

# The American MERCURY

January 1927

HYPOCRISY

BY THOMAS BEER

THE playwright came wandering among the tables and settled beside me distractedly with a grunted apology for being so late. His distraction continued and only some rapid action on the part of a waiter saved him from pouring his cocktail into his soup.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" the surgeon asked.

"Nothing . . . Oh, every now and then humanity gives me a jolt! . . . Listen! I went down to Del Monte to spend Sunday with a sequestered aunt, and my aunt had a friend visiting her. Perfectly sane sort of woman—travelled a good deal, and all that. Well, this morning her daughter arrived from Santa Barbara."

"As who should say from hell," said the architect.

The playwright shrugged. "Easterner! If there's any difference between Newport and Santa Barbara, isn't it in Santa Barbara's favor? . . . Well, the daughter arrived. Very nice girl. Used to know her when we were kids. She's married to a man I know. His salary's exactly six thousand dollars per annum. And they have a baby. Well, the conversation at lunch resolved itself into a duel between mother and daughter. Mama wanted daughter to get a four-thousand-dollar motor car. The girl protested that her husband couldn't afford it. The mother retorted that she

needed a four-thousand-dollar car, that she owed it to herself and her position, and that her husband was a swine if he didn't provide it. This went on for half an hour. Then I had to catch my train."

"So far you're not very thrilling," the architect drawled.

"One minute! The lady stopped lecturing her daughter and handed me a magazine to read en route. Said I'd find a very good story by Sophie Kerr in the thing, called 'Packhorse'. So I read the story. And it happened to be about a man who revolts against his wife's extravagances. But this matron recommended it to me as a fine tale and one, she said, with some point to it! Beat that!"

The surgeon chased a shrimp's rosy curl among the other objects of his *hors d'œuvre* and caught it. I envied his pride. He said, "Well?" and ate the shrimp.

"But the damned hypocrisy of it!"

"I don't see it at all."

"My God! This woman first eggs her daughter, before me, into bullying her husband for a car he can't afford and then recommends a story which is a denunciation of exactly that kind of thing!"

"Where's the hypocrisy? You simply mean the lady has no sense of humor. . . . No," he told me, "you can't have any soup."

"Then what is hypocrisy?" the playwright snarled.

"I've never found out," said the surgeon. "You literary creatures have never defined it decently."

"Hypocrisy," I said, "is the sacrifice of honor to personal advantage."

"That's conscious hypocrisy," he objected.

"Unconscious hypocrisy," said the architect, "is merely a lack of humor. I'm not at all sure that there is any such thing as unconscious hypocrisy."

"Yes, there is," said the surgeon. "I ran into it the last time I was ass enough to stop off in New York on my way to Europe. My idolized daughter, back there, has been mucking about among your ghastly æsthetic push. She particularly wanted me to meet two young critics before whom, I gather, your intellectual world genuflects. They specialize in a sense of the past. The traditions and records of Europe are their roast beef. They were agreeable enough."

"What were their names?" the architect asked.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," the surgeon said, salting his soup. "One of them had no eyebrows and the other needed a manicure, but they were amiable young men. Only, by the most casual course of conversation I discovered that Rosencrantz did not know who William of Nangis, Stephen Marcel, John Chandos, the Sieur de la Boétie, Michel de l'Hôpital and Bernard Palissy were. Guildenstern thought the Jacquerie to be a phenomenon of the Fifteenth Century. He also didn't know who Maspero and Ebers were. He further cheered me by saying that the name Koshchei was an invention of Mr. Cabell."

"There's no hypocrisy involved," I said. "The Young Cerebrals probably have a considerable sense of the past gained by reading essays of the correct writers on historical topics. I often meet bright fellows who know all about patches of anthropology and folklore which figure in 'The Golden Bough'. Most of them can prattle prettily about the Ægean civiliza-

tion because that is to be had in Elie Faure's dream of art. But such dogs as Maspero, Bury and Guizot are not inside the æsthetic pale, nor is Gibbon much esteemed. The sense of the past which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lug around with them, flatly, is the literary sense of the past, and not that of informed men who have read history. Art, as we all know, is not the biography of mankind, but, until that pleasant delusion is smashed out of Cerebralia, you need not expect to find any Guildenstern aware of Stephen Marcel or William de Nangis. Personally, I don't think it matters much whether the Cerebrals know history or not. As for calling two estimable young gentlemen hypocrites on such slight provocation, I think it shocking! They would find Maspero as dull as I find the *Yellow Book*."

"Is that as dull as I remember it to have been?"

"It is almost as dull as the memoirs of Casanova. I borrow the comparison from Miss Rebecca West. Miss West's disapproval of the *Yellow Book* and Casanova has heartened me to admit that I find both of these admired literary landmarks tedious. I should hardly care to admit as much in print, however. I wouldn't be safe. . . . What can I have for lunch?"

"Nothing," said the surgeon, "except a little hot water and, perhaps, a baked apple for desert."

## II

He waved back the waiter who was about to pour some white wine into my glass and resumed: "Granted that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not hypocrites, can you excuse the following episode in what you call Cerebralia—although what the American literary world has to do with intelligence I don't understand. I have often legally killed American writers, on the operating table, with a considerable relief."

"Literature," I nervously agreed, "is merely an impediment to civilization. Pray continue."

"A gentlewoman," he said, brutally attacking a mutton chop, "lately invited to her house in the Santa Clara Valley a young Cerebral from New York who proved to be such an unusually horrible specimen that her other guests recoiled from him in open alarm and relentlessly snubbed him. After some hours of this, the dirty puppy announced his deep interest in psychoanalysis to his hostess and began his revenge by assuring her that two eligible young men dangling after her daughter were obviously homosexuals. He proved this by explaining that the girl's cropped hair and sporting tan made her look like a handsome boy. Leaving the lady in a state of gasping collapse, he collected an elderly clergyman and assured him that his wife's constant hectoring of her stepson was the mask of a secret passion for the kid. He was starting to work on a third victim when one of his hostess's daughter's swains caught up with him. . . . I set his nose. . . . Was not this hypocrisy?"

"Obviously," I said.

"Bubble and squeak!" the playwright broke out. "It was not hypocrisy at all! If one of Shakespeare's friends had been a psychiatrist he would have told the Stratford wonder to go into any cheap tavern along Thameside, when he was writing 'Othello,' and listen to young actors in a huff. Why is Iago so unreal that even literary criticism has been able to perceive it? Because he analyzes himself and shows the holes in Shakespeare's imagination of him. No, the real Iago believed his own lies. If the play were well written from the beginning there would be one scene in the first act in which Othello violently snubs Iago before some superior people. No further explanation of Iago would then be necessary. One could enjoy him heartily. His character would still be improbable, because he's supposed to be a soldier—a man of action. He is actually a literary introvert in a fit of pique. His solipsism is peculiarly literary in its phases. Your Cerebral who played old Doctor Freud did so in all sincerity. It was a momentary

sincerity, but it was sincerity! His wounded vanity went into mechanical operation and, as he had no sense of the world, he proceeded against these phantasms of his own mind with the most immediate weapon of his rage."

"But why not simply have thrown rocks?" asked the architect. "The anecdote is banal, of course. It happens every weekend when women are fools enough to invite writers into houses with decent people. But why was this cub's immediate weapon sexual gossip?"

"The alliance between rage and lust," said the surgeon, "is old. Even American writers have commented on it. When I was dressing this puppy's nose his condition was exactly that of a man exhausted by a wild night. Anger had stimulated him. His assault on the character of his fellow guests was a kind of inverse rape. It was most interesting, but I decline to believe that he didn't know he was lying."

"The point," I said, "could be discussed for a week without doing anything more than infuriating us. But the word solipsism is suggestive. The inferior egotist is your true solipsist. He perceives the world only as his mind creates it. Perhaps the other creatures of the house-party were in no way real to the Cerebral. They were simply phantasms which didn't behave themselves. A superior egotist would have seen them more or less as they were and would have—possibly—wondered whether the snubs he'd received were not, as one says, deserved. A superior egotist can conceive humility. The force of his own mind makes him acknowledge that his ego is simply one of spinning millions. On wet Thursdays in Lent and on Midsummer Eve he may really imagine that he is rather a low worm in the sight of God. . . . Thus, too, it is the inferior egotist who drapes his heroes in legends of sexual performance and creates the great of the æsthetic world in the manner of stallions. This primitivism is precisely that of the little boy who brags that his father can thrash policemen. Sexually

timid himself, the Cerebral gives the men he reveres all the qualities of primordial demigods. An English essayist recently roused snickerings in the less hopelessly literary portion of the literary world by solemnly approving the discovery of Wordsworth's illegitimate child as an increase of Wordsworth's legend. *Aeternus puer!* The commonplace writer is not only a boy who can't grow up but rather a dull boy into the bargain. We destroy civilization."

"Your definition of civilization," the playwright yawned, "must be very complicated."

"On the contrary," I said, stealing an olive, "it's simple. A civilized nation or person is one which attempts the recognition of facts."

"Wild grammar," the surgeon commented.

"That is the fault of my expensive education. I was sent to the best schools and colleges. Had I been reared in Shark City, Washington, I would probably know a pronoun from an adverb."

The surgeon finished his mutton chop and said, "Just this morning I saw the destructive force of literature at work on a really intelligent man. I finally had to give him a shot of morphine because he was working himself into mania and talking revolvers. His wife had run off with some long-legged imbecile. He loathed the woman and had loathed her for years, but he reads a good deal, and the whole force of literary tradition was behind him. He spewed up sections of novels wholesale. This, in effect, was how a wronged husband should act. Women are usually more sensible in that situation but, too often, they make asses of themselves in the same way."

"Your truisms," I said recklessly, "are not impressive. And kindly, in blaming writers of fiction, shed some bile toward their masters, the critics."

"I can not be expected to read American criticism at my age," he retorted, "and don't. One is told that Guibert Rosen-

crantz and Eustace Guildenstern are grand youths who will rattle the dead bones of American thought. One watches the actual output. The mountains tremble in the correct reviews and out come ridiculous and very mangy mice. One expects a cataract and gets some feeble drip about the decline of French cooking or the defective collection of American folksongs. Miss Repplier has said as much and more in one volume of essays than have most of the wild young cerebrals in the seven years since literature began to assume formidable contours in America."

### III

"You are unjust to the Cerebrals," I argued. "It has been cleverly remarked of Robert Louis Stevenson that he became an author simply as a species of objection to the world around him. Most of the Cerebrals are merely young men in a state of awful boredom with the American atmosphere. . . . I rather like the Cerebrals and envy their Olympian composure."

"I don't like them and resent their hypocrisy extremely," said the architect. "It bores me to see whole paragraphs complacently echoed from Ford Madox Ford or Wyndham Lewis in the smart reviews without the suggestion of a quotation."

"That is true and yet untrue. Many people are quite unconscious of quoting. Again, many things which seem derivative in literature are simply parallel expressions arrived at quite independently. I lately printed some comment on the psychological nature of George Douglas's forgotten novel, 'The House With The Green Shutters'. While the book containing this sufficiently obvious matter was in the press, I picked up Mr. Edwin Muir's last volume and discovered a passage on Douglas which said much the same thing. When my book appeared I was promptly accused of filching Mr. Muir's idea and, idiotically, a hedge critic in the South has just accused Mr. Muir of stealing from me."

The idea is no great shakes, but Mr. Muir and I came to it independently of each other. So, too, in the last year three people have broken forth independently of each other with comments on the lack of sweetness in Mr. Ring Lardner's humorous tales. . . . That piques me peculiarly, because five years ago another harmless oaf and I tried to print our honest belief that Mr. Lardner flattered humanity even less than do Mr. Cabell and Mr. Dreiser. The same editor told us parentally that we were insane and that Mr. Lardner's talent was all compact of innocent merriment. He has now, of course, gone over to the other school of thought in the case. I have not the courage to remind him of his snorts five years ago."

"Have you any courage at all?" asked the surgeon.

"Almost none. I have been a professional writer since 1918. . . . But why?"

"If you had the guts to use it I would give you the plot of a novel to play with."

"Give it," I said, stealing another olive.

"Some weeks ago," he began, "the newspapers announced the deaths of a man and woman in a motor wreck. They left no children. The man was once my chauffeur. The woman was once a charity patient of mine and her husband first saw her coming in and out of my office. She was a young prostitute of a special class whose hip had been injured in a drunken row with another woman. My driver fell in love with her childish and very innocent beauty. She was an awfully nice, simple child and quite intelligent. My driver married her—"

"Knowing that she was a prostitute of that special class?"

"Certainly. She told him herself. He married her and took her down to his family in the country. But one of her former clients met her on a beach and her husband's family gathered the inference, and hell broke loose. Finish the story."

"He then," I guessed, "became ashamed of what had formerly not mattered a rat's whisker and—"

"See the force of literary tradition! That is what *should* happen. On the contrary he told his family to go to the devil, took his wife into another State and lived with her very placidly until they were killed in this motor wreck."

"The story," the architect said, "is no good. I mean that it is no good for literary purposes as fashions go. To begin with, it ends pleasantly, which violates one current literary canon, and then it represents a man as behaving with what is awkwardly called common sense. Send it to Paul Morand, whose specialty is the representation of people behaving quite calmly and logically in situations which the Anglo-American school of writers either would coat in hysterics or defend by solemnly pointing out that the situations were really pieces of life. Morand recognizes human phlegm. . . . No, your novel is impossible, doctor. The author who attempted it would be defended to death by the admiring critics and cursed by the correct. Finally some one would talk of the story's perverse beauty and that hypocritical phrase, hurtling in air, would oblige him to chuck himself off a tall building in order to make the protest of martyrdom."

"The phrase perverse beauty," said the playwright, "is a stale egg enough, but I don't see its hypocrisy."

"The phrase perverse beauty," the architect said, "was born in this way: Some critical ninny saw something whose beauty was irresistible but which offended his notion of good manners in art or in nature—a cockatoo with a pink beak or the portrait of a lady with her entrails wrapped around her neck. Obligated to admit the beauty in which he believed, he yet had to apologize for its lack of good manners. Hence, perverse beauty. Never forget that art, to simple creatures, is a species of etiquette."

"But," said the surgeon, "do you think that a lack of manners in natural beauty is offensive to the simple?"



"Obviously. The Alps were sinister through the Eighteenth Century in correct writing, and it needed railroads, romanticism and good hotels to make Switzerland a *cliché*. The octopus, the cactus, the bedbug and the gila monster all have charm for the resolute æsthetician but remain unpopular among the sensitive. Intestinal and phallic suggestions in the case of the octopus and the cactus probably have something to do with the matter. The gila is a most interesting arrangement in color, and the bedbug's shell is lovely. What do these merits avail? Things which can bite, off of which one falls, or which stink and wriggle too much have to be explained to the timid. One still hears a deal of the sinister and perverse beauty of tigers and Russian dancers, commonplace as art has made them. No, art is etiquette to many critics and humdrum amateurs."

"It is, then, the lack of etiquette in the art of Goya, Gericault and Beardsley which offended?"

"Pardon, but Gericault only offended condign simpletons. His statuesque attempts in the macabre rather obviously horrified him, too. Goya, as you know, always had a certain popularity with hardheaded folk who relished his massacred peasants shown as heaving lumps of shadow, hands that stiffen in a last terror before the levelled guns, his wigged beasts, his bawds, his scandalous beggars. The hardheaded can always see that an octopus is an octopus and not a primrose which refuses to behave itself. No, it needed the literary softies to establish Goya's degradation and perversity and all that impapyrate puke. It needed—three cheers!—an American softy to discover perverse beauty in Goya's lovely picture of the girl under her parasol at Lille, the most charming of his many purely charming things. Sensible people have always been able to get along with an octopus in art. But—my God!—now that Van Gogh's swipe from him has reminded the Cerebrals of Gustave Doré,

they are even writing up Doré in his capacities as a macabre and perverse artist!"

"Give Raymond Radiguet some credit," I said. "A little before he died he remarked that a good deal of modern painting seemed to date from Doré's illustrations of the Contes Drolatiques. There was a bray which echoed all down Montmartre and scared Cerebrals in the Rotonde. But two young American painters went home, dug up the old book and looked with some interest at those reeling, eccentrically shadowed and foreshortened cuties, and have since been pensive. Doré was no fool. . . . Only what you are trying to say of the critical softy is really that he must be hypocritical. To be heard by nice people, one must establish oneself as a nice person, and nice persons apologize for forwarding to their equals notice of the portrait of a lady with her liver draped over her ear. The sacrifice of honesty entailed in using such nonsensical phrases as perverse beauty is compensated by the safety of so doing. It is true that there is no such thing as perverse beauty, but what of it? There are greater hypocrisies in criticism. Take, for instance, the theory of the best butter."

"What," asked the surgeon, "is the theory of the best butter?"

"May I have some coffee?"

"Yes—half a cup. . . . Go on."

#### IV

"The theory of the best butter," I expounded, "is one very prevalent among correct people and is as vulgar as a sewer. It implies that great writers and painters and that sort of person never derive, consciously or unconsciously, from hacks and inferiors. In this way it is righteous to remark, while the cocktails are being shaken, that Charles Kingsley based 'The Water Babies' on Rabelais because nobody gives a damn what Kingsley based anything on, now, and the Cerebrals don't

care. But, if one remarks that passages of Goya can be found in the rubbishy prints of Spanish hacks of the early Eighteenth Century—and notably that effect of the levelled guns just mentioned—one has committed something pretty serious. It is true, but it ought not to be true, and Cerebralia shudders as it shuddered when news came out that Van Gogh had copied from Doré, a mere illustrator. The great are the great. The panegyrists of Emerson and Alcott mentioned that the great man and his lackey had read Carlyle and Goethe, but they seldom mentioned any reading of Richter, Froebel and Pestalozzi, or—”

“Have you read Pestalozzi?”

“I have,” I said modestly, “by an accident. My father once bought a whole mountain of books at an auction in Washington in order to grab out some Americana. The mountain contained Pestalozzi and other dead cats who have manured the stem of advertised greatness. I have no mind, in particular—I thank God!—and it has given me no pain to read inessential authors. You see before you one who has completely read the works of Ralph Waldo Trine, George Whyte-Melville, Louisa Mühlbach, George Sand, Octave Mirbeau, Polybius, Brick Pomeroy, Augusta Evans Wilson, Diodorus Siculus, Minnie Catorba Watkins, G. Manville Fenn, Andrew Lang, Ludovic Halévy, the continuation of William de Nangis, Eugene Schuyler, Frances Courtenay Baylor, Tristan Bernard, Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Augustus Le Plongeon.”

“Eugene Schuyler,” said the surgeon, “was an admirable writer in many respects.”

“Of course he was, but what of it? This pastime, I’m sorry to say, has kept me from finishing the works of Marcel Proust, Freud, Dostoyevsky, Jean Cocteau, Chekhov, Guillaume Apollinaire and several more, although I can speak of these worthies in tones of proper respect. *Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, etcetera*. Plotinus and Henry James are the only two fashionable

celebrities with whose words I am fully acquainted.”

“Most of Plotinus,” said the architect, “is horribly stupid.”

“What of it? Theogenes tells us that great wisdom and great dullness come to much the same thing. William James told a friend of mine that passages of Plato sent him to sleep. . . . To go back to the theory of the best butter. You see, a great artist can derive only from great artists. One admits that Goya had gazed at works of El Greco and Velasquez, but there must be no penny prints in his lineage. De Quincey had not looked through ‘Levana.’ Carlyle was not aware of Lesage. It is not to be conceded that the living artists whose specialty is the stream of consciousness know that paragraph in the last chapter of ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ in which—and how expertly!—Carton is made to recall the hurrying footsteps in Soho and a phrase of his father’s burial service, and yet sees the upturned faces of the crowd below the scaffold as all flashes from him in the heave of ending life. To the merely sensible, these goods are suggestive, and, as it is shakily admitted that great artists must go to school, it hardly seems to matter that they went to school to nobodies and to mere entertainers capable of some minute excellences. No, upholders of the tradition of the best butter shrink from such admissions against the aristocracy. And this hypocrisy, I think, is the best bloom in our critical garden of nonsense, for its seed is an obvious self-flattery. In short, one admires Goya and it must not be admitted that Goya’s levelled gun barrels and winged abortions have improper ancestors. . . . Plato is remotely the grandfather of this iniquity.”

“How?”

“Plato urged—didn’t he?—that the lives and sayings of eminent men be described and extolled for the benefit of posterity. Himself something of the heavy snob, he neglected to urge that the contributing forces of such lives should be added as a kind of humbling moral to the

tale. So, behind the tombs of heroes, appear the grinning ghosts of fishwives, haberdashers, newsboys, street-walkers and makers of penny prints from whom these great accepted timely advice and strays of information. And yet, granting the necessities of admiring biographers, it has been truly pointed out that eminent men are frequently unpretentious and modest. They'd better be!"

"Your inferiority," said the architect, "constantly takes the form of heaving rocks at the tombs of heroes."

"Heave a rock at the last resting place of any of my heroes and watch me wriggle! Yesterday, in Sutter street, my companion bowed to a lady and, when she had passed remarked that she was a daughter of William James. I turned and gaped after this unassuming gentlewoman as though she were a circus parade with nine elephants and I a child of seven."

"James," said the surgeon, "had his weak spots. He came dangerously close to approving the doctrine of the immediate good at the expense of the eventual good."

"True. The weak spots of fine men make us wriggle more than do positive cancers in the careers of halfway people. I sweat with rage while retrospectively watching Theodore Roosevelt conciliate the herd's idea of a great man," I said. "It was deplorable in the last American!"

"Why last?" yawned the playwright. "Don't be so damned affected!"

"No," said the surgeon, "he's reached a lucid statement of cold fact. I'm older than any of you. The Rough Rider was the last American of a class now almost extinct. He closed an epoch. The elder United States died with him. . . . He was charming, bumptious, vain and able. The character was not uncommon. I knew many variations of it. These men feared God not at all and took their own part. They envied Europe and were flattered by its attentions—as Roosevelt was—but it was a decent envy, and they accepted the flattery as one accepts flatteries from a

man one can knock down. Isolation had, at least, given those old Americans a certain stiffness of the spine, a grain of energetic pride in being themselves. Their egotism may have been laughable and parochial, but it was an egotism. Life among them was strenuous."

"A dull book," said the playwright.

"Perhaps," I said. "But the Rough Rider, however clumsily, hit and hit hard at the grossness of the generation rising around him. His taunts were naturally taken as an invitation to play a great deal of golf and to shoot big game. But he presumed to preach an egotism which might have ended in the production of a less lacteal mush, for the superior egotist is not a hypocrite, save in the grand manner. Your superior egotist is not ashamed of a penny print in the history of his gods and when he sacrifices belief to personal advantage he does it with a sweep of the hat. . . . The whole downward contour of American thought and life after the Civil War was reaching its dead level of the present in 1900, and the completion of the disaster Roosevelt barely saw. He felt it coming. The movement in decay can not be arrested now. Unless the contentiousness of the primitive Americans wakes again—and who really expects that?—we shall become more comic than we are. Our mania for devices in self-protection can hardly crawl lower. We have preferred the comfort of cotton wool, and even our momentary screams against that stifling investiture have a slightly false, theatrical note. We have grown to enjoy our masochism."

"You're almost frank," said the surgeon. "Yes, the final truth about your cerebral American is that he enjoys his sufferings under the swill-pail breaking his back."

"Rot!" said the playwright.

The architect said: "No. . . . There's something in that. The other day I was asked to eat a very good lunch in one of your clubs with a group of your local architects. Some of these gents have been



wailing over the bad taste and cheap building of Californians. Their woes have been elegant in the best architectural magazines. They've been yearning for some means to advertise reputable architects and decent buildings. Along comes somebody—I forget his name—and prints an article in a five-cent magazine accessible to the mob with photographs of good houses by George Washington Smith and some more, and horrible examples of the other kind of thing. This was just what the aesthetes had been wanting, or had said that they wanted. Did they like it when they saw it? Not they! I sat for an hour in the steam heat of their indignation. Art, somehow or other, had been defiled. . . . Yes, there's a strain of sheer masochism in the refined American's sufferings. I fancy that men violently busy with the forces of their own talents would not have time to suffer so much aloud, or that their suffering would pour out a livelier lava on the vulgarians. It's all rather weak and unrealized. Our judgments on the scene seem to be the verdicts of so many little brothers to Judge Bridle-goose, very prettily phrased and a trifle platitudinous. We say nice things about the right people and groan over the rest, and who cares? . . . I wonder about the future."

## V

"There isn't any," I said. "So don't bother."

"None at all?"

"None," I declaimed. "We shall be Saite, at the best. The generation which vanished with Roosevelt was the last flare of hereditary energies. Twilight was commencing for Europe when the *Mayflower* started on its cruise. We're a child born at menopause. . . . We'll be less crude. Oh, yes! Even the decaying Europeans may come to jeer less—may even creep from stilled Thebes and Memphis to admire a little the palanquins and the gilding in our Saite streets. I'm sure that life in Sais was somehow charming with

its repetitions of the past. The slim nobles received well and showed the tourists through the tombs so finely copied, form for form, from the best in the Valley of the Kings beyond old Thebes. And those bronze and alabaster women—so softly molded!—charm us still on shelves in Cairo and Berlin, carven echoes of the great day. It was all charming! The sharp enamels glittered on the walls, and the Greeks, stinking of oily goatshair, gaped in the markets and shyly drew aside from the white formal sleeves which drifted past them under stiff parasols of tinted papyrus. Sais was fair. All sense of simulation had passed. It was all an echo, and there was no shame in the great fraud. . . . We shall have that much—a prolonged twilight, a high grace of mimicry, an etiquette in death, a last and unconscious hypocrisy. We shall not know that we are cheats."

"You were saying just the opposite on Tuesday," said the surgeon.

"That was Tuesday. This is Saturday and you've put me on a beastly diet! . . . But the intermediate period of tutelage is rather rough. We learn from Europe by licking its spittle, I think, too publicly. I weary of watching artists, themselves able, go panting for compliments or censure to some foreign touring tramp. I sicken when I see children of gentlefolk accept insults from a Czech ballet boy, a male harlot kept by a vulgar——"

"Hold on!" said the architect. "That's my story, not yours!"

"My good fellow," I sneered, reaching for my hat, "did you fancy that I was going to let any of you say the best things in my report of this conversation? Ass! Did you not shiver when I mentioned all those ghosts grinning behind the tombs of people who swiped their stuff?"

"But *I* mentioned them!" he howled.

"What of it?"

"Hypocrite!"

"Oh, consciously!" I said. "Pray, did you think that I haven't learned from my betters?"

# THE PLAGUE OF LAWS

BY WILLIAM P. HELM, JR.

AT SOME point in space along the pathway this rolling ball of mud is following, there lies, at no far distant date, a Judgment Day. It is not the Dreadful Day of Wrath that Gabriel will announce so picturesquely with his trumpet; rather it is a Day of Deliverance. The crystal shows it as a Judgment Day of Judges and of Laws, as a Day rampant on a field of junk towering to Heaven and tapering off unbelievable miles to a Dawn of Hope.

With this picture clearly on his retina, the crystal-gazer will at once perceive that the wreckage in the field consists of our complicated, broken-down and altogether impossible machinery of laws and legal practices. Even now, as it creaks through the courts, the Frankenstein of the Law flaunts symptoms of disintegration. There may be no mud on its ermine, but it has the asthma. The majesty of its youth is no longer majestic. Who once bent the knee now thumbs the nose. Some of this prevailing disrespect for law may properly be attributed, perhaps, to changing hearts and shifting ideals, but the prime cause lies in the law itself. We have built a machine that no man can control. Thou-shalt-not has been piled upon Thou-shalt-not until Thou-shalt and Thou-mayest have been utterly buried. Ten thousand law-mills have submerged America beneath their grist. No living man can hope to know the law, and he who claims to do so is deserving only of long hairy ears and a bale of hay.

Back in the Roman days there ruled an Emperor, Justinian, who had the hardihood to junk the laws of Rome. They had

grown fearful and conflicting, though hardly attaining the magnitude of our own colossal structure at the present time. Succeeding legislatures had spawned progressive confusion. When in Rome the Romans knew not what to do. So one fine day Justinian dropped the whole of Roman jurisprudence into the sluggish Tiber and gave to his countrymen a brand new set of 2,000 concentrated statutes as adequate and sufficient to hold them. We of America now seem to be far along the road Justinian trod many centuries ago. We have reached the twilight zone where the tragedy of misunderstanding is transmuted into the comedy of error. No man can tell even the number of our laws. How, under such conditions, can law be either enforced or observed?

Not long ago a somewhat inquisitive person who seeks to measure things as they are rather than as they are thought to be journeyed to an enlightened city, somewhat removed from Canton, in the progressive and respectable Commonwealth of Ohio, and bespoke a friendly policeman engaged in the practise of his art.

"Officer," asked the inquirer (all policemen are officers, for some occult reason), "tell me something of your work here. You are required to enforce the city ordinances, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir; we try to."

"And, of course, the laws of the State of Ohio?"

"Yes, sir."

"The Federal laws, too?"

"Yes," replied the policeman, "and the county laws. You forgot them."

"So I did," rejoined the inquirer.