

The Last Question of All, by C. E. Montague, on page 218

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The Decay of Rhythm

WE are forgetting how to read poetry. If four or five in a casual group are asked to read poems—even well-known poems—aloud, the results will strike the least observant ear. One reader will beat it out on a metronome, coming down heavily on all the accented (and some unaccented) syllables. Another will sing-song in a voice that tries not to seem affected. The rest will probably do their best to reduce good poetry to bad prose, like actors who have to recite blank verse.

Something has happened to our sense of rhythm. Perhaps the anthropologists are right, and rhythm is one of the primitive instincts which civilization overlays and weakens. It may be like sight or hearing or smell or the sense of physical danger which are notoriously keener in primitive man.

But this explanation is too simple. Our loss of gusto for rhythm in poetry is evident; it has been recognized by poets who have taken over increasingly into modern verse the irregular rhythms of prose. Poetical rhythmic prose, such as Ruskin wrote, has almost disappeared, or survives only in degenerate examples, where writers for the magazines try to strike the "human note," or where sentimental novelists throw their "great scene" into bastard hexameters. Our standard prose in newspapers, magazine articles, advertisements, and most books, and in the best speaking and writing, is apparently unrhythmic, though actually with its own rhythmus, but certainly with these rhythms as little stressed as may be. Compare

O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

with a sentence from any modern account of a murder trial. And a vast amount of poetry tends to plane itself down to these unstressed measures, capturing the mind by beauty of image or of word rather than by rhythmic phrase.

Yet at the very moment when all this is happening, rhythm—stressed emphatic rhythm, rhythm that pounds like Byron's

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold—

has swept through the ears of civilization like a popular song in the 'nineties or an epidemic of influenza. As poetry has lost its emphasis music has taken it on. Music in its more elementary forms, especially dance music, has become popular, and it is a jazz music of pounded rhythm (sometimes only pound and no music at all) that carries rhythm back into life over a million radios from a hundred thousand singers and plays.

It is difficult on a summer's day, with the windows open, to escape from an insistent rhythm anywhere short of a mountain peak or a row boat in mid-ocean. Life moves to a syncopated beat, and if it were not for the deadly flatness of the announcers' voices on the radio, you might believe that jazz staccato must inevitably creep in, even into our talk. But as a life in the midst of rhythm affects them so little, probably this fear is not justified.

It seems, then, that our sense of rhythm has been weakened to the point where it takes a stronger stimulus than poetry to make it respond. This rhythmic response is like a muscle. It has to be exercised or the human suffers. If it is not Shakespeare or Beethoven that awakes it, then it will be a jazz orchestra, or, failing anything else, a spoon tapping on a table or the delectable rattle of a stick on a picket fence. There is a picket fence nearly a mile long

Try Tropic for Your Balm

(On the Properties of Nature for Healing an Illness)

By GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

TRY tropic for your balm,
Try storm,
And after storm, calm.
Try snow of heaven, heavy, soft, and slow,
Brilliant and warm.
Nothing will help, and nothing do much harm.

Drink iron from rare springs; follow the sun;
Go far
To get the beam of some medicinal star;
Or in your anguish run
The gauntlet of all zones to an ultimate one.
Fever and chill
Punish you still,
Earth has no zone to work against your will.

Burn in the jewelled desert with the toad.
Catch lace
In evening mist across your haunted face;
Or walk in upper air the slanted road.
It will not lift that load;
Nor will large seas undo your subtle ill.

Nothing can cure and nothing kill
What ails your eyes, what cuts your pulse in two,
And not kill you.

Boswell to Presidents*

By CLAUDE G. BOWERS

IN "Masks in a Pageant," William Allen White has painted some extraordinarily fine portraits, and through the careful selection of his subjects has managed to make his book very like a consecutive story of the political life of the country in the last half century. It is impossible for any one to acquiesce in all his conclusions, but just as impossible to question his intention to be just. Most of these portraits are painted from life, the sitters having been in intimate contact with the painter in his work as a journalist. In these the coloring is vivid. The figures actually quiver on the canvas.

There are a few, that are notably fine, such as the painting of Harrison, which denotes no little meticulous research; and yet, such is the art of the writer here displayed, that each study conveys the impression of an intimate association. The author seems a Boswell to them all. His style, while sprightly and colorful, is singularly free from that cheap flippancy through which so many sensationalists who are flooding the book shops with biographical matter seek to gloss over the superficiality of their work. In short, these are brilliant essays, written in most respects with fidelity to the facts, and because the author writes in several cases from a personal acquaintance, and describes graphically so many historic scenes he personally witnessed, this book is, we believe, destined to have a permanent value.

It is a courageous book, too, and some will think it iconoclastic. It is merely honest and courageous. There is no attempt to push anyone from a pedestal. Happily no attempt to make a hero out of a Stuffed Shirt. Even the respectable mediocrities with whom the author deals are touched up sympathetically on their human side. And historically it is the work of a realist. The author has no illusions as to the age in which we live. He makes it clear that we are living now under a Hamiltonian plutocracy. That is true, of course, but hard to say. It may even send some political clubs down to Trinity churchyard again with wreaths for the grave of Hamilton and some ladies of literary societies may protest against the denial of the importance of the part played by him in the establishment of the government. Of course there is no such denial; merely an honest definition of plutocracy as Hamiltonian. Hamilton believed honestly in the rule of money, and made no bones about it; his followers, with less guts and red blood, believe as he believed but slather it over with hypocrisy.

These characters are treated in groups. There are the Old Kings—the bosses, Croker and Platt; and the Warwicks, Bryan and Hanna; and the princes of the urban democracy, Smith and Thompson. These out, there is a consecutive story of the swaying fortunes of the fight between democracy and plutocracy. This is treated under three significant heads—The Early Stuarts, Harrison and McKinley; the Great Rebellion, Roosevelt, Wilson and Taft; and the Restoration, Harding and Coolidge. Under the Early Stuarts money, as such, ruled without ostentation and with some circumspection; during the Great Rebellion the rights of men to the domination of government in the cause of man were uppermost; and since the Restoration

* MASKS IN A PAGEANT. By WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1928. \$5.

This Week



- "The Buck in the Snow."
Reviewed by *Louis Untermeyer*.
- "The Brain from Ape to Man."
Reviewed by *Robert M. Yerkes*.
- "Point Counter Point."
Reviewed by *Richard Curle*.
- "Costumes of Eros."
Reviewed by *R. N. Linscott*.
- "Reginald, and Reginald in Russia."
Reviewed by *Elmer Davis*.
- "The Drafting of the Covenant."
Reviewed by *Charles Seymour*.
- "Politicians and the War."
Reviewed by *J. W. T. Mason*.
- "New Songs for New Voices."
Reviewed by *Deems Taylor*.

Next Week, or Later

Dickens.
By *J. Ranken Towse*.

near Branford, Connecticut, the esthetic possibilities of which are simply inestimable.

We are, in fact, drugging our rhythmic faculties with the strong beats of syncopated music. That is why young people are not reading poetry. They dance too much. One doubts whether it is possible to dance six nights to jazz music and be able to read good poetry with rhythmic comprehension for some

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the rule of money is not only open but blatant. All this is unquestionably true, but is it wise to set it forth? We are afraid it may make the judicious grieve. Even so we rejoice that it has been done and so graphically. People who cannot see a picture through the printed page can see it on the canvas.

It is a tribute not only to the art but to the literary integrity of the author that there is nothing of caricature in the portraits of Croker and Tom Platt. Of the two as here painted we much prefer the former to the latter, because he is infinitely more human. One was something of a bully and the other everything of a sneak; and if both used the instrumentalities of government to fleece the public, Croker gave a share of his profits to the poor, while Platt robbed to increase the profits of the rich. In view of Mr. White's prejudices against Tammany it seems incredible that he intended to make an attractive figure out of a Tammany boss, but that is precisely what he has done.

To me the most startling portrait in the book is that of Harrison; not that it presents any new phase to one who, as a child, sat once or twice in the old patrician's parlor and looked with some awe upon the cold, leathery, wrinkled face, but because it does justice to him. That has not been fashionable. The average man imagines that he was a very ordinary man. He was, in truth, one of the most intellectual men ever elected to the Presidency, and a fine gentleman, a little too class conscious to be sure, but ever above stooping to petty things. We doubt whether he had any inferiority complex on account of his height. It would have been just like him to have been a bit proud because he was no shorter than Napoleon. But on the whole the Harrison here painted is our conception of the man. We hear of this man's literary style and that one's but never these days of Harrison's. The author reminds us that he was notable for the dignity, simplicity, and rugged strength of the spoken word.

Quite as unfashionable is the penetrating, almost devastating portrait of Cleveland whose moral and political stature has been much exaggerated ever since he went over to the rule-of-money men in the last Administration. He who emerges from the strokes of Mr. White's brush is not awe inspiring. A rather dull, heavy, unresponsive, commonplace man in whose biography the author thinks neither Plutarch nor Boswell would delight. And yet all his virtues are painted in with his supreme selfishness—his industry, his courage, his simplicity. Ultimately we are convinced that this picture will be that which posterity will accept. The record of his actual achievements is not impressive as here set down. He was not concerned much with the crusading spirit. He was a lawyer guarding an estate.



The portraits of McKinley and Mark Hanna should have gone together, for one was the product of the other, and the two ushered in a rather brazen plutocracy according to the showing here made. It is clear that Mr. White prefers the unmoral pirate to the more circumspect receiver of the goods. In truth we had never thought to have such a sneaking respect for the old pirate as this book has given us. The painter has touched up the boisterous, blundering, bull-doing, old political reprobate with something of a loving hand, and we can understand why he did it. The very audacity of the man invites color. He believed as firmly in the divine right of money to rule as the Stuarts did in the divine right of kings. One can admire and even respect him, just as one must admire and respect old Thad Stevens or the Captain Kidd of our childhood imagining. Beneath his rough exterior there was a fine vein of sentiment. This portrait is a real creation.

We are given another pleasant shock in the portrait of Bryan. Now, because he made a fool of himself on religion and prohibition, the average liberal finds it proper to deny him any strength or virtue. Mr. White thinks of him as one who contributed more to the cause of liberalism than this generation realizes. Great heart, great courage, great crusading genius, but without the constructive faculty or enough of the background of learning—there is the Bryan of this study. But how perfectly silly for intelligent people to deny him credit for arousing the nation to the need of radical reforms. At first his was a voice crying in the wilderness and everyone qualified for membership in our best clubs by hurling stones at him; and the rattle of the stones only helped him awaken the conscience of the masses. Had there been no Bryan there would have been no Wilson and no Roosevelt; for these took the

harvest after Bryan had cleared the field and dropped the seed, and in the heat of a deadly sun, tended it to fruition. After all, the jobs in the offices depend upon the success of the drummer on the road. "He was right fundamentally," says Mr. White, "as often as any statesman of his time." Which may, or may not mean that he had "a stunted mind."

The Harding who looks out upon us from this canvas is the well-groomed, handsome weakling that the country now knows too well perhaps. A good-natured man of no learning but with a glib tongue and a musical voice and graceful manner, who lived with "the boys," and took himself none too seriously; a part of a machine that moved with the rest of the machinery when some one pushed the button. There is something ineffably appealing in this portrait, and we pass on to the next without admiration but with a genuine sympathy and a wish that destiny had not touched him with its wand.

Of course Mr. Harding was the first in the line of the Restoration, which in its subservience to money in government goes far beyond the dynasty that preceded the Great Rebellion. Mr. Coolidge is here shown to hold even more Hamiltonian views without possessing the human charm of his predecessor. "No qualities of leadership . . . always undramatic, unimaginative . . . deadly careful,"—a man who "would prefer to get the day's work done as duly and easily as possible." Moreover he soon "made it clear that he was heartily with the tendency toward our Hamiltonian plutocracy." Thus "the Liberal movement which came to rest in 1917 had no resurrection under Coolidge." Perhaps this will suffice. It is the portrait by a realist, and not a propagandist.

The two most thrilling studies are those of Wilson and Roosevelt, both painted as progressives. One can imagine just the shadow of a leer or sneer on the artist's face as he paints Wilson, his face beaming boy-wise as a worshiping child in the presence of Babe Ruth as he paints Roosevelt. It would be just the other way around, we suspect, had we done the painting, but there is no use quarreling with a feeling. One made more noise, and the other did more great progressive and constructive things. It does seem a pity, however, that we again have the thoroughly exploded story that Wilson refused a commission to Roosevelt on personal grounds and kept Gen. Wood from France in spite. Gen. Pershing knows better. The absurdity of the charge that Wilson played politics with the war is the fact that Hoover is a Republican nominee for President, because Wilson made him, and Pershing is an asset on the stump for Hoover, because Wilson made him too.

The portrait of Smith will attract attention because of Mr. White's hostility to his candidacy. Aside from an undue accentuation of the tragedy that befell Smith in being born in a city, it is a square attempt to be square. As the author concedes it is no worse to be born in "a back alley"—which is exaggerated by the way, than to be born in a backwoods like Jackson and Lincoln.

The Decay of Rhythm

(Continued from preceding page)

days or weeks afterward. Our instinct for rhythm has got back to the tom-tom stage when only a loud beating noise can awake it. Perhaps it was dying before. Perhaps the insistent trickeries of Longfellow and the smooth sinuosities of wave capping wave of Swinburne were decadences indicating its approaching descent into flat newspaper prose. Perhaps this savage dum-dum of jazz is a heroic recharging of the battery, until we shall be capable again not only of the subtle rhythms of finer music, but the lovely wedding of harmonious sound to sense which is the best in poetry—able to appreciate the refinements of writers who would shade their style by gradations all the way from a blank verse lifted just above prose to the intricate beauty of lines as rich as phrases from Stravinsky.

Just at the moment, however, it seems that radio jazz is the same kind of substitute for the rhythm of poetry as back-yard grape fortified by industrial alcohol for Château Neuf des Papes. Soon we shall be asking for poetry with the punch of a soda water bottle. A really good anthology—such as *The Golden Treasury*, or *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, is recommended for this disease of the rhythmic centres—to be read each night slowly, for sound as well as sense.

The Logic of Childhood

JUDGMENT AND REASONING IN THE CHILD. By JEAN PIAGET. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1928.

Reviewed by ARNOLD GESELL
Yale University

PROFESSOR PIAGET has provided us with a valuable sequel to his earlier volume entitled "Language and Thought of the Child" (reviewed in the August 25, 1928, number of this journal). Together these two volumes constitute what is in a sense the first systematic outline of the logic of childhood.

Dr. Piaget is Professor of the University of Geneva, and is Director of the Institut Rousseau, a center for research into problems of child development. The author approaches his subject in the spirit of a naturalist and of a clinical observer. The pages are crowded with dialogues and soliloquies, interspersed with statistics and specimens of childish conversation elicited under both spontaneous and experimental conditions. Eight children from three to seven years of age furnished 10,000 recorded remarks for analytic study. Scores of children from four to twelve years were individually examined with numerous questions and test situations, to determine their ability to distinguish between right and left, to detect absurdities and contradictions, to introspect, to define, to judge and reason about simple mechanical and physical problems.

The result of these patient studies is a mass of verbatim data which wears a superficial guise of familiarity and even of triviality. But Piaget comments on this "obvious" material with such penetrating analysis that we are afforded definitely new glimpses into the dynamics of the child's reasoning.

The very intimacy of our ordinary acquaintance with children tends to blur perception of their true nature. There is an inveterate tendency to regard the child as a miniature adult, merely reduced in dimensions but identical in organization. It is the business of genetic psychology to dispel this error. We place such naive interpretation on the language and thought of the child that systematic study of their peculiar mechanism is a scientific, and ultimately, a practical necessity. For one thing we shall not understand much of the "lying" of young children until we appreciate the frailties of early logic, which up to the age of eight years make the child's thought literally teem with contradictions. Piaget found an intelligent boy of seven and one-half years who said that boats float because they are light. In the next breath this same boy said that big boats float because forsooth they are big and heavy enough to support themselves. He was blissfully innocent of the incompatibility of his statements.

Logical reasoning proper is a fruit of long and slow growth. Although a child will sometimes use the conjunction "because" at the age of three years, a verbatim report of 10,000 spontaneous remarks of pre-school children failed to yield a single utterance that could be counted as a process of explicit reasoning. The plane of formal thought and logical assumptions is not reached till adolescence.

In discussing the stages of development of reasoning the author utilizes psychoanalytic concepts, and perhaps places undue explanatory stress upon the egocentrism of the child. He holds that this egocentrism is responsible for the difficulty with which children handle relative notions, to say nothing of conjunctions of causality and of discordance. Egocentrism is the twilight zone between the pure pleasure seeking autism of infancy and the socialized thought of the adult. The child is a realist but he moulds the world with reference to his immediate personal point of view; he has little capacity for objective observation; he confuses words and things; thought and the object of thought; his judgments are of an irreversible sort; he has scant synthetic capacity. "In a word, he is conscious of nothing but his own subjectivity."

Although the text requires close reading it is far from dull and is so contributive both in content and suggestion, that it will have a stimulating effect on many students. The author warns against hasty application of his conclusion to other fields; but he would not deny that the laws of child logic have pertinence for related problems in comparative and abnormal psychology. A comprehension of the slow and halting growth of reasoning in the child will assist in the interpretation of primitive mentality, autistic and symbolic thinking and infantile characteristics in adult thought.