ourselves into a bad temper because life has refused to conform entirely to our little theory. We can shout until we are black in the face, and kick until we wear out our shoe leather, but we can't destroy a fact. And why should we look upon a fact as upon an enemy? We get our hurts when we refuse to adjust ourselves to facts.

A RETURN TO THE DARK AGES

HERE are men, outside of lunatic asylums, who would confine education in a vicious circle by making the ignorant the judges of what should be taught. They would have truth decided by a vote. A bare majority of one would be more significant, in the eyes of a demented Demos, than all the researches of the scientists; the ballots of morons more important than the brains of thinkers. According to this silly and contemptible notion of democracy, that legislation is right and proper in the sphere of
ideas, the state would outlaw the teaching of evolution and damn it as heresy and falsehood by a vote of narrow-minded, ignorant legislators; for example, the vote of 71 to 5 which, in the lower house of the Tennessee legislature, recorded a "democratic" hostility to evolution. A Columbia (Tenn.) minister, Rev. Richard L. Owenby, sharply commented on this "monkeyish" action of the Tennessee statesmen; and the latter proceeded to resolve that Rev. Owenby was "unfair, un-Christian-like, and unpatriotic." Better still, the statesmen embodied their conception of democracy in the statement that "the members of this body were not elected by a few fanatical scientists of this state, but by the great mass of the people who believe in the teachings of the Holy Writ, and who believe that the schools of this state would weaken the faith of the next generation in the said Holy Writ."

The exemplars of democracy in the neighboring state of North Carolina also looked upon the heresy of evolution and found it evil; and Charles L. Snider (Denton, N. C.) wrote for the Greensboro Daily News a letter purporting to be from the pen of Rev. Arthur Doxy, in which it was contended that for the good of the "peepul" other heresies of modernism should be placed under the ban: for example, "the doctrine that the earth is round, and rotates, and revolves around the sun," and "the doctrine that the earth was in the process of making longer than six days, each of twenty-four hours." The teaching of modern geography, insists the Rev. Doxy, is plainly pernicious and a device of the devil: we must return to the geography and the cosmology of Moses. It is also proved, in this remarkable letter, that the taking of interest on money is unscriptural and the laws which permit it signify a vicious departure from the ways of God. The statesmen are also reminded that, if the Bible is to be supreme and a complete, bold, scriptural position taken against the sins of education, then the belief in witchcraft and in devil-possession must be revived and enforced by the law of the land. "The state must be made safe for orthodoxy," declared the Rev. Arthur Doxy. Its school books must be rewritten upon the infallible basis of biblical authority. There must be no more doubting that Moses wrote the account of his own funeral, or that Joshua stopped the sun. The professors of science must be driven out, and their laboratories blown to atoms." The Rev. Doxy cries out that the motto of all good men and true, swiftly to be realized in the laws of modern democracy, is "To hell with heresy!"

A MODERN VIEW OF SOCRATES

H, these disrespectful moderns! Here's one who seems to entertain the notion that listening with old Socrates was rather a bore or that our record of the philosophic dialogues is lacking in realism. This fellow hints—just hints, mind you—that Socrates, that sly old leading man, got surprisingly ready and obliging answers from the group of bright young thinkers that surrounded him. Q. and A. always fit perfectly in a continuous, smooth progression. You can see that Socrates is the master of
ceremonies, with none to dispute him very pressingly. There is no heckling. Nobody has the temerity to sock one at old Socrates, as if to say, "There now! Answer that one!" Socrates occasionally gets someone else in a corner and has him fighting for air—but the sage himself never pants nor wobbles nor rubs his hand in perplexity across his perspiring forehead. One thing leads on to another, and Socrates not only does the leading but the junior partner in the dialogue always seems to have a hunch as to the direction in which the old philosopher desires to lead—generally speaking, at least. Anyway, the answer always points to a thought as unerringly as a dog to a bird. Then Socrates aims, shoots, and another idea, the victim of predatory logic, is socked into the archives. When Socrates says, "Is it thus and so?" the answer is pat, "It is thus and so." The sole, obvious, irrefutable answer to a question about virtue is the very answer that Socrates is coyly and expertly angling for. The skeptic who thus winks at the immortal dialogues perhaps believes that a little more heat, an occasional loud, insistent tone, a jangle of cross-purposes and contrary principles, would represent a more realistic atmosphere. Apparently it is his notion that a young man of Athens in Socrates' day, like any young man of our day, had a greater love of argument and a greater regard for his own opinion than are reflected in the well-arranged edition of Plato. Yet this is not necessarily true. Those Athenians were doubtless earnest and high-minded, but not wildly o'er-wrought, in their search for truth. They were a calm-thinking race, we know, and had not the fanaticism of the latter day Christian and the "educators." They had the advantage, too, of being in the company of Socrates, where the role of listener was more attractive, and safer, than the role of talker. We cannot properly judge the dialogues unless we remember that Socrates was an extraordinary man. If he had not "the eye like Jove to threaten or command," he had the influence of the great thinker, calm and wise and benignant and perfectly poised and with more or less reputation in Athens and its classic environs. If we had a Socrates today, to gather the earnest thinkers around him, perhaps we should have the spectacle of honest, careful, good-tempered inquiry—of willing minds led in the direction of truth—instead of cantankerous disputes that get nowhere and are merely the repetition of unshakable opinions absorbed sponge-like in school and church, the uninspired marketplace and the political bawling.

EDITORS AND CULTURE IN KANSAS CITY

HE editors of Missouri were meeting in Kansas City, leaving the rest of the state in total darkness while the assembled journalistic lights dazzled the metropolis that sprawls out over the hills of northwest Missouri and its neighboring commonwealth of Kansas. As the largest small town in the state, Kansas City is just the place for a rendezvous of the intellectual leaders of the little old home towns. They can enjoy the noise and temptations of the city without missing the atmosphere that is reflected in the personal items of the various Bazoos and Boomers that keep Missouri
in the forefront of progress and that are now striving heroically to lift the state out of the mud. Kansas City has the village spirit, The Star is its home paper (hated but esteemed), and its pride is a prodigious, swollen compound of all the local prides of the Missouri and Kansas towns that dispatch soldiers of fortune to Main Street by way of the Union Station. Kansas City is “home” to these editors, three-fourths of whom barely missed setting up their type-cases at the mouth of the Kaw and becoming Bill Nelsons instead of lesser township scribes and prophets. When they meet—these mistaken ones—on the scene of their former possible but unrealized glory: they compare regrets, but pride is a stronger note than regret: they are thrilled by what might have been, and there is a distinction in one’s having passed up Kansas City to flourish the scissors and pastebrush in Sedalia.

They are philosophic—the leanest and hungriest country editor is an optimistic philosopher, from private conviction, patriotism and purely business motives. Schopenhauer would have been an ill success as editor of the Sedalia Basoo. The man for the job is Editor Goodwin (an ideal name for the necessarily cheerful and vociferous country editor)—one of those editors, by the way, who didn’t hang up his coat and hunt for subscriptions in Kansas City. This editor, who is reported as “wearing the same stiff, gray plug hat that he has been wearing to conventions for years,” handed out to his brethren of the press galleys cards which bore (besides the Basoo imprint) the following glad “message”: “I am an old man and have had many troubles, but the most of them never happened.” One of his troubles that never happened was that of running a big newspaper plant in Kansas City. With this kind of brotherly, beaming, boosting optimism, no man need fail (relatively speaking) as a country editor. He can always maintain a bold, hearty front for the good of the town, never a strain of pessimism appearing in his columns to drive away subscribers and advertisers. The country editor of the genuine, good, glad type lives in the best town in the best county in the world. A block of paving, a newly painted fence, a new awning for the corner drug store, a good rain (one of the million-dollar kind)—and especially a new subscriber—each in its turn persuades the editor continually and anew that all’s as right as right can be. True to their optimistic calling, the editors assembled in Kansas City, proclaimed as one man that the grand old state of Missouri is dizzy with prosperity—and, I suspect, that the Republican editors were more vociferous in the cry than the Democrat editors. There is nothing but good in sight—the future belongs to Christian Science and a free press that owes allegiance to no one but the advertiser.

The impression of prosperity was doubtless enhanced by the “spread” at the Muehlebach given to the fraternity by The Star—a remarkable affair, by The Star’s own account; it was, says The Star, with a nice and modest choice of language, “not without its features.” The leading features were “an illuminated replica of the Goddess of Liberty; then, an American eagle, done in ice, followed by a miniature replica of The Star building, radio towers and all.” The Goddess looked every inch a lady, the eagle shivered and the radio towers filled the beholders with pride. Those radio towers are the sentimental, loquacious pride of every man, woman and child in Kansas City. They are at least the
grandest and most gigantic to be seen west of the Mississippi and perhaps in the whole country—not having listened closely to the panegyrics, I am uncertain on this point. I know that Kansas Citians, one and all, are personally and particularly proud of The Star: and though many of them hate it and oppose it in city politics and love to hear Senator Jim Reed denounce it, they will tell you that it's the greatest newspaper in the world.

All in all, and generally speaking, there is nothing that quite equals the pride of the Missouri and Kansas villagers in their adopted bigger village of Kansas City. They are proud even of the vacant lots that are scattered all over the city—these forlorn, weedy expanses indicate that the city has plenty of room to grow and that it can comfortably hold that million population which is due to arrive within ten years. There are Kansas Citians who are proud of their bootleggers and of the case with which the wayfaring man can get—"anything you want." Of course, the Missouri editors, whose profession is to be proud of all things that impinge directly and favorably upon their trade area, have the same eager and egotistic affection for Kansas City as for their own home towns. After all, it is their city and their state—and The Star, too, is their paper, especially when they reflect upon the frequency with which they are mentioned in that column of smartly topical press clippings, the Missouri Notes. These editors love The Star because it appreciates, and frequently calls attention to, the importance of the little old home paper. There is no false, uppity, citified pridefulness about The Star. It is not too much puffed up about its radio towers and its big presses and linotypes and its monthly advertising figures—figures that arouse unimaginable feelings of envy in those editors who failed by a hairline rule to stake the mighty Nelson's journalistic claim. No—The Star feels that it is only a bigger little home paper and it sensibly and generously lifts all the home papers to the virtue and glory of its own position.

There is nothing that tickles the country editor more than to feel down to his very toes the peculiar weight and dignity of his trade—and in this, let us fairly observe, he differs nowise from the rest of his fellows in other branches of vainglorious sweating and striding. But we consider him for the nonce as an isolated example. He, not another, is before us. We see him out of his restricted, depressing environment, away from the smell of printers' ink and paste, far from the eyes of the advertisers, the country politicians and the local ministerial bund. He mingles with other editors who have escaped temporarily from the interests, inhibitions and intimidations of their bailiwick: and his thoughts blend in the vast emotion of relief and pride that thrills this gathering of galley-slaves who, with The Star rubbing the Aladdin's lamp of hospitality, are conducted into a glittering world of editorial omniscience and omnipotence. The editor, in his own home town, is not the supreme local arbiter, the strong, deft, undisputed molder of opinion, that he would like to be: he is forced to trim his own sails carefully to various breezes, and even the jolly old village character who sweeps the stray type and single wrappers out of his sanctum disagrees with him on every vital issue. He is too often made to feel that he is an eleemosynary object, or at best only a lowly trumpeter of the
Town's vanity. His chief art, the very life of his trade, is to please, flatter and cajole the community. So with other fettered and rueful knights of the pen he is glad to move for a day or two in a larger and freer world, where there is but a single, robust, cheerful opinion as to the prestige and significance of the country editor. He expands visibly as he listens to a tribute, by a big city editor, to the small town editor and The Old Home Paper. Oh, yes, it is true that the home paper faithfully chronicles every interest and incident of life from the cradle to the grave; it is true that it has nothing but good to speak of the town and its people (even when it would prefer to speak an ill truth in season); that it follows the sons and daughters of the community out into the world, records the local pride in their triumphs and draws a veil over their misdeeds and misfortunes; that the home paper, the Great Recorder, the preserver of the common annals, attains the dignity of history and art by its constant hold upon the "two great facts of man's existence—birth and death"; it is true that it enters the home, week after week, an unostentatious, friendly visitor—often a charitable visitor, coming long after the subscription has run out. All this, and more, the country editor willingly hears—he believes it, and on the morrow morn he wakes in the little old home town, goes with something of a strut to his office, and, looking over the latest list of "stops" and noting that on this day of going to press Jones has not brought in the copy for his ad, he is "a sadder and wiser man." Yet he must be an optimist. Life is real and earnest. He reaches for the pastebrush—doesn't find it. Scissors missing, too. Then, struck by an absent-minded inspiration, he seizes his pencil and writes the leading editorial of the week: "Now is the time to subscribe."

TOLERATION FOR IDEAS

It's amazing how ubiquitous, how unescapable, is that intolerance which seems to be an ever-present manifestation of the human mind. Consider the Esperantists, for example. I get the strangest letters pleading, protesting and exhorting me to beware of the international language scheme known as Ido. Ido is rank heresy in the eyes of Esperantists. It should be put down. They don't want it to have even the slightest hearing. They declare it is a plot of the interests that wish to kill off the international language movement, and who, by throwing into the breach a number of new languages, simply confuse the issue and make it impossible for the pure, original reform of Esperanto to score the triumph it deserves. These promoters of an international language are as intolerant on this linguistic issue as any champion of creed or party is on issues of religion or politics. You'd think such a question as Esperanto versus Ido could be talked out in a fair, calm, easy spirit.

One can't see how the emotions can be so intensely wrought upon by that sort of thing. But the old human mind has a little set of tricks that it always repeats, no matter what the new setting of issues. The most deep-seated and almost invariable characteristic of all is intolerance. A new movement comes along, proclaiming the most idealistic
intentions, making large gestures of freedom, announcing its mission of liberating and dignifying the human personality, saving mankind in the latest, most up-to-date fashion. And what is the first thing noticeable about such a movement? Why, the very first thing it does is to repeat the old, old trick of intolerance. The thoroughly modern apostle of liberty (as he represents himself to be and no doubt imagines himself to be) displays obvious points of similarity with the witch-burners of several centuries ago. The phrases of freedom are employed to enforce a mental hardness, to convert men by sheer force of dogmatism. Yes, it’s queer and “human, all too human”—but no matter how remote or recondite the issue, no matter how abstract, how seemingly removed from the sphere of the emotions, still it arouses the party spirit in its worst phases, and we hear the cry of “Heretic!” from another and unexpected quarter. Perhaps we have advanced a little in some respects since Voltaire wrote his Toleration. It is not so much the custom to burn people for a difference of opinion. A man can have an idea and possibly escape hanging for it. Yet are we very much more tolerant than people were when Voltaire wrote his masterly treatise on Toleration? I see little evidence of improvement. There is a plenty of intolerance to be seen on every hand. We have, as I say, perhaps improved a little—a very little. We have reached the point where we can tolerate those who have ideas similar to our own. Now we must go a step farther and learn to tolerate those who have different ideas.

CULTURE IN THESE STATES

ON July 4 the United States celebrates its birthday as a nation. It has a good, discreet, weighty age. It is an age at which one expects sensible, well-regulated conduct. Youth can no longer serve as an excuse for a heedless manner of living. Nation or individual, at this period of middle life, is not judged more or less easily by its promise, but strictly by the failure or the fulfillment of this promise. The brighter the promise, the greater the fulfillment that we expect. There can be no two ways of viewing the early promise of this country. It started out with the most brilliant and far-reaching prospects. It had a whole new continent in which to make good. It began with the highest ideals of liberty, order and progress. It was free from the handicaps of old traditions. Older nations could say, as older people always do, “You have a better chance than we had.” Bright as was the star of the young nation, it did not escape the reckless experiences of youth. It sowed an appalling crop of wild oats. Divided against itself, it lived a dual, dissipated life that almost ruined and did fearfully weaken it by a most severe blood-letting. After this final orgy, the nation sobered up for a while and buckled down to hard work. Even then, it displayed more energy than thoughtfulness. Its mighty exertions were not in the least planful. It lived hastily and heedlessly in the moment, with little or no thought of the future. With infinite natural resources at its command, it squandered these resources recklessly, exhausting them in riotous living or flinging them into the laps of adventurers whom, because they shared its prodigal ways,
the nation regarded mistakenly as its friends. So badly did it manage its affairs, that when it arrived at that age of sober reckoning which overtakes all that is earthly, the nation found almost its entire patrimony in unfriendly hands, tightly grasping the invaluable resources of the continent that had held forth such boundless possibilities. The nation, having reached the end of its youthful rope, was forced to go to work for a living, to dig and sweat for those to whom it had surrendered its opportunities. It had dreamed, in the spacious, easy-going days of youth, when dreams do not exact immediate realization, of a free, glorious life. It did indeed, as youth so often does, set no less than perfection for its goal. Now it gave up its grand dreams and tried to reconcile itself to a sordid, hand-to-mouth existence.

Probably because it now had to keep its nose to the grindstone in payment for the excesses of its youth, it did not learn how better to manage its affairs. It saw, with little protest, its resources being more and more closely withheld from it. Worse still, it permitted those who had imposed upon its youth and defrauded it, to indicate its manner of living and even its mode of thinking. Its possessions gone, it saw its liberties follow. It permitted itself to be drawn into a quarrel that it did not understand, in order that the false friends of its youth, who had betrayed it, might more securely fasten their hold upon it. Naturally, under such circumstances, it did not grow in culture. When it gave up its liberty of thought, it shut the door in the face of culture. Now, after the day's uninspiring toil, it is too tired to think and prefers to spend its evenings at the movies. It still has its childish love of sensation and sentimentality. Its favorite reading is the daily newspaper and the novels of Harold Bell Wright. It has no real standards of life, but is rather stupidly dominated by its early prejudices. It foolishly exalts its own ignorance and actually prides itself upon its lack of culture. Far from admitting its follies, it clings to the ridiculous boast that it is superior to all other nations. It keeps up the pitiable pretense that it is still a young, free, idealistic nation. Yet we observe that it is told what to drink, what to read, what to think, what to speak, and, more and more, what to do in all the circumstances of life. It has failed to achieve those rewards of a successful age—self-respect and independence. Its masters, who profited by its irresponsible youth, still treat it as an irresponsible youth. It does not appear to resent this degrading control, which is rightly regarded as a wretched substitute for self-control. It sneaks off to jazz parties and, under the influence of corn whiskey, fatuously imagines that it is having a fine, free time. It echoes the editorials in the daily newspapers, and thinks that it thinks. It reads silly love stories, condemns all reality, and deludes itself into the belief that it has moral standards. It is infinitely credulous, too, and will believe anything that it is told—excepting, of course, the truth. It is a hard worker, prides itself upon its productive ability, yet does not seem to reflect how little of its own production it enjoys. Even its industry is largely futile. Consider the appalling number of trivial objects that fill the marketplace; and, proof of proofs of triviality, observe the utterly incon-
sequential productions of paper and ink that fill the brightly placed book stalls.

Consider how the nation spends its time. This is the real test of character. Its idea of art is the cinema; its idea of pleasure, an ice cream social or a jazz party—the extremes of dullness and recklessness; its idea of labor, to produce without regard to use or enjoyment; its idea of the intellectual life, to disapprove generally of the intellectual life. To be more definite, what are its intellectual and artistic standards, in terms of living examples? Its favorite poet is Eddie Guest; its favorite philosopher is Dr. Frank Crane; its favorite novelist is Harold Bell Wright; its favorite singer is Al Jolson; its favorite artist is Bud Fisher; its favorite orator is William Jennings Bryan (who is also its favorite “scientist”); its favorite statesman—who is he? Harding, McAdoo, Ford, Underwood, Roosevelt Junior, “Al” Smith or Wilson? The list becomes ludicrous. To continue it would be an indecent exposure.

Am I too critical? Does the United States exhibit any of the indications of good sense, discretion and taste that one should expect in a nation that has just celebrated its hundred-and-fiftieth (or thereabouts) birthday? Of course it is not too late to mend. It’s Never Too Late to Mend, as Charles Reade would say. The nation is still in pretty good shape physically, even though it has severely abused its Constitution; I believe it has a good mind, if it will only use it; it is still young enough to have much of life before it and not too old, I hope, to be capable of change. There is a gleam of hope. The nation has begun lately to glance at the classics. It has shown an interest in Socrates and Shakespeare that prompts one to suspend final judgment. A nation that reveals even the faintest sensitiveness to art, that reaches out ever so hesitatingly toward culture, cannot be given up as wholly lost. All the United States needs is light and leading. With these, it can repair the mistakes of its youth, throw off the slothfulness of its middle age and devote the long years ahead of it to a life of freedom and beauty. A hundred and fifty years is not so old. The world is considerably older.

AMERICAN BIGOTRY

It is true, however much we hate to admit it, that we Americans are intolerant. We hate people who do not agree with us. We cannot forgive a man who happens to hold opinions that run counter to our own. We go out only to those who take their ideas from the same source, who fit into conventionalized patterns. When a neighbor, or an editor, or a public speaker, or anyone, for that matter, gives expression to views that are not our own, we grow angry at the individual and make faces at his thoughts. We have not learned the art of tolerance. We are like the people who lived in the Middle Ages—only worse, because there are more of us. We do not burn people for their honest opinions, but we often feel that we would like to. We have not grasped that most delightful and valuable attitude of looking at ideas disinterestedly, de-
tachedly. We are not curious about viewpoints. We like to know that the other man has our slant on things even before we open up on a subject. All of which proves that intellectually we are still children. Let us try to be tolerant. Let us seek for the truth, always the truth, never anything but the truth. And if, during the search, we find that the ideas we have grown to revere and consider sacred are all wrong, let’s put them aside calmly like sane thinking people, instead of growing mad and throwing mud.

TWO NOTES

It is impossible for a man to be lonely in the midst of good books. A library offers you the companionship of the best thinkers and artists of the ages. Any company you choose, is at hand for you to enjoy. The poet will sing for you; the dramatist will show you the great emotions of humanity; the philosopher will lead you into new and interesting fields of thought. A book, too, does not impose itself upon one. There is no compulsion to read it. If you don’t like it, you can throw it aside—and there is another book handy which will interest you. People may bore one. Books do not. Only an imbecile would afflict himself with the reading of a dull and worthless book.

* * *

In Lincoln’s day the Know-Nothings movement became menacing for a while. This organization was the forerunner of our Ku Klux Klan, functioning by prejudice, bigotry and hatred in the name of “100 percent Americanism.” Lincoln denounced this movement as he would denounce the Klan today, were he alive. Here is what Lincoln wrote:

“Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that all men are created equal. We now practically read it ‘all men are created equal, except Negroes.’ When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read, ‘All men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics.’ When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.”

The next time you hear a Kluxer palaver about the “Nordics” and the white, native-born Protestants, show him what Lincoln said and watch him squirm.

THE LETTERS OF THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

A LETTER from Smith—Ah, the paper-knife: the easy chair: the pipe well-lit, and a glass of grape juice at my elbow: but if the tax collector or the paper salesman or the young poet with a new book of ancient, mildewed verse should call, remember that I’m not “in.” Very personal pages written in the fine, free hand and the sprightly tone of the inimitable Smith—these have the precedence of all other mundane matters. Here will
be gossip, I know, and not of the dull saffron hue but as gorgeous and multi-colored as the rainbow: and here will surely be news, refined and clarified and nicely juxtaposed, of interesting men, women, books, ideas, movements: humor, epigram, thumb-nail character sketch—little strokes of the pen that are dearer than many a volume of gilded repute. Letters—the kind that you lay aside in a select little pile and open eagerly—have their distinct, matchless thrill for all of us. And it is with hardly less eagerness that I open a book of letters that passed between other men and women in other days. I really feel as if such letters were addressed to "E. Haldeman-Julius, Girard, Kans." They are as fresh and intimate as if they were from Smith to me. They go below the polite surfaces of history and biography and reveal to me the very accent, visage and gesture of the men and women who made history in their day. Letters, journals, diaries, autobiographies, confessions—give me these in place of all your more orderly, weighty, discreet, currently accepted works of history. If history were universally taught through such books as these—through the charm of the contemporary, personal page—it would be irresistible, a truthful and living thing; and everyone would know history as well as he knows the gossip in the next block.

I have been reading some of the letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Higginson was a preacher—and that cut of cloth, when it bespeaks the sanctimonious and proselytizing habit and covers a plump, creased, little soul of metaphysics and fried chicken, repels my soundest instincts. But I can easily forgive T. W. H. on this score. I forgive it because I forget it. As I read his interesting letters, I do not think of him as a preacher: and even when he speaks of the pulpit occasionally, the fact but dimly registers that he was a man who stood in the pulpit and exhorted the brethren. But he did not mumble of dry texts. He talked earnestly of great issues—preached in the robust style of an Emerson—and indeed wandered so far from the articles and the Apostles that his views on slavery cost him the Newburyport pulpit. He resigned the pulpit in a graceful and tolerant valedictory—and was glad of it. A martyr? Oh, no. He and his wife retired to quiet life at Artichoke Mills, and he wrote to his mother that "This martyrdom in the nineteenth century . . . is a singular thing. . . . But sincerely, if you knew how I especially have longed for this release from a life which did not content me; and how unworthy it has seemed of rational beings to continue living in Essex Street when they could live at the Mills; and other such things which are very familiar to us, you would willingly consent to our being, not noble martyrs, but (the much more commonplace character) contented and merry human beings!"

T. W. H. was a man of culture and humor and a full sense of life: there is more of the library than of the pulpit about him, and even more of the world of men. And New Englander though he was, living within the shadow of Plymouth Rock and a frequent walker of the streets of Boston and Concord, there is no unpleasant evidence of puritanism in the man. He was earnest, belligerent, on the slavery question: but his moral sense did not bob ridiculously in a sea of trifles: he was not the kind of man who wishes to be the jailer of
other people's consciences. I know that I could have smoked a cigarette in his presence without rebuke or even slightly indicated disapproval. He wouldn't have asked me if I "drank." He would not have been offended by my skepticism; he might have thought it odd if I had said grace before meat (as he thought it odd of Mark Twain, when he visited that half-conforming skeptic), but he would not have felt outraged had I omitted the gesture. I believe I could safely have passed days in his company and he would not have asked if my soul was "saved" nor offered to undertake the delicate mission of rescue. In short, T. W. H. and I would have talked, exchanged wit and civility, and no doubt warmly disputed on occasion as two very human creatures, each viewing the world freely according to his own notions. If at times I felt the moralist in him uncomfortably, or he the skeptic in me, we should not have quarreled about it. We could have talked a long evening about books; and as for personalities, there we should have enjoyed a limitless field.

A procession of quite remarkable figures emerges from the shadowy past and stands in characteristic attitudes in Higginson's letters. Emerson, Thoreau, Garrison, Phillips, Holmes, Lowell, Parker—those are names that one does not skip. Higginson describes them charmingly in very real bits of portraiture. In a short passage we have cameos of a half-dozen of the great and near-great. It is worth the reading of a whole book to happen upon a single note like this: "Mr. Emerson is bounteous and gracious, but thin, dry, angular, in intercourse as in person. Garrison is the only solid moral reality I have ever seen incarnate, the only man who would do to tie to, as they say out West; and he is fresher and firmer every day, but wanting in intellectual culture and variety. Wendell Phillips is always graceful and gay, but inwardly sad, under that bright surface. Whittier is the simplest and truest of men, beautiful at home, but without fluency of expression, and with rather an excess of restraint. Thoreau is pure and wonderfully learned in nature's things and deeply wise, and yet tedious in his monologues and cross-questionings. Theodore Parker is as wonderfully learned in books, and as much given to monologue, though very agreeable and various it is, still egotistical, dogmatic, bitter often, and showing marked intellectual limitations. Mr. Alcott is an innocent charlatan, full of inspired absurdities and deep strokes, maunders about nature, and when outdoors has neither eyes, ears, nor limbs. Lowell is infinitely entertaining, but childishly egotistical and monopolizing."

Lowell was also a very careless editor of the Atlantic Monthly, and a manuscript would lie beneath a pile of papers on his desk for several months, while he wondered why it didn't appear: he did not bestir himself to find good articles, but waited patiently for them to come to him: and he was rather meticulous—"crotchety," says T. W. H.—"strained at gnats and swallowed camels." He was a "torment" to his contributors. Fields, who followed him as editor, was very different: enterprising, of good but liberal taste, and a quick disposer of manuscripts: Higginson tells of him receiving a manuscript, and returning it with approval and suggestions, in a short afternoon. "Such promptness was never known in a magazine; it would have been weeks or months before L. would have got to it."
That Emerson was "thin, dry, angular" I can well believe. I admire him tremendously as a writer of "exquisite sentences" and a-tone moral philosopher, but a tête-à-tête with him must have been a trial. I could not have puffed blithely at a cigarette, nor chatted away with the Kansas freedom, in Mr. Emerson's company. Yet Emerson could fairly be described as a good fellow, if not a jolly fellow, and one could take friendly liberties with him. Thus T. W. H., dropping into the philosopher's study one day when the latter was out, espied a first edition of Tennyson that was "especially tempting": he took it, and wrote Mr. Emerson quite gaily about it after six weeks. "... I borrowed it," he writes, "promising myself to return it in a week. Alas, that conscience should be so hardened by time, but I have kept it six weeks, and do not feel so guilty as when I first pocketed it."

Lowell was a standoffish fellow—could be agreeable but not generously inclusive—was, one clearly gathers, a little too conscious of his position in the world and inclined to lord it rather dogmatically: he is "almost rude" to Oliver Wendell Holmes at an Atlantic dinner, but Dr. Holmes bears himself good-naturedly—a quite benevolent autocrat of the breakfast table or any table—and he is the wittiest man of this particular party. He spoke "about the absurdity of studying doctrines in books and supposing that we got much from that source, when each person is the net result of a myriad of influences from all nature and society which mold him from his birth and before it." Wise words are these—the expression of a truth that, if realized, would relieve us of a vast deal of useless preaching. Temperament is most potent in disposing man toward certain beliefs, in making him an atheist or an amen-shouter, a soap-boxer or a standpatter, a gay or a grum dog; yet it is natural that we should dignify these preferences by labeling them convictions, that we should employ our intellects in buttressing and decorating with the slogans of eternal verity that which is, quite often, anything but the product of independent reason. If a man is by nature a believer, a million Volterreans might labor without making a skeptic of him; and if one has conservatism in his blood (or in his bank account), the arts of a master propagandist like Upton Sinclair will probably be wasted upon such a predisposed static individual.

Yet with Holmes and Lowell there, and a half-dozen other and minor celebrities, including Charles W. Storkey—"a lazy, witty lawyer"—this Atlantic dinner, we learn, was not a dazzling affair, not the "feast of reason and flow of soul" that one might imagine. And elsewhere Higginson laments that the intellectual life of "the Athens of America" is rather barren. The precious evenings of high discourse were few and far between. One couldn't meet a genius every day.

I love to read such a book of letters in a loitering and disorderly fashion, turning the pages with idle expectancy, pausing at a letter here and there which attracts my eye with a name, a phrase, a date, a place. And if you can open the book at any page and happen upon something good—what better praise? The letters of T. W. H. nobly meet the test of hit-and-miss perusal. I turn, quite at random, and find a sentence—just a brief but very revealing line—about Charles A. Dana, later to win distinction as war correspondent and as editor of the New York Sun. Of Dana, Higginson says: "He looks finely and was gay as
usual, but I never feel entirely at ease with him—his corners are too clearly defined.” That is to say, with Dana a thing was white or black, right or wrong, and there was an end of it. In his younger days, Dana was quite a radical; he finally turned into a conservative; but, whether the one or the other, there were sharp angles to his convictions: no ifs, ands or buts, only very decided pros and cons. T. W. H., it appears, had some realization of the shadings of thought, a perception of that middle ground of philosophy where ideas almost imperceptibly merge: he was not, I am sure, a preacher who would glibly and totally damn a heretic. He would suspect that the heretic had perhaps a glimpse of the truth, a little portion of saving grace.

Again, I note the name of Horace Walpole. T. W. H. was a little late in the order of time to have known that elegant trifler, but he compares an acquaintance to Walpole, and that’s interesting. The man is Tom Appleton, brother-in-law of Longfellow. He was a wit and a poetaster and a leisurely, erratic patron of the arts. “He was that rare character in America in those days, and even now, a man of wealth and leisure without regular vocation or domestic ties, affectionate yet selfish, paying deference to no man, taking up favorites and putting them down at will, free-thinking yet superstitious, cosmopolitan yet American, unpuritanical yet free from actual vice. He always had favorites about him, to whom he was exuberantly kind until superseded; took sudden fancies, tapped a young artist on the back while copying in the Louvre, and said, ‘Come with me to Egypt,’ and took him, paying all expenses. He treated ladies as men, with no more courtesy, but equal intellectual recognition. . . . I once dined with him tête-à-tête at his house in Newport. . . . I felt as if I had had a day with Horace Walpole. . . .” Tom Appleton was also a useful fellow in his role of occasional challenger of the New England gods, shaking them up so that they emitted human noises. T. W. H. appreciated that as he should. He remarks: “In a circle where Holmes and Lowell were the leading spirits, it was a great thing to have someone who when so moved would ride directly over them and talk them down. . . .”

A talk with Whittier interests me. I am not surprised to read that he was a humorous, lovable man: and he was more of a poet than Longfellow or Lowell. Whittier, by his confession, learned what every idealist must, soon or late, sadly learn: “I have long ceased to expect that because men are reformers, they will therefore be better than other people. They are just the same.” The poet was speaking of Mrs. Chapman, who was a bitter-end among the abolitionists, and had also it appears, a bitter tongue. She had written him an excessively cordial letter, but that wasn’t the whole story. Shortly afterward, said Whittier, he met Mrs. Chapman, and after listening to a tirade in which the terms “liars” and “thieves” were quite freely used, he turned on her with this rebuke: “Thee has heaped all this reproach upon my friends—how do I know that thee will not go to someone else and use the same language of me? Thee has written me a letter expressing more confidence than I ask for, and thee treats me accordingly now:—when I have just seen a letter from thee to — [W. did not say the name], in which thee says of me, ‘As to Whittier, he is either a fool or a knave.’ And thee cannot deny it!” Then, added Whittier: “I never saw a face
that looked as hers did then; the beauty had all vanished, and she looked more like a demon than a woman. And I have never wished to see her face again. . .” Whittier spoke also of Garrison. “I know him thoroughly,” he said, “and know that he is a despot. . .” Garrison identifies the movement absolutely with himself. He is a Robespierre with the same perfect self-consecration and the same absolute incapacity of tolerating those who differ from himself; his course has been from the beginning that of Robespierre, stopping short of bloodshed.” T. W. H. replied that Garrison was the natural leader of the movement—Wendell Phillips, for example, culturally the superior of the two, freely acknowledged Garrison’s leadership. If Garrison was—as Whittier declared—leader “because he would be so,” it may be remarked that this applies, more or less, to nearly all leaders. It is the man who will lead, who does lead.

Turning the pages, I see the name “Keats” and read that here is a man—Ellery Channing—whose talk is like Keats’ letters. And he delivers himself of some pungent and unabashed criticism of Emerson. “Sitting on the footstool, pipe in mouth, by the stove, staring in,” Channing declares: “Emerson has no love of beauty or knowledge of it—he gave it all up after he wrote ‘Nature’—he is all humanitarianism—he is a very shrewd Yankee merchant—that’s what he is. He saw early that he must have a system if he wanted to make an impression—everybody was unsettled and he must be fixed.” (Yet Emerson’s system is out of vogue, while his vigorous, exalted personal message—his sound talk on the conduct of life—has not lost its power and will not.) “The love of beauty”—this from a New Englander, who finds his Puritan neighbors strange and less his countrymen than the Irish and English immigrants—“separates you directly from men, if you care anything about it; you are unsocial and puzzle them. . . .” But Thoreau, “he knows about it—give him sunshine and a handful of nuts, and he has enough. . . .”

So I turn, and pause, and read, and scribble a note, and skip delightfully along, on this Sunday morning, while my neighbors are at church. I trust (doubting) that they have been equally edified. I have had the experience (which I am told is a novel one) of listening, as it were, to a preacher for two solid hours without a hint that my feet are on the downward path that leads to the fiery pit.

IN DEFENSE OF IDEAS

I CANNOT understand the type of mind that hates ideas—fears ideas—is thrown into a state of excitement, uneasiness, antagonism when it confronts an idea. I cannot see that the world is in danger of being upset, that the sky is on the point of falling, because another man has an idea that is different from an idea of mine. I am willing to consider his idea, if it is a new and strange idea, if it represents a viewpoint that is unfamiliar to me. This contrast of ideas is a basis for discussion, and I am not able to see it as calling for any other attitude. I weigh this idea carefully, and it is not impossible that I shall find it to be a true idea, an idea that shows me an aspect of life.
not quite glimpsed before, an idea that I can use; perhaps, in order to accommodate my thinking to this idea, I shall have to discard other ideas: very well—ideas are not sacred, they are to be utilized as far as possible in the business of life and then, if their usefulness ends or too much doubt is cast upon their validity, they are to be cast aside. I have not a single idea in my head that I am not ready to pitch into the street if someone will offer me a better, sounder idea. But suppose I encounter, in my reckless mental adventuring among books and men, an idea that seems to me false and that I cannot persuade myself to accept as true? My attitude toward such an idea depends upon my view of its importance. I may regard it as a trifle, and pass it with barely a glance: I may see it as an oddity, a queer mental twist, a bit of humor or contrast or fantasy, and feel amused by it without profoundly bothering about its truthfulness or usefulness: I may value it simply as a flash of personality, the revelation of another’s mind: I may consider that it is an important error in thinking, that it precludes a sane and free and useful conception of life, and so I may question, dispute, oppose the idea. There are many ways of looking at an idea that might suggest themselves to me—but never to hate it, never to fear it, never to jump with clenched fist and an oath at the man who utters the idea. He is not a criminal because he thinks, nor an enemy because he makes me think.

A NEW WAY TO READ OLD BOOKS

It seems remarkable at first glance that so few students acquire love of literature in school; I refer, of course, to the higher schools, where some importance is given to this particular branch of instruction. Reasoning at large, without the aid of mere example, one may well assume that, where the teaching of literature is practiced as a special and serious function, the student cannot miss that ecstasy of appreciation which is at the bottom of a real knowledge of literature, which indeed is the life-giving atmosphere of literature. One could go farther and declare that all study should be, if not the creature, then the creator of enthusiasm—that knowledge and enthusiasm are inseparable. However, let us confine ourselves to literature, which offers liberal scope for a passing inquiry.

Our logic as to the influence of literary instruction rests fundamentally on premises that, we see clearly enough at second glance, are very unsafe. We assume—why, I know not—that a teacher of literature must be a lover of literature; and that text-books of literature, and the methods of study they prescribe, are based on that creative criticism which is a very happy kind of literature in its own right. If we have literary teachers and literary text-books, then we have literary students, who love literature—who learn literature, not by rote, but, let us say, with a profoundly different meaning, by heart. Unfortunately, we do not have this ideal combination; and as a result we have students to whom literature is little more than a casual collection of labels: who can give us an outline of periods, a list of masters, a classification of schools, but who seek their amusement in reading the daily paper, the monthly magazine and the hourly novel. About Shakespeare they can
tell you, for example, that he is the greatest writer of all time (so great, indeed, that he is placed upon the top shelf—quite out of reach); that he belongs to the Elizabethan Age; that he wrote plays—and possibly they will add, as a human touch, that he was himself somewhat of an actor; they may tag glibly a few of the plays: Othello—Theme, Jealousy; King Lear—Theme, Insanity; Macbeth—Theme, Murder. What they will miss, one and all, is the fact that Shakespeare, if he is the greatest writer of all time, must also as an implicit corollary, be the most interesting writer of all time. They have studied Shakespeare, but they have not really read Shakespeare. So it is with the rest of the masters: they are unloved masters, so far as they concern the average student, equipped with only the impedimenta of literary names and dates.

Why does this curious indifference, this low standard of taste, prevail in spite of the literary teaching in the schools? It prevails, I should say, not in spite of such teaching, but directly because of it; and it is in spite of such teaching that a few students do manage miraculously to imbibe the true spirit of literature. It is because literature is communicated in the schools without enthusiasm that it is received without enthusiasm. Students are set to reading certain classics as a duty rather than as a pleasure. The fact that literature is a source of pleasure, of the keenest delight indeed, is sedulously concealed. Do students go to school to enjoy themselves? Obviously not. They are there for the serious purpose of being bored. So the masterpieces are reduced to the dull level of text-books. They are divided precisely into a series of cold, compulsory tasks, to be escaped as quickly as possible.

With this shirking of literature as a task there is also an exaggerated, unwholesome awe of the great literary masters, as of personages not quite human and understandable. Remote and austere are Shakespeare, Sterne, Dickens and all their glorious company. They have the visage of schoolmasters, their frowns are like the awful, unbearable gaze of Jehovah himself. Poor Addison, so manly and unpretentious, than whom no man ever sought more winningly to please than in his delightful pictures of Sir Roger de Coverley (dear old Sir Roger! bluff and naive country gentleman, innocent as the day and foreign to all the confusions of guile)—Addison, I say, is looked upon with a shifty and uncertain eye by the student under the spell of a false, forbidding countenance which he mistakes for that of literature. Quaint, lovable Charles Lamb, whose gentle humor does not even force rude laughter upon you but is content to evoke a quiet smile, so charming always, so unaffectedly interested in the human scene—Lamb is looked upon as a very lion by this absurdly affrighted student. Imagine Dickens, who so loved to tell about the lives of common people and who, let us not forget, has left us our most familiar caricatures of cradled pedagogues—Dickens, who created such a world of warmth and gaiety, whose characters troop through his sunny pages with laughing voices—imagine Dickens presented to a group of young students in the severe habiliments of a schoolmaster! Why should Shakespeare be made a stupid image, set up to terrify students—he, whose brain was the very microcosm of humanity, who has told us quite simply that "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." The student, regarding with a dull and distant reverence the masters of literature, has not been
taught that the great are simple; that these masters, by virtue of their
mastery, make the most direct and irresistible appeals to the human
heart. He does not know that in the pages of these masters there are
laughter and tears, men and women, day and night, all the vigorous,
changeful round of living—that here, in short, are the greatest stories
ever told. If in an access of daring he attempts to read Shakespeare,
he seeks, whether consciously or not, for something different from the
human scene, for something that is neither life nor death but a mirage
of his distorted imagination, a vague, colorless, supernal something
that is but the shadow of his exaggerated idolatry. Missing what he seeks
unknowingly, he misses also the glow and bustle of visible, moving life
that is actually there. Back goes Shakespeare to the top shelf, there to
accumulate the dust that is symbolic of the dust of illusion in the reader's
mind. Pity this reader! He knows not what he has missed!

After this scrutiny it is clear why the masters are universally neg-
lected, why old books are not read. They are disguised as taskmasters,
contorted with the grime of duty, hedged about with an unnatural
divinity, fenced off from life. Small wonder that they are not read! Small
wonder that the reader doubts if such men ever walked the earth! They
never did.

How, then, should the masters be approached? How should old
books be read? Once we have the schools out of the way, the answer
lies close at hand: As their contemporaries read them. Greet the
masters as living men, as indeed they are, being immortal. Open the
old books in the spirit of present reality. Read Shakespeare as if each
play of his were the latest dramatic success. Read Dickens as if he were
a best-seller. Read Sterne as easily and intimately as you would read
Mark Twain, who has not been long enough dead for his genius to petrify
in the dry atmosphere of the schools. These men once lived and wrote
for eager readers. They are not dead—they live in their books. These
books have eager readers still. Why are not you among them?

Do you think that Shakespeare was not popular in his age? that he
was always a mere bust gravelly dominating a torpid schoolroom? He
was a successful playwright, which he could not have been without the
support of public interest. His plays were given to crowded houses.
There was no stiff literary mummy-worship to spoil the people's frank
enjoyment of these tremendous dramas in which great action flies swift
and colorful on the wings of poetic speech. No doubt the Londoners of
that day asked one another if they had seen Falstaff, the funniest fellow
ever seen on a stage; recommended to one another Romeo and Juliet
or Hamlet or Twelfth Night as plays full of action and warranted not
to pall—but they would be careful not to tell how it ended, that would
spoil the play, one must see that for oneself. Sterne's name, in his day,
was on all lips, his books were the talk of all circles, high and low,
large and small. Uncle Toby was more real than any living English-
man. Tristram Shandy was not hidden away on a dusty bookshelf, but
was read in the drawing room, in the stagecoach, at the club, even hastily
thumbed at the bookstall. It was a best-seller. Sterne was a popular
novelist. But in sheer popularity no one has ever equaled Dickens.
How astonished his contemporaries would be if they could hear the
modern reader, his eye on the pedagogical rather than the palpable
Dickens of flesh and blood, speak of this born story-teller, this creator of Pickwick and Micawber and Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, as a dry writer! What would they say to the commonplace criticism that Dickens' stories are too long? Why, they would gladly have followed the adventures of Oliver Twist to the end of time! Did they not sigh deeply, as with regret for a lost friend, when David Copperfield reached the end of his life's journey? They looked forward with fluttering hearts, with anticipation whose intensity was almost painful, to each installment of these great stories. They lived in Dickens' vast, eventful and curiously peopled world.

Then came a new generation. Then came the school and there began the insidious process of denaturing Dickens, of taking the sun from out his sky, of pressing a firm hand over laughing lips, dressing the gay throng of Dickens Land in sober, unearthly garb. Out of the heart of the people, through the funereal schoolroom, Dickens was carried by academic pallbearers to the mausoleum of the top shelf, to rest side by side with Sterne and Shakespeare.

Happily, they are not dead beyond resurrection. They can be revived quite simply. Take them from the top shelf, open their pages to the sunlight of an enthusiastic mind, and see how quickly the magic works! See with what joyous resilience they spring to life again! They have discovered, and the reader has discovered, the secret of perpetual youth: the mind alive to beauty and joy. Happiest of discoveries! Happiest of all when the discovery is made through the pages of an old book, which turns a fresh, smiling face where one had looked for a dismal stare!

The way to read old books—the way to read books, old or new, that are worth the reading—is to read them in the spirit of happy enjoyment. The masters—jolly old souls—ask nothing better than to minister to your pleasure. They have no dark ulterior aims, no lurking designs upon you. Hospitable hosts, they invite you with the most innocent friendliness in the world to the rich and variegated feasts they have spread before you. Gladly they welcome the light heart and the eager mind.

The new way to read old books is a simple way. It is a happy way. It is not really a new way. It is new only in the sense that it has been forgotten. Amazing forgetfulness, one would say, did not one see how the schools have deliberately obscured the true attitude toward literature, how they have laid dull hands upon all this brightness and given it the leaden hue of duty. Duty—it is an ill word that falls from unsmiling lips. With pleasure—this is the way to read books, old and new. They belong with the joys of life; and of these joys they are among the greatest.

BEGET OR MR. PINTO WILL GET YOU

From the viewpoint of social usefulness if not of art, certain masters or masterpieces should be emulated with a contemporary atmosphere and purpose in every age. We need a Voltaire in this day of renascent bigotry—a need that, when I declared its urgency, evoked an uproar of "Yeas" and "Nays" that proved me to be right; and it is, I believe, a sign of the indifference of Nature to
human progress that she does not produce a Voltaire every fifty years. A Rabelais is too valuable a force to be released for a brief season and left to pass, when every age would be vastly amused and benefited by such a man. Imagine what a joy—what a strong, odoriferous, persuasive influence—a Rabelais would be in these far-flung States. What would we not give for a Heine! And nature, who can make a Heine, turns her arts instead to the manufacture of a Bryan, a Billy Sunday, a Harold Bell Wright! A Dickens and a Thackeray, each in his way, could satirize and illuminate the social life of America. And Cervantes! Don Quixote should be reborn at half-century intervals to reveal in artistic style the current and peculiar (but in truth ever old) follies of mankind.

A task for a modern Cervantes would be to describe the absurdities of American lawmakers, reformers, officials who are indecently eager to poke their noses into every corner of private life. The age of reform and regulation, of private affairs made public, is not less ridiculous in its way and aim than the age of chivalry. The plea of social uplift, of this or that benefit to the state, is advanced confidently as a reason for any interference (without exception) in the life of a person who, not being an officeholder, apparently has no rights that even a constable or an officially endowed and empowered cleaner of streets and alleys is bound to respect. We have moral laws, Sunday laws, censorship laws—laws to punish art and to limit or virtuously define education—laws, one might almost say, that are intended to watch over every little act of a man’s life and apprehend him in a purely personal pastime at any hour of the day or night. And it is notorious that the police, in these States, can lay hands upon a man anywhere, anytime, for any or no cause. A man who is not a criminal may be a vagrant; and a man who is not a vagrant may be a suspicious character; it is the duty and irresponsible privilege of a policeman to demand why a man happens to be standing at a certain busy corner at two o’clock in the afternoon, calmly smoking a cigarette and looking as if he were waiting for someone.

The number of laws that invade the privacy, restrict the adventures and put a firm hand upon the idiosyncracies of the citizen is not a measure of the disposition of reformers to shine as guardians of their erring and obtuse fellows. For every foolish law on the books there are a dozen that are seriously proposed and that often fall short of the dignity of law only by a hairbreadth of sanity. It is a commonplace, and an unfailing source of comedy for the paragraphers of the city press, that no session of an American legislature is complete without the introduction of a number of silly bills by Silly Billies who aspire to elevate the moral tone of American life by regulating the size, position and use of kitchen sinks; or the height of clotheslines; or the hours when a man can sit on his front porch and when he should decently retire to the back porch. A cry goes up for statutes or ordinances to save the Commonwealth by putting down the “social evil” of kissing on park benches, but no Solon has yet proposed to abolish the moonlight. Several years ago, I believe, there was great talk in Kansas of a law to prohibit smoking in public, even in offices and business places that were exposed to the view of tender-minded women and children and pure men. It was suggested that such a law would revolutionize the style of Kansas toilets, which would thereafter, in all well-regulated establishments, have to be
equipped with smoking accessories: and only this very private compartment would be left free from the ravages of reform legislation. The reformers will never be without an issue so long as there is a feature of somebody else's business that can lead the way to a fool's notoriety.

The latest would-be savior of the Republic, and particularly of the State of Nebraska, is one who bears the picturesque equine cognomen of Pinto. Dr. A. S. Pinto is the indication of his full name, and he is regally enthroned as health commissioner of Omaha, which is a metropolis of the meat-packing industry. It is Pinto's ambition, if one may exaggerate slightly, to stand over the marriage bed—that is, to have the State occupy, in a manner of speaking, that intimate position; and to remedy the irresolution of Hamlet by deciding the question of to be or not to be—not as to the ending but as to the beginning of life. "Pitiless publicity"—and regulation—would, if Pinto were king, will, if he can persuade the democracy to follow him, record their greatest triumph. Montaigne really has nothing to do with it, and is indeed far removed from the present-day reformer, but I shall quote him before revealing the great object of Pinto's life. "Everyone avoids seeing a man born, everyone runs to see him die," wrote Montaigne; "to destroy a man a spacious field is sought out, and in the face of the sun; but to make him, we creep into as dark and private a corner as we can..." Now it is Pinto's aim to outlaw, and that not uncertainly, one phase of this privacy that has always surrounded the begetting of life. The public, says he, must demand not only a marriage certificate but a birth certificate to justify it.

To put the notion boldly, Dr. Pinto would have the State, in the person of some Pinto, walk, so to speak, into the bedroom of a man and wife who have lived and presumably slept together for two years, and demand in the stentorian tones of a bailiff opening Court, "Have you had a child?" If the pair admit that they are criminally childless, they will be told with the sternness of a village night-watch ordering a child home after curfew, "See that you have a child within three years!" And if these three years pass without a child to show for this "intimacy recognized by the police," then this man and wife will be commanded to go their separate ways and dwell together no more, in the name of the great and sovereign State of Nebraska. Such, in brief and in grotesque, is the proposal of Pinto.

Say what you will of this Pinto; that he is a fool, and granted—that he is a notoriety-seeker, and perhaps it is so—that he has the meddler's itch and cannot bear to let another out of his sight even in that other's bedroom, and it will not seem improbable—that he has a Freudian complex of fearful depth and hue (and cry), and who will deny it absolutely? Yet the man has reasons—social reasons, mark you—and in the philosophy of American reformism he is a man of vision who, if he cannot see farther than the end of his nose, has a nose that reaches far. It is for the everlasting good of the State that the worthy Pinto would step with a policeman's club between the man and wife who had failed to fruitfully embrace. He has been studying statistics—a pursuit that has ruined many a good man before Pinto. There are, says he, too many divorces in Nebraska. There are too many wives working outside the home. Why? he demands. No children. No home interests.
Man and wife, both workers and entirely too free, meet after work, get their dinner in a café, go to a "movie," and use their apartment only for sleeping—not for begetting children. This is bad—that is to say, it is not as Dr. Pinto would have it. Again, it is plainly the business of Pinto, and of all good men, to have it otherwise. Children, if they do not come by desire or accident, must come by order of the State. Thus runs the argument, half-plaintive and half-pompous, of Brother Pinto.

It is perhaps no occasion for surprise that there has been, even in America, and even in Nebraska, some criticism of Pinto's scheme to extend the powers of the State. And, strangely enough, a common objection is that having children is a strictly personal affair between man and wife. Yes, there are people so lacking in a sense of social responsibility that they believe, and unblushingly declare, that a man and his wife should decide this delicate question. The artist, Neysa McMein (artists being queer, you know), is one who expresses this oddly obtuse point of view of personal liberty. But Dr. Pinto has the reformer's well-known and rather wonderful facility of logic. He replies to Neysa McMein, and to all who are similarly blind, in this profound and pertinent wise: "She forgets that two persons cannot be married without resorting to law. Why should not the law continue to watch over their affairs?" That settles it, you see. One might, of course, suggest that the law does not, after all, compel two persons to marry: but then Dr. Pinto would probably reply that the law should compel them to marry.

So we perforce follow Pinto in his reasoning, which leads us first, and inevitably, to the conclusion that the law should prescribe the frequency and manner of cohabitation between man and wife. The ancients settled these matters more artistically (as other references to Montaigne would assure you) but we live in the age of unlimited law and reform, and, let us say, Pintoism. This being so, we realize that the law can leave no aspect of life untouched. We follow Pinto, then, and we perceive that the law, in Pinto persona, should determine the number of children that a couple must beget. That, indeed, appears obvious and, without such a precise and complete arrangement, the whole pintoescque program would descend to the level of ridiculous paltering. What! Is the State merely to proclaim, in a general, indefinite way, that these twain shall reproduce, leaving it quite to the haphazard, anarchic, utterly irresponsible choice of the parents whether they shall have one or two or a dozen children? Will it not be equally foolish (whether apposite or not) to order that the barn door shall be locked after the horse is stolen, without making plain that it should be locked at once before the harness and the provender and the garden spade are stolen too?

Brother Pinto may be a statesman, but he is evidently so rapt in his broad, bucolic vision that he lets essential details slip by him. There are other details that cannot well be ignored by anyone who plans to regulate thoroughly the economy of socialized, state-regulated, padlocked and police-guarded matrimony. For example, it occurs instantly to a more cool and detached observer than Pinto that the intervals as well as the number of births should be decided by the State. It should be on the statutes in clear, businesslike black and white whether a couple shall present a pink bundle of legal proof and justification at the nearest
police station once a year, or biennially, or every three years. What, too, of the quality of the children thus drafted, as it were, out of Time and Space into the service of Society and the State? Dr. Pinto, whose heart so beats for the good of the American race, cannot be indifferent to the dispositions, efficiencies and fates of the offspring of the Nebraska legislature. There is astrology, we remind him, which claims that the month and sign under which one is born has a potent predestining influence. Astrology is foolish, but so is Dr. Pinto, and the two may properly go together. Then I say that certain months should be prescribed for the birth of infants; and by this I do not mean that all are to be born in a single month, for that would defeat the whole aim of Pintoism, rightly and elaborately considered. No: there should be variety (Dr. Pinto has doubtless heard that “it takes all kinds of people to make a world”) and, in the full and carefully prepared light of astrological and legal and reformist bunk, there should be children born every month in the year. The point, of course, is that the State, and it may be Pinto, should set aside certain months for the induction of the progeny of certain couples into the ordered ranks of Nebraska life. Say that the Browns produce in May; the Smiths in December; the Simmonses in August; and so on, thus assuring a brilliant and bewildering variety of useful human life, yet all scientifically checked in the card-index of Mr. Pinto. Then we could overhear, early in August, the following dialogue in the office of Mr. Pinto:

Mr. Pinto (to his secretary): “How about those July reports for the city?”

The Secretary: “Fine, Chief! A wonderful bunch of leaders of men. Very few delinquencies—the Joneses, by the way, shirked in the Tenth Ward. They were marked down for July, too, as you can see by the files. I believe it’s Mrs. Jones’ fault—she has a criminal eye. You know, that’s really a bad ward all round—has to be investigated every three months. Now over on the North Side, among the lower classes, the record is always first-rate. They’re the kind of citizens the country needs. . . .”

Mr. Pinto (cheerfully, then brusquely): “Well, well, that’s encouraging after the crop failure in June. I’m a man of vision, Charley, and I can just see that July bunch of kiddies growing up to be football captains and floorwalkers and police sergeants and members of the State legislature. Who knows? maybe there’s a future Pinto among ’em . . . Send an officer around to the Joneses right away, to get their marriage license and serve them with a writ of ejection. We can’t have this flouting of the law. Scofflaws—that’s what folks like the Joneses are.”

The Secretary: “Yes sir. You’re right, sir—the State is bigger than the Joneses. But say: the Simmonses are two hundred percent Americans—they had twins . . .”

But to return from the future, alluring as it is, to the present: There is the final question of sex. Surely a smart man like Pinto, who feels himself equal to solving the great problem of the future American race, will not neglect to provide, specifically and proportionally and altogether wisely, for the sex of the children. He will understand that the indiscriminate bringing of children into the world, regardless of
sex, is hardly less an evil than too few children for the Pintos to regulate. There is no doubt that a great discrepancy, one way or the other, between the males and females leads a train of social embarrassments and exigencies in its wake. And here, we reflect, more subtle considerations will enter. It is not simply that a due proportion must be kept between the sexes. That is important; and it is also important, as Mr. Walter Shandy knew, that there must be no perilous teetering of town and country population; and again, there is certainly the question—and a pressing question it is today—of too many people: and, above all, of too many Pintos. But it must also occur to Mr. Pinto that sex orders for male and female children cannot be handed out, right and left, without some thought to the parental temperaments that must beget and rear the human crop. Some parents, undoubtedly, are better fitted to raise males. Others will be more useful to the State if they are assigned to the cultivation of females. It's a matter of psychology, biology, astrology, and probably other things; and it really appears that Pinto, for all his willingness and confidence, will need some expert help in his vast, intricate, endless undertaking. After all, no one man—not even Pinto—can make a race.

THE BLIGHT OF CENSORSHIP AND INTOLERANCE IN THE "MOVIES"

A BRIGHT, contemptuous critic (methinks it was George Jean Nathan, alter ego or twin devil of H. L. Mencken) spoke profoundly when he remarked that the only kind of "movie" he will condescend to see is that in which pies hurtle lawlessly and ludicrously across the film; he regards pie-throwing as the only genuine phase of the silent drama.

This is a far-reaching observation, containing more thought than appears humorously on the surface. It is an epitome of the artistic failure of the "movies." As pies bursting in air and besmearing faces appeal to children, so the "movies" as a whole exhibit a childish level of representation. They supply the kind of fustian, illogical amusement and large-lettered romance that is demanded by the mentality of children of all ages, from six to sixty. Appealing to the child-mind, relying for safety and simple effectiveness upon this level of intelligence, it is plain that the "movies" must forswear the dignity and high importance and subtle methods and immense purposes of art.

Art cannot be reduced to jejune, juvenile standards. It must be free to create its own audience. Had Shakespeare been forced to write solely for children, he would not have given us the greatest dramas of the library or the stage. It would have been a feeble use of his genius to scatter pumpkin and custard over a room. As to pie-throwing, it may be said that whatever art is implicit in that sort of performance has been fully and triumphantly evoked by the "movies."

In the battle of pies, you will reflect, the "movie" director has a free hand. There is nothing in a spectacle of pies to arouse the suspicions of moral censors. One can hear the deep breath of relaxed
attention that is unanimously exhaled by a group of censors when a pie-throwing episode appears on the screen. Now they can pocket their spectacles and their scruples and view the unfolding of utter innocence.

One might, of course, speculate lightly on the morality of pie-throwing. It is obvious that anyone who should suddenly begin hurling the pastry in real life as indiscriminately as it is hurled on the screen would fall into the hands of the law. But the censors, no doubt, regard this as a remote and fanciful danger; and, this far-fetched possibility aside, there is no occasion for the slightest quiver of alarm. Choice of pies is not imposed: there is no dictum that berry pies shall be eliminated for the sake of morality, that apple or peach pies will shock the tender minds of the children, or that open-faced pies generally must be withheld from Sunday circulation: from Maine to California, under a startling variety of state regulations and the caprices of censors, the whole juicy category of pies can be thrown at random, unmolested. This is why pie-throwing, within its natural limits, has been developed so amazingly, if not admirably, on the screen: why, insofar as it is an art, its full artistic possibilities have been realized in the “movies.” It is beyond the reach of the censors. By a stern decree of nature, its appeal is limited to children: and there can be no sternier decree of the censors to limit it further.

But the comedy and drama of human existence is of vastly greater scope than pies: even Sir Toby Belch’s “cakes and ale,” although they lead us at once into a larger field, do not wholly comprise the tale of man. What of the struggles of man outside the culinary department? It is the misfortune, the supreme and terrible handicap of the “movies,” that they cannot present these larger struggles in a free, realistic spirit.

When the pies are laid on the shelf and the last fruit-mottled face has faded, the “movies” must surrender their only hold upon reality and step carefully to the tapping of the censors’ ferrules. In all things, they must strive for the childish appeal that is legitimate only in the sphere of pie-throwing.

We suffer from many varieties of censorship—legal and illegal or extra-legal, open and covert, public and private—and always, under minds to force all other minds to wallow helplessly in the slough of the censorial mind. The censor wars upon human intelligence. He is the enemy of truth and freedom. He is jealous—fearful—of the heights and of the sublime, daring, generous vistas. There is nothing a censor hates so much as a grown mind in a grown body. The censor has a child-mind and he is driven, by this childish mentality, to suppress every element of maturity in art.

It seems that wherever we turn, we are confronted by censors. “Don’t” is written large everywhere. We are burdened with so many foolish laws that no man can be perfectly obedient to the lot of them; the citizen who ventures a block from his own home can hardly fail to break some law. And for every foolish law, there are a hundred silly rules and regulations that reflect only the caprices of idiots enjoying irresponsible power.

The greater part of the censorship that hinders intelligent effort
in any field is not a matter of law, but of irresponsible, fattuously prejudiced authority. Falling emphatically into this latter class, and most idiotic and irresponsible of all the forms of foolish authority, is the censorship that robs the "movies" of virtually every vestige of freedom save that of the indiscriminate throwing of pies.

Few even among those who are awake to the follies and dangers of censorship as a whole probably realize the kind of subjection that prevents the "movies" from evolving a real art of the screen. They are subject to the control of morons, who have no guide but their own ignorance and who are restrained by no law but the peculiar caprices that orient their stupidity.

Consider the fact that the "movies"—this most popular medium of representing life—can reflect no higher standards than those of ridiculous Dogberrys to whom life is simply a set of stupid moral maxims: that every picture of life that is projected on the screen must be approved by those to whom the least glimpse of truth is immoral. And it is not a general rule of stupidity to which the "movies" are forced supinely to conform; they are the victims of incredible caprice, of local and individual stupidities that defy calculation.

William de Mille, writing in the September issue of Scribner's Magazine, points out that what is moral in one state is branded and banned as immoral in another state; that what is moral for one week is immoral for a longer showing; that what is moral on a weekday is immoral on Sunday; that, in short, the foolishness of one set of fools offers no basis upon which the "movie" producer can predicate the exact idiocies of the next set of morons to whom he must submit his picture before the public is permitted to see it. Often the censors hardly know their own minds and take refuge in a compromise that reaches the acme of asininity.

A particular group of censors will be for the moment staggered by the tremendous problems of morality that confront it. For example, we have it on the word of Mr. de Mille that Charlie Chaplin's production, The Woman of Paris, threw the minds of the Ohio censors into such confusion that they could only rule that the picture must be limited to a showing of one week: on the eighth day, according to this queer ruling of the Ohio censors, the picture automatically became immoral. This, one would say, is surely the greatest achievement of idiocy within the power of the censorial mind. Not so: in Massachusetts the censors decree than an illegitimate child may appear on the screen during the sinful, secular week, but on the sacred day—on Sunday—no child that has not been legally born into this crazy world may toddle into a film. And returning to Ohio, that state with one righteous gesture has eliminated all uncertificated love from the screen.

So far as the state of Ohio may see it, within the confines of its "movie" palaces, Shakespeare did not know human nature: for in that highly moral state every man who follows the lure of beauty in the garish light of the cinema waves a wedding license in his hand: and no woman smiles with soft intent unless there is a Justice of the Peace standing around the corner.
Whether in Ohio or some equally benighted section, there was objection to the utterance of a "movie" hero who said of the heroine: "That fightin' gal is the only one in the valley I want." Ah, said the censors, the fellow must be made to declare his intentions. So the caption was changed to read: "That fightin' gal is the only one in the valley I want to marry." Thus the commonwealth was saved and the innocent moviegoers were guarded from the suspicion that there is anything more subtle or tremendous in the drama of love than a repetition of the vows before the proper authorities.

As a general rule, it is ignorant puritanism that cuts and slays the work of the "movie" producers out of all recognizable shape. Apparently most censors have evil minds and are sinfully self-conscious on the subject of sex. Thus in Pennsylvania the censors forbid "themes and references to race suicide," "embraces which would be contrary to propriety in ordinary life" (a cryptic rule indeed!) and "subtitles relating to sex or other immorality." One wonders what the censors mean by "ordinary life." Do they exclude passionate love from the course of ordinary life? Or do they mean that the screen shall exhibit love as merely the stale sufferance of bored, unhappy married couples? Maybe the censors who formulated this rule were simply indicating their own position in the matrimonial doldrums.

For evil-mindedness elevated to the censor's chair, few things can equal this choice bit of scandalous interpretation that Mr. de Mille relates: "In some States it is not permitted to show a 'close-up' of a hotel register, presumably because the use of the hotel register sometimes forms a part of the actual process of marital infidelity." However, censorship stupidity defeats its own end, as "in a recent picture a man and woman were shown registering, each under his own name, and being assigned to different rooms. In those States which have the anti-register law, the scissors of the censor leave the audience under the impression that the couple is illegally registering themselves as man and wife." |

An unfriendly light, too, is thrown upon the ethics of sex relations, as they appear to the puritan mind, by another rule which Mr. de Mille includes in his damning array of the idiocies of censorship. "One of the fundamental rules of censorship," he writes, "seems to be that a man can mistreat any woman to whom he is married, but that he must use more discretion toward other women. To most people it would appear that to ill-treat your wife is even more reprehensible than to ill-treat a perfect stranger, but this advanced philosophy has not yet achieved censorial recognition." There, you see, is the conception of woman as man's property—a fundamentally immoral conception, one that is quite typical of the puritan mind and true to the Christian ethics of Saint Paul.

The censors, of course, have no sense of humor. They satirize themselves by their own bungling efforts. Thus they rendered moral the screen version of Kipling's story, Without Benefit of Clergy, by making the tale begin at the altar: but they let the title remain—thus reflecting, says Mr. de Mille, "somewhat cynically upon any benefit of clergy to be derived from the marriage ceremony."
Zaza, we are told, caused the Pennsylvania censors to throw up their hands. My God! here was a husband, who should have been content with the perfunctory embraces and breakfast-table quarrels and carpet-slipper comfort of “ordinary life,” enamored of the smiles and thrills and kicks of a concert-hall singer! Could this situation be safely revealed to the blissful, unsuspecting husbands of Pennsylvania? Nay! nay! The husband of the story must be deprived of a wife and given a sister, so that there would be no moral obstacle to his infatuation for Zaza. And, with regard to the element of artistic conflict, the censors declared that “the difference in social caste is quite enough obstacle between him and Zaza.”

From whatever point of view one regards it—whether sexual or social—the morality imposed upon the screen by the censors is that of evil, stupid and tyrannical minds. In one picture, a girl was depicted as talking smartly to a judge who had tried her case: out came the scene, because it suggested a lack of respect for the law. A comic scene in another picture showed a man taking several cigars out of his host’s private box. Comedy was no excuse—here was an act of theft. The scene was saved only by a new title “in which a valet tells the guest that the host is unavoidably detained, and that he is to help himself to whatever he desires.”

Patriotism, no less than morals, must be sedulously guarded by the censors. Thus in a George Ade picture there appeared the caption with reference to the World War: “When the big fuss was over and the world was trying to find what it was all about, our hero...” That was dangerous humor; so out came the scissors and the words, “and the world was trying to find out what it was all about,” were eliminated.

Probably the most extreme case of deliberately adapting the “movies” to the intelligence of children occurred in the censorship of the picture, Brother Officers. The representation of baby clothes in the making for an unarrived infant was excised, the censor explaining that “the average child believes a stork brings the baby—we can’t disillusionize the child.”

It seems that the censors have a Christian Science attitude toward the evil of this world: barring all suggestion of sin from the screen, they evidently imagined that they have purified real life and made virtue supreme and secure. There is a fear, too, that an evil act portrayed on the screen will impel the spectator to go forth immediately and perpetrate a similar act. This fear rests upon the doubtful assumption that the horde of people who frequent the “movies” have no knowledge of the world—that they would not suspect the existence of evil were it not presented on the stage or screen. Again, one can hardly credit the psychology which assumes that one who sees an act of theft or murder or what is loosely termed “immorality” performed in a play is driven to imitate the actor.

We know indeed that human nature is weak, but it is not blown about quite in this fashion. For that matter, we incline to place more
faith in the psychology of Bernard Shaw, who argues that it admirably
subserves the social scheme that people should perform evil acts in their
imagination, as spectators of art that portrays the erring courses of
morals. One's evil impulses, satisfied through the imagination, are not so
likely to demand the sterner and more perilous outlet of reality.
But doubtless the censors have not heard of Shaw—or, if they have,
they picture him as a very devil. Shaw, by the way, pays brief and elo-
quent tribute to the work of the censors in the “movie” world by declar-
ing: “... there is no criticism of morals by ridicule or otherwise
... nothing which could give a disagreeable shock to the stupid or shake
the self-complacency of the smug ... the leveling down has been thor-
oughly accomplished.” Perhaps “leveling down” is a mild phrase, indi-
cating though it does a sufficiently bad state of affairs.

The censors have succeeded in turning the “movie” world topsy-
turvy, so that a chaos of capricious morality rules in the place of that
human nature which has been more or less celebrated throughout the
age. A “movie,” from any point of view—artistic, intellectual, tech-
nical—is apt to be a spectacle of disorder and ineptitude.

Mr. de Mille solemnly assures us that the public is far from realizing
the full baneful effects of censorship upon the “movies.” He declares:
“Entire scenes are cut from stories and nothing done to close the wound;
lines spoken by characters are changed to words which express the
censor’s point of view and not the author’s; relationships of characters
are changed by clumsy titling so that the laws of human nature may not
conflict with those of Pennsylvania.”

Through the help of the pious, puerile censors, we have in the
“movies” not only bad art, cheap thought, false morality, utter degra-
dation of standards in every field of life, but we have ridiculously bungled
and butchered work from the mere standpoint of technique, of the bare
mechanics of filming.

Censorship is, on the face of it—and to say no worse of it—an
insulting and peculiarly odious example of tyranny. It assumes that all
who frequent the “movies” are simpletons or idiots, potential rakes or
criminals. One is indeed tempted to say that the censors judge the gen-
eral public, with gross and incorrect assumption, by themselves: and as
the censors are forced to see every pitfall, every peccadillo, that is pre-
icted on the screen, one wonders how they manage, with all their
formidable armor of artificial righteousness, to avoid these iniquities.

The censors, to put it mildly and to give them credit for better
intentions than do really animate them, look upon the public as chil-
ren: and, in the language of an Ohio censor, they are determined that
we—you and I and all of us—shall have, not the kind of pictures that
our tastes require and that our intelligence can appreciate, but “the kind
they (we) ought to have.”

And who decides the kind of pictures we “ought to have”? The
kind of person whose intelligence we can regard only with contempt—
whose mental growth stopped at the age of twelve—who is capable of
the banalities, the gaucheries and the monstrosities that Mr. de Mille narrates. We, the great public, are forced to see an artistic medium, whose possibilities we can scarcely imagine, distorted to fit the image of men and women who "make the angels weep" with their sub-human follies.

Mind you, I don't think that the removal of censorship would enable the "movies" to evolve suddenly into pure art. Leaving the question of censorship aside, I am not so complacent regarding the "movies" as Mr. de Mille, a leading figure in the "movie" world, naturally appears to be. There are other handicaps, besides that of censorship, that the screen must overcome: and, in the nature of things, it has to solve the problem of its amazingly cheap popularity, its immense, indiscriminate appeal. It must ask itself how it can entertain the crowd—with its large element of eager children, large and small—yet elevate its standards.

However, it is glaringly apparent that the screen can make only feeble, imperceptible strides toward artistic greatness so long as it is under the domination of the Dogberries of censorship. This tyranny is sufficient to damn and destroy it utterly. A great industry, which might be a great art, is rendered senseless and futile by a parcel of brainless bigots, fanatics and old fogies whose cerebral cavities are stagnant pools of vulgarity, ignorance and ineptitude. The censors, one and all, male and female, old and young, should be kicked out and forced to take jobs in their favorite type of "movies"—throwing pies at one another.

SHAMS OF THE DUMB DRAMA

When I wrote about "movie" censorship, as befits one who is an advocate of freedom in all things (not the spurious sort of "liberty" that brings itself up with a jerk at the limiting line of "license"—that, in the puritan view, means freedom to do good as the goody-goody crowd sees it), I spoke sharply of the censors of the cinema. Amusing indeed, but no less alarming, were the revelations by Mr. William C. de Mille of the foolish interference with the "movies." Here is one field in which the censor appears really to be a law unto himself—guided and checked by no statutes, his fiat unappealable, determined simply by the happenstance of his own witless reaction. There is no moral criterion, no legal code, no artistic standard which defines, however absurdly, or indicates the probable attitude of the censor. Whatever Ma or Pa Grundy dislikes, whatever is slightly alien to the Sunday School, Grand Old Party, vinegar-virtuous mind, whatever is not "nice" to the Little Lord Fauntleroy school of criticism, is rejected with groaning and gnashing of false teeth. Nor is it the more or less standardized, assessable ignorance of a class or a certain type of mind that rules; each censorial body utters the law of the moment in its own peculiar, startling fashion. In short, anything may happen to a picture, as any notion may pop from nowhere into the skull of a stupid censor.

I hate censorship. I cannot see how any man with a spark of enlightenment in his head can view complacently or lightly the presence
of censorship in any field of life. We may indeed permit ourselves a
laugh at its folly—but let the laugh be followed by a blow at its tyranny.
I can enjoy the humor and the truth of Mr. Mencken's observation that
as the "movies" are full of cheap, trifling nonsense, the censor cannot
remove from them anything of value to an intelligent person. Mencken
is not a "movie fan." Nor am I. Yet while I can enter into the spirit
of this devil-may-care thrust—let 'em slash and smash the "movies" and
run the things through a wringer, run them backwards or upside down
—I feel that, for the sake of the record, it is well to point out that
we cannot really afford to be indifferent to "movie" censorship.

The censor is bad, at all times and in all places and for all purposes.
There should be no quarter given, either in jest or in earnest, to the
hateful principle of control over the expressions of the human mind—
even the expressions of mediocre minds. The more power the censor
has in one direction, the more will he seek in other directions.
Anything the censor does is bad. When censorship is ignorant, it may
do any sort of harm, and probably the very thing you don't expect.
When it is intelligent, it is even worse—more subtly and systematically
dangerous. The censors may jump upon a book, a play, a picture that
does not interest me—whose suppression will not deprive me of enjoy-
ment—but I am as dead against them as if they attacked such excellent,
interesting literature as the Little Blue Books. Brother Mencken, of
course, feels the same way. He despises the "movies," however. And I
can understand how he has almost a fellow-feeling with the censors who
raise the devil with this drivel.

Well, I have no greater regard for the "movies" than Brother
Mencken. And I must keep straight with my readers by letting the
printer reduce to the cold candor of type a few of my impressions of
the silent, or dumb, drama. I have struck dutifully, and quite as
heavily as the occasion demanded, at censorship of the "movies." I
believe they should be free. At this moment I ask nothing of them
personally. As a social and critical being, desiring the triumph of art
and intelligence in all ways possible to man, I ask nothing of the
"movies" to save that they produce the best of which they may be capable.
One very sound reason why I oppose censorship in this field, as in
every other, is that no improvement of the artistic quality of the
"movies" is at all thinkable so long as they are governed by the Grundys.
Whatever the possibilities (and they may indeed be great beyond our
imagining) that belong to the future of this wonderful medium, they
can be realized only in the atmosphere of perfect freedom. Yet we
cannot ignore that immense, gloomy failure of the "movies" which is
not the fault of the censorial hand. We should not fall into the error
of believing that lack of freedom is all that is wrong, or even chiefly
what is wrong, with the "movies." In my other article, devoted pri-
marily to the issue of censorship, I could only suggest that the screen
is self-limited as well as censor-limited: that if the stupid censors were
kicked out, and no other change should occur in the management of the
silent drama, we should still have stupid "movies"—stupid as the flat,
general rule, not as the exception.

The silent—the dumb—drama! It is dumb, in any valid artistic
sense, for the simple reason that it has nothing to say. Absolutely
nothing! One is struck by the fact that the products of this tremendous world of effort—tremendous in size, machinery and display—are so trifling. One observes, with an astonishment that familiarity does not lessen, that in this field mediocrity reigns supreme. There is no hint of greatness. There is no challenge, no promise, no gesture of real art. There is no intelligent minority of artists to dispute the supremacy of popular favorites. In any field of art, the cheap and popular may enjoy the numerical advantage. The artist or pseudo-artist can more easily appeal (and there are more ambitious fellows capable of appealing) to the lowest taste than to the highest. The majority of books that come from the press are, we know, perceptibly less than great; or they are mediocre; or they are quite worthless. Yet we have great books. We have never been without great literary productions, however few by the side of the many effusions of hokum. There is no field of art that is absolutely barren, that can show no harvest of excellence: no field save that of the “movies,” if we may consider as art that which is uniformly inartistic. In the “movie” world, there is the complete, unrelieved spectacle—the very depressing spectacle—of flatness. Sham, in this dull and tawdry world, is king. It labors mightily to evoke the horse-laugh and start the crocodile tear. The drama, here, is dumb. That is to say, there is no drama—only the dumb dance of dummies.

Night after night the millions pour into the “movie palaces”—sit, comfortably digesting their dinners, through a couple of hours of garish triviality—and go out by the same door as in they went, without a new idea in their heads, carrying away no glimpse of beauty or truth, having felt not the slightest momentary change in their stuffy or sticky mental-emotional processes. Hundreds of times they have beheld these very tricks, lolling in this same cheaply unreal atmosphere, found uninspired and unchanging entertainment in this old, old sham.

It is a sham older than the “movies.” It is the sham of falsifying life, of feeding the crowd with moldy ideas and mildewed sentimentalities, that is as old as the first charlatan who gathered the pop-eyed multitude to witness his magic. Stale magic it is now—but still it works.

* has been performed in every possible fashion in a long, long line of tenth-rate fiction. Old tales, old plots, old situations—the very dregs of sham imagination—these are repeated on the most sumptuous scale in the “movies.” The “movies” have simply extended the audience of the Laura Jean Libby school of fiction. They have given the pot-boiler a world all its own, in which the masterpiece can appear only as a stranger disguised out of all true semblance. One cannot properly speak of any “contribution” of the “movies” to contemporary art. They have contributed nothing. They have followed right in the path of the tinfoil romance. They have made unreality visible in actually moving figures of lustian and folderol—which is an achievement in its way, to be sure, and enables the crowd to get its pap of pretty, trifling tales, with little effort. Here is the minimum of mental effort. It requires, after all, a slight prodding of the imagination to read a penny dreadful or a penny tearful, and to see mentally lines of types as scenes and persons. At the theater dedicated to dullness, one simply sits, chews one's cud of gum, and watches the thing unfold itself. And there are no subtleties, no puzzling speeches or inflections, no tense, full moments that
are so trying, which one may find in an old-fashioned play. There is no effort here, in this kingdom of glittering sham. From the kick-off to the kiss, all you are to do is get your eyes full. Sit tight, and Gloria will do the rest.

The crowd flocks to these “palaces” with the absolute assurance that it will not be dismayed by anything “highbrowish” or slightly over its head. It is filled with perfect trust: and to this trust the dumb drama is doggedly true. What the public wants—nowhere is it given in such faithful or full measure as in the “movies.” Plays, as distinguished from playthings, are uncertain. They have queer and often misleading titles. One may be shocked, confused, lifted if only for a jiffy and by an inch, out of the good, old, comfortable rut. Books are not safe. One may get hold of a book that is too unpleasantly real, that jars the mind with painful, bold, dangerous thought. But a “movie”—ah, who ever doubts the unfailing quality of this show? The very titles are reassuring. They are meant to be reassuring. They cry out to the public that here is the old hug-em and hit-em stuff; here is laughter that the most humorless can enjoy with shaking ribs; here is a plot that is so thumping-splashing grand and awful that it will thrill the most sluggish intestines; here are tears that will dampen the handkerchiefs of the shallow-mindedest of the lot; here's the bright, galloping show for every dull yoke. See the prickly-palpitating titles: Forbidden Paradise. A Sinner in Heaven. The City That Never Sleeps. Stolen Sweets. Two Hungry Hearts. Dangerous Money. His Hour. The Scarlet Temptress. The Downward Path. Here is Rudolph the Sheik, love seeping out of his eyes and streaking his manly-maidenish cheeks; good old Doug, hero of a hundred hurdles and hand-to-hand fights; Thomas Meighan, the ever-handsome hero; Conny Talmadge, in a night of romance; Mary, never contrary, always sweet, too sane (she tells the world) to be a genius; and, fit companion of these romantic dolls and dummies, here is that chinless wonder, Andy Gump.

This kind of title, this kind of “star” attraction, with the kind of picture that abundantly and exactly fulfills the promise of the title—in other words, this melodrama and this moonshine—is the usual and major offering of the cinema. It is to this sort of gimerackery that this vast “movie” world is almost wholly given o'er. It is not simply that what is lowest, cheapest, most trifling and ephemeral in the world of books is highest in the world of “movies”: rather is it true that this constitutes the single, endless, flat level of the “movie” world.

There are good “movies,” some one may say. Only in the sense that one may procure “good” whiskey from a bootlegger—somewhat better than the worst. It is true that a very slight eminence of merit stands out boldly in the general flatness of the “movies.” Charlie Chaplin, of course, is king in his particular comic sphere: he is notable personally and uniquely as Chaplin, however, and is generally better than his vehicle—a sort of lone figure who seems to have wandered upon the screen: and it is not so long since he first emerged in his own proper person as something more than a pie-throwing artist. Then we have the old masters, such as Dickens and Hugo and Balzac and even Mr. Shakespeare, who appear on the screen in somewhat
of a fashion. Lovers of these men in the library always regret that they are rudely dragged into the light of the picture "palace." Their masterpieces are mauled to death, as a rule. And if one is more or less faithfully reproduced—if it is not squeezed and thrust about in too violent a manner—still the magic of the tale, we perceive, has been lost in the shuffle. The "movies" do not supply any device of art to fill the gap left by the lost magic of words, of character-drawing, of milieu that exists somehow on paper as it does not in a picture.

It is indeed a strange thing, when you reflect upon it, that this medium of the screen, which is so sharp and detailed and complete to the eye, fails to convey the sense of reality that words give. Here we can see real people—and, in the matter of costumes and settings, the "movies" have achieved a technical triumph; real landscapes unfold before our eyes; here are rooms that we might be sitting in, witnessing this drama; here is action—the motions and gestures of life: and yet, with all these visual aids, with this power of making a story happen while we wait and watch, it remains true that the picture never equals the possibilities of the original story. Excepting the trash which is fully three-fourths of the "movie" productions, and which is dumb and meaningless and unreal whether seen or read, there is no written story that has been transferred to the screen without loss to the vividness and significance of the tale. The artist, depending upon the words alone—compelled, after all, to throw upon the reader the burden of actually visualizing his characters and action—exceeds in realistic, creative power this medium which can supply the imagination with a wealth of animated detail (mechanically, not artistically). The artist has words—and his art. The "movies" have words, and everything else—but art.

Everything but art. This, in a word, is the situation of the "movies." The wonder of this medium, the triumph of it within limits, no one can deny. Certain spectacles that it produces are amazing in their sheer immensity, their gorgeousness, their vast and life-like reproductions of scenery and costumes and figures of the past. The historical films, on the whole, are marvels of purely visual recreation. One sees the French court and the English countryside in Monsieur Beaucaire. The environment of that olden time is, so far as may be, perfectly reproduced. Well reproduced indeed so far as detail goes—the details of dress and buildings and landscape and centuries-old garb. But the story—is a mere idle tale, forsooth. Of real character there is not a feature. Of subtle, significant detail—detail of character, restrained, hinted, rightly shaded detail of high comedy or tragedy, detail that would throw something besides the obvious spotlight upon these dead days—of this sort of detail there is nothing. There is strutting and posing—swashbuckling and loud insistence of great deeds—handsome Rudolph bows, the villain is foiled, and the lovers, parted o'erlong, kiss to part ne'er more.

One witnesses a similar failure in a picture like The Covered Wagon. It is a contrast between a great colorful, moving background and a petty, plotty, lovelorn tale. An epic subject, handled ineptly. One discovers that these long wagon-trains toiled over the thousands of miles of prairie and over the Rockies: that these
pioneers braved unknown territory, peopled by only too well-known enemies; that this tremendous, slow, dangerous, wearisome march from the Missouri to the Pacific was undertaken—for what?—that Molly and Will might embrace over one of the first fences of Oregon. The planting of an empire fades gently into the planting of a kiss. And, again, in such a "movie" we have the old sentimental-patriotic-heroic falsification of motives. We must be given to understand that these men were inspired by nothing save a high, unselfish vision of destiny in this westward migration. "We must save the children. It's them who'll be the Empire Builders," enunciates one grizzled land-seeker. And there is such inartistic, unconvincing, obviously thrown-in author's hindsight as the remark by Ma Wingate, standing prophetically on the site of Kansas City: "Some day a city may be built here." We are told that greed finally parted this gallant band—one group greedily and selfishly heading for California in quest of free gold, the other group nobly and unselfishly keeping on toward Oregon in quest of free land. Now this epic, to anyone who sees things in their true proportions, is not the less immense or thrilling because the actors in it were prompted by material motives. Gold or land, they were seeking that which would better their fortunes. It is quite beside the point, and beyond the purpose of the tale if truly told, to ascribe to these men a spirit of patriotism and prophecy that they did not possess. 'Tis enough that they did what they did—with such motives, quite natural and not shameful, as usually move human beings to deeds great and small. 'Tis enough that here were bold, rugged, picturesque actors—actors on a vast background of history. As it is, we are given morality, sentimentality, patriotism—and the background of what might be an epic tale. That is the triumph of The Covered Wagon—the great background. Its failure is the failure to tell the really great story.

Great stories—these the "movies," first and last, fail to give us. Neither fine words nor fine pictures are enough. The play—the story—the real heart of character and the great, true sweep of action: these we must have, or the thing's a farce. We are not interested in tales of true but trite love that runs all too smoothly over the same old mechanically messed-up path of misunderstandings, sighs and osculatory reconciliation. Imagine the ineptitude of this "movie" world—the flat triviality of it—in which, to observe a single, significant, all-revealing example, every story ends with a kiss!

One constructive suggestion I can offer toward better "movies": and for what it may be worth, I say the kiss (in its role of the grand, smacking climax) should go. There should be a different ending—at least two, possibly three, different endings. The absolute, complete, final death of the handsome hero just at the foot of the rainbow would be one good ending for a change. The murder, or at least the earnest and effective manhandling of a censor, would be another. I have another suggestion: All caption writers should be forced to read carefully a full set of the Little Blue Books, and thus learn how to write good, sensible English. Finally, the "movies" should do what may indeed be impossible—attract the crowd while appealing to intelligent art-lovers.
WHAT is art? It does not appear to be a simple question to anyone but the passionately rational Upton Sinclair, who will pursue his definitions and formulas even at a wide and improper venture; and, if one says that art is an imitation or an improvement or an illusion of life, or that it is an expression of the soul of man, or that particularly it is an embodiment of the artist's vision; yet one is brought up sharply by the reflection that every artist decides for himself what art is, that there are almost as many kinds of art as there are artists, and that (if he be really an artist) the artist's view of art must be practically true. Here, as elsewhere, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; and the work of art that lives and moves and has authentic being, that has countenance and character, will take its place quite simply among the books of all sorts which prove that the most obvious thing about art is its variety and its capacity for repeated and rare surprises. Practice goes beyond theory, and art follows the artist; each artist, so to speak, invites us to consider a new view of art and life; despite familiar surfaces, there is a depth of personality, a color, a tone that is unique. The drama may be Shakespeare or Eugene O'Neill; the essay may be Montaigne or Llewelyn Powys; the novel may be Balzac or Sherwood Anderson; the poem may be Shelley or Carl Sandburg. Not What is art? but What is this one artist? is the question we can ask with the greater show of pertinence—and never entirely answer.

This variety—essentially this individualism—of art, irritates the moral, social-democratic and formula-loving Sinclair. At bottom he is full of resentment over differences. He cannot view with equanimity the fact that there are artists who are not as he is. Every man to his taste is a rule no one will dispute, a good rule indeed; but the conclusion is not that one man's taste shall give a general name to art and shall drive out of the reckoning, and out of its due and interesting place, every other kind of taste. One must have the wit and grace to recognize that there must be all kinds of artists to make art and all kinds of readers to appreciate it. We may talk of art and reach the most divergent opinions about it, but after all our talk the work of art remains and we are not able, by our dislikes and objections, to rob the artist of his true identity and to prove that, not having done one thing, the artist has not therefore done another thing.

The simple truth that Sinclair will not see is that the artist has the right to select his theme, to choose his materials, and to employ them in the fashion of his peculiar genius. We are not, in short, to make demands upon the artist, but to take what he offers and enjoy it in its place and time. Now Sinclair makes impossible demands. He would have the artist be right on certain issues. He would have the artist be a logical (or a Sinclairian) thinker. He would have the artist be moral, an exponent of the virtues, and a friend of the people. He would even have the artist be accurate, which is per-
haps the last word in unreasonableness. He demands many things (which in the light of human imperfection are not a little absurd) and utterly forgets that the only thing the artist is obliged to do (and that in his own way and season and good pleasure) is to give us freely of himself and of his viewpoint and of the kind of life that interests him.

The reward and the penalty are alike the artist’s; and whether we are interested in him simply depends upon whether he is interesting, whether he can get hold of our minds and make us see what he sees; not that we are bound to agree with him, or that our interest in and judgment of the artist hangs upon our belief that he would make a competent director of the affairs of State or that, given the power, he could be trusted to build the kind of world we should desire to live in; but does he communicate himself to us in a vital and authentic way? is our first and last and truly our sole, important question.

It is really the artist who is most different from us who will (if we can sufficiently free ourselves from predilections that matter not) interest us most. We can indeed learn more from the artist who has observed life in a setting that is alien, and maybe painful, and maybe unrighteous to our view. One would better not venture upon reading if one reads only with the purpose of straitly upholding a certain view of life. What! are we to sit in a corner clasping tightly our little handful of prejudiced notions, and dismiss all artists who come near us with strange and different gifts of imagination? And if an artist, without being properly introduced and accredited as the holder of right opinions, obtrudes into our private world, shall we wax indignant and cry that this is not the right kind of art? Shall we kick at this man, who beckons us to new and not certainly true visions, saying that verily he is a pernicious propagandist, a priest of false gods, an enemy of honest men?

It seems to me that this is not an unfair illustration of the attitude of Upton Sinclair. As a literary critic, he is the Socialist with colors flying, and band playing the Marseillaise, and a Marxian rule in his hand to measure all artists by. “He who is not for me is against me,” says Sinclair; and the artist who is against Sinclair and his social program is very poorly rated in this curious, but assuredly not final, grouping of the world’s various, and often quite unsocialistic and un-Sinclairian, voices. It is, of course, not possible for him to deny the exquisite, pure, strong art of a Goethe (though Sinclair would not use such adjectives of praise); but he is unfriendly to this conservative artist, considers him as rather futile, and defines his art as simply propaganda for an aristocratic ideal. He tells us also that he could show Goethe in a worse light by emphasis upon his love affair with another man’s wife; which reveals the almost equally strong obsession of Sinclair, that of a moral and puritanical view of art and life.

This is not quite as strong, we observe, as the note of political bias. The erring rebel, with feet of clay, is the rebel still: and as such Sinclair can speak gently of his faults, make allowances, forgive with a gesture of pity and regret. Burns was a simple, good-hearted
man of the soil, who sang of lowly themes in field and cottage; and he discharged some very amusing satire at the respectable ruling classes, while proclaiming the rights and merits of commoners; and, this being so, what shall one say of Burns except to repeat the useful and true cliché that he was his own worst enemy? On the other hand, Sinclair is broad-minded enough to see good in a lord, if he is a traitor to his class as was Lord Byron. It is certain that Sinclair is not the man to approve of Byron's debauchery; but this lord was a rebel, and he died trying to save a war for liberty in Greece, and this social attitude is enough to justify a forgiveness of Byron's dismaying morals and to reveal something worthwhile in his art.

Balzac, on the score of morality, was undoubtedly a better man than Burns or Byron. He was not a practitioner of wild, excessive vice after the manner of Byron, nor was he a waster and a toper in the fashion of Burns. He was not, it is true, the kind of perfectly clean and untempted fellow whom Sinclair would acquit utterly on the ground of personal ethics; but he lived with a fair show of decency and he was a hard, sincere worker, possessing that rare and admirable kind of virtue—the ability to drive oneself steadily and completely to the performance of a great task. However, Balzac was a bourgeois, and he was vain of social prestige, and he was a reactionary in art for the simple reason (as Sinclair simply sees it) that he was not a revolutionary. That is to say, there is nothing of Edward Bellamy in Balzac, and although he wrote a very great deal, being indeed amazingly prolific, there is nowhere in all his writings the map or program of Utopia. And Balzac was able to write of gay cavaliers and dames of high degree without interrupting the business of his tale to throw sociological tracts at the reader in the grandiloquent, very conscientious style of Victor Hugo. And, says Sinclair, Balzac was a very bad kind of propagandist; and he sees in him, not the great artist, not the man who viewed the human comedy with a tremendous vivid sweep, but merely the perverted reactionary defender of a wicked system of society.

It matters not that Balzac went to all the fields of life for his characters, that he described simple provincial types with the same artistic scrupulousness and sympathy that he brought to the delineation of figures who were notable in the salons of Paris; it matters not that Balzac was interested, not in social ideas nor in any ideas per se, but in men and women—and that in studying human nature he was very faithful and was, quite obviously, moved by a wholly artistic desire to get at the bottom of this strange, colorful, eager, mockingly enigmatic drama of living; it matters not that Balzac the artist (and not Balzac the propagandist) created a world—not perfect nor decorous nor right-thinking indeed, but marvelously real and thrilling and rich in diversity—that is, as much as anything may be, immortal, that has survived the social life of Balzac's own age, and that will hardly be forgotten whatever regime of mass or class may be delivered out of the very pregnant future.

These are irrelevant matters in the view of Sinclair, who will make a propagandist of his man—preeminently and urgently that and little more—even if he is compelled to use a very distorted kind of
propaganda for his purposes; and so it is that Sinclair reduces the vast *comédie humaine* to comically false limits, and assures us that Balzac chose for heroes only the seekers after success, the socially and financially ambitious, and that it was Balzac’s purpose to exalt this theory and practice of success in life. It is a matter of forgetfulness or indifference to Sinclair that Balzac ranged from high to low and through all social grades for his characters, good and bad (to mention distinctions that were far less important to Balzac than they are to Sinclair); and Sinclair also forgets or ignores that Balzac did not write falsely.

It is very much to the point that Balzac did not picture the fashionable world as an ideal one, nor even as a good one, nor necessarily as an attractive one: he did not imitate that discretion which is supposed to be polite, and show us only a reticently veiled, deceptive surface of conventional life: he did not arrange, shift about, trickily light up (or dim) this life propagandistically with the object of making it seem other than what it was. That Balzac did not so falsify life—that he was quite evidently an honest artist using with care, and with penetration that one does not look for in the mere apologist of a clique, the best materials at hand (materials that, one may well repeat, were far more catholic than would be dreamed of in any class-conscious philosophy)—is a fact that cannot be dismissed by anyone who is disposed to judge fairly this charge of propaganda. Propagandists are not so careful with the lights and shades; they are not blessed with that equality of curiosity, of sympathy, which turns about everywhere to catch interesting glimpses of life; they are not so absorbed in probing the secrets of human character that—forgetting the propagandistic black and white, the propagandistic pro and con—they use all the colors of life: these are qualities of the artist, by which the artist may generally be recognized, but they are not the stock in trade of the propagandist.

Balzac wrote much of this world of the salon and boudoir that Sinclair dislikes (a dislike which is neither here nor there as a criterion of art): and where have certain heedless, ignoble and disastrous aspects of that world been portrayed more candidly than in *Father Goriot*? Again, let us admit that Balzac loved money and social position, and that personally he set too high a value upon worldly success: then let us ask ourselves what study of passion for the “root of all evil” can rival that of the old skinflint, Grandet, and whether the career of Eugene de Rastignac appears so happy and noble that Balzac may be charged with representing him, propaganda-like, as an ideal.

Whatever one may see in Balzac the man, one sees behind and above his temporary phase, this mask of mortality as it were, the essential and enduring aspect of Balzac the artist; whatever Balzac’s social views, his view of life was human and artistic and triumphed over all else; whatever his weakness, one can easily overlook it (if one is seeking the joy of art rather than the vanity of moral or political judgment out of their proper sphere) in the contemplation of his strength. Yet that last, in truth, may be pressed too hard until it borders on cant, and we must own that the artist is well himself with
all his weakness and his strength: and that many things, external and internal, good and bad and indifferent, go into the making of the work of art; and that, even so, once the work of art emerges as a living thing it has an authentic, superior life of its own—it is a brain-child that indeed bears marks of its father but is still a new and different being, shutting for itself and rightly demanding to be judged on its individual merits.

Aside from a reckless use of the word “propaganda,” the fundamental error of Sinclair lies in confusing the influences that variously share in the making of the work of art with the work of art itself: and, instead of surveying this living background in a scientific-critical spirit, dragging it into the foreground as a judgment on the artist. So that we have Sinclair producing with a triumphant air certain indisputable facts of a man’s life, telling us that had the man not lived thus he would not have written so; and when he is through we ask what all this signifies in the way of artistic valuation. Quite conceivably, Balzac would have written a different kind of novel had he been a country parson, living quietly to one side of the mad, gay procession of life; and had Balzac been forced to live in a garret all his days and subsist on bread and milk, we are not concerned to deny that his art would have been influenced thereby—and possibly we should have had from Balzac that note of indignation against social wrongs that Sinclair regards as the highest justification of art; yet we may inquire with a shade of doubt whether Balzac, had such been his lot, would have given the world a better kind of fiction. And, if we imagine Balzac in another man’s shoes, we reflect that we have still to consider his work ultimately and fairly with an eye to its distinct, self-sufficient merits as art, and not according to moral and sociological criteria.

Insofar as he labors to prove that art is not absolutely independent of life, and that the artist like any other man reacts to his surroundings, Sinclair does not get beyond the obvious. We know that the way a man lives and the society in which he mingles; whether he is sick or well, rich or poor, alone or in the midst of friendly life; whether he goes easily along the path of success, or whether he meets with opposition; whether he sees life from the windows of a drawing room or a garret; whether he is given to sober or dissolve ways; whether the atmosphere and manners of his time are agreeable to him, or oppressive; we know very well. I say, that these are not idle matters, that they are reflected in works of art. What trifles indeed have influenced artists (notoriously more sensitive than the average of mankind) might form a proper and amusing theme.

Our difference with Sinclair rests in the importance we give to these biographical data and the use that we make of them. In the first place, we do not accept them as simple and complete explanations of works of art. There have been ordinary men and artists who have been plagued bitterly their lives long by serious constitutional defects; there have been men who have felt the effects of snobbery and impoverished struggle; men who have been cruelly disappointed in their ambitions; men who have seen intimately the corruptions of politics and social life: but it is a Jonathan Swift who
writes Gulliver's Travels. And surely, something is due to Swift the man, who came into the world himself and not another; and something is due to Swift the artist, who could not have written like Addison and who could not have been another Pope; and we must, in short, conclude that, aside from external circumstances, the unique personality of Swift went largely to the making of this satire on man. And though there is contemporary satire in Gulliver's Travels, who cares about it? It has triumphed over diurnal limitations, and belongs to this day as truly as it did to Swift's day.

Again, we do not regard the facts of the artist's life as useful in guiding us to artistic judgments: and the danger indeed is that, knowing too much of an artist's life, we may put a false value (and that either too low or too high) upon a work of art. It is remarkable, let us say, and a fine, heartening spectacle to observe Stevenson working in pain and bad health and under the shadow of death. Yet this circumstance does not make Stevenson's work better in any degree. On the other hand, the fact that Villon was utterly a rogue does not make his poetry the less vivid and true as art: his art reflects his life (immorality putting on immortality) but it is art and it is valuable, not because of the influences that produce it, but because of what it is and would be if we knew nothing whatever of Villon's life—because it lives and is, after all, the authentic voice of a man who happened to be a poet in the company of other rogues who were, as it fell out, not poets. Had Villon been respectable and written living poetry—well, he would have been a living poet still, and the poem, not the life behind it, would be the test of poetic greatness.

Oscar Wilde produced different kinds of art. It is a far cry from The Importance of Being Earnest (which Sinclair brands as worthless) to The Ballad of Reading Gaol, which, though not soundly Marxian, is a poem whose spirit can hardly fail to win at least a nod of approval from Sinclair. Yet Wilde, regardless of the change in his life and its reflection in his art, was the artist no less distinctively in his earlier than in his later phase. Had Wilde written the poignant ballad before going to prison, and the witty play after going to prison, neither would be changed in value, judged as a complete and self-sufficient work of art. We should then have to say, in the one case, that Wilde had the ability to imagine the feelings of another in a very different situation of life (something that is not unheard of in poets); and in the other case, that Wilde was one who could boldly throw an epigram in the face of suffering (again, a demeanor that is not exactly incredible nor unreported in the strange annals of mankind).

Such matters as Sinclair exhorts us all too urgently to behold and ponder are, no doubt, interesting; they throw light upon a work of art and may furnish a clue to moods and implications that else would remain obscure; they may aid us to sympathize more humanly (whether to agree or not) with the work of art; but as no biography quite reveals the man even, so these biographical and social details cannot explain the work of art—they may explain opinions, but not the artistic life that flows out of them; and, finally, let it be said that
this Sinclairian criticism does not alter, nor in any degree help us to arrive at, real artistic values.

Was this poet a reactionary? Very well; still he is a poet, by virtue of his poetry and not his reactionism, and all other nouns and adjectives that may be placed on the table do but extend the list of his qualities. Was this essayist a selfish idler who wrote for amusement? that one a man full of hate and suspicion? and the other a spendthrift, philanderer and valiant bottle-killer? Yet their stuff is better to our taste than many a discourse on virtue written by a dull upright man. Is it true that this novelist is the defender of a social system that, in the light of economic science, is indefensible? So much is pertinent if we consider the man as an economist; but if we consider him as an artist, we ask only whether he has breathed life into characters and told a story that was worth the telling. Is this fashioner of plays, this poet-dramatist, who astonishes us with sublime, deathless words, an immoral, low-lived fellow and, in the larger view, utterly obtuse or recalcitrant to his social responsibilities? We are interested; we may even regret it; for the rest, tell it to the clergy or the police, and let us enjoy the play.

LIFE AND LITERATURE

MAY begin by saying that my subject is so vague as to be no subject at all in the ordinary sense, and by "vague" I mean that it is free from limitations. It is the vagueness of variety. If I should tell you that my subject is life, you would be none the wiser. The term "life" covers a multitude of possible subjects. Life is so many things that it is not any one thing. Strange to say, life, which one would think is the largest and most promising subject imaginable—a subject, indeed, which should hold endless fascination, since life is the sum of all our experiences and emotions—is really the most uninteresting of subjects. It presents no concrete image to the mind. How many of you would be attracted by the announcement of a lecture on life? You would not regard it as a subject proper, but would still ask: What is the man going to talk about? Life, you see, is too general a term to be clearly descriptive. It cannot be seen truly as a whole—notwithstanding the ambitious attempts of the philosophers—but only in its parts. Life means this or that particular thing, and its meaning changes as our interest is diverted momentarily by the business of living. It means the French occupation of the Ruhr, the earthquake in Japan, the subconscious mind of D. H. Lawrence, the scandal in the next block, who will be the next President—some passing aspect of business, politics, science, art, sin or adventure. We read as we run: we glimpse life, as we grasp life, a little at a time.

Literature, which is my subject if I may be said to have a subject, shares the expansive nature of life and is almost as broad a subject. Literature, I might say, is life; but it has this advantage, that it confines life artistically within a certain representative sphere of thought or action, it scales life down to our comprehension. "All the world's a
stage and all the men and women merely players,” as Shakespeare happily observed; but it is too vast a stage and it holds far too many players for us to see conveniently; so we must have a smaller though similar stage and fewer though corresponding players. We must see romantic love in Romeo and Juliet; the life of the gross, jolly, unmental and unmoral, utterly sensual lover of the good solid things of this earth in Fielding’s Tom Jones; the powerful, eternally true drama of desire in Balzac’s imaginative masterpiece, The Wild Ass’s Skin; the essential tragedy of the miser in George Eliot’s Silas Marner, with the pathetic influence of human affection in his narrow life; the tragedy of neglected boyhood in Dickens’ Oliver Twist or the tragi-comedy of shiftless irresponsibility in his inimitable Micawber. Or in biography we must see, according to Emerson’s classification, Plato as the thinker, Shakespeare as the poet, Montaigne as the skeptic, Napoleon as the man of the world. Fielding, by the way, spoke of fiction as biography and it is, indeed, the genuine biography of man. Time and place are non-essentials, they are merely stage-carpentry; however the background may shift, however the names of the players may change, however capriciously fashion may decree her alterations of appearance, or custom produce a new set of manners, it is still the familiar drama of man that is acted before our eyes.

It is not so difficult thus to see life typically on the reduced but vivid scale of literature when one reflects that life is much the same and people are much the same everywhere. The emotions are universal, they know nothing of the artificial boundaries created by man. The rogue and the saint, the miser and the spendthrift, the lover and the hater, the dreamer and the doer, the weak and the strong—these contrasting types are roughly alike in the metropolis or the farthest isle, in West or East, Asia, Europe or America, in the mountains or on the plains, whether they be in color black, white or yellow. The simple urge of hunger and of sex, fear and wonder and desire, and that vanity which Solomon declared is the sum of life—these emotional springs of human action do not take reckoning of latitude and longitude, do not vary so widely as people imagine. Climate may intensify certain passions, a bare, unfriendly land may emphasize certain needs, a land of smiling plenty may provide opportunities for a higher degree of culture; but, if these things manifest themselves in fluctuating rations of importance and intensity, their fundamental nature is unchanged.

There is, of course, a vast edifice of custom and of cultivated life that has been reared upon the foundation of our plain old human nature; and this edifice presents different features in different climes and countries, so that we have the exotic note in literature, the peculiar appeal of books of adventure and travel whose scenes are laid in foreign lands to which distance itself lends an air of mystery and enchantment. There are certain exciting adventures, too, that are not possible in the orderly and law-ruled city, that readily occur in the South Seas, let us say, or in the Andes, whose very name suggests adventure, or in the remote, lonely seas where Joseph Conrad casts his fictional net. But the more one reads these tales of far places and strange peoples, the more one sees emerging from the picture the familiar, age-old yet ever young countenance of humanity, the more one recognizes that, under their skins and stripped of social externalities, men are fashioned of the self-
same stuff. Your neighbor in China, so to speak, is very much like your neighbor across the street. Even in that most romantic of all romances, the Arabian Nights, where events are frankly given over to genii who operate without regard to the laws of probability, one detects the immemorial man playing his usual tricks. Nothing offers more fascinating proof of this kinship of humanity than an examination of the proverbs of various nations and races—those simple generalizations about life and human conduct, drawn from daily experience, that are found as common wisdom on the lips of men. I have edited sixteen separate collections of national proverbs; to me it has been interesting to note the many currents of similarity running through these proverbs, signs of a profound relationship in the scattered and outwardly diverse life of the race.

One need point only to the plays of Shakespeare as an example of the continuity of human experience. Why is it that we can appreciate these plays so thoroughly, that they can move us so deeply? In every external circumstance, these scenes and characters are about as foreign to us as they could be. The inventions of man have so changed the face of the earth and altered our way of living that Shakespeare might as well have written thousands as hundreds of years ago. If we look no farther than their costumes and the physical environment in which they moved, we should say that Shakespeare's characters were people of another world. But we look into their hearts, and we see the reflection of ourselves. Every lover sighs with Romeo; every man of divided will and character broods and vacillates with Hamlet; every merry glutton and loose liver can see himself in Falstaff, though he may shamefully deny the portrait. The stage is Shakespeare's, but the players belong to every man. Shakespeare lives in literature because he gave us such a glowing, eternally true version of life, because he wrote the immortal biography of man.

Aside from the representative quality of literature, its convenience in adapting life to the needs of our imaginations, there are other valuable qualities which are lacking in our individual observations of life. These are unity of impression and—in the artistic sense—completeness of vision. Of course, life is really incomplete to our understanding; and when we know all that can be known, there is still an infinite, incalculable, indefinable something beyond. But, for the purposes of art, the well-rounded tale may be regarded as complete. When we see all the acts and motives in a drama, we may say that we understand the life that it represents. As mere accidental spectators of life, we do not have this artistic unity and completeness. We see the life around us in hurried and confusing glimpses. We see the stark culminating event, but we do not see the chain of events that led to it. We are bewildered by climaxes that are like fitful lights in the surrounding darkness, by passages torn from the context of life. We observe a man, at a decisive moment in his life, make some bold stroke toward success or failure, enter upon a course of action that will lead to happiness or misery; but the drama is inexplicable, because we have no knowledge of the man's past, we are ignorant of the innumerable circumstances that have shaped his character, of the background that has colored his thoughts, of the strain of temperament or the accident of fate that has
served to whet the keen edge of desire; nor can we forsee the final issue of the drama—consequences, as well as causes, are outside the range of our vision. Here is a man who has come to a pitiful decline in his career, who embodies the tragic spirit of decay, possibly premature, and what know we of the devious ways of this life’s journey that has ended so disastrously? A domestic tangle in the neighborhood sends the gossips scurrying to and fro, but the story in all this is a closed book to us. There are a thousand things in the day’s news, little disconnected episodes, that have an unguessed content of drama; and there is no tragedy of the day that is ever fully explained by the most ingenious and industrious reporters. On the street or the car, in public halls—yes, in the homes of our friends—we see baffled and weary faces whose stories we cannot read. Our closest companion is, after all, much of a riddle to us. Often he could not, if he would, take us completely into his confidence.

One can carry the illustration farther—to our own inner selves. Few of us understand very clearly our own thoughts and actions. We come to unsuspected situations by imperceptible ways. We are suddenly confronted by life in some unaccustomed aspect and we are unconscious of the fact that we have been approaching this moment as steadily as human steps can tread. Even when we review our lives with a gaze that is fully conscious, how much is sunk in oblivion! We cannot perfectly reproduce our thoughts and feelings of the past. A few years is often sufficient to blunt the delicate edge of remembrance. The youth has forgotten the shy, evanescent, curious spirit of the child. The man, buried beneath affairs, looks upon the youth as a stranger. Middle age marvels at early manhood, while age sits in its corner and looks at life through eyes quiescent or querulous. Each man is composed of many selves, that are successive heirs to his bodily estate, and so it is that we cannot read clearly even the stories of our own lives. Our impressions succeed one another too rapidly. The procession of life moves past our windows at such a great pace that we see it only as a flash of color and hear it as a blaze of sound. It leaves us with an imperfect vision and a faint echo. Life is like a falling star—it comes suddenly into view, blazes for a brief moment, then drops into darkness. We see the middle of the play, but neither the beginning nor the end.

This fleeting, chaotic spectacle of life is given form and meaning by literature. A great work of fiction gathers up all the scattered threads of circumstance and character and weaves them into the whole fabric of a life. It shows us not only every act, but every thought, that is essential to the understanding of the drama. Hidden clues, that would escape us in real life, are brought to view by the patient hands of art. One might well define the perfect work of fiction as the perfectly comprehensible story of a life: I would add, insofar as any life is comprehensible to the human understanding, with that life unfolded fully to the view. We may probe character to the bottom, sift circumstance ever so carefully and minutely, yet there is a blank wall of mystery that we cannot level nor scale. Certain novelists have the sense of the inerutable nature of life to a poignant degree; they always communicate this feeling of a fate that is over all and that has the last word in human affairs. But so far as a life is the product of human and understanda-
ble influences, it is revealed to us by the art of fiction, properly practiced. George Meredith, in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, illuminates the drama of his hero's life in this artistic fashion. When Richard is a child in his cradle, we observe the laying of the train of tragic parental misrule that is to explode his life's happiness. The father, his mind embittered and his view of life distorted by the faithlessness of his wife, concludes dogmatically that the passion of love is an evil and treacherous thing and he resolves to guard his son from contact with the opposite sex. He will rear him according to a philosophical system that takes no account of the emotions of the natural man. So we see the boy, as he grows in years, becoming more restless and unhappy in this unnatural atmosphere of repression, every healthy human instinct wounded terribly if not crushed: a lad who is not allowed to be as other lads, whose entire future is mapped for him by a thoughtful but foolish father. When, in spite of this morbid surveillance, love comes to him—a love pure and idyllic, compact of all the wonder and beauty of life—the blind father, instead of letting the course of true love run smooth, interferes in his blundering way. The result is a runaway marriage, estrangement and unhappiness all round, evil days for Richard, sad days for his young wife, bitter days for the father who, although his proud artificial system is in ruins, still tries obstinately to preserve its ruins; and at last the overwhelming tragic conclusion of this mad, futile attempt to clap Nature in irons and outwit the sun, moon and stars. Aside from author and reader, there is no one who understands from beginning to end the tragedy of Richard, who sees his ordeal step by step. The father, separated by years but more tragically still by his utter forgetfulness of the simplest facts of human nature, does not understand his son; Richard's wife, being unable to see his past life and unaware (as indeed Richard himself is) of the rigid theoretical plans of the father, feels but does not grasp the significance of the tragedy; Richard's friends, of course, see only the outer face of events; a single observer of the tragedy arrives at a sympathetic comprehension, but only when it is too late. This is an illustration of our inability to see life as a whole. Only when Meredith shows us the life of Richard Feverel artistically can we see it from the first cause to the last effect. We know Richard's story far better than we know our neighbor's story. Thus the indirect observation of art is superior to the direct observation of life. What matters it that the story of Richard Feverel is fiction, so-called? It is life truly enough, as we are convinced before we have read a hundred pages. This tyranny over the natural spirit of youth, of which Richard's father was enormously guilty, is something we can see in actuality if we look far enough. But we cannot see it whole, without the aid of art.

When I compared life to a procession, I had in mind that other quality of literature which is such an aid—an indispensable aid—to clearness of vision: that is, unity of impression. We may have a good seat and see the procession from beginning to end, but it fails to make a single, compact, and therefore unforgettable impression upon us. We see it rather as a series of impressions that are but loosely related in our minds. Even where we are privileged witnesses of the entire life history of another person, our understanding is handicapped by the
fact that we observe slowly through a long period, that there is possible neither a sustained viewpoint nor a continuous degree of interest. Time effaces many of our impressions, the picture fades gradually in the very making, and by the time it is complete a single, clear view is impossible. Looking back over a history of whose every detail we have been personally cognizant, there is a haze that we cannot dispel by the most prodigious effort of memory. Here again art triumphs over life. We can read the story of a lifetime within a few hours; at the most, several days are enough for the reader who is really interested. When we close the last page, the whole story is fresh in our minds and we are left with a single, powerful impression. We see the story not as a succession of episodes but as a coherent and intelligible drama. Event closely follows event, cause and effect tread upon each other's heels, so that we cannot fail to receive that unity of impression without which true understanding is impossible. The climax of the story, which gathers all the contributory impressions into the ultimate general impression, is felt intensely and seen as inevitable. The artist, you see, can compress years into a sentence, decades into a paragraph or a chapter—he can even span centuries with the long reach of imagination and, instead of the comparative chaos of life, he gives us the sublime unity of art.

The importance of this singleness of effect has been pointed out by Poe, with his usual fine carefulness. Poe, indeed, stated that the most effective prose medium was the short tale that could be read at one sitting, and that sitting preferably within an hour's length. He insisted that the novel is inferior to the short story, not from the standpoint of execution but from that of effect, because it cannot be read through without stopping; you read several chapters, then you turn to the business of actual life, and when you return to the novel the continuity has been broken. It cannot be denied that there is some truth in this objection. We can no doubt recall more vividly the novels that we have pursued intently to the end at a single sitting—those novels that we have on occasion sat up the night long to read, closing the last page just as the dawn peeped in at the window, unconscious until the very last of any need for sleep. These are the high moments of reading. These are nights of intellectual dissipation before which all commonplace and customary dissipations pale.

Compared with the slow unfolding of events in actual life, however, the longest novel is a miracle of unity. Nor am I inclined to consider its length as a handicap so vital as it seemed to Poe. The intervals between reading are short, the mental interruption is so slight as to be hardly a strong positive force, and the period over which the reading extends is so relatively brief that it cannot be said really to destroy the totality of impression. Indeed, I think it might be urged that in the reading of a novel it is best that there should be short periods of perusal alternated with short periods of reflection. The concentration of art is often terrific. The impression is so profound, so tremendous, that it overpowers our mental forces, that we cannot comfortably receive it without having life to act as a shock absorber. There is a limit, too, upon the mind's power of assimilation. We cannot gulp a story hastily without losing a great deal of the taste as well as overburdening our receptive faculties. To enjoy its full flavor and to promote thorough
emotional assimilation, we should read more slowly and make allowance for breathing spells. If one is reading a tragedy, a comic interlude in real life will serve as a relief. If one is reading a tale of heroic deeds, where the excitement runs high, one can relax in a brief return to the commonplace.

To sum up—to express its function in a word—literature organizes life; it takes the disorderly episodes of life (disorderly, that is, to our imperfect vision) and marshals them in the orderly drama.

There is another function of literature upon which we are more obviously dependent—a field in which it reigns not only supreme but solitary. Literature alone can bring the past before our eyes. To it we must go for our knowledge of the ways of men in other ages. You will say at once that I mean history. So I do, but not history in the academic sense only. Too much of this sort of history—written in the cold, unimaginative text-book style and generally confining itself to the mere outline of events, with a dull preponderance of names and dates—is altogether unworthy of the name of literature. It has the narrow atmosphere of the study; and, for all the sense of the vividness and vastness of history that it gives, it might have happened within the four walls of the study. Imagine Napoleon scaling, instead of the Alps, a bookcase! Imagine Julius Caesar crossing, instead of the Rubicon, the space between two rugs! Imagine Cromwell, instead of overturning a throne, upsetting the ink bottle! This is the spirit in which many so-called histories are written; and, unfortunately, this is the kind of history that is forced upon the minds of the young, thus filling them with an aversion for history in its many forms.

Yes, history has many forms. It is found in all the books that record the life of man. Biography is history—indeed Emerson declared that all history is, properly speaking, only biography. But speaking of biography in its correct sense—the particular account of an individual's life—what a rich and fascinating kind of history it is. Through the biography of a great man, we see really the whole life of his age. He has been a participant in or a privileged onlooker of all the important events of his time; his life is intimately connected with the lives of the other great men of his time; we shall not fail to see in his life a true reflection of the thought and manners of the period; and, instead of an impersonal record, we have a thrilling personal story, colorful and alive. More intimate and engaging still are the autobiographies, the diaries, the reminiscences, in which we see events directly through the eyes of the participants. These are the source-books—the real material—of history. The life of every age has been recorded by its articulate geniuses; it is these immediate transcripts of life, having a freshness and a genuineness that are missing in the most crudite books written by scholars out of other books—it is these pages written on the spot that fully satisfy our sense of history. All history is, in fact, based largely on these original sources; and to the sources the wise reader will go for his knowledge.

To me, biography—by which I mean every kind of personal record—is the ideal form of writing. I state this as my personal preference, not as a critical dogma. You can see the importance I give to biography by noting the list of biographical titles in the Little Blue Books. The list of fiction is longer, and you may wonder at this, considering my
avowed enthusiasm for biography. Thereby hangs a story, and it is the story of the most remarkable phase in the development of the Little Blue Books. For a considerable time I confined the Little Blue Books to reprints of the classics, in which fiction predominated, though philosophy and the essay were liberally represented. This was the natural beginning; and it was tremendously useful work, as it brought these classics in cheap, convenient form to many people who could not afford them formerly; indeed, the largeness of the enterprise and the widespread advertising of it made many people keenly aware of the classics to whom the classics had been nothing but a name, and not a very attractive name. Enormous advertising space had been devoted to the worthless productions of the current book market, and the classics had been left in semi-obsccurity to shift for themselves. I cried up as loudly the virtues of the classics and have, I believe, succeeded in making them even better known. I may add that, from the first, I gave even my list of classical reprints a broader scope than that offered by the usual list. I did not restrict myself to well-known and favorite authors, to those cautiously and somewhat narrowly selected classics that have the academic mark of the school. I published not only the accepted and widely-known classics (not necessarily widely read because widely known) but also rare and less familiar classics that had been left unfairly by the wayside. Many of these classics, known only to the curious student of literature, I have included in my list for popular reading. I have taken rare editions of old books—books that would not be likely to come in the way of the average reader—and reprinted them in the Little Blue Books, where they can be bought for five cents instead of several times as many dollars (and, being rare, often they could not be procured at any price).

But to proceed: When there were several hundreds of the Little Blue Books, I began to turn my attention more to biography. I had not entirely neglected this field; but it had certain awkward limitations for a series of books made to fit the pocket. Biography—and history in its narrower sense—presented material that was too voluminous and bulky. These subjects did not readily fall into the category of short classics. But it seemed unreasonable that this should be a permanent obstacle. Somehow such an important field of literature must be adapted to the brief popular form of the Little Blue Books. A biography, I decided, need not be written in such a lengthy style. Why should not a man's life be told fully and vividly within the limits of one of the Little Blue Books? Then came the thought: Why not have short original biographies and studies of history written specially for the Little Blue Books? The deed swiftly followed the thought and the series entered its unique creative phase. I had little trouble in collecting a staff of capable writers, who were eager to do precisely this kind of work. I began to assign subjects with a happy air. My enthusiasm for biography had found an ideal outlet.

The difficulty of space proved to be no difficulty at all. A fifteen-thousand-word sketch—the usual length of the Little Blue Books—was ample for the complete story of a man's life; and do not believe that the story cannot be told in a very fascinating way, with all the lights and shades, in this number of words. I have read many biographies of several volumes' length, but they did not interest me more nor tell me
essentially more than the biographical manuscripts that are submitted to me. Now, when I read one of these short biographies written for the Little Blue Books, I have no need to read a longer biography of a man in order that I may have an intelligent view of his career. My desire for knowledge of the man, and as a rule my curiosity as well, are nicely satisfied. Of course, it is a pleasure to read the longer biographies if one has the time and the inclination. But often the short biography in the Little Blue Books will tell all you wish to know; while, if you wish to read further, the Little Blue Book has served you as an excellent guide, has opened for you a field of interesting research that you would not have discovered in any other way. The Little Blue Books give not only original biographies but admirable condensed versions of the autobiographical material of which I spoke. Thus I have in the Pocket Series selections from Pepys’ Diary, in which you will find curious and valuable glimpses of the social life and manners of the seventeenth century in England; and interesting versions of The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini and Boswell’s Life of Johnson.

When I speak of history in its broader application, I should not think of omitting fiction. Some of the best pictures of past times have come down to us in the form of fiction. If the truth is told, one often can get more real history from a novel than by reading volumes of history proper. The vivid picture of an age that you get in this kind of fiction endures in the memory longer than any mere collection of facts. This is the drama of history; it is history written with imagination—and by imagination I do not mean invention, but rather the power to reproduce an age so perfectly that it lives in the reader’s mind. It would be hard to find a better example of this kind of writing than that extraordinary tale by William Morris, A Dream of John Ball—one of the less known classics that I have included in the Little Blue Books. This is a tale of Wat Tyler’s rebellion in the England of the fourteenth century, and more particularly a tale of the uprising of the yeomen of Kent to join their brothers of Essex who have been reduced to a condition of utter servitude. To begin with, Morris has reproduced most charmingly the manner of talk of the period and has chosen a narrative style that has a delightful old-English flavor. So much for the form of the tale. The story opens with a perfect description of the physical aspect of fourteenth century England. There is a road, relic of the Roman invasion, from which the teller of the tale surveys the countryside, “an ordinary English low country, swelling into rising ground here and there.” The view, aside from the lie of the land, is one which modern eyes can behold only through the printed page. It is a neat, peaceful, rural landscape. Let me quote the description, which is short and striking:

“Copses were scattered over the country, and there were signs of two or three villages and hamlets in sight besides the one near me, between which and me there was some orchard land, where the early apples were beginning to redden on the trees. Also, just on the other side of the road and the ditch which ran along it, was a small close of about a quarter of an acre, neatly hedged with quick, which was nearly full of white poppies, and, as far as I could see for the hedge, had also a good few rose-bushes of the bright-red nearly single kind, which I had heard
are the ones from which rose-water used to be distilled. Otherwise the land was quite unhedged, but all under tillage of various kinds, mostly in small strips. From the other side of a copse not far off rose a tall spire white and brand-new, but at once bold in outline and unaffectedly graceful and also distinctly English in character. This, together with the unhedged tillage and a certain unwonted trimness and handiness about the enclosures of the garden and the orchards, puzzled me for a minute or two, as I did not understand, new as the spire was, how it could have been designed by a modern architect; and I was of course used to the hedged tillage and tumble-down bankrupt-looking surroundings of our modern agriculture."

All this, you will note, is told by one who has awakened from a dream to find himself in this strange fourteenth-century England; and the tale is told with a freshness as of one seeing all these things for the first time. Into the village this man goes, and we have a description of the houses, of the church, and of "a tall cross of stone" near the church which "stood on a set of wide stone steps, octagonal in shape, where three roads from other villages met and formed a wide open space on which a thousand people or more could stand together with no great crowding." We see the dress of the people—"red or brightish green or blue cloth jerkins, with a hood on the head generally of another color;" and they carry "bows in cases of linen yellow with wax or oil; they had quivers at their backs, and most of them a short sword by their left side, and a pouch and knife on the right." As we see them, they are coming in from target shooting with stout English bows. We enter an inn, every detail of which we see as in a perfect picture; we are introduced to all the manners of these people as they eat and drink and talk, and sing the songs of Robin Hood. Later we see the yeomen crowded about the stone cross, and we listen with them to a militant sermon by the rebel priest, John Ball, who urges them to join their brothers in the rebellion that is afoot. There is a battle of "bills and bows" in the field just outside the village; there is no description of a modern battle, with all its vast movement and mighty engines of destruction, that can match this simple picture, complete in every detail, of how men fought in the days of Wat Tyler and John Ball. There is also the stir of reality in the tale; atmosphere enfolds in living outlines all this perfect detail. In short, Morris takes the reader into the very heart of the fourteenth century and into the heart of high deeds as well. History more interesting than this is not to be found, nor history that stays with one more vividly. Other tales I might name, that are historical in this great sense: such as Balzac's *In the Time of the Terror*, through which you see a phase of the French Revolution; Stevenson's *A Lodging for the Night*, through which you see that rogue of a poet, Francois Villon, and his harum-scarum crew; Zola's *Attack on the Mill*, through which you see a grim episode of the Franco-Prussian war. Such fiction is history endowed with the breath of life.

Science is a branch of history that I must not forget. This may have a forbidding sound to you—science makes dry reading, you may say. I know the feeling. Science without style—a heavy load of closely technical information—has real terrors for me. A text-book on science
sends cold shudders down my spine—as do all text-books, in fact. Still, so important is science that I should be willing to suffer a little for the sake of its knowledge. But why suffer? Science can be made interesting, no less so than other history. Huxley, being a stylist as well as a scientist, could make science interesting. Those of you who have read Wells' Outline of History know what a sublime and fascinating story can be made of the development of life on the earth. Carroll Lane Fenton knows this trick of making a wonderful tale out of the facts of science; and I have been fortunate enough to join this man to my staff of writers for the Little Blue Books. He has written a number of Little Blue Books about science—Man and His Ancestors, Animals of Ancient Seas, Animals of Ancient Lands, A History of Evolution, The Building of the Earth—which I guarantee will not put you to sleep. I do not hesitate to promise that you will read each of them through at one sitting. Of course, that is not long—about an hour. But an hour's reading of science, as told in the weighty text-book style, is equivalent to several hours of ordinary reading; it is only when science is told as an interesting story that one can sit through it with a light heart.

If you are to see life, past and present, through literature, it follows that your reading should be general. Avoid the mistake of limiting yourself to any special class of literature. You will display some favoritism, of course. I have confessed a leaning toward biography. You may find your deepest pleasure in fiction; or perhaps the essay will win your favor more than any other form of writing; or in poetry you will find the note most personal to you and will linger over a book of verses. It may be that you will concentrate yourself by turns on different forms: there will be a period of intense absorption in the novel, a time when you will be attracted steadily to the essay, a long dwelling upon biography, intervals when science or philosophy crowd out other things, a season when the play is the thing. This is a common experience, in which books wait upon our moods. One may have read widely, but have touched only lightly, let us say, upon the essay. There will come a day when he happens upon a charming essay by Lamb, or DeQuincey, or Montaigne, or Hazlitt. A happy note is struck, one's interest in the essay suddenly deepens, and this form of literature—so wonderfully free and suitable to every mood—will fill one's horizon. But whatever your method of reading, do not deny yourself the pleasure that is to be found in all kinds of great writing. Quite often you hear a person say, "I don't care for the novel," or "Biography bores me," or, "I can't see anything in poetry." If it is really true that you are temperamentally incapable of enjoying fiction, or biography, or poetry—and this is sometimes the case—it is your misfortune. Happily, this is a rare misfortune. The average reader is quite capable of enjoying anything in the realm of literature. What I would warn you against is depriving yourself of any kind of pleasure to be had from books, through a mere whim or prejudice or indifference. Give the novel a fair trial; find out what there is for you in the essay; look carefully into biography; try the book of verses with all your senses alert. Above all, do not scorn the novel because you regard it as light reading or as the idle product of the author's imagination; do not wave aside the essay because it seems trifling to you, or poetry because it seems effeminate; do not pass up
the biographies simply because you have an encyclopedia handy. The novel will give you the deeper truth of character and emotion; the essay will lead you into many charming ways of thought and fancy; poetry will appeal to your sense of beauty, which is more developed in strong natures than in weak; a biography will show you the whole man, vivid and alive, which the encyclopedia, useful as it is, cannot do.

Another error into which you should not fall is that of attaching too great an importance to such labels as realism, romanticism, naturalism, symbolism. These classifications are more or less arbitrary, and in any case they are useful only as they define the particular field in which the artist works. They should not be regarded as fences to shut the reader out from this field or that. If you insist that you do not like romance, for example, you are excluding yourself from some of the greatest literature; so with a prejudice against realism or any school of writing. It is art's greatness that it is perfectly free, that it can take a hundred forms, that it can pursue its aim in any direction; so that it be art, it needs no other label. The point in all this is that a well-balanced choice of books makes a well-balanced personality; if you read to any purpose, a good book, whatever its form, has something to give you.

How shall one judge whether a book is good? This is of first importance, for it is obvious that if one does not know how to distinguish good from bad, all reading is idle. But so versatile and many-sided is art, so many are the degrees and kinds of merit in books, that I would not venture a precise and absolute definition. A book is not made to measure, it is not constructed by a pattern. Neither style nor subject matter will serve as an infallible guide in judging a book. Style is an important aspect of art, and if a book be well written, so much the better. But there are books that achieve greatness despite crudity of style. Balzac, though he did not have greatness of style, put such greatness of character, such a power of emotion, into his novels that the reader forgets the detail of style. It is in the story especially that one will err in emphasizing style; the important thing, after all, is that the story be great, that its characters shall live emotionally for us. Poetry, on the other hand, can hardly dispense with beauty of language; a badly written poem is intolerable. The essay, too, though it need have no particular style, must reveal the art of language. As to subject matter, the world is wide and art may wander where it will. One cannot say that a book is good merely because it has a large subject; the subject may be too large for the author, in which case the book will be a bad one; whereas, in the hands of an artist, the smallest subject may be impressed with infinite significance.

One cannot help thinking in this connection of Guy de Maupassant's story, A Piece of String. It is, in strict conformity with its title, simply a story about a piece of string. A purse has been lost; an old man has been seen to pick up something from the road; gossip busies itself and the old man is called before the local authorities, where he insists that it is only a piece of string that he has found. He produces the string as proof, but all are skeptical, though a search of the accused reveals no sign of the purse. Nevertheless the story flies, everyone believes the old man is lying, wherever he goes he is the subject of jeers and
men point at him as he passes. The sole object of the old man's life is now that of refuting this scandalous story, and he goes continually from one to another, repeating his simple tale and pathetically producing the piece of string as evidence of the truth of his tale. But the more he explains, the more is he suspected; his mind weakens under the strain, he takes to his bed, and, with his dying words, still protests his innocence: "A little bit of string—a little bit of string. See, here it is..." Just a little bit of string—yet with it Guy de Maupassant weaves this infinitely pathetic and character-revealing tale.

If I were to give a general definition of a good book—and it would have to be general—I should say it is a book that is alive! In the novel, there must be living character, emotion, atmosphere; in the biography, the man must stand out distinctly and individually as in life; in the essay, there must be distinction of thought or personality, enforced always by distinction of style. Such a definition, I realize, is somewhat vague, and this must be so with one who has not discovered for himself the difference between a dead and a living book. You can know instantly by looking at a man whether he is vigorous and alive; familiarity will enable you to judge books in the same way. After all, it is the critical sense that tells us whether a book is good or bad. So the best way to distinguish between good and bad books is to develop the critical sense by reading good books. This seems like putting the cart before the horse; but what I mean is simply that one who wishes to develop a taste for good reading should begin with those classics as to whose merits men are generally agreed and in reading which one cannot err. Thus familiarity with the good will breed contempt for the bad. The time comes when one can stand on one's own feet and survey the fields of literature with an independent eye; with sound standards, one can choose more freely for oneself, perhaps throwing aside a book which the critics have given a tremendous reputation and finding a secret of delight in some book that no one has seen fit to talk up.

I do not wish to introduce unduly the element of self-advertising, but it is no more than fair that I point to the Little Blue Books as a trustworthy guide to good literature. This is truly the best advice I can offer on the subject of what is good in books; and why should it not be, as here is the result of years of labor in carefully selecting the best? These are the books that I consider good, and I am pleased to recommend them to anyone who is seeking good books. In speaking of what to read, I should not forget to mention that there are two titles in the Little Blue Books that are full of valuable hints to readers: Carlyle's essay, On the Choice of Books, and Georg Brandes' essay, On Reading. You could not find better advisors than Carlyle and Brandes.

In discussing good books and how to judge them—in all of this rather wandering discourse on the subject of literature—I have assumed, fairly enough, that you wish to read good books: that you correctly regard good books as not only important but interesting. If there should be any among you who automatically substitute the adjectives "heavy" and "dry" for the adjective "good"—who think that by good books I mean heavy books or dry books—I would disabuse your minds of such an unjust impression. I am quite willing to say to you, "If you find
that a book is dry and uninteresting, throw it aside." Such a book will
do you no good, and what is more to the point, it is almost certain to
be a very poor book. The best literature is the most interesting. The
test of the artist is his ability to move us deeply. Dry books, dull books,
heavy books do not live. Why does a book become a classic, holding its
own through generation after generation? Why else than because
generation after generation of men and women have found it interesting?
The books that live—the good books—are the books in which you will
find life most vividly portrayed. Shakespeare is eagerly read today,
and he will be eagerly read a thousand years from now if our civilization
endures, for the very reason that his dramas are so packed full of human
interest.

It is a sad joke that is played upon the generality of readers with
regard to Shakespeare. They are somehow given the impression that
while Shakespeare is to be looked upon with awe-stricken admiration
as the greatest of all writers, he is, strangely enough, not exactly read-
able. A set of Shakespeare—sumptuously bound, of course—looks
imposing on the library shelf, but the owner of it never thinks of handling
familiarly these fine volumes. Shakespeare is to be admired dizzily
from a distance, but not to be enjoyed as a teller of tales, as a man with
whom to mingle laughter and tears in contemplation of the comedy and
tragedy of human life. Then one day, perhaps by accident, this victim
of the Shakespeare myth begins to read one of the plays—no matter
which one, they are all interesting—and behold! he discovers how grossly
he has been cheated. He finds, not some incomprehensible, frigid thing
that he has mistakenly pictured as greatness, but—wonder of wonders!—
a good story. Of course, it is inconceivable that he should not read the
plays through and through, and be left at the end with a feeling of
amazed incredulity that he should have been so palpably victimized by
a conception of Shakespeare that is not even superficially plausible. If
the great are dull, then the mediocre are interesting: an anarchy of
values which no one would accept, if stated in these plain words.

There is another side of this shirking of the classics—a silly, snob-
blish side that can hardly be regarded as anything but the reflection of
mental laziness. This is the prevalent use of the term "highbrow" in
connection with those who demand the best in literature. Strange to
say, those who most freely use the term "highbrow" in this way are
never willing to accept for themselves the logically associated term "low-
brow." They will be neither "highbrows" nor "lowbrows," therefore
they must be "nombies." Such derision is childish and pointless. It
is simply an indication of very good sense that one should wish to read
good books, just as it is very good sense that one should wish to wear
good clothes, eat good food, live in a pleasant house and, in short, enjoy
the best of all the things life offers.

The pathetic (or ludicrous, if you please), aspect of all this is that
many a person who has a desire for the best in reading is afraid and
ashamed to indulge openly his taste, but reads good books in secret, or
with a furtive air, an uneasy eye turned always to detect the approach
of some acquaintance who may fly out at him with the dread reproach
of "highbrow." If a hand is laid suddenly upon his back, he starts up
in a very fit of terror. Can it be that this acquaintance (good old Bill
Jones—sturdy, plain fellow he is—reads the sports page) has actually caught him reading Montaigne’s Essays? He is all apprehension. He is moved by the panicky impulse of flight. It is a ridiculous state of things, surely, when a person of superior taste shrinks with a sense of inferiority!

I am so far optimistic as to believe that this anomalous, grotesque situation is passing. Indeed, I take pride in the thought that the Little Blue Books that are printed by the millions in Girard are making culture respectable, as it were. It is odd to speak of culture being made respectable; but, with that absurd term “highbrow” in mind, one cannot deny that culture has carried with it an odor of desirability. It has the “odor of sanctity.” Now the Little Blue Books are appearing everywhere. People read them quite openly in all sorts of public places—on the street, car or the train, during the lunch hour, in hotel lobbies, in the parks. Men of affairs have the Little Blue Books lying unashamedly on their desks—they do not bother to hide them in a drawer. If two men fall to talking, as likely as not one of them will pull a Little Blue Book out of his pocket, look his companion squarely in the eye, and say: “Here is a good book I want you to read—Life and Character, by Goethe. It’s great stuff—not the sort of trash that’s worse than a waste of time. This writer was full of interesting ideas. Here, for instance, is an idea about ideas: ‘Who so shrinks from ideas ends by having nothing but sensations.’ Isn’t that very true? You see a lot of fellows like that every day—dead from the neck up, as the boys used to say. Here is a greater thought: ‘Life seems so vulgar, so easily content with the commonplace things of every day, and yet it always nurses and cherishes certain higher claims in secret, and looks about for the means of satisfying them’. What do you think of that?” Perhaps the other man will reply: “I haven’t read that one, but I’ve read another book by Goethe—Thoughts on Literature and Art. He was a real thinker, who urged the higher claims of life. By the way, here’s a charming thing I’ve been reading; if you don’t mind, I’ll trade books with you.” Out from his pocket comes another Little Blue Book—The Wit and Wisdom of Charles Lamb. So these two shameless “highbrows” exchange books!

There is encouragement in that thought of Goethe’s. If things appear overwhelmingly commonplace to you, and the vulgar seems to triumph, remember that life has higher claims; and to read good books in the right spirit is to be in tune with life.

THE MAN WHO MISSED THE FEEL OF LIFE—
AND HOW HE FOUND IT

HERE was once a discontented man. There was nothing in his immediate field of vision that promised joy, but he looked afar off at things desirable and out of reach. He didn’t really know what he wished, but passed long hours in vague day-dreaming. What he missed, in a large phrase, was the feel of life. He was a lonely speck of troubled consciousness, unfixed and unidentified, drifting on a dark sea. There was much to excuse this man’s state of mind. His lot was obscure and uneventful. He had to work hard and long to
support a life that to him was not life. His daily round was exceedingly narrow, there was no spaciousness, were no far vistas, in his environment. He had little schooling—the Machine had claimed him early—and his mind was cramped as well as his body. Glory and riches and ease were not for him. Leisure, that would have released his spirit, was denied him. The wonders and excitements of travel were things vaguely visioned, but not practically possible.

Everyone around this man was situated like him, with the difference that while others were apparently contented, he was a discontented dreamer. They didn’t realize that their lives were empty; with him, this realization was acutely present at all times. There were no companions with whom he could share even the futile ache of his dreams; more unfortunate still, there was no one to show this man how to get something out of life, how to identify himself with the wide, interesting world, how to form definite meanings out of the indefinite chaos of his desires. There were no such companions, personal and alive; nor companions impersonal (yet alive too).

The case of this man was pathetic, but not hopeless. The very fact that he was discontented was full of promise. He had spirit. He knew at least that his life was empty, unlit, immobile. The man, you see, was a bundle of inflammable stuff, that needed only the spark of inspiring contact to make him flame into real being. Only an impulse, a suggestion, an arrow flying to the mark, was needed to set this man’s idle spirit in vigorous motion.

He will never forget the day when the great impulse came to him. Taking a short train trip, a fellow passenger, with casual beneficence, handed the man a little blue book which, he said, was a thing of beauty and might divert the man who had been staring moodily out of the window at fields familiar and meaningless. He accepted the book as casually as it was offered, not greatly interested but preferring anything to his miserable moodiness. It was a poem, and that, to begin with, was not very promising; for to him poetry was verse like The Village Blacksmith or The Boy on the Burning Deck, and such things had never meant anything to him. This poem, however, had a strange title, a title that struck his curiosity: The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

He began to read—well, it was beautiful. Here was a magic of words that he had never known. The grandeur of these new cadences was strangely stimulating. He found thought here, too, that charmed him by the expression of the very attitude that he had vaguely felt. The elusiveness, the hollowness, the mystery of life were here sung in clear, swinging, positive melody. The man had made one important step in the direction of a life of meaning and growth when he had found this definite voice proclaiming his own discontent and feeling of emptiness. For even pain and disillusionment, given artistic form, spoken out boldly and simply, become, strangely enough, less painful, less bitter in disillusionment. There is something heartily affirmative about strong, clear denial: it is a landmark to recognize, a spot to set out from, a path marked for the weary, uncertain traveler. Here, for example, was the haunting sense of mystery in life put into words that gave a satisfying outline to vague emotions:
"Into this Universe, and Why not knowing,
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing."

Well, that was simple; he saw himself clearly in that flowing verse.
"As Wind along the Waste"—there was a picture of a phrase, and, para-
doxically, this unflattering simile was good for his spirit, it contained
a definition for which he had been yearning. He had not known what
he was: now he at least knew that he was a wind along the waste. This
was something; this was a gift of identity; the man was being led into
self-consciousness. Another step; a metaphor that contained a grain
of promise, a spur indeed and a challenge to the spirit:

"A Moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—
And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The Nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!"

He went swiftly through life, like a wind; but that was not all—
there was a "Well amid the Waste," from which he could have a
momentary taste of Being." A taste of being—ah, that was just what
he had thirsted for with an unavailing thirst. However short life, how-
ever narrow life, he could enjoy Being. It had never occurred to him
that there was a rich meaning in mere being. After all, he was alive,
and in a world that was alive. He glanced out at the rapidly passing
fields with a new eye. He felt the swaying motion of the train with a
new consciousness. Vaguely, he began to realize himself. He came to
the same thought, expressed in a different metaphor:

"O threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
   One thing at least is certain—This Life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies."

What then? Blow bravely, flower. Inhale fully this sweet per-
fume, man. Waste not your time in vain yearning after lies that mock
and elude you, but embrace and enjoy the life that is tangible and true.
Brush aside all vagueness and uncertainty, that you may grasp the
certainty of being. Robust philosophy, a hopeful cry, a quickening
draft, was this. And then:

"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
   A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
   Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"

Why, here was the very spirit of living! Simple joys, too, within
the reach of any man—himself, for instance. Taken not literally, what
did it mean but to see and feel and enjoy with every active sense the
pleasant thing within one's ready grasp? Fundamentally, it urged a
definite, eager attitude toward life. This, for a surety, was what the
man got from it. It called upon him to live, to be, to express himself in
harmony with life. His troubled agitation had been merely the
restless motions of a sleeper. The old tent-maker, waving his wineglass, and singing his cheerily challenge to life, awakened the man. "A book of verses underneath the bough"—that line had a very present meaning. This book of verses, this little blue book that he held in his hand—through its pages he had got his first real glimpse of life, his first thrill of being. Just a little, thin book, with blue paper covers, and in it was the secret of life for him. It was a date. It was his 1492.

Now there are things obvious that could be said about this man, after this discovery of himself. It is known for a certain thing that he walked the streets with a more lively pace, that he breathed the air with a heartier sense, that he whistled on his way and sang at his workbench. He saw the fields and the trees with a new eye, an eye that had been taught to see beauty. He scanned, too, the faces of his fellow with a curiosity that was continually alert. He sought, we may be sure, for signs in his fellows of the same blind urge toward life that had formerly possessed him. And that which he had been unable to see when he himself was blind, he now discovered with a sympathetic awareness. Others, too, wished to live, yearned for indefinite, far-off things—things that were, the man now knew, all about them, awaiting only the outstretched hand of directed desire. And we may be equally assured that the man, after a time, communicated his new consciousness to his fellows, and that the Little Blue Book, beautiful as poetry and invigorating as philosophy, passed through many hands.

Other books, too, and it is of these I have to speak. For the man learned life through books, as many before him had done and as many after him will do. "One look in a book, two looks at life," Goethe wisely observed. And this man took many looks at life, but he had never looked at life, never really seen it and read its meaning, until he had first looked in a book. And the more he looked in books, the more he looked at life. Life grew for him as his reading grew. What, indeed, are books—good books, the real books, such as this man was highly fortunate to get—but life made vivid and strong and whole, life directed into a clear channel, life molded into perfect and eternal form? If life is a wind along the waste, are not the books the tree-tops which reveal the presence and direction of the wind? If life is a well amid the waste, is not a book a pitcher of water that is drawn from the well?

These are not very good similes, perhaps, but they express somewhat the man's feeling about books. He reasoned yet more plainly that books were the clear voices of men who had eyes perfectly equipped to see life and through these finer eyes those with lesser vision could be trained to see. Not everyone has spontaneously and irresistibly this artistic gift of vision; but if I have it not, said the man, I shall get it from others. There was knowledge, too, that he could get nowhere but from books. If you wished to know a thing, you must go to a man who had studied it. He knew this from his own experience. His own trade was a thing of mystery to many; and if others wished information about his trade, they came to him with their questions. Well, there were men whose trades were those of philosopher, scientist, historian; men whose trade was the expression of beauty in poetic form; men whose trade was the study of human character, the epitomizing of human destiny, in fiction; men whose trade was that of showing their fellows the humor in life that
they might not grow too wrinkled in brow or too heavy in spirit. There were men, he knew, who had spent their lives in study and research and long, arduous questings, that they might bring to their fellows some knowledge and thought and beauty.

In books, then, were to be found the results of these men’s labors. Surprisingly convenient, too. Why, in half an hour, with one of these Little Blue Books (you may know, as a matter of course, that he quickly found out all about them and where he could get them), he could learn, quite simply, about this Earth on which he lived. One of the Little Blue Books, The Building of the Earth, told him all this—built the Earth out of chaos for him, as it were by a second divine labor—during one noon hour, after he had eaten his hasty lunch! This was not all. He found out how life came to be upon the Earth. He read, with breathless interest, the absorbing story of the slow upward march of life, of the gradually unfolding life forms that reached their grand efflorescence in man. Evolution was a word he had heard vaguely, but that had left no picture in his mind. Now here was the picture, full and clear, given in a Little Blue Book called A History of Evolution. This wonderful knowledge, this sweeping view of the mighty resistless ages, the ages uncounted even but only guessed at, came to him on a day when he read avidly on the way to and from work! More he learned, in his odd half hours, about Animals of Ancient Seas and Animals of Ancient Lands. He could see these gigantic, curious life forms, he could reconstruct these remote eras, with the aid of simple words on plain paper.

He no longer regretted his meager schooling; here was an education to be had cheaply, practically for the taking. He saw these Little Blue Books—there were five hundred of them then—referred to as “A University in Print,” and the phrase had a special personal meaning for him. Universities had been far beyond the narrow limits of his life; he had never expected to see a university, but here was “A University in Print” happy phrase—that he could carry about with him, a university of silent,—patient instructors, who were ready to teach him at any moment he chose, ready in their several fields of knowledge to teach him anything he wished to know; and instructors who served him for an incredibly small fee. Just imagine, for example, getting a competent instructor to tell you about The Ice Age for only five cents! And here was another man who would give him A Guide to Plato, reveal with amazing simplicity the beginnings of philosophy, for the same trifling sum!

Never was student so eager, never was university so well attended, so faithfully used to the last point of service. Science he studied, to learn what the Earth and Man was. With this basis of material understanding, he sought in philosophy for the mental vision, for glimpses of the meaning of life. Of course, as he knew from his scientific reading in the Little Blue Books, life could not be fully explained. No matter how many questions one asked about life, there was always a question beyond the last. But, practically, one could find here and there some clearness in life, there was a certain unity of experience by which one could be guided, there were flashes of intelligence that pointed the way to some desirable goal. One could relate oneself logically and alertly to the phenomena about one. One could study human conduct, learn what to avoid and what to seek, how to get the most pleasure and the least pain.
out of life, and how, too, to profit by one's painful experiences. He
could get some orderly, constructive view of life, some philosophic
outlook that would be a post of observation or an intellectual base of
supplies, as it were.

He found that he had a braver, nobler view of life, that he had
definitely grown in his own personality, after he had read The Trial
and Death of Socrates. Here was contact with a great spirit, from which
his own spirit took heart and strength. After this spectacle of a man
accepting his fate, fulfilling his high destiny, with calm philosophy, the
little timidities and trepidations of life faded before the man's courageous
countenance. He was not insensible that there was drama also in the
tale, that here was a splendid, stirring moment of life caught and held
to view for all time. He enjoyed the philosophers as well as their
philosophy. Out of The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius he got not only
wisdom but the whimsicality of the man's thought. He felt himself in
contact with a curious personality, a man whose thought was illuminated
by individuality. Stray thoughts, on this page or that, he applied soberly
or smilingly to his own life or to the lives of those around him. Voltaire
he enjoyed hugely. Here were wit and wisdom joined, alike stimulating.

He reveled in the satirical hits (never a miss!) of the Pocket Theology
and his mind was cleared of much rubbish by the unflinching introspec-
tion of The Ignorant Philosopher. Well, he had quickly enough found
that the first step toward wisdom was the recognition of one's ignorance.
It was also well to have the bounds of the knowable and the unknowable
clearly defined. More light he got from Herbert Spencer, a man of
whom he had never heard until he read, one evening between supper and
bedtime, a Little Blue Book called Herbert Spencer: His Life and Works.

It may be added that he never really understood the fact of progress,
the possibilities of life, until he read The Discovery of the Future, by
H. G. Wells. Other Little Blue Books had carefully traced for him the
development of man to his present state. This Little Blue Book turned
his scientific vision toward the future. A view of God and life that
was very curious and suggestive he got from God: Known and Unknown,
a Little Blue Book written by Samuel Butler. Religion had always been
a thing of mystery to him; and he got some clear idea of the origin of
religious ideas through The Ideal of God in Nature—here was a well-
known thinker, John Stuart Mill, who obligingly gave him insight into
these things for that same little payment of five cents, the price of a
sack of peanuts! This man was dead and gone, but here he was a living
instructor in the "University in Print."

Closely related to philosophy, were the many little books of epigrams
and maxims that he read. These were books that he could pick up any
time and peruse delightfully at random. Funny, he thought, how a
sentence or two, pungently turned, could flash upon one's mind a new
phase of human experience. Why, just one of these Little Blue Books,
Maxims of La Rochefoucauld, was a pretty good short course of study
in human nature. This fellow was cynical, to be sure, but wasn't cynicism
often merely an ill-natured name for the truth that hurts? A man is
called a cynic if he tells us unpleasant things for which we have small
relish, from whose ugly truth we recoil.

From the wit of epigrams, the man went on to the beauty of poetry.
Here he found a great deal of the stuff of epigrams, swift illuminating pictures of life, as well as great matter of philosophy. Poetry had given him his first impulse toward life, his first fine glow of being. The Kasidah he found to be as broadening an influence as any work laying special claim to philosophy. Here was a combination of poetry and philosophy such as he had found in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Walt Whitman’s Poems, too, turned life into a glorious, significant rhythm for him. Here, indeed, he found in its fullest expression the glory of mere being. The Earth, which he had seen in its scientific aspect, he now saw in its poetic aspect. Not the pretty aspect of verses about Spring, not the gentle carolings of the Nature poet, but the virile, urgent, all-embracing vision of one who was Poet and Naturalist, but first of all a man. Whitman taught him that everything is beautiful, that Nature is one, that out of things seemingly vile spring forms of wondrous beauty. A Shropshire Lad reached to the very depths of his emotional life and brought up rare, unsuspected treasures.

He loved the essay, that literary form which comes the nearest to intimate talk shared by a cheerful fireside. He read widely here: Montaigne on Love, Thoreau On Walking, Friendship, Nature, Wilde on The Decay of Lying, Bernard Shaw On Going to Church; he read Bacon, Emerson, Lamb and Chesterton; DeQuincey’s Confessions of an Opium Eater was essay, autobiography, descriptive prose-poetry and study of human character, all in one Little Blue Book; Brandes’ essay On Reading renewed and redirected his enthusiasm for books, for the Little Blue Books of the “University in Print.”

He had a pile of the Little Blue Books on history and biography. He buried himself for a time in the past. The most heroic, creative, picturesque moments in the life of man he lived again, sitting quietly by the kitchen fire. He felt the shaking of the continent of Europe beneath the mighty tread of Napoleon; conquered the savage Gauls, penetrated the isle of rude ancient Britain and ruled Rome at its greatest with Julius Cesar; followed Bismarck as he built up the powerful German Empire; saw the Battle of Waterloo through the eyes of that master dramatist, Victor Hugo. Through the biographies of great writers, he was shown the broad highways of the world of literature and many oddly interesting corners hidden from the casual eye.

He learned the power of humor, its gift of blessed release from the vexations of life, its quality of intellectual lightness, its large element of philosophy, too, hiding wisdom beneath the laugh. Why, without this relation of spirit, this hearty smiling at life, this kindly wise tolerance, covering human imperfections and blunders and stupidities with a garment of geniality, how would life be supportable! One would go mad with too much thought. No, the wind must laugh and dance as it goes along the waste.

Fiction—here was Man, the proper study of mankind, moving with verisimilitude through the daily scene. Here were the “magic shadow-shapes” of Omar Khayyam given impulse and identity, transformed into human realities that planned and worked, struggled and won or lost, dreamed and reached to the heart of dreams, flesh-and-blood persons, at close grips with destiny, moving in a tense atmosphere of high fate, epitomizing man’s life, presenting a vivid chart of human character.
Here were the scattered forces and emotions of life focused, brought into clear relationship and given visible completeness of consequence, thrown into bold artistic relief for all men to see and understand. Here was profound instruction and lively entertainment. He could say with George Meredith, that he had learned as much "from the pictures of our human blood in motion as from the clever assortment of our forefatherly heaps of bones."

Drama, too—here he found the stuff of fiction in condensed, livelier, more sharply contrasted form. In drama, he found Shakespeare, and here, he thought, was the deepest expression of human emotion in all literature. Where were tragic figures that could touch the shoulders of Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear? Where was comic representation of mankind that could match the fat, blustering, roistering shape of Falstaff, this man who was all compact of sensuality, who drank and ate and plundered and philandered and lied and laughed, who was coward and braggart, rogue and rake, yet who never felt more than a passing or pretended twinge of conscience, and who "babble o' green fields" on his deathbed? And such word magic! Here he found, in The Tempest, a poetic simile for life that matched Omar Khayyam's "wind along the waste":

"... We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep..."

The world of drama also contained for him the witty comedies of Oscar Wilde, "the champagne of literature." And here were the character satires (broad outlines of human folly) of Moliere and the social criticism of Ibsen, conveyed through living dramas.

Earth and Man, Life and Art, this man got from the Little Blue Books. He thought with the philosophers, sang with the poets, flashed into witty perceptions of life with the epigrammatists, laughed robustly and riotously with the humorists, held charming conversations with the essayists, saw life clear and whole with the novelists, saw all the world as a stage with the dramatists. "The University in Print," he finds, is one from which there is no graduation. One never ends this fascinating study. This is really living, being. This is the "well amid the waste" which is never empty, for whose life-giving waters one continually thirsts.

The man has a long shelf of the little books. They are his constant companions. Now he is never lonely, never discontented in the old way. Instead of his old discontent with life, there is a new eagerness to live. He has that discontent which is called divine—the discontent which spurs one on to continuous growth, the discontent which is at the farthest removed from all mental sloth.

Without schooling, this man educated himself. Without great leisure, he made his little leisure count in ways undreamed of. With little wealth, he gained that knowledge which is beyond price. Within a narrow physical environment, he expanded his mental environment into a boundless world of thought and feeling. He won to the heights through self-development, as any man can do. He can say, with Walt Whitman,

"All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul."
CULTURE AND THE WORKERS

THE IDEA that the workers, because they have not the full advantages of education, are invariably illiterate, is one of those prejudices that results from the too wide separation of social classes. If it is true that the majority have low tastes, and prefer to frequent the movies, read the comic page and discuss the baseball score—their most daring intellectual diversion being to skim through the pages of a popular novel—it does not follow that this majority consists of workers only. Taste does not follow class lines. There are many quite socially respectable and leisureed folk who love to see the movie hero leap skyscrapers; and there are many workers, men of brain as well as brawn, who stay home to read Plato, Shakespeare and Ibsen. The eager, active, thoughtful mind—the high appreciation of great things—the desire for knowledge, the love of beauty: these qualities are not to be sought in any particular corner of life. They permeate life and, in all places, lift it above the daily scramble.

Any one who assumes that the worker must be deaf to the grander harmonies of life, that he must be blind to the colors of life, that he must be incapable of reacting to the situations that project boldly and vividly from the pages of literature, has failed to take into account certain facts. There is the fact of progress, and the changed situation of the worker. We live in an age of vast production, when mammoth machines are constantly turning out comforts and luxuries that past ages did not dream of. The living standard of the modern worker is not comparable to that of the worker of even fifty years ago. Today the worker demands more and more of the things that lend joy to life, that raise existence above a dull animal level. He wants a phonograph, a car, a radio set; he demands comfortable furniture that is good to look at, clothes that are well-made, food that is tasteful. In short, the modern worker is animated by the desire to live like a civilized human being. The machine has brought him into touch with many formerly remote and inaccessible phases of life, and he now demands life in its fullest. Demanding this, it is natural that the worker should demand the pleasures of the mind as well. He desires that education which was once regarded as the august privilege of a few. He wants to be able to attain the dignity of discussion of important subjects. He revolts against the position of the dumb, driven slave. He must express himself. He wishes to make history his own, to know what great men have said and done, to ponder what philosophers have thought about the chaotic, confusing spectacle of life, to learn what science is able to tell him definitely about the motion and meaning of life. The worker is no longer isolated, no longer confined within the narrow horizons of the serf. The world is before him, and he wishes to explore it. The world is one, it has been materially united by steam and electricity, and the worker wishes to identify himself completely with this world.

The worker is, I think, advantageously situated to enjoy the greatest in literature. Great literature, we know, deals with fundamental human emotions. It springs directly from the rich, vigorous soil of life. It is
grandly simple. It speaks, for the most part, of common men and women, their hopes and fears, loves and hates, defeats and ambitions. Most great writers have gone to the lives of the people for their theme. Even when literature chooses aristocratic subjects, it must deal, perforce, with essential emotions: "The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins." Now I say that literature, having these qualities, can be especially appreciated by the workers. The workers are realists. They are close to the heart of life. Their contact with life is simple and direct, they grapple bare-handed with powerful emotions. The worker who thinks at all is apt to see life more clearly than another because he has fewer class conventions to overcome, fewer sophisticated prejudices and mental mannerisms through which to pierce to a vision of the realities of life. He has, be it ever so little, somewhat of the creative spirit. He is not so likely to be burdened with pretense, to be enamored of a pose, as his brother who has a position to maintain in society. The worker depends upon his own efforts alone, and he has no reason for appearing other than what he is nor for seeing things as other than what they are. He calls a spade a spade, and uses the short and ugly word, fights with his fists and damn what he doesn't like with hearty frankness. He is man, elemental and picturesque.

So the worker, when he reads great literature, finds himself on familiar ground. Here is the real, solid stuff of life. The bold presentation of life does not shock the worker. He can watch the straight and fearless gaze of the artist. He has not the timidities and inhibitions of those who live sheltered, artificial lives. The intelligent worker, too, is quick to detect sham and artifice, the false note. He will not be put off with any pale, feeble imitation, but demands that the artist render life sincerely and strongly. He reacts to history as he does to fiction and the drama. Strong men, great movements, tremendous struggles, attract him. In philosophy, he wearies of circumlocutions, of metaphysical meanderings, and seeks for a clear, sensible analysis of life's problems. For science, as a thing highly practical and realistic, he has infinite respect. He has learned something of what science can do, through the intricate, marvelous machinery of the industrial life in which he moves. Handling the perfect tools that science has given him, seeing them perform their mighty operations, he thinks little of the miracle-workings of superstition.

Thus we see that the workers naturally appreciate the classics because in them they find life realistically presented; and they have a growing interest in the classics, as a part of their modern demand for a full civilized life, made possible by the development of the machine. But the worker has always labored under a double handicap in the pursuit of culture. Books have been so expensive that he has not been able to afford many of them; and his leisure has been so limited that he could not find time to go through the endless pages of the heavy tomes which have been until recently the repository of the knowledge he sought. Often when he comes home from a hard day's work, he is too tired to do much reading.

I have always felt that if the best literature could be offered to the workers in cheap and convenient form, they would eagerly embrace the opportunity. The success of the Little Blue Books has proved the opti-
tude of the workers for the classics. The reason is apparent. Here are books that are so cheap that the poorest worker can afford to buy them; they are short, so that he can easily spare the time to read them; they are convenient in size, so that he can carry them in his pocket to be read on the way to work, during the lunch hour, any time that he has a few minutes unoccupied.

More important, from the standpoint of culture for the workers, than the short classics that have been reprinted in the Little Blue Books, are the original works that are now being published in the series for the special sake of those with little leisure. Biography, history, philosophy, science, are all being rewritten, with an eye to brevity, for the Little Blue Books. Everything is carefully reduced to the compass of the fifteen-thousand-word essay. The material is all there, told not the less vividly because less verbosely. The series contains an imposing list of important biographies; and each biography of sixty-four pocket-size pages is complete in all essentials.

This brevity meets the special needs of the worker. He has time for these little blue books. He can explore the world of knowledge in odd half-hours. He can read the biography of a great man while riding to work; can learn the gist of the Chinese philosophy of life during the lunch hour; can obtain a clear view of the sweep of evolution on his way home from work; in the evening, if he desires, he can spend a half-hour enjoying fiction, drama or poetry—or he can extract kernels of wisdom from a book of proverbs or epigrams. Sundays in the park he can carry some of the Little Blue Books and, when he grows tired of feeding peanuts to the monkey, he can read about the upward march of the race from monkey to man.

It is to the candid, disinterested desire for knowledge and the wholesome, unalloyed love of beauty, that the Little Blue Books make their appeal. They aim to disseminate culture, not to enforce creeds. Propaganda has no place in them. I have called them a “University in Print,” and this phrase truly describes their purpose: To teach, not to preach. Sound knowledge that will aid clear thinking is what the worker wants. He can better assess the claims of the various propagandas that are directed at him if he has a well-rounded view of life, if he appreciates somewhat the ways by which man has reached his present point in history. Biographies of the great men of the past will enable him to look with a clear eye upon the figures that emerge from the welter of contemporary events. A perusal of the best expressions of artists in all ages will enrich his sympathies while sharpening his judgment. Communion with the philosophers and thinkers will stimulate him into thinking, lead him to question life, to bring order and design into his own life, to view life reflectively as something more than a scramble.

The interest of the workers in the classics should be a revelation to those whose hectic imaginations picture the workers as the modern Goths who may overrun and destroy our twentieth century civilization. A best seller in the list is Plato’s dramatic and thoughtful story of The Trial and Death of Socrates. Thousands of workers are reading this ancient classic today. Can workers who read with eager minds such noble literature as this be pictured with any degree of verisimilitude as
Goths? Are mechanics who dream at their work-benches of the glories of the past likely to cherish destructive impulses? Should workmen who delight in The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, the poetry of Keats, the plays of Shakespeare, the essays of Schopenhauer, Bacon and Emerson, inspire fear of the part they may play in the future of society?

THE CRITIC AND HIS JOB

UNDER this heading, H. L. Mencken syndicates a characteristic protest against the Taine idea of criticism—that criticism is in some sort a science, and that the critic should follow scientific method in his labors. According to Mencken, criticism is a very uncertain thing, highly personal, depending upon the age, subject to all changes of opinion. Sainte-Beuve, says he, was a very good critic but a critic of the Second Empire nevertheless.

In support of his thesis, Mencken refers to the case of Whitman. The critics of his own day hooted at the Good Gray Poet. He was denounced as not merely a pretender in the realm of art, but as an indecent, low fellow. Even Emerson, who exclaimed with something like enthusiasm over Whitman, later recanted his wisdom. In the latter part of the century, when the agrarian Populist revolt appeared, and the labor question came to the fore, the radicals adopted Whitman, eventually the professors took him up, and he became the vogue. Now, critically, Whitman's merit is undisputed. Yet, says Mencken, his position is not certain or lasting. The verdict of critics a hundred years from now may be against Whitman: as, indeed, it may be against Shakespeare or any other writer.

It seems to me that Mr. Mencken's case is rather weak and that his argument is very misleading. Babitt, reading his Sunday paper, will say that at last the leading critic of them all says that his own craft is nonsense: that criticism is just somebody's opinion, probably wrong, susceptible to contradiction or change, a mere venting of personal likes and dislikes. Those who hate critics and who deeply resent criticism will take comfort from Mencken's strictures. Writing for the great American public, it is due his subject that Mencken be somewhat more careful and intelligible. I know what he means, and partly agree with him. Criticism is not an absolute science. The personal element enters into it very largely. It would be impossible for Mr. Mencken and Professor Saintsbury to view works of art in quite the same way, yet both are very good critics. For one thing, no critic, however intelligent, is equally sympathetic to all forms of art. He may be a strong critic of fiction and a very poor critic of poetry. He may appreciate and correctly evaluate biography, but have little regard for the drama or for belles lettres or for the essay. In short, we must look, in the writings of any critic, for the inevitable personal, temperamental note. Yet within these limits, after making these due allowances, can we not regard criticism as having not only an artistic but a scientific aspect?

The fact that opinion may change, that the critics do not always
recognize talent, that a Whitman may be hooted by one generation and hymned by the next, does not appear to me as a good argument that criticism cannot be an intelligent, just, fairly accurate business. That critics allow themselves to be influenced by many things which are not germane to criticism, that they judge often by political or moral notions that signify nothing in art, simply proves that critics betray such rules as may fairly be laid to the account of their craft—that critics, not criticism per se, are unscientific. We can say, for example, and say confidently, that the professorial criticasters of Whitman's day were a timid and generally a foolish lot. We can say that the intelligent critic of Whitman's day was too much bound by tradition and failed to see the great substance, the splendid strong spirit, in this new and strange poetic form. We can assert that, while the social and political reasons for bringing Whitman into favor were of course immaterial to considerations of art, nevertheless the modern appreciation of Whitman is just. We can say further that a critic of Shakespeare's day who had snickered at the bard as a poor poet would have been himself guilty of a very poor judgment, of very little critical insight; and should a critic arise in the year 2000 to declare Shakespeare was no dramatist, no poet, no man of literary or artistic or intellectual abilities, and that Hamlet is not as good a play as Abie's Irish Rose—well, we should recognize that critic as a man pursuing the wrong vocation.

In short, while criticism is not an absolute science—while it has not that exact and dispassionate role which distinguishes the search for sober scientific fact—while the critic in his study is certainly moved by human considerations that we do not expect of the scientist in his laboratory—it is still true, on the other hand, that criticism may and should be intelligent and accurate and guided by knowledge of the forms of art, the genius and temperament of the artist, and the age in which the artist plies his calling. We cannot say that all the critic has to do is to follow the admonition of Whistler—to say what he likes and what he doesn't like, and let it go at that. He will, of course, be affected in some degree by his peculiar preferences, his enthusiasms, his aversions; and we indeed place great value upon the unique personal note in criticism, the individuality of it, the art of it. Yet we can see, too, that criticism may differ in atmosphere, in the manner of thought and style, without conflicting. Isaac Goldberg and Mr. Mencken may each appreciate a book, deal with it justly, yet each see it from a different viewpoint, get different things out of it, write a critique that shall be unlike the other.

Take, for example, Bernard Shaw and Georg Brandes, each writing of Ibsen. Both Shaw and Brandes are fully and profoundly aware of Ibsen's genius; both understand the man and his message; both have written of Ibsen (Shaw in The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Brandes in Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century) in a very penetrating and thoughtful style. Yet both critics produced works that were very much their own, that are supplementary to rather than contradictory of each other, that show different but true aspects of Ibsen. On the other hand, we should not expect an intelligent criticism of Ibsen from a provincial book reviewer on an obscure daily
paper. We should not expect him to understand Ibsen, in the first place, or to draw any sort of worthwhile conclusion from his dramas. Good critics may not write alike, but they may—and usually do—agree in recognizing genius and correctly estimating the nature and degree of talent. They may write at times with a very personal note, and we know they are writing personally, expressing their individual reactions; but they need not, therefore, be chaotic and arbitrary and obviously erroneous, even fatuous, in their judgments.

Speaking of Brandes, the great Scandinavian critic, in his introduction to Creative Spirits, indicates his disagreement with the view of criticism as a science, though he does not, like Mencken, absolve it from all obligations that may be described as scientific. Criticism, says Brandes, is an art (why not, in some sort, both an art and a science?)—but he does not say that it is an irresponsible art. Indeed, what he says may be reconciled with the view of criticism as having both artistic and scientific aspects. He says merely that "no methodical research can give us the key to a composite human spirit. Where a successful attempt has been made to understand such a spirit (that is to say, an attempt of which the correctness cannot be doubted, since it carries with it its quotations, so that the reader himself can apply the test) it is not to be supposed that we have before us the result of a purely scientific investigation." True enough—and the critic who does not understand the spirit of the artist, or who perhaps through temperament is antipathetic to an author, will but hopefully attempt the task of writing about him. The spirit of art and of the artist must be perceived, appreciated, felt artistically. Yet, with a method that may be called scientific, the critic can assure himself what the artist has tried to do and measure the result of his attempt: he can, let us say, realize for himself whether the artist has chosen the form of art, the field of art, suited to his talents and his theme: and the critic can study the genesis of the artist, the effect of his temperament in directing him toward a kind of art, the traces of his own peculiar experience in his writings, and the influence of the age in which he wrote.

And Brandes indeed accomplishes this in Creative Spirits. The admirable first essay in that book, the one on Hans Christian Andersen, is a good example of scientific criticism. He carefully studies the forces and the conditions, not simply that determined Andersen's genius, but that made it possible. He shows that Andersen belonged in his century, and that he could not have functioned, for example, in the century of Voltaire. He points to the interest in Nature (an interest that was rare and hardly noticeable in the eighteenth century) as leading the way for the fairy tale; and he tells us that the genius of Andersen absolutely required the unique kind of freedom that is offered in the field of writing for children—that without Nature, which is so important in the fairy tale, Andersen's genius would have found a poor outlet or none at all. Briefly, Brandes does not sit down and, out of his feelings and opinions, write arbitrarily and irresponsibly of Andersen. He studies his man, and the age, in a very scientific spirit. The result is a sound, able, finely revealing critique.

The scientific aspects and possibilities of criticism are indeed
well expressed by Brandes, when he writes: “Thus it will be seen we can study the poet’s art by studying the ideas which are his inspiration. To contemplate these in their origin and their ramifications, in their abstract essence and their concrete power, is, therefore, no superfluous act, when it becomes our task to make a study of individual poetic fancies. For the bare idea cannot make poetry; but neither can the poet make poetry without the idea and without the surroundings which give it its impetus. About the fortunate poet there gathers a multitude who, in a less felicitous way, are working in his own vein; and about this multitude the people swarm as mute but interested fellow-laborers. For genius is like a burning reflector, which reflects and unites the scattered rays of light. It never stands alone. It is merely the noblest tree in the forest, the highest ear in the sheaf, and it is first recognized in its real significance and in its true attitude when it is seen in its rightful place.” To study genius in its rightful place, and in its origin and ramifications, is, I should say, a scientific job.

THE CRUSADERS’ SECOND CHILDHOOD

HAVE often been greatly amused by the attack on Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Why the issue of Darwinism should be raised with such vehemence is beyond me, until it is merely proof that there is a vast body of people who have learned nothing from the past fifty years of human progress. When Darwin first announced his views on the development of life in The Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871) a conflict naturally arose; and the chief intellectual activity of the latter half of the nineteenth century was the discussion of Darwinism. One can understand why, with the appearance of this startling new theory, revolutionizing as it did all previous conceptions, men’s thoughts were deeply agitated. But when, after more than half a century, in which time the Darwinian hypothesis has triumphed completely in the field of science and evolution has long been taught as a matter of course in our schools, a second anti-Darwin crusade rears its head, declaiming against evolution with all the fervor of fresh discovery, as if it were a contemporary issue, the spectacle is too ludicrous for words. I doubt if such an asinine discussion could occur with such force in any country but America. Certainly nowhere else would the lawmaking bodies be seen trying to pass laws against the teaching of evolution in the schools! The issue, of course, is made a moral and religious one—as every issue absurdly becomes in this country, where speech is reserved for the enemies of free thought. No stupid lawmaker is capable of weighing the evidence of evolution, nor does he treat the subject as one requiring evidence. It’s “agin” the Bible, therefore out with evolution!

As one horrified disputant writes: “Such theories as some are teaching can have no other effect than to undermine the faith of the people in God and the Bible, cause lack of respect for authority, and an increase in crime.”

I think God can take care of himself; I am not worrying about the state of faith in the Bible; as for authority, it must ever justify
itself—and there can be no such thing as authority in the province of ideas; crime, I am sure, has not been increased by the influence of the Darwinian theory. These things are not at all important in considering the subject of evolution. The question is one of evidence. The evidence in support of evolution is so overwhelmingly conclusive that to attack it is simply to advertise oneself as uninformed. I am well aware that science does not pretend to positive knowledge about all things; it does not absolutely know how life began, nor how life will end. It has not been able to disprove a future life, any more than the churches have been able to prove it. But the fundamental hypothesis of evolution, that life is a slow development from lower to higher forms, is beyond the reach of controversy.

Science, through the record of the rocks, has discovered many things about the nature and development of life in the past. In the fossil remains of life forms that lie deposited in the strata of the earth's surface, the course of Nature in her vast and intricate experimentation with life has been patiently traced by science. We know that there was a time when man did not exist, because in the layers of rock that represented the earth's surface at that time, fossil remains of other forms of life are found, but no traces of such an animal as man. We know that there have been, in long past ages, strange and formidable creatures that no longer are to be seen on the earth. We can see, through the evidence of fossils, the Dawn-Man, his countenance still marked heavily with his low origin, emerging from the night of subterbrutishness. We finally observe Man, the identical higher product of evolution, advancing through crude epochs from savagery to civilization, from primitive wandering tribes, eating raw food, living on herbs and nuts, to an ever widening state of social life with its complex arrangements for an orderly, comfortable and beautified existence. We see Man, the wild hunter, discovering fire and making himself the first uncouth weapons; perceive the rude beginnings of agriculture, the original impulse toward a more settled way of living. Coming to written history, the light becomes clearer, and we are familiar with the progress, mental and material, that man has painfully achieved through long ages. We see that each age builds upon the foundation of the preceding age. We see, most thrilling sight of all, Man escaping from the black mists of superstition, learning to think, to understand life, to reason from cause to effect; and we behold the growth of the artist spirit in Man—he learns to create and enjoy beautiful things. All these impressive evidences we see, and then, our vision having traveled as far as the present day, we find that the work of evolution is not yet complete, the path that leads to the summit of life stretches tortuously above us—men are found who still decry the facts of life, oppose evidence with superstition, imagine that Man has fallen from a perfect state into the depths where some state legislature flounders, instead of having risen from the jungle to the legislative hall. Of course we should restrain our pride; see what a little way we have come! But the day will arrive, gloomily remote as it may appear, when the Bible will not be considered as evidence in weighing the facts of science. Evolution cannot be removed from human thought without
destroying the record of the rocks—a job that, I imagine, would daunt even an amazing Don Quixote, such as Bryan was, who would be a grotesque hangover from the Age of Innocence when Darwinism was really a debatable issue.

The more I puzzle over this odd recrudescence of anti-Darwinism, the clearer it seems to me that it is simply an example of the second childhood of a generation. This belated crusade is carried on chiefly by men like Bryan, old men whose young manhood coincided with the rise of Darwinism. When these men were young and their ideas were being formed, evolution was a new thing, a very live subject, and attacks upon it were quite the fashion. The minds of men like Bryan were strongly colored by the conflict with evolution—the essential wickedness of Darwinism became a part of their mental growth, just as the acceptance of Darwinism belongs to the mental growth of the present generation. Now these men of a past generation, not realizing that time in its flight has removed evolution from the arena of discussion, are enjoying a parting fling at their old enemy, living again the days of their intellectual activity when Darwinism was the head and front of all scientific offending. The orientation of such minds is precisely that of the Civil War veterans who gather around the fireside and fight again the battles that to them were the most important events of life. Seen in this light, any furore about evolution is but a futile echo of another day—it is simply the pale spirit of reminiscence momentarily infused with the glow of life.

AN OPEN MIND

DOCTOR, in his practice as a physician, doubtless instructs men and women in the ways of general health. And I doubt not that he offers many patients certain information regarding sexual health in particular. The doctor will hardly say that the sexual life of man is not important: and I daresay that upon reflection, he will find in his own experience abundant examples of the blindness and recklessness of people in matters of sex. Without the aid of knowledge, without that understanding of sex which we are only approaching, and that uncertainly, men and women cannot “solve their own problems” of sex. The ordinary observer knows well that a high percentage of sexual adventures (and as a rule they are blind, impulsive, unguided adventures) turn out unhappily or miserably or tragically. It is a commonplace that people go wrong, at least as often as they go right, in the sexual life. And a doctor, above all, should recognize the heedlessness with which male and female enter into relationships that are fated to end sadly or even bitterly: and one is surprised should a doctor say, “Male and female must solve their own problems”—with the evident assumption, so it seems, that instinct, impulse, the accidents of association will lead them to intelligent, happy choice. I am willing to agree that the problems of sex should be solved by the individual, if it be added that a knowledge of sex is necessary to a wise solution.

I hold no brief for any theory of sex—for psychoanalysis or
eugenics or Dr. Hirschfeld's sex institute. I can say only that the scientific study of sex is so recent, that this field of investigation is so big and so newly opened (and far from thoroughly and surely covered by the human mind) that we must approach it with open minds; we must welcome any honest effort to throw light upon sex, a phase of man's life which puritanism and theology have so long kept in darkness; we must have the attitude of being ready to examine any theory that has for its object the guidance of the sexual life of man. One cannot, in a field of knowledge so uncertain, which only moderns have presumed to carefully explore and in which specialists disagree, dismiss a theory as bunk. We know, at least, that the idea of substituting a degree of intelligent choice for blind chance cannot, in any reasonable and calm view, be regarded as bunk. However they differ in other aspects of theory, scientists agree that sexual knowledge is the way to sexual health and happiness. They do not believe that men and women can simply drift on the tide of sex and depend upon reaching a safe port.

I do not, of course, believe that science will be able to eliminate all sexual mistakes, that it will perfect human nature in this or any other activity of life. Human nature would probably not submit to such a process of perfection, even if science were in a position, or should presume, to offer it. And I do not favor any scheme of compulsion in matters of sex. It would be an intolerable tyranny, and a foolish one, to have some authority determine who shall and who shall not marry; who shall and who shall not produce. It is a very different thing, however, when science tries to help men and women, to solve their own problems a little more knowingly than in the past.

A great deal of the opposition to the spread of sexual investigation—to the idea of directing the function of sex instead of letting it follow any course without regard to the consequences—comes from theology, by way of puritanism, by way of thoughtless and indifferent custom which, through the influence of inertia, seems to be sacred. This attitude is prevalent, and underlies much of the antagonism to views of eugenics, sexual selection, birth control and the like. It is felt that sex is a particularly private, not to say sacred, relationship which science dare not invade. It is indeed a private matter, as between individuals, but it is foolish to hold that the general subject is not properly to be examined and brought to the understanding of men and women. That may satisfy the feelings of certain persons—who feel rather than think on the subject—but it means injury to the real and not fancied feelings, and ruin to the misguided, mismated lives of thousands. The modern view is that we should have full light on the subject of sex. Neither God nor Nature will make men and women happy in this or any other field of life. They must make themselves happy through intelligence.

Like sex, psychology is, in any really scientific sense, a new field of study. Psychologists today recognize that the great body of what passed for psychology in other ages was little more than a rationalization, a defense, a subtle and elaborate justification of preconceived notions, of intuitive and often semi-religious beliefs. Why we think, how we think, what our thinking signifies, and the extent to
which we can control our thinking—it is only in this modern day that psychologists are seeking light on these questions which (as with theories of sex) call for the open mind, the mood of frank examination, rather than for impulsive, dogmatic opinions. And if I say that to me a great deal of the material of psychoanalysis seems of doubtful value or significance, that indeed it partakes somewhat of the older method of rationalization (building up a plausible defense of a theory that has been prejudiced in a general way), it does not follow that I am in a position to dismiss psychoanalysis, sweepingly, as bunk and nothing else. It does throw light upon hidden places of the mind: and the popularity of this theory, while it has led to many freakish and fantastic notions (with casual rather than serious students of the theory), has undoubtedly stimulated many to a closer view of their thought processes, and it has shaken much of the certainty that is associated with dogma and unconsidered impulse. "We do not think enough about thinking," says James Harvey Robinson, "and much of our confusion is the result of current illusions in regard to it." He insists that we must investigate, and not ignore, "all the physiological changes which escape our notice, all the forgotten experiences and impressions of the past which continue to influence our desires and reflections and conduct, even if we cannot remember them. . . . We must reconcile ourselves to novel and revolutionary conceptions of the human mind, for it is clear that the old philosophers, whose works still determine our current views, had a very superficial notion of the subject with which they dealt." In a word, the study of the human mind, while it has yielded valuable discoveries that are hardly in the nature of controversy, still partakes largely of the nature of theory: wherefore it behooves us to be careful, critical, but not absolutely dismissive of psychoanalysis or any other theory which has behind it a respectable weight of scientific opinion. We are still in the phase of investigation, and have not, if ever we shall, reached the phase of certainty.

WARNING TO FREE THINKERS MORE THAN SEVENTY YEARS OLD

An unknown reader sends me a clipping of a United Press dispatch from London, England, recording the sudden death of George Whale, rationalist aged seventy-five, shortly after he had "made a speech in which he ruthlessly attacked the dogmas of Christianity and its ministers." The anonymous one, who sees the direct handiwork of God in the collapse of this heretic, writes across the clipping: "Laugh that off."

That is to say, think very seriously, Haldeman-Julius, for you see what God does to a man who speaks unfavorably of the Christian religion. Yet the point is weakened when I reflect that I have been writing, week after week, opinions that are doubtless as severe as those expressed by the late Mr. Whale: and God still spares me. The moral would seem to be, if any moral there be, that if I skip along to the good age of seventy-five, I may finally die—by God's hand,
and as long as I keep my youth and health, I can write pretty well what I please. It would perhaps have been a trifle better for the "Laugh it off" attitude of my unknown would-be friend, had God struck down a young and husky free thinker, around the age of thirty or forty; and had physicians been unable to assign any possible natural cause for the man's death.

The death of a man of seventy-five is not a startling, though it may be a sad, event. At this age, men frequently die, not being as young as they once were. Even preachers and good believers die when they grow old, and often when they are younger. Why, yes, preachers have been stricken with apoplexy in the midst of a stirring call to repentance. No doubt it would be interesting to have statistics regarding the number of divines who have been stricken (by God—by whom else?) in the pulpit. The headline over the news item from London reads: "Dinner Speaker Dies Soon After Attack on Christianity." A silly headline, without news value, and put in big type for the sake of Christian readers. It would be precisely as important and significant for a headline to read: "Dinner Speaker Dies Soon After Defense of Christianity." Still, I thoughtfully pass on the warning to all free thinkers who have reached the age of seventy-five. They may die if they are not careful.

DO YOU ENVY THE MILLIONAIRE OR THE THINKER?

The average man would rather possess Rockefeller's money than Bernard Shaw's wisdom. We show our characters in the things we envy. I need scarcely urge the difference between the man who envies another's good taste, good sense, talent, ability and the man who envies another's bank account, automobile, or social position. I would rather have the culture of an Anatole France than the wealth of the richest man who ever lived and I realize how foolish this preference would seem to the average fellow, who is well satisfied with the little smattering of knowledge he may have but is never satisfied with the degree of his material prosperity.

Hold one moment, and do not cry "Bunk!" at me: for I am not aiming at the ridiculous notion that wealth is unimportant, that the good material things of life are mere trifles that may well be ignored by the philosopher. What I do say is that we should not overrate these material things to the exclusion of everything else: or, better still, that we should not view them as the whole structure, but rather as the foundation, of a full, happy, significant life. We want independence. We want leisure. We want comfort and luxuries. Do we also want knowledge? culture? good sense? Do we want to feed our minds, our imaginations, as well as our more lowly though legitimate appetites?

We hear a great deal about the unequal distribution of wealth. There is little said, however, about the inequality of intelligence among the members of the human family. There is a greater protest against the contrast between wealth and poverty than against
the contrast, surely not less obvious or important, between ignorance and intelligence. "Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed," said Descartes; "for everyone thinks himself so abundantly provided with it that those even who are the most difficult to satisfy in everything else do not usually desire a larger measure of this quality than they already possess." Few men are heard to complain that they have been unfairly dealt with in the matter of brains; that their information is too little; that their judgment is not as sharp or well trained as it might be; that their opportunities for learning are limited. It would be astonishing should a revolution occur, demanding that the best of knowledge should become common property; that equality of intellectual opportunity, liberty of thought, and fraternity of discussion should be assured by the State; that the poor in mind should be enabled to grow rich in mind. It would be interesting indeed if we should observe suddenly a great, widespread agitation, not simply for a living standard of wages, but for a living standard of intelligence. We could hardly believe it were the saying, "Money talks," changed to "Wisdom talks." What a novelty it would be for a book to appear regularly, recording the intellectual status of men, as financial ratings are now published; and instead of looking up Blank's name to ascertain how much money he had, we should be more interested to ascertain how much good sense he had.

The just man will not defend the inequalities of fortune, but he may at least remark that the inequalities of intelligence (of knowledge and good sense, at any rate, if not of peculiar talent) are the easiest mended. People who cannot hope to acquire a great fortune can acquire a fair mental competence, if not mental riches. And mental riches, indeed, are possible to many who are otherwise poor. Granted that you have a mind, what do you put into it? to what use do you put it? in what degree do you value its possession and its possibilities? There are good books that you can read; there are thinkers from whose abundance of good sense you can freely draw, provided you have only the will and a mind of reasonable capacity and capability. It is a fair deal, too, and you rob no one when you appropriate good sense for yourself; he who has knowledge, he who has the power of thought, does not lose but gains by communicating it. Good sense (if human nature were different) might be distributed to the utmost point of equality, and no man be the poorer. The trouble is, as Descartes observed, the majority are too well satisfied with the present deal.

GOD THE TEMPTER

No preacher has ever been able to explain, strictly from the viewpoint of the pulpit, why God endowed man with the faculty of reason. Of course I assume, for the sake of argument, that the preachers are correct and that God really created all that in us and before us and around us lies. It is obvious that, if he is the one who made the cosmic works, he is the author of human reason as well as stupidity. The man who uses his
mind in a skillful way, who applies himself to problems in a spirit of realism, who reasons things out—this man, good or bad, is simply putting to its proper and inevitable use a tool that was given to him by none other than the hand of God. When a man once contracts the habit of thinking—when a little doubt, a little observation, a little reflection starts the wheels inside his head—not he, but God, is responsible for the process. And no man can be assured that he will escape thought. Reason lies in wait for every man who is not a born fool. Certain persons can no more help thinking than they can help breathing. Yet, if we are to believe the preachers, God has a merry hell prepared for the man who thinks. Why? Is this a crazy trick that God has played upon the human race? Is this God’s idea of a joke? Did God create man with a reasoning machine? and spread throughout this world of his various and endless temptations for man to use his reason? and then, to cap the climax, fix it so that a man who thus fulfills the divine plan is condemned for his helpless, God-invented and God-impelled sinning to burn in a hell for ever and ever? Must we regard God as the supreme, universal tempter, outdoing Satan in his machinations? I repeat that this is something which the preachers, with all their jabbering, have never explained.

"BOOK LARNIN’" IN DAYTON

BOOKS on the subject of evolution, or explaining the arcana of Holy Writ, were not popular in Dayton, Tenn., during the great trial in which the atmosphere of fasting and prayer predominated. The Daytonians are not interested in "book larnin’," for which indeed they have a mingled contempt and suspicion.

Naturally, they would not read Darwin’s books or any Darwinian treatise. They are hard books to read, in the first place, and Daytonians are not easy readers. Again, it is well known that danger lurks in such atheistical tomes. The believer could not be absolutely sure of reaching the tenth page with his faith intact. Merely to handle the book is perilous.

Good Christian books on the Bible fared as unsuccessfully in Dayton. A young man, with the optimism of youth that passes understanding, brought over a satchelful or a trunkful of books from Chattanooga. They were books that, one should think, would appeal strongly to natives of Dayton and its environs: Mr. Bryan’s works, Famous Figures of the Old Testament, In His Image, The Bible and Its Enemies. No one bought them.

Few in Dayton feel that they need read anything for or against their beliefs. They believe it, whatever it may be, and that’s enough and more. The statement in the trial that these people understood best—that they really understood—was Mr. Bryan’s remark, by way of a confession, that the Bible was enough for him. The Daytonians are similarly limited in their reading and their desire for knowledge. They are good people; they are honest people; they are people who will do any stupid and fanatical thing for their convictions; but they
are not broadminded people and they are not consumed by a burning passion for intellectual pursuits. Bryan couldn’t tell them anything about the Bible. Darwin couldn’t tell them anything about the origin of man.

The mental interest and the profundity of the people of Dayton was illustrated by the remark, so frequently heard: “Where I come from don’t bother me, it’s where I’m goin’.” And this was said with an air that made it perfectly plain that the brother was going straight to heaven, if he didn’t backslide and fall into the habit of thinking—of which, small danger.

One book did sell in Dayton. It was the best seller. It was that great recondite, shining masterpiece of art, science, literature and theology: Puddle to Paradise, by one B. H. Shadduck.

THE NAUGHTY SPIRITS

HERE is not always the sympathy one might be led to expect between different brands of bunk. They are rivals for the patronage of the consumers of bunk. Thus we are not surprised to find The Sunday School Times saying harsh things about spiritualism, which is trying to steal the paying customers of orthodoxy. The Times believes in spirits, but to be safe it confines their activities entirely to the other world, except for the invisible working of the Spirit of God. Spirits who by vague and peculiar report, come to earth and chat more or less inconsequentially with human beings, are not of the best character, says The Times. Piously, The Times raps the spooks that rap the tables:

“Commonly, the utterances of spirits are garnished with phrases of a sentimental religiosity. They talk of God and of the summerland of after-death. At times, they join in hymns at the seances through the mediums present. They offer deceptive tributes to Christ as teacher and master. Then, as if thrown off their guard or from sheer perversity, they will break out into cynical and blasphemous utterances which would make the ears of a normal man tingle.”

Of course, such bad talk might be the spirit of Voltaire butting in on the spirit of Pascal. And it does not violate plausibility, if one believes in spirits, to assume that there may be good and bad spirits; although, to be sure, one cannot expect good, old-fashioned Christians to associate with spirits who cannot or will not talk properly and decently. Perhaps the spirits—a little bit human, after all—grow weary of singing eternal hosannas around the Throne, and seek relief in letting their ethereal tongues wag without reverence or propriety. Then, again, another revolt of the angels may be brewing in heaven.
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