

war, he cries, will have been to give back youth of heart to those who return from it. His peasant comrades show him not only how to laugh, and how to die—"you do not know the lesson taught by him who falls," he says, "I know it"—but how not to be literary: "My fault as an artist is to wish to dress the soul of my race in a beautiful robe of my own fancy." As the "anonymous" war of 1914, which had permitted him to keep his detachment, develops into the bloody conflicts of the spring of 1915, which make it "a frightful necessity to be a man," he gets a kind of poignant stir of life from violence itself. The *macabre* of the battlefield no longer rends him:

"The death of the soldier is close to natural things. It is a frank horror which does not palter with the universal violence. I have passed many times by bodies whose progressive decay I could watch, and this new life was more comforting than the cold and immutable aspect of city tombs." After five hideous days of slaughter he comes at night upon the body of one of his friends: "Corpse white and magnificent under the moon: I lay down beside him. Beauty of things which awaked in me. . . ."

The great sacrifice which even this mystic stoic had to admit was to renounce being a "standard-bearer." Yet flags, he said, are for children; it is sufficient for a man to know that the standard will be carried all the same. "Every instant reassures my heart. Nature makes standards of anything, and always there will be eyes to garner the teaching of sky and earth." "Whatever happens," says his last letter, "life will have had beauty."

This sort of sublimation of pain, which to certain pacifists appears sheer unbalance, is the spiritual counterpart of Dr. Carrel's triumph over the horrors of shrapnel and gas. When one sees the most brutal wounds healing as by miracle under the beautiful application of man's intelligence, the wound appears trifling compared to the intelligence: when one comes out of Belgium purged by contact with a nation which has freed its soul by enduring the depths of human suffering, the suffering seems worth the victory. Whether or not such consolations are valid, it is certain that man's gift for making the best of things is the outstanding glory of this war. These letters are now being translated into half a dozen different languages. They are written with that sharp economy of word and phrase which no language but the French can adequately render, but their vibration should carry far. There is a communicative ecstasy about it which makes one feel, as one closes the book, that an instant of supreme vision is indeed the price of life, and that the young heroes of France, and the mothers who live with them in the austere presence of death, are greatly loved of the gods.

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT.

The People as Poets

ABOUT a century and a half ago, the pioneers of the Romantic Movement began to socialize the theme of English verse. To-day, the literary descendants of those pioneers are busy socializing the ability to write verse. In a hundred and fifty years we have advanced from the position that poetry ought to be written for and about the people to the position that poetry ought to be written by the people.

This new opportunity for the people to share in the creation of literature is not without parallel in other forms of art. It appears unmistakably in the expression devices which have of late become so irresistible an allurements to the purchase of phonographs and player-pianos. "Press this ingenious spring," says the manufacturer to the hosts of the wistfully inarticulate, "press this spring, and the innermost hopes and dreams of you will mould the music as it pours forth, and inform it with the beauty that lies rebelliously buried in your soul. Press this spring, and you shall share in the magic of Beethoven and the subtle wizardry of Ysaye."

In neighborhood theatres and in community singing there is a socialization of art only less crude. And for some years now the way has been paved for the people to express themselves in painting. But here the simplification of a traditional technic has repelled the hard-headed socialists of art by its inevitable unintelligibility.

These manifestations of the new spirit in other fields than literature have not alarmed the critics only because they have not perverted those vaguely defined judges of art, the cultured public. No one seriously thinks of the owner of an automatic player as a rival either of Chopin as a composer, or of M. Paderewski as his interpreter. No one, however ardent with democratic enthusiasms, quite overlooks the limited ability of clerks and shop-girls enacting Hamlet. No one has any illusion about community singers as compared with a trained and chosen chorus. By general consent, community singers and player-piano musicians are kept in their proper places.

In the case of free verse there is a salient difference. The cultured public and their highly sensitive servants (or prophets) the editors of magazines, have been shamefully perverted. Socialized poetry has received the sanction of authority; and the critics are frightened and indignant.

As defenders of the sacred traditions these critics are not without justification. They are the advocates of the cause of infinite pains as opposed to indolence, of ability as opposed to wistfulness. And unlike the prosecutors of earlier literary

heresies they are themselves tolerably good poets.

Their outstanding error consists in applying to free verse the canons of a narrow and inexorable technical criticism instead of lavishing upon it the sympathy and insight of a new school of biographical-social criticism—a school of criticism which judges poetry frankly not by its effect upon the readers but by its effect upon the writers.

This is doubtless a new attitude towards literature, but so are the conditions that make it necessary now. For now, for the first time in literary history, the writers of poetry are as important numerically as the readers of poetry.

If the critics have failed to appreciate these altered circumstances, the editors, consciously or unconsciously, have not failed. They are offering to the multitudinous poets of our time the encouragement of recognition. And in doing this they are impelled not by the motives of the literary demagogue but of the far-seeing literary statesman.

It is as if some benevolent baseball magnate, seeing the flabby, bilious hordes that come to his grounds, were to induce them, for the sake of their health, to play baseball themselves, and were to bribe each individual player to exert himself to the utmost by the promise of full bleachers and cheering without end. In the event of such an unusual exhibition of philanthropy on the part of the baseball magnates, there would be an inevitable resentment in the hearts of baseball writers, when among all the myriads of converted bankers and stenographers and clerks and lawyers they failed to discover a single Alexander or Cobb or Speaker or Mathewson.

In their more agile years, many of our sporting writers played baseball themselves, and all of them have given much labor to learning the subtleties and discipline of the game. From them would come an irresistible outcry against this monstrous perversion, against this institutionalizing of a worthless technic, against the men in power for recognizing and sanctioning bad baseball.

On the other hand, from the tribes of the physical culturists and the Better Body Builders and the How to Keep Healthy doctors there would come an eloquent defense of bad baseball. They would point to legions of healthier office boys and ruddier bankers. They would expatiate on increased chest expansion and unfogged eyes and clear complexions. They would applaud the passing of sport as a spectacle, and the coming of sport as an upbuilder of the people's health. In this hypothetical baseball controversy they would represent the school of what I have called biographical-social criticism as opposed to the school of technical criticism.

Now the magnates of periodical literature can

do, and are doing, what is so manifestly impossible for the magnates of baseball. They have converted the sitters-in-the-bleachers into players. They have made the readers into writers. They are furnishing the forty thousand yelling fans to these stiff, self-conscious performers.

It would be well if these magnates could have the support of defenders of bad verse. No one has yet written any adequate appreciation of the possibilities of bad verse. The verse, I mean, that is composed at the crises of life, on the mountain tops of exultation and in the joyless valleys, by persons unskilled and ordinarily unpoetic. The verse that is hidden away in vases and bureau drawers, never to be shown, and always produced in some moment of vanity. Only a true poet could write a just appreciation of bad verse; and from his pen the words would come too much tainted with the implication of irony. The quality of bad verse is not strained. It is written to suit no magazine's policy. It is rewarded with no check. It is a brave denying of reality; a prayer that is its own answer. It is, to use Maeterlinck's phrase, "a making or invoking of wings" by creatures that creep on their bellies.

I know that Mr. Max Eastman has insisted on the difference between the expression of intense emotion and the intense expression of emotion; and I know that the kind of bad verse that F. P. A. sometimes reprints is commonly taken as a demonstration of that difference. But these unhappy examples are ridiculous not because they contain intense emotion inadequately expressed, but because they have had all emotion squeezed out of them by the exigencies of an artificial metrical form. Their authors are constrained by rules to be trite, to be banal, to be hypocritical, to be dishonest. Give them a tradition that sanctions self-expression in the more natural rhythms of free verse, and the result will never exhibit the banality and the untruth of the wedding poems and elegies that abound in country newspapers.

Long ago in Japan the tradition of socialized poetry—of bad poetry written by the people—was established through I know not what benevolent agency. And the whole nation is the better for it. "Poetry in Japan," says Lafcadio Hearn, "is as universal as the air. It is felt by everybody. It is read by everybody. It is composed by almost everybody. . . . You might wander, as I have done, into settlements so poor that you could not obtain there even a cup of real tea; but I do not believe that you could discover a settlement in which there is nobody capable of making a poem. . . . The old ethical teaching was something like this: 'Are you very angry?—do not say anything unkind, but compose a poem. Is your best-

beloved dead?—do not yield to useless grief, but calm your mind by making a poem. Are you troubled because you are about to die, leaving so many things unfinished?—be brave and write a poem on death. ”

Something of the same power of poetry over men's lives the vogue of free verse is slowly and haltingly establishing among us. It may be that in a few years the inevitable pendulum will swing, and a rigid classicism will debar from the joys of publication all our upstart poets. But then these million bards will no longer need the tonic of recognition. Among them the great tradition will

have become too firmly established for adversity to threaten it. For the sake of the few glad years before their art was made tongue-tied by authority, they will continue to pour the chronicles of their lives into poetry. In an increasingly mechanized age, in a passive age, in an age characterized more than ever by living-by-proxy, this socialized poetry will remain almost the only form of spontaneous emotional expression left to human beings. And for such a gift, the publishing now of five hundred mediocre poems in new and questionable meters, is, after all, a small, small price to pay.

MEYER COHN.

Democratization of Industry

AMERICA has been drifting through an epochal period of world change. The driving necessities of the greatest war in history have revolutionized the governments of Europe. Through terrible lessons new conditions of life and labor have been forced upon all the belligerent nations. Unless our people translate this cruel education into a program of peaceful progress, how are we to maintain our ideals and our commercial power after the war against governments reorganized under martial needs to unprecedented efficiency, against peoples driven by vast debts to a relentless struggle for economic supremacy and welded into a national solidarity of purpose unknown here since the Civil War?

America must be reorganized. But no legislative program will avail to accomplish this purpose until it is based upon a common impulse and desire to establish new conditions. There are no legal pain-killers, tonics, or cure-alls whereby an inspired minority can regenerate a suffering but uninspired majority. It is a weakness of political theorists to regard demands for legislation as an adequate program for constructive achievement. The primary effort should be to create understanding of that spirit in which America must reorganize and to develop a majority purpose to reconstruct our government and our industries so that in enlightened self-interest we may raise the level of the general welfare.

There are in America, as there have been everywhere since governments began, two opposing faiths, one openly admitted—belief in the mass wisdom of democracy; the other openly denied, but the basis of our invisible government—belief in the class wisdom of oligarchy. The well advertised “efficiency” of Germany was the triumph of benevolent autocracy. It was not an hereditary ruler but the united oligarchy of Germany's com-

mercial and political rulers who developed that marvelous coöperative machinery of government and industry. In the forced competition of war the Allied nations have developed like oligarchies and it is hardly conceivable that the end of war will change the character of the governments so reorganized. We have a government in democratic form, and back of that government, and inevitably superior to that government, we have an industrial organization almost as oligarchic as the feudalism of the middle ages. Yet it is a truism that to obtain true democracy in government there must be true democracy in the economic life of the people. All Americans profess to desire the supremacy of democratic institutions. But to contend in the competitions of peace with nations now reorganized by war the industrial rulers of America will inevitably (and partly unconsciously) demand oligarchic expansion of the powers of our government to work in harmony with our oligarchically governed industries. In fact, demands for such extension of powers are already being pressed in order that we may play our part efficiently in the great war.

If those who are of democratic faith meet this drive against democracy only with defense of our political institutions, then, as our governmental power weakens with the incessant struggle for control, our industrial organizations which dominate our government will increase their anti-democratic power. To defend and perpetuate our political democracy we must submit our political faith to the final test, and establish democracy in the commercial government which is the real government of the nation.

Before considering the line of advance toward industrial democracy it may be desirable to demonstrate briefly the character of our present industrial control. Many independent workers may not real-