



ALL through the war people talked about what the war was to do for art. I don't know what, precisely, they expected it to do. Probably nobody had any clear idea on the subject. Rather, it was expected that in a general way art would be stirred up, as water is stirred up by a stone. It was assumed that no sensitive mortal could look on at the great cataclysm and not experience new sensations and emotions, out of which unprecedented works were bound to flow. My own feeling on the point was held in check by this very question of precedent. Had modern art ever been structurally affected, so to say, by any military collisions? My mind would go back to Velasquez. He was the same man after Spionola took Breda that he was before. His famous picture is like a poem, something remembered in tranquillity. I have wondered if it has not been the same with all of the authentic artists of our own time. The Great War has given some of them themes. But they remain, in treating them, much the same men that they were before the war.

I felt this when I saw recently the most beautiful statue thus far related to the subject. It was carved by an American sculptor, James Earle Fraser, to be set in the atrium of the Bank of Montreal, in the Canadian city of that name. It commemorates the valor of a portentous body of men from the bank who died on the field of battle, more than three hundred of them. Fraser interpreted their deeds, not in dramatic but in serenely meditative form. He modelled a standing figure of Victory, a gleaming white image, which he has placed among the colossal pillars of dark granite that make the salient feature of the atrium. For his heroic subject he had a background designed by the architect McKim in the grand style. This entrance to a busy banking-room has the majesty of a temple. The statue is architecturally in harmony with its environment. It is literally part of the building, and Fraser's conception of his

task was, no doubt, determined in a measure by an architectural view of the matter. But what has interested me in this superb memorial has been the fact that the artist's imagination, profoundly touched by the war, was never for a moment dislocated or detached from the atmosphere in which, as an artist, he had been accustomed to work. According to the hypothesis tentatively framing itself, as I have indicated, among commentators on art while the war was progressing, this statue should have been developed into something new and strange. Instead, the maker of it adhered to classical ideas, was almost Greek in his treatment of form. He looked to the spiritual side of victory, its calm steadfastness, its mood of exalted resignation. He thought only of what was nobly tragic in the world conflict, and as he did so remembered constantly the fundamental immemorial canons of plastic art. The result is a monument extraordinarily beautiful, one in which an historic convention is so filled and animated by personal force that it is lifted above conventionality. Incidentally, it offers a grave rebuke to those numerous memorials produced since the war which have illustrated the impulse just mentioned, the impulse toward mere novelty.



FRASER was steadied, it is to be inferred, if he needed steadying, by tradition. In the eyes of a great many artists tradition is the enemy. They have come upon the scene to revolt against the past. There are, of course, philosophers ready to assert that the war did indeed do something to art. They would have it that the war gave prodigious impetus to a world-wide renovation that is even now going forward. They "point with pride" at certain substitutes for tradition. The topic is not exactly new, but we have lately had some new light upon it. Although in recent years we have had every opportunity to see what the modernists in

France and Russia, for example, were doing, we have had to wait for anything like an adequate exposition of German participation. It was put before New Yorkers in an exhibition held at the Anderson Galleries in October, organized by Doctor W. R. Valentiner, a critic long known for his studies among the old masters. He wrote an introduction for the catalogue, one of deep interest to the student of contemporary art, because it tells him something about the point of view developed behind that veil separating us from Germany throughout the war and to some extent through the subsequent years. These pictures and sculptures were presented as the fruits of an art "born out of the soul of the people, and expressing its deepest suffering." Doctor Valentiner made much of it as the manifestation of a positively spiritual upheaval. "We are living," in his opinion, "at a time which marks the parting not only of two generations but of two epochs of centuries, perhaps, both with entirely varying philosophies." Some of his types he characterized as moving around "in an almost transcendental dream life," and all of them he indicated as torch-bearers of a new epoch, a new philosophy. What his modern artists are driving at is suggested in the following passage:

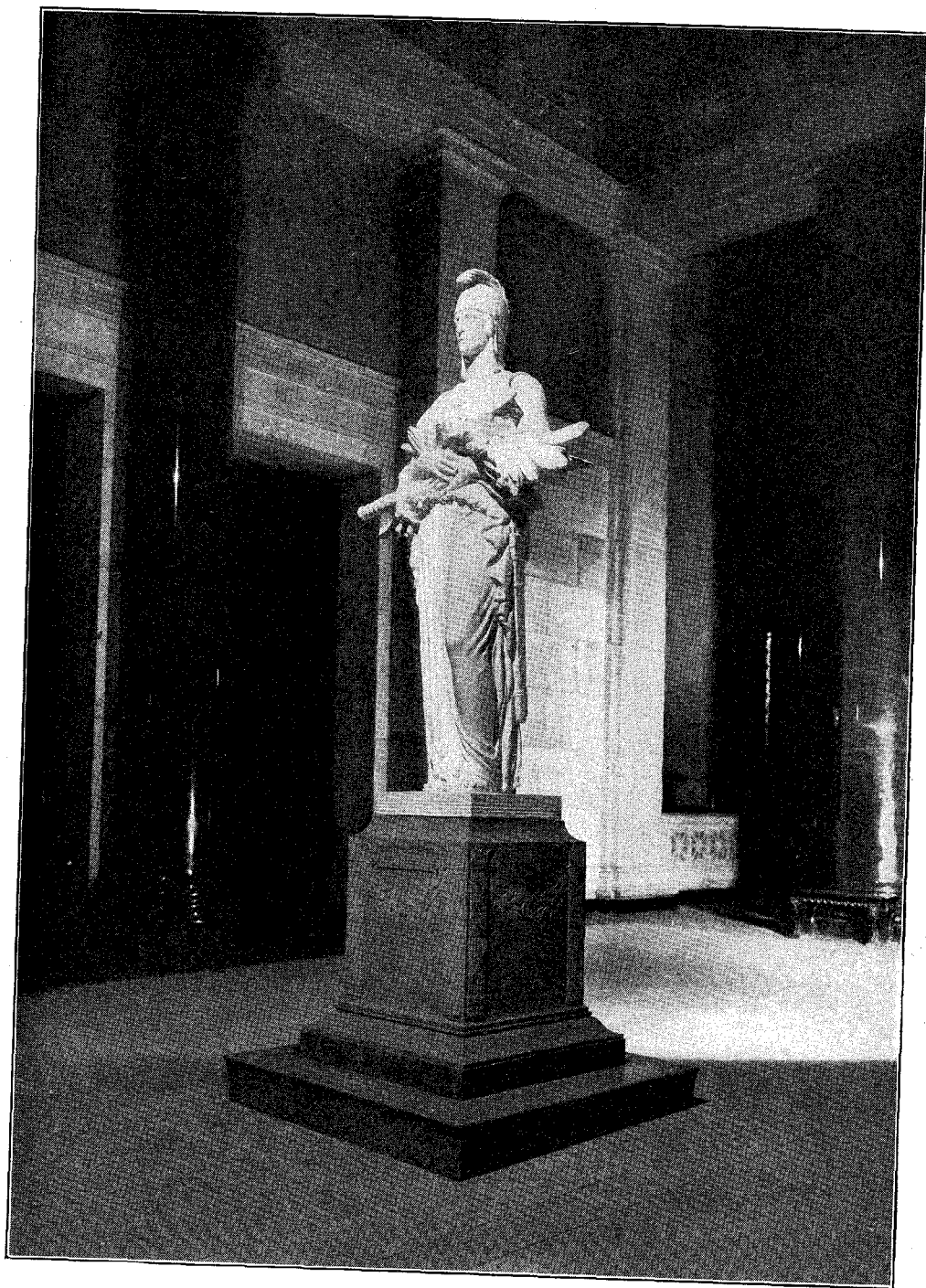
The great problem of all abstract and spiritual art is to abandon a facile rendering of space, such as is obtained by photograph. Primitive art aims at a strong presentation of the image seen by the eye, in which only such elements are accentuated as express clearly the inner life; for instance, the expression of an eye, of a drastic movement, etc. By omitting all superfluous details of the appearance, the essential content of the composition becomes clearer. A certain conventionalization of the form is a common characteristic of all abstract, spiritual art. The intention is to impress the spectator with higher spiritual laws. At the same time, a more intense decorative and architectonic character is obtained in this art, as it does not break through a wall, as does the window perspective of naturalistic art. Primitive art accentuates the wall and decorates it with colors and rhythms of lines.

This is about as lucid a pronouncement as has come, to my knowledge, from the modernistic camp. The point of view is clearly stated. Why is it that when one turns to the works of art inspiring a passage like the foregoing luminosity fades and one is left groping in the dark? The

burden of proof rests, of course, upon the artist. Nothing that Doctor Valentiner can say, no matter how well he says it, can validate German modernism in art. The fortunes of that depend utterly upon the painter and sculptor. And they, as I found at the Anderson Galleries, accomplish next to nothing. Old German painting, of which Dürer is the fine flower, had a positively scientific solicitude for matters of form. The master of Nuremberg studied the human proportions with lifelong devotion, and his ideal persisted long after him, surviving amid even such departures from his broad spirit as were reflected in the divagations of the Munich Secession. But the German modernists have thrown all that overboard, and neither painters nor sculptors in the exhibition to which I am referring revealed any convincing conception of form. The best man in the group, the painter Emil Nolde, half persuaded the observer because he had a certain large, broad way with him, and because his color was sometimes fine, but he, too, was tinctured by the brutality of taste which gave the whole show an air of coarseness and crudity. Why, I repeat, do the artists whose programme is summarized in high-erected terms by Doctor Valentiner fail so completely to realize anything of the power and beauty which, after all, must be the objects of the artist's activity?

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ONE phase of the matter, possibly taking us a little nearer to an explanation, has interested me not only in the presence of these Germans but in that of the modernists everywhere, and, indeed, in that of many a painter not modernistic in Doctor Valentiner's sense at all. It is a phase to which you get a clew in one of the anecdotes of that painting class in Paris over which Whistler for a time presided. He hated a messy palette, and used to reprove a careless student in this wise: "Have you noticed the way in which a musician cares for his violin? How beautiful it is? How well-kept? How tenderly handled? Your palette is your instrument, its colors the notes, and upon it you play your symphonies!" There is a whole philosophy of art in that story. It directs us straight to what I



Victory.
The War Memorial in the Bank of Montreal, sculptured by James Earle Fraser.

may call the genius of pigment. At the root of the modernistic fallacy lies nothing more pernicious than the degradation of technique. Some artists foolishly imagine that when Ingres talked about drawing as the rectitude of art, he meant an academic style of drawing. He meant good drawing, through which an artist may develop any style he pleases. Put a drawing by Ingres side by side with one by Rembrandt. Each exposes an absolutely personal style, but both have the same rectitude. It is the same in the matter of painted surface. Doctor Valentiner gives us an odd saying. Referring to the art that is "born out of the soul of the people," he remarks that one does not expect that it shall "ingratiate itself through charm and surface agreeability." I fancy I know what is at the bottom of this idea of his. He has been irritated by the tendency of some refined painters, who are a little too refined, to lapse into mere preciosity. They produce wearisome stuff, no doubt. But one may arrive at that judgment and still feel that Doctor Valentiner's notion is beside the point. Surface agreeability, turned into a fetish, is absurd. Surface agreeability, expressing a respect for the artist's medium, is indispensable to sound painting. Take the words of Whistler and apply them definitely to oil paint. How beautiful it is, intrinsically; what a marvellously pure and ductile medium of expression! With what a gust of sensuous appreciation does an instinctively respectful manipulator of pigment squeeze a tube out upon his palette! I have seen a painter of this type at work, and have kindled to his handling of his brushes, watching the caressing delicacy of his touch, noting the purity of the tone he laid upon the canvas. There was nothing precious about his surface when he got through with it. It had dignity, it had what artists love as "quality"—it had, in a word, agreeability. Artists of all kinds of genius have used their medium in this way. The masters of tempera in the Florentine Renaissance were consummate exemplars of the principle I would emphasize. When the Van Eycks turned to oil they fostered the same conscientious simplicity, the same respect and tenderness. As European painting

was developed it unquestionably broadened in style, but even the technical virtuosity of Hals submitted to a curb where the genius of paint was concerned. Some of Hals's blacks and grays have a Whistlerian distinction and beauty. Velasquez is a miracle of courtly good manners in the matter of painted surface. His fidelity to what I think might reasonably be called a fundamental law runs through all his work, early and late. Take him in the *bodegones* of his formative period. You might cut out of the canvas a square-inch of his black or his yellow and it would have an æsthetic interest. Then, as his art grows more flexible, he will paint you the farthingale of an Infanta, a subtle complexity of rose and white, and again you feel that, just as so much painted surface, a great work of art stands before you. A master invariably works the same big magic. Look at Vermeer, or look at his modern descendant, Alfred Stevens. Look at Manet or at such an antithetical countryman of his as Puvis de Chavannes. Look finally at one of Whistler's truly symphonic "Arrangements." They all spell profound understanding of, and unshakable loyalty to, that thing which I call the genius of paint.

The mark of these masters, too, is that they never overplay their hand. There is another anecdote of Whistler that is apposite. "Be quite simple," he once said to his friend Starr. "No fussy foolishness, you know, and don't try to be what they call 'strong.' When a picture 'smells of paint' it's what they call 'strong.'" I recall here not only the German modernists, whose absolute deadness to the genius of paint is fairly appalling, but a good many of our own painters. The Germans, after all, are comprehensible in their callousness. The race has never been remarkable for its taste. It is surely not boastful bluntly to say that the American is of a finer grain. But he, too, has frequently been betrayed into fearful treachery to the genius of paint. The gospel of technique which Frank Duveneck preached and practised so effectively has gone to the heads of some latter-day artists; and, with a glorification of manual dexterity, they paint by main strength. One of the earlier exhibitions of the present season brought this fact

home to me with renewed force. It was an exhibition made by a number of men calling themselves the New Mexico Painters, most of whom were previously known as members of the Taos Group. This is a body of sincere and able workers occupied in the commendable task of por-

traying Indian types, costume, and architecture. The pictures they paint are interesting and valuable as records. But considered for their paint, purely, they are as hard as nails, affairs of accurate but unsympathetic drawing, hot and opaque color, of repellent, almost claylike surfaces. It is puzzling in the extreme, for this disagreeability of surface seems so unnecessary.



On the Shore. By Karl Schmidt Rottluf.

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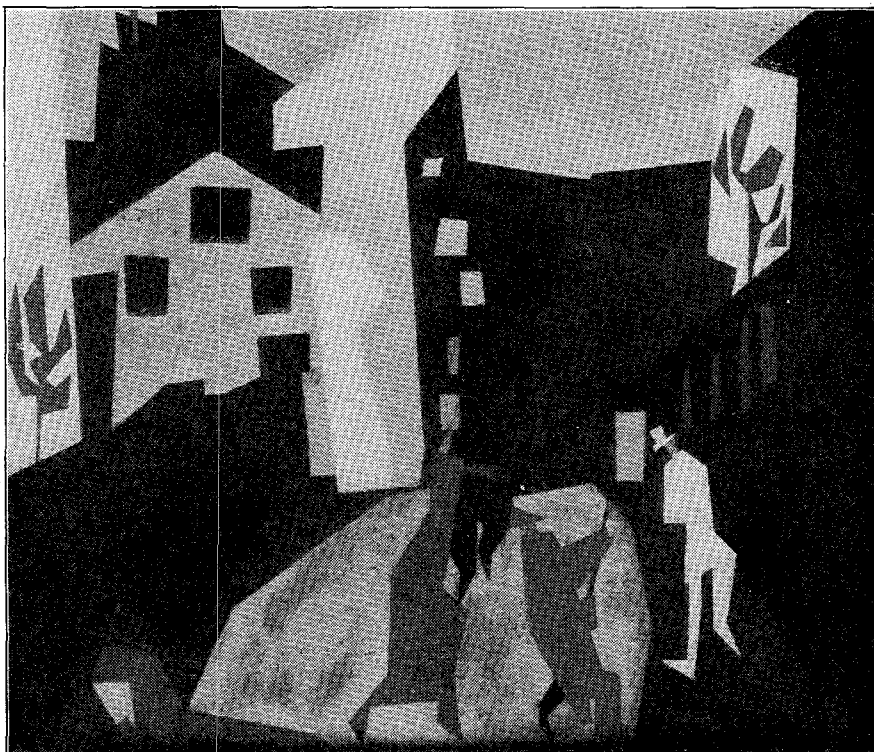
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AN artist friend of mine advances the rather piquant idea that the nature of the medium has something to do with it, that this very genius of oil paint of which I make so much has something del-

trious in it, and that the schools might find salvation if they were to go back for their cue to the Renaissance and use tempera once more. There is fascination in the idea, when you think of the purity and serenity of early Italian art, its complete freedom from that violence of ges-

ture which does so much harm to-day, and when you think, above all, of the exquisitely decorative effect of a Florentine or Venetian Primitive. The medium then was allied with a whole habit of mind. The simple pattern of color characteristic of the Primitives played into the hands of their pictorial convention. But I don't think a reversion to tempera would correct the trouble at which I have been glancing. If artists won't respect oil paint they wouldn't respect tempera. They would mess about in the one medium as deplorably as they mess about in the other.

From one point of view it might seem as if we were dealing with only a subordi-



The Street Sweeper in Red. By Lyonel Feininger.

nate phase of the problem. Art lives by ideas. It must proceed from men's minds and imaginations if it is to last. Technique is only a means to an end. In all the assaults that are nowadays made upon the citadel of art, the leaders come out strong on the esoteric purpose of their campaign. Doctor Valentiner talks about "the inner life." But what these explorations of the inner life lead to may be judged from the one or two examples which I reproduce from the German exhibition. I put aside, for the moment, all question of such ideas as they may embody, weighed simply as ideas. I look at them merely as technical exercises. How much, viewed in that light, do they throw into the argument for modernism? They urge us far more, by the shock of contrast, I think, to a reconsideration of that too frequently forgotten principle in art, the interdependence of idea and technique. Let the

technique be neglected or wilfully distorted, and the work of art lurches lopsided into obscurity, if not into downright fatuity.

The painter as schoolmaster is an unpopular figure, and in some quarters is held to be abhorrent. Let us grant that he is dreary enough when he winds red tape about art and indulges in dry, soulless, mechanical, academic admonition. But the brutalization of pigment, which means the negation of technique, cries aloud for the ministrations of some authoritative schoolmaster, re-enacting Whistler's rôle and, with a rap over the knuckles, saying to the owner of a squalid palette: "Have you noticed the way in which a musician cares for his violin? How beautiful it is? How well-kept? How tenderly handled? Your palette is your instrument, its colors the notes, and upon it you play your symphonies!"



A Checkered Year in Financial and Political History

PERPLEXITIES OF RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT—"SPRING BOOM" AND AUTUMN REACTION—ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AT THE YEAR-END

BY ALEXANDER DANA NOYES

NOBODY needed to be told beforehand that at the end of 1923 the symposium of opinion on the financial future, usual at that time of year, would invite unusual interest. Some of the forecasts

of the financial New Year will have been extorted from reluctant captains of industry, some will have been volunteered with obliging readiness; that often depends on the nature of the outlook. If matters are going badly in trade and industry, "personal forecasts" will usually be vague or non-committal. If the prospect is altogether bright, they are apt to be distinct and positive. The reasons why all such predictions, of whatever character, will get a keenly attentive audience on the present occasion are, first, that the outlook for 1924 does not belong clearly in either category; second, that the ordinary man-in-the-street has found very particular difficulty in making up his own opinion.

That the old year is ending with a spirit of returning cheerfulness in American business circles, every one recognizes. What is not so easy to determine, however, is how far this cheerful feeling has arisen from tangible evidence of impending business recovery and how far from the facts that the stock-market, which during much of the autumn had refused to give any sign of what it thought, moved up positively in the later weeks and that expectations of increasing trade depression, widely expressed a few months ago, have not been fulfilled at all. The soundness of the credit situation, the absence of rashly speculative business methods, no

one questions. As to what will be the precise character of the coming financial twelvemonth, however, prediction has been singularly cautious.

FINANCIAL opinion differs even in its retrospect of 1923. Alternation in the past year's American markets of confidence and doubt, of apprehension and reassurance, of a "spring boom" and an autumn reaction, leaves it a matter of more than ordinary difficulty to give the year its place in the period's economic history. When retrospect turns from these confusing incidents at home to the political deadlock which in Europe grew progressively more tense between January and December, the difficulty increases. Even the different markets of the year-end have pointed in opposite directions. At the moment when the rising stock-market seemed to indicate returning hope and confidence, the falling foreign exchanges testified to rapidly increasing doubt.

It is not too much to say that, with the possible exception of the first year after the armistice, no calendar year since peace returned has ended with the business community in so much doubt over the immediate past and the immediate future as is shown at the close of 1923. A year ago, evidence of continual expansion of American trade and industry was too convincing to be missed. Such weather-signs as production of steel and iron, railway traffic, checks drawn on the country's banks, were showing weekly and monthly increase which betokened not the climax

Prophecies
Concerning
1924

The Past
Financial
Year

but only the early stages of progressive trade revival. At the end of 1921 the pace of recovery in these various directions was even more rapid, though that expansion indicated turn of the tide from low ebb of trade activity rather than beginning of a "boom."

PRECISELY opposite but equally unmistakable indications marked the ending of 1920, when a monthly decrease of 10 to 15 per cent in steel and iron output and a shrinkage of 40 per cent in weekly railway traffic from the autumn maximum—not to mention an utterly demoralized stock-market—pointed to the sweeping trade reaction which was in store for the next six months. As for financial opinion at the end of 1919, it is true that forecasts of the future were at that time divided and conflicting. Many experienced observers predicted early reaction from an overdone "trade boom." But others, equally experienced, stuck to belief in continuing rise of prices and industrial activity, and each group of prophets had some basis for its forecast.

No such consensus of opinion can be discovered at the present year-end, even in Wall Street; the case is still one which can only be described as suspended judgment. When a year goes out with such financial uncertainty as has prevailed on this occasion, the natural recourse at the year-end is to review the actual history of the twelvemonth and to discover, if possible, what continuing influences seem to be embodied. In 1922 or 1920 the events of the year were themselves convincing as to the immediate future. But 1923 does not respond easily to such a test. To begin with, different parts of the past year have presented tendencies wholly opposite; as a whole, it has strikingly illustrated the often-cited fact that, considered as a distinctive period, a calendar year and a financial year often fail entirely to fit one another.

IN many essential respects, the first four or five months of 1923 provide diametrical contrast with the months which followed. During the earlier period, American trade was expanding with im-

mense rapidity; the country's monthly iron production had increased 25 per cent by April or May, and its monthly steel production 23 per cent. But in the rest of the year the monthly output decreased 18 per cent for iron and 16 for steel; practically all of the early and rapid expansion was cut off. The course of other industries was similar and simultaneous.

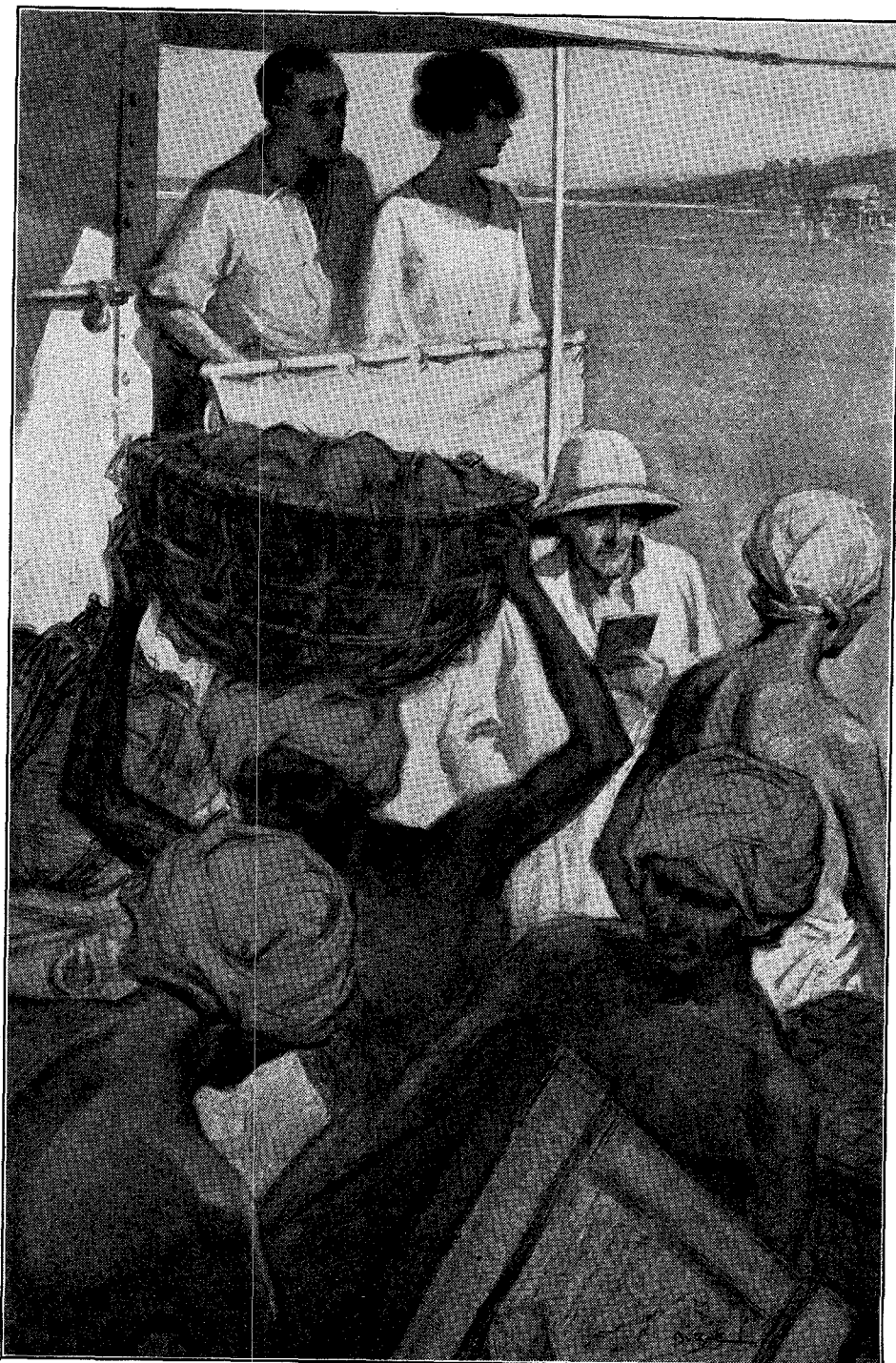
The Two
Periods of
1923

Average prices for commodities had risen 7 or 8 per cent by April; they had lost all that advance by December. Even in the matter of foreign trade, conditions prevalent until May were reversed during the remainder of the year. In the first five months of 1923, imports exceeded exports by \$180,000,000, the first "import surplus" since 1914 and the largest ever achieved. Reports published for the subsequent months showed a \$277,000,000 surplus of exports. This change was not, as in some other years, a consequence purely of the natural autumn increase of outward trade. Although exports in October were much above those of March, they would nevertheless have left no export surplus if the autumn month had matched the spring month's imports. It was the decrease of nearly \$100,000,000 in the monthly import trade which turned the balance, and that decrease was as sure evidence of an altered business situation as were the industrial output and the price of commodities.

The year 1923, then, presents in retrospect two periods as different from one another, though in less degree, as 1920 and 1921. Yet there is no such easy economic explanation for the change as was presented two or three years ago. Nowadays every one can cite the 8 per cent money market of 1920 and the 40 per cent Federal Reserve ratio, to prove that the excited "trade boom" of the period broke down because of reckless overstrain on credit. This year a normal 5 or 5½ per cent money rate has prevailed throughout the year; the reserve percentage has never been below 71 per cent, and it held above 75 at the height of the "boom in trade."

There has been no opening even for the theory of those economists who ascribe every reaction in trade to a fall in prices, and every fall in prices to contraction of

(Financial Situation, continued on page 47)



From a drawing by Harry Burne.

ELAINE OBSERVED WITH INCREASING INTEREST THAT GREW TO FASCINATION.

—“On to Bhamo,” page 201.