
The revolt of the turbulent 'twenties, despite its poor marksmanship, produced results, and wove achievements into the fabric of American life. Mr. Beer, author of "The Mauve Decade" and "Hanna," depicts the richness, the color, and the significance of the 'twenties.

Toward Sunrise

1920-1930

BY THOMAS BEER

The Renaissance was born of defiance, and therefore it lacked depth, width and sureness of creative instinct.—OSWALD SPENGLER.

ALL through the year 1919 transports and liners brought back to the United States those women who had chosen to involve themselves in the war as nurses, drivers of ambulances, clerks, entertainers and managers of sectarian associations, cooks and idle witnesses. There is already a difficulty among historians in computing the numbers of this minor army, since hundreds of tourists caught abroad in 1914 and ladies already resident in Europe must be added to the official figures. But they came home, now, and the memory of their various experiences came with them. They had slept on shivering cots fifteen feet below ceilings carved and gilded in the time of Marie de Medicis; they had learned fortitude in stone halls damp when Thomas Aquinas lectured and damper still in 1917; they had endured British cookery, the French telephone and the Italian official. If they were sensitive they had watched the Englishwoman's withdrawing smile as they concluded some loud, innocent remark, and had supported the Frenchwoman's stare, divid-

ing them into layers of sartorial and erotic insignificance. And, sensitive or dull, they had lived in a subtle, unremitting tension which only two writers of English, Arnold Bennett and Ernest Hemingway, have conveyed to print. They had been parcels of convenience, strewn around among men whose lives were valued at a zinc tag, and they had seen men of their own towns turn from them cheerfully to harlots and brandy. Now they came home and it was natural that a prophetess came along with one detachment of nurses and drivers on a certain transport in February of 1919.

She was a tall, handsome woman who may have been forty years old. Arriving beside me quietly one brilliant noon she asked for a match and in the same drawl ordered me to find an eminent neurologist. It seemed that a girl in her gang had just tried to crawl through a port-hole into the Atlantic Ocean. . . . No, there was nothing much wrong. Just nerves. A lot of them were wretched, in her bunch. "This kid," she said, "has just realized that she has to go home and

spend the rest of her life with all those damned five spots."

Had she said "two spots" the remark would not be memorable, because I was used to hearing Americans called two spots by harassed political gentlemen and publicists. But she said five spots, preferring the notation of mediocrity to the notation of negligible quality. Having thus prophesied most of the criticism to be uttered in the next ten years she begged me to find the neurologist. He stopped his contemplation of a lunatic officer in the wire coop on an upper deck and went to duty. My prophetess thanked me, that night, and expanded her topic a bit. These girls, she said, were reared to believe there was something fine and special in merely being born an American. Not one of the gang, except herself, had been abroad before 1917. "Oh, they'll go home, you know, and pretend everybody in Europe was crazy about us, but they know we were just as big jokes to the French and English as you men were." She said that without emphasis, and left us.

A big young captain from Detroit then prophesied the general answer of the conventional to such sayings. She shouldn't be allowed to talk like that. It was all wrong. It was "criticism"—a word which he made horrifying by a heavy accent on its first syllable. Why, he had a translation of the speech a French general read to his regiment when awarding medals. He had it with him, in a pocket. I saw before me a specimen of the American who has faith in compliments. But nobody was paying attention! Lights grew on the sea. Orderlies were running with messages from shore. Next morning a pair of tall lads and a most lovely little girl swarmed on the prophetess in a cold drizzle at Hoboken while a gigantic man with the device of the Medical

Corps on his collar waited a turn at her. So, nameless lady, here is a tiny paper monument to your wisdom.

Before 1922 a general revolt against the dulness of the five spots had broken out, expressing itself in letters, public manners and conversation. American journalism dealt with this phenomenon by several methods, all ineffective. The most striking method was that of telling the rebels to forget it, whatever it was, and settle down to good, hard honest work. A lot of this was put forth from the Middle West and in it one can discern something of the cheaper pioneer philosophy. It conforms, too, to the anti-philosophic attitude exquisitely noticed by Mr. Glenway Wescott. "Maturity, responsibility, immorality, virtue are offspring of memory; try not to remember. . . . No tragic arts ought to flourish; tragedy was treason, the betrayal of state secrets to the enemy, even the enemy in oneself. Memory was incest. . . ." Forget it, this thing you wish to say, and remember that this is a young country, full of opportunities. Will to forget, in short. Sink that ultimate power of the disciplined intelligence which is called taste in this rich pea soup of activities. Kill yourself for the comfort of the mediocrities who shoulder you. "Try not to remember!" And since this anti-philosophy was offered by men who think of themselves as patriotic optimists, it seemed to many of us to be an utterance of the drugged and the privately desperate. They seemed to be saying, "Help us to maintain an illusion in which we have aged. Do not take away our faith in the golden rabbit sure to pop from Uncle Sam's big hat. Try not to disturb our belief that there is something fine and special in merely being born an American."

This answer had at least the exasperating pathos of futility. The more com-

mon answers, "Stop being smart!" and "You mustn't talk like that!" simply incited the rebels to extravagant brayings. By 1923 the nature of the revolt was altered. It had become, Mr. Wilson Follitt pointed out, an army with banners. The movement against mass thinking and mass morale was now a mass production of defiances, catchwords and excited demands for the quite impossible. The trouble with mass production is that it destroys interest in the thing produced, even when that thing is admirable. Who remembers the brilliantly charming paper of Mr. Spingarn, in *The Freeman* of 1922, called "The Younger Generation," with the phrases: "To destroy a Bastille is not to build a city. . . . What city of the spirit shall we build and how?" Within five months this original formula was repeated by complacent young gentlemen in a litter of essays and reviews, until it sickened readers. The city spiritual was requested in everything from *Vanity Fair* to *The Saturday Evening Post*. And just so, in 1929, a mass movement in favor of an intellectual mode named Humanism, much wronged, it is said, by impressionists, disciples of Rousseau and H. L. Mencken, swelled up and became a bore inside four months. A topic which might have interested and might have been fruitful was done to death in hasty appraisals, and has, so far, created nothing but an agreeably tart essay by Mr. Hazlitt in *The Nation*. The deeper trouble, here, is that the army with banners often attacked the wrong thing and defied ghosts. Let me explain what I mean by discussing briefly the attack on Prohibition.

About two weeks after my prophethess spoke her mind, Mr. Oscar Underwood spoke his, in an office at Washington. Irritation made the senator from Alabama epigrammatic. His melodious conver-

sation was usually formless. He talked along, rather in the manner of Mr. Theodore Dreiser's novels, although Mr. Underwood was never tedious, and one remembered afterward a number of good things. He dreaded Prohibition and exactly foretold to Mr. Davison Weeks and myself what would come of it. Many men did that. But he understood, as many critics still do not, the root of the manifestation. "The damn fools down South wanted this so as to keep the niggers at work," he said, "and your big bullies up North want it so's they can swindle a few extra dollars out of poor folks." That, in sum, is the moral basis of the law on whose noble motivation Mr. Herbert Hoover insists, and in the spring of 1930 its apologists have admitted this with full candor. The event was flippantly prophesied by Octave Uzanne in 1891: "It will be necessary for these masters of mechanical industry to find constantly fresh objects for manufacture and fresh markets, if their gross incomes are to be maintained. . . . In the end, *after protecting themselves by tariffs from foreign competition they will be obliged to descend to tampering with internal legislation in order to have the goods of their competitors declared illegal. . . .*"* This was successfully accomplished in the United States between 1890 and 1920, and it is unimportant that men who figured in the process really thought themselves aiding a sound ethical cause. The hidden philosophy of the hog's trough was once stated neatly during a gay

*A more open application of Uzanne's suggestion is the case of the legislation, in several states, against wooden shingle roofing. This ridiculous law was "put over" by pleading the inflammable nature of wooden shingles on roofs. But its proponents were unable to secure a law forbidding shingle walls. Mr. Taft justly remarked of this performance that it was "contradiction of common sense." But the gain to the manufacturers of artificial shingle, from the county of Nantucket, Mass., alone in 1927 ran to an extraordinary sum.

New Year's eve party at a hotel in Detroit by a great manufacturer. "See," he said to Mr. Calvin Secor, "all this good money goin' on booze when these folks could buy cars with it!" For the industrialists who support Prohibition have no real intention of producing a sound economic situation in America. They do not want to see money saved by the working man and his wife, now that the small competition of the saloon and the wineseller has been removed—in public. They want to see money spent, and spent on their limitless outputs. Even the literary, obsessed by a straw image named Puritanism, began to perceive this after 1926 when the outcry against Prohibition grew acute. Then the advertising agents of the industrialists delicately commenced an operation; capable popular authors and essayists were summoned to conference in offices hung with tapestry and rendered theatrically effective by grilles of wrought iron; voices keyed to a tone of maternal solicitude informed the writers that the workman's automobile, paid for on the instalment plan, and his daughter's electric sun-bath, on the instalment plan, and his wife's washing machine, on instalment, would be lost to him if the saloon was brought back. And there was something said about a powerful serial against all this lawlessness, or some essays, which could be placed in proper magazines. "I see," said one author. "What you want is to keep up the market for superfluous production, isn't it?" But American finance does not admit that there is such a thing as superfluous production, and a lady never believes that she is aiding in a public hypocrisy.

Puritanism, however, had been appointed the villain in this piece, although Puritanism, where it exists at all in the United States, was just the drudging comedian of the jobbery. Still, Puritan-

ism was the cry, and the suppression of a couple of books, plus the objections of a very few veteran critics to the mild frankness of new fictions, increased and solidified the attack on Puritanism. It is true, of course, that the Puritan tradition is a romantic asylum to a certain intelligence. The words "sin" and "morals" continue to have a quality nearly objective in the minds of academic and rural publicists. Even in the spring of 1930 one professor of English is still talking about the Ten Commandments as "spiritual laws," whereas six of them are purely materialistic rules for maintaining tribal etiquette and property rights. If people would replace the word Puritanism by the word etiquette, we would be nearer a definition of facts in the struggle of American society toward a sunrise of mental comfort. There is no actual religious *motif* left to Protestantism in the United States, and precious little fighting spirit, save in small communities dominated by pastors of the more violent sects. The very weak censure on Robert Shafer's statement, in 1926, "Christianity as it now stands is moribund, as practically every one sees," indicated the extent in which the cultivated classes had abandoned the identification of religion with Christianity. That the sectarian machinery perseveres, to be sure, is patent. But in attacking that machinery, a regrettable majority of our critics fell to the low plane of attacking it as "religion." When Doctor Henry van Dyke honorably tried to explain to an assembly of his sect that the question of Prohibition was not a religious question, the charming old essayist simply confronted stubborn men with a converse of the proposition which had been thrust at them by unthinking journalists. For, as Puritanism was blamed for Prohibition increasingly, pastors who had been neutral on the

point or even opposed to the 18th Amendment, suffered a natural emotional recoil and turned in behind the measure. It has been said by an acute amateur of social conditions in the Middle West, Mr. Silas Kent, who enjoys the privileges of being at once a chemist, a travelling salesman and a recanted clergyman, that the Eastern journalists elected Mr. Hoover in 1928 by fighting against him. This is not improbable, for the minor eloquence of the campaign here and there shows plainly the playing off of Mr. Hoover as the good, self-made country boy, the friend of sobriety, as opposed to Mr. Smith, the wicked fellow from the big city. However that is, the Republican triumph in 1928 was a triumph of manipulated emotionalism, once more, and the Protestant sects were used, as never before, to maintain the public and private interests of the rich. Even those of us who have no objection to wealth as wealth, find ourselves placed as taxpayers whose earnings are used to maintain forced markets for the makers of salable objects, electric ice boxes, motor cars, and very certainly the gasoline used in motor cars. Meanwhile the gasoline and the motor cars convey young people and middle-aged people and old people to hot places of resort where the radio enlivens dancers, destroys conversation, and adds to the consumption of alcohol, drunk as it has never been drunk in the history of the United States. The swindling myth of decreased spending on drink can be attacked by every kind of statistic, but the attacks are necessarily useless. This is a democracy, and therefore a nation always sold.

Upon the opposition to free speech, in arts and public affairs, the rebels were more sensibly led. But here, too, they tended to blame the totemic Puritanism instead of the commercial solidarities.

What the commercial American feels about free speech was precisely summarized for criticism in 1925 by Professor John Broadus Watson, at the close of "Behaviorism." "I have always been very much amused by the advocates of free speech. . . . All true speech does stand substitutable for bodily acts, hence organized society has just as little right to allow free speech as it has to allow free action, which nobody advocates. When the agitator raises the roof because he hasn't free speech, he does it because he knows that he will be restrained if he attempts free action. He wants by his free speech to get some one else to do free acting—to do something he himself is afraid to do." Could Professor Watson tell me what bodily act in need of control by organized society is represented when I exercise my privilege of free speech in saying, here, that I consider Old Gold cigarettes tasteless, tastelessly packed and tastelessly advertised? What interest has organized society in this casual expression of dislike? What action am I urging on anybody? The whole world may smoke Old Gold cigarettes, for all I care, and since some friends of mine are stockholders in the company producing Old Gold cigarettes I am pleased by the success of this commonplace article. But Professor Watson knows fully that no ordinary newspaper and few magazines would print my opinion of Old Gold cigarettes, Ford motor cars, Pond's Vanishing Cream or Crane bathrooms, unless that opinion was gushingly favorable, and he knows that organized commerce—not society—would be the preventing agent. His vulgar statement encloses also the Philistine argument of incitation—the eternal case of Madame Bovary—the notion that by freely describing acts not licensed in the mores of some particular group the artist and

critic incite the imitation of those acts, an argument raised since 1919 against Mr. Cabell, Miss Cather, Mr. Hergesheimer, Mr. O'Neill, Mrs. Scott, Mr. Footner, Miss Glenn, and Mr. Hemingway. To make my point a trifle clearer, let me recite a case which has had no advertisement in the press.

In the spring of 1929 a designedly frivolous tale appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. The author's intention was one thing, but innumerable readers picked something else out of the story—the discharge of a reporter from a midland newspaper for criticising goods sold in a big department store. Letters at the rate of six and eight a day showered in on the writer. He became aware that this act of mercantile cowardice was ordinary. There have been at least a hundred and thirty-eight reporters, several of them women, discharged for petty criticisms of commerce. One girl was discharged for mention of a tobacco-nist's colored doormat. But the astonishing letters were those of the merchants; a shopkeeper in Omaha quoted Ecclesiastes, advising the author to remember his Creator before he stirred up anarchy. Some of the sentences in these tirades are just believable: "You should be ashamed to write anything that spurs on this wave of Red criticism that is sweeping the whole nation. I demand"—from Syracuse, New York—"that you not repeat any such attack on good business as this, because you know what will happen if we permit any damned fool on a newspaper to begin criticising goods sold in our places of business for the good of the community. . . ." In other words, translating precisely, here is Professor Watson's notion of incitation; the lawless are being invited to do the unthinkable thing, to criticise merchandise. Organized commerce, you see, is promptly indignant. The good of

the community is about to be attacked. "In my case," says a young journalist of St. Louis, "the man who had me fired from the — is a nice fellow. I have met him a number of times. He is Jewish and a good deal of a liberal, socially. I may add that his shop is one of the best in town. . . . Your young liberal, in the story, declares that it is shameful that books, plays and pictures should be mercilessly criticised in the newspapers whereas merchandise cannot be so criticised. But whose fault is that? Has criticism even begun to fight machine-made truck? All these glittering generalities about the machine and so on in the critical sheets come to nothing. Mr. Babbitt reads them and says, 'That's so.' But *his* particular kind of junk is not specifically mentioned. Nothing has been said about *his* bad taste. *He* is not mixed up in this. . . . If Mr. Nathan said in *The American Mercury*, 'I have just been driving in a Whoozis car. The upholstering looked like a Mississippi bawdy house,' the owners of the Whoozis car would be having the designers and builders on the carpet in ten minutes. But criticism does not do that. . . . Is there not something in encouraging the principle of general criticism? I do not see why Presidents and actors should be the only ones to get a public kick in the pants. . . ."

I have spent space on this trivial business because its phases display the cowardice of the one well-organized American class, the sellers of goods, and because the young man in St. Louis is right. It was not beneath the dignity of Goethe and Spencer to discuss water-jugs and tavern signs. Mr. Mumford and Mr. Van Vechten are willing to attack specific buildings, lamps, and manufactured jewels which offend. Waldo Frank, by one paragraph of rippling invective, in "Our America," once scared a

landholder in Los Angeles into throwing away the designs for fifty insipid plaster cottages and sending for an architect. Bad architecture and ugly machine-made shoes are public infamies. They are not destroyed by a generalization. The species of Behaviorism which has been ethically in power in America since the Civil War has taught two generations how to get along with these "group standards," to the huge profit of various intrenched groups, and it is idle to go on talking about "the unseen Philistines who design cloth for the seats of motor cars" when what you mean is that the cloth of the Whoozis cushions is like the plush of a cheap brothel's chairs. This protected cowardice of the merchant is not merely American; the means used by certain great English firms to save their goods from comment are well known to me, and the sale of flatteries for use by commerce is one of the most cultivated arts in France. But here the rebels have failed in the specific; what should have been a detailed battle with sharp knives has ended as a massed display of painless colored smokes.

The social manifestation of the revolt is not worth many words. It had been going on quietly for years—since 1900, really—and things established in cheap fiction as madnesses of the "lost generation" were done without exciting the doers at all in 1910.* What broke out, after 1919, was a rather defiant frankness, also by the mass, and it broke out among the five spots and the cerebrals equally. A woman prophesied all this in 1905, in

a modest fiction named "Paul's Case." Paul was the son of a Protestant nonentity in an ugly industrial city. He went sick for luxury and dignity, and sneaked off to New York with some stolen money for a pathetic revel. Miss Cather appropriately ended him under a locomotive, thus foretelling the grand sadness of modern gaiety, for the joy of the rebels was a machine which ran on a narrow track, a regimented impulsion fed on gin, verbal lewdness and noise, and more noise, and awful noises. The European, pitying some American when he sees the creature wandering Europe alone, sitting alone at the play—if he can stand the play in Europe—and dining alone, does not know how often he is seeing the happiest thing alive, a being divorced from the telephone. He may be homesick, and so keenly; he may resent insolence, and the prices of bad food and wine now everywhere prevalent, even in France; he knows that this society through which he idles is commanded by charlatans and industrialists repellent as those at home, that it is tolerable only for the decoration set up by its ancestors and the manners which are traditionally bland. But his happiness makes him hard against all that. He cannot be asked to come and have a good time in the houses of his friends.

The years howled by. Writers got in more letters from far-away towns commencing: "I am eighteen years old and would like to be a writer, . . ." or "I feel sure from the way you talk about things that you would understand me. My father does not want me to go abroad and study art . . ." and "Would you be good enough to recommend some books like a cultured person ought to read, because there is not any public library here. . . ." But publishers noticed that books still might bury their authors in favoring reviews, demands

*For instance, at least two of the naked mixed swimming parties since so much used in moral films, etc., etc., took place in a private pool near St. Louis before 1911. The most alcoholized dance I have ever seen among polite people occurred in 1912. To get very practical and flat, it is a matter of official record that more than a half of the senior boys in a big midland high school habitually carried contraceptuals in 1911.

for lectures and autographs, without selling two thousand copies in a population of a hundred and ten million people. Ernest Boyd and Burton Rascoe pointed out in the same week that all this pother about books and literary personalities was, quite simply, pother. New magazines advertised painters and decorators. In fact, these magazines developed fine circulations. One met ladies who knew the names of artists in profusion. Never mind that. In the crowd screaming at Charles Lindbergh while the grave young fellow was displayed in the worst procession ever devised by municipal clownishness, stood one of our three eminent painters, halted by the mob on his way to give a drawing lesson for two dollars. "Our writers and painters," said a lady, a few days later, shaking cocktails in a drawing-room coated with lustrous enamel interset by sparks of platinum in a design of perverse flowers, "should only be allowed to issue something every five years. Then we'd have quintessences," she concluded. How were they to eat, in the meanwhile? "Oh, that could be arranged! Art," she said, "ought to be a sacrificial calling." And then she asked what was to be done with the hallway? Should she send for Robert Locher, one of the few masters of linear elegance now alive? So difficult to find his address in London, though. Nobody seemed to know. "For God's sake," her caller said, "look in the telephone book!" The lady did not know that Mr. Locher was an American. Nor was Mr. Locher ever asked to decorate the hallway. But the lady's deep interest in American art was mentioned in her obituary.

The years went defiantly on. The sensational entertainment was superb. You could hear and see so much, and so constantly. There is a lot to remember—the piling cry of the Negro actor, Gilpin, in

"The Emperor Jones," as he vanished from the hold of the slaver, the preposterous swimming of John Weissmuller who appears to slide just above surfaces, vaguely attached to the water by his toes,* Madge Kennedy's laughter in some fearful play about Diane de Poitiers, the petulant baby elephant and that unnamed woman, noble as a Cambodian statue, in the film called "Chang," the blue waltz in "This Year of Grace," the idiotic spring song in "Sweet Adeline," Ruth Draper's monologues, the slow march of old Myron Herrick through yellow light in the funeral of Foch, a great performance which cannot be repeated, and the grace of a thousand dancers, athletes and trained dogs. These sensations have nothing to do with the revolt against the commonplace. They were there to be seen and heard, if you chose to look and to listen. If you chose to look at letters in their final quality of entertainment to the intelligence a great deal went on which was not defiant, not mechanized by hate of the five spots, but ever so good with the goodness of the well accomplished, as in a defiant little play of E. E. Cummings, there was one of the most charming love scenes in many years of the theatre. We have been entertained, since 1919, by all kinds of good things, by Henry Mencken's consideration of the Blushful Mystery and a delicate, quiet paper of George Nathan on the illusion of plays and scenes, by Edmund Wilson's discordant dialogue between Van Wyck Brooks and Scott Fitzgerald, and by Mr. Fitzgerald's musical enumeration of the great Gatsby's strange

*Mr. Grantland Rice will authenticate this description of Mr. Weissmuller's performance. It is extraordinary, in all the wilderness of sporting literature since 1920, that this swimmer has not been rhapsodized by somebody. His economy of motion in the water is exactly comparable to the economies of Belmonte and Nino de Palma in bullfighting, or to the gesture of Madame Pitoeff in the theatre.

guests, by Lewis Mumford's courtly ex-coriation of a bad book by Elie Faure, by Dorothy Parker's defiance of the massed poets and intellectuals, by Richard Connell's tale of the professional murderer meekly asking a rise in pay, by Chester Crowell's story of Mary Fisher, by Samuel Hoffenstein's extraordinary parody of Miss Millay, by "The Killers" and the twelfth chapter of "The Sun Also Rises," by the seduction of Mabel in "The Western Shore," by the beginning of "Blue Voyage" and the end of "Golden Pilgrimage," by long passages in "The Stammering Century," and longer passages in "Emerson and Others," which Van Wyck Brooks has never fully published and must publish quickly, by Professor Kittredge's counterblast to the nonsense on historic witchcraft, and by Mary Swindler's huge study of ancient painting which dignified American scholarship in the autumn of 1929, by Paul Rosenfeld's reverie on Paris, the opera Louise and potatoes soufflés, by Sherwood Anderson's notice of cows blundering through tall cornstalks in the night, by the railroad builder of "A Lost Lady," by the sweep and force of "Look Homeward, Angel," and by so much else that rose simply from the wit and observation of good writers. There were excellences of all kinds in books meant as propaganda; one forgot what was being defied in observing how well people saw and wrote. Under the noises, all this went on.

The ordinary American in the spring of 1930 remains undistractedly the reader of light fiction and newspapers. He does not carry one of Mr. Cabell's essays on mankind shaped as a romantic allegory when he goes a journey. He is more likely to carry one of Sinclair Lewis's satires on himself and to declare that he likes it. He has heard a lot about intellectualism, from his son and daughter,

and may have tried to read Mr. Eddington or Mr. Walter Lippmann. He is a humanist, preferring clarity, simplicity, and mediocrity of analysis; he has no appetite for rich confusions of sensation and memory. He cannot infer from the impressionists. The naturalists bore him because there is no story in their books. He is supposed to like biography and history. He doesn't, but that supposition is sacred, for the moment, with critics who have not examined the sales lists of publishers. Political studies do not absorb him. Christianity does not interest him—it meant little to his father.

And yet something has stirred this man's mind. He permits an increase of the grim and the ironical in the magazines which are made for him. The vogue of the tale of murder—the extinction of entity—has startled doctors. Perhaps the wide sales of "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" were pushed by this curiosity about destiny and Deity. He advances on people indicated as critical and plumps unanswerable enigmas at them. "What do you think we were born for, really?" or "Do you believe that there's really much in life?" It is the beginning of the end for the American will-to-forget, that is obvious. Whether a sentimentally tragic sense is the next mood is not yet worth discussing. But the American begins to question happiness, as he has experienced happiness. His motor car and his electrical ice box have not made him secure from wonder. To-morrow was the Absolute which justified the world to his father and grandfather, the day of the golden rabbit's coming from the big hat of Uncle Sam. And, in a sort, the rebellion of these years has been an insistence on the discomfort of to-day. This much has reached the ordinary man. He begins to know that he must have some other defense than the apocalyptic hat. Not even

Mr. Coolidge's frequent and comforting mentions of the nation's wealth or the sedate efficiency of Mr. Hoover suffice. He is a little scared. One hears that in the voices at the golf club and the bar. He was offered some advice in 1929, although few of him read it: "Man's ultimate defense against the Universe, against Evil and accident and malice, is not by any fictitious resolution of these things into an Absolute which justifies

them and utilizes them for its own ends; this is specious comfort. . . . Art in the broad sense of all humanizing effort is man's answer to this condition: for it is the means by which he circumvents or postpones his doom, and bravely meets his tragic destiny. Not tame and gentle bliss, but disaster, heroically encountered, is man's true happy ending." That stands a long way from him yet. But he is closer to it than he was, ten years ago.



Book Madness

BY LOUIS HENRY COHN

Works of living authors cause this particular dementia.

INSIDIOUS is the word. No other can describe this bug that has bitten us. Most of us are sane—that is, fairly so until "Firsts" are mentioned, but from that moment the wild gleam comes into our eyes and a very torrent of words gushes forth from our lips about issues, half-titles, condition, new end-papers, and what-not. How did we get that way? If we loved literature only as literature, we might get everything necessary to our pleasure in buying second, tenth, or even later editions of our books. If our hobby were merely acquisitiveness, why do we not collect the portraits of our American statesmen as depicted on our currency, or the lovely engravings illustrating American industry, which are to be found on so much of the paper traded in on the little street running from the river to the grave-yard?

Are we artistically inclined? If so, why do we not collect pictures—those given away with cigarettes in our youth, and Rembrandts in our later years?

A short time ago an ardent collector tried to justify himself to me—to whom it was not necessary—with a long explanation of his fondness for the works of H. G. Wells and his consequent desire to own them in beautiful condition. And then, when I went to look at his collection, instead of showing me the Atlantic Edition, which is a really lovely piece of book-making, he fished out some dirty little pamphlets and beamed like a sun at noon. Ridiculous! Of course, he was, but so am I, and so are a great many of you, gentle readers. So why try to explain at all? We are that way, God only knows why. How did we get that way? Well, I only know the facts about two