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Catspaws for the Zeitgeist

THEY used to call it yellow journalism, but popular journalism is a better name now for the tabloids, the "I Confess" magazines, and the read-me-and-weep (or snicker) stories which Struthers Burt discussed in the *Review* last week. The people want them, he said, because sensational journalism satisfies the desires bred of their environment. As long as there are Third Avenue Elevators, judicial executions, part-educated minds, so long will vulgar, depraved, sensational journalism accompany them, as a dog follows his master.

That was Mr. Burt's argument, which we leave to others to confirm or refute. It is part of the argument from environment which Mr. Malcolm Davis handled with some sarcasm in his review of the *Vanguard* pamphlets on Soviet Russia, elsewhere in the same issue. Social ills explain intellectual evils: clean up the environment and you clean up the mind also.

But what of the panders and pimps to this public vulgarity? Are they, as Mr. Burt says, mere instruments of a social demand, catspaws for the Zeitgeist? But we know them to be men and women of intellect and ability in spite of the unflattering terms by which social philosophers must describe them. They are individuals—writers, editors, publishers, reporters—they are close to us, they are human; the public, one is tempted to say, is not. As individuals they must have problems not altogether caused by the climate, the slums, industrialism, or psychological suppression. It is difficult to regard them as steps in a process, as beings devoid of responsibility for conditions of which they are a part.

Yes, but that is a way we have with our new views on responsibility. Nothing is anyone's fault, all that is wrong must be charged to the time spirit, to psychological conditioning, to economic urges, to the environment. Everything is so infinitely related to everything else that if milk is to be purer or viler, honest, nothing short of remaking the universe will guarantee a cure. Gambling is human nature, hence let gambling alone until you revise human nature. Sensationalism is an offspring of industrialism, hence disregard neuroticism and morbidity while you proceed to reverse the industrial revolution.

* * *

Perhaps, perhaps—but in this large talk of large issues the individual is lost. The public craves its tabloid, but what of the man who makes it; has he no rights, no intellectual integrity to safeguard, no longings to be a middleman in a better traffic? Is it enough to say, Forgive them, Lord, for they know what they do, but cannot help it!

Cannot help what? No one supposes that the sponsors of popular journalism are free agents. They cannot remake democracy according to an honest journalist's desire, they cannot escape from the tremendous pressure of popular demand, but their minds are relatively free, with a freedom gained from education and clarified by experience. They know good journalism from bad, the reasonably true from the certainly false. If the public demands patent medicine, patent medicine it must have, but it can be drugs, not slow poison. If the great public is essentially vulgar in the modern sense of that word (and this is by no means proved), if life is badly organized, and the corners of civilization choked with dirt, that is no excuse for the man who willingly makes dirt breed dirt, carries disorganization into new limits, out-vulgarizes vulgarity. It is mere coddling to call these able folk, who can pass any intelligence test and make journal-

The Stranger

By HAROLD VINAL

HE is a stranger to her still,
Too heavy-handed to be more
Than just a brute to break her will
As he has broken it before.

The battle is not hers, but his,
She is a marble that must yield,
But yet her hour of triumph is
A fruitful field.

He takes her in his time of need,
She is as soft as any dove,
A broken and rebellious reed
Bent downward by his love.

She bears his insults and his lust
With eyes perhaps that are too mild,
His treacheries because she must—
He is the father of her child.

Rudyard Kipling*

By LEONARD BACON

RUDYARD KIPLING is now sixty-two. He has had a career successful beyond any recorded in the history of literature. He was world-famous in his twenties, and rightly so. He touched all departments of literature except the drama and criticism, and touched nothing without adorning it. Though prose was his chosen medium, his verse was known in three continents. And his life was one uninterrupted triumph from the 'eighties to the tens. It is part of the tradition on which the insecure twenties are founded, that after "Kim," his powers began to wane. At all events something happened to him at that time. The Nile of his mind no longer overflowed annually with a rich inundation. Instead the flood subsided to a trickle. And concerning the quality of the diminished stream there were many opinions. In short, a reaction had set in.

He had always been opinionated and forthright, and it was not wonderful, if people who did not share his views on the British Empire and the White Man's Burden, on the education of the young and personal morality, should criticize him severely. But there is something fatal and astonishing about the fashion in which almost everything he hated in the world began taking on a new lease of life after 1910. The kind of politics, the kind of literature, the kind of personal philosophy which were dear to him, after that date were derided and actually in the dust. From his Sussex solitude he from time to time emitted comminatory or satirical stories and poems, which his cult (better, religion) accepted with the literal faith that is theirs, and which Young England steadfastly ignored.

And the chorus of indolent reviewers rapidly worked up a new collection of old clichés, whose general purport was that Kipling had been over-estimated as a prose writer, and was in no sense of the word a poet.

* * *

The first statement is self-evidently absurd. So long as men speak the English language, "The Jungle Books" will be evidence of the fact that there was a man in England in our times, who was not less than his fathers—a man with divine power to imagine and to express. Mowgli satisfies part of the soul, as Don Quixote and Hamlet and Gargantua and Robinson Crusoe and Tom Jones satisfy. This is simply a fact. To discuss it further would be to join the ranks of those neurotics "whose weak eyes cannot suffer the spectacle of genius."

But with respect to the poetry the position is more ambiguous. Long ago it was said that his great poetry was his prose. Any reader of "The Bridge Builders" must feel the epical quality that supports one half the paradox. And any reader of "The Absent-minded Beggar" must regret the support which that bit of jingoistic balderdash affords the other half. Obviously the reviewers are within their rights when they castigate weaknesses of this description which often appear more nakedly in the verse than in the prose. Clearly they are justified when they pour their contempt upon outbursts like "The Sons of Martha" and "The Female of the Species," whose ghastly rhythms clog-dance in one's ears for days. One must give the reviewers best here, at the same time wishing that he had never written the poems in question. But one may ask

* RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE, INCLUSIVE EDITION. A new and enlarged edition containing some new poems. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. \$5.

This Week

"Sulla, the Fortunate."

Reviewed by *M. R. Dobie*.

French Books on America.

Reviewed by *Charles Cestre*.

"The Standardization of Error."

Reviewed by *E. M. East*.

Books on Blake.

Reviewed by *Foster Damon*.

"The Way Things Are," and "A Girl Adoring."

Reviewed by *Amy Loveman*.

"The Three-Cornered Hat."

Reviewed by *William Rose Benét*.

"Life and the Student," and "Literary Blasphemies."

Reviewed by *Arthur W. Colton*.

French Memoirs.

Reviewed by *Walter W. Hayward*.

Granules from an Hour Glass.

By *Christopher Morley*.

Next Week, or Later

Frémont.

Reviewed by *F. S. Dellenbaugh*.

ism (if they choose) as socially desirable as it is now socially undesirable, the victims of a downgrade movement toward degeneracy. They can be humiliated, can be scornful, can suffer from cynicism, can like work or hate it, can prostitute for profits, or take some pay out in satisfaction, like other men. They may be sheep in the sight of the universe, but not to each other or themselves.

It may be doubted, therefore, whether the present odorous condition of popular journalism is entirely to be charged to the sweaty public. Some of its evils are due to sheer exploitation, exactly equivalent

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why a lapse of taste on the part of Rudyard Kipling is unforgivable, while the intelligentsia say mildly to their protégés, "Go, and sin no more." Lapses of taste those poems certainly are—grotesque over-elaboration of truisms. And the mechanical analogies in which his soul delights too often indicate an interest in the machine rather than in that to which it is analogous. But this is no more than to say that he writes poor poetry when accident betrays him into the passionate consideration of matters of no overpowering spiritual import—something that can happen to Shelley.

And when it does happen, mastery of language and verse are an aggravation. The virtuoso's fingers crash out discords and cacophonies with the same outrageous power that rended our souls in the symphony. But we cannot recall that capricious and misguided hour with pleasure. Kipling has been guilty of this sort of thing much, much too often.

Perhaps causally connected with this is something we seem to have noticed about him. Walter de la Mare in a too little known essay has distinguished between poets. Aware that virtue has departed from the words "classical" and "romantic," he endeavored to discover a more exact definition. He based it on a description of attitude. "Do you find the Kingdom of God within you, or without you?" Kipling finds it without him rather too exclusively. No man in the history of literature had ever seen the world with such burning distinctness. To him, as to his own tracker of the jungle, "The lightning shows each littlest leaf-rib clear." Is it then any wonder that in his verse he should be so preoccupied with the outside of things? That he should spend his power in catching and preserving in the amber of language some ephemeral, winged appearance that but for him had perished in the general lapse of things? Over the whole outer aspect of the universe he is the superb and uncontrolled master. But the inner empire, has he subjected that to his will? Can he paint a spiritual landscape with the power that brings a jungle in the Deccan, an icefloe off Greenland, or a stretch of tropic beach visibly, audibly, and tangibly to our senses. The answer is that he can, and frequently won't. Why, God knows.



There can be no doubt that a great number of the poems in this volume suffer from this "externality." We see ten thousand superlative images which bear the same relation to great poetry that the brilliant pencil sketch of the master bears to the painting which glows with the unnamable interior light. The soldier swaggers by. The Pathan chief speaks to us. We are on the wild ride from Paniput to Delhi. But too often in the poetry we have merely a detached and blazing vignette, to illustrate something that may be foreign or dull.

We see

Ramparts of slaughter and peril—
Blazing, amazing, aglow—
Twixt the sky-line's belting beryl
And the wine-dark flats below—

and are let down with some moralistic remarks on the hard necessities of war. And when we go back

To the trumpet-flowers and the moon beyond
And the tree-toads' chorus drowning all—
And the lisp of the split banana frond
That talked us to sleep when we were small

the upshot of the miraculous stanzas is that the English will never understand the feelings of other people—something we are too apt to think we already knew. Too often the fox-fires of his mind blaze on a rotting trunk of platitude. Too often the electric current of imagery galvanizes a frog's leg that has kicked far too frequently.

For the sake of argument let us admit that these strictures are entirely just, something that the man who has thrown them together would hesitate to do. If they are so, then, as a great essayist on a similar occasion once remarked, "What of it?"

After all our carping, after all our reservations, our niminy-piminy objections, our intellectualized and judicial expression of prejudices no better than Kipling's own, where is there such another as he? And to whom does this generation that spits at him owe more? Debtors seldom love the man who lent them money. And pupils are not always grateful to their teachers. Kipling has suffered from this, but it is time we acknowledged our debt and admitted how we have been instructed. He showed us incomparably well a way of looking at the outer world. It would be more gracious to thank him for this

than to rebuke him for not showing us another way of looking at the inner universe. And who of all writers of these times has taught us more about the felicities and graces of our own tongue? How he has widened and enriched the language! With what art has he known to set a word so that every facet of it gives back the "blue-white spurt of a diamond." What beautiful ancient coinage has he reminted so that dull eyes have lighted, looking on the elephant chariots of Alexander or the dolphins of Syracuse! He is a light himself and he leads to illumination, and none need be ashamed to be in his debt—though too many of the two-spots of this world have seen fit to inform him as to the proper place to descend.

Not a poet! With those speaking things in hundreds of passages where he forgets the evil powers that beset him and all men—fascinating places where a voice, "all manly," utters with divine energy words that are more than words, places where emotions that seem simple suddenly appear in their universal complexity, and the new is in touch with the ancient deeps, and the old is lighted by strange fires. The things we have lost are here.

There walks no wind 'neath Heaven
Nor wave that shall restore
The old careening riot
And the clamorous, crowded shore—
The fountain in the desert,
The cistern in the waste,
The bread we ate in secret,
The cup we spilled in haste.

And what things has he found that we might have discovered—the meatiness, the flavor, and the zest of life and art, staled and corrupted for this generation not by suffering or war but by *cliché*—swapping critics at literary teas.

Oh charity all patiently
Abiding wrack and scaith!
Oh faith, that meets ten thousand cheats
Yet drops no jot of faith!
Devil and brute Thou dost transmute
To higher, lordlier show,
Who art in sooth that lovely truth
The careless angels know!
Thy face is far from this our war
Our call and counter-cry.

My god, how far!

And there are nobler notes. The American has often been angered by Kipling's dealings with us, seldom generous, and occasionally unjust. If in the passion of the war he disparaged us, we ought not to forget the side of his nature that also found utterance in those times. Poems like "Rebirth" are little read at present, but the writer believes that this will not always be so.

If any God should say
I will restore
The world her yesterday,
Whole as before
My Judgments blasted it—who would not lift
Heart, eye, and hand in passion o'er the gift?

If any God should will
To wipe from mind
The memory of this ill
Which is mankind
In soul and substance now—who would not bless
Even to tears His loving-tenderness?

If any God should give
Us leave to fly
These present deaths we live,
And safely die
In those lost lives we lived ere we were born—
What man but would not laugh the excuse to scorn?

For we are what we are—
So broke to blood
And the strict works of war—
So long subdued
To sacrifice, that threadbare Death commands
Hardly observance at our busier hands.

Yet we were what we were,
And, fashioned so,
It pleases us to stare
At the far show
Of unbelievable years and shapes that flit,
In our own likeness, on the edge of it.

There is something here that rises above a feuilletonist's praise as it transcends the hatred and the pettiness, the vulgarity and the vainglory which the time had foisted on the man. Milton struck that note and Wordsworth. Few others have attained to it.

My dithyramb draws to its close. To travesty a more important conclusion the pothouse critics will continue to abuse him without discernment, and we enthusiasts will continue to do him honor in the

same manner. Both alike will be ignorant of the true glory of the man who, since Robert Browning was carried to Westminster Abbey, has been the greatest force in English letters—a solitary and extraordinary figure with all the powers and all the defects of genius, at one moment shallow as blue mirage, at the next profound as the Bermuda Deep, wilful, long-suffering, petulant and kind, burning with poetic passion, shrill with artificial rhetoric, immortal in spite of himself by virtue of something hid behind the ranges of personality, that in itself was great.

Life and Times of Sulla

SULLA, THE FORTUNATE, THE GREAT
DICTATOR: BEING AN ESSAY IN POLITICS
IN THE FORM OF A HISTORICAL
BIOGRAPHY. By G. P. BAKER. New York:
Dodd, Mead & Company. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by M. R. DOBIE

AS our knowledge of antiquity increases, our confidence in accepted authorities and traditions declines. When authors who wrote in Greek and Latin were believed incapable of deception or error, it was possible for us to write *Lives of Great Men*, with appropriate reflections on the vanity of ambition and advice to Sulla "to forswear public life and sleep sound." Now the historian must weigh evidence and argue the merits of rival hypotheses, until his work reads like the report of a lawsuit.

Mr. Baker returns to the manner of the "life and times" of a great man. He quotes no sources, he does not argue; he has formed his opinion, and bids us take it or leave it. The method has its dangers; for the reader has no guarantee in the book itself, that the author has not departed from the evidence, out of ignorance, frivolity, or a wicked desire to deceive. In this case, he may be reassured. Mr. Baker has used his sources most conscientiously in reconstructing a man and his environment, and on the few occasions on which he writes what may be called fiction, in presenting things from his hero's point of view or describing the reactions of personalities, it is avowed and legitimate fiction, like the speeches of Thucydides, based on reasonable suppositions.

The result is a very vivid picture, as accurate as our knowledge permits, of that strange, turbulent Rome, blundering dangerously in its new-found emancipation from old disciplines and its new-found wealth and power, to be saved in the end by the new discipline of the Empire. It begins with the Gracchi and ends with Julius Caesar. The persons of the story, whether individuals or groups, are endowed with a life which makes their conflicts truly dramatic. The great events and problems of the age—the breakdown of aristocracy, the growth of the financial class, the appearance of a nation as opposed to a city, and the advent of monarchy—are set forth with vigor and justice, and are accompanied by reflections which make this truly a philosophic history. As instances of the originality of Mr. Baker's views (at least, they are new to the present reviewer), one may mention his interesting distinction between the position of the aristocrat and that of the oligarch at the time, his statements that the large estates meant a political, but not an economic disaster, and that the number of citizens had to increase with the power of Rome, and his portraits of Lucullus and Crassus.

Perhaps he makes the Rome of the time a little too rude and antique. Greek culture had long flourished in the circle of Scipio Æmilianus, and Cato the Censor had protested against its corrupting influence before his day. It can hardly be said that there were as yet no Oriental Mysteries in Rome, when Plautus had ridiculed the "tambourine-bangers" of Cybele almost a century ago, and the affair of the Bacchanalia was a thing of the past. Mr. Baker might also have said a little more about the great Hellenistic kingdoms, which must surely have had some influence, as an example, on the political development of Rome. He hardly mentions them, and speaks as if the only institution known, except the ancient monarchies of the East, was the Greek city-state, now fallen into chaos. But these are only points of disagreement with a book which, in addition to its more serious merits, is most enjoyable.

A special word must be said for the maps, which not only are useful, but by their decorative character greatly add to the attractiveness of the volume.