

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

VOLUME IV

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 1928

NUMBER 38

La Fayette

DOES anyone read Plutarch now—read him as they read him in the eighteenth century, for his practical examples of human nature in action, and his illustrations of how desire and temperament work out in history? If there are any left who are still interested in the character as well as the habits of eminent men, they will find good pasturage in Henry Dwight Sedgwick's new life of La Fayette.

For here is a documented and unromantic study of precisely the character type least in favor to-day—the moderate, open-minded liberal, who was neither a dreamer nor an opportunist, a man who actually preferred his principles to the rule of France, and who, in spite of exile and hope deferred, seems to have got more solid satisfaction out of his struggle for a reasonable freedom than the Bonapartes, the Marats, the Hamiltons, whose intention was above all to stay on top. It is impossible to make of La Fayette other than a generous enthusiast determined in good causes; it is impossible to argue that his life in every way was not a success. One of our national heroes, at least, has come through modern scrutiny without loss.

Plutarch would have been quick to note that the quality which made La Fayette successful was one which essentially belongs to this type. He had a mind that was both loyal and generous. Passion with him, therefore, as with all natures both intense and tolerant, was not exhibited in that hard egoism which we are admiring now as the earmark of greatness, nor was it absorbed in that resolve to break and crush which is praised in revolutionaries or autocrats, and punished in children. His passions, which seem to have been intense for so genial a man, were poured into a loyalty to causes that had hope and energy in them. He gave his friendship to men like Washington, and would not be swerved. He would not compromise with Napoleon, and it is to be noted that whatever may be true of the twentieth century, in the nineteenth, his idealism triumphed over Bonaparte's practice. Europe went his way, and not the dictator's.

They hate you more than they hate me, Napoleon said to him, speaking of the old régime. Plutarch would have made much of that remark also. The Lenins and the Mussolinis get the tribute to irresistible force which comes from the servile element in human nature. But a mind that neither accepts the old as immutable, nor follows the new into excess, is a menace to the plans of "practical" men. It is praised in public, sneered at in private. La Fayette, the major general by courtesy, who insisted upon risking his youthful reputation in the field with professionals, must have set hard-boiled tongues wagging in Philadelphia. Why was he not content to be the publicity agent of the Revolution, and a catspaw for the interests of France? But his kind are not "practical." That is why they warm the imagination and get unexpected results.

And so this amiable republican, who, measured with Washington, Jefferson, or Franklin, was incontestably not a great man but rather only an enthusiastic boy who guessed right in his choice of men and ideas, was, nevertheless, almost a decisive factor in the Revolutionary struggle. The French came to Yorktown for no very altruistic purposes, but it is unlikely that they would have come in time except for La Fayette, who himself would never have warmed Europe to the young republic, if he had not himself been generously warm.

La Fayette is, if you please, a special case. Passionate moderates, at war with extremes, and too

Love Is a Sea

By SHAEMAS O'SHEEL

LOVE is a sea that is there, under all life,
Always, inexhaustible waters; it must have
fountains,
To find the upper air, to flow, to sing on the
mountains,
To fill cool cups for our caked lips, salt with strife.
She is such. She is a fountain, very abundant.
As the sap mounts in the birch-tree, the sweet waters
Flow upward through her, sweet among the
daughters.
She is a green place among the rocks, ascendant,
The waters find her and flow through her as a spring.
If she hold out her hands love falls on you; cooler
than rain
That fingers the roots of the grasses, caressing and
fain.
If she enfold you, the waters are gathering,
A river, a bearer of life, surging, fecundant,
Up from the caverns, the deep caves under the
mountains
Where love is cool waters, upwelling, seeking foun-
tains.
She is such; a fountain of love, very abundant.

Is It Prose or Poetry?

... the other harmony of Prose.

DRYDEN.

By HERBERT READ

THERE are two ways of distinguishing prose from poetry. One is merely external or mechanical: it defines poetry as a mode of expression which is strictly related to a regular measure or metre; prose as a mode of expression which avoids regularity of measure and seeks the utmost variety of rhythm. But as to the poetic half of this distinction, it is obvious that it only accounts for verse, and every reader knows that verse is not necessarily poetry—that verse, indeed, is merely an outward form which may, or may not, be inspired with poetic feeling. Verse, therefore, is not an essential thing; it is merely a species of rhythm, and, in the abstract, a static, academic "norm." No such "norm" is ever postulated for prose; there is therefore no exact opposition between prose and verse. We are compelled to take into account the more essential sense of the word poetry.

I wish to state here most dogmatically (leaving to another occasion a more detailed defence of this dogma), that the distinction between poetry and prose is not and never can be a formal one. No minute analysis and definition of "feet," no classification of metre, no theory of cadence or quantity, has ever resolved the multiple rhythms of poetry and the multiple rhythms of prose into two distinct and separable categories. The most that can be said is that prose never assumes a regular, even beat, but this is a negative criterion of no practical value. That there is a surface distinction between poetry and prose must, I think, be admitted; but it is like the surface distinction between sea and land—one is liquid and wavy, the other solid and indented; but why distinguish the surface of things when the things themselves are so palpably different?

The distinction between poetry and prose is a material distinction; that is to say, since we are dealing with mental things, it is a psychological distinction. Poetry is the expression of one form of mental activity, prose the expression of another form.

Poetry is creative expression; prose is constructive expression. That, in a sentence, is the real distinction—a distinction which will only become clear as we proceed.

By "creative" I mean *original*. In poetry the words are born or reborn in the act of thinking. The words are, in Bergsonian phraseology, a becoming; they develop in the mind *pari passu* with the development of the thought. There is no time interval between the words and the thought. The thought is the word and the word is thought, and both the thought and the word are poetry.*

* Compare generally the ideas of Leone Vivante on this subject, in his works "Intelligence in Expression" (Eng. trans. 1925) and "Notes on the Originality of Thought" (Eng. trans. 1927); note particularly this paragraph from the first-named work:

In prose the period is more subject to rules, whether in the collocation of words, in the structure of the phrase, or in the use of words; *i. e.*, it is subject to conventional usage. Uncommon words can hardly be introduced; it seems wayward and arbitrary to use them, and in general we cannot depart from common usage—while in poetry a like "transgression," a like inversion or the uncommon use of a word passes, as such, unobserved. And this is due to the boldness which words have in poetry—because their meaning is entirely present, their every reason or value is present and active in them, in every moment of expression; and because, on the other hand, the very material, as it were, calls forth activity to form itself according to all its intrinsic values and forms and, being one with activity, is itself concept.

"Constructive" implies ready-made materials;

This Week

Essays by Huxley and Gosse.

Reviewed by Arthur Colton.

"Why Men Fail."

Reviewed by Joseph Jastrow.

"Olives of Endless Age."

Reviewed by G. Lowes Dickinson.

"The Diary of Henry Teonge."

Reviewed by Captain David Bone.

"The Wolf Cub."

Reviewed by Charles J. Finger.

Two Volumes of Poems.

Reviewed by Jessie B. Rittenhouse.

"Cézanne."

Reviewed by Frank J. Mather.

"The Story of Civil Liberty."

Reviewed by Zechariah Chafee.

Next Week

Spring Book Number.

generous to force their own domination, are seldom so openly successful. They leave usually a spirit behind them, but not a reputation, for their own tolerance limits their fame by depriving them of organized followers. Yet the current taste for biography might be directed toward more of their kind. Discoveries in the private lives of national heroes have been so abundant lately that one suspects a complex in the psychology of the biographers. They have been looking for private vices in men distinguished in public life instead of for public effectiveness. As a counter to hero worship the process may have been useful, but there would be a greater usefulness in discovering men better, not worse, than their reputation, the undistinguished La Fayettes, the individuals responsible for the belief in the possibility of making a finer animal of poor old man, which, in spite of cynics, still persists.

words stacked round the builder, ready for use. Prose is a structure of ready-made words. Its "creative" function is confined to plan and elevation—functions these, too, of poetry, but in poetry subsidiary to the creative function.

Does it follow that poetry is solely an affair of words? Yes: an affair of words adequate to the thought involved. An affair of one word, like Shakespeare's "incarnadine," or of two or three words, like "shady sadness," "incense-breathing Morn," "a peak in Darien," "soft Lydian airs," "Mount Abora," "star-in-wrought," or of all the words necessary for a process of thought like the "Divine Comedy."

Prose, too, is an affair of words, but only of words as so much dead material given life, *which life is rhythm*. Paradoxical as it may seem, we now see that poetry may inhere in a single word, in a single syllable, and may therefore be without rhythm; prose, however, does not exist except in the phrase, and the phrase always has rhythm of some kind.

This distinction between poetry and prose may seem a subtle matter; it may seem to be one difficult of application. It may be asked: how are we to recognize creativity when we see it? I frankly resort to an esoteric doctrine at this point. My observation convinces me that in poetry, as in every other art, the people who recognize the art are few, and that these few recognize it instinctively. Just as the ear in some natural and innate way reacts to melody, and the eye to color, so the intelligence reacts to poetry. I do not profess to explain these instinctive reactions; they are probably constitutional, but I see no reason to suppose that because words, rather than musical scales, are the medium of normal communication between men, that therefore the art of words, which is poetry (and prose!) is in any degree made more accessible to ordinary men than the art of music. All art is difficult, remote, subtle; and though in the process of catharsis it may act as a release for emotions that are common to all men, yet in this process art is to those men an unknown quantity. That is why the artist among us is so dangerous; he is always playing with social dynamite and is therefore banished from any ideal Republic. Only realistic philosophers, such as Aristotle, see that he has his uses.

The answer to the first question therefore is: that the difference between poetry and prose is a quantitative difference that has its effects in expression, but that these effects cannot be measured qualitatively, but only by the exercise of an instinctive judgment.

The second question is simpler. Is there an abstract entity, an absolute prose style to which all styles approximate, or against which all styles are judged? I think there probably is, but it follows from my definition of prose that such a style can never be exactly defined. But there are many negative restrictions—such as the one I have mentioned, that the rhythm of prose is never regular, and such as the laws against archaisms, metaphor, affectation, sentimentality, confusion, and inappropriate accent—and if all these restrictions are borne in mind at one and the same time, we do arrive at a negative definition of perfection. But it remains a negative definition, with all the defects and uncertainties consequent on such definitions. Nevertheless, we can ask ourselves, if only for amusement, which among our prose writers come nearest to this indefinite ideal. We perceive immediately that of very few authors can it be said that they had no insidious faults. Take this test only: of how many writers, in the search for an appropriate and representative passage, could we trust to the offering of any page we opened at? Obviously, only of the consistently good and the consistently bad. But which writer can we claim to be consistently himself and consistently good? I have had some experience in the "dipping audit" which I have applied to English prose writers during the preparation of a book, and only about three or four names occur to me as possible. There is Berkeley, there is Swift, there is Sterne, there is Southey, and, if modern examples must be quoted, there are W. H. Hudson and Mr. Bernard Shaw. Yet in Berkeley I know there are terrible wastes, and in the "Querist" and in "Siris" (where, too, there are the greatest delights); in Swift there are occasional lapses, due to anger or weariness; in Sterne the conversational ease is, after all, an instrument of limited range (it avoids what it cannot compass); in Southey there are forlorn failures of interest—an objection I would also hold against W. H. Hudson and Mr. Shaw. Swift is the only one of these prose writers, and the only one, therefore, in the whole

of English literature, in whom there are no organic and inevitable lapses. The prose style of Swift is unique, an irrefragable instrument of clear, animated, animating and effective thought. English prose has perhaps attained here and there a nobler profundity, and here and there a subtler complexity; but never has it maintained such a constant level of inspired expression.

New and Old

ESSAYS OLD AND NEW. By ALDOUS HUXLEY. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. \$2.50.

PROPER STUDIES. By ALDOUS HUXLEY. New York: Doubleday, Doran. 1928. \$2.50.

LEAVES AND FRUIT. By SIR EDMUND GOSSE. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON

MR. HUXLEY'S "Proper Studies" is only apparently a collection of miscellaneous essays; in reality it is an argument, a book with a theme. He is an individualist and would cry out with Emerson: "Masses! The calamity is the masses! I do not want any masses; but men and women." Mass rule and mass education are a folly and a failure. Men are unlike. Their unlikeness may be less fundamental or essential—whatever these terms mean—than their likeness, but it is not less ineradicable and important. The important



ELIZABETH BOWEN

Author of "The Hotel" (Dial Press), reviewed in last week's issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

unlikeness between Emerson and Mr. Huxley—it may be noted here—is that Emerson's individualism is idealistic, a pure individualism neither massed nor classed, and springs from a vision of humanity as it might be; Mr. Huxley's is realistic, springs from a recognition of humanity as it is, and moves toward practical results through classifying. There is a "new and old" even among individualists.

The equality of men, Mr. Huxley says, was an eighteenth-century dogma, contrary to the facts then as always. Modern psychology and that of the medieval churchman agree in so far as both are realistic. What actually is the nature of human nature? is the first question, and then, what sort of social institutions would best be fitted for the kind of thing humanity appears to be? If you know human nature you have a standard by which to judge institutions. The eighteenth-century sociologists used this method, and our institutions are largely the outcome of their conclusions. The trouble with these institutions is not with eighteenth-century logic, but with eighteenth-century idealistic psychology, with an idea of human nature which was gratuitously and novelly wrong. The idea of equality might be derived from Aristotle or the medieval schoolmen by way of Descartes or Locke, but none of their theorems had any social or political application. "All men are in essence the same," or "Reason is found complete in all men," was not understood by any of them in a way to trouble Athenian slavery

or the feudal system, any more than was the Christian brotherhood of man and equality before the infinite. It was the eighteenth-century thinkers who needed a theory to underly the reforms desired, applied these formulas to politics, and explained the obvious inequality of men as due to environment and education. Equalize these and you equalize men. "Intelligence, genius, and virtue are the products of education." The "all men are in essence equal" of Locke became "all men are created, or born, or are by nature equal," which is untrue down to the most rudimentary embryos.

✽ ✽ ✽

Mr. Huxley does not mention the interesting point made by Sir Henry Maine, that the maxim of Roman law, *Omnes homines natura aequales sunt*, meant that there were in Rome two systems of law, namely, civil and equity. The theory had grown up that the latter represented natural law in distinction from the technical and traditional code, but it did not spring from any such theory. It sprang from the practical need of finding law applicable to aliens. The maxim meant merely that before a judge sitting in civil law there was distinction of persons, whereas before a judge sitting in equity there was not. "Are created equal" is a natural translation of *natura aequales sunt*, but it is not what it meant, any more than did the "equal in essence" of Locke's *tabula rasa*.

Mr. W. C. Brownell, in his most recent book called "Democratic Distinction in America," remarks that the effect of the doctrine has been to replace classes by individuals; that the equality which the Declaration of Independence had in mind was, of course, not capacity but title to consideration. Also of course, very true. And true that, if the Jeffersonian formula had been more accurate, it would have lost its *flair*. But a formula so emphatic, unqualified, and on the face of it untrue, is a very imperfect formula, however valuable as proclamation, and however much that is both valuable and true for social theory may be sifted out of it by selection and interpretation. I do not think that the Declaration can be properly understood without a realization of that eighteenth-century political thought within which Jefferson's mind moved, and a realization of the fact as well that in 1776 he was very young. It is true that the men of the Continental Congress in 1776 were as shrewd and sensible as any men that ever lived. Accordingly they were not only well aware that men are not created in any way equal, but were also aware of the value of such eloquence as Jefferson's. In "times that try men's souls" shrewd and sensible men ask for words that move miscellaneous men to unity. Mr. Huxley's analysis of the doctrine seems reasonably correct, but he does not take account of its value, immediate or continual, as an inspiration and as a safeguard. He thinks our political failures come from the doctrine; he does not seem to admit that our political successes may have some connection with the doctrine too; indeed he does not, with any great cordiality, admit the successes.

✽ ✽ ✽

Men are unlike then and unequal. But in what ways do they differ? To a realistic psychology they are mentally as unlike and unequal as they are physically—perhaps more so—and may be classified vertically or horizontally, that is in degree or in kind. The mind of George Babbitt is on the same vertical lines as that of William James, and the relations of Joanna Southcote's mind with that of Hegel would be similar, that is, different degrees of the same kind—whereas horizontally the minds of James and Hegel, and those of Babbitt and Joanna, would be classed together as respectively a couple of high-grade and low-grade minds. In respect to differences of kind there are extraverts and introverts, contemporary words for an old distinction; there are also visualizers who think in images, and non-visualizers who think in abstractions; there are geometers and analysts, which is a somewhat similar division. All these terms are familiar, I suppose, in modern psychology.

Mr. Huxley believes himself to be a moderate extravert, an imperfect visualizer, and more or less of an analyst. But are not most men more or less mixed or qualified? Are not these distinctions of faculty and direction, rather than of persons? If persons can be said to belong to one of these classes only in the sense that a certain faculty or direction is predominant in them, an absolute classification by persons amounts in sum to a vast exaggeration of