

# CLINICAL NOTES

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

*Crooked Criticism.*—It is the practice of a certain arm of American criticism to estimate an artist not by the best piece of work he has ever done, but by the poorest. His highest level of achievement is conveniently forgotten, and emphasis allowed to rest instead upon his inferior work. This is particularly true where the artist's fine achievement bears a relatively early date mark and where his weaker efforts belong to the more immediate present. It has always seemed to me that an artist justifies himself before the world if he produces one good thing in his life, no matter how many bad things he produces either before or after it. Yet an artist is seldom criticized from this point of view in America. Let the author of "Sister Carrie" and "Jennie Gerhardt" write so much as a single negligible article for a popular magazine by way of laying in enough money for the Winter coal and a case of decent Scotch, and a score of critics will jump on his neck and announce loudly that there is nothing in the fellow, that he has been greatly overestimated, and that the embalmer is already impatiently waiting for him in the vestibule. Let the sculptor of Lincoln turn out a couple of busts of Abram S. Hewitt and Blair Thaw, and a dozen critics will let out a sardonic cackle and shout that the fellow is a false-alarm and should be exiled to some remote plaster-of-paris *Fabrik*. Artists are not to be criticized thus. If they were to be, the critics would be justified in laughing themselves to death over the later Schumann who composed "Genoveva," the Ibsen who wrote the epic, "Terje Vigen," the poem, "Paa Vidderne," and the drama, "De Unges Forbund," and the God who, after creating

Galileo, Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Napoleon Bonaparte, turned out Vice-President Dawes.

*A Forgotten Man.*—With monuments being erected monthly all over the land to such members of the nation's illustrious deceased as second-rate New England poets, Civil War profiteers, medicine-men of the Ojibway tribe, presidents of tank-town colleges, founders of orphan asylums and builders of the Gowanus Canal, I put in a demand that one man who has been completely overlooked by the memento professors be honored at once with a tasty statue, monument, obelisk or horse-hitching post. I allude to the late Hon. Charles C. Hall, inventor of the modern collar-button, a man who did more for his fellow Americans than all the statues that ever stuck hands into Prince Alberts or pointed prognosticating fingers at amatory couples on the park benches. Among the services rendered by Americans to their countrymen, none is more important than that rendered by Hall. To say against his service that it was an obvious one and one that must have been rendered at one time or another by some other man if Hall hadn't got there first, is as idiotic as to argue that if Balboa hadn't discovered the Pacific Ocean, Hiram Johnson would have in due time. Hall made the egg stand, and to Hall goes the credit.

Yet Hall, like many another such man, is neglected and memorials are erected instead to individuals who deserve them much less than he does. A rich marble shaft is put up in honor of a dog whose barking saved the lives of two osteopaths, three Elks and a pretzel manufacturer when

a house burned down, and the man who invented and gave the lead pencil to the world is allowed to rot forgotten in his grave. Monuments are raised in honor of William Cullen Bryant, Horace Mann, Maria Mitchell, Oscar S. Straus and Pawnee Bill, and the memory of the men who gave America the Pullman club-car, the steam radiator, the curved tooth-brush, the coat-shirt, the Boston garter, Michelob beer, open plumbing, the modern envelope and witch hazel is left to the worms.

*The After-Life.*—The doctrine of after-life, as expounded by the rev. clergy, is based upon the optimistic theory that if the cook drops a cheap china soup-plate, breaks it into a hundred pieces and lets them lie on the floor long enough, they will shortly, after the mistress of the house has stopped crying, re-synthesize themselves in the form of a beautiful Sèvres vase.

*Veritas in Vino.*—One of the greatest schnitzels of balderdash that has rattled down the ages in proverb form is to the effect that in wine there is truth. In other words, that when a man is in his cups, his speech and action break loose from their erstwhile anchorage of deceit and promptly take on a mantle of veracity and plain dealing. I do not go so far as to say that, in the way of minor detail, a deplorably fried gent may not conduct himself in the light of his real nature and character; what I do say is that for one man who is brought to talk and act honestly by contact with ethyl alcohol, there are a hundred who, as a result of the same contact, are converted into even bigger frauds and liars, psychically, physically, rationally, emotionally and every other way, than they were before.

The effect of intoxicating liquids upon the average man, as anyone who takes the trouble to investigate the matter will quickly observe, is to exaggerate in him all his qualities of pretense and simultaneously to reduce in him all his quali-

ties of forthrightness and probity. The only difference between a liar sober and a liar drunk is that, when sober, he lies to deceive others and that, when drunk, he lies to deceive himself. Give the average man half a dozen cocktails and he will promptly proceed to a vast bragging about himself and about his prowess in the courts of Mars, Venus and Babbitt. Sober, he appreciates full well the truth of the fact that his wife can lick him with a single quick left to the jaw, but, oiled, he presents himself as the superior of Harry Wills. Sober, he truthfully appreciates that his bank account is overdrawn; pickled, he tosses money hither and thither like the millionaire he would like to be and like to have his friends believe him to be. Sober, he truthfully appreciates that, as a lover, he is about on a par with an octogenarian Eskimo; stewed, he recommends himself to whatever fair creature happens to be sitting across the table from him as a cross between the San Francisco earthquake and the Chicago fire.

Alcohol, in short, is the greatest inducer of fake and falsehood known to man. It converts the hard, clear-seeing realist into a moist-eyed romantic, the doltish clam into a pseudo-philosophical chowder, the mountebank into an even worse mountebank. If it were the sesame to truth that legend has made it, the crowded law courts might be cleared in a few hours simply by keeping a couple of cases of synthetic gin handy to the witness-box. How the legend started, it is difficult to make out. A good guess is that it was floated by some percipient stews who, realizing that they were actually of utterly no importance in the world, sought to have the world accept them at their soused face-value.

*Jazz.*—The current indignations of certain musicians on the subject of jazz and their disposition to place it in the musical category somewhere between Schönberg and the American Can Company need not unduly alarm composers who are working seriously in the field. The latter may com-

fortably reflect that even Haydn joined Albrechtsberger in condemning in no uncertain critical language the license and lawlessness of the destroyer of forms named Beethoven, that Wagner and his disciples considered Brahms something of a jackanapes, that the operas of Wagner himself were rejected by opera-house manager after opera-house manager as being utterly impossible and that when "Tannhäuser" was produced in Paris the critics threw so many dead cats onto the stage that it was withdrawn after three performances, that the musicians of the time actually at first refused to dignify the new-fangled instrumental tremolos of Monteverde by consenting to play them, and that some of the professors still swoon and yell for the smelling salts when anyone mentions the name of Richard Strauss.

*The Civilized Man.*—The phrase, "civilized man," appears to bother certain readers of this magazine; a number of letters come in demanding an explanation. I venture a definition. The civilized man is one who believes that the pursuit of truth is the noblest of human occupations, but who freely confesses that, were he to catch up with it, he wouldn't know it if he saw it.

*System.*—I recently had occasion to do some business with a shop whose proprietors and managers boast that it is the most perfectly systematized establishment of its kind in New York. These gentlemen have spent three years, they say, in working out every last detail of their business machine so that it will give every last drop of service to themselves and to their customers. Time clocks, checking devices, filing cabinets and mechanical aids of every sort give the place the look of a suave boiler-works; the over-clerks, under-clerks and mid-level clerks have been trained with the precision of German lieutenants; the cab-starter wears as many medals as General Foch. Thousands upon thousands of dollars, in short, have been spent to make the store click like an automatic

pistol. "All this," run the firm's advertisements, "promises those who deal with us the ultimate in satisfaction." The other day, as I say, I made a minor business transaction with the firm. It would take ten days, the person in charge of the department assured me, to fill my order. I needed what I needed in less time, but I understood, in turn, the shop's need for more time, so assented. At the expiration of the ten days, I called up the store and asked if my order was ready. I was assured that, true to the promise given me, it was. I asked that it be sent to me that day without fail, as I had immediate need of it. But, I was told, the delivery boys had already left; it was then four o'clock in the afternoon; and my order therefore couldn't be delivered until the following morning. I requested that the shop have a boy bring the order around to me; it would take only a few minutes, as I lived not three blocks away. That could not be done, I was told, as the organization had no provision for such deliveries; all deliveries had to be made according to the set and systematized schedule. I went to the shop, got my order, and that is the last that particular perfectly systematized establishment will ever see of me.

This is the sixth time in the last two years that such admirable systematization in six different establishments has lost a hitherto steady customer in me. The trouble with these highly perfected business organizations is a simple one. They work as perfectly as so many machines and, like machines, they lack all personal sense and discrimination. Their managers are tickled to death by the accuracy of service, as it is reported to them on the daily charts, but these managers never know how this very accuracy has alienated customers in one way or another, for the reason that a disgruntled customer usually shuts up and takes his patronage somewhere else. The theory that the way to please a customer is to lay in a patent bundle-wrapper that will tie up his purchase in two minutes, to train the clerk to discourse amiably with

him on the British foreign policy while he is waiting and then to have him politely bowed out by a floorwalker with a gardenia in his buttonhole is not quite as sound as the system professors believe it is. The way to please a customer is not to do everything that he expects the shop to do—the customer takes that as a matter of course; the way to please him is to do various small things that he doesn't expect it to do. But these small things the perfectly systematized shops never take into consideration. And, as a result, they lose customers every day to the little unsystematized concerns who kick the system professors, salesmen of triplicate checking-books, installers of self-opening show-cases, inventors of automatic goods-packers and other such up-to-the-minute nuisances out into the street and install in the stead of them and their devices a little old-fashioned trading common sense and a little old-fashioned understanding of human nature. The simple old-time little cigar store presided over by the amiable Gustav Schultzes kept its customers until they died or were sent to jail. The systematized modern cigar stores, with their interiors equipped with every device known to Efficiency, save only the forgotten one of the personal equation, lose theirs weekly. And it is the same with every other kind of shop.

*Opera in English.*—Nothing could be more provincial and absurd than the current demand that opera drop its born umlauts and accents and acquire, for the

greater delectation of the Anglo-Saxon, an English speech. Opera in English is, in the main, just about as sensible a plea as baseball in Italian. The opera is not an Anglo-Saxon art form and to attempt arbitrarily, for patriotic reasons, to make it one is akin to Germanizing Georgian architecture or Frenchifying American jazz. The notion that you can get, say, French opera in English by the simple trick of translating, for example, "Les Huguenots" into English is like the notion that you can get American comedy in French by translating George Ade's "College Widow" into French and having the football team wear the Sorbonne colors. What results, obviously, is a hybrid, as unpersuasive and unconvincing as an Englishman talking American slang or a German wearing a monocle. The notion, further, that the way to get opera in English is to have the librettos written by English-speaking artists is a good notion so far as it goes, but an equally good notion is to have English-speaking artists first write music as good as Wagner's, Mozart's or even Papa Meyerbeer's.

*Gaul and Anglo-Saxon.*—The Englishman and American write of women as men know them; the Frenchman writes of women as women know them.

*Advance of Sociological Criticism in America*—From recently available statistics for the fiscal year ended December 31, 1924, we learn that there were 27 murders in London, 32 in Berlin and 59 in Paris, while New York showed a grand total of 333.

# NOTES & Queries

*Queries and answers should be addressed to The Editor of Notes and Queries, and not to individuals. Queries are printed in the order of their receipt, and numbered serially. An answer should bear the number of the query it refers to.*

## QUERY NO. 98

Some time ago I had occasion to go to Annapolis, Md., the seat of the United States Naval Academy. I found the town very wet, but that is not the point. What I want to report is the discovery of a village named Gott in the Maryland wilds, somewhere between Annapolis and Baltimore. And what I want to ask is, Is this the only place named after Jehovah in the United States? I have never heard of another. Somehow, it seems strange. This is the greatest Christian country in the world. Shouldn't there be a town named after God in every State? It would be only polite.

L. M. PALMER, *Philadelphia*

## QUERY NO. 99

Is there any record in the literature of psychological research of messages from the spirits of the following: Admiral Dewey, Dwight L. Moody, Lillian Russell, Buffalo Bill, William Jennings Bryan? If so, what have they to say?

AMERICAN IDEALIST,  
*Hobenzollern, Neb.*

## QUERY NO. 100

The word *bijacker*, used to designate an outlaw bootlegger who holds up and robs respectable members of the profession, gives me puzzlement. Was it suggested by

*highbinder*? If so, how did the *high* get itself changed to *hi*? The word is in none of the dictionaries, yet I find it in the newspapers almost every day.

PEDANT, *Chapel Hill, N. C.*

## QUERY NO. 101

Can anyone tell me if an adequate bibliography of Sinclair Lewis has been printed—that is, one listing his early contributions to magazines? If so, where?

LESTER B. MARSH, *Buffalo*

## QUERY NO. 102

Who translated and who published a German translation of Carl Schurz's "Life of Abraham Lincoln"? I had it about 1909 and cannot get another copy.

ALEX VONNEGUT, *Indianapolis*

## QUERY NO. 103

Can anyone explain the chemical reaction set up by the insertion of a red hot poker into a jug of cider, moderately hard? The practice is quite common in the Central Pennsylvania hills, but none of the pseudo-chemists there is able to tell how (if at all) the alcoholic content is increased, which is the apparent purpose of this procedure.

WILLIAM G. MCKEE, *Lewiston, Pa.*

## QUERY NO. 104

Some grammarian, I hope, may be able to solve the following problem, which has been troubling me for some time. My bewilderment has to do with the classification of the word *away*, in a sentence like the following: "That year away from home was unique in my experience so far."

I have consulted Webster's New International Dictionary, Funk and Wagnalls'