

# CLINICAL NOTES

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

*Divorce.*—In a report made recently to the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Convention by the Right Hon. Bishop Herman Page, of Michigan, chairman of the joint commission that has applied itself to a study of the problem for several years, the recommendation was made that normal schools, colleges, universities and seminaries be requested to offer greater instruction on the subject of marriage and human relationships by way of overcoming the seriousness of the divorce situation in the United States. "What is needed," the report went on to state, "is the same thorough study and diagnosis that are characteristic of all good engineering and medical work today."

With the highest regard for the eminent Herman, with due appreciation of the amenities and as one pew-holder to another, I take his ear delicately in my fingers and whisper into it: Bosh. All the instruction, study and diagnosis of marriage and human relationships put on tap in all the schools from Seattle to Provincetown and from Chicago to Memphis will not help matters a jot. And the same thorough study and diagnosis that are characteristic of all good engineering and medical work, in our friend's phrase, will help a heap less. Divorces are the result not of misunderstanding so often as they are the result of too complete and too intimate understanding. The way to prevent divorce is not to teach boys and girls how to understand girls and boys but to teach them the compelling, persuasive illusion of the stimulating and mysterious unknown. Divorce was little heard of in the age of chivalry and roses. It flourishes today in an age of sex tomes, popular treatises on anatomy, flapper sophistication and cheap oysters.

*The Apartment House.*—The apartment house is frequently charged with breaking up the old spirit of home life in our larger cities and contributing toward marital débâcle. The idea strikes me as buncombe. The notion, commonly promulgated, that a wife who orders dinner up from the restaurant, or gets it at the delicatessen around the corner, or is able quickly to prepare it with newfangled mechanical appliances is bound for some occult reason to be a less meritorious and gradually less contented and happy spouse than the one who stands half a day over a sweltering stove does not penetrate too smoothly into my logical centres. The wife who washes dishes may contribute to keeping her husband's and children's home intact—in fact, she generally does—but it is a home sordid, rebellious and miserable. The so-called old home life was often largely a sentimental legend, cherished by outsiders. Its disappearance has done more to argue for the success of marriage, relatively speaking, than anything else one can think of.

*Sartor Resartus.*—The assertion that the American is nationally the best dressed man doesn't persuade me. The truth is simply that the American buys himself a new suit oftener than any other man. There is a considerable difference.

*Arena.*—The truth of the matter in the case of the much discussed old corner saloon—it may be brought to the attention of Prohibitionists—is that more fights used to take place around the free lunch counter than around the drinking bar.

*Civilization.*—Civilization, apart from the somewhat too narrow definition of

Lecky, is in its general sense not designed for youth but for age. The combined aim and end of civilization, when all else is done with, is personal security. For that, youth has little need or use.

*Hedonism.*—Hedonism, in the sense that the term is popularly and currently employed, is corrupted by the trivial and disdainful definition of pleasure. To speak of a hedonist is, in most idiots' minds, to speak of a professional golf player, boozier or jazz baby. Yet the real hedonists, above all men, are to be found among our first scientists and artists.

*Footnote XXI.*—In the presence of a romantic situation or a romantic scene, the American always believes that it is necessary for him, as a testimonial to his manliness, to be humorous.

*More on Slang.*—American slang expressions and those in general use among the French approach each other in similarity more closely than the argots of any other two countries. The slang of England, curiously enough, considering the common tongue, is often as strange to Americans as American slang is to Englishmen. So with German and Italian slang, and vice versa. But the vernacular of America and France is often identical. For example, we say *doggy*; the French use the phrase *du chien*. We call a fool a goat; so do the French. We call a pawnbroker uncle; so do the French. Both French and Americans sometimes allude to a colored man as chocolate ("Bon-Bon Buddy, the Chocolate Drop"), a heavy boozier as a funnel (*entonnoir*), the foam on a glass of beer as a collar (*faux-col*), one who tries to trick us as one who tries to string us, the common people as small fry or fish (*fretin*), and whiskers as grass or alfalfa (*gazon*). We call eyes lamps; so do the French (*quinquets*). We call a red-head a carrot-head; so do the French. We allude to a certain kind of fellow as an old shoe; the French allude to him similarly (*une savate*). When we wish ironically to

designate another kind of man we say, "There's a bird"; the French call him a canary (*un serin*). A silk hat to us is a stove-pipe; so is it to the French (*un tuyau de poêle*). A simpleton to both Americans and French is a calf (*un veau*). We say that a fellow has nerve; so do the French. Both French and Americans refer to the nose as a snout and use the words *whitewasher*, *chicken*, *ass*, *chippy* and *gaga* in the same sense. We say a person is about as interesting as a glass of water; the French say he is about as interesting as a pitcher. We say a restaurant check is bad news; the French say it is *la douloureuse*. We say a lanky fellow is as thin as a slat; the French say that he is as thin as a lath (*échalas*). We say a slattern is a dirty dishrag; so do the French. And both French and Americans often use the word *cheese* with the same derogatory implication.

We say "He's in the soup"; the French say "Il est dans la purée." We say, "He lives on air"; the French say, "Il vit de l'air." Such expressions as "His pockets are well lined," "He's a clam," "He is cracked," "He's full of bugs," "lifting an elbow" (to guzzle), "six feet underground," "chase yourself," "I won't be done," "come again," "shut up" and many others are common to both argots.

*The Next Table.*—This is the one country in the civilized world where a gentleman may take a lady to a public restaurant only with dire misgivings that something in the audible conversation of men at a nearby table will inevitably reach her ears with profound embarrassment and disgust.

*Society.*—"Why do you persist in burying yourself so; why don't you go out oftener?" Frederick Lonsdale not long ago demanded of James M. Barrie. "Why should I?" replied Barrie. "One only hears again what one already knows, expressed more dully or more brilliantly."

*Marriage.*—In this age of scandal-slinging it has come to be an accepted fact that the

breaking up of at least nine-tenths of marriages is due to outside fooling around by one or another of the parties to the marriage. For one such marriage that goes on the rocks for that reason I hazard the guess that there are a dozen that go to pieces because of indoor difficulties on the part of the married couples themselves.

*Theorem.*—The theory that the faults advanced against America would be found to be faults equally of any other country—a theory lately propounded with indignant eloquence by certain of our elder critical patriots—unfortunately does not, one fears, hold water. By what other nation under the sun is a citizen, returning from abroad to his homeland, arbitrarily regarded as a thief and a liar, treated as such, and his person obstreperously paddled for evidences of his guilt? In what other country is a motorist, pausing by the wayside, arbitrarily regarded as a seducer and treated as such? In what other civilized land may a man's house be indiscriminately entered and searched for a bottle of beer? In what other country would men, presumed to be innocent, be brought into court and to trial shackled like slave convicts? In what other country are human beings lynched and burned at Methodist picnics? In what other country may the people's pleasure places, however harmless, be arbitrarily invaded and demolished by scurrilous paid agents of the law? In what other country may a man be arrested for paying a woman's railroad fare or for owning a copy of a book on sex or for winking at a pretty girl on the street? In what other country is libel a perfectly safe practice of daily journalism? In what other country under the sun could a man like Herbert Hoover be constituted the nation's leader?

*No. 18 Again.*—Mr. W. C. Durant, president of Durant Motors, Inc., has hung up a prize of \$25,000 for what he designates

"the best and most practicable plan" to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment. Although I elect to let Mr. Durant keep his \$25,000 and buy himself some decent champagne with it—which will augment his wisdom and, more importantly and needfully, his fund of humor—I present him with the following, with my solemn guarantee that it will work:

1. Declare war on England, which will automatically shut off the supply of drinkable gin, Scotch and cognac.
2. Declare war on Germany, which will automatically shut off the supply of Rhine and Moselle wines.
3. Declare war on France, which will automatically shut off the supply of Burgundies, clarets, champagnes and cordials.
4. Declare war on Italy, which will automatically shut off the supply of drinkable Chianti and vermouth.
5. Since, under this plan, Canada would take up arms for the motherland, Canadian whiskies would automatically be shut out of the United States. The same thing would hold true of Jamaica rum. Spanish merchantmen, because of the war-torn seas, would furthermore be unable to bring in sherry. There would be left simply the problem of Cuba and Bacardi; it could easily be handled.
6. With the declaration of war against Italy, the current wop cellar-professors would be interned and the bootleg supply in that direction cut off.
7. With the declaration of war on Germany, the brave Vigilantes would come forth again gratis and do away with the present esoteric beer *Techniker*.
8. With the declaration of war against England, there would be an automatic elimination of the spurious English captains of mythical British tramp steamers who presently show up periodically in full naval regalia and cozen the boobs into purchasing Macdougall alley *Schnapps*.
9. With the declaration of war on France, the consequent forthright Staten Island labels on champagne bottles would drive the rich to the aboriginal American cider.
10. Finally, the knowledge that all alcoholic beverages on tap in the United States were bogus would discourage drinking immediately. The knowledge today that they may conceivably *not* be bogus is what encourages drinking.

If Dr. Durant thinks that this plan is flippant and silly, let him try to get hold of one for \$25,000 less flippant and silly that would actually work one-twenty-fifth so well.

# THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

## *Detheatricalized Drama*

A MOVEMENT seems to be under way in France to rid the drama of drama. It appears to be the enthusiastic purpose of a considerable portion of contemporary French authors to concoct plays with the least possible amount of theatrical stimulation. Drama, in the usual sense, is evidently regarded by them as peculiarly obnoxious and they exert themselves to the limit to write plays that shall sedulously avoid it. They may be called the undramatic school of dramatists and their credo may be defined as a denial of action and an affirmation of inertion. Shaw said of Sardou that his plan of playwriting was first to invent the action of his piece and then carefully to keep it off the stage and have it announced merely by letters and telegrams. The people, he observed, open the letters and read them, whether they are addressed to them or not, and then they talk either about what the letters announce as having occurred already or about what they intend to do tomorrow in consequence of receiving them. These grandchildren of Sardou have got rid of even the letters and telegrams.

In this dramaless school of dramatists we find such men as Paul Raynal, Jean-Jacques Bernard, Charles Vildrac and the later Louis Verneuil. Of Bernard's theatrical "stills," and of Vildrac's, I have written in the past. Samples of Raynal's and Verneuil's, recently disclosed on the American stage, may come in for a little further consideration. Raynal's play, "Le Tombeau Sous l'Arc de Triomphe," known locally as "The Unknown Warrior," and Verneuil's "Monsieur Lambertier," known as "Jealousy"—both, as was to be expected, hardly box-office startlers—exem-

plify prettily the lengths to which the academy of Bernard et Cie arbitrarily goes to substitute inaction for movement and beefy reflection for nervous thought, movement and speech. Verneuil is the lesser offender of the two; there are moments when drama, for all his tugging and pulling against it, creeps into his manuscript like a rebellious ghost out of his playwriting past. But, obedient to the nonsensical new dispensation, he quickly gets it by the sheet-tail and exorcizes it. To make doubly sure that there shall be a minimum of drama in his exhibit, he manages, after much obvious sweat, to fashion it with only two characters, as Raynal, by dint of equally obvious effort, manages to fashion his with only three. Both plays clearly demand a fuller set of characters; both plays would be infinitely better with a greater number; both literally bawl for the entrance of characters arbitrarily kept in the wings. Yet the authors, intent upon detheatricalization, puff and groan self-consciously and absurdly in keeping them in exile and in a consequent reduction of assertion to implication and of alert drama to mouthy rhetoric. So far in this direction does Raynal's play go that it resembles that part of a moving picture that has been left in the cutting-room. It is as if the play we see were a patchwork of all the undramatic portions cut out of an originally dramatic play and pieced together.

This attempt to confect a drama that shall impress and move a theatre audience by inferential rather than by more direct means is, I daresay, but another aspect of the prevailing auctorial yen to achieve facile notice by a figurative brushing of the hair with a toothbrush. We have thus been entertained by the spectacle of a