

MATTERS OF OPINION #14

IN THE PRECEDING MOPY

I made a statement that others besides Chauvenet may question, so I'll repeat the explanation I gave him. "I guess I should have clarified that point about using selfish arguments in debating before a crowd. I meant the arguments based on the speaker's own interests, which led him to take the side he did. Admittedly he can preach to the audience's selfish interests and those be identical with his own, but in such case it's on the level of demagoguery, whether he is addressing proletarians or aristocrats. Paine's Crisis papers and many others do appeal to the reader's self-interest, but there is behind them the implication that the action urged will also cause the greatest good for the greatest number of all mankind, which is an ideal, however unsatisfactory. I meant that a conscientious advocate's argument and the deliberations of the true statesman must always refer back to a universal ideal. I admit they don't always."

We left out a thing or three we intended to mention in our discussion of fanationalism. One is the problem of symbolism. Gernsback's "Scientifiction" contest is the beginning of this, and the Scientifiction coar-or-arms is not bad at all, but too limited to cover the entire field of fantasy. Various fan organizations have attempted to find satisfactory symbolizations of fantasy as viewed by the fan; even our FAPA emblem is a symbolization of science and future fiction rather than of the fan press, a point stressed by Dan McPhail in urging that we adopt a new one. According to Dan, the only accepted symbol that we yet have for science-fiction is the rocket, and after a look at the emblems of several organizations, we're inclined to agree with him. Our failure to find a national symbol doesn't mean that we don't want one; the problem of symbolization has been one of the most difficult in the course of the American democratic faith, according to Gabriel, but our clutching at Washington, Lincoln, the Flag, the Declaration, etc, shows the vigor of the search.

Another aspect of nationalism that I didn't bring out properly is the "future greatness" theme, of which there is at least one example in this present Mailing.

And for unconscious but unadulterated fanationalism in the previous Mailing, look at Trudy Kuslan's interlineation of "For God, for country, and for fandom"!

FOR ONCE

I'm not going to instruct you how to vote the Right way in this election. I mite say, tho, that if there were a competent candidate opposing Chauvenet for vice-president, I would vote for him. There have been no serious consequences yet of this anarchistic attitude of the recent vice-presidents, but before trouble happens, I want to make another public protest against it. The vice-president cannot be true to his office and take the attitude that it's OK to break the Constitutional rules as long as no harm, as far as he can tell, results. I know that many liberals in recent decades have become prejudiced toward a conservative safeguarding of a constitution because the American Supreme Court so misused the due process clause and other details of the Constitution. But the trouble there has been precisely that the Supreme Court has not been conservative, that it abandoned the old policy of judicial restraint to become actively reactionary. A good constitution, faithfully observed, helps rather than hinders progress. If the constitution is at fault, it should be amended. In the meantime it should be followed.

RETRACTION

"Peradventure thou spokest unwisely", said someone. "Since that thou'rt on the inside of the War Department, thou knowest well enow that our leaders military can be entrusted with the prosecution of the war, and that their one concern is to bring

about the complete submission of the enemy within the shortest time and with the least expenditure of men and materials possible. But suppose thou hadst no way of knowing this. Then wouldst thou advocate complete trust in our General Staff?"

"Yea,"

I answered. "For the chance that they would be foolish or dishonest in planning of the war is much less than the chance that I would be mistaken in my estimate of the situation and what should be done."

"But, man, seest thou not that this delivereth thee into the hands of the authorities? Hast thou not publicly endorsed the saying of the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, that thou wilt not accept an opinion unquestioningly simply because it comes from one more competent, at least in this particular field of judgment, than thyself?"

"It is true that I will not accept an authority's opinion against my own. But the weight of the authority must shape my own opinion, aside from my estimate of the elements in the situation itself. I may not believe, from looking at it, that a piece of machinery will work in a certain way, but an a mechanic whom I trust tell me that it will, I will be inclined to make that my opinion."

"Yet dost thou ever reserve the final right of decision to thyself. Suppose that thou wert outside the War Department, as thou mayest soon be, and the Army continued in a state of inactivity month after month, when all circumstances seemed propitious for vigorous action? Wouldst thou not eventually cease to trust the generals, and begin to make demand that they move against the enemy?"

"Mayhap. But only in the form of urging. I would not bring political pressure to bear on them. The ultimate decision should be made by the responsible agency; the President and the military establishment."

"How now; wouldst thou urge no congressional pressure even an thou hadst reason to believe that those agencies were not primarily concerned with the welfare national?"

"Oh, but that is another matter. Yea, in such case I would."

"Then ultimately the individual doth have the right to question the actions of his leaders, and to oppose their policies when, all circumstances considered, he believe them unwise."

"Yea, verily; so long as he use constitutional means."

"But now suppose the government embarked on a course subversive of the basic liberties of the individual, though it be supported by a majority of the citizenry and eke acting within the Constitutional forms; wouldst thou not appeal to thy rights under the constitution of the universe, even unto resisting by force, in case where that the course of action seemed destined to dissolve the contract social?"

"Thou art right. The ultimate sovereignty which resteth with the individual implieth also the responsibility of making or approving all decisions."

#### YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Take that volume of Tennyson, or that anthology of English literature, down from the shelf, and look again at The Passing of Arthur. He's talking about the 1940s.

Oh,

it's all dressed up in medieval armor, as Time says, and Tennyson lays primary blame for the breakdown on moral weakness, seems not to have considered the possibility that the collapse may be primarily thru the action of natural forces and accidents.

But here truly is the picture of the end of a civilization. "I think that we shall never more, at any future time, Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,

walking about the gardens and the halls Of Camelot, as in the days that were." Camelot, I believe, was still standing. There were young knights loyal scattered about, and the veterans of the pure clan coming under Lancelot too late for the Battle in the West. With these the King and Sir Bedivere might have continued the Round Table, and made more new knights to fill the gaps. But such an idea was so impossible that he scarcely looked at it. Men's minds had changed; the Round Table was no longer a symbol to conjure with; the knights themselves had fallen from their earlier vigorous idealism; the civil wars had destroyed the people's faith in their rulers. Arthur had about as much chance of successfully reestablishing the Table as America has of returning to Nineteenth Century economics and politics combined with Twentieth Century science and technology.

You see the era's passing symbolized by its leader, Arthur Pendragon; the other great figures of the culture, Galahad, Merlin, Gawain, Guinevere, and Lancelot, are either already passed away or going into monastery life to die soon after. The King's last speech begins with the line he used in rejecting the Roman demand for tribute in the days when he first came to power. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fills himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world." Indubitably the social conditions based on the Round Table are disappearing also: the ways will not be safe from shore to shore for centuries now; learning will slink back into the monasteries and stay there; the waves of barbarians will wash in almost unopposed, and the British race be submerged. Mark Bedivere's words: "Now I see the true old times are dead, When every morning brought a noble chance, And every chance brought out a noble knight. Such times have been not since the light that led The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh. But now the whole Round Table is dissolved Which was an image of the mighty world; And I, the last, go forth companionless, And the days darken round me, and the years, Among new men, strange faces, other minds," Such the end of one civilization; not necessarily the exact pattern for all. But there are many similarities.

The poet has contrived very well to leave absolutely blank the period following the carrying away of Arthur to Avilion. We are told (more by Malory than by Tennyson) that Lancelot went into a monastery for the rest of his life, that Percivale lived a while in another monastery, and that Guinevere died after a few years as a nun. But all these were cut off from the world, and of the fourth survivor, Bedivere, we are told only that he lived to an old age among changed surroundings. In real history, cultures don't die at a definite point like this; the Romans never knew what hit them. In our present self-conscious and analytical age, we probably will notice it - people have been proclaiming the end of the world for a hundred years at least, and saying "this is the dawn of a new era" for half that long - but we can't be sure it's happened till we get perspective on it.

We can say this: That we know about as little about what's coming as Tennyson tells us about post-Arthur Britain. We think we're going to see less of individual national sovereignty, that there'll be more government control, and more economic security probably at the cost of economic if not civil freedom. But we can't be at all sure even of these hazy things. We may muddle along for thirty years or more, much as we've done for the past thirty, or we may reel back into the beast and be no more. I doubt that the future has ever before been so uncertain for as large a part of the Occident. Here is the blind haze which folded in the passes of the world in the days before the Battle in the West.

Another point that the Idylls illustrate has already been suggested. A civilization may collapse, but people go on living. "You can live thru the end of civilization", as Bolwell says. The old leaders may fade out, but the great rank and file go right on living, and can hardly tell there's been any great change in their way of life until statistics show a sudden polarization in a different direction, like

the shift in immigration late last century.

Willy Ley says "There will always be survivors". They largely determine the pattern of the next cultural epoch. I expect to be one of them.

Looking back over the foregoing, I see that it is very different from the basis on which, in the year of the Great Debate, I laughed at Clarence Streit's earnest recitation of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. I wish I knew which attitude is correct.

#### FIRST DISSERTATION ON DISCIPLINE

Russell's counsel that I occasionally let myself be governed by my moods calls for a lot of discussion. The truth is that I do often let myself be governed by my mood of the moment, and I don't like it; it indicates less moral fiber than I would like to have ("immunity to non-logical motivations for abandoning a course previously determined upon"). And almost always when I follow my moods as to what I shall do with a plug of time, rather than what I know most needs doing according to my long-term scale of values, I pay for it thru the nose. If I read a story in Astounding when I know I should be reading *The Great Crusade and After*, I don't know who some guys talk on the indentification questions in the final exam. If I dally about doing Maugham's two unpleasant things per day, I have to bruise the Spirit's gears to get to work on time and then may not make it (and have to skip breakfast anyhow), or, in the evening, if I've lain on the bed reading when I know I should be getting some sleep, I may wake up with a cold next morning, and anyway will drowse in class in the afternoon. If I go out for fun when I should be stenciling, I miss the deadline and have to send out my publication late, in a post-mailing. Almost invariably the price I pay is disproportionate to the pleasure of following my mood.

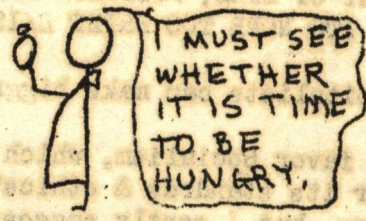
And one can discipline himself so that it doesn't cost so much to refuse the mood; as I indicated in the filler that started this discussion, one can even change his mood by throwing himself into the thing he needs to do.

Now, Russell, being a bloody aristocrat, has leisure so that he can often follow his momentary inclinations without doing himself much harm. But people like me and the Rothman of peacetime are carrying too big a load to take it easy. Look at what I was doing last month (April) before I got the mumps: I was working eight hours a day. I had classes nine hours a week, with theoretically eighteen hours of study (actually I got by in good shape with perhaps five or six). I was secretary of the MYF sub-district and active in my local church; other social life and recreation in addition. All this is besides my fan activity--FAPA presidency and preparation of material for my publications, other correspondence, reading fan and prozines, etc. Add the incidentals such as eating, going to and from work (no small item in wartime Washington), keeping up with the newspapers and the radio. Hoykawow, man, you can't carry a schedule like that and still go wandering in the woods whenever you feel like it. Yet there's not a thing on that list that I think makes less profitable use of the time it takes than some other activity or inactivity would.

Chauvenet of course wouldn't feel that way about it. He'd say it's better to indulge in a little more recreation and relaxation and try to accomplish less. Santayana would say the same thing. Perhaps it's more than coincidence that Chauvenet and Santayana were both brot up in the Catholic tradition while Rothman and I are products of the American Jewish and Protestant cultures, tho all four of us have left off believing in the supernatural elements. The "take it easy" philosophy is like the Chinese, and they prefer not to gain physical efficiency at the cost of mental effort. If they're digging a tunnel thru a hill by working from both sides, they'll have the two parties aim at each other, but if they don't meet in the middle of the hill-- why, go ahead and each party dig on thru; why fuss around and get upset about a lot of surveying and hairline precision? There's a Chinese proverb on the same theme which

is even more to the point, but I couldn't quote it in mixed company.

I'm Occidental. I'm American, too, activism being one of the most distinctive traits of Americans. There are times when I'm in the mood described in Unattached Chapter to Six Against the Past, but that is a minority feeling, and I can't sacrifice a major aim by failing to do some necessary things just because I don't feel like it at the time. I take my relaxations, I even make dates, when time for them appears rather than when I feel the urge; and I don't think I enjoy it any less.



That's self-discipline, in case you're wondering what it has to do with the title. I can give other examples of the value of self-discipline. Len Marlow, in the recent *Banshee*, described the way a convention should not be, and the thing needed to right the situation as described is self-discipline by each of the attendees to get the business done that they're meeting for, so they'll feel, even months after, when the glow has died, that they accomplished something.

It is curious, then, that a few paragraphs earlier, Len suggested that fantasy (presumably he meant pure fantasy, since *stf* itself is fantasy in the broader sense) is superior to *stf* because it's less restrained. The Humanists were claiming a few years back that the trouble with modern literature is its complete lack of restraint. When you aren't controlled by anything, what's to give direction to what you write? It's pure stream-of-consciousness in literature or dadaism in art. I think we get more stories approaching the class of real literature in *stf* than in the "modern mythology" of *Unknown*, and the poorer stories in *Unknown* are often those in which an unlimited wishing power is granted, or something on that order. That's what's wrong with *Superman*: No strong opposing forces... An introduction to *Paradise Lost* in a school anthology says, "within the restrictions of form his personality revealed itself as tending toward freedom of thought and utterance; the power that resulted may be thought of under the figure of expansion against pressure. The same figure may be carried over to explain his character, as a man of the Renaissance reacting against the limitations imposed by Puritanism /Milton was a Puritan/; and it applies also to his thought of the universe compelled to express itself within the limits of Christian mythology." I wonder if Milton could have written such a great epic in the field of pure fantasy, unhampered by the restrictions of his century in religion and science. There is more greatness in conflict than in harmony, and this may extend also to conflict between imagination and restrictions, and between meaning and presentation, sense and sound.

I'm not disposed to spend time in arguing the question of neckties. But in discussing this, Rothman brings up the matter of symbols, and I will digress. He says that when he thinks about the things V and Lidice and Bataan and cetera stand for, he thinks about the realities behind them rather than the symbols. I say he can't. I don't believe the human mind is built to handle a broad spread of experience in its primal state as a unit of cogitation or discourse. (Hah! Guess that got rid of the mental flyweights!) You've got to have a word, or a group of words that acts as a single symbol (like "He-who-walks-behind"), to pull in the necessary threads from that glob of experience and take its place in a sentence. It's impossible for me, when I say "Bataan" in a sentence, to run over in my mind all these radiograms from MacArthur and Wainwright, but "Bataan" serves as a symbol for those when I say "You can't explain Bataan by the two instincts of hunger and sex". The thing is to keep the threads straight, so that you never misuse your symbol, never make a vital omission in your abstracting. That takes a pretty fine intellect.

LIST OF LIES, MISSTATEMENTS, AND HALF-TRUTHS APPEARING IN LE VOMBITEUR  
IN ITS NONE TOO BRIEF EXISTENCE--continued yet more

66. "so th Italian or Japanese Capitalists can make bigger profits." Ms. We laugh, with tinkling laughter.

67. " ... to favor Socialism, which looks to th futur & only to th best of past & present for its standrds & ethics" Ms. I have no quarrel with the sentiments expressed here, but I gently suggest that he is stretching the term "Socialism" to take in a heck of a lot of idealism.

68. "Morovr, territorial xpansn of any people by way of military agressn is repudiatd by evry responsibl Socialist, as well as by th Communists."  $\frac{1}{2}$ T. This was written some seven months before the Russians invaded Finland; I'll not hold Doc accountable for the future.

69. "& ther can b no compatia-bility whatevr between Socialism & any part of th Fascist theory or program." L. Maybe I'm wrong, but what does Nazionalsozialistische mean? And don't tell me the word doesn't properly apply.

70. "any statmnt in Le Vombiteur is, at any time, sub-ject to retractn by s. if & whn we discovr proof to th effect that it is incorrect, or is no longer correct. Xcept in such cases -- & in them, no tim has been, or shal b, lost in making public retractns, correctns, & apologs --" Ms. The trouble is that Robert Lowndes was sole judge of such cases as far as public retractions went, and it seems appropriate to echo a question he later flung at me, "what constitutes proof?"

71. "such nauseatng specimns of fascist-inspird ravngs as 'Horror's Head'." L. By the way, Art, remember what I told you about Farley and Horror's Head?  $\frac{1}{2}$ ursh I could make a published item out of it.

72. "We r patiently waiting for Jack Speer's projected symposium of what he terms th 'lies, distorsions, & half-truths' that hav appeard in Le Vombiteur." Ms. I'm pretty sure I didn't use the redundancy "distorsions" and "half-truths" in the name of this dept as told to Doc. Paren-thetically, he has misused "symposium". But, Law, Doc, we hope your patience didn't wear thin before this department finally started appearing; we have no hope that you have any left by now, when it's about to end.

73. "In an early FARA mailing (we hope) wil appear a magazin (publishd by us) entitld: 'Th Anti Michelist', in which sam wil appear a longish articl by Jack Miske attacking your editor". Ms. The mag never appeared, but I mention it only for the sake of asking Doctor Swisher if he has this on his Check-List alongside my earlier-proposed "Anti-Michelist" or "Anti-Michelist Omnibus". The latter publication, incidentally, is still on my "projects outstanding" list, but I think that having finished this department at long last, I'll wait a good many years before fulfilling another such out-of-date promise to myself.

74. "Of cours we cannot tel all (we dont evn kno all, not being H. G. Wells)".  $\frac{1}{2}$ T. A nasty and unjustified crack at Wells.

75. "but we expect that by th tim that th 25th issu of Levy is in Ur hands, Fohl-Ferri nuptials wil hav already been com-memoratd."  $\frac{1}{2}$ T. This is true if, as I believe, there were no issues of LV after 24. Tell us, boys, have those nuptials ever been legally consummated? I believe there was some trouble for a while about Fohl being under age, but that has no doubt been corrected by now.

A final word, addendum to a remark in Susro thistime. I just now counted, and the Futurians had ten different pieces in the Fourth Mailing, of which at least eight were probably by the same party.

JACK FSPEER  
JUN 2/F43