



Word-Minded Dictators

THE old-fashioned conception of literature as belles lettres written for the delectation of connoisseurs is rapidly disappearing. New histories of literature, like Parrington's studies of the intellectual life of America, or Mr. Van Wyck Brooks's description of the esthetic flowering of New England, depart widely from the rutted track of fiction, poetry, and essay. As one finds philosophy exhibited in a foreign policy as clearly as in an academic system, so literature can be found in oratory or a state document as often as in the sweet airs that give delight and hurt not of poetry or the drama.

Once the question, What were the best books of an age? is changed to a very different query, Where did the literary impulse attain to its greatest influence?, the nature of literary history sensibly alters. With the second question, we are trying to discover a force rather than a merit, and that force will often prove to have been most vigorous in unexpected directions, often outside of the province of the orthodox literary historian.

What, for example, were the outstanding writings of the period 1914-1917? Unquestionably, as one looks back, the notes and messages of Woodrow Wilson. They had the intensity and cogency of phrasing which is a sign of high literary potential. They put expressions into the language which firmly rooted there and will probably continue to be familiar: "too proud to fight," "make the world safe for democracy." We are not discussing here the wisdom, the validity, or ultimate usefulness of these messages. It is indeed too early to tell. But the word charged with emotion (which is a good definition of literature) reached its highest effective voltage in those days in the writings of Wilson.

The parallel with today is interesting. If one asks what have been the most effective discharges of emotionalized words in recent years, the answer is obvious. They have been in the speeches of Hitler and Mussolini, our two word-minded dictators.

Some may question the use of "literary" for Hitler. It cannot be used except by

stretching the term to cover rhetoric, as rhetoric was understood in the days of oratory. "Mein Kampf" is very villainous literature, but regarded as rhetoric it has its persuasive excellences. As for Hitler's speeches, those who have experienced many say that he makes but one. Every speech ranges through a group of selected appeals to the emotions—and these appeals are extraordinarily effective even in the ears of his enemies, who scoff at his ideas as set down in cold print but are moved by his oratory. It would seem probable that we have had no more outstanding example of rhetoric pure and simple since the days of the Romans.

But with Mussolini we pass into a murky realm that has always been claimed by literature. Whatever he may be in practice, in his speeches he is a great romantic in the tradition of Byron. Like that great ego who liked to think of himself as a persecuted archangel, and who spoke for the imperial romanticism of Napoleon so much better than Napoleon himself, Mussolini deals entirely in terms of magnitude. His Italians are encouraged to think of themselves as of greatness suppressed. Glory, courage, disdain for petty welfare, but most of all glory, are fed to them in words which must recall to every literary student a romantic age which we thought was safely dead. As with Byron (before he got there) the Greek revolution was exalted into a battle for the age of Pericles, so with Mussolini the Abyssinian adventure is a first stroke for the revival of the wide swung Roman empire whose vastness is necessary in order to match the greatness of the Italian soul.

Mussolini is a Childe Harold, who if he can impress Europe with his own and his people's greatness is careless of what whirlwinds may follow his words. Hitler is a Marc Antony, who can change minds with a speech, but seems recklessly disregarding of the ultimate results. Thus time brings about its revenges on the proneness of the human race to choose bad literature for their stimulus in preference to good.

"Subject Culture" Whether it is more important for teachers to know their subject or to know how to teach it, was discussed at length by M. Ernest Townsend, President of the New Jersey State Normal School, in last Sunday's *Herald Tribune*. It is the old quarrel between subject and object, not easily settled in a democracy that refuses to spend much money on teachers' education, by saying that they should know both. Dr. Townsend is a good debater. He makes out an excellent case for teachers as practitioners in the field of human guidance. What good for them to know, if they cannot impart—if they are unaware of those rules of mental behavior which psychology and pedagogy teach, ignorance of which leaves the teacher helpless before a class that is led to water but will not drink?

The arguments, as he states them, are

impressive. But unfortunately the evidence points in a different direction. Grant the value of a psychological training, grant the usefulness of pedagogy, and still it is the born teacher who, in this profession which will always be more art than science, is successful, even without pedagogy. Whereas the products of our normal schools must be judged, as a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* maintained, by the fruits of their teaching, with results most damaging to all concerned.

And does anyone know his object who does not know his subject? English is the medium of all our teaching. Should not a sound knowledge of the language precede even pedagogy and psychology? There is surely something wrong with a system that permits Dr. Townsend, a teacher of teachers, to write "There are some who would deplore this controversy, in spite of the fact that . . . constant improvement in the status of teachers has transpired." Or to produce such a tumor upon expression as: "General culture represented by subject-matter offerings is increasingly subjected to appropriate refinement, including investment with professional implication."

As Caesar said of Antony, one does not much dislike the matter, but the manner of his speech. All hail to pedagogy; but if we have "serious-minded scholars laying themselves open to just criticism through their unwitting acquiescence to the belief that [people can teach] with only the insights gained in the undirected acquisition of subject culture," surely we have normal school presidents proving that they can lay down the law without having really mastered that medium indispensable for all teaching the language itself? Perhaps the methodologists have dropped their "subject culture" too soon!

Ten Years Ago

"Which Way Parnassus?" a discussion of American education by Percy Marks, was reviewed by C. W. Mendell in a late Fall issue of *The Saturday Review* in 1926. The reviewer felt that the book was aimed only at those "who enjoy hearing the difficulties and shortcomings of colleges elaborated," and concluded that it contained little that was new. Percy Marks had previously (1924) written "The Plastic Age," a novel of college life.

Today

On page 7 of this issue, William Rose Benét reviews Percy Marks's new novel, "A Tree Grown Straight." Mr. Benét writes: "Mr. Marks's strongest suit is his description of adolescence. It is not for nothing that his former 'The Plastic Age' attracted attention. This author knows what impressionable youth is up against."

Letters to the Editor: *Cooper and the Schools; Santayana and Amiel*

Cooper Memorial

SIR:—For a long time, I have felt that we should do something in a substantial way to show the Board of Education that we appreciate the fact that they have named several Public Schools in honor of American men and women who have attained fame as writers.

With this in view, I found a few friends who still remember the thrills they experienced in their boyhood in the reading and rereading of the *Leather Stocking Tales* of Cooper. So I raised a little fund and we have purchased a bronze tablet of about 26 x 56 inches in which will be set a portrait of Cooper done on bronze and etched in 24-K gold, and in cooperation with and with the enthusiastic approval of Dr. George J. Ryan, President of the Board of Education, this tablet will be erected in the James Fenimore Cooper Junior High School at 116th Street west of 5th Avenue, and we hope to have it dedicated about March first.

It appears to me altogether fitting that we should make this acknowledgement of Cooper's position in American literature because I was not only greatly surprised but impressed in some of my foreign travels to find that the *Leather Stocking Tales* are perhaps the best known and often the only known American fiction in many of the countries where one would least expect it; such as Persia, Turkey, Russia, and the Orient.

I hope that the dedication of the tablet will deserve and receive much general publicity, and it will naturally follow easily that we can erect similar memorials to Edgar Allan Poe and half a dozen others in schools that are already named, and then recommend to the Board of Education the naming of still more schools after American writers.

MARK O. PRENTISS.

Mr. Prentiss informs us that since writing this letter he has formed a sponsoring committee for the Cooper Memorial which includes Van Wyck Brooks, Christopher Morley, William McFee, Edward Hungerford, Will Irwin, Lowell Thomas, William Lyon Phelps, James Thurber, Harry Elmer Barnes, Robert E. Spiller, with Henry Seidel Canby as chairman.

An American Amiel

SIR:—I am prompted to observe how strange it is that no critic or reviewer has seen the similitude of "The Last Puritan" to Amiel's "Journal Intime." Oliver Alden more nearly resembles in his soul struggles, in the tyranny which his intellect exerts upon him, it appears to me, Henry Frederic Amiel, than the hero of "The Way of All Flesh" or even of "Marius the Epicurean," though the similitude in these latter cases is not inapt. Though no critic has so described him, Oliver is an American Amiel, unable to reconcile the life of thought with the life of action. He was affected with what Gautier, years ago in the *Mercure de France*, was pleased to describe as *la maladie d'Idéal*, another manifestation



"LET'S GO SOMEWHERE QUIETER. THAT BASSOON IS MAKING
A HELL OF A NOISE."

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of which Gautier described as "Bovaryism," with what affinity is evident.

Oliver is a Protestant Puritan, as was Amiel, for there are acknowledgedly Catholic Puritans, too, of a different stripe. Oliver lacks the intellectual, but not the emotional tolerance of Amiel. He has his same sensuous response to nature and beauty, but Oliver was less reclusal than Amiel. He saved himself by complete retreat from the reality which Oliver was too little able to face or effect. Amiel's retreat saved him, at least corporeally. Oliver destroyed himself by continuous attempt to orient himself to conditions. Amiel shunned them, and dreamed.

ANNE WHELAN.

New Haven, Conn.

Daniel D. Home

SIR: I am engaged on a critical study of the career of Daniel Dunglas Home, the spiritualist, who died in 1886. I should be very grateful for any material, letters, or portraits, which will be returned.

HORACE WYNDHAM.

2 Whitehall Court,
London, England.

The Author of "Prue and I"

SIR: About two years ago your column kindly carried a notice of my proposed critical biography of George W. Curtis, American essayist, orator, and civil service reformer of the nineteenth century.

I was surprised at the warm response on the part of lovers of Curtis from Massachusetts to Iowa, many of whom sent me unpublished letters and other data of Mr. Curtis. Since I am using this proposed biography as a Ph.D. dissertation,

I am anxious to make the research as thorough as possible. Would you be kind enough to request again for me any unpublished letters of the author of "Prue and I" or other material that could be used by me? I assure your readers that any material placed at my disposal will be preserved and returned to the owners.

FRANKLIN T. WALKER.

Mississippi College,
Clinton, Miss.

William Morris

SIR:—The undersigned is engaged in the preparation of a book on William Morris and begs the hospitality of your columns to inquire whether some of your readers may be in possession of unpublished letters or clippings, or out of print pamphlets, containing statements relative to Mr. Morris's views concerning socialism, anarchism, or communism—or to his relations with socialists, anarchists, and communists. If so, possibly some arrangements could be made to secure copies of the material.

LLOYD WENDELL ESHLEMAN.

121 East 77th Street,
New York City.

William James Linton

SIR: I am at present preparing a biographical study of William James Linton, wood-engraver and poet of the nineteenth century. I should greatly appreciate hearing from any persons who may have correspondence or other original material relating to him in connection with his political or artistic or literary work.

FRASER NEIMAN.

192 Upland Road,
Cambridge, Mass.