

Thorstein Veblen

By Ernest Sutherland Bates



A biography of the stormy petrel of American economics, called by many America's most original thinker. His economic analysis was prophetic and is now meeting growing acceptance

THORSTEIN BUNDE VEBLEN was one of the few great original thinkers whom America has produced. Thirty years ago he pointed out the defects of our modern industrial system that are evident to every one today. He tore to shreds the theoretical defense of capitalism elaborated by political economists during two centuries, and was the first English writer to place economics on an empirical and scientific basis. "He, more than any other one man," writes Professor Harold Clark of Columbia, "altered the course of American economic thought." Similarly Professor Paul Homan of the University of Chicago writes that "almost all the new leads in economic thinking which have been fruitfully followed out during the last twenty years are in some degree directly traceable" to Veblen. Wesley Mitchell, W. F. Ogburn, Charles Beard, Harry Elmer Barnes, Rexford G. Tugwell, A. A. Berle—they are, in varying degree, Veblenians all.

Veblen's writings are still new and fresh, even those of them written a quarter-century ago. Who now reads Theodore Roosevelt's *The New Nationalism*, or Woodrow Wilson's *The New Freedom*, or Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life*? The fatuous optimism of their period drips from the very titles. But Veblen, the pessimist, is read ever more widely. Out of an entire generation of political and economic thinkers, he alone produced a body of thought that lives on.

Our modern social insanity, characterized by starvation based on over-production and by deliberately suicidal wars, was long ago coolly analyzed by Veblen and its causes traced. He came into our world like a stranger from a far planet, finding our most familiar customs as bizarre and curious as we find those of the Andaman Islanders. Interested, ironically amused, occasionally indignant, despite himself, at the inhumanity and destructiveness about him, he drew the picture of his times and pointed grimly toward a future, possibly better, but more likely worse than the present. A lone wolf, with all the pack against him, he had one powerful ally,

Time. He had other allies, friends, and disciples outside the pack, but it is Time, above all, that has justified him.

Yet his death in 1929, on the very edge of the great depression, passed almost without notice. Could he now observe his posthumous renown it is safe to say that he would regard it with his wonted irony. In his lifetime he was, by and large, an unhonored prophet, a notorious black sheep of the academic world, driven back and forth across the continent, hounded from each congenial pasture by the well-trained dogs of law and order. He did not seem particularly to care. No man, at least outwardly, had greater scorn for all forms of popular approval.

He was tall and gaunt and gray, phthisic and always ill. In social assemblies he sat silent, or surprised his associates by an occasional incredible platitude—whether meant seriously or not, they never knew. He delivered his college lectures, seated, hunched over his notes, muttering and mumbling in a voice barely audible, with an elbow on the desk and one hand half-covering his mouth. When he came to the New School for Social Research in New York, after being dismissed from three other institutions, the director, Doctor Alvin Johnson, drummed up an audience of seventy for his opening lecture. Veblen, though in desperate need of money at the time, made no concessions to popularity. He lectured in his usual manner and at the next meeting had an audience of six. Perhaps one student out of a hundred would have his entire course of life and thought changed by Veblen; the others got nothing from him. He deemed one in a hundred a sufficient proportion.

With his lanky figure and pointed beard, he was often likened to Don Quixote, especially when living at the New School with an Armenian professor whose figure resembled that of Sancho Panza. Yet this modern knight of the woeful countenance was much admired of women. The dogs of law and order held that, too, against him. He was not only an economic heretic, they barked, and a poor instructor, but he was a scandalous

creature. They were right, according to the mores of the day. Veblen's departure from the University of Chicago, it was rumored, was largely owing to a reckless crossing of the Atlantic companioned by the wife of another member of the faculty. At Leland Stanford there were not unsimilar occurrences. But despite his reputation, Veblen was not at heart a gay Lothario. Sex he considered a rather burdensome cosmic jest, to be endured as best one may without allowing it to intrude into one's serious thinking, although one might occasionally permit oneself an outraged fling at an outrageous society. In his relations with women he was usually the pursued rather than the pursuer, the victim rather than the victor. He was not "faithful," but he was otherwise uniformly kind, which he regarded as much more important. That his first wife became "queer" and that his second, much younger than himself, became violently insane, were misfortunes for which he was little responsible and from which he was the chief sufferer. On the whole, sex was a cause of misery to him, along with ill-health and poverty.

It was his outraged flings which gave him his unmerited reputation. Revolted by the least sign of stiff and starched respectability, he was tempted to parade his indiscretions as a mark of contempt for bourgeois hypocrisy. He scented a bourgeois taint even among the Socialists. New York still recalls a Socialist dinner in his honor to which the representatives of the proletariat came in formal evening dress, determined to capture Veblen for the movement. One irrepressible comrade, however, an extraordinarily handsome man, brought with him a chorus girl more noted for her beauty than for her knowledge of Karl Marx. Veblen, arriving in a plain business suit, turned his ungainly back upon the rest and devoted all his attention to this lady. The Socialists did not capture Veblen, but Veblen captured the chorus girl. Don Quixote in a sack suit, fighting modern windmills with modern methods.

Were it not for this element of exhibitionism in his amours, there would be less occasion to recall them. But the exhibitionism was as important a feature of his character as was the aloofness which it seemed to contradict. Without the second he could not have written as he did, without the first he might never have written at all. And both sprang from the same source.

"Scandihoofian" is the hospitable term with which the native Americans in Wisconsin and Minnesota welcomed the newcomers of Swedish and Norwegian stock. Veblen was a "Scandihoofian," member of a proud but at that time culturally despised minority. He was born in 1857 in Wisconsin, the son of a Norwegian immigrant, a carpenter, who later took his large family to a Scandinavian community in Minnesota, where he became a successful farmer. Of Veblen's immediate relatives, one became a prosperous lumber merchant and

two others attained some eminence in academic life, members respectively of the faculties of Princeton and of the University of Iowa. Belonging to an unusual family and early conscious of his own ability, Veblen was not one to submit tamely to social discrimination on the score of his race.

There were other elements of discontent in his community besides that of racial consciousness. The nascent Populist movement of the West was beginning to get under way during his childhood. Criticism of Wall Street was prevalent enough. Then, too, Veblen's early life on the farm united with his frugal Scandinavian heritage to give him a pronounced distaste for every form of luxury, a distaste that was later to urge him on to his famous analysis of the "leisure class."

At the age of twenty Veblen entered Carleton College, at that time the seat of John Bates Clark, who was soon to become the leading orthodox American economist. Clark's logical subtleties, difficult to answer though obviously at variance with fact, further stimulated, by opposition, the spirit of revolt in Veblen. Passing both the junior and senior examinations in Carleton at the end of his junior year, Veblen repaired to Johns Hopkins for graduate study in philosophy, but, finding George Morris's idealism little to his taste, he transferred to Yale, where he took his Ph.D. in 1884, with a dissertation on "The Ethical Grounds of a Doctrine of Retribution." During the same period he wrote an essay on Kant's "Critique of Judgment" which was published in William Torrey Harris's *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. At Yale he was influenced by William Graham Sumner in the same negative manner as by John Bates Clark at Carleton, these two stout defenders of society achieving what seemed to him a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of their own doctrines.

Although regarded at Yale as Noah Porter's star student in philosophy, Veblen was unable to find a teaching position in a subject which was then still a perquisite of college presidents and retired clergymen. He returned to the West and passed the seven traditional lean years—years of study which were poor enough financially but were rich in intellectual development, for at their close he had definitely formulated his philosophy of life and his approach to social and economic problems.

The most important constructive influences upon his thought at this time were Darwin, Spencer, Tylor, and, above all, Karl Marx. The former led him to an evolutionary position somewhat beyond their own in its complete acceptance of cosmic mechanism. The latter, though he rejected many of Marx's special theories, taught him the significance of variations in the material means of production as the basis of social and cultural change. His own position was in essence a reformulation of Marx in evolutionary terms, with additional ma-

terial from Wundt, William James, and even the rejected Sumner, the whole deriving a new slant from his own temperamental approach.

Through some of his early writings Veblen obtained a fellowship in economics at Cornell under Professor J. Laurence Laughlin, and when in 1892 the latter went to the new University of Chicago he took Veblen with him to a minor position in his department. The University of Chicago, under President Harper, secured the services of what was probably the ablest faculty ever brought together in an American institution. There Veblen came in intimate contact with such men as John Dewey, Jacques Loeb, Wesley Mitchell, Herbert Davenport, and Robert Hoxie. Under the stimulation of this yeasty environment, his fourteen years at Chicago were the most productive of his entire career. Indeed, it may be doubted whether anything that he did in the twenty-three years after leaving Chicago was more than a filling out and completion of his earlier achievement.

During the Chicago period he wrote the majority of the essays collected in the volume entitled *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization*, as well as three other books of major importance, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, and *The Higher Learning in America* (which was not published until thirteen years after it was written).

The Place of Science in Modern Civilization is the least known but probably the most significant of all of Veblen's works. The essays in it, published originally in technical journals and familiar only to economists, were one and all directed against the "classical economics" of his day. To appreciate their value, we must recall the main tenets of that economics.

The classical economics, then all but universally accepted in America and still taught in the more backward of our colleges and universities, was a theoretical elaboration of the "rugged individualism" praised by a recent but now almost forgotten president of the United States. It was substantially identical with the views held until yesterday by the great majority of Americans, not only held but incorporated into their organisms, bone of their bone and sinew of their sinew. Originated by John Locke and given its classic formulation by Adam Smith in the eighteenth century before the Industrial Revolution had done away with handicrafts, it reflected the actual condition of society before the rise of machinery, big business, and mass production. It taught that one has a natural right to private profits as a reasonable reward of private industry; that capital is accumulated through the frugal savings of its owners and is thus a "reward of abstinence"; that loans and credits are devices to assist the less wealthy members of the community; that the laborer enjoys the same "freedom of contract" as the capitalist and that his failure or success is dependent on the amount of his own efforts.

It will be conceded that all this was typical "American doctrine" at the beginning of the twentieth century, even though it had been worked out by Englishmen a hundred and fifty years earlier, and even though during that hundred and fifty years industrial conditions had entirely changed.

The only point wherein classical economics differed from the ideology of the Average American was in its general assumption that men are actuated solely by the desire to obtain pleasure and avoid pain, and even here the Average American, in his more cynical moments, would have been inclined to agree. This hedonistic assumption, however, made necessary a complicated profit-pleasure labor-pain calculus dealing with an abstraction called "the economic man," the result of which was to enlarge the breach between economics and actual life. As industrial conditions departed farther and farther from handicraft, economic theory became more and more deductive, a series of inferences unchecked by facts but all going to prove what John Bates Clark flatly announced in his *Essentials of Economic Theory*, namely, that "each man is paid an amount that equals the total product that he personally creates"—a statement that deserves to be remembered as a supreme example of the folly that can fall from the lips of accredited wisdom.

This whole economic pseudo-science Veblen subjected to devastating analysis. He riddled its dogmas and ridiculed its methods. As an alleged social science, economics, he urged, should be based on an empirical study of changing conditions, not on a parody of mathematical deductions from supposedly eternal principles. The hedonism of classical economics had long been discredited in philosophy and had been definitely overthrown by modern psychology. The static conceptions of classical economics had been rendered antiquated by evolutionary science. It was based on an outworn individualistic conception of society; it disregarded a century of technological development; its notion of capital as physical goods neglected the immaterial assets that have become the major part of capital; its opposition to monopoly contradicted both the inner logic and the actual development of capitalism; its identification of increased business and increased production was utterly erroneous; above all, it took for granted a mysterious "natural right" to private property instead of examining the alleged right from the point of view of its social serviceability.

Veblen regarded economics as part of the general study of human culture instead of as a special field of investigation separated by barbed-wire entanglements from all the other social sciences. He himself brought to its illumination a vast amount of historical, anthropological, and psychological knowledge. The conservative economists of his day were bewildered and disgusted by his habit of bringing the customs of the

ancient Cretans or of the primitive Melanesians into a discussion of modern civilization. Surely we were Anglo-Saxons, descendants of Adam Smith, not Cretans or Melanesians! Nevertheless, Veblen continued calmly to show that Cretan and American women were much alike, and that many modern ways of living were far less rational than those of the peaceful Melanesians.

In his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899 and already adumbrated in an article on "Some Neglected Points of Socialism" in 1892, Veblen turned his attention more directly to the question of the serviceability of private property. From the passing of primitive communism down to the present time, he found that social esteem and special privilege have been largely monopolized by the non-productive groups of warriors, priests, and acquirers or inheritors of unearned wealth. These groups have formed a leisure class whose contempt for labor, determining the social outlook, has established an ideal of actual non-serviceability. Incommodious but ostentatious houses, uncomfortable but fashionable clothes, lavish entertainment, and the prestige of useless learning, such as a knowledge of Latin and Greek, all testify to the prevalence of this ideal.

The book opened up a new field of study and interpretation, but it hardly touched the contemporary business man, whose cultural rôle has been somewhat different, and whose proudest boast has been that, above all others, he has proved himself a productive agency, developing the American continent, intersecting it with railroads, creating wealth and prosperity. This claim Veblen subjected to close analysis in his succeeding work, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, published in 1904, reaching diametrically opposite conclusions to those generally accepted. He drew a sharp distinction between "industry" and "business," industry being concerned with production, business with the transformation of production into private property.

This distinction, now regarded by many, writes Professor Homan, "as an indispensable instrument of economic analysis," was distantly suggested in an interesting but forgotten work, to which Professor Mitchell called my attention, published in 1821 by an unknown writer who called himself "Percy Ravenstone."

In Ravenstone's book, cumbrously entitled, in the manner of the day, *A Few Doubts as to the Correctness of Some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subjects of Population and Political Economy*, he wrote: "Property is the creature of convention; it owes its birth, its origin, to society; it can have no rights but what it derives from its (society's) will, none but what are conducive to its benefit. . . . The rights of industry are far different in their importance; they are the rights which a man has in his limbs, in his faculties, in himself."

Ravenstone, of course, used the terminology of his time, but his point was not unsimilar to Veblen's. The latter, however, had probably never even heard of Ravenstone, and, in any case, he developed the idea in an entirely different manner, applying it especially to contemporary conditions. Modern wealth and prosperity, such as they are, he showed, have been derived from the vast increase of production made possible by technological improvements. Scientists and inventors are the true parents of modern industry. The business man, on the other hand, makes his profit not from production but from prices; to maintain prices he is always ready to "sabotage production" so far as he dares, to manipulate the market so far as he can. Instead of being socially efficient, the business system is one of constant waste, through the unemployment of material resources, through the rivalry of salesmanship, through the production of superfluities and spurious goods, through dislocation and duplication everywhere. The business man, in other words, instead of being a leader of industry, is a monkey wrench thrown into its wheels. The only escape in sight from all this waste and inefficiency lies in the inevitable development of monopolies, but this will leave prices still divorced from production, will turn the country over, bound hand and foot, to big business, and will lead, when the domestic market is exhausted, to foreign wars.

So much, in general, for the vaunted "service" rendered by business, the chief modern agent of private property. In *The Higher Learning in America*, Veblen took up the question of its influence on education. He showed that the governing boards of our universities are everywhere composed of influential business men, who, though necessarily out of touch with educational problems, nevertheless select the president, determine the quality of the faculty, and guide the academic policy. And the results: an increasing number of business presidents, devoid of scholarship; a progressive lowering of standards; such an emphasis upon "the accessories of college life," athletic and social, that the old term "institution of learning" can now be used only in an ironic sense.

"These accessories of college life," Veblen wrote, "have been strongly on the increase since the business régime has come in. They are held to be indispensable, or unavoidable; not for scholarly work, of course, but chiefly to encourage the attendance of that decorative contingent who take more kindly to sports, invidious intrigue, and social amenities than to scholarly pursuits. Notoriously, this contingent is, on the whole, a serious drawback to the cause of learning, but it adds appreciably, and adds a highly valued contribution, to the number enrolled; and it gives also a certain, highly appreciated, loud tone ('college spirit') to the student body; and so it is felt to benefit the corporation of

learning by drawing public attention." The remedy, Veblen mildly suggested, would be to do away with the governing boards of business men, who, he readily showed, give only perfunctory attention to the actual business needs of the colleges, and to replace them with educators, who might, where necessary, have a staff of business subordinates.

Bold though he was, Veblen did not venture to bring out "The Higher Learning" until he was through with academic teaching. It did not appear until 1918, but the trend in American universities having undergone no change, it was then fully as pertinent as in 1905. Veblen's charges were all reiterated once more in 1930 by Abraham Flexner, with copious additions of his own, in his volume on *Universities*. But both Veblen and Flexner were answered in a typically American manner. They were not refuted. Nearly every one professed to agree with them; and then, nothing was done.

From 1906 to 1909 Veblen was at Leland Stanford, and from 1909 to 1918 he was at the University of Missouri. But something seemed to go out of him after leaving Chicago. Whether it was ill health, personal disappointment, the lack of stimulus in his environment, or, most likely, all three, the keen, alert thinker that was Veblen now loitered and procrastinated, seemingly only half awake. His long exile beyond the Mississippi produced only two books, and those toward the end of this period, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*, in 1914, and *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, in 1915. The former was merely a restatement of earlier work and in less convincing form. Veblen had always trusted too implicitly in evolutionary anthropology, and when this was largely discredited by the work of Boas and his school, he failed to modify his views accordingly. He had always overemphasized the rôle of deliberate, conscious activity, and he refused to learn from Freud. On the other hand, he also refused to learn from Watson and the behaviorists. He had been vegetating, mulling over his old ideas, until they took exaggerated form in a kind of cosmic opposition between a mythical instinct of workmanship, the father of art and industry, and an equally mythical predatory and pecuniary instinct, the mother of war and madness.

The actual war in 1914 brought him back to reality. He was no pro-German, but neither was he the victim of Allied propaganda. *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* was one of the sanest books written during that stormy period, showing the rivalry of English and German industrial imperialism, though granting that, at the moment, Germany's was the greater menace to the world. On America's entrance into the war, he went to Washington as an industrial aid. Asked to prepare a report on the I. W. W., he made a thorough study of that unpopular organization,

concluded that its demands were reasonable, and recommended in his report that they be granted. Asked to investigate food shortage, he uncovered considerable profiteering in high places and submitted names and dates. Washington then decided that it could dispense with Veblen; he seemed to have no sense of what war meant. He had now earned the enmity of the bureaucracy, and when in 1919 he published *An Inquiry into the Nature of Peace and the Terms of its Perpetuation*, the book and its predecessor were suppressed by the government. In it he had offered the helpful suggestion that the neutralization of all citizenship was absolutely essential to a lasting peace, an entirely sound measure which stood about as much chance of adoption as had his earlier educational suggestion to abolish all existing boards of trustees. Men did not really want peace any more than they wanted education; what they wanted was to be able to talk about peace and education—but not in such an unbecoming manner as was Veblen's.

During 1918, along with John Dewey and Helen Marot, Veblen became one of the editors of *The Dial* in its new and brief incarnation as an organ of liberal social thought. It was there that he published the articles later collected in *The Vested Interests and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1919) and *The Engineers and the Price System* (1921). Along with much repetition of earlier ideas, they contained a new note of hope. Hitherto, as a consistent mechanist, Veblen had been scornful of reformers, including the Socialists, regarding them as men who either opposed the inevitable or needlessly strove to hasten it. Now, however, in the heady atmosphere of the war, and inspired by Jack Reed's enthusiastic tales of Russia, he believed, with amazing blindness, that a fundamental social change was immediately at hand in America, and he dreamed of becoming its Karl Marx. Not that he expected or desired anything so strenuous as a proletarian revolution. "No movement for the dispossession of the Vested Interests in America," he wrote, "can hope for even a temporary success unless it is undertaken by an organization which is competent to take over the country's productive industry as a whole, and to administer it from the start on a more efficient plan than that now pursued." Such an organization, he thought, might be created among the engineers and industrial experts, and in *The Vested Interests* he entitled one of the chapters "A Memorandum on a Practicable Soviet of Technicians." This was destined specifically to provide one of the germinating ideas in the recent movement of "Technocracy," headed by Howard Scott, an associate of Veblen's during the early twenties. More broadly, Veblen's demand for a planned economy underlay all the recent efforts in that direction, including the contemporary program of President Roosevelt and his "Brains Trust."

But what of the projected "Soviet of Technicians"? Veblen himself had been too long a college professor not to have great dread of appearing ridiculous, and he carefully guarded himself against the charge of extravagance. "By settled habit," he wrote, "the technicians, the engineers and industrial experts, are a harmless and docile sort, well fed on the whole, and somewhat placidly content with the 'full dinner pail' which the lieutenants of the Vested Interests habitually allow them."

Even before *The Engineers and the Price System* got into print, it was evident that his hopes were utterly without foundation, the reaction was already in full swing, and the liberals were scurrying to cover, happy if they were not accused of disloyalty and treason. *The Dial* passed into other hands and became a more pompous and exotic *Little Review*, devoted to "pure art" and the latest literary fashions from abroad. Veblen taught for a while at the New School, and wrote one more book of social criticism, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times; the Case of America*, published in 1924. It was an elegiac valedictory to the old themes. He then retired to the West, amused himself by translating the "Laxdaela Saga" from the Icelandic, became more seriously ill, and died at the age of seventy-two.

Shortly after his death, his friend, Horace Kallen, wrote, "I have a shrewd suspicion that Veblenism may be to the intellectuals of the future what Marxism has been to the humanitarians of the past." Without stopping to cavil at the use of the word "humanitarian" in connection with Marxism, one may grant this to be an interesting conjecture but scarcely more. The Veblenian vogue can hardly transcend the limitations of Veblen himself. He was a critic, not a savior, of society. His avowed aim, even at the last, never went beyond mere efficiency, and, though it is an American habit to halt there, mere efficiency is far from an adequate basis for a constructive social philosophy. Nor did he have any real conception of the forces that might achieve his desired transformation of society. He himself pointed out that not only big business and small business but also the farmers, the professional groups, and even the skilled workers in the A. F. of L. are all aligned in support of the existing order. By logical exclusion, his own allies could therefore be found only in the proletariat, but there he would not look for them. Instead, he dreamed of prying loose the engineers to create a "Soviet of Technicians" in Cloud Cuckoo Land!

By both temperament and early training, he was a rebel and sceptic, not a positive thinker or system-maker. But, one should remember, to be a great rebel and sceptic has, before this, sufficed for immortality. Especially might this well be true in a country like America

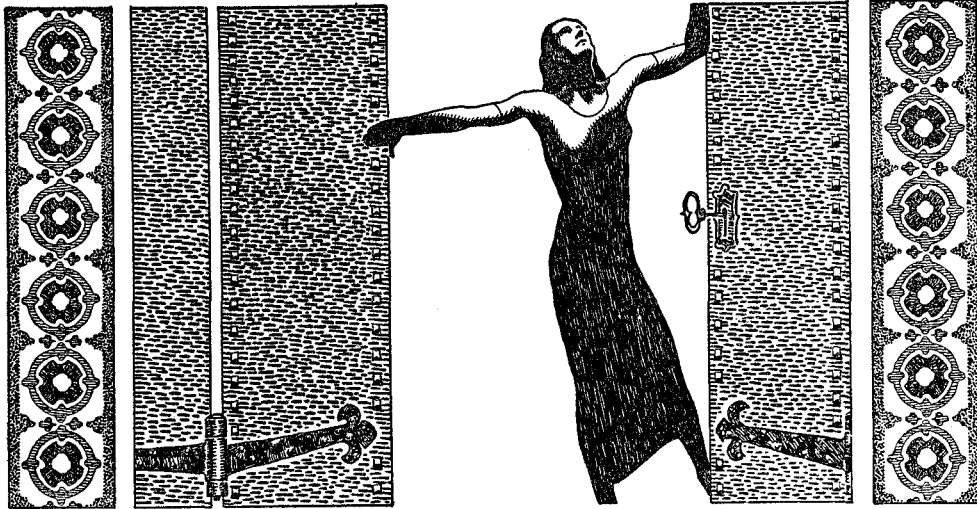
which has not been richly endowed with that particular kind of genius. So far as American literature is concerned, Veblen, in his own rôle, is incomparable.

Out of his racial humiliation, personal insecurity, and practical uncertainty, Veblen forged a stylistic weapon that served him equally well for defense and for attack. Compounded of learning and irony, it frightened fools out of his garden, and protected him when the enemy appeared in overwhelming force, while in actual combat it inflicted deadly wounds. Once habituated to the strange involutions, convolutions, and circumlocutions of this heavily Latinized style, one follows it with an almost hypnotic fascination, waiting for it to condense to the inevitable poisoned epithet. A master phrase-maker, recalling in this respect Matthew Arnold but far more pungent and profound, Veblen was accustomed to sum up an argument, or a characterization of a whole historical period, or a description of some fundamental human tendency, in a concise formula, usually invidious and illuminating, such as "economic emulation," "conspicuous waste," "the kept classes" defined as those who live on "vested interests" defined in turn as the obtaining something for nothing. He was a lover of words, delighting to put them through their paces; a deliberate and careful stylist. The editors of *The Dial* long remembered Veblen's ashen anger when Robert Morss Lovett, a newcomer on the board, ventured to "correct" some of his sentences.

But Veblen was also a humorist of the straight face. Joyce himself never indulged in a better bit of satiric verbal fooling than Veblen achieved when he wrote: "If we are getting restless under the taxonomy of a monocotyledonous wage doctrine and a cryptogamic theory of interest, with involute, loculicidal, tomentous and moniform variants, what is the cytoplasm, centrosome, or karyokinetic process to which we may turn and in which we may find surcease from the metaphysics of normality and controlling principles?"

Advocates of the vernacular, such as H. L. Mencken, who once wrote a thunderous anti-Veblen diatribe, will never find him to their taste, but nonetheless Veblen's style admirably served his purposes. Both in its massive learning and in the sharp ironic sword-play in which all the learning was focalized on some immediate issue, his style like his thought was a protest against the haphazard culture of his age.

He could not shake the walls of Jericho, but he silenced its defenders. He bridled economic theory and made it ready to perform human service. He was a profound critic of American culture. We may even believe, with Lewis Mumford, that "he will come eventually to be numbered with those kings of satire who wage contention with their times' decay, and who will outlast even the tenacious institutions they seek to destroy."



TAMARA, sitting at the dining-room table, was writing a letter to her American college friend. The two weeks of Christmas vacation had caused college to recede to a very distant plane in her mind, and she was having a hard time thinking of something to say. Moreover the door leading to the drawing-room was wide open, and she could not help hearing what her aunt Nina Nicolaevna and Count Seversky were saying. For the third time Aunt Nina called out to her.

"Tamarochka, why is it that you cannot finish your letter later? Come and have some tea with Vladimir and me."

Stubbornly Tamara refused to join them.

"Really, Aunt Nina, this letter is terribly important." Which of course was not true.

Tamara could see her aunt lying curled up in the corner of a broad sofa. She looked tired. Magazines and books lay piled up on the rest of the sofa, but Aunt Nina, without removing them, had managed to make herself comfortable in her small corner. In an armchair opposite her sat Count Seversky, sipping his third glass of tea. He had stopped in on his way from work, which is to say, after ten hours of driving a taxi. His chauffeur's cap and heavy overcoat were on a chair near by. The count had had a good day. He had made more money than usual and was planning to take Tamara to the Russian Club that night. In her turn, Aunt Nina told of the strenuous morning she had had. She had been to the market early in the morning and had argued with a Russian-speaking Jew about the superiority of continental cooking to American. Then she had to carry two heavy bags of provisions home.

"In the old days in Russia, no servant would have been expected to carry such a load. Why, our cook used

Cornered

A STORY

By Lola von Hoershelman

to go to the market followed by the kitchen-man. I remember the housekeeper complaining that they stayed away for hours."

Vladimir Seversky asked what Nina's husband, Fedor Pavlovitch, was planning to

do now that he was out of work. Aunt Nina frowned as she answered:

"Well, we have written letters to every one asking for a loan at the highest rate conceivable, to be paid when we get our estates back in Russia. We wrote to them in the nicest French, too. You see, we are planning to open a gasoline station."

"Now, how does it happen that you and Fedor Pavlovitch know anything about cars and gasoline?" asked Seversky in surprise.

"We don't really. We thought maybe we could just sell the gasoline, and the customers could put it in their cars themselves."

"They might not like that," Seversky politely suggested.

Finding no retort, Nina Nicolaevna began to feel annoyed. She did not like to face difficult problems. It was just as well to trust that everything eventually would turn out for the best.

The conversation irritated Tamara. In the first place, she was feeling small pangs of conscience for not having suggested accompanying her aunt to the market; in the second place she wished Seversky would not sit there in his taxi-driver's clothes, dirty and tired. How could Aunt Nina expect her to want to marry him if he insisted on being seen at his worst? For one short frightful moment she imagined her college friends suddenly walking in to be introduced to a *taxi-driver*:

"Count Vladimir Seversky, my fiancé."

Of course he was not her fiancé, yet if Aunt Nina