



## A G E N B I T E      O F      I N W I T

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### CLASSROOM BEACHHEAD

By James Blish

"We've had our day at triv and quad and writ our bit as intermidgets."

JAMES JOYCE, Finnegans Wake

Despite the efforts of President Hutchins of Chicago University, the number of Americans able to make Joyce's boast diminishes daily; the mediaeval disciplines persist in education as disparate units -- one can still study grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy in colleges everywhere -- but the rounded whole of liberal education which they represent has not been a controlling force among our faculties for many years. Many men of letters have complained of this -- vide Alfred Jay Nock's complaint that most of today's university graduates are unable to read their own diplomas -- and Hutchins' program of reviving the trivium and quadrivium at Chicago represents the first organized attempt to remedy the situation.

It may also well be the last. While Hutchins and his faculty puzzle over what books do or do not belong in the list of one hundred best, and Mark van Doren studies the possible usefulness of liberal arts in a technological society, American institutions are peering timidly at a future which makes trivium and quadrivium look mediaeval indeed. The G. I. Bill of Rights, Public Law #346, has come, and presages the influx of an estimated 650,000 students whose demands will be anything but liberal, and whose educational desires will lean heavily upon the vocational. The reports which have come in thus far, as to what kind of teaching returning veterans will request, have shown a pattern far afield from the classical. Students of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill -- in many ways one of the strongholds of scholarship in this country -- write from the battlefields to demand that their professors be made to travel, and express the fear that they will be bored in college classes when they return. Soldiers with no real aptitude for college work are looking eagerly at the G. I. Bill and planning to collect diplomas they would never have dreamt of seeking in normal times, even had they the money. Others see in the law a refuge (since it supplies fifty to seventy-five dollars subsistence money a month as well as tuition) from periods of joblessness.

During the writer's last year in the Army he encountered these attitudes everywhere he turned. Thus far the most articulate expression of them is the one published last year in the Saturday Evening Post, signed by a high school student who served with the Marines in the South Pacific, and then returned to finish his senior year. This youth -- whose account is presented "as told to" a staff writer; the editors evidently mistrusted his ability to write intelligibly himself -- anticipates the benevolence of the Veteran's Administration with a juicy packet of criticisms. One of the chief of these is that



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he thinks he ought to be awarded some college entrance credits for his combat service. He, too, is bored with actually sitting in a classroom and learning something after all the excitement with the Japanese, and declares his teachers and what they teach to be "out of this world."

Probably it is a little annoying to return from a battlefield to a high-school English teacher who reads pretty poems through her nose. That bad teaching and superfluous courses exist in the Marine's high school and every other one, nobody would question. Nevertheless, very few people have succeeded in getting through any curriculum, even leading to the Ph. D., without being either bored or downright baffled by a percentage of their classes and instructors. What is to become of this Marine if he is allowed to skip what is boring to him in high school, for the not very related reason that he has been in combat, in order to confront the far stricter requirement of college classes, not all of which can be guaranteed to be as thrilling as establishing a beachhead?

Before the war, admission standards to undergraduate schools, while low enough to permit many inferior students to register, weeded out the obviously unfit. Even then, however, it had been possible for some years for a man of no special intelligence to get a degree in physical education or business management or some other subject remote from scholarship as most people imagine it; sadly enough, one of the easiest college courses to pass is teacher training. This was the situation which originally called forth the criticisms of educators like Nock and Hutchins; they suggested dividing lines to separate university study and vocational guidance, and advanced the admissible idea that degrees in fields of real scholarship were being devalued by the issuance of cap and gown to people who had survived nothing more than an advanced variety of manual training.

But what now? With the threatened inundation of veterans promising grave admission problems, are the colleges tightening their entrance requirements? Nothing of the sort appears to be in the offing. The president of Baldwin-Wallace in Ohio has already announced that for veterans the college's standards may be lowered to some extent; and the general feeling is that the pressures of public opinion and veterans' organizations will persuade many other institutions to do the same -- and further, will make them reluctant to drop failing ex-GI's from the roles. This movement has other ramifications; there is, for instance, the Rutgers University "Gold Star Scholarships", awarded recently to seven sons and two daughters of alumni killed in the war. A stray slug, striking thousands of miles away, has nudged these nine people into the class of students. Under the circumstances, it will hardly be surprising if the young Marine discussed above comes out at the other end of an academic assembly line complete with degree and the same assortment of magnificently descriptive phrases like "out of this world" that he had when he went in.

The writer has taught for some years, and has seen his share of education's automata, the well-mannered, nicely-dressed youngsters who went to college because people of their stratum are expected to do so, and passed their curricula with decent marks without ever learning anything beyond a set of reflex motions. They make a sharp contrast with education's own orphanage, the men and women who never did get to college and never expected to, but learned a very great deal of value through the unaided use of native intelligence. This might be enough to make reasonable Nock's conclusion that the educabl



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will learn, and the ineducable will not, regardless of physical advantages, but it is difficult to accept the status quo with such equanimity -- for there is a third class, the educable who did get to college, and came out magnificently equipped with the codified learning of twenty centuries; and the fourth, the College of Hard Knocks class, which holds that not having gotten to college automatically exalts them over the educated.

A teacher at graduation ceremonies can watch the wearily ironic faces of nuclear physicists and the genetics experts while the Ph. D.'s in Landscape Gardening are being handed out. In his own laboratory he has heard the voices of that inevitable bloc of students comparing their class-cutting achievements. And it is with no special happiness that he can look forward to the advent of 650,000 new cut-totters, and the subsequent going out of 450,000 Bachelors of the Sciences of Advertising, Business English, and Comic Strip Continuity; 450,000 to look with superior smiles upon the mere high-school graduate even when he knows eight times what they do or could, and to boom the College of Hard Knocks by sheer contrast, to a comparable insufferability. The day seems imminent when the air with which Mr. Roosevelt's economics experts were greeted will be welcoming the nuclear physicists as well.

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#### CONTENTMENT (A Parable)

By Dale Hart

Two men sat under a mango tree in Hawaii. They were drinking liquor distilled from sugar cane.

One was very wealthy. He was a poet, by chance. His companion could have been a poet, too, given financial security. Economics decreed that he haul pineapples to the cannery. This man was intelligent but poor.

The poet was in a philosophical mood induced by the drinks and the mellow weather.

"I want the contentment of all inanimate things. I am a restless soul, and I am content nowhere. Here in the island, East meets West in a conspiracy to drug the mind. However I cannot succumb, when succumbing is the easiest thing to do. I remain master of myself so as to strive for peace of mind without anaesthesia of the brain. Contentment is a state which never palls if it feeds upon the direct sources of life itself."

The hauler of pineapples nodded comprehendingly, and the poet continued.

"I want peace, I tell you, the contentment of a mango ripening in the sun."

As the last word dropped from his lips, a mango dropped vengefully upon his philosophical head.

This mango had grown tired of ripening in the sun.

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EN PASSANT

The neatness and generally outstanding appearance of Sappho, unfortunately, is insufficient to conceal the poetic poverty of its contents. Two of the persons represented seem to have the requisite feeling for words and nuances: Michel and Ebey.

The former, while attempting far less in "style" achieves far more. "Mr. Rossheim died" has a savagely bitter quality which communicates, as well as under-surface meaning; the Ebey selections indicate only that young George may be able to do something with poetry when he has reached the point of understanding the reasons behind the "modern" techniques he affects -- and when he has more to say.

In Tumbrils, Hart achieves a charming effect of little consequence; my feeling is that here is a man who may have something to say, but who needs to make a clean rupture with out-moded forms of expression. With Sostman (if one poet may speak sotto voce to a better poet) I have found much of Aiken here -- in style, that is, and while it is pleasing to note an adoption moving forward of his better modes, it is a bit disturbing to see the Aiken faults as well -- compression is to be desired!

Modern Concept deserves an A for effort, but material of general interest to Vanguardists is needful. (Specifically, material not referring to past issues of amateur publications Vanguard has not seen.)

Appreciated: "How to Write Radio Mystery Thrillers", "Wonders of Non-Accumulation", "Genus Pipe-Smoker", excellent reproduction of correctly-typed poetry by RWL, Discrete's cover, and Knight's snide jingle on FSNY.

In reference to "On Pamphleteering and Puberty", influence can only be judged by effect --

a hindsight matter. The actual size of the audience of a pamphlet, essay, or any publication is not in itself sufficient evidence for judging that pamphlet, essay, or publication in its influential aspects. (Again, Knight has not indicated any particular type of influence. "In short, pamphleteering is an instrument for influencing opinion, and its value must be computed on the basis of the size of audience reached.") However Knight forgets that such influence operating on a very few individuals of weight in relation to a given sphere of operations may (and usually does) count for far more than "influencing the opinions" of large numbers of people who are unable to make their opinions count effectively in any sphere of concrete action.

(Even in the microcosm of the pseudo-science "fan" publications, instances may be found where an item in a given publication decidedly had "influence" due to its reaching, and having an effect upon the opinions and actions of, individuals in a position of authority in the magazine publishing world.)

To paraphrase Emden speaking of Michel, Zissman's lapses into such emotional gibberish as "any thinking person's constrained to agree with the man", somewhat lessened the value of the review of "The Responsibility of Peoples."

And to give the dying horse one final boot I'm a bit curious if Emden considers reporting of extended observation (which was part of "Free and Unequal") as "unsubstantiated opinion". The attempt, successful or not, was to draw conclusions from observation. To date there has been no "reply" to the article wherein the rebuttalist showed any comprehension of what that article was about.

O D E

By Clark Ashton Smith

O young and dear and tender sorceress!  
Your delicate, slim hands  
Reweave the glamors of forgotten lands  
To enchant the noon or night --  
With many a soft caress,  
Restore the lost and lyrical delight.  
The limbs of maenads flown  
Have given you their grace,  
And immemorial Aprils haunt your face.  
All that was not, but should have been, mine own,  
Your gentle beauty brings  
Till the heart finds again its forfeit wings.  
The young, Favonian loves  
That passed aversely, darkling and unknown,  
About your bosom dwell like coted doves.  
Long-fallen fruits by necromancy burn  
Upon your lips; and perished planets rise  
Into the beryl evening of your eyes;  
And the lost autumns in your hair return.

In you each yesterday  
Shall past tomorrow stay;  
And love would linger here,  
Letting your pulses tell his destined time  
Through all the clement year:  
Yea, having known your fair, Arcadian heart,  
He would not thence depart:  
Harsher it were than death  
To face again the lonesome rain and rime,  
And draw reluctant breath  
From the grey rigors of an alien clime.



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FIGURES      AND      HORIZON

By Henry E. Sostman

Now when she moves with tentative  
soft-lapped steps, the querulous  
shadow of her hands in water is  
forecast of indecision.  
In the mauve, in the azure, the pale  
hands effect permutations of dim flowers  
sinking like snowflakes in a crystal bowl.

Roses are questions flung like tears against  
the pelting petals. Corolla, calyx, pistil,  
nerve-meshed, the pattern in translucent wax  
veining, dividing, asking.  
The query tinkles slowly from nerve to crystal  
touched with a tiny bell, and sinks like snow.

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
something I escape not often and with difficulty.  
Oblivious to the ordinated plane  
the careless lovers kick their heels in the grass.  
Shadows the while encroach upon the marge;  
a planet finds its pale parabola.

MIRAGE

By Robert W. Lowndes

Someday, someday,  
Tides will not return.

Somenight, somenight,  
I will build sandcastles  
Beneath a moonless sky peace-enshrouding.

They will stand for a thousand years.

C E R I F S      With this i s s u e,  
                    Agenbite o f Inwit  
has finally realized a policy. I  
know now what I want for these  
pages, and the number of them in  
future issues depends entirely up-  
on how much I get of what I want.

Material will be considered on  
two counts: (a) is it reasonably  
well done? (b) do I find it inter-  
esting? Thus the scope of Agen-  
bite is more amorphous than that  
of, say, Renascence; the require-  
ments are less strict (since this  
is something of an experimental-  
laboratory magazine), and the tone  
more varied. I'm interested in  
controversial and provocative ar-  
ticles (Ex: "Classroom Beachhead"  
in this issue, "Epode" in Tumbrils  
#1); critical essays (Ex: "Eblis  
in Bakelite" in Tumbrils #2, "A  
Window on Bok" in Banshee); humor  
(Ex: "Basil and the Lion" in Dis-  
crete #1, "Genus Pipe Smoker" in  
Temper #2); satire, (Ex: "Lowndes  
For Presidente" in Agenbite of In-  
wit, May & July, "Fitting In" in  
High Points); whimsy, (Ex: "Hexa-  
teuch" in Heeling Error, "Wonders  
of Accumulation" in Agenbite of  
Inwit, March) and poetry (Ex: "The  
Folded and the Quiet", Tumbrils  
#2, "mr. rossheim died", Sappho --  
but not the usual run of Sappho,  
Leprechaun scrawl!)

Artwork, to be considered at  
all, must be submitted on the  
stencil.

Zissman's review of "The Res-  
ponsibility of Peoples" reminds  
me that Dwight MacDonald had writ-  
ten much of interest and good  
sense in Politics, and other peo-  
ples magazines -- except in rela-  
tion to one subject. When Mac-  
Donald so much as thinks of the  
USSR, his thought-processes become  
"a tortured midnight, fraught with  
fearful shapes"\*, his logic de-

parts from him; he yammers; and as  
with the case of the young man  
from Dundee who became involved  
with a baboon, the results are  
most horrid. This is unfortunate,  
as MacDonald might be able to con-  
tribute some opinion of value,  
were it possible for him to speak  
sanely on the subject. As things  
are, though, he's more literate,  
but no more reliable a commentator  
upon the Soviet Union than Benja-  
min de Casseras, chronically to be  
seen in Hearst's cribhouse.

Just in case I forget again to  
mention in Vanguard Amateur that,  
in the index of mailings, maga-  
zines are listed in order of re-  
ceipt, I shall note that here.

New York members were discuss-  
ing the 2d Vanguard Mailing, which  
had just come out, and news of the  
day. The Communist Political Ass-  
ociation had just been put on the  
spot by the French Duclos, who had  
written a letter violently attack-  
ing the American CPA policy. What  
would Browder say to all this?  
The conversation floated to possi-  
ble members for Vanguard; the  
names of some old-time science  
fiction writers came up. Then  
spoke Chet Cohen: "Why not invit  
Earl Browder -- he's working on a  
story!"

In case anyone's interested ,  
"El-Hanyf" means: the convert. It  
is an Arabic word and was origin-  
ally used to designate the follow-  
ers of Mohammed, before the term  
"Moslem" was adopted. One reason  
for "El-Hanyf" being dropped could  
be that it means either "one con-  
verted from evil to good" -- or  
the exact opposite!

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\* Lowndes, "Cerifs"

Agenbite of Inwit, Sept. 1945