

and in the time, and like Kipling's tribute to the little old lady of Windsor, if it miscarried it was well meant.

I WILL confess, while I am on this business of reporting, that one of my unworthy pleasures is listening to the same story from two sides of a fence. It does happen now and again that it is the same story in every important detail. That happened not many days ago when I heard two almost identical accounts of a neighbours' quarrel—one from the aggressor and the other from the victim. But it happens so rarely that I find myself wondering still how it came about in this case. As a rule the variation is so wide and so emphatic, that nothing remains with me afterwards but this secret query: Are they innocents or liars?

They need not, of course, be one or the other, and in most cases they are not. They are moral cowards, as we all are most of the time, and admiration hungry, as most of us are all the time. I once read a book about America in which the author set out to prove that the explanation of everything good and bad in America's relations with the rest of the world is the average American's desire to be loved. Long before I reached the last chapter I knew that the author was talking nonsense. It was not all nonsense. Some of it was true, and much of it half true, and it was all true to this extent that it would be easier to sustain an argument of that kind against America than against any other great nation. The Americans are not only the youngest of the great nations. They are the youngest nation the world has ever seen wielding such power. It is not surprising that they are as eager as youth always is to be admired, and as troubled as it always is if they think they are not admired enough. But they are incorrigible corrupters of recorded history. What the British used to tell the world with one hand in their pocket and the other on their heart, the Americans tell with both hands clasped and with their eyes fixed anxiously on the world's changing expression. It is a half-true story, and the trouble with half-true reporting is that cynics believe none of it and innocents swallow it hook, line and sinker.

So I get back to my neighbours' quarrel about Mr. Churchill. One said that he went to Washington to sign on America's dotted line. The other said that there was no space left on the line since Mr. Attlee was in Washington. Before long both were dupes, fools, liars. One threatened to punch the other's head. The other refused to argue any longer with a 40-years-old kid. Friends interposed and all went home, both told the same story afterwards.

I don't know why it turned out like that, since men who quarrel as violently as these did don't often use words accurately or conscientiously. Their tongues are undisciplined because their minds are. I have to suppose either that I have known two completely honest men or that these two men were completely indifferent to my opinion of them.

THOREAU, who dropped some of his most devastating remarks in odd corners that no one today explores, woke me up this afternoon with a word or two on the origin of wind. I was watching a grass fire moving in the direction of my boundary, and wondering at what point in the advance I should muster and move my

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 21, 1952.



**HAKON MIELCHE** (above), who is in charge of the information service on the Danish research ship *Galathea* which visited New Zealand recently, is the main speaker in the edition of "Book Shop" being heard from 1YA, 2YA, 3YA, 4YC, and the YZ stations during the fortnight which started on March 17. His talk is about the making of a travel writer. Mr. Mielche has written nearly a score of popular books on travel. A voyage across the Atlantic on the route Columbus took led to "After You, Columbus," and others of his books which have been translated into English are "Let's See if the World is Round," "Land of the Condor," "From Santos to Bahia," "The Amazon," and "Journey to the World's End." Also being heard in the current "Book Shop" is a talk by C. R. H. Taylor, librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library, on the celebrated literary forgeries of T. H. Wise

sheep. To fill in the time I opened *A Week on the Concord* and started to re-read the thoughts that passed through the author's mind as he floated with his brother down that sluggish little river one Sunday morning 113 years ago. After a page or two my mind and my eyes parted company, as they so often do when I read in the open, and then he hit me hard with this tough nut:

These modern ingenious sciences and arts do not affect me as those more venerable arts of hunting and fishing, and even of husbandry in its primitive and simple form; as ancient and honourable trades as the sun and moon and winds pursue, coeval with the faculties of man, and invented when these were invented. We do not know their John Gutenberg, or Richard Arkwright, but we read that Aristæus "obtained of Jupiter and Neptune, that the pestilential heat of the dog days, wherein was great mortality, should be mitigated with wind." This is one of those dateless benefits conferred on man which has no record in our vulgar day, though we still find some similitude to them in our dreams, in which we have a more liberal and a juster apprehension of things, unconstrained by habit, which is then in some measure put off, and divested of memory, which we call history.

I have my own opinion about that "dateless benefit" which I have often regarded as a primeval curse. But while I was still pondering on that passage, and wondering where to draw the line between the poet and the philosopher, the wind changed direction on top of the hill, and gave the 250 hard-pressed beaters their first chance to gain control. If this explanation, given to me by a school-boy three hours later, turns out to be a dream and not history, it is no dream that the fire is now out and the wind blowing strongly away from me.

(To be continued.)



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