

THIS COMMUNICATIVE WORLD

By Robert Cortes Holliday

LOYD GEORGE not long ago, addressing the Nonconformists of England in Whitefield's Tabernacle, spoke of two eminent English divines, John Wesley and George Whitefield. The latter of these two founders of Methodism who kindled the hearts of our ancestors, it was recalled by a New York newspaper at the time of the wide publication of the address, lies buried in the graveyard of Old South Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Probably very few people, however, recalled the fact that this eighteenth century preacher was an autobiographer with a remarkable flair for his title. Nothing in his case could have been happier than this: "A Short Account of God's Dealings with George Whitefield".

And that title leads one, with at the moment nothing better to do, into a little byway of reflection upon the subject of the autobiography — now (to paraphrase Mr. Whistler) upon the town. You wouldn't be likely to see today a volume entitled, let us say, "A Short Account of God's Dealings with John Farrar". Our present slant on human existence is somewhat reversed; piquantly reflected in Harry Kemp's title, "Tramping on Life".

There was a time when you didn't write your autobiography unless you were somebody; your motive, indeed, was pride; probably, in the days when to be one "born" was a matter of prime account, pride of birth. Witness the title of the autobiography of Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle: "A

True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life". Those (of aristocratic tendency) who have sought to poke fun at the memoir writing craze have often said that the last word would be reached when the autobiography of an English butler was written. Their forebodings as to the ultimate descent of the autobiography have been justified; a little while ago an announcement came from London of the publication of the record of "A Lady's Maid in Downing Street". But as to that — some time ago, away back indeed in the infant nineteen hundreds, there were published in Rome the memoirs of an old waiter, who scrupulously set down the relative liberality of prominent persons whom he served.

When his eye fell upon this bit of news, a gentleman (wearing spats) in a club put down his newspaper and, with a dreadful sneer, exclaimed: "What are we coming to? Next thing, I suppose, will be the confessions of a garbage collector!" And probable enough. Why not? One of our leading American magazines the other day bought the memoirs of a bootlegger, a work which in conversation the editor spoke of very highly.

Rich man . . . poor man . . . beggar man . . . thief; doctor . . . lawyer . . . merchant . . . chief — that's a bibliography, a bibliography in effect of the heterogeneous literature of confession. It is not infrequent spir-its, impelled by the torture of genius to self-utterance, that cry alone in the

wilderness. The literature of confession is like a mammoth, motley fair. The great are there, and the prophets preaching amid the din of countless hawkers. And the acrobats are turning, there is love making and drinking, and soldiers are marching. All the world is there in the grand autobiographical *Comédie Humaine*, in nobody knows how many volumes.

Let us stroll a little way through this Fair and read the signs. Here are the gates we go through, the "United States Catalogue" and the "Periodical Index" — two of the most entertaining and instructive literary works in the world. Here, in our list, is the Confession's Pleasance. We may, if we take enough time, note the Confessions of:

American citizen	commercial senator
apostate	con man
barbarian	Czarina
beachcomber	detective
best seller	daddy
Browning lover	drone
caricaturist	drunkard
child	engaged couple
chorus girl	English opium eater
clarinet player	fool
clergyman	quill driver
frivolous girl	railroad man
grass widow	railroad signalman
heathen idol	rebellious wife
husband	schoolmaster
little man during	seafaring blackmailer
great days	sinner
hyphenated American	social secretary
Macedonian bandit	sometime kindergartner
M. D.	spectator
monopolist	thug
neurasthenic	two brothers
nun	undertaker
obscure teacher	violinist
old maid	wife
palmist	wife forced to make
parasite	her own living
priest	young mother
physician	young man
princess	young wife
publisher	older wife
clubwoman	war correspondent

If you do not find the show that you are particularly interested in let us

turn over to the Memoir's Midway. Here are the personal Memoirs of:

cow pony	little girl
Huguenot family	man of the world
royal chaplain	Protestant condemned
Arabian princess	to the gallows
charming woman	physician
baby	revolutionist
doll	seraph
guardian angel	cavalier
Russian governor	failure
Senate page	white elephant
	American lady

This phenomenon, the autobiography, rises under a variety of titles. There are the Recollections of:

California pioneer	missionary in the
Confederate staff officer	Great West
admiral's wife	player
alienist	Royal Academician
gold cure graduate	runaway boy
Lucknow veteran	townboy at Westminster
Irish patriot	drummer boy
fire insurance man	naval officer
49er	mid-and late Victorian
happy life	nonagenarian
royal governess	New York surgeon
Scottish novelist	private soldier
spinster aunt	rebel reefer
old mountaineer	Russian diplomat
New England educator	superannuate
diplomatist	newspaper man
	old musician

Those who have contributed Reminiscences are:

musical amateur	boy in blue
missionary bishop	dramatic critic
Mosby Guerilla	astronomer
soldier's wife	nurse
sportsman	bachelor
ex-Confederate soldier	Franco-American
invalid	Mississippian
K. C.	Pullman conductor
pioneer in the Rock	portrait painter
River country	teacher
ranchman	radical parson
revolutionist	wartime statesman
prisoner of war	and diplomat

Autobiographies have been given us, among others, of a farm boy, a navvy, an androgyne, and a super-tramp. Almost anyone by a moment's thought can recall a little list of racy

authors of autobiographies. Then there is an affair, sometimes highly interesting, which you might call the oblique autobiography, such a volume, for instance, as a book published a number of years ago called "The Autobiography of a Race Horse". The "Memoirs of a London Doll", a very quaint little contraption, first brought out in England in 1857, was recently issued in a new edition in the same size as the original. There is, too, the type of "autobiography" which reprehensibly pretends to be what it is not, the memoir of the patently spurious class, its most typical specimens of scandalous character. The literature of roguery is full of the spurious confession. Innumerable were the literary forgeries of the ingenious Courtilz de Sandras, sieur de Verger, to whom also the world owes the immortal d'Artagnan. Among the more weird curiosities in the realm of the perverted memoir is the work of that ingenious lunatic who, in 1857, published the "Autobiography of Jesus Christ".

Then there are curiously interesting and altogether authentic autobiographies which superficially appear to be something not autobiography at all. Of the books of this class a distinguished recent example is Joseph Hergesheimer's volume "San Cristóbal de la Habana", commonly listed in libraries and catalogues under "travel". Of course, you cannot say that it is not travel at all; but it is much more interesting and important as the other thing. I have now and then had occasion to look up certain facts about Mr. Hergesheimer, such, for instance, as the religious belief in which he was bred and his position at present in this matter, and I have gone straight to this volume to find what I wanted; but "San Cristóbal de

la Habana" would be far from the first book I should seek out in gathering material on Havana.

The intimate essay is, of course, the quintessence of autobiographical writing. Among those who have practised that most debonair of all the arts, "the ingenious way of miscellaneous writing" (in the ingenious phrase of Lord Shaftsbury), is a line of autobiographers of the gods anointed: Montaigne, Elia, Hazlitt—to name (for the sake of the thrill) these three alone.

William McFee (whose "Harbours of Memory" is a title of perfection for a book of autobiographical flavor by a veteran of the sea) prints on a fly leaf of his novel "Command", recently published, this "Prefatory Note":

This tale is an original invention. It is not founded upon fact, nor are the characters herein described portraits of actual persons. The incidents and topography are imaginary.

Probably very few readers of the book noticed this note. It is, however, a pointed commentary (or may be taken as such) on the fiction of the period. Very few of our novelists of today could truthfully make such a statement concerning their work. Indeed, most of our contemporary novels are not, strictly speaking, novels at all; they are, in the main, autobiographical narratives carried along into something like a story by a more or less slender infusion of invention. One need reflect but for an instant to recall that this has been the receipt for some of the noblest monuments in the field of fiction; it is sufficient to remember "Tom Jones" and "David Copperfield", although there is a wealth of authentic literature in this genre. One of the most notable modern novels patently of this field is Somerset Maugham's book "Of Hu-

man Bondage". At the moment, one of the most interesting performances of the kind is the soul's record of a famous sports writer who became a litterateur, Heywood Broun's story "The Boy Grew Older".

Under the head of biography pure and simple marches another little army; humorous, racy, startling; tinkers, tailors, ambassadors, Rajahs, candlestick makers — and today in the sun's hot eye, erstwhile war lords and ex-Kaisers. Then there is the large body of the literature of confession of multifarious designation: "Up From Slavery", "Astir", "Marie-Claire", "My Mamie Rose", "L'Educatation Sentimentale", "Thus Spake Zarathustra", "The Record of Nicholas Freydon", "John Barleycorn", "The Education of Henry Adams", "Steeple-jack", "Ocean Echoes", "The Americanization of Edward Bok", and (to name no more) Theodore Dreiser's recently published volume, "A Book About Myself" — as a specimen list.

"There are few more delightful books in the world than Casanova's 'Mémoires'," remarks Havelock Ellis at the outset of one of his studies in the volume "Affirmations"; and he immediately adds: "That is a statement I have long vainly sought to see in print." Though we know that various eminent literary personages have cherished a high regard for this autobiography, "a confession", as the author declared, "if ever there was one". The unrivaled memoirist, the self-ennobled Jacques Casanova Chevalier de Seingalt, lived in an age with a genius for spontaneous revelation of human nature in literature. It was the period in which the novel reached full development, and an age of diaries and autobiographies. Though Pepys had finished his work some time before, during Casanova's life-

time Boswell was writing that biography which, as Mr. Ellis observes, "is so wonderful largely because it is so nearly an autobiography", Rousseau's "Confessions" preceded Casanova's only by a few years, and a little later Madame Roland wrote her "Mémoires Particulières". What is probably the first real edition in English of Casanova has recently been privately published.

It has for some time been the fashion to speak of another illustrious autobiographer as one of the world's greatest liars, Benvenuto Cellini. The book, however, which the great Goethe thought worthy of translating into German with the pen of "Faust" and "Wilhelm Meister", remains, as its most distinguished English translator, John Addington Symonds, remarks, "an imperishable document for the student of human nature". It is an indispensable picture of the Italian Renaissance. In addition to its solid merits, Horace Walpole found it "more amusing than any novel".

Both Casanova and Cellini wrote out of the fulness of garnered years; they were men who in their prime had packed more than the heightened living of many a lifetime into a single day, and had drunk yet deeper of life on the morrow; they knew all that the world had to show. In the year 1873 a girl of twelve wrote on a page the word "January", and began the self-revelation of a unique individuality, a record which Gladstone called "a book without a parallel". Marie Bashkirtseff's journal, an amazing compound of the cynicism of a Machiavelli and the naïveté of an intensely ardent girl, was stopped by death when the author was twenty-four.

There are (to number the types) the immortal confession, the "Vita Nuova"; the spiritual confession,

Newman's "Apologia"; the religious confession, St. Augustine; the confession of elaborate art, "Memoirs of My Dead Life"; the confession of sheer, vibrant egotism, Mary MacLane; the burlesque confession, "The Cruise of the Kawa" (a book, by the way, ridiculously successful beyond the cheapness of its merits); the fabricated confession (to name an amusing instance now largely forgotten), Dr. Cook's, and, related to this type, the imaginative confession, "Robinson Crusoe", though here perhaps we stray into the realm of purely creative literature.

The "Book Review" of the New York "Times" last summer published an admirable article of some length on Amiel. Dr. Joseph Collins, eminent American neurologist (and charming man of letters), promises us a study of the nervous mechanism of the inspiration to literary confession, which should be highly illuminating, and with which he has been tinkering for some time. He ranks high among the works of self-revelation the volumes of W. N. P. Barbellion, whose "Journal of a Disappointed Man" (the diary of an intensely egotistical young naturalist tragically caught by the creeping approach of death) H. G. Wells regards as "one of the most moving records of the youthful aspects of our universal struggle". May Lamberton Becker has included in the "Lamberton Lectures" which she has prepared a talk (which I wish I might hear) on "The Literature of Confession".

But the literature of confession has not attracted anything like the amount of orderly analysis which the subject deserves. In 1909 the author of an excellent book, "The Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative Study", Anna Robeson Burr, was able to speak of the "unmapped field of autobiogra-

phy". At about the time of the publication of this native essay into the subject the voluminous work of Professor Georg Misch, "Geschichte der Autobiographien", was issued in its first volume—an edifice of immense erudition, doubtless, for those who have the key to it.

"No man", declared Dr. Johnson, "can be written down except by himself." The exact truth of that dictum is, perhaps, a bit problematical. It is difficult, however, to gainsay Mrs. Burr's remark that "there is no friend like your autobiographer". In one of the appendices of her volume she has a most interesting list of "reasons for writing": Self-Study and Science . . . Request of Friends . . . No One Else Likely To Do It or Do It So Well . . . Money . . . Pride of Birth . . . Study of Insanity . . . "To Emblazon the Power of Opium" . . . To Revive His Latin . . . Use of Children or Descendants . . . Religious Witness . . . Purely Apologetic . . . For Amusement, or to Recall the Past . . . No Reason Given. The memories of some (few) autobiographers go back to the age of one year. Others (Bunyan, Darwin, Rosseau, and Ruskin among them) confess to, or give evidence of, weak memories.

The autobiographical instinct apparently is particularly awakened by any convulsion in the social order, when, naturally, strong is the call in the land to the "event memoirs"; and in times of searching political disturbance come forth floods of the "apologetic memoir". Since the development of the autobiography it has flourished most lavishly in the wake of great wars. Witness the vast Napoleonic literature; the entire libraries begot of the French Revolution, the streams of volumes flowing from our Civil War—and the avalanche of today.

THE LONDONER

General Election in England--Elections and the Book Reading Public--A Musical Critic's Dilemma--A Problem for the Literary Detective--Housman's "Last Poems"--The Thousand and One Nights of "The Beggar's Opera"--Drastic Revision--Aldous Huxley--"When Winter Comes to Main Street"--"Babbitt"--"Stavrogin's Confession"--De Maupassant in English--The Year 1923.

LONDON, November 1, 1922.

WHEN I wrote last month I had no idea that my next letter would be written amid the excitements of a General Election; but so it is. Wiseacres had told me that the election would occur on or about November 18, but they had been giving dates on so many previous occasions that, like the boy who shouted "Wolf!", they had ceased to command credence. Nevertheless, we are engaged upon the desperate battle, and we are already tired of the noise and bustle involved in making a change which would have been achieved as well, and more simply, by the mere act of sitting upon the head of Mr. Lloyd George. However, nobody seems to have had the strength of mind to sit on his head, and we are listening to his personal attacks upon his quondam friends and their milder personal attacks upon Mr. Lloyd George. The ex-Prime Minister has a great gift of invective. But I see that Lady Bonham Carter, Mr. Asquith's eldest daughter by his first marriage, has described Mr. Lloyd George as suffering from St. Vitus's dance, and his successor, Mr. Bonar Law, as suffering from sleeping sickness. She evidently prefers her father's leadership to that of either of his rivals.

Several literary men are standing as candidates, but none among them is

so prominent as H. G. Wells. By the time these notes are in print the results of the election will have been known for some weeks in America, and so I shall not speculate. But while I see that Wells might be of great use to the cause of education in this country, in the event of his election, I should regret very much the loss of his gifts to literature. I do not think the life of Parliament would suit his temperament, and the wear and tear of it would be bound to bore him. So I should hear with equanimity of his defeat.

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The coming of the election has begun a slump in the theatres and the booksellers' shops. In any case I do not think that the season would have been particularly striking, but there is no doubt that for some peculiar psychological reason which I cannot fathom, elections do interfere with the normal relaxations of men and women. Whether they go to political meetings instead of to the theatre, or whether it is that they are simply too agitated over political problems to read new books, it remains to some social historian and analyst to make clear to us. Possibly if one knows the latest news about the candidate and the Cabinet and the situation generally it is not necessary to know what is the latest book. It may even be bad form at