

mercilessly dealt with. The speaker, for instance, should not be permitted to attribute to himself the anecdote of "the perfectly good cat in the ash-barrel," or of the two men in a dynamite explosion of whom one was calm and the other was collected. Neither must he claim for himself the authorship of the statement that there are three kinds of lies, the third kind being statistics. A schedule of such familiar pieces of com-

mon property should be attached to the bill and be added to from time to time.

There is a great deal more I could say, but I must hurry and dress for a dinner of the Society for the Encouragement of Macadamized Roads in the Bronx, at which the senior senator from Porto Rico is to be the principal speaker.

Affectionately,
Harold.

ON THE POSEUR

With a Good Word for that Well-abused but Indispensable Type

My dear Graham:

You ask me with a humility more becoming than habitual for my views on the poseur. You are more particularly interested in the case of your own son, who, being at bottom a hearty American lad, has plagued you by playing the part of the *grand seigneur* and scattering condescensions with ducal munificence. My dear fellow, let the boy alone. The specific for these ailments is time, and if that drastic remedy should prove by chance ineffectual, why, even then perhaps there are worse handicaps in life than the ability to take undying pleasure in that most inseparable and troublesome of all one's belongings—oneself.

The pose is world-wide and as old, if the "Paradise Lost" be authentic, as man. In a gay essay, Stevenson said that dogs pose, and Hardy says, in effect, that children pose, and that their posing is one way of being simple. Men pose not only in the recess of the private letter, but in the crypt of the private diary. Our poses conduct us to church, invade our seclusion, climb with us to our chambers, and lie down with us in our beds. Our silence poses; our solitude poses; death strikes attitudes, and the act of suicide becomes a pose. Nature catches the infection, and makes real men who, so to speak, pose as poseurs; precisely as if she should make seals with a fur that mimicked plush.

But the question of honesty distresses you; you are almost equally vexed whether your son succeeds or fails in passing off his grandiosities as genuine. You add, with that debonair eighteenth-century antithesis of which all my exhortations have failed to cure you, that you do not wish to have him admired on false grounds or laughed at on



sound ones. The first of these fears may be put aside; the chances are five to one that the lad's self will be his only convert. As for the second anxiety, there are plenty of worse employments for our scapegrace human nature than the evocation of wholesome

laughter by the exhibit of harmless foibles.

And why should the laughter be ill-natured? The poseur, as we know him, is the man whom we have outwitted in his attempt to outwit us. We have fathomed his trick, and he is entitled to his share of the charity which we lavish on the exemplifications of our sagacity. The great poseurs, indeed, like the great criminals, are lost in the incognito of their triumph; history preserves them, like successful rebels, under other names. The poseur so-called has failed, but he is often an innocent and likable failure. He stands aloof from the swindler by his disdain of material profits, and from the slavish or craven copyist by his choice and relish of his part. The savor of *Iago's* pose of the roistering "sodger lad-die" is its disinterestedness, the paucity (so worrying to critics) of palpable exterior motive; it is art for art's sake, like later immoralities. One fancies the real Poe looking up to his pinchbeck namesake almost as *Tom Pinch* did to *Mr. Pecksniff*.

A pose often springs from a balked ideal; it is a day-dream about ourselves in the nurture of which we ask the coöperation of an indulgent public. Looked at rightly, does not a man's supposition that his true self is unworthy of the eyes of the neighbors involve, in relation to those neighbors, an ingratiating and beautiful humility? What homage so complete as that of putting off, in honor of one's fellow-men, not one's hat or one's shoes, but oneself?

The poseur is a man for whom the effect of the world upon himself—the expression of which would be sincerity—is of less account than his own effect upon his circle, whether that circle be the *orbis terrarum* or the ring of tilted arm-chairs about the stove in the rural post-office. In his offenses his public is commonly an accessory both before and after the fact. *Mrs. Poyser* sagely remarked that you never caught a dog standing on his hind legs when there was nobody looking at him. The poseur in religion sometimes has his holiness thrust upon him, like *Krishna Mulvaney* or *Peer Gynt*, and the false prophet may be the dupe, and not the deceiver, of his votaries. The ministerial pose is often the nursling of the woman parishioners; and authors, and perhaps even self-installed magnates like your son, often refuse to make fools of themselves until a public or a coterie has set them the demoralizing example.

I am lured on to say a word of cases which have doubtless no application to your son. It has often occurred to me that the sinfulness of hiding oneself under a pose depends much on the kind of self remanded to obscurity. When the *Nurse* in "Romeo and Juliet" calls on *Peter* for her fan, *Mercutio* approvingly cries out: "Good *Peter*, to hide her face; for her fan's the fairer face." The alternative to the pose, be it remembered, is not abstract reality, but the reality of the poseur. Are the people who deplore the affectations of the made-up *Mrs. Skewton* in "Dombey and Son" really sorry that Dickens did not give us more of the "old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, . . . huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown"? Nothing, we virtuously feel, can excuse the pretense except—the substitution of the reality. People imagine that if the real Byron had peeled off his multifarious envelops, the Wertherian pose of *Childe Harold*, the Mephistophelian pose of the comic narratives, and even perhaps the Prince Hal pose of the friendly letters, the core would have been—well, let us say, Shelley. They do not see that it was the

absence of Shelley at the core that made the integuments possible. When one rubs the silver plating off a fork, the residuum is never gold.

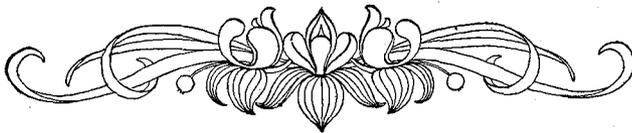
There are perhaps meager and starved realities capable of no better use than that of contribution to some brilliant and imposing semblance. There are men whom the pose evolves, completes, and individualizes; to whom it supplies the breath of life, like the pipe of the animated "Scarecrow" in the pathetically whimsical fancy piece of *Mr. Mackaye*. Who would have Chateaubriand sincere? The thought is homicidal. One would as soon have a reverent Voltaire, a prudish Whitman, an obvious Henry James. Men like Chateaubriand, like Pope, like Walter Pater, increase our wealth of types, enrich the great museum of human character which history, art, and letters slowly accumulate.

Lastly,—and here I think once more of your son, whom I have been rudely ignoring in the last two paragraphs,—let us remember that the pose is sometimes the wooing—not rarely the successful wooing—of the reality: it is the youth's manliness, which manhood comes slowly but surely up to justify. Perhaps in your son's case, also, imitation is only prophecy. The process is common enough. Who shall say that humanity itself was not once a pose—the pose of some hairy, prehensile creature who found apehood insupportably plebeian? The first upright walk was a pose in the most literal sense, and one can imagine the uproar which the affectation evoked from the mouths of the compact simian majority. If the superman should ever become a reality, will not the pose be usher to the fact?

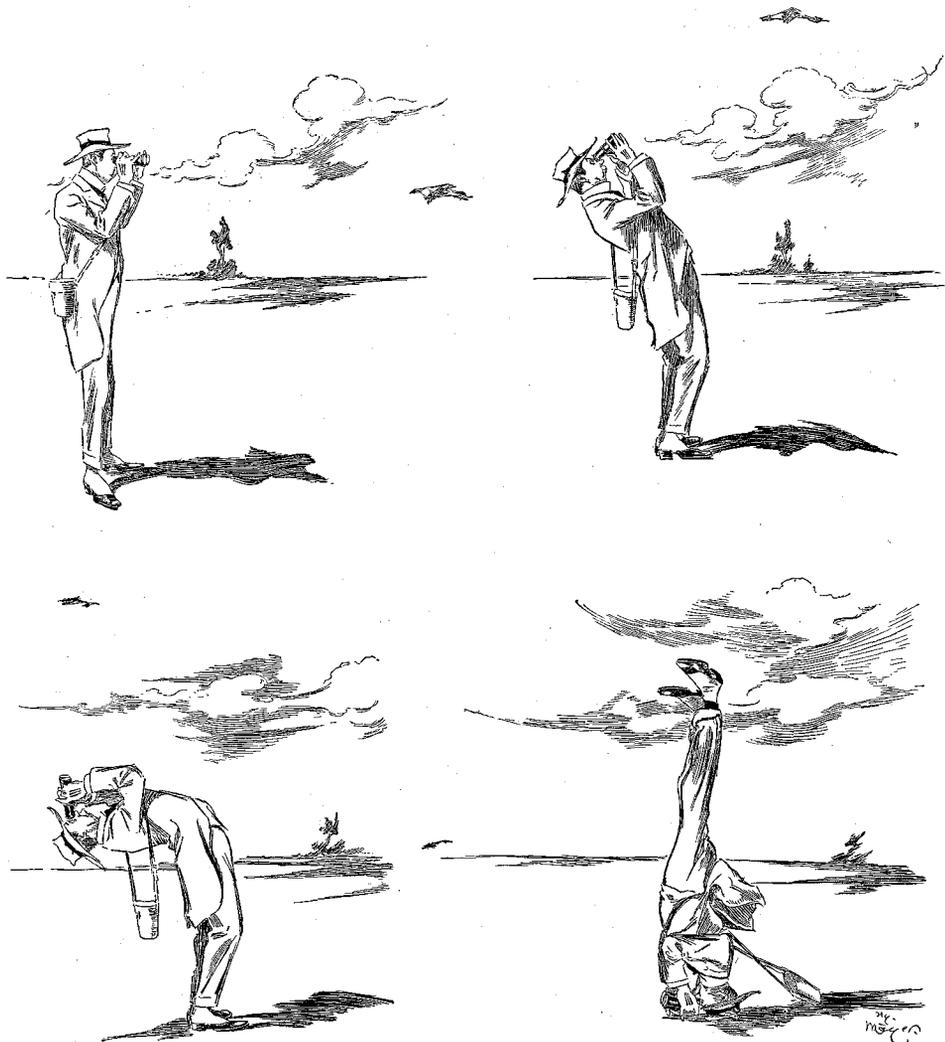
Sincerity and reality are great things,—too great and perhaps too rare to warrant an attitude of impatience or disdain toward all that lies outside the restricted boundaries of their absolute and unmixed sway. We are all, alas! poscurs, in which great class or cult let me admit my own membership in subscribing myself

Fraternally yours,

Oliver Forbes.



IN LIGHTER VEIN



Drawn by Hy. Mayer

WATCHING AN AIRSHIP

OLD DADDY DO-FUNNY'S WISDOM JINGLES

BY RUTH MC ENERY STUART

THE TERRAPIN

BREER TERRAPIN draws in 'is head so knowin',
 You can't tell whether he 's comin' or goin',
 But *his* mind ain't mixed—he 's layin' low
 Tel he sees which way he 's obleeged to go.
 An' he ain't no new politician in dat—
 No, he ain't by 'isself in dat!

THE RATTLE-SNAKE

BREER Rattle-snake rattles befo' he springs,
 But he warns too late to 'scape 'is stings;
 His high-class manners don't count for much
 Caze dey grafted on to a sarpent's touch.
 An' he ain't by 'isself in dat, in dat—
 An' he ain't by 'isself in dat.