

of art must be of such a nature that we can find expression for our wishes in it."

I know that this is a fascinating path of inquiry. I know also that a beer bottle in one of Cézanne's still life pictures is sometimes supposed to be ferociously phallic. But to proceed as if these things are actually proved is not vigorously scientific. It is flabby, windy and woozy. Besides, it departs from a useful etiquette. A man who never hints how much he knows or how little, who never admits the tentative character of his speculations, is bound to mislead some of his readers. And are we ready to imply that if there were no suppressed desires and wishes, there would be no enjoyment of beauty? Perhaps Mr. Langfeld does not believe this, but his examination of paintings with complete attention to motor adjustment as indicated by the form, without any regard whatever to color, arouses an enormous suspicion as to his scientific adequacy. He has four or five chapters on paintings alone, in which he gives no sign that he has ever seen one of these paintings. He talks of his black and white reproductions, indeed, as if they were the actual paintings. This omission of an integral factor in the objects of which he is discoursing not only upsets one's confidence in his thoroughness. It makes one wonder how responsible he is in this whole matter of motor response. The "desires of the organism" do undoubtedly play their part in the enjoyment of beauty. But how can that part be estimated if we talk of painting and omit color? To do this is to deal oneself all the trumps, like the believers in economic determinism.

Much more could be said on this score, just as much could be said about such valuable dicta as "it is necessary to meet the existing thoughts and desires at least half-way . . . There is little value in an art that is doomed to empty galleries and halls. Even the plays of Shakespeare at the present time have not the hold upon the people," etc. But enough has been said to indicate that Mr. Langfeld has much knowledge but no more profundity than to reduce all aesthetics to the platitude that if you like something, that is the sort of thing that you like. ("If we find the proportions of our dwellings entirely satisfactory, it is because they are in harmony with our predominating modes of response, or what is the same thing in other terms, because the proportions express our personality.") This is pragmatic, possibly, but I still believe that there is more in the science of beauty than rotating on the axis of platitude. But the man to realize this is not the man who thinks in the Babu English that devastates the post-graduate mind.

F. H.

A Chronicle of Facts

Our War with Germany. A History, by John Spencer Bassett. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

PROFESSOR BASSETT has written an undramatic account of our war with Germany, by relating, in the main in chronological order, the "facts" of a more or less external and obvious sort. If one wishes to know what our neutral trade-right dispute with Great Britain was, out of what concrete cases the dispute arose, what the formal defense of the British government was and what the reply of the Secretary of State; if one wishes similar information about our dispute with Germany; about our preparations for war, the organization of our national resources, the sending of the Expeditionary Forces, or the military and naval engagements in which our troops took part; in a word, if one wishes factual information about our part in the great war, presented without bombast, with

restraint, with accuracy (so far as accuracy was possible in 1919), with attention to perspective and relative importance, this will be a useful book to refer to. But one must not expect any extended discussion of the causes of the war, any searching analysis of facts or ideas, any illuminating interpretation of the course of events. The author refrains, deliberately I take it, from attempting anything of this sort. "It is from the standpoint of the historian," he says, "that I have endeavored to tell the story of the struggle." I suppose this means that he aimed to relate the events in narrative form, with a minimum of discussion and without obtruding his opinions on the reader: he aimed to give us the facts, and to let them "speak for themselves."

This is a worthy ideal; but, strictly speaking, unattainable in a narrative story of events. Facts are so wretchedly complacent, so indifferent, so neutral in word and deed, that they speak a various language. It is all one to them; they don't care what they say. Indeed, it is not, after all, the facts that speak for themselves when connected in narrative form; it is the author's selection and arrangement of the facts; it is the author's phraseology; the "whereases" and the "therefores" and the "notwithstanding"; it is all this that does the speaking. The most detached and objective historian in the world has at least one preconception, which is that he must have no preconceptions.

Thus it happens that Professor Bassett gives us more than a wealth of concrete information about the war; in spite of the best intentions, he gives us a kind of interpretation also. Aiming always at the strict truth, he is greatly preoccupied with the duty of being impartial, with making sure that "no injustice is done to any person or cause." The result is that he is disposed, wherever possible, to set one fact off against another, to balance one opinion or policy against the opposite opinion or policy, and to pronounce only very carefully guarded judgments himself whenever it seems essential to pronounce any. This is all admirable in itself, but it has its dangers too. It inclines the author to avoid controversial questions and crucial difficulties as much as possible, and, where this cannot be done, to try to find, by searching out safe neutral ground, a kind of reconciling via media.

I do not at all mean that Professor Bassett is neutral as between the United States and Germany. His history obviously justifies the United States in making war against Germany; but the justification seems to lie just in the fact that we did make war against Germany. Similarly, by allowing the facts to speak for themselves, Professor Bassett seems to make them say that President Wilson was, on the whole and all things considered, right in keeping us out of the war as long as he did keep us out, in taking us in when he did take us in, in getting us out when he got us out, in proclaiming the ideals which he in fact proclaimed, and in making the peace which he in fact made. The author does not explicitly affirm this; but the President was necessarily so much in the centre of things that the very course of events, when narrated factually, carries him as it were triumphantly along at every stage. This is the way things happened, we seem to hear Professor Bassett say, and so this is probably about the way things had to happen. The reconciling via media is always most conveniently found in accomplished fact. The mere "fact," if you allow the wretched creature to open its mouth, will say only one thing: "I am, therefore I am right."

It is an author's privilege to reveal or to conceal his opinions; but I wish Professor Bassett might have selected

and arranged his facts in a way calculated to make the reader a little less complacent in his own opinions. I wish he had not made it so easy for the reader to slip without a scratch over all the rough places. Without committing himself he might, for example, have called the reader's attention to what was perhaps the most fundamental of the President's inconsistencies (not that any mortal man can be without inconsistencies). In January, 1917, the President said that the realization of the great ideal which was the basis of his policy, the ideal of a new international order which would end war and make the world safe for democracy, required a "peace without victory. . . . Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. . . . Only a peace between equals can last." Personally, I think this was the truest thing he ever said. But whether true or not is irrelevant; the President affirmed it in the most explicit and solemn manner. Now the war ended with Germany vanquished; the peace was "forced upon the loser, victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished." This was the very peace which the President said could not last, the very victory which he affirmed would make it impossible to establish the new international order. Nevertheless, he went on to establish the lasting peace, the new order, as if nothing had occurred to make it impossible, and afterwards affirmed that the Treaty of Versailles was that peace, and that the League was that new order. I do not say that the war could have ended otherwise than it did, or that, "all things considered," a different peace than the Peace of Versailles could have been made. But I say that if the President was right in 1917 he was wrong in 1919. If the President changed his mind about peace without victory sometime between 1917 and 1919, it would be interesting to know why.

These are facts too. They are perfectly willing to speak for themselves; properly introduced, they will speak with great eloquence. But Professor Bassett seems partial to facts that speak a more prosaic language.

CARL BECKER.

The Shadow

The Shadow, by Mary White Ovington. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.

BENJAMIN BRAWLEY in a searching essay of some years ago called our attention to the "mob spirit in literature" which prevents our seriously touching the drama of the American Negro.

As a matter of fact, the Negro in his problems and strivings offers to American writers the greatest opportunity that could possibly be given to them today. . . . One can only imagine what a Victor Hugo, detached and philosophical, would have done with such a theme in a novel. . . . And yet, with the Civil War fifty years in the distance, not one novel or one short story of the first rank has found its inspiration in this great theme. Instead of such work we have consistently had traditional tales, political tracts, and lurid melodramas.

What is true of literature is true of art: here with a tenth of us colored, we see a colored face in an illustration, a painting or a bronze, on the stage or in a movie but rarely, and then usually in obvious caricature.

The reason is clear. We Americans have settled the race problem and we will not have our settlement tampered

with. The truth of Art tampers. That is its mission. We refuse, however, even to conceive a black hero and white heroine, a white hero and black heroine. Too, we are impatient at "colored" grades in any relation to whites. And in characters wholly black we are frankly uninterested. The result is obvious: authors who aspire to be "best sellers" seek to avoid the race question, art or no art.

But it cannot be wholly avoided, being a dark and exceedingly stubborn, a sinister and an amazing fact. In which case for a long time we tried to embalm the past or preach about the future: we painted and repainted the glory of a type of Negro long since dead or we ranted about the inevitable character and fate of the present Negro, so long as, like Tom Dixon, we followed the lead of the Mob.

So much for the past. But there are signs of change and *The Shadow* is a bright one. Miss Ovington in her novel on the race problem has avoided the chief difficulty of her task by making her heroine white in blood and only colored by adoption. This gains for Hertha immediately a sympathy which no Negro could claim from most American white readers. Former writers who have hit on this expedient have then overshot the mark by making the attendant Negroes as miserable and worthless as possible. If Miss Ovington were merely a propagandist in this work—and I hesitated to read it because I feared she was—she would have swung to the other extreme and made Hertha's Negro "relatives" paragons of goodness. With much skill and resulting readableness the author avoids this and the real art of the novel lies in the fact that this white girl's life conflict lies in the fight between her wish to be free and white and her deep-seated affection for her colored family. No matter what the truth may be, in Hertha's thought Ellen is a sister, Tom a big, sweet-hearted child and "mammy" a mother.

Here Miss Ovington touches with sure hand the crux of this human problem. Most folk are torn in such a case in two ways: if Negroes are human and sensitive as we are, Americans say, the horror of their situation is such boundless tragedy that sheer self-defence forbids any discussion of it on our part in poetry, essay or fiction. If on the other hand they do not feel their situation, then they are not human as we are, and why should I enlighten or arouse them even if that were possible? Miss Ovington's novel simply suggests that one who knew some of them intimately, was, rightly or wrongly so sure of their common humanity and endless suffering that the knowledge of it brought cataclysm to her own life.

The tragedy then which the book especially emphasizes is, that between these races so old in their acquaintanceship and so close in common life, between them today there can be no friendships. Tom is aghast to think of a place where he can talk simply to his white foster sister and the attempt to tell her news of his mother's death nearly brings a lynching. On the other side the plight of the whites is equally tragic: the race hatred of Dick, the "poor white", is a piteous disease and madness, and the life struggle of landlord Merryvale begins rather than ends with his marriage to Hertha.

How curiously complicated it all is! What a treasure house for the story teller does Miss Ovington again open to us—but the Mob—the Mob!

The Negro himself, the author touches with delicate restraint. She does not attempt the racial conflict of Charles Chesnut's *Marrow of Tradition* or the inner analysis of Jessie Fauset's *Emmy* and *The Sleeper Wakes*—knowing that such penetralia are only for those born to the Veil.