

a reality more ultimate than that of its members, and a consequent sovereignty over them.

MARY WHITON CALKINS.

WELLESLEY COLLEGE.

“A LOVER OF THE CHAIR”

PHILOSOPHY is philosophizing; it is the human activity of deliberate reflection, and its historic sum is the sum of the recorded expression of consciously thinking minds. Its subject is experience, nature, phenomena, being—whatever we choose; but its essence is always the same—a man’s thoughtful effort to right himself in the course of his life’s events, and its essence is, therefore, always imbedded within the subject. We who are by profession philosophers, or teachers of philosophy, are sometimes prone to forget that our subject-matter is no segregated corpus of writings, narrowed to neatly debatable problems, but is, in sooth, as broad as the reach of impersonalized judgment—of any concern which a man may have when for the moment he withdraws from his own foreground and views himself as a nature in the midst of natures. Philosophy is, in fact, a branch of literature, and, even when its consideration is of the truth, of fictive literature. Aristotle’s dictum about poetry, that it is a higher and more philosophic thing than history, invites the entirely sound inference that philosophy is indeed but poetic sublimation—a transcendental personification of our simpler humanity. Not all its rigors of dialectic and mathematic method, not all its authoritarian apriorisms, its belligerent empiricisms, can quite purge it of that stain (as so many deem it) of imagery which is, in final honesty, its deeper matter. A sophisticated poetry, Pascal called metaphysics, voicing in his own way the hidden cousinship; to which should be added that the final sophistication is its recognition of the cousinship, and hence of the spreading wealth of its own domain.

These reflections ensue upon the perusal of a book by a man who is neither by training nor profession initiate in the thiasus of the metaphysicians, who assumes no familiarity with its rituals, no gift for its chants. *A Lover of the Chair*, by Sherlock Bronson Gass,¹ is the work of a humanist, untaught of the metaphysical schools (though not unilluminated by the philosophers, for the light of Plato is everywhere reflected), a man professing what the strait-laced metaphysician inherently feels are the softer humanities of belles-lettres. Nevertheless, it is a work which is philosophic not only in mode, for its truly subtle art of expression is in the great in-

¹ Marshall Jones Company, Boston, 1919.

heritance from the mimes of Plato, but even more in the substance of its thought; for Mr. Gass has made the philosophic quest, valley and ridge, where it most yields, in the life of an alert and conscientious intelligence early aroused to that double regard of self and nature which is the center of the rational soul. Furthermore, he has made this quest not merely in a mode generously frank at least to all lovers of subtlety in literature, but with an outcome which sets his final shrine well within the walls of the metaphysical Acropolis. Mr. Gass has given us not merely an adventure, but a philosophy.

His literary form, essays cast in dialogue and memorabilia, gives a first impression of desultory and inconclusive thinking—just as Plato's dialogues, first-off, seem desultory and inconclusive—just as life itself is desultory and inconclusive. But the attentive reader will perceive that herein the author is but applying the lessening of the philosophic master; for it is the greatest sagacity of the genius of Plato that he realized that the last significance of thought is beyond formulation in words; he knew the futility of conclusive arguments, and he knew, too, that conviction is never imposed, that it must be found. Moreover, besides this absolution from the empty pretentiousness of system which the dialogue form gives, it possesses a yet shrewder art; for in throwing thought upon a background of shadowy personalities, phantasmata, intellects half-embodied, it graces it with a double truth; your bald logical abstraction is always an affection, an opinion masquerading as a law; it is not until truth appears in its more honest, if humbler apparel, as biased human thinking, that it becomes winning. This, at least, the dialogue does not allow us to forget. Our Lover of the Chair is always humane, and though stoutly rationalistic in all his convictions, he never deludes himself nor attempts to delude his readers with the facile sophistry of the logicast *rs* who would somehow contrive out of human reasonings a "transcendental" or a "scientific" Super-Reason.

But Mr. Gass is humane not merely in the art of his expression. His essential thinking is humanism, cast not in the lettrist, but in the philosophic mode. Politics, religion, science, art, education, all come in for a shrewdly genial consideration; he lets the voices of the time speak for each, and he seems to listen, and sometimes hardly suggests a reply; but his essential method, none the less, is an inquisitorial irony, analogous to the Socratic, which by uneasy suggestion rather than open refutation gives the lie to pretense and pause to superficiality. Human life in the range of its thoughtful interests, at the core of its humane appeals, is the theme of this

Socratic inquiry; and it is tribute both to its sincerity and its power that there emerges from it a clear and fortified philosophic attitude which is at one with the finest humanism of all ages even while the place of its emergence is America and the twentieth century. For Mr. Gass is a true, not a vulgar, American; he realizes perfectly the context of his life and thinking, and it is the mark of the clarity of this realization, as well as of his integrity, that he refuses to submit to its spiritual enslavements; he welcomes, wistfully enough (for his hopes are tempered) what is noble in our last attainments, but he loses himself never in empty laudations, and he rebuffs with quiet finality our tawdrinesses, our puffy prides. In political bombast, in religious blindness, in the crass complacencies of science, the unabashed temperamentalities of art, the dreary and conceited helplessness of education, in all these, as we know them to-day, he perceives the uncurbed barbarism of our times; but because these interests are uncultivated they are not condemned as futile. Rather, Mr. Gass sees in them the necessary foil of our intelligences, the Chaos which Form must master; and although his outlook is tinted by no temporal optimism, it is stained by no bitterness; indeed, his own spirit is always that of a contained and wholly lovable humor.

In all this comment there has been no attempt to chart the Middle Place of the author's thought, the "center," as he himself calls it. It is anti-pragmatical, as the title of the book indicates. It is shot through with a horror of the Flux, a passion for the Form, as numberless passages show; but it is not therefore gone flounderingly over to noisy mechanisms; its author would be among the last to confound the discourse of reason with a rote of numbers or to attempt to compute the virtues on an abacus. Nor has he any concern with transcendental metaphysics and the cosmos. His affair is in the houses and haunts of men, there where they are most truly men, in the great quest for the sanity of an inner and spiritual life. His philosophy is humanistic in its circumference; it is intellectualistic in its conception of salvation, and it is exclusive in spirit; and if it be touched with the superstition about the divinity of the Greeks, this is at least a superstition which some of us, by the grace of God, are unperturbed to share. At the last there is a citadel, high-seated, to which Mr. Gass is fain to withdraw—in architecture simple, severe, enduring; but he is not concerned that he be followed thither; the place is established only for those who may find it, and generation by generation they are few. Nor are its specifications revealed save to those who are at once its discoverers and its architects.

No, it is not for any high or final or systemic metaphysic that

A Lover of the Chair is so wholly worth reading; nor merely for its art, but centrally because here philosophy may be found in its pure and first form and concerned with its essential concern. For Philosophy is philosophizing, and its subject is human nature where it is most truly humane, seeking out that steersmanship of the soul whereof the undying form is the truth that is the Ideal Man.

HARTLEY ALEXANDER.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA.

SOCIETIES

EASTERN DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION: PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT OF ANNUAL MEETING

THE next meeting of the Association will be held in New York City, at Columbia University, December 28th to 30th. In addition to papers on miscellaneous topics, there will be a symposium on the subject: "The rôle of the philosopher in modern life, with reference both to teaching and to research." This discussion will be led by Richard C. Cabot, professor of social ethics, Harvard University; Thomas Reed Powell, professor of public law, Columbia University; John M. Mecklin, professor of sociology, Dartmouth College; James B. Pratt, professor of philosophy, Williams College; and Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, professor of philosophy, Columbia University. Abstracts of their papers follow:

ABSTRACT OF PROFESSOR CABOT'S PAPER

Can we make philosophy tell more definitely on our students' lives?

1. Philosophy courses are now elected by students without any idea of painful reform.
2. It is difficult but necessary to get students to *practise* the task of conceiving new ideas or arranging old ones as they would practise a musical instrument.
3. Belligerent discussion and truth seeking.
4. Need of taking our task more seriously.

ABSTRACT OF PROFESSOR POWELL'S PAPER

The contribution of the philosopher to the solution of the problems of the social sciences may begin by shedding light on the questions whether the social sciences are sciences and whether their problems are susceptible of solution. The philosopher, as an out-