

NOTES ON THE BACK OF A PASSPORT

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 4)

Anyway this evening the people we were with seemed happy. In spite of the language, I never spent a pleasanter evening. The visitors were toasted and tossed in a blanket (which is a compliment) and walked home to the hotel through the early glare of a Leningrad summer morning. Peasant women in shawls were selling strawberries along the Nevsky.

Walking round Leningrad I have all the time the feeling that I'm walking around in the burnt-out crater of a volcano. Dostoevski's St. Petersburg, the Petrograd of Jack Reed's and Ransome's despatches, still are more vivid in my mind than this huge empty city full of great handsome buildings (we'd call them Georgian or Colonial) that exaggerate as through a megaphone the last words of Vitruvian architecture. No town can make so much history as has been made by the city of Peter and Lenin and not wear itself out, I suppose. Still I kept wishing I'd been there eleven years before. When Kittin and I took the sleeper to Moscow it was like going to bed to wake up a few years forward in the future. Moscow's the crater now.

II

Snapshot: Moscow

Slipping unseeingly with numb wet feet on the sleekslimed pavement, the Amerikanski Peesatyl stumbled into the station and found his way dazedly to his compartment in the train. In the trainshed it was like the Moscow winter afternoon outside, only darker and greyer. The dim electric bulbs made no light in the December murk, cold and heavy and grey as pig-iron. Only the steam rising from the engine and our breaths made a little fragile stir of whiteness. The A. Peesatyl was dead tired, his nose was stuffed up with a cold, his stomach was full of cold herring and smoked fish, the vodka of many good-byes had worked up into his head where it weighed and buzzed in an iron crown.

All the day before, all night, all this day he'd slushed through the sleetpitted snow of the streets, climbed grey stairs, tried to explain, to understand explanations, to say things in foreign languages, to ask how, to tell why; had stood face to face with great healthy youthful people in formless grey clothes; had been warmed and moved by the warmth and movement of their faces so alive in the eyes and lips, eyes strained to see beyond the Frontier, beyond next week and next century, lips always forming questions; had left the questions half-answered, half-understood, and had shaken hands. This shaking hands and saying good-bye was like shaking hands with a doctor you were friends with who had come to the door of the operating theatre for a moment to strip off his rubber gloves and smoke a cigarette and to try to explain something to you before he went back to the lights and the blood and the glittering instruments of the theatre where with desperate difficulty a baby was being born.

In the early morning there'd been a long drunken drowsy trip in a taxicab to a suburb where you could hardly see the grey ramble houses against the long grey snowbanks disappearing under the grey sky, to visit an old peasant, a sharp-faced folkless man, who'd brought from some Volga villages a whole basket of lacquered scraps of the middle-ages made up for him into ashtrays and soup-spoons and cigarette boxes, painted right today in the style of the Byzantine icon painters; and then back into the murk of Moscow, into the terrible jangling bird-work of the future again, and more unfinished talks, little glimpses of vodka, good-byes.

But all the old habits of thirty years of life are straining away toward the West and carpets and easychairs and the hot and cold bath water running and the cheerful trivial accustomed world of shop-windows and women's hats and their ankles neat as trotting horses' above the light hightapping heels and the non-sensical life of advertisements and ginetracks and greenbacks. It's like waiting for the cage that's going to haul you up out of a mine, like getting out of a cement factory, like climbing the long greasy ladder out of the stokehold of a steamboat, like getting away from the rotary presses of a newspaper and stepping out onto the disorganized jingling street.

Groggily the A. Peesatyl dropped his bags in his compartment (Gowway made the train) and stepped out on the platform to smoke one more of too many last cigarettes, and stood stamping his numb feet in the grey iron cold of the trainshed under the spiralling beckoning vaguely seen steam. The woman who was a theatre director, the nice genial woman with the broad forehead and the fine dark eyes, had come down to say good-bye; the company came with her, all the fifteen-year-olds and eighteen-year-olds I'd seen rehearsing the plays for the Sanitary Propaganda Theatre: the play about avoiding syphilis, the play about cleaning your teeth, the play about the world that will stand up so bright and shining when the dark murky scaffolding of today's struggle is torn away.

"They want to say good-bye," she said as I was shaking the hard unseeably hands (they were all factory workers in the day-time and actors at night), under the probing of so many blue eyes curious and friendly, wanting to be told, to be with, to understand, to cross all these faraway frontiers. "They want to know," she said. "They like you very much, but they want to ask you one question. They want you to show your face. They want to know where you stand politically. Are you with us?"

The iron twilight dims. The steam swirls around us. We are muddled by the delicate crinkly steam of our breath, the iron crown tightens on the head, throbbing with too many men, too many women, too many youngsters, seen, talked to, asked questions of, too many hands shaken, too many foreign languages badly understood. . . . "But let me see. . . . But maybe I can explain. . . . But in so short a time . . . there's no time." The train is moving. I have to run and jump for it. They are gone in a swirl of steam, rubbed out by the iron-grey darkness. The train has pulled out of the station and is rumbling westward.

I fall into my bunk in the too stuffy, too rumbling, too drowsy compartment, and roll over and go to sleep.

In connection with liberty of conscience and freedom of speech here in America, how about the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Belford, of Brooklyn, and his views of the Rev. Father Coughlin, together with his opinion of Alfred E. Smith? Could all this be said to be intimately connected with Catholic dogma, and so to be transgressing it, or is it viewed, rather, as interference with some purely political program of the Church, which is said not to be in politics? If the latter, how about the public performances of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin?

CITYSCAPES

by SHERWOOD ANDERSON

THE Guggenheim. . . . The applications pour in. Since the depression, the number of applications from young scientists, students and doctors has not increased much but, among the young writers, painters, sculptors, etc., my understanding is that it is rather a flood. As for the painters, they are asked to send in samples of their work. An empty store room is rented and three or four painters, their reputations already made, are asked to come in and pass on them. I gather there is a process of slow selection. I suspect that it is something like this:—Sometime ago I took to Dreiser the work of a young writer I admired. He looked at it. "Huh," he said, "of course you would like his work. He writes like you."

I was speaking to a young writer of real ability. one who applied for the Guggenheim and didn't get it. "This is the way I did it," she said. "I thought up a project that I thought would impress them. It wasn't what I wanted to do at all. I wanted some money so I would have time to tell a very simple story. I thought I would get the money or the big sounding project and then do as I pleased." She didn't get it. If she had told them what she told me she might have. Who knows?

* * *

Waxey Gordon. . . . I spoke to one of the jurors who helped send Waxey, the beer baron, to his reward . . . a fine of eighty thousand . . . ten years in prison. The juror told me about it. Waxey went on the stand. He didn't have to and the tip was that his attorneys put him on because, in a similar case, income tax evasion, the big banker Mitchell went on and got away with it. The banker came clear. The juror said . . . "when we got into the jury room we were all sorry for Waxey. We thought he was guilty all right but he had made such a pitiful showing on the stand. Then we got indignant. After the showing the big bankers made down in Washington we thought we had a right to expect something better from the big racketeers. To find out they were the same kind of weak-kneed saps as the big bankers was just too much."

* * *

In a city court room. . . . A thick-necked Austrian father had his daughter up, wanting to have her put on probation. The girl was perhaps nineteen; and very pretty. She had a job in a small restaurant at ten dollars a week and did not often go to church. Sometimes she went out, to a dance or a party, and stayed out until after midnight. She had a young woman friend who had once been divorced. The magistrate kept trying to find out what was wrong with the girl. "I want her to obey me," the father kept saying. Once, when she came home quite late and the father kicked up a row, the girl told him to go to hell. In the court room she kept looking at her father with cold indifference and the magistrate kept trying to explain that the girl, having been born in America and raised in America, was an American woman. "I would have to put all the women and girls in America on probation if it came to a question of their obeying either fathers or husbands," the magistrate said.

The father couldn't or wouldn't understand. He kept saying the same thing over and over. "She is my daughter. I want peace. I want her to obey me."

"Shut up," the magistrate said. He was tired of it. The father's thick neck got more and more red and he tramped out of the court room. The young woman, I presume, went back to her job.

* * *

The extra overcoat. . . . The man told me about the trouble he had with his extra overcoat. He said he had two. They were both last year's coats but pretty good yet. He had a job but his wages had been cut. Men without overcoats kept ringing his door-bell and asking for an overcoat. He kept refusing. It got on his nerves, he said. He said he got more and more bitter about the matter. "Look here," he said, "didn't Hoover or someone talk about two automobiles. If a man can have two aut. mobiles, why not two overcoats?" He had a brown coat and a black one. He liked them both. "Sometimes I liked to wear one, sometimes the other," he said. He didn't want to give either of them away.

He said he must have got a bit hysterical. He couldn't sleep. He lived in a New York suburb and men without overcoats kept ringing his door-bell when he was at home in the evening.

And then, one night, after three men had come to his door, asking for a coat and he had dismissed them all . . . he cursed the last one . . . he suddenly, in the night, when he couldn't sleep, got out of bed and went down into the cellar. He took one of the coats, the black one, and threw it into the furnace. "Wasn't I a damn fool?" he said. "That's the kind of a damn fool I am."

The Editors of *The American Spectator* calculate that, what with untaxed and profit-making religious schools, universities, boys' and girls' orphanages, hospitals, shrines, cemeteries, Little Flowers, religious retreats, sanitariums, lodging houses, hotels, cathedrals, churches, parish houses and real estate adventures in general, the wealth of Christ must transcend by many billions the combined fortunes of the Rockefellers, Morgans, Mellons, Duponts and who not else. Starting as a carpenter, the humble Nazarene appears to have established an all-time mazuma high.

SERVANTS OF GOD

No. 19

United Press Dispatch to the *Scranton (Pa.) Times*: JONESBORO, ARK.—A three years' church war in Jonesboro resulted today in the death of John McMurdo, sixty-eight-year-old watchman of the Jonesboro Tabernacle. He died of gunshot wounds inflicted by Rev. Dale Crowley, militant evangelist.

THE WORST BOOK OF THE MONTH

MOTS-DÉLUGE: HYPOCROTES

By Eugène Jolas

5½ x 7½. Pp. 204

Paris: Editions des Cahiers Libres

AMBROSE LIGHT

by GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

WHENEVER I meet a man with a pretense to sagacity in the matter of American *belles lettres*, I have an annoying habit of asking him his opinion of the late lost, strayed or stolen Mr. Ambrose Bierce. If, upon the question, he imparts to me a crisp wink, I put him down in my mental files as a fellow worth cultivating. If, on the other hand, he goes into an encomiastic clog, I dismiss him as one whose critical faculties have still not outgrown their adolescence. For I believe that an admiration of Bierce, among men of my generation, is invariably an unconscious hangover from the enthusiasm of their youth, when an epigram—provided only it were sufficiently cynical—was the last word in worldly wisdom and when any story of the occult in which the tall grass was mysteriously agitated by something (spelled with a capital S) was a dark-shuddering masterpiece.

Bierce's persistent reputation as an eminent of letters is undoubtedly due to these long-pents laudators with an unrevoked short-pants rapture. Certainly a sedulous scrutiny of his collected works reveals little adult basis for it. He was, at his best, little more—in "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter" (a paraphrase of a translation by Danziger of Richard Voss)—than a prelude to George Sylvester Viereck; little more—in "Can Such Things Be?" and "Tales of Soldiers and Civilians"—than a somewhat superior *Black Cat* magazine writer. His fables in "Cobwebs From an Empty Skull" and in "Fantastic Fables" are second-rate Alfred Polgar and fifth-rate Dunsany. And as for his "Write It Right", the title itself provides abundantly illuminating criticism. As editor of *The Argonaut* and *The Wasp*, Bierce had his points, but his so-called Prattle columns, which he contributed for years to the San Francisco *Examiner*, when re-read today seem pitifully weak and empty beside the columns of such men as Heywood Brown, Don Marquis, et al.

It is the consistent custom of Bierce's champions, however, to meet any such derogatory appraisal of his literary performances with the proud exclamation, "Ah, but what of 'The Devil's Dictionary'!" This "Devil's Dictionary" is not only one of their powerful legends, but one of literary America's at large. It is held out as the paragon of true and devastating wit, the trump of polished, crystallized acid. Well, take a look at it. I open it and quote a few samples from under the A's alone; they sufficiently suggest the flavor of what is under the B's, C's, D's and on to the Z's:

Abasement, *n.* A decent and customary mental attitude in the presence of wealth or power. Peculiarly appropriate in an employee when addressing an employer.

Abdication, *n.* An act whereby a sovereign attests his sense of the high temperature of the throne.

Abscond, *v.t.* To "move in a mysterious way," commonly with the property of another.

Academe, *n.* An ancient school where morality and philosophy were taught. Academy, *n.* (from academe) A modern school where football is taught.

Admiral, *n.* That part of a war-ship which does the talking while the figure-head does the thinking.

Admonition, *n.* Gentle reproach, as with a meat-axe.

Affianced, *pp.* Fitted with an ankle-ring for the ball-and-chain.

Ambidextrous, *adj.* Able to pick with equal skill a right-hand pocket or a left.

Anoint, *v.t.* To grease a king or other great functionary already sufficiently slippery.

Apothecary, *n.* The physician's accomplice, undertaker's benefactor and grave worm's provider.

Appeal, *v.t.* In law, to put the dice into the box for another throw.

April Fool, *n.* The March fool with another month added to his folly.

Architect, *n.* One who drafts a plan of your house, and plans a draft of your money.

Armor, *n.* The kind of clothing worn by a man whose tailor is a blacksmith.

Arsenic, *n.* A kind of cosmetic greatly affected by the ladies, whom it greatly affects in turn.

One speculates as to the origins of the notion that Bierce was a considerable somebody. Like the late Richard Harding Davis, he had a superficially impressive front and a superficially impressive manner: these, as they often do, may have contrived to make certain impressionable men confound the big brass sign outside the bank for the amount of gold in its vault. He had, in addition, a romantic Civil War record, and a romantic war record isn't a bad asset to any writer, particularly in the minds of his contemporary critics who have served in the commissary department, or as pot-toters in field hospitals and butlers to the General's horse. And there were a number of such in the Civil War. Further, in the San Francisco of his day, Bierce—with his large manner and small competence—was a big toad in a little hole. He looked important; he comported himself importantly; he spouted importantly. He possessed the faculty of investing himself with a certain degree of awesomeness, like a movie actor in the city to the South today who has a Picasso in his bathroom and has once had a Duke stay over-night in his house. What was more, he had that most precious of all speciously impressive gifts: the air of a man who always seemed superior and independent and, even when without a sou in the world, at perfect and lofty ease among those with ample funds.

In every smaller city, there is always some writer or newspaper man who is singled out for matinee idolizing by his cronies and certain of the town folk. It is a matter partly of local pride and partly of the average man's insistent need to number among his friends and acquaintances someone, however essentially dubious, to talk about, brag about, and in a degree look up to. In every newspaper office in every such city there is one such hero. Bierce was the selection in the San Francisco of his time. And it was not long thereafter that he was advertised broadcast by his loving friends in the same ecstatic breath as the California climate, the size of the redwood trees, the sunset on the Golden Gate, and the one-dollar girls in Chinatown.

The first and biggest fall-guy was that charming fellow, the late Percival Pollard. Percy—God rest his good soul—was the greatest discoverer of his critical period. Hardly a week passed that he didn't discover a tremendous genius in one corner of the globe or another. In his day, Percy discovered geniuses by the wholesale and by the freight carload. The only trouble with the great majority of his geniuses was that they didn't seem to have much noticeable talent. But that never deterred Percy, as a glance through his critical manifestos will attest. Percy's geniuses ranged all the way from *Schuhplättler* in Munich cabarets to female Polish mystics and from mural-painter graduates of comic weeklies to the more comely French young girl aphrodisiac poets. And in due time and in the natural course of events, Bierce took his place in the Pollard Hall of Fame. That was the send-off, and it was not very long afterward that the younger critics, offshoots of the old *Criterion* school of which Bierce was a constituent, began on their own imitatively to discover Bierce all over again. It is these younger critics, now grown to more or less venerable manhood, who—along with their still small and enthusiastic Bierce-reading sons—continue to foster the Bierce legend.

CIVILIZATION REACHES THE WHITE MAN

by MONTAGUE GROVER

THE white man is at last becoming civilized—in Australia, at all events. Public opinion has been aroused by the decision of the Federal Government to send a "punitive expedition" against the aboriginal blacks of Caledon Bay, in the far North, and aroused so fiercely that the Government has watered down its course of action until the "punitive expedition" is to be little more than a social call.

The expedition was decided upon as the result of several murders committed by the blacks. These blacks are primitive people, so-called savages. They occupy an area of Australia into which others than aborigines are not supposed to trespass. They live by hunting wild animals, by fishing, and by grubbing edible roots out of the ground. Their weapons and implements are of wood or stone. They wear no clothing whatever, except for ceremonial purposes, and build no houses, being content with the shelter of a strip of bark or a dislodged branch from a tree. They speak no English and probably the vast majority of them have never seen a white man.

These facts have to be remembered in summing up the acts of what are to-day the most primitive people on earth. And it is these facts which have, until recently, led to the general acceptance of the half-baked ethnologists' description of the aborigines as the most degraded type of humanity. But they have their own code, their own virtues. They have raised manual dexterity to such a pitch of perfection that the writer has seen a young black walk along the bank of a creek, throw half a dozen sticks of various sizes into the stream, and leave behind a row of dead fish, each killed by a stick. Described as treacherous and murderous, he and his fellows in Western Australia only a year or two back had two foreign aviators, engaged in a world flight, crash down in their midst. The populous Eastern states, knowing that the accident had occurred, reported that they had been killed by the blacks—"and eaten," added one imaginative writer. When the aviators were located by search parties, it was found that they owed their lives to the kindness and consideration of the primitive "savages" among whom they had fallen.

It is necessary to realize that the abo. has been a much maligned man in order to grasp what has just taken place in Australia. The shores in the vicinity of Caledon Bay are frequented by Japanese luggers in search of pearl-shell. It is the custom of these Japs to take abo. women aboard the luggers, make merry with them, and then land them anywhere along the coast—the Caledon Bay variant of "having to walk home." This happened a few months ago, and when six Japanese sailors landed, ostensibly to obtain water, the outraged husbands and brothers of the last batch of shanghaied women promptly speared them.

A protest was made. Unofficially it is said that the Japanese government, always held in great respect, not to say fear, by Australian governments, passed a hint that it expected "justice" to be done. The Commonwealth sent out a mounted policeman who entered the territory supposed to be sacred to the aborigines. He also was speared. The Government then decided on its "punitive expedition."

But the unexpected happened. In the past such "punitive expeditions" did not worry the people of the big towns. In the good old days of thirty years ago, whenever some blacks speared station cattle or committed a similar offense, the Queensland state government used to send out a posse of police and civilians to "disperse" the blacks. A dispersal was a polite term for surrounding a camp of perhaps half a dozen, perhaps half a hundred, abos. and coolly shooting them down with rifle fire. But the white man has sloughed some of his savagery apparently. Northern and Central Australia are no longer unknown lands, and the abo. is no longer merely regarded as a "black cow" who kills the steers of the man who killed his kangaroos. Scientists have invaded the back-blocks and the abo. has been studied without prejudice and without hatred. The result is that he has been found to be a human being "much like me and you". The findings of the scientists have filtered to the public, and the mission stations in the Never Never have fortunately included men who think as much of the bodies of their charges as they do of their souls. Many of these missionaries, too, feel themselves charged with a sacred duty to obtain all possible knowledge of this last surviving race of the stone age before it is finally swept away.

The Government decision aroused a storm of resentment—such a storm that it receded speedily from its original intention and substituted, for a so-called punitive expedition, an expedition of investigation. On top of this came a message from Groote Island mission, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stating that the stories of its grave dangers from the Caledon Bay blacks, put forth officially, were so much hokey. The missions' headquarters in the cities sought to accentuate the discomfort of the Government by sending an expedition of their own, to go unarmed through the supposed danger area, but were dissuaded from such theatrical display by some of the more sober in their own bodies. So the expedition of investigation proceeds and it is safe to say that it will proceed cautiously. There will be no killing of blacks, unless there should be an attack by them; there will be no indiscriminate shooting; and the farce of looking for the murderer of the policeman will be played out solemnly, to be embodied in a Government report full of polysyllables and laid on the table of the House of Representatives and forgotten.

But one thing stands out. This is the first time that the case of the abos. has been put and the first time that the people of the Australian cities have voiced their view that the massacre and oppression of a body of defenseless people must cease. It is the first time and it will be the last time. The record of the white Australian toward the colored people in his country has been just as appalling as the record of the white American in North America, the white Spaniard in South America, the white Belgian in the Congo, and the white Frenchman in Morocco. It is a pleasant sign; a sign that the white man is becoming civilized at last.

REQUIRED READING

"The bestowal of that prize [*the Nobel Prize for Literature*] is frequently a little puzzling, but it has seldom gone to anyone who was not in the advance guard of the moderns."—Dorothea Brande in *The American Review*, January, 1934.

Required Reading: The following twenty-one Conservatives out of thirty-two Nobel prize-winners: René François Armand Sully-Prudhomme, Frédéric Mistral, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Rudyard Kipling, Rudolf Eucken, Selma Lagerlöf, Paul Heyse, Maurice Maeterlinck, Rabindranath Tagore, Verner von Heidenstam, Henrik Pontoppidan, Karl Gjellerup, Carl Knut Hamsun, Jacinto Benavente, William Butler Yeats, Ladislav Reymont, Henri Bergson, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Ivan Bunin.

SEEMS LIKE IT'S BETTER IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW

by STANLEY K. WILSON

GOOD English is supposed to be amenable to standard and to precept. There are definite rules. Clarity, economy, force, color—you can find out how to achieve them. The "don'ts" are specific. The blemishes have all been tabulated: "fine" writing, labored eloquence, miles of adjectives, blind faith in the cliché, deliberate or helpless obscurity. And yet writing, today, is much of it at all events, presents a staggering anomaly. It is an air-tight example of the failure of know-how. The expert in writing is left at the post by the tyro. Major critical acclaim goes to writers who most conspicuously don't know how to write. That's a pretty harsh indictment, but I think it can be supported. I'll bring up my witnesses in a minute or two.

The specimen authors I wish to examine (I shall muster only four of them) have the critics with them. They've been received with laurels, although not in every case with showers of blessing in the guise of sales. They are hailed as exemplars. They're in danger of becoming founders of "schools." One of them at least—and he is the one I'm going to be particularly noisy about—is held by many to be the most distinguished literary figure of the American day.

The names on my black-list write fluently and in the main grammatically; but they write badly all the same, because they don't know how to handle their literary materials. And I'll launch my case on evidence drawn from the most fulsomely praised of contemporary American writers, potential White Hope of the new world, the man of whom Arnold Bennett said, "He writes like an angel"—yes, children, I mean William Faulkner.

Take off your coats with me, and plunge into "Light in August," Faulkner's most recent novel. You don't have to read far before—well, try this excerpt from pp. 2-3:

"... gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and hemmed upon a stumped corner of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes."

Two dozen adjectives in one sentence: what would George Gissing (to name offhand a novelist who wrote like a craftsman) have said of such a page! Sophomoric exhibitionism? Inflation with a capital "I"? And not even a trenchant display of vocabulary. Two repeats: the threadbare "profound" and "gut"—incidentally wrenched to the intransitive. Only two splashes of unbacked color: "stumpocked," good enough, but spoiled by the arrogant omission of the hyphen—an irritating trick that this author runs to, cf. "hookwormridden," "limpeared," "closed-to," "wiscenks," "manlooking," "crossslanted" (3 successive s's); and "galloping fury of equinoxes," which is pretty spotty after all, since the equinox is not a storm but the time when it may occur.

Overworked similes team up in Faulkner with overworked words. Thus, "like a forgotten bead from a broken string" is followed three pages later by "like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road" and this in turn three lines below by "like already measured thread being rewound onto a spool."

Slipshod English thrives in everywhere: "She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all."

Reckless and meaningless usage: "the wagon crawls terrifically toward her."

All the above angelicisms are to be found in the first eight pages of "Light in August."

To go directly on. "Armistid grunts, a sound savage, brusque," p. 10; "... a gray garment worn savage and brusque," p. 11; thirteen lines later, "with the abrupt savageness of a man"; two lines later, "She clashes the stone savagely"; eleven lines later, "savage finality"; nine lines later, "savage crew of gray hair." Ho, hum!

Let's take to our own pinions now and skip to p. 107 where we find this:

"On all sides, even within him, the bodiless formidableness of negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other mansplained life about him had been returned to the light, but wet primeval female."

Another merciful jump. Beginning of Ch. VI:

"Memory believes I fore knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing (echoing the narrow) building of dark red brick southclerked by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewn-pocked compound surrounded by smoking factory parlous and enclosed by a ten foot (fifty not tenfoot) steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtreading, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant at the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacent chimneys streaked like black tears."

The fact is, so far from writing like an angel William Faulkner writes like the devil. Don't get this wrong. I'm not talking rules. I'm forgetting the sour syntax. But it's fustian. It's wind. Showing-off. Spluttering fireworks. Clumsy. Chaotic. Attitudinizing. Just dambadwriting, that's all, and don't let anybody tell you otherwise. He simply doesn't know how to use his literary materials. The only things Faulkner has that can conceivably explain his vogue are, first, a completely sincere unshackling of assorted "bastards" and "sons of bitches"; second, removal of all inhibitions on "vomit"; and, third, a most articulate nose for Negro smells.

These are mildly provocative but hardly broad enough to support his reputation. No, there's only one conclusion (you've seen it coming): It's precisely his bad writing that has "made" William Faulkner; the mess he makes of his literary materials is so overpowering that the critics can't classify it, and helplessly decide it must be great. And the dumb public strings along. Ergo, it seems like it's better if you don't know how.

Then there's George Davis, another and scarcely less luminous White Hope. Hullabaloo for his first novel, "Opening of a Door." He's a more sophisticated sinner. Harder to catch out. Davis' crimes are two: a maddening use of ellipsis and non-sequitur and, even more reprehensible, a wanton misuse of words that amounts to perverted genius. Probably he thinks—and no doubt the critics do—that his stuff is fresh, different. But writing does not achieve freshness and difference by flying in the face of sense. Grant that there's a reaching out in this author for new combinations, fresh chords; and that there's a

clear purpose to avoid the trite and the hackneyed. The writing is still bad. His tools aren't sharp enough. He doesn't know what to do with his literary materials. Mere startling propinquity of words never before yoked is not enough, is not the mark of a mature craftsman. Much of his stuff skirts the ridiculous or definitely lands in bathos. Read these sample exhibits from "Opening of a Door":

p. 9 "He left behind of his spirit the savagery of a gentle smile." (Both savage and gentle?)

p. 29 "The amber soprano was warm and moving."

p. 36 "... she lifted her hand to the short iron flow of her hair."

p. 48 "He viewed it (the traffic) with cold passion. His attention slid longingly from the steel excitement to the surge of passing faces."

p. 53 "The morning was marine. Trains waited their turn, like swimmers, for that last hurtling clean cut into the blue."

p. 97 "Words that had been to Aunt Theodora a lucent gesture of amity were to Aunt Flora but the evil flirtation of ignis fatuus through sunken labyrinths."

p. 97 "... a scarlet glint of fear passed through her milk blue eyes."

p. 185 "Aunt Theodora heard the clang of exultant evil." (You can't hear the clang of evil.)

p. 194 "Together they were pitiless... as her strength failed he lifted her up, captured her numbed, melancholy mouth between implacable teeth. Cruel, cruel; they triumphed in the moment. The spirit, divinely pyrotechnic, burst its cold stars."

You can't deny that this author is a master of oxymoron—and the ox-brained Ipse-dixit critics as well as the "You-said-it" morons have got him wrong as a heaven-sent genius of writing.

Robert Cantwell's "Laugh and Lie Down" and Isabel Paterson's "Never Ask the End" round out the quartette. These books have enjoyed a remarkable press. I've yet to find anyone who could finish either (suggested revise of Mrs. Paterson's title: "Never Reach the End.") Why? Well, it isn't easy to quote damagingly from these novels. They don't hurl gaucheries at you. The style is spare, smooth, economical. You read the words easily enough. But after a page or two—what on earth is the author driving at? The sense has eluded you. Holes in the meaning! You go back. Maybe you were just dopey—or something. Then it dawns on you. Whether wilfully or not, these authors are fumbling their literary opportunities. This writing is ineffective writing. You may not laugh, but you lie down.

What is the answer? Are these two mock novels deliberate *tour de force*, tongue-in-cheek assaults upon the gullibility of the public? Their gratuitous ellipses and pervasive clinging fogginess seem a bit too thick to be wholly accidental. But even that posit does not absolve these authors. Whether they can write better or not is beside the point. In "Laugh and Lie Down" (the title alone makes me want to "rare up") and "Never Ask the End" they didn't write well. They didn't so much as write intelligibly. Yet the fact remains that these two books won several sets of very florid bays. It is these books and not the authors' good writing that "made" them. When they abused their literary materials they won the critics' awards. Parenthetically, it is enlightening to reflect that Mrs. Paterson's earlier novels, written in a strong clear style, took no prizes either "literary" or popular. The critics could understand them—and accordingly pronounced them only so-so. It wasn't until both she and Robert Cantwell began to write as badly as they could that they became potentially immortal.

It would be tempting to digress here to pose the question, Who's to be the judge? For if rules and precedents are scrapped it's everyone for himself and the critic no better than you or I. And as a matter of fact nearly everybody thinks he can criticize writing. The dumb-cluckier he is, the more dogma he is likely to air. Just drop the sentence "Two words does it" into a casual group and find out for yourself. Or, to stick closer to our knitting, ask your friends whether "light" in August is different from that in any other month and if that's not the meaning what is and what the hell has it got to do with the book anyway. Maybe you're mulling some highfalutin imaginative twist, tell 'em—and then wait to be told. Or go up a little higher and ask the professional critic what he means when he says a style is distinctive but not distinguished; and what on earth a distinguished style is; and does it embrace "womanshennegro" and "vomit" and "bastard," or is it "glimpsed" through forests of atrophied adjectives; and who the devil is he anyhow to make up decisions for you out of his own head?

The "sonofabitch" probably never read beyond the first eight pages himself.

NATHAN DIGESTS THE THEATRE

"JEZEBEL" (Owen Davis)—M. Davis, a playwright zombie out of the later eighteen-hundreds, stalks the modern theatrical scene with another morgue extract, this one a Schauspiel of the Old South, replete with supernaturated hokum.

"The First Apple" (Lynn Starling)—O

"The Lake" (Dorothy Massingham and Murray MacDonald)—Badly confused effort to mix a little Chekhov with a lot of boiled-over Henry Arthur Jones, the result being even worse Massingham-MacDonald.

"The Locked Room" (Herbert Ashlow, Jr.)—Junk.

"Yoshe Kall" (I. J. Singer and F. Block)—Second Avenue Yiddish drama translated into English and brought to Broadway where, as a consequence, it was unintelligible.

"Big-Hearted Herbert" (Sophie Kerr and A. S. Richardson)—A farce-comedy blank.

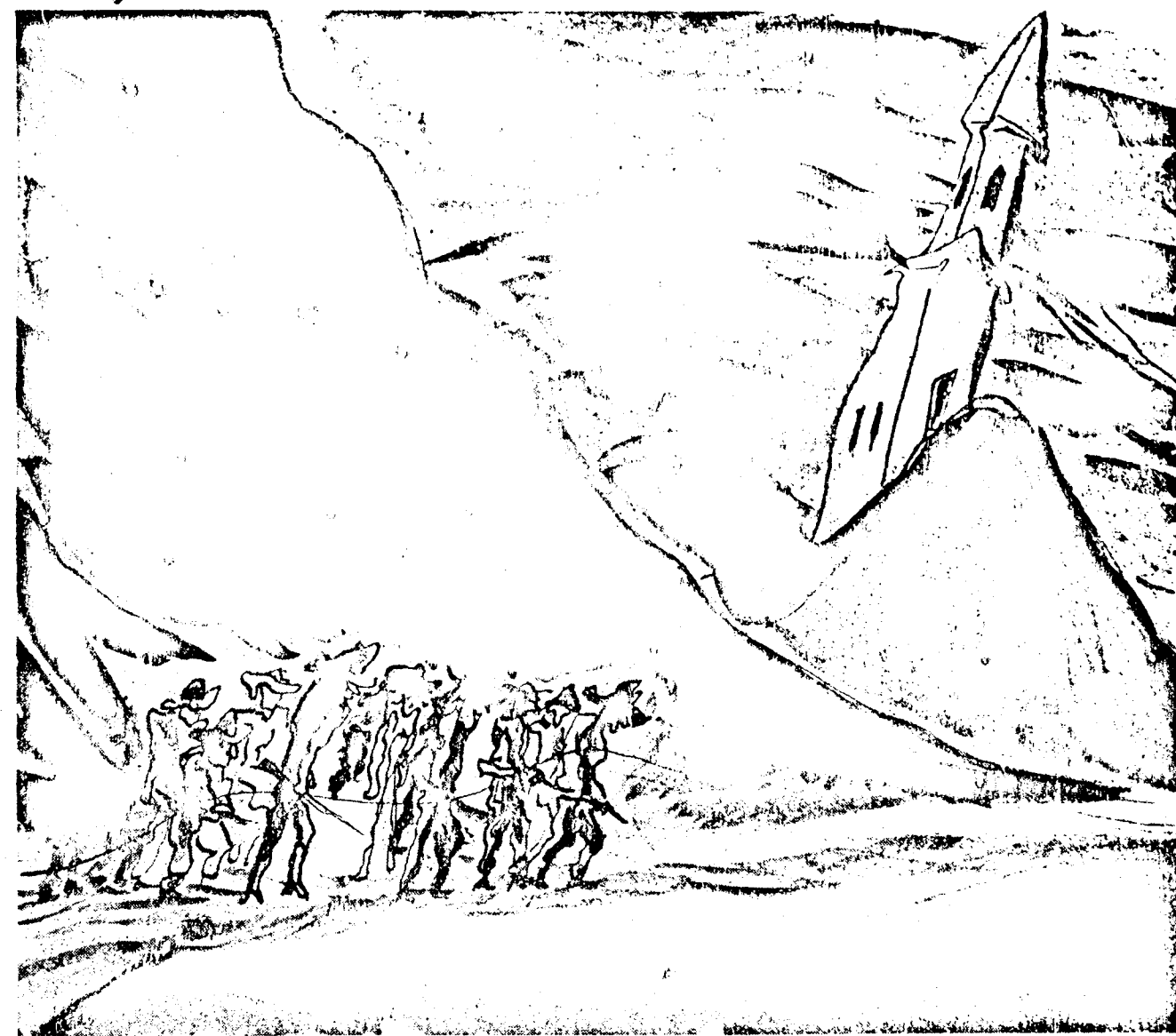
"Halfway to Hell" (Crane Wilbur)—All the way to Hollywood.

"The Gods We Make" (G. H. McCall and S. B. de Lozier)—Terrible.

"Days Without End" (Eugene O'Neill)—It ranks with "Welded" and "Dynamo" as one of its author's worst.

"Oliver Oliver" (Paul Osborn)—Fair comedy, but greatly inferior to Osborn's "Vinegar Tree."

"A Divine Moment" (R. H. Powell)—Whew!



The New South

—Hubert Davis

THE SOUTH AND THE NIGGER

by MERLIN N. HANSON

QUITE unwittingly, the Southerner has provided the darkey with schools and various kinds of training, and this education is bringing out a class of skilled laborers and expert professional men. One should remember, where schools are concerned, that the person with as little as one thirty-second of Negro blood is barred from white institutions. Woe unto the one who creeps by and sits with the sisters and brothers of the lily-white skin! But the Negro's standard of living, forced to the low level of corn bread and turnip greens, has, interestingly enough, resulted in hardy dusky-skinned workmen whose towering strength offers more than serious competition to the white man, for it very often replaces him. And nearly all of this replacement comes from the full-blooded darkey. For those with a high percentage of white blood have absorbed too many refinements from the Southerner to mingle with the "niggers," yet they are ignored by the race which lightened their skin. That sad section of men and women, generally accepting their plight stoically, lives almost in seclusion, or finds friends now and then among the low caste whites. But it constitutes a lost race.

These other Negro workmen, however, are apparently unaware of the advantageous position which they now occupy, and from which they snatch work from the eager hands of the white man. Nevertheless, this subjection of the Negro to frugality has been rewarded by the development of a slowly moving tide of brown, which is now reaching back toward its origin. White workmen, as well as other individuals identified with the labor movement, its union leaders, admit their plight, but with bitterness. "We must make the nigger raise his standard of living to our own level, or we are lost," one of them recently lamented. "He competes with us now in nearly every line of work, and always can underbid us." And one of the other ironies of this amusing situation is that, quite frequently, public officials who have flapped to victory on the wings of the Democratic rooster, symbolic of white supremacy, turn about and award work to the darkey, for he does it just as well and cheaper.

But the contention that the nigger must be kept in his place vanishes where the Negress is concerned, for many whites claim they make better mistresses than their pale sisters. The Negro harlot walks the same streets as the white prostitute, she lives in the same district, consorts with the same men, and in this phase of life also underbids.

Yet the cruel treatment of the male Negro comes mainly from that element which consorts with dark-skinned women. White men can venture forth, attack a Negress, and be fined five dollars for disorderly conduct by a contemptuous judge; but let a colored man try something of the sort in another direction! An insane Negro was once shoved into the docket room of a jail to be charged with rape. He had been discharged from the asylum before he was cured. Officers in the room knew the man to be insane and yet, while prowling about the wild-eyed darkey, sneered at his captor for making the arrest.

"Why didn't you shoot him right where you got him?" they snarled at the policeman. "You could have claimed self-defense. You're a damn fool!"

And finally, two of the most urgent and contemptuous of the cops, black blood-lust moving them, lunged forward, while a local reporter pranced gleefully about, hoping to participate in the approaching orgy of torture—probably death. Fortunately, an alert and more cautious superior officer leaped to the side of the accused man, who was utterly unaware of his danger, and routed the would-be attackers by booming threats of suspension or dismissal.

While preparations were being made to take the Negro to a place of "safety," a mob formed near the edge of the town. Two look-outs were dispatched to inform the mob as soon as the Negro, with his intentionally small guard, started from the jail to the railroad station. The mob waited patiently, then not so patiently. The train arrived and actually left with the Negro unmolested. Later in the night, when the two look-outs were at last located, they were found as drunk as judges, and had forgotten all about their pious duty.

There is another case in which a Mobile man disappeared while hunting at a camp about forty miles north of that city. Eight Negro woodchoppers, who happened to be working in the vicinity, were arrested, and ten separate confessions wrung from them over a period of three or four days and nights. What confessions! What confusion! The pitiful efforts of ignorant black men struggling to satisfy their white masters! Then, one day, while the woodchoppers were aiding officers in a search for the

body of the missing man (it was never found), one of the Negroes slipped overboard into hip-deep water. Eight hours later, according to police doctors, he died of "pneumonia." Mobile physicians laughed. It was the first case on record where pneumonia had been fatal in less than three days. But the nigger must know who is boss; his flesh is worth forty cents a pound when he turns state's evidence.

Two of us representing newspapers finally penetrated that jungle and had been working on the story only a short time when scowling people began threatening us. A return to Mobile was necessary, and when we again went back to that wild desolate bit of so-called civilization, we were not only heavily armed, but had the hardest shooting man on the Mobile police force as body guard. But the thing to be noted is that those people had the most remarkable "grapevine" system I have ever seen. Every move we made, and many of the things we said, were run out to the most remote sections until every person encountered knew who we were, what was wanted, and made duplicate statements to all questions. The investigation was short lived; we were not only in danger, but were uncovering too much third-degreering in connection with the eight blacks.

When those Negroes went to trial, a local holiday was declared; the schools were closed so the town-folk of all ages could witness the gestures of a court of justice. The accused men are now serving life terms.

Of course, there is a different attitude toward the monied Negro. While he is the victim of another form of hatred—that of a flaming, vicious envy—he is not quite so harshly treated; in instances, he is almost fawningly received. But this does not alter his social position to any considerable degree; he is still a "nigger." The name of a married Negro woman cannot be used in a Southern newspaper, even in police news, for it necessitates employing *Mrs.* in front of her name, and that must not be used in the South. Yet, as I chance to know, there was one city editor who always kept a copy of *The Pittsburgh Courier*, a Negro newspaper, in his desk, because he liked its flashy make-up and copied it in his sheet. And here and now I am violating a sacred Southern dogma by capitalizing the word "Negro."

But this gross injustice, this brutality by the police and prison guards, is not restricted to the Negro alone; by some metamorphosis of the money caste, it applies also to the poor or unaffluent whites, although of course not to the same degree. Yet they, too, are victimized by cross-eyed justice, pounced on by prison guards, stuffed into sweat boxes on blistering summer days, and beaten with garden hose (since this leaves no tell-tale mark) for offenses too trivial to list. I have seen Negro and white thus beaten with rubber hose and have heard the pleadings of accused men begging for mercy when officers were attempting to torture out a confession. And often those very men who had been knocked out when arrested, and subjected to the inhumanities of what is so graciously termed justice, were discharged in court, their innocence quickly proven.

So when winter comes to the South, and winds rustle through the scrub oak and sigh mournfully through the pines, some folk liken the forlorn whisperings of the wind to the voice of Old Enoch, an aged slave who used to sing, in melancholy lamentations, the sorrows of the Negro.

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