

led some of them to say that he wasn't a philosopher at all—maybe a poet. "If you took [my lucubrations] more lightly perhaps you would find them less aggravating," he wrote to Professor Lamprecht. He himself thought a smile might say much—in a letter to Father Munson he speaks of the impor-

tance in his philosophic life of a passage of Plato's *Parmenides* "about 'ideas' of filth, rubbish, etc., which the moralistic young Socrates recoils from as not beautiful, making old Parmenides smile. That smile of Parmenides made me think." Of Santayana's smile we feel it does no less.

The Birth of Tragedy

AND me happiest when I compose poems.
 Love, power, the huzza of battle
 are something, are much;
 yet a poem includes them like a pool
 water and reflection.
 In me, nature's divided things—
 tree, mould on tree—
 have their fruition;
 I am their core. Let them swap,
 bandy, like a flame swerve
 I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve.

And I observe how the sensual moths
 big with odour and sunshine
 dart into the perilous shrubbery;
 or drop their visiting shadows
 upon the garden I one year made
 of flowering stone: to be a footstool
 for the perfect gods
 who, friends to the ascending orders,
 will sustain this passionate meditation
 and call down pardons
 for the insurgent blood.

A quiet madman, never far from tears,
 I lie like a slain thing
 under the green air the trees
 inhabit, or rest upon a chair
 towards which the inflammable air
 tumbles on many robins' wings;
 noting how seasonably
 leaf and blossom uncurl
 and living things arrange their death,
 while someone from afar off
 blows birthday candles for the world.

Irving Layton

IRVING LAYTON (1912-). *Montreal. Teaches in Montreal. His books include: Here and Now, Now is the Place, The Black Hurtsmen, The Cold Green Element, and The Bull Calf.*

Gore Vidal

A Moment of Green Laurel

MY absent-mindedness seems to have only to do with places; I have little difficulty in recalling either names or faces and I usually get to appointments on time although, even in this, I've become a bit careless lately. Last week I arrived for an appointment not only at the wrong hour but at the wrong address, a somewhat disturbing experience. But now the Treasury Building was straight ahead and I was relieved that I could still find my way so easily through the streets of Washington, a city I'd not lived in for many years.

Thousands of people crowded the sidewalks, for this was Inauguration Day and all were eager to watch the new President ride in state to the Capitol for the inaugural ceremony. The crowd was in a gala mood, though the sky was dull, promising rain.

With difficulty, I crossed the street to Willard's Hotel. At the curb I was stopped by the pillar of some Mid-Western community, a pillar now wreathed in alcohol. In one hand he carried a small banner and in the other a bottle of whisky with no label (I did not then guess the significance of this detail). "Things going change in this town. Take it from me." Gracefully, I took it from him and, avoiding the bottle proffered, moved as quickly as I could to the hotel entrance, and went inside.

Willard's has two lobbies: one on the "F" Street side and one on the Pennsylvania Avenue side, parallel to it; the lobbies are connected by a carpeted, mirrored, marbled

corridor where I was able to find a sofa to sit on that I might comfortably observe the hundreds of people who now passed from street to avenue, all hurrying, all delighted.

Out of loyalty to our elegant Washington society, I decided these noisy passers-by must be from out of town; thick business-men with rimless glasses, South-Westerners with stetsons and boots, New York ladies in silver fox . . . all political and all, for one reason or another, well pleased with the new President. Some carried whisky flasks, I noticed: the first I'd seen since I was a child and Prohibition was, in theory, law. Apparently, flasks had come back, as the advertisers would say.

A POLITICAL personage sat down beside me, his right buttock, a boney one, glancing off my thigh as he squeezed a place for himself on the sofa. He wiggled about, making more room for himself. I scowled, unnoticed.

"You sure get mighty tired standing around," he said at large, stumbling on truth. I agreed. He was southern, and he talked to me, and from time to time I nodded with discreet half-attention, pretending to look for someone, hoping to excuse thereby my inattention. I even squinted near-sightedly as though a familiar face had suddenly appeared among strangers. Then one did. I saw my grandfather, white-haired and ruddy-faced, approach with a political colleague. He was smiling at something the other was saying. As they passed in front of me, I heard my