

ingless abstraction. And the resulting feebleness infects the entire health and strength of a once vigorous language.

The point is easily made plain if we turn back to English political writers of the nineteenth century, let alone those of earlier epochs. An admirable instance is to be found in the essays of Lord Macaulay. Macaulay was a typical Whig, a man of much sense and little sensibility, a drastic logician, a violent and often a pedantic critic. We pride ourselves nowadays on a finer quality of imagination, a greater susceptibility to delicate impressions. But, whether we agree with Macaulay or not, we do not close the book and wonder what it is all about. He says what he means, and he says it hard. A lucid virility is the essence of his style. Here at least is a clear bright flame of reason, not a muzzy glow. English utilitarianism is out of fashion; our Hegelians and mystics pass it contemptuously by. We have yet something to learn from utilitarian politics; after all, we are in no position to laugh. And we have still more to learn from the utilitarian writing. It would be hard to find more agreeable English than the prose of Lord Morley and Sir Leslie Stephen. Here are clarity and strength well compounded, a stream never sluggish, yet never tossing in the rapids of verbosity. Morley's *Voltaire* is instinct with passion; yet there is not a vague phrase, nor an empty one. Every word plays its part, and every line has dignity.

Should one follow the English publicists still further back, the contrast is even more marked. What have we in these days to match Swift's *Conduct of the Allies*? Only Mr. Shaw, another Irishman, approaches Swift in power, and the secret of Mr. Shaw's power is his sincerity. Of Swift, in his full flight of passionate reasoning, it may be said, as of the clerk of Oxenford,

Not one word spak he more than was need;  
All that he spak it was of heye prudence,  
And short, and quyk, and ful of gret sentence.

There could be no finer description of a good prose style.

Direct writing is the counterpart of direct practice, and honesty in English prose vanishes with honesty in public life. The corruption of the eighteenth century was at least an open corruption: it never troubled to hide its ugly head, and there is less guilt in knavery when all are knaves confessed. But the corruption of to-day is a backstairs business that carries our minds to the freedmen of Imperial Rome: all the dealing is done on the quiet, and bills are paid in jobs and honors rather than in hard cash. Statesmanship has yielded to Big Business, and the substitution of business men for statesmen means the substitution of opportunism for principle and policy. We live in the 'wangler's' day of triumph, and are fed with 'wangler's' English, a diet of cheap narcotics. Yet if our books are compact of studied nothingness, the public must accept its share of the blame. Never was truth more openly spurned. We run from it like children from a bogey; and crouch shivering beneath the skirts of Dora, there to be nursed with the drowsy syrups of the censorship. In a world where truth is dishonored there may be cleverness of affectation and neat trickery of the tongue. But style is dead.

The Athenæum

MR. FRANK BRANGWYN, R.A.

BY E. T. RAYMOND

BEHIND a high and rather forbidding wall in a street off the Broadway at Hammersmith, where few prospects please and most of the architecture is

vile, stands one of those long, low Georgian houses, a few years ago common in every older suburb, against which the flat-speculator has waged a war of extermination.

This house serves as dwelling place and atelier to Mr. Frank Brangwyn, who has just become a member of the Royal Academy. In one sense the house symbolizes its tenant; for Mr. Brangwyn owes his distinction as an artist to a singular and happy mingling of intense modernism in externals, with the faith and spirit of a long-past time. He is a man of the Middle Ages in trousers; and the more really one because he has no positive objection to the trousers. Indeed, there could be nothing more authentically twentieth century than the outer man of Mr. Brangwyn. He is not, indeed, a typically English figure. The full, florid, bearded face might well belong to some prosperous Brussels tradesman; it is the kind of face one often used to see on a Sunday afternoon in the Bois de la Cambre, placid and eupeptic, beaming alternately on a highly comfortable Bock and a highly comfortable wife. For Mr. Brangwyn, though of Welsh descent, was born at Bruges, and has more than a suggestion of the once fat land of Flanders. He is rather the Continental bourgeois than the English middle-class man, but with as little artistic affectation as either; if ever he were seen in a velvet jacket, it must have been very early in his career, and his taste in ties is as sober as a bank director's. Nobody, of course, could possibly mistake him for a bank director, or for any kind of business man; there is a faint note of the Bohemian with all his rectitude; and you feel that he takes no real joy in his trouser crease.

But if there is no enthusiasm, there is no revolt. Mr. Brangwyn accepts the conventions as he accepts every

other external of the twentieth century; his only revenge is to go a little farther back spiritually. It is the same with his work. He is content to take as his raw materials the Hammersmith street, or the chimneys of the nearest power house, or the electric cranes on the riverside. He does not regret the existence of John Smith, the trade-unionist, or complain that he does not spell himself Jehan and belong to a mediæval guild; but uses him, dirty collar, sloppy tweeds, trade-unionism, and all — and somehow gets a rare dignity out of him, while telling the essential truth. Such a man as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, both as poet and painter, remained a Victorian with a squint, despite his labored efforts at archaism, because he tried to keep one eye on the nineteenth century and one on the twelfth. Mr. Brangwyn has both eyes on the twentieth, but his soul is in the twelfth. He is one with the old masters, because he is so vitally of his own time.

The Academy has honored itself by honoring the least academic of living artists. But one wonders how Mr. Brangwyn feels in that gallery; he is like some great wolfhound on view among a lot of sleek Italian greyhounds. His whole outlook on art is the very antithesis of the average R.A.'s. The Academy remains true to its origin. It was founded chiefly with the view of giving a status to those who supplied a British demand for pretty things, or who painted the portraits of the British aristocracy; and it has so little departed from that rather servile tradition that nine people out of ten think of an academician as necessarily a successful painter of easel pictures, and were considerably astonished when an architect was recently chosen president. Perhaps not altogether unnaturally, architecture was not commonly conceived as an art. This attitude is

the culmination of a movement now more than four hundred years old. Mr. Chesterton has acutely pointed out the essential difference between the objects of art before and after the Renaissance. Mediæval art was popular; the blaze of color inside a cathedral and the riot of fantastic shape outside were the work of artists who had Tom, Dick, and Harry in view; they were not meant to please a small and specialized class, but to appeal to everybody. They were the common man's gift to common men. But with the Renaissance there came, by a variety of incidental causes, a change in feeling. The artist, like the soldier, became a true mercenary. Art became an aristocratic and exclusive concern. Its appeal narrowed; it forsook the streets for the mansions; it spent on a nobleman's goblet the pains that once went to the decoration of a market cross. In succeeding centuries we have fine landscapes, marvelous portraits, silver work, and faïence that are a delight to the connoisseur; but there is a definite good-bye to the greatest in things that cannot go into a remover's van.

Mr. Brangwyn is truly of the mediævals, because to the centre of his being he rebels against this limitation of art. He painted easel pictures to make money and amuse himself; he sometimes paints them still for amusement. He delights in etching, which more than amuses him. But his real heart is in the art that cannot be kept in a portfolio or used to give a false note to a dining room. He is above all, and in the widest sense, a decorator, and there must be moments in his life when he regrets that he was born six centuries too late to do the best that is in him. His imagination glows with visions of real English cities (not the ordinary aggregation of slum and suburb), ruled by men jealous for their beauty as well as for their wealth,

filled with enthusiasm for the common life, in which art would take its place as no extraneous thing, but as an impulse governing every corporate activity. In such cities it would indeed be well that the chief citizens should delight in filling their houses with the best that the easel painter could produce. There is a legitimate domestic and intimate side to art; but the true work of a great genius would be, as in the distant past, for Everyman: work which could not serve as gambler counters for the speculator, or certificates of taste for the millionaire, but would remain for centuries a reminder to citizens of the glories of their past.

It is the enormous insensibility of his countrymen to art as a vital thing, touching life at all points, that makes Mr. Brangwyn's considerable world success not a little ironical to him. There is a constant and lucrative market for the pictures he does not want to paint, since the days are long past when a five-pound note was of consequence to the self-taught artist who had roughed it before the mast, and vagabonized it in many remote parts of the globe. But there is little demand in this country for the work he would like to do for it. With a half-humorous sigh he will talk to you of proffered foreign commissions, and of the English orders that so seldom come. England wants of Mr. Brangwyn only what Mr. Brangwyn does not want to do for England. The English shop-keeper who controls our municipalities probably never heard his name; in any case, knows him only as a picture painter. He cannot complain of want of success. His name is respected by the print sellers, at Christie's, and everywhere where pictures are sold. It is no case of a neglected genius; only the sadder case of a misused one. For Frank Brangwyn, properly employed, might have filled the public buildings

of England with feasts of form and color which would have brought us pilgrims from everywhere for centuries to come. Instead, much of his best work can only be seen abroad, and the best of all remains undone.

The Outlook

## SOME LEGENDS OF THE WAR

M. ALBERT DAUZAT's book \* is of real psychological interest. The creation of legends in our own time and by our own people is surely as interesting as the stories of mediæval Italians or even of the contemporaries of Cuchulain. This naturally applies only to the unconsciously created legend, for during the war governments for their own purposes invented stories, allowed false reports to go without contradiction, and suppressed facts when it suited them to do so. The psychology of masses is such that the necessity for these subterfuges is sometimes imperative, and it would be mere hypocrisy to blame governments for not immediately and always publishing the exact truth. Thus the uncensored publication of the news of the disastrous battle of Charleroi in August, 1914, would certainly have caused a panic in the Allied countries. On the other hand, the ingenious Wolff was rather too fertile in subtle yarns, and his scientific fabrications were frequently so very unlikely that the most credulous of his own people doubted him.

How difficult it is to obtain a precise account of any event, even from eye-witnesses, is shown by an anecdote given in M. Dauzat's volume. At a meeting of scientists a squabble between two people was suddenly and unexpectedly sprung upon them by previous arrangement. The president of the meeting, under pretense of se-

curing legal evidence, requested everyone present to write a report of what had happened. Though the assembly consisted exclusively of psychologists, jurists, and doctors, only one report contained less than twenty per cent of errors, thirteen had more than fifty per cent of errors, and thirty-four had invented between ten and fifteen per cent of the details. When men of science, quietly met together, can make so many errors in a single report there can be no further surprise at the legends invented and implicitly believed in during the agitated years of war. Quite apart from those artificially started by governments, either in their own or the enemy's country, there were numbers which grew up spontaneously, usually from a slight basis of fact but so magnified or distorted as to be unrecognizable. The famous story of the angels at Mons belongs to this category. On September 20, 1914, Mr. Arthur Machen published in the *Evening News* a little imaginative sketch called 'The Archers' in which the soldiers were supposed to receive help from spirits. This story, running from mouth to mouth, rapidly lost all memory of its real origin, and was reported as an actual occurrence. Many occult reviews gave it credence; it was mentioned in sermons, and in August, 1915, a wounded lance corporal asserted that he and his comrades had seen 'strange lights' and 'outstretched wings' during the retreat. A similar legend, though less easily traceable, is the 'miracle of the Marne.' Rather more original (for it was scarcely likely that Jeanne d'Arc would be left out), is the story of how St. Anthony of Padua came to a drill-ground in Italy, and said to the instructor: 'Why torment these men uselessly? The war will be over in two months.' M. Dauzat gives it as his opinion that the saint was a pro-German monk from a

\* *Légendes, Prophéties, et Superstitions de la Guerre*. By Albert Dauzat. Paris, La Renaissance du Livre. 5f.