

CLINICAL NOTES

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

Newspaper Training.—The tradition, fondly cherished in certain quarters, that newspaper training is one of the greatest and most valuable boons that a human being can enjoy, remains with us. Propagated largely by old reporters who have never succeeded in getting out of the business and who, at fifty-five or so, are still covering the exploits of Ida von Claussen and the bigger and better fires, the legend has served not only as a philosophical anodyne for themselves but as something with which to impress cubs just out of college and with enough money to set them up at the speakeasy nearest the shop or older fellows lodged by fate in trades theoretically less romantic. The successes in newspaperdom, the important editors, departmental heads and special writers, are seldom heard to exude the bosh, save on such occasions as they are invited to speak at banquets and wish to indulge themselves in a bogus superiority complex by way of lording it momentarily over the adjacent bankers, automobile manufacturers and other such more opulent and hence condescending fellows. For they know all too well that what goes by the name of newspaper training may be all right in the way that a preparatory school education is all right, and a good thing for men who are willing to be underlings all their lives, but that they themselves would never have got anywhere if they had not had the capability, sense and gumption to bring and add to it a dissociated skill variously acquired from other sources.

Star reporters very seldom mount to the big newspaper jobs. Newspaper training may be excellent for a man if he doesn't waste his time at it too long. It teaches him certain things that are undeniably

useful. But, if he sticks to it in active practice, unless he happens to be one man in a thousand, it will deaden his higher faculties almost completely and inevitably turn him into a humdrum slave who pathetically deludes himself that because he knows a measure of the inside of the world's affairs he himself is a figure in those affairs.

It is said that newspaper training teaches a man how to write. It does nothing of the kind. Try to think of any of the conspicuously talented and successful writers in America today who actually learned anything about their craft in a newspaper office. It is said that it teaches a man speed. It does. But of what avail, outside of newspaper reportorial work, is this speed? It is said that it makes a man apt at quick character analysis, that it teaches him how to appraise his fellow men and their pretensions. Does it? Where will you find men more goatlike in their susceptibility to frauds than nine-tenths of the newspaper men? It is said to impart a valuable cynicism based upon experience. Yet its very graduates who are most often pointed to by newspaper men themselves, from Richard Harding Davis to Sam Blythe, have succeeded on the score of a mellow and pervasive optimism. It is said that it teaches accuracy. In such elementary things as reporting exactly the number of persons killed in a railroad accident or the amount of money collected toward a statue of Otto Kahn, it may be said to do so. But if there is more inaccuracy in any other field of human endeavor than one regularly finds in the general newspaper appraisals of human, ethical, philosophical, sociological or political phenomena, I should be happy to have it brought to my attention

Newspaper training, in short, is valuable as any other form of elementary education and instruction is valuable. Four years of it is more than ample. If a man has talent of any kind, he may use it as a stepping-stone, but he had better jump off before it is too late. Newspaper work long indulged in gives birth, with few exceptions, simply to a lot of impoverished ancients, with a gold-headed cane apiece, who know some amusing reminiscential anecdotes and who can familiarly call a few conspicuous local muckamucks by their first names.

The Young Intellectuals.—This month, I am informed, marks the tenth anniversary of the appearance in our midst of that particular group of boys and girls whom one thinks of when the label, "the young intellectuals," is mentioned. In the group there are approximately a dozen young men and two or three young women, some of the latter not so very vernal at that. Let us celebrate the great occasion by considering what they have represented and what they have accomplished.

Two—it will be unnecessary to name names, since all of them are only too readily identified—have written verse without capital letters, punctuation and rhyme. Four have written plays that essayed to break down dramatic and theatrical traditions and that have been found to be stabs at an ill-assimilated Expressionism, signifying nothing but their authors' complete incomprehension of dramaturgy. One has confected verse that consists of one or two word lines and of endless word repetitions. One has written a book proclaiming Charlie Chaplin, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Paul Whiteman and several music show clowns great geniuses. Another has written a book declaring that the only true artists in America are Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore and E. E. Cummings. One has written a series of essays on the relation of metaphysics to skyscrapers, the Ford automobile, the hot-dog and other such great American wonders. One has

written a novel in jazz-band form, and another a novel whose claim to fame rests in the printing of a word hitherto more intimately associated with latrines than with literature. One has composed a symphony in which wash-boilers, vacuum cleaners, hand-pumps and airplane propellers figure. One has written a novel about the younger generation in which one of the girls loudly declares her eager intention of being deflowered, and another a novel in which there are six goddams to a page and at least three Jesuses. One has written two good short stories.

Foreign Travel.—It is generally argued that the value of money is best borne in upon one when one is ill, that at such times, when every aid and comfort are desirable and necessary, it does its job as nothing else can do it. That there surely is truth in the contention, no one will deny. But there is another occasion when the value of money is just as forcibly impressed upon its fortunate owner and that is when one travels abroad. Travel at its best and most luxurious, as anyone who has had experience of it knows, is anything but a comfortable and voluptuous business. With all the improvements that have been contrived in European railroads, hotels and what not, it is still replete with inconveniences, discomforts, irritations and, often, downright physical gripes. That even the best is none too good for Reilly states Reilly's case altogether too mildly. Such highly modernized and relatively satisfactory means of conveyance as the *de luxe* Continental railway expresses, while certainly a great improvement over their antecedents, are still far from being what the amateur voyageur claims for them. There isn't such a *de luxe* express today that, in any strict definition of the word, may be called entirely and sufficingly comfortable, and to travel on one that does not come under the so-called *de luxe* heading involves physical dolours of a considerable acuteness.

As if appreciating all this, the manage-

ments of the locomotion agencies, and of the hotels no less, indulge in all sorts of little devices to divert the traveler's conscious mind from his discomfort and to hocus-pocus him into a temporary forgetfulness of his mental and physical disquiet. Thus, on the Hamburg-Berlin Express a high to-do is made over the en route telephone service presumably installed to take the passenger's mind temporarily off the fine dust that seeps through the windows and gradually causes him to take on the look of a swell mulatto. Thus, on the Golden Arrow Express, shooting between London and Paris and one of the de luxiest trains in the world, a Martini cocktail is available to the passenger by way of taking his mind off the chill dampness that, for all the heating facilities, persists in penetrating into his compartment. Thus, in such hotels as the London Savoy and Berlin Adlon the guest's towels are elaborately warmed by a patent heating dingus by way of making him momentarily oblivious of discomforts unavoidable in even the best of hotels.

Money at least reduces the inevitable decomposures incidental to travel and makes it partly tolerable. Without the means at one's command to minimize the inconveniences once one leaves home, travel is doomed to be fraught with a hundred and one doubled afflictions and hardships, and fit only, in the direction of so-called pleasure, for hoboes, Iowans and professional sightseers. Without a lot of wampum in his pockets, Reilly is better off in his American flat.

Social Life in the South.—The gradual rise of the Negro in the social scale south of the Mason-Dixon line begins to impress itself upon those who follow his activities in that section of the Republic. Discontented with his long submergence, the Negro has set about elevating himself in no unmistakable manner and with results that, if not yet entirely satisfactory to him, promise in the perhaps not distant future a more or less rosy elegance. All over the

South the colored man is taking steps to make a social figure, however yet humble, of himself and to give himself an opportunity to enjoy some of the Caucasian usufructs. In Louisville, Ky., there is a Negro club whose stock of ingredients for the composition of juleps is the envy and despair of the white colonels, and whose dances, evening dress obligatory, are conducted on a scale not less high-toned than many of those held by the lesser Kentucky palefaces. At Juliette, Ga., according to a recent issue of the *Macon News*, the colored ladies of the community have formally adopted and put into general use among themselves French instead of the more commonplace English titles and address one another as Mlle. or Mme. At classical Athens, in the same State, the *Red and Black*, the University of Georgia's campus newspaper, announces the formation of a new Greek letter fraternity composed of the Negro butlers of the white Greek letter fraternities at the college. "In order to be pledged to this fraternity," the college organ says, "a man must be a butler at a Greek letter chapter house that rates (that is, that is regarded as of good social standing); he must attend all college football games; and he must wear genuine campus-cut clothes." The brothers attend all the college games in full fraternal regalia, with their diamond fraternity pins conspicuously displayed in their neckties. Dances are to be held three times a year. In New Orleans, there are two tony Negro contract bridge clubs. In Atlanta, Ga., a fashionable Negro golf club is in process of formation and in Richmond, Va., plans have actually been made for a Negro polo team. In Charleston, S.C., there is a Negro banqueting club that meets once a month and that invariably serves Pommery Brut, 1919. The best-dressed gentleman in the city of Nashville is commonly accepted to be Peter Galland, a colored man. The sales statistics for 1927 show that no less than seventy Negroes in the State of Texas own and drive automobiles costing more than three thousand dollars apiece.

THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

Fragmentary Meditations

III

To DISMISS a theatrical critic as blasé is to be at one with the donkey. The best critics of the theatre have been and are blasé men. The very circumstance of being blasé implies experience and experience, in turn, implies patience only with what is worthy and complete impatience and contempt for what is not. The blasé critic is one whose emotional equipment has been so toughened by concussion with tin-pan drama that, unlike that of the still enthusiastic idiot, it responds alone to the finest form of stimulant. No critic in his first days is blasé. He is tickled by almost everything, and indiscriminately. No critic in his first days is worth a hoot. It is the critic who has a hard time keeping awake at the theatre that is the critic whose opinions are worth reading.

II

Just as even an otherwise taciturn person is seized peculiarly with an impulse to talk the moment a doctor sticks a clinical thermometer into his mouth, so is even the most linguacious critic rendered peculiarly mute when confronted by an indubitably fine piece of work. The latter, once the prefatory hallelujahs are done with, leaves so little for him to say; the artist has said that say so much better than he can say it in his rôle of mere liaison echo. This is why we find critics, even the very best of them, driven to the resort of praising a work in terms of detraction of certain other more or less related work. The counterpoint of detraction gives them the necessary ground to dig their heels into; it vouchsafes them an articulateness that would otherwise be difficult.

Although the talking movies seem to me to be the last word in bastardy, one argument currently used against them strikes me as being hollow. It is contended that the talkies are doomed to failure because the quality of the speaking voices of the movie actors is ridiculously defective. It might be argued with equal reason that the drama is doomed to failure because the quality of the voices of its actors is often similarly defective. The stage has presented us with voices, even in the relatively high places, that have been far from ear-massaging, yet the drama has somehow managed to triumph over them. Maude Adams' squeak didn't send "Peter Pan" to limbo any more than Lionel Barrymore's auctioneering roar, now that he has gone Hollywood, is likely to send the worst talking movie.

IV

There has never been an actor, however bad, who didn't succeed in giving a good performance in the rôle of a butler, a policeman, or a Chinaman. Nor has there ever been an actor who didn't seem completely convincing in a telephone scene. If I could figure out the reason, I'd write an essay on the subject.

V

In much the same category as our young so-called radical playwrights who attempt to conceal the fact that they have nothing to say by saying it in a new and alarming manner, fall certain of our recognizable littérateurs who, also having nothing new to say, attempt to conceal the fact by say-