

first step, the rest is simply a matter of patience. Now and then, perhaps, he will stumble. The transition, for example, from Beethoven's Second symphony to the first movement of the Eroica may give him a sleepless night or two. But if he has proper direction he will avoid such dangerous leaps. Mozart's Jupiter, coming after Beethoven's Second, would be more humane than the Eroica; moreover, it would give the candidate his first thrilling, if bitter taste of fugue. Mr. Spaeth offers some general advice in this department, but it is rather too vague. Why doesn't he draw up an educational series in gradually ascending stages, and then induce the phonograph companies to issue it in sections, for the civilizing of Babbitts? It might begin with "Home, Sweet Home" and end with Bach's B minor mass. It might even go beyond Bach to the moderns, and so be of use, not only to Babbitts, but also to musicians.

It is my belief that very few human beings are utterly incapable of acquiring a taste for good music—that those who lack it are, in the main, simply unfortunates who have never had a chance to hear much. On various occasions I have undertaken to launch unmusical friends whose consciences troubled them, and every time I have succeeded it has been by some such device as that recommended by Mr. Spaeth. The novice is always hugely delighted when he discovers that he actually likes some composition that is genuinely "classical"; once he gets that far, he almost always goes on. Does he like jazz, and delight in strongly marked rhythms? Then start him with the Brahms Hungarian dances. Is he fond of sentimental songs? Then what could be more beautifully sentimental than Schubert's "Standchen"? Does he run to the loud braying of military bands? Then try him with "The Ride of the Walkyre." A few experiments will suffice to fetch him, and after that it is easy. In a year or two he will be quite ready for the typical New York orchestra program—a Tchaikowsky symphony, a

Wagner *Vorspiel*, the Emperor concerto, and something by Papa Liszt. The danger is, indeed, that he will quickly grow snobbish, and begin to sneer at Johann Strauss. That is my private test for bad musicians.

### *The Reporter At Work*

THE BEST NEWS STORIES OF 1923, edited by Joseph Anthony. Boston: Small, Maynard Company.

Just what Mr. Anthony's qualifications may be for deciding what is good, what is better and what is best in current journalism I don't know. "Who's Who in America" is silent about him, and his introduction to his collection reveals nothing save a familiarity with a few threadbare journalistic platitudes. But the collection itself, barring the hollow bombast of the title, seems to me to be extremely interesting, and even somewhat instructive. For what it offers is a very fair cross-section of American journalistic writing—not the best, perhaps, as genuinely competent judges of narrative English would choose the best, but certainly a reasonable approximation to what would be looked upon with pride in the average newspaper office. The job of the reporter, obviously, differs considerably from that of the writer on more lofty planes. He not only does his work against time, with no opportunity to devise the "spontaneous" ornaments of style that spring out of second thought; he must also bear in mind that he is writing for an audience that, in the main, is no more than barely literate, and so keep himself within the bounds of its narrow information and elemental taste. Worst of all, he must write stuff that will commend itself to his immediate superiors, the copy-readers—men chosen, more often than not, because they are efficient rubber-stamps rather than because they are competent judges of English style. The result of these various pressures is that the sagacious reporter, whatever his natural urge to originality, inevitably takes refuge in *clichés*. They save him trouble doubly—first the trouble of de-

vising something better, and secondly the trouble of having the copy-desk down on him. When he writes according to the mode he both pleases his immediate superiors and delights the customers of his newspaper.

The effects of these forces are plainly visible in many of the news stories reprinted by Mr. Anthony. For example, turn to one from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* by Hugh Harley: a report of a jail delivery from the Eastern Penitentiary. The thing happened at 10.25 P. M., and it is highly probable that midnight was striking before Mr. Harley had gathered the facts and was back in the *Inquirer* office, ready to write his story. He made a very competent job of it, setting forth all the essential circumstances clearly and even getting a certain dramatic power into it. But he could accomplish the business only by falling back upon the *clichés* that a young reporter learns almost as soon as he learns how to make out an expense account. In his first sentence one discovers that the escape was "sensational"; in his second that one of the three men who got away was caught "after a chase of several blocks"; in his third that the other two "are still at liberty." In paragraph two one encounters "dash for freedom"; in paragraph four a clubbed guard "summons his waning strength" and has "blood streaming" from his wounds; in paragraph seven the adjacent householders are "terrorized"; in subsequent paragraphs the pursuing cops "scour" the neighborhood, the prison guards are ordered to "shoot to kill," the fleeing prisoners "elude their vigilance," an extra-watchful guard is "met by a fusillade of bullets," another rushes from his cage "to learn the cause of the disturbance," and "it is the work of a moment" for the convicts to open the prison gate. Meanwhile, a police lieutenant "calls every available policeman to his aid," citizens join in the "man hunt," the news "spreads like wildfire," alarmed housewives leap into the street "carrying tiny infants in their arms," and

the "break for liberty" is pronounced "the most daring ever conceived."

I here attempt no sneer at Mr. Harley. His story was plainly written under circumstances that would have reduced a Walter Pater or a James Branch Cabell to a despairing thumb-sucking. Nevertheless, it is yet fair to point out that, as a specimen of narrative English, it is very flabby and obvious stuff—that its effects are all traditional set pieces, familiar from long use. It is a statement of fact in a stale and often half meaningless jargon; as literature it simply has no existence. The same thing is true of at least four-fifths of the news stories in Mr. Anthony's book—most of them, I believe, submitted by editors as among the best things printed by their papers during 1923. In only a small minority of these stories, even those written more leisurely, is there any genuine distinction of style, any actual feeling for words, any sense of the superb plasticity and resilience of the English language; in even fewer is there any noticeable originality of thought. The reporter thinks as he writes: in well-worn patterns. His view of the world, as he grows up in the trade, becomes increasingly Philistine; when the wide-eyed wonder of the first year or two oozes out of him its place is taken by a facile and unintelligent cynicism, with room for bathos in it. One finds him, in this book, growing maudlin over the death of Harding, who "passed with the sunset"; one sees him stirred by the same heroics that stir baseball umpires, sophomores and office boys. The world he inhabits is one in which Rotary Club orators are taken seriously, the Bolsheviks are "bloodthirsty wild beasts," and visiting intellectuals say that "in every Russian child's heart, no matter of what class, there is love for America!"

But perhaps I generalize too freely. A few extraordinary reporters seem to survive, somehow, the crippling strain of the city room, even the bellicose imbecility of the copy-readers. In the present book I encounter, here and there, some strangely

intelligent stuff. I point, for example, to a story by Louis Weizenkorn in the *New York World*: it might have been at home in the *Sun* of twenty-five years ago, before Munsey's dreadful presence laid the ghost of Dana. And to one by Harry T. Brundidge from the *St. Louis Star*. And to one by Paul Y. Anderson from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. And to one by Julian Sargent from the *St. Paul Pioneer-Press*. There are others, too. But not many.

### *Brief Notices*

THE SULTAN OF THE MOUNTAINS, by Rosita Forbes. New York: *Henry Holt & Company*.

THE author, an Englishwoman, traveled to the Moroccan retreat of Raisuli, the bandit, and dredged out of him the story of his life. A narrative of great interest, and full of barbaric color.

FORTY YEARS IN WASHINGTON, by David S. Barry. Boston: *Little, Brown & Company*

THE reminiscences of a veteran Washington correspondent, intermittently (and now) a jobholder. The usual mixture of

fly-blown anecdotes and obvious observations, with here and there a touch of novelty. Newspaper work in Washington seems to be fatal to the higher cerebral centres. After ten years of service a correspondent knows everything and says nothing.

A PRIMER OF MODERN ART, by Sheldon Cheney. New York. *Boni & Liveright*.

ANOTHER gallant attempt to explain what the revolutionists in painting (with side glances at sculpture and architecture) are driving at, this time with many excellent illustrations. It is the best I have encountered so far, but I still remain somewhat confused and dubious.

APOLLO, by S. Reinach. New York: *Charles Scribner's Sons*.

A NEW edition, revised, of Reinach's standard history of art. There are some errors in the text, and the discussion is very weak in its later sections, but so far as it goes it is probably the most useful available small book on the subject.