

# The AMERICAN

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## The AMERICAN SPECTATOR

A LITERARY NEWSPAPER

EDITED BY

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

ERNEST BOYD

THEODORE DREISER

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

EUGENE O'NEILL

have composed, the dresses they have designed, the pictures they have painted. Left to themselves, men are always creative in some field or other. It is hard to conceive of men not getting more out of the leisure which this new division of the world's work implies than women have got out of the existing order. Probably because the latter have been wrongly endowed with leisure they do not know how to use and wrongfully cut off from activities which they secretly desire. They could hardly make a greater muddle than men have made, and all the

## DOES HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

by VAN WY

DOES history repeat itself? "of Leopardi on his *Recanati*," he writes to answer that I will lead history away from its as

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## EDITORIAL

MAN'S place is obviously in the home. There is his true sphere, rather than the great world of affairs, of which he is making such a mess that even Big Executives are beginning to have doubts of the future and to gaze wistfully at R. F. C. loans. Woman, on the other hand, has been notoriously bored by domestic life and has consistently refused to take an intelligent interest in it. She has never invented a labor-saving device to lighten the burden of household work. After centuries of unwilling slavery in the kitchen she has attained no eminence in that department. Men are still the best cooks, as they are the best dressmakers and the best interior

In some, the question will seem so obvious that I expect the answer "No" that it deserves no discussion; to others it may appear to be based on the false assumption that journalism once had a dignity and merit from which it could descend. It might, in that case, be improved; it could not be restored.

My experience of American journalism is too slight and casual to allow me any wide statements, but I believe that the obvious trend of English journalism, which is downward, is paralleled in the United States. The readers who want a full and intelligent description or discussion in their newspapers continually dwindle. They want or will at least accept the quick view, pictures, headlines, prejudice, hysteria, not necessarily because they are themselves hysterical cretins, but because they are intensely bored with solemn discussions about the doings of half-wits. It is not so much the reader

by GEORGE J.

SEVERAL years ago the mind momentarily turned to the Baptist church to himself bemused by what æsthetic idea. In the very New York, it would build a golden and white with all the fine arts might find a pile of New York, rich and sniff, to the improvement of the purple steams of beauty monument to its own cruelty, the Rockefeller found out a natural pride, the full share of \$250,000,000 a great blasting and disor



## SLIGHTLY SYMPOSIAL

by *BRANCH CABELL*

THE postman has brought me letters from but three of your tribe to-day, my dear sir, as I observe with relief. The first of you, I find, is making a study of sundry "outstanding personalities" from the standpoint of "To what extent did your early training and family background contribute to your personal success?" This problem is to be disposed of by the victim's answering ten questions, of which each is divided into some half-dozen subsections, questions of a highly ramified, of an exhaustive, and here and there of a delicate nature, questions which (I estimate roughly) I might dispose of in rather less than a month's steady work. The second of you is preparing a "symposium upon religion," for which are desired my "personal views, theories, or beliefs, concerning religion, together with the reasons for these views, whether they be philosophical, scientific, or theological." Him, I imagine, I could answer within the mere space of a week's passing.

But you, sir, are compiling a book of "personal messages of cheer and comfort" to be distributed among the inmates of tuberculosis hospitals, and you ask that I contribute "not less than fifty words," to sustain the moribund in optimism and hilarity. It is an asking which moves me to a deal of puzzled and perturbed reflection.

I may not pretend to understand you immoderate persons who thus pester authors to take part in "symposiums." Upon purely sordid grounds, I, who am of Scots descent, marvel that you should expect authors to drop whatever work they may have in hand and to combine gratis to write for you your book, your pamphlet, or your magazine article. From the standpoint of mere rationality, I have never found that any such "symposium," when once it was completed and set forth in print, displayed any detectable reason to justify its existence. It publicates, for the most part, only the ostensible views of quite unimportant persons as to topics about which they know nothing in particular; and one honestly does wonder why the hodgepodge was electrotyped.

Not every practising author (I would whisper to you, sir, in close confidence) is omniscient. It follows that when a writer is called upon offhand to speak of socialism, his favorite recipe, the future of literature, Christmas, the immortality of the soul, alcohol, his ideal woman, the younger generation, his most awkward moment, the best books of the year, the talking pictures, divorce, censorship, the capitalistic régime, and how he intends to vote at the next election—all which may very easily

happen to an unwary writer upon any morning in his life—not every one of his dicta can be of universal interest and of perdurable worth. Quite a number of them in fact will be damned silly. And I think that to every writer who does not abstain absolutely from such "symposiums" one may apply just the same description.

I do not attempt humor. Did these "symposiums" aim but at frivolous topics there would be in them no great harm. My complaint is that they don't. My complaint is, for example, that they enable a chuckle-headed altruist to draw on me for "a personal message of cheer and comfort" for hospitalfuls of men and women dying of consumption. It is a draft very far beyond my mental funds. I myself have come reasonably near to dying upon several occasions, and upon none of them could I contrive to make even myself feel cheery and comfortable. Death did not, somehow, appeal to me as a brisk pleasure jaunt; I was wholly willing to postpone it and the nearer it approached, the more fretfully did I regard it, with the irrational but strong distaste which I had hitherto reserved for golf and horseback exercise. It might suit other people well enough, if they cared for that sort of thing, I felt, but not me. I wanted not to die, not for the present, anyhow. I did not want, not immediately, to be an angel and with angels stand. I wanted a corps of physicians at my bedside and all the better-thought-of drugs in extra large quantities.

Who, then, am I to recommend the King of Terrors as an uncommonly good fellow when you come really to know him? I do not know anything about Death save that all his ways, in so far as I have witnessed them, are tyrannous and unclean and terrible.

And yet, you see, I feel that after all one might pocket both common-sense and one's awkward memories philanthropically. I feel that one could perhaps contrive some sort of opiate claptrap which might, just possibly, hoodwink a few of the less intelligent consumptives into a half-belief which would a little ease their going out of this world. And I know that for me to do this for even one person would seem (to me, at all events) a far more laudable performance than to cling selfishly to mere mental integrity. And I know too that I am so constituted I cannot contrive this claptrap.

So the sole fruitage of the matter is that I come to abhor the chuckle-headed altruist who has made me feel bitterly uncomfortable. After that, my dear sir, I do not drop your letter hastily into the waste basket, but instead I scrouge it down with ferocity.