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WINGS

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The purpose of *Wings* is to establish a closer contact between the organization and its Members; to give information about Guild authors, the Editors' reasons for making their selections, and to present the literary news of the day in entertaining fashion.

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JAMES BRANCH CABELL

by H. L. MENCKEN

IN one of his books, *Straws and Prayer-Books,* a sort of monologue upon the life of an artist, Cabell deplores (politely, and without repining) the fact that he is chiefly known to his countrymen, North, East, South and West, as the author of *Jurgen,* and that *Jurgen* is regarded by the great majority of them who have ever heard of it at all as an extremely naughty book, to be read only on Sunday afternoons, with the children asleep and the blinds down. His discontent has good ground, for *Jurgen,* of course, is nothing of the sort. What gave it its evil name is not anything that Cabell himself put into it, but simply the dreadful things that the pornographic Comstocks read between the lines. Who remembers that a New York court decided that the Comstocks were fools? Not many. So *Jurgen* lives in the finishing schools as a wicked book, and the fact that it is a noble work of art is half forgotten. Worse, it is often forgotten that Cabell has also written many other books, and that some of them are even better. Such are the penalties that a moral Republic lays upon an artist, bogged in its swamps. If he is not hot for virtue, it is assumed at once that he is in the service of sin.

In the same *Straws and Prayer-Books* Cabell discusses this business at great length, and with vast ingenuity and humor, and then proceeds to prod into the nature of art and the motives of the artist. What is it, in brief, that the artist tries to

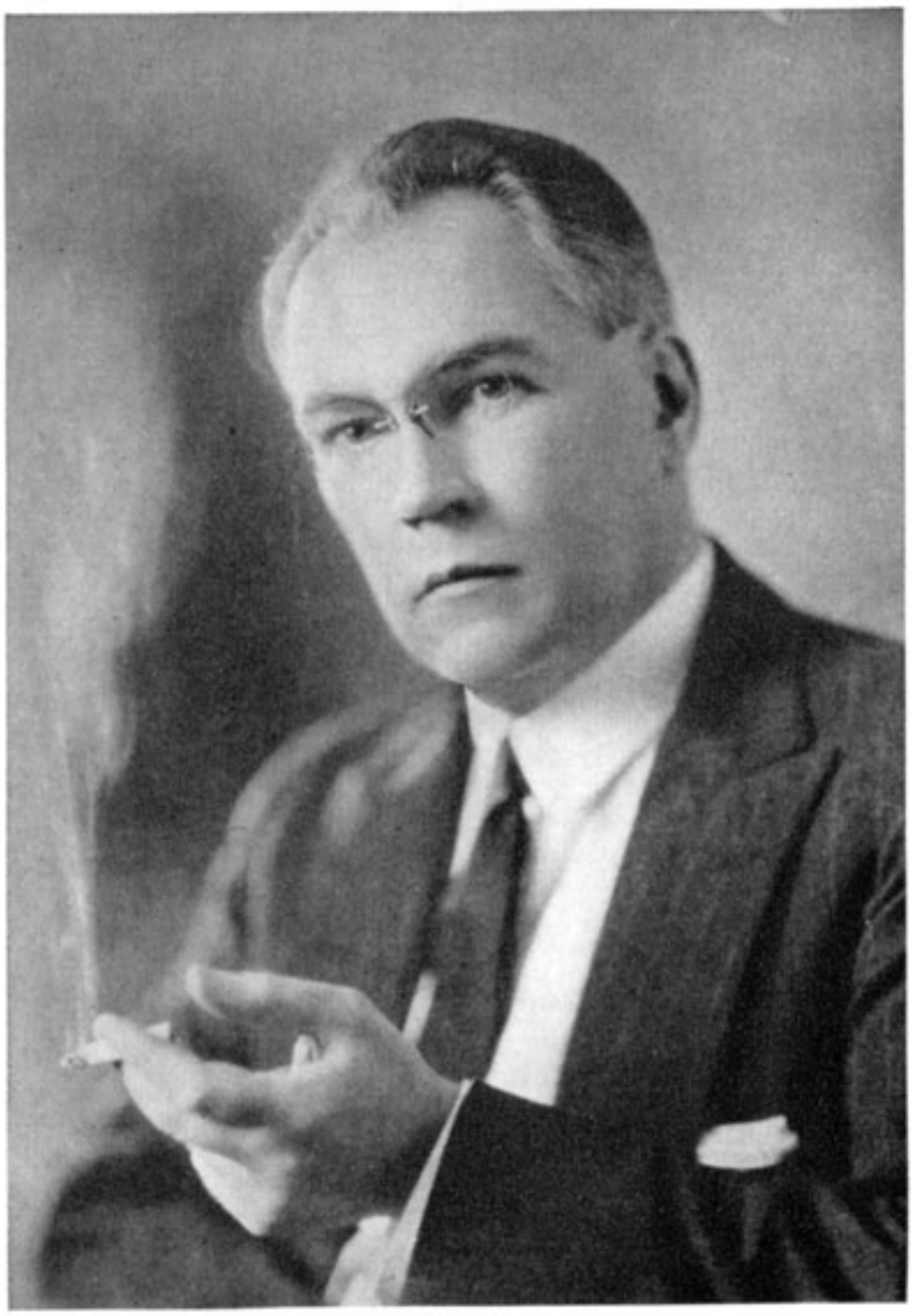
do? The orthodox American answer is that his purpose is, first to depict the life that he observes about him, and, second, to criticise it—in other words, to show how it could be improved, and to argue for his private scheme of improvement with all the voluptuous eloquence that he can muster—in yet other words, to make ideas appetizing by wrapping them in beauty. From this Cabell dissents sharply. The true artist, he says, has no such purpose, save in the sense, perhaps, that "prison-breaking is a criticism of the penitentiary." His real aim is not to suggest improvements in the life about him; it is to escape that life altogether. What he tries to do is to construct a world that shall be better than the world of everyday. He does not denounce his fellow-men for being satisfied with that everyday world, and he does not urge them to improve it; he simply invites them to take a ride with him and enjoy the lovelier scenery that he has discovered. The butt of his dream, if a dream may be said to have a butt, is not man, but God. It is his business to show that the stupendous achievements described in Genesis I, praiseworthy though they were, were yet not the last word in cosmic engineering—that immense progress has been made since then, theoretically if not actually, and that man, as artist, can now imagine a world as much superior to the one we all know as the one we know is superior to the city dump of Harrison, N. J.

Such notions, of course, have a contumacious and even ribald smack, and so the artist is doubly suspect—first, because he is devoid of moral purpose and seems to be anaesthetic to the Larger Good, and, secondly, because he approaches Genesis I in a bilious and insolent spirit. This is sufficient to explain, says Cabell, the artist's general disrepute in society. When he is admired at all by respectable folk it is somewhat sneakingly, as a bootlegger is admired. Mainly, he is not admired at all, but distrusted and disliked, and whenever moral passions begin to run high he gets a kick or two, and maybe a coat of tar and feathers. No artist could be elected President of the United States or dean of Harvard. The best any member of the profession may hope for is to be overlooked, or, like Cabell, to be attacked only by persons who happen to be unpopular with the courts. His offending, in the last analysis, lies in the simple fact that he doesn't take life seriously enough. He is too willing and eager to turn his back upon it, and seek release and happiness on the high peaks where goats run wild, and the cities appear as mere smudges of smoke upon the horizon, and there are no policemen. He is a traitor to responsibility, to high purpose, to duty. While the jails and lunatic asylums bulge, and the hangman misses meal after meal, and thousands come down with high blood pressure and diabetes, he departs for the hills with a banjo and a ham sandwich, and entertains himself matching his fancy with God's. The night

Mr. and Mrs. Cabell of Richmond entertain Burton Rascoe, Ellen Glasgow and Elliot White Springs at dinner

the American Legion discovers a Red reading the Bill of Rights he goes to hear a string quartette. All of Columbus Day, from dawn to dark, he labors upon a sonnet or a wood-cut. Turning his back upon statistics, he pursues, snares and kisses a pretty girl. Such is the artist as Cabell sees him.

Unquestionably, this life has its charms. It lures, indeed, many a yokel from the plow and the wagon-spoke works, and many a yokel female from the little red schoolhouse and the bungalow kitchen. Every Greenwich Village in the land is full of such refugees; they are happy, at least while youth lasts. But what of the bitter that goes with the sweet? What of the net produce of this strange, immoral life? How does it appear to a man weighing 160 pounds and 48 years old—in other words, to Cabell himself? Such a man still enjoys dreams and hallucinations, of course, but he must also know the value of Liberty bonds, balloon tires, public respect. There are blue days, no doubt, on which he yearns for the dignity and puissance of a bank president, a bishop, a United States Senator. Why, then, does such a man devote himself to the fine arts—especially in America, where they are less esteemed than anywhere else? Cabell, in *Straws and Prayer-Books,* sets himself that question, and answers it with great subtlety. I simplify his answer by changing its form slightly. Why does a cat chase its tail? Why is a humming-bird not a hippopotamus? Why did God create gallstones?



BRANCH CABELL

"THESE RESTLESS HEADS"

by CARL VAN DOREN

THERE is so much to be said about James Branch Cabell that the Literary Guild is sending to its subscribers, along with *These Restless Heads,* a reprint of a study of his work published in 1925 by one of the Editors. This critical and biographical study, although slightly revised to make it cover Mr. Cabell's later books, is in no sense a selection of the Guild. Its Editors have never considered the possibility of choosing any book by any one of them and in this case have consented to the reprint accompanying the February selection only because it seems likely to be a convenience to any readers, if there are any, who may now be introduced for the first time to a serious consideration of Mr. Cabell's writing.

This unusual introduction to *These Restless Heads,* like the critical study of Edwin Arlington Robinson sent with *Tristram* five years ago, is in a sense even more necessary than the earlier accompanying volume. For Mr. Cabell in *These Restless Heads* has begun a second chapter in his literary career, after the completion of one of the most distinguished first chapters which the career of a romancer has ever had. During the quarter of a century between 1904 and 1929 he published separately the various books which go to make up the Biography of Manuel. This is a great imaginative undertaking, which begins with the actual life of a legendary Count of Poictesme, known as Manuel the Redeemer, deals with his posthumous reputation, and follows the fortunes of his various descendants down to twentieth-century America. The individual volumes which go to make up the Biography have been published at different times and not in the order in which they fall in the total series. Only in the collected edition of the *Works of James Branch Cabell* in eighteen volumes has the entire panorama of the life of Manuel and his descendants been systematically set forth to the world. Now, however, that this has been done, some brief commentary upon the whole scheme needs to be made as an introduction to Mr. Cabell's subsequent work.

The monograph on Mr. Cabell which herewith accompanies *These Restless Heads* is therefore actually a summary of his previous and completed work. At the end of the Biography he himself closed the chapter by saying that he had done what he meant to do, no less than Gibbon at the end of his history of Rome, and that he must consequently say farewell to his readers. By many readers he was understood to have given up writing altogether,

and there was at the time much debate in the newspapers over the question whether he would really be silent thereafter or not. He had, of course, only completed the Biography.

It was, it now appears, only the biographer of Manuel who had ceased to write. Mr. Cabell himself was still full of things to say. With a humorous effort to be consistent he has ceased to exist as James Branch Cabell and as Branch Cabell has written another book. It is this new book inaugurating a subsequent career which the Guild now sends to its subscribers.

If *These Restless Heads* needs any further introduction it is not because it is itself difficult to read but because it does not easily fall into any of the conventional classifications into which conventional readers like to find their books falling. On the whole it is more than anything else like conversation. Mr. Cabell, author of a great work now completed, talks to his readers about his way of life, his ideas, his experiences, certain of his plans, with the justified assumption that readers will be interested in what he has to say. At the same time, his new book is by no means a mere footnote or afterpiece to the Biography. It is a beautiful and distinguished book of prose in its own right, a rich and leisurely survey of many topics and many observations. Readers who do not know about the Biography may not always catch Mr. Cabell's allusions. In such cases it is necessary only to read the accompanying study as an introduction. After that, *These Restless Heads* will be seen to be as clear as it is beautiful and original and surprising and amusing.

These Restless Heads is published in the trade edition by McBride. It may be purchased at any bookstore for $2.50. James Branch Cabell, by Carl Van Doren, $1.50.

THE ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

Our cover is reproduced from an etching by Carl Wuermer, a Chicago painter of Bavarian descent in whom are combined the rarest values of modernity and the most painstaking and authentic traditions of academic art.

The cartoon by Picasso is a bitter jibe at Renoir whose heavily sentimental *Liebespaar,* now in the Museum of Cologne, inspired the great Frenchman to draw this cruel caricature.

In the monotype of a girl's head, Henri Matisse demonstrates how simply and economically a drawing may be executed when the lines are controlled by so accomplished an hand.

PALMGROVE, from the etching by Thomas S. Handforth, used to embellish Burton Rascoe's note on Mr. Cabell, has been selected from that artist's work done in Morocco. Mr. Handforth was born in Tacoma, Washington. His work is represented in the principal museums of Paris, London and New York.

Courtesy Kennedy and Company *Thomas Handforth*

PALMGROVE

Mr. Cabell of Richmond, Va.

by BURTON RASCOE

AS befits a man who has lived so much in the mind and spirit, the external facts in the life of James Branch Cabell are not in themselves momentous, however fruitful they may have been in experience that he was later to see through the temperament of an artist and turn to literary account. He was born in Richmond, Virginia, of a family of distinguished lineage and thus was not handicapped at birth in a city wherein ancestry counts for so much. And he was born to, and nourished by, those notions of chivalry and gallantry established in the Old South, with their "strange meridional notion of womankind which, none the less, no living Southerner ever permit-

ted to enter into his specific relations with any specific woman".

He went, in time, to the College of William and Mary where, after his graduation, he taught Greek and Latin, wrote poetry, tried his hand at fiction. He was a reporter for a while on a Richmond newspaper and for a spell gathered items of news of Haarlem Society in New York for the New York Herald. Nowhere in his books is it obvious that he has made use of his experience as a newsman. Nor, indeed, may one readily find in his work reminders that he was once engaged in coal mining in West Virginia. There are souvenirs, of suspects, in *The Cords of Vanity* (that better *This Side of Paradise* of an earlier day) of his wander-year abroad when he was ostensibly engaged, for profit, in genealogical research to establish the family of a soap manufacturer with a prideful family tree. But with the solid success of a serialization of a first novel, *The Eagle's Shadow,* in the Saturday Evening Post, short stories appearing in Ainslee's, and commissions from a magazine to write suitable text to go with some colorful medieval paintings by Howard Pyle (which text grew into the stories of *Chivalry, Gallantry* and *The Line of Love*) behind him, he settled down to the profession of authorship, married and thence stirred as little as possible from Richmond and its environs.

Much of the writing of the eighteen volumes of the Biography of Manuel and much of the revision of these volumes were done in the library work-room on the second floor of a commodious Colonial house on an estate named Dumbarton Grange, in Dumbarton, a suburb of Richmond. Casement windows extended the full length of one side of this library work-room; and, so placed that the light might fall over Mr. Cabell's left shoulder, there was an ordinary typewriter desk into which the typewriter disappeared when not in use. At this desk Mr. Cabell worked, doing all his typing and re-typing and making his infinite corrections in his minute handwriting that is so legible and so like copper etching. At this desk he faced a doorway always, because he suffers from a mild form of claustrophobia which makes it impossible for him to write unless he can look up and see an exit.

This library he has described in *The Cream of the Jest* and in *Beyond Life* and his habit of washing the framed pictures of its walls himself because no servant can be trusted to keep water from getting beneath the glass and making stains. Those windows were the magic casements which opened up on strange worlds for Felix Kennaston and through windows like them Manuel surveyed his domain. For around Dumbarton is the region enchanted into Poictesme (including, of course, Rockbridge Alum Springs, the summer resort, which, *These Restless Heads* tells us, furnished the setting and the paraphernalia of so many magics)

by Mr. Cabell's wizardry, and no doubt it will some day be subjected to comparative topographical research.

So in this library Mr. Cabell for a long time wrote his books and wrote, too, occasionally the theme papers for one of his step-daughters who was in a finishing school and these theme papers were duly corrected and graded with low marks by that same John Macy, then a school's preceptor, who was later to say on his word as a critic that James Branch Cabell is one of the greatest masters of prose that ever wrote in English and to compile the anthology of Cabell prose to prove it. Of the fortunes and misfortunes concerning the books there written one may look in the various prefaces of the Storisende edition of the works of James Branch Cabell.

For with the completion of the Storisende edition James Branch Cabell ceased to exist as an author and Branch Cabell, by a simple truncation of the James, was born. This demise and birth coincided with the removal of the Cabells from Dumbarton into town. When the youngest of Mrs. Cabell's daughters was married and Ballard Cabell (Mr. and Mrs. Cabell's son) was old enough to go away to school and keeping servants in a big house in the country was a problem, the Cabells moved into a large brick house on Monument Avenue, a broad, tree-lined residential esplanade in Richmond, dotted at regular intervals with fine equestrian statues of heroic officers of the Confederacy. The library of this house Mr. Cabell has alluded to in *These Restless Heads,* with its vast collection of toy animals in porcelain, glass, bronze, iron and brass and its books and inscribed photographs.

Of his life in Richmond Mr. Cabell has been explicit in *These Restless Heads.* He has described his surroundings and given us intimate domestic glimpses and alluded to the routine of his days with more humorous emphasis upon the annoyances to which a famous author is subjected and the rewards of authorship also. His habits are sedentary, his activities are circumspect and orderly—those of an exemplary citizen, tax-payer, pew-holder in the Episcopal Church and local literary light, a position he shares with such eminence abroad with his good friend, Miss Ellen Glasgow. In Richmond he once encouraged *belles lettres* by acting as president of the local writers' society and helped out the Misses Emily Clark and Frances Newman in the editing of a shortly-lived but brilliant little magazine.

He is a man of medium height, heavy set, soft, not fat, with a high-domed forehead with blondish brown hair roached back and greying at the temples. The first thing Robert Cortes Holliday noticed about him was that he wore a suit and overcoat tailored of the same material and that the sleeves of his coat are long and large and hung low upon his hands. The late Miss Frances Newman (*Cont. on page 26*)

Mr. Cabell of Richmond in Virginia

(*Continued from page 16*)

noticed that he blushes easily. His eyes are grey and ordinarily twinkling with ironical merriment. He chuckles but does not laugh and his conversation is unobtrusively dialectical, Socratic in tone, and often at humorous self-expense.

He is never positive about anything that is open to debate and his skeptical bent is sometimes the despair of his professionally skeptical friends. Once Joseph Hergesheimer and H. L. Mencken visited Mr. Cabell in Richmond. After the visit I encountered Mr. Hergesheimer in New York. He was still disturbed about that visit. Mr. Cabell, he told me, was in a serious way mentally: Mr. Cabell actually believed in the immortality of the soul. I pressed Mr. Hergesheimer for details. It seems that there had been a long discussion lasting hours, and matters of religious faith and the immortality of the soul had come up. As Mr. Hergesheimer described it I could picture the scene: Mr. Mencken the vehement anti-religionist to whom the idea of the soul's survival after somatic death is nonsense, pounding the table in his hearty Gargantuan emphasis and marshaling all his extensive knowledge of physics, biology and theology to shatter the idea of the immortality of the soul, and Mr. Cabell with a quiet inner amusement leading him on, dragging him out, with an unshakable soft insistence that whether the soul survives or not is something about which no mortal man can know definitely, and since the question is open to debate there is much to be said on both sides.

It is with this true skepticism that Mr. Cabell has informed all his writings. It enabled him to create the charming Heaven of Jurgen's grandmother and the Hell that Jurgen's grandfather demanded as the proper punishment for his sins.

Lincoln Steffens, Bear Hunter

(*Continued from page 12*)

indignant and wanted to know why he encouraged the child to tell such stories. "That's nothing," Steffens answered, "I just killed ten bears myself."

Pete and his father understand each other perfectly. Both of them adore mama, both of them understand and humorously tolerate her distaste for lies, but both of them go on lying. Pete and his father have a song which they sing and they went outside and sang after mama put them out for telling lies about bears:

"Mama and Annie are absurd;
Pete and papa are wonderful."

Annie is the maid. Pretty soon she called them in for lunch and while they were eating Pete leaned across to his father and nodded his head with great understanding.

"Mama and Annie are wonderful,
Pete and papa are absurd," he said.