

# WANTED: A Civilized Style

Which is the more interesting, more significant; more potent influence in life: the systematic observation of things as they are, or the eager search into things as they ought to be?

The world we live in has accustomed us to regard the object of the first as practical fact, of the second as idle theory. At any rate the first can be carried on without the second, but the second necessarily builds upon the findings of the first. In other words, when we have exhausted ourselves in pursuing the facts we can pass on to consider what use we can or ought to make of them. Indeed this is their whole significance for most practical people.

Let us, for instance be practical in a literary sort of way. Let us take the matter of "style" that no lover of literature who now and then sits down to the typewriter himself very really outgrows: Is it more interesting to study what this or that person's style is, than to consider what style ought to be?

Dipping for the nth time into one of those modern anthologies of English essays—rich quarries of style—I happened upon two pieces that perfectly illustrate this contrast between what is and what ought to be, indicating quite clearly which problem arouses the deeper interest, at least for the many who are driving at practice.

"Literary style," says John Addington Symonds, "is more a matter of sentiment, emotion, involuntary habits of feeling and observing, constitutional sympathy with the world and men, tendencies of curiosity and liking, than of the pure intellect. The style of scientific works, affording little scope for the exercise of these psychological elements, throws less light upon their authors' temperament

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By ANTONIO ESTRADA  
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than does the style of poems, novels, essays, books of travel, descriptive criticism.

"In the former case all that need be aimed at is lucid exposition of fact and vigorous reasoning. In the latter the fact to be stated, the truth to be arrived at, being of a more complex nature, involves a process akin to that of the figurative arts. The stylist has here to produce the desired effect by suggestions of infinite subtlety, and to present impressions made upon his sensibility."

Here we have minute and accurate observation of fact, such as one might expect a psychologist of the latest American school to tabulate. Symonds leaves us no doubt as to his being abreast of that science, for he says:

In the exercise of style it is impossible for anyone to transcend his inborn and acquired faculties of ideation, imagination, sense-perception, verbal expression—just as it is impossible in the exercise of strength for an athlete to transcend the limits of his physical structure, powers of innervation, dexterity, and courage."

On the other hand, Sir Arthur Clutton-Brock tells us a few things about prose and the nature of prose that serve for a hint of what style ought to be, and he enforces his own precepts with his own example. He is criticising Mr. Pearsall Smith's anthology of English Prose, which is like the gene-

ral run of such anthologies, collected for their purple patches, and he evidently has an altogether different idea of excellence in prose:

"Prose of its very nature is longer than verse, and the virtues peculiar to it manifest themselves gradually. If the cardinal virtue of poetry is love, the cardinal virtue of prose is justice; and, whereas love makes you act and speak on the spur of the moment, justice needs inquiry, patience, and a control even of the noblest passions.

"But English Prose, as Mr. Pearsall Smith presents it, is at the mercy of its passions and just only by accident. By justice here I do not mean justice only to particular people or ideas, but a habit of justice in all the processes of thought, a style tranquillized and a form moulded by that habit.

"The master of prose is not cold, but he will not let any word or image inflame him with a heat irrelevant to his purpose. Unhasting, unresting, he pursues it, subduing all the riches of his mind to it, rejecting all beauties that are not germane to it; making his own beauty out of the very accomplishment of it, out of the whole work and its proportions, so that you must read to the end before you know that it is beautiful.

"But he has his reward, for he is trusted and convinces as those who are at the mercy of their own eloquence do not; and he gives a pleasure all the greater for being hardly noticed."

This is an idea of prose as an achievement of civilization which, if it is rarely enough met with in England, where Sir Arthur was writing, is certainly rarer in America, and hardly known at all in the Philippines. Yet, as he expounds it, what an inspiring and potentially serviceable ideal it presents us with! This conception of style far outstrips the usual version of Buffon's *le style c'est de l'homme même*, for it is capable of influencing not merely our way of speaking and writing, but also our way of judging and living.



If even a handful of educated people were habitually to practice that way of expressing themselves that "elicits reason and patience by displaying them", would not that make for clear-headedness in public opinion in the long run? And if by some freak of human nature it were suddenly to become fashionable to adopt that manner of address "which assumes that we do not wish to be tricked or dazzled" what a gain it would be both for our Press and for our Rostrum!

The trouble with the yellow press with which we have lately been overrun, is that it prevents (or tries with all its might to prevent) people from looking facts in the face and endeavours to stampede them into indiscriminate action. Now everybody knows that under the stress of passion individual persons are liable to deeds they are the first to regret and often the last to understand. And the caprices of masses of people snatching up one catchword or slogan after another are well known: the liability to unjust action is multiplied.

At a crisis in history, when so

much depends upon a wise decision and energetic action, the need for some tranquillizing influence becomes acute, and the suggestion of some such device as is here proposed becomes almost a duty.

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