

BUSKINS OR SLIPPERS?

BY HOLBROOK WHITE

IT is Horace Walpole who writes somewhere, 'I do not love great folks till they have pulled off their buskins and put on their slippers.' He might very well have added that he was accustomed to compel the great folks of his day to walk *sans* buskins. For however stiffly shod they stalked about ordinarily, upon entering the domain of his letters they must put their shoes from off their feet. By no stretch of metaphor can those letters be said to be holy ground, yet the writer of them, like the custodian of an Eastern mosque, suavely insists upon the donning of slippers. There are instances where he refuses even the dignity of slippers.

Walpole did not object to joining sometimes in the free-and-easy promenade he describes; yet in general his foot-gear was of the trim, high-heeled fashion, suited to the dancing of court gavottes. It must be admitted that he did not go out of his way to discover the *déshabille* of his acquaintances. To loiter in dark corners and to frequent back stairs in order to stumble upon subjects for discourse, was not his custom. He did but observe what came within his ken (he had a seeing eye) and write down his impressions. However, to be 'written down' in Walpolesque fashion was often an easy descent into depths from which it was hard to get out. The mere plucking off of buskins seemed to cause an extraordinary shrinkage in stature. How men and women had managed to walk at all on such stilted affairs remained a wonder.

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With all his maliciousness, Walpole did not like to see his victims dismantled, disrobed. He left them a good deal. That was more than Swift was in the habit of doing; in his rage he would snatch ermine and velvet from rulers and judges, rejoicing to see unclad humanity shiver; unless he deprived them of humanity altogether, and made them *marcher à quatre pattes*.

This making free with coronets and fingering of robes of state is a practice that has persisted down to our own day, though the disposition which prompts it may have altered somewhat with the years. Apparently it is not now a spirit of mockery, still less is it a high scorn, that urges. It is, for the most part, curiosity. We are anxious to know whether the coronet is copper, whether the velvet is cotton, if the fur is moth-eaten. That is to say, if the crown is copper, and the velvet is cotton, we want to know it. There is no end to this curiosity of ours. It is leading us up and down and round about the wide world, noting, listing, cataloguing. The highways, from end to end, are known and read of all men; the byways now must deliver up their secrets. Not a hamlet, safely hidden away hitherto from all inquisitive travelers save the swallows, but is indexed in some county guide-book. Not a far hillock that crouches unseen. Little streams, so remote that only the kingfisher's wing has brushed them, woodland ways dear only to the rabbits, are drawn in all their windings on prosaic maps. Glens and grassy dingles,

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where the fairies once danced unmolested — the trail of the surveyor's tape-line is over them all. Mountains at which we used to gaze from afar with a wholesome awe have become familiar ground to unconcerned climbers. No longer is the ocean horizon haunted by shadowy islands, retreating homes of the fancy. Like that *Apropositus*, sought of ancient mariners, they are lost to sight; they have burst like the South Sea Bubble. The seas are charted.

As a record of all this research, a multitude of books in long-drawn-out series appears periodically, devoted to the description of nooks in every corner of the earth. Photographs and picture post-cards, more than any man can number, spread abroad the semblance of far-away spots, magnified thenceforth in the sight of all nations. Not content with all this, we have turned our serious attention to the beasts of the fields and the fowls of air. Comes another multitude of books. From the ant to the elephant, we know them all — know them 'as they really are.' The beguiling little fictions in which animated nature used to be served up to us are proved delusions. No more does the lion stand up before us in the fine, kingly pose of old picture-books. The heron is not now permitted to take the one-legged, thoughtful position beloved of amateur artists. So with all the rest: they have been come upon unawares, caught in undress, so to speak, and are revealed to us in new, and usually ridiculous, attitudes. We do, indeed, know them well — too well!

But knowing the earth in its fullness is not enough. There remain our fellow creatures to be found out. And we are finding out a great deal. Thorough investigation in this quarter brings another procession of books, in which are disclosed the lives of the distinguished, and undistinguished, dead. Not only are we offered an intimate and exhaust-

ive knowledge of their lives, from the cradle to the grave, but of their 'times' as well; a capital device, by the way, for padding a lean volume into corpulence; for something is sure to be going on somewhere throughout the two hemispheres. It is astonishing what one poor human document can be edited, re-edited, revised, and foot-noted into. Many of the more favored subjects could stand in the shade of the heaped-up volumes that commemorate them. And some of the subjects *do* stand in the shadow of the volumes they have evoked.

There must be indignant dwellers in the Elysian Fields when they gather around new-comers who bring the latest news from this planet. Old prophets and old poets must be bewildered at the strange meanings twisted out of their texts. Old masters — be they painters, warriors, or saints — must be aghast at the activity, little short of fiendish, ascribed to their earthly career. The younger dead surely are confounded at the Books of Revelation which have been opened, in the name of memoirs, to extend their fame. I fancy that Jane Carlyle may have spoken somewhat emphatically on this subject as she gathers the celestial asphodels in wide meadows. How the voice of her husband may have thundered along those flowery plains, shaking the blossoms to their very rootlets, one dares not think. Have the Brownings murmured a wish that the smoke of their burning letters might have risen betimes as incense on their altars? Does Shelley regret that from those who would 'see him plain' he had not been removed further into his own 'Unapparent'? I am not sure but there are martyrs who would cheerfully walk again into the fire, if assured that the faggots had been kindled with the books which blazon their names.

The good, the great, the wise, all

appear to us to be of a 'questionable shape.' Like the watchers on the platform at Elsinore, — though without their perturbation, — we are trying to make many an uneasy ghost explain himself. Victims have been wounded by arrows of their own feathering. If there is not a proverb there ought to be one, to the effect that familiar letters in the hands of a foolish friend are as a poniard in the hand of an enemy. If letters have sometimes gained immortality for some men or women, they have been the undoing of others. In those moments of slippered ease we catch the writer unawares, and those moments outweigh hours of buskined dignity. The intense interest that the public feels nowadays in the sons of fame is apparently confined to these moments of slippered ease. There is a widespread disposition on the part of readers to push unannounced into the privacy of the elect, a determination not to be kept waiting in the ante-room until the great man is 'on view.' Like tourists who come to inspect a Ducal abode, they are not content with seeing the state apartments, but insist on being shown the rooms that are lived in. They would fain have the keys to the closets (hoping perhaps for a skeleton or two), and seek an opportunity for cutting away a button from a gold-laced coat, as a souvenir. Strange things in the way of souvenirs are cherished by travelers. No less strange are the souvenirs of illustrious personages which afford satisfaction to curious readers — tawdry, rueful bits, of no more worth than a tarnished button, or a splinter from a wrecked flying machine.

The idea seems to be, in this desire for familiar acquaintance, if idea there be beyond curiosity, that in this way only can one escape being imposed upon. If a hero is not a hero to his lackey, it is deemed important to know the rea-

son why; a proper regard for truth — the whole truth — forbids the leaving of anything to conjecture. The discovery that those hitherto looked at from a distance are subject, after all, to common failings and foibles is encouraging — so it is claimed. Possibly. There *is* something agreeable in the ability to feel *camaraderie* for a genius by simply sharing with him certain foibles of which one might otherwise be ashamed. If the eccentricities of genius lean toward the grotesque, or the mean, so much the more entertaining. To readers like these the fact that the author of the *Ode on Immortality* went 'booing' his lines among the hills is of greater moment than any intimations the lines themselves convey. The story that Landor once threw his cook out of the window is relished, if there is no relish for *Pericles and Aspasia*. The Shakespeare of *King Lear* is obscured by the Shakespeare who left in his will his 'second-best bed' to his wife. *There* is something to ponder on!

This frame of mind accounts for the cordial welcome extended to the volumes — becoming frequent — of racy gossip and belittling anecdote. Anniversaries are sure to call out an innumerable number of these illuminating studies. One who has a reverence for a name great in history or literature must needs feel apprehension as the centenary draws near. As Renan once said, *Les centenaires ne sont la faute de personne; on ne peut pas empêcher les siècles d'avoir cent ans*. So each year we celebrate somebody. And our celebration consists in recalling and recounting in detail all the facts which have no particular bearing upon his proudest achievements. If his ancestors were nothing to speak of, they are exactly what we feel called upon to speak of — from the house-tops. An early, unhappy love-affair, if it can be

traced, will fill a chapter. Several love-affairs will ensure an extra volume, if not a work by itself. The inquiry, in its far-reachingness, is of the nature of a civil-service examination. And now that the philosophers are giving us, one and all, a subliminal self, why must not the biographers be expected to chronicle also the vagaries of that undivided half part of an individual? How can they afford to neglect an opportunity like that?

The 'candid, unvarnished tales,' as the reviewers call them, — truthfully enough, — which result from these exhaustive inquiries are crowding the 'best-sellers' on the shelf. Biography has become as entertaining as a novel.

Feminine wit has not been behind-hand in furnishing these side-lights on history which snap, and sparkle, and surprise like electric wires. Such light may lend piquancy to a scene; still, for a work-a-day illumination, one would rather depend on something a little slower — a steady glow, not a flash-light. To some of us it does not seem quite fair play to perpetuate a fleeting expression on the face of an unconscious 'sitter.'

At all events we are glad that among those dwellers in ampler ether there are some who have never been held up by literary highwaymen — who can declare, as Dr. Johnson once declared to his friend, with no little asperity, 'You have not traveled over *my* mind, sir, I promise you.'

In this small circle of happy spirits who abide free from any anxiety as to earthly recording, is that statesman in buskins, Lord Chatham. The truth seems to be that he was such a consummate actor through all the troubled years of his later life, even down to that last dramatic scene in the House, that he walked, as it were, *incognito*. The recent biographer of his early years admits that the task of inter-

preting his life as a whole is well-nigh impossible. No one knew the 'real' Chatham — Pitt *en pantoufles*. However much we may regret a fact that perhaps deprives us of another piece of brilliant writing, there is, withal, a savor of satisfaction that a great man, in contentious times, was able so to baffle the watchers at his elbow.

The Father of his Country, by no means a *poseur* like Chatham, remains with him in an assured rest. He has been conjured to render his reasons. That one oath he did fling out, that one lie he did not tell, have been wonderfully manipulated in an attempt to make us feel the acquaintance desirable among kin. It is useless. Washington is still something 'Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,' like — I was about to say — one of those ancient menhirs by the sea in Brittany; but I remember that now they say those monstrous stones, once in a century, on Christmas eve at midnight, rush in a wild scramble down to the water for a drink. Such is the impertinence of this generation! It has been prying into the habits of solemn Druid relics which have heretofore maintained, by common consent, an unalterable, Washingtonian calm.

Shakespeare and his fellows are of this serene company. In what dark depths of ignorance concerning them have we been left to stumble! How tantalizing have been those Elizabethan hints as to 'things done at the Mermaid'! All those great actors on the world's stage sitting together, buskins tossed aside, and no nimble Boswell there to peck up 'copy' as pigeons pease! If they thought of us at all, they deluded themselves with the belief that if we were to have *Philaster*, and the *Alchemist*, and *Hamlet*, and the rest of the mighty lines, it would suffice us. They little guessed that our spirits would be vexed because we have not

the table-talk of the author of *Hamlet*; that the possession of the *Alchemist* ill repays us for our uncertainty as to what the quarrel between Jonson and Drummond of Hawthornden was all about. Information of that kind appears to be necessary before a correct appraisal of a man's work can be made.

We are more cautious in the giving of halos and laurel crowns than were they of olden time. Their liberality in this direction was — one must say — reckless. It is not so easy to be a saint or a hero as that! Our duty is, plainly enough, to guard against the further misuse of these badges of superiority; and duty, in this case, is happily not so far removed from inclination as oftentimes. No matter with what assurance the partial friends of an aspirant for honors may set forth his claims, a rigorous search will usually produce disqualifying facts.

Here is one, say, who took it upon himself to run down dragons, and succeeded in slaying two or three. Why! well done! But the truth is, slaying of dragons is not so highly considered as of old. The beasts are looked upon as rather picturesque features in the landscape. Moreover, this candidate for saintship was unprepossessing in his appearance — and was never quite at ease in society. Here is another who did lead a forlorn hope with something not unlike heroism; still, it is no secret that he was given to borrowing money of his friends, and was slow in repaying. A third may have writ lines which have the ring of poetry; yes, one must call them real poetry; but his early days were passed amid repellent surroundings — and there is a year out of his life which has never been accounted for.

The tendency to disqualify is in the very air of the times. One who has ears to hear can overhear, along with

the crisp crackling of the paper in some latter-day books, the stir of withering bay-leaves.

In the matter of making up our minds about contemporaries, we are largely aided by the modern fashion of 'interviewing.' A man is quite sure to be at a disadvantage during that inquisition. The greater the man, the greater, probably, will be his discomposure; and so much the more will the lucid expounding of the reporter be in demand. For if, as they say, genius is a profound mystery to itself, its disquieted possessor is nevertheless no mystery to the usual interviewer. Deep-sea fishing, or bent-pin experiments in the village duck-pond — all's one to him. Equanimity and persistence! is his motto. 'His,' I say. For 'her' interviewing, if one may judge by printed results, is apt to be attended by a little more fluttering of the eyelids. She generally succeeds, somehow, in making the conference read like the confidential outpourings of a burdened heart into sympathetic ears.

Boswell was, of course, the father of interviewers. When he planted himself squarely before his eminent friend and inquired, 'If, sir, you were shut up in a castle, and a new-born child with you, what would you do?' there you have the system inaugurated. In the fullness of time we have arrived at the reporter behind the note-book, and the lie-in-wait behind the kodak. There is this much to be said of the parent, which cannot always be said of his descendants — that he was steadfastly resolved to make his subject pose well. If the foretops of Dr. Johnson's wigs were all burned away in reading, the biographer feels bound to mention the fact; but he speaks disparagingly only of the candle. He would not have hesitated, I feel sure, to inquire of Socrates concerning his domestic infelicities, or of Henry VIII concerning his religious

belief; but in his report of the matters Socrates would preserve his dignity, the king his piety.

Latter-day interviewing is not always so comfortable for the party of the second part. To our thinking the kodak-snapper is sometimes not unpleased to surprise an awkward gesture, an unimproving grimace. The 'personal note,' the 'human interest,' are catchwords of the day, and in response to them we are scanning our brother man rather ungently. If the unabashed curiosity of the public suffer no abatement, a time may come when there will be installed in the homes of the interesting, some phonographic gear that records accurately what goes on within the four walls; a kind of domesticated Sherlock Holmes. Future generations are not to be so defrauded in the matter of 'true histories' of their great men as we have been in the case of Shakespeare. We are miserably uncertain whether in giving shelf-room to Bacon we are not entertaining Shakespeare unawares. They will be gloriously sure not only upon what meat their Cæsars feed, that makes them grow so great, but, as well, of the size of the slippers which fit their Justice Shallows and Master Slenders.

Of men whom we wish to honor we set up statues in public places. It is true enough that many of these statues leave something to be desired, yet there was, in every case, an honest intention to make them dignified, effective, honorable. We never commission a sculptor to represent the man in dressing-gown and slippers, as he may have sat by the home fire. Why, then, are we so anxious to see him, in the mind's eye, dishevelled?

Among the statues of Cæsar at Rome there is one which represents the man standing with the left arm extended in front of him. A photograph of the statue will render that hand larger than the other — out of all proportion to the body. Yet looking at it you are not straightway convinced that the hand of Cæsar was strangely deformed. You suspect that the camera was untrustworthy at that point, distorting the marble hand because it approached too near. So it might be wise to distrust the biographer who, in his narration, dwells insistently upon the trifling incidents of a day, the small talk of the hour, the petty weakness of the moment. He stands too near his subject, and gives us a distorted view of the one he professes to picture. Some one said once of Fontenelle that he dwarfed the heavens when he explained them, so little could he apprehend the majesty of the universe. He is not the one to whom we would direct an earnest seeker after truth. Nor ought we to rely on the story of a writer who cannot — or will not — perceive the full stature of a man. Be it his misfortune, or be it his fault, it is our good fortune that we can turn to other observers who were better fitted for the task of interpretation. We have noble biographies written with sympathy and a becoming reticence. There is no more inspiring reading. We have letters edited with unflinching good taste; and there is a perennial charm about the volumes. The men and women so commemorated are not led out to a sorry dance in morning undress and sandals. They are left, as Hamlet said to the player, nearer to Heaven by the altitude of a buskin.

AN APOSTLE TO THE SIOUX

BISHOP HARE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

BY M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE

SANCTITY and chivalry were so inherent in the nature of William Hobart Hare, that 'saint' and 'knight' stand in the first rank of the generic terms by which he may be characterized. More specifically, he was also an 'apostle' and a 'pioneer.' If John Eliot had lived in the nineteenth century, it is easy to imagine that his apostleship to the Indians would have expressed itself in many of the words and deeds of Bishop Hare. As a pioneer, moreover, he exerted an influence not exclusively limited to the work of a Christian missionary. He bore an important part in preparing a wild region for civilization; and when civilization began to come, it came the more quickly and surely for what he had done, and continued to do, towards making the Indians better neighbors to the whites and to each other, and towards working a corresponding benefit to the whites themselves. This vital and many-sided service he rendered through overcoming difficulties which a man of his sensitive fibre, both physical and spiritual, might have dodged without cowardice. He faced them all, with a high fortitude and helpful humor, and with a deep devotion to the Christian religion as a system, and to its founder as a living, personal director of daily life.

When such things can truly be said of a man, it is impossible to say also that he is of those regarding whom

. . . no one asks
Who or what they have been.

The world has a right to ask and to know something about them. Some glimpses at Bishop Hare's early experiences in what is now South Dakota may suggest why the titles of saint and knight and apostle and pioneer may be linked with one modern name.

William Hobart Hare was born in Princeton, New Jersey, May 17, 1838. Most of his boyhood was spent in Philadelphia, where he received his education and took orders in the Protestant Episcopal Church. After about ten years of parish work in and near Philadelphia, he became Secretary and General Agent of the Foreign Committee of the Board of Missions, with headquarters in New York. In January, 1873, he was consecrated Missionary Bishop of Niobrara, a new jurisdiction made up largely of the present State of South Dakota. Thirty-five years old, seven years a widower, he went forth to his labors.

The conditions of life about to confront the young bishop presented the sharpest contrast with those under which his life so far had been spent. He had lived only in the two leading cities of the country and their immediate surroundings. His personal background had been enriched by a multitude of kinsmen and friends holding definite places in a long established social order. All the comfortable amen-