



Patent Medicine

ON a Saturday morning some twenty years ago, three members of an expedition slid down a sequoia trail from the high Sierras into a lumber camp on the edge of unbroken forest. They were after provisions, but there were only bran and flour for sale in the little camp store in the clearing. If food was scarce, however, there was plenty of medicine. Four long shelves above the counter glittered with a collection of patent medicines of which Liggett's might have been proud. There were elixirs to prolong life, remedies guaranteed to take hold of powerful diseases and shake the life out of them, colored fluids warranted to cure consumption in a week, jars of pain killer, tonics that would build up health on the edge of the grave. And all were violent, all boasted of the speed with which they cured, all were short cuts to health. And every bottle, box, and jar was stamped with the picture of some hero and dictator of medicine, bearded, virile, triumphant, holding a bottle in his hand like a pistol or a hand grenade.

Lumbering in the hot sun and cold nights of the Sierras, sawing and chopping the vast trees, banking logs as big as bungalows, was a hazardous trade requiring youth and muscle, so one doubts whether these fiery doses did much harm. The lumbermen could take it, at least until rheumatism got them. They were violent, ignorant men, who had not been told that tuberculosis was caused by a germ, and that joints ached because of too much salt pork plus too long wading in cold water. There was some curative value in the brash, assertative labels of those bottles. A swig of pain killer helped the men to get along for awhile, a swallow of colored water laced with a sedative quieted the cough which a few years later would be tearing the lungs away. Nothing is more seductive to the unwell than patent medicine.

All over the supposedly civilized world they are offering us patent medicines today—patent medicines in shining bottles, with heroes on the labels offering peace by power, prosperity by conquest, and

happiness through obedience. Your morale is low? Well, give up your will and your children to the state. See airfleets fly over, watch the millions at march, believe what we tell you, that you are God's pure and chosen people—and already you feel better. Your armies were beaten in the last war, your swarming population is no longer welcomed in other lands? Let Mussolini bluster for you, and you will be cured. The Italians *do* feel better. So do the Germans. So do the Japanese, who have got rid of the sense of racial strangulation by what may prove to be the illusion of more land on the Continent.

But the world is not made up of lumbermen. We can't take patent medicine long without what Burns called a curmurring in the guts. Napoleonic wars supported by "la gloire" (a patent medicine) leave a thirty years' headache behind them. We ought to know, and can readily find out, what has happened after inflation—whether of money, vaingloriousness, or pugnacity. As has often been said in these columns, impressive numbers of books, historical, sociological, anthropological, philosophic, and economic, are now available to anyone who wants to know what has been, and presumably will be, the results of patent medicines in politics. The best of these books are negative rather than positive. They contain no panaceas, but they do make abundantly clear what bluster and bluff and calculated violence and international immorality have led to in the past. Even more impressively, they demonstrate by fact and figure the cost of modern imperialism and exploitation in terms of war, taxes, economic crises, and social demoralization. From them one can readily learn that if democracy fails it will be from its own vices, and not because it is democracy; and that if totalitarianism succeeds it will only be because the dictators are intelligent enough to substitute internal hygiene for the patent medicine of conquest. For the world is not mentally and physically young like the lumbermen, and neither its health nor its sanity will stand much more poison.

In the United States, so far, all we can complain of is that we have taken to tonics when we needed a purge. In social reconstruction we are still ten to twenty years behind the program of the English Tories—and have been told we could catch up without pain or loss of profits. That was patent medicine, though not so dangerous as the poison of the reactionaries, who since the Civil War have been putting profits ahead of real progress. Russia took the first big swig of patent medicine—proletarian autocracy, destruction of the bourgeoisie—and has been having visible gripes lately for obvious reasons. Germany swallowed its doses like a regiment at a clinic, its rulers fortifying the tonic of hope with the alcohol of vanity, hate, and racial snobishness. Germany spewed out the Jews and radicals, and has been filling the

vacuum with the superheated steam of militarism. It is a nation grieved by its history, and forgetful of its philosophy. Japan is trying a cure by blood, and there is no patent medicine—not even aphrodisiacs—so dangerous as stimulants to blood-thirstiness. Where are the Mongols? Where are the Assyrians? What became of the Turks who fastened on a civilization and sucked it dry? Italy is a success story—all but the last chapter, and the bill for printing. A mean French peasant is safer for civilization than a drug clerk who has been told that he is an imperial Roman. And there is not very much variety in the drugs they are all taking. The same firm that has long catered to man's desire to prove his superiority by exploiting or beating up his neighbors, fills most of the bottles with new mixtures of the same old intoxicants. It has taken the scientists hundreds of years to wean us from rhinoceros horns and powdered pearls as cures for our fevers and belly-aches. How much longer before these far more dangerous medicines of the mind will be known for what they are!

If this were an essay instead of an editorial, it would be easy to bring in specific instances of patent medicines recently administered of a quality so dangerous by any historical test that their like has rarely been seen even in politics. Consult General Goering's remarks of last week, or Mussolini *passim*. The German is the strongest, because the nostrum makers there really believe in their product. The Italian is the noisiest, because Mussolini has the most to cure and the least time to do it in. We had plenty of bogus cures in our war propaganda, but this dangerous talking of the present is different from propaganda. Propaganda is for the unbeliever, or half believer. This political patent medicine is for the already convinced, and is meant to keep him inflated with the self-regarding idealism of his national state. For it is idealism which is being pumped out of the fermenting vats of nationalism—make no mistake as to that. This is no realist's world in which we are living; it is as romantic (in one sense of that much abused word) as the age of religious wars or the wars of the Roses. A realist nation would learn something from the history of the individual, in which law and coöperation have made it possible to live without a sword in the hand and a knife in the belt. A realist nation would consider that both theft and miserliness have been proved economically unsound and socially disastrous. But what goes by the name of realism now is really cynical defeatism. The best remedy for that (next to education and common sense) is, as dictators know, patent medicine, the bad medicine of a perverted and pathological idealism. And the beginning of a cure for many now somewhat precariously alive is to recognize patent medicine from the label on the bottle.

H. S. C.

Letters to the Editor: *America's Day-Dream; Books in Arctic Norway*

Magic, Not Logic

SIR:—In my opinion, Mr. Lovell Thompson concluded an otherwise highly perceptive analysis of America's comics with a couple of sentences which might be misleading—misleading both as to America's soul or destiny and to the conclusions one is justified in making from a study of a nation's comic sheets. "America wants Magic, not Logic. It does not want a Lenin, but a Jeep or a Kingfish," writes Mr. Thompson. I may or may not agree with the idea behind these phrases for other reasons, but, I ask, is that what a nation's comics indicate of the people who write and read them? Do the comics of nations ruled by Lenins tell what we should, by this theory, expect? Or do they reveal what—by another theory—we should expect: that the comics of all nations, as comics, exhibit the same imaginative fancy, playful humor, and magical adventure that we find in America's comics?

No, I'm afraid one can't judge a nation's character—especially its political character—by studying its comics. What the comics reveal is true of all nations and all people—of the human soul in general. They reveal the need of relaxation through the exercise of the imagination. This need is manifest in the people of dictatorial as well as democratic countries. One arrives at the conclusion that "America wants Magic, not Logic" through other means. Can one, by studying a nation's arts, formulate its practical, or governmental, character? No, but by studying its practical nature one can analyze its possible or probable—and impossible or improbable—fields of artistic or imaginative endeavor. Mr. Thompson has the cart before the horse.

Again, if America does want Magic, and not Logic (and who would want otherwise for purposes of relaxation?), is that any indication that it will not decide upon a Lenin—or a Hitler—to bring its Magic to Reality? It is, after all, the Lenins and the Hitlers who promise most of the Magic. Magic in the fanciful sphere may be manifested by a dictator in the practical.

PAUL SHANA.

New York City.

Reading under the Midnight Sun

SIR:—It has occurred to me that you might be interested in knowing what people read in Arctic Norway. In Kirkenes (the last town in Norway to the northeast on the Finnish border, probably not on any map you have) this summer I saw in a shop window a book on Edward VIII. In Harstad, one of the most attractive towns north of the Arctic Circle in Norway, I saw in a bookstore window in translation (of course!) "Yang and Yin," by Alice Tisdale Hobart; "Men Are Such Fools," by Faith Baldwin; "Europa," by Robert Briffault; "Journey to the Soviets," by André Gide; one on Mrs. Simpson, one by Priestley, the title of which I couldn't make out since my Norwegian is less than sketchy;



"OF COURSE ABOUT BEN ADHEM'S NAME LED ALL THE REST. IT BEGAN WITH AN A."

and one by Ortega y Gasset—probably "Invertebrate Spain," though I couldn't be sure. "Yang and Yin" and "Men Are Such Fools" are evidently very popular since I saw them in bookstore windows in several cities, the latter even in a paper edition in the little shop on the mailboat on which I traveled up the coast. Some one on shipboard was reading Pearl Buck's "Exile" in Norwegian, some one else Halper's "Union Square," though I am not sure whether it was in Norwegian or German.

I also window-shopped in bookstores in Stockholm but found so many translated books there that I couldn't keep track of them: mystery stories galore including Dorothy Sayers, at least two novels by Louis Bromfield (one "The Strange Case of Miss Annie Spragg"), several by Priestley, Faith Baldwin, Sir Philip Gibbs, Isabel Wilder, Ernest Hemingway, P. G. Wodehouse, and Pearl Buck's "Exile." There were others but those were all I could remember till I had a chance to write them down.

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Poetry and College Students

SIR:—You are wrong, of course. The seventh grade is not "full of the brave modern spirit, telling one another: 'Our dried voices . . . are quiet and meaningless.'" I don't pretend to say just what the seventh grade is full of—probably admirable whimsy out of A. A. Milne and appealing sentiment out of Sam Foss. But I do know what college students are full of—and it isn't the "brave modern spirit," either.

I do not praise or blame these modern collegians. I merely report: they are sus-

ceptible to poetry, but not to tenuous musing nor to subtlety in any form. They are taken by words, sonorous words, pretty words, startling words. They like pictures that are clear and make little demand upon their imagination—that's why they like Sandburg. They demand philosophies that are hopeful and trusting—no Hardy, no Housman. They are hardly aware of currents of thought not reported in the classroom text or the newspaper.

Two weeks ago I had a glimpse into the average sophomore's palace of pleasure when I asked my class to prepare a list of poems they would like to hear read aloud. I did not ask them to name pieces they thought were "important," or high-brow, but only those they would enjoy listening to. Here is the list in the order of expressed preference. I make no comment except that it is neither discouraging to one interested in student tastes, nor encouraging to one who expects college people to escape the influence of the textbook or to identify themselves with the time-spirit.

1. Poe, "Ulalume" and "The Raven"
2. Markham, "The Man With the Hoe"
3. Bryant, "To a Waterfowl"
4. Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind"
5. Robinson, "Mr. Flood's Party"
6. Millay, "Renascence"
7. Teasdale, "Barter"
8. Noyes, "Barrel Organ"
9. Sandburg, "Chicago" and "Fog"
10. Lindsay, "The Congo"
11. Frost, "Birches" and "Mending Wall"
12. Benét, "John Brown's Body"

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