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AN ESSAY ON THE QUINTS

By JAMES LARKIN PEARSON

All the world knows the Dione Quintuplets—by name and by sight. From the day of their birth they have been in the public eye—advertised and press-agented to an extent never before known. Even Shirley Temple, carrying the weight of her seven years lightly, is hard so much of a world celebrity as the Quints. Shirley is getting to the point now where she is beginning to be taken for granted, and some of the first glamor of discovery is wearing off. She has become one of our settled institutions and is expected to function right along without so much attention.

But the Quints are still new enough to be an amazing curiosity. They have not quite become standard equipment yet. It is as if we were still trying them out and wondering if they would last. Maybe there is a lurking fear that we might wake up some morning and find them only a dream.

On the screen and on the magazine page we have become familiar with their round chubby faces, their cute smiles and their saucy little pranks. Most of us even try to know them by name, and we have long and profound arguments about their several personalities—what mental traits or talents each will develop in years to come. I remember seeing in some magazine where a famous artist had pulled aside the future's veil and painted them as full grown women—college seniors, I believe—and he had undertaken to transmit the child features to the very queenly-looking grown-ups.

All of which is very interesting, and some of which might be true. The only way to be sure about that is to wait and see. If the children all live to grow up they will undoubtedly be very superior young women—physically, mentally, and in every way. They may even be so superior to the common garden variety of female as to seem almost supernormal.

Now right here is a chance for an interesting study. The parents of the Quints were just ordinary poor laboring people, presumably without much education, culture, or social standing. They had several other children born before the great day when the Quints arrived. These other children grew up just any way they could; ate and wore whatever their hardpressed parents could provide, and took their chances with malnutrition, disease germs and all the uncertainties of childhood. Neither the parents nor the children had ever been heard of. And if the five that came together had just happened to come separately like the others, not one of the Dione family would have been known to fame. It was merely the accident of multiple birth that trained the spotlight upon them and changed the whole course of the family's fortunes. Poverty and obscurity one day; fame and fortune the next day; and all because a certain long-legged bird called a stork had a sense of humor and brought five little girls to the Dione home in one package.

And Dr. Dafeo was right there all ready and waiting for his Big Chance. One might be pardoned for suspecting that the doctor had a secret understanding with the stork, and that the whole thing was cooked up between them as a big publicity stunt. Well, it worked. Certainly Dr. Dafeo has gotten as much out of it as anybody else. That he has done his part well nobody will deny, and he has given the world the very best possible ex-

ample of what COULD be done with every child that is born into the world—barring certain constitutional defects that would be exceptions to the rule.

What I mean is this: He could have gone out into the by-ways and back streets where the shacks of poverty stand in squalid rows, and there he could have picked up five new-born infants out of five different shacks. He could have taken them into his care and given them exactly the same treatment he has given the Quints; and ninety-nine chances out of a hundred they would now be in every way equal to what the Quints are. Perfect care, perfect sanitation, perfect food, and the sense of well-being that springs from such an environment—and nearly every pitiful and neglected infant born into the world could become a super-child equal in every way to the perfectly wonderful Dione Quintuplets.

Picture to yourself a world full of such children, and not a slum brat nor street rat in all creation. All of them growing up to be super-normal men and women. Dr. Dafeo has proven that it COULD be done.

Then why isn't it done? No reason in the world except ignorance and greed and selfishness—the disposition of the powerful few to trample upon the weak and helpless. We are still in the jungle state. The Quints are just a sample of what the human race can and will be when we begin to get civilized.

The Thing That Endures

If anyone wants proof that it is the quality and not the quantity of a poet's output that gives him fame, we have only to cite the case of A. E. Housman. His total output of poetry during his life was very small, but it was of such immortal quality, so dynamically alive with the high voltage of genius, that Housman's place is secure.

Poets, will you take the hint? Instead of "dashing off" a poem or two every day only to have them die unnoticed, suppose you try writing two or three poems a year and putting as much honest hard work into them as you might otherwise have put into two or three hundred.

Concentrate. Boil down. Melt and remelt in the furnace of your mind. Skim off the dross of words until nothing is left but the pure golden magic of deathless poetry. If you can write, during your stay on earth, two or three poems that will live through the ages, you have done a greater and better thing than to have subdued a continent or piled up a billion dollars. If I might choose between being Alexander the Great or Robert Burns, it would not take me three seconds to choose—I would be the poor plowboy of Ayr whose gentle name will outlast all the swords of history. If I might choose between being Rockefeller with his billions or James Whitcomb Riley without a penny to my name, it would be the author of "Little Orphant Annie" for mine.

Make no mistake, brother—the sword will be eaten with rust; the dollar will somehow vanish into thin air; but the poem—if you have put into it the immortal dream-stuff—the poem will live.—J. L. P.

One of the most interesting "columns" in any North Carolina newspaper is Nell Battle Lewis's "Incidentally" in the Raleigh News and Observer. Miss Lewis is not only well-informed, but she is unafraid, and often says things that cause the smug hypocrites to squirm in their shoes. We need more columnists able to swing a pen like Nell Battle Lewis.

CHARLES W. HUBNER --- The Last of the Old Southern Poets

BY ALICE McFARLAND

Charles William Hubner, who died on Jan. 3, 1927, just two weeks before his 94th birthday, was the last surviving member of the second group of great American poets of the Civil War period. The Southern members of this group are, in chronological order: Theodore O'Hara, Francis Orray Ticknor, John R. Thompson, Henry Timrod, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Charles W. Hubner, Abram J. Ryan, James Ryder Randall, Sidney Lanier, James Maurice Thompson, John Henry Boner, and John Banister Tabb. These poets, born between 1820 and 1845, were forming a new school of poetry following that of the senior bards—Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, Emerson, Poe and others—when their literary activities were interrupted by the Civil War. A number of them lived long enough to resume poetic activity after the period of reconstruction.

Mr. Hubner in his long life numbered among his friends members of the three great groups of American poets. Longfellow, Whittier and Holmes paid tribute to his work. Longfellow gave special praise to Mr. Hubner's tribute to Bayard Taylor. Oliver Wendell Holmes in a letter to Mr. Hubner expressed his admiration for this poem in the following words: "Such a warm tribute, such a token passing between the two sections of the country, make us feel that it is and always will be one in heart as in name." Holmes also expressed his appreciation of Mr. Hubner's poem on Robert Burns. Whittier wrote to Mr. Hubner concerning his poem on the death of Paul Hamilton Hayne: "I thank thee heartily for the beautiful and touching verses on the burial of our lamented friend, Hayne. They are lines that will live." Whittier also wrote appreciatively of Mr. Hubner's book, "Poems and Essays."

Of the group of poets to which Mr. Hubner himself belonged, Paul H. Hayne, five years his senior, was his devoted friend and corresponded with him for many years. Hayne frequently expressed his deep admiration for the poetry of Mr. Hubner. The two poets were men of similar gifts and culture and were devoted lovers of their art. Mr. Hubner and Sidney Lanier also formed a deep and lasting friendship. Hubner met Lanier when he was in Atlanta on a concert tour, in the seventies. Hubner, himself a musician, was on the stage with Lanier; and after the concert Lanier invited him to his room in the Kimball House. "I did not get home till after three the next morning," said Mr. Hubner in relating this incident. "Certainly for me it was a feast of soul and a flow of reason. This was the beginning of our friendship, a love and admiration on my part that has lasted till the present day." Mr. Hubner considered Sidney Lanier "the greatest poet America has ever produced." Mr. Hubner was also a close friend of James Ryder Randall.

Of the more recent group of great American poets, James Whitcomb Riley and Frank L. Stanton were friends of Mr. Hubner. Mr. Stanton wrote a beautiful poem to Mr. Hubner, which first appeared in *The Atlanta Constitution*, and which forms the introductory poem in Mr. Hubner's latest volume, "Poems of Faith and Consolation." Mr. Hubner was born in Baltimore, January 16, 1835. His parents were John Adam and Margaret Hubner. He attended the public schools of Baltimore, and

studied the higher branches of drawing, painting and music under private tutors. He spent a year in Germany, where he studied music, art, literature and the languages, for about six years.

On his return to the United States he taught school in Tennessee. He was teaching piano and covered the Tennessee Female Academy at Fayetteville when the Civil War began. He enlisted in the Confederate army and was an officer under Col. Torrey, of the First Tennessee Regiment. He served until the war ended, and took part in the battles of Manassas, Mountain Ridge, Resaca, and Atlanta. At the siege of Atlanta he had charge of the telegraph corps, with the rank of Major.

After 1870 Mr. Hubner made his home in Atlanta. He was connected editorially with several Atlanta papers—the *Constitution*, the *Journal*, the *Christian Index* and the *American*. And for a number of years he was Assistant Librarian of the Carnegie Library.

Mr. Hubner's first wife was Miss Ida Southworth. Their children were Carl, Ida (who died in young girlhood), and Rose, who was her father's devoted companion in their attractive bungalow on Catherine Street. In 1877 Mr. Hubner married Miss Mary Frances Whitney. Their son, William Whitney Hubner, is a prominent musician of Atlanta.

Major Hubner published two collections of poems—"Windflowers" and "Poems of Faith and Consolation," the last named coming from the Oglethorpe University Press in 1928. He also published a collection of "Poems and Essays," two lyrical dramas, "Cinderella," and "The Magic Wonderstone," a treatise on "Modern Communism," an anthology of Civil War poems: "War Poets of the South and Confederate Campfire Songs," a collection of tributes to Robert Burns entitled "For Love of Burns," which has been highly praised in Scotland; a compilation of Historical Souvenirs of Luther, and a valuable critical work, "Representative Southern Poets," in which he has written appreciatively of the great poets of the South, a number of whom he knew intimately. This book has been greatly praised on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mr. Hubner was a seer with a high vision and an uplifting, inspiring message. His poems embody the spirit of sublime optimism, of high-born faith and courage, and love of the beautiful in Nature and in life. He was also a thorough artist, a master of melody and word-magic. He had the poet's twin gifts of vision and expression. He never sacrificed form to thought nor thought to form. Sublime message and perfect expression are inseparably linked in his poems.

I am glad to publish the above appreciation of the late Charles W. Hubner. It is one of the types of writing that I want. Mr. Hubner's life is an eminently worthy and fitting subject for such a sketch. And lastly, he was for a number of years one of my best friends. From the time I first made his acquaintance until the time of his death at 94 years of age we carried on a rather intimate correspondence. One of my letter-files has a very fat section filled with the well-known handwriting of Charles W. Hubner. Thirty or forty letters, some of them of considerable length written to me by the aged fingers of this great poet.—J. L. P.

LITERATURE OF "ESCAPE?"

By JAMES LARKIN PEARSON

Why not? Certainly there must be plenty of things that we need to escape from—poverty, sickness, bereavement, disappointment, ugliness—suffering of many kinds. And if literature can offer a momentary escape from these things even for a little while, what possible objection can be raised?

In view of the modern craze for realistic writing, for stark and cruel photographing of life at its very worst, I have racked my brain for some sane reason why ugliness and suffering should be needlessly multiplied in print.

For most of us, our daily lives are conditioned on circumstances that are, or seem to be, beyond our control. We do not willingly and purposely invite the tragedies that come into our lives. We do not actually prefer to live in a world of such uncertainty, or where the only certainty is trouble. There are little intervals of peace and satisfaction, of hope and happiness; but taken day in and day out, there is perhaps more shadow than sunshine in nearly every life.

Then here comes our school of realism and says that isn't enough. We must double up on it by having a literature of defeat and frustration to bedevil us the rest of the time. If we have an hour of respite from actual trouble, an hour of leisure for reading, we must pay the Erskine Caldwell and the William Faulkners to make us unhappy during that hour. We must hire them to drag our minds through a cesspool of muck and filth, to shock us with crime and sicken us with low and dirty language.

Why? In God's name, why can we not have at least part of our time to be clean-minded and self-respecting? Why must even our reading time be spent in a mental garbage wagon and our nostrils assailed by the stinks of rotten and immoral fiction?

It is the fashion to scoff at ideals, to rail against the pilgrims that seek Utopia. But the human race has never taken a step forward and upward toward happiness except as it followed the gleam of an ideal. There is no advantage in having a prophet if he lies face down in the gutter and prophecies ruin as the only possible end and object of life. The prophet's business is to show a better way, to inspire, to lift up. The poet who does not set to deathless music the finest things of earth and heaven had just as well not sing at all. If it isn't beauty it isn't poetry, no matter what the school of realism says to the contrary.

Thought is the beginning of action. A man's mental state determines his course of conduct and his ultimate station in life. There is no denying the fact that the reading of good books does conduce to a healthy and wholesome state of mind, and such a state of mind will result in a better life.

To follow our best dreams and ideals is richly worth while. We will perhaps never reach perfection in this world, but we will come measurably closer to it if we hitch our wagon to a star.

Last of all, the "literature of escape" (if they insist on calling it that) justifies itself precisely because it does provide a temporary escape from the ugly and disheartening facts of life. It gives one a chance to relax and gather strength for the next battle. So what?

Bleeding Beauty

From Lee G. Crutchfield, Jr., Richmond, Va., comes to this office a poetic offering called "Morning Mallards"—the Mallards being wild ducks, as you may happen to know.

The poem is all about going out on the water in a boat and hiding to shoot the ducks when they came within gunshot range. There is one stanza which is true and genuine poetry. It pictures the coming of the ducks—"Seven dots against the morning"—and I think that line is very beautiful poetry. But when the birds get near the hidden gunner they are shot and killed. They tumble from the skies, broken and bleeding, and the "sportsman" thinks he has done a very fine morning's work. In this case the sportsman and the poet seems to be the same individual. Anyway, the poet agrees that the bloody murder of the beautiful ducks was all right and a perfectly lovely thing to do. But for me that spoils the poem and I refuse to print it in my paper. It is a strange sort of mind that gets pleasure out of killing such beautiful and innocent creatures.—J. L. P.

H. Clay Ferre, a young man on the staff of the Winston-Salem Journal, is another writer who is going to be worth watching. His column, "Like It Or Not," in the Journal, is mighty interesting reading.

Dr. Archibald Henderson, of Chapel Hill, N. C., is the most internationally known of all the Tarheels who work with words. His various works on Bernard Shaw have made him a world figure.

Two novels of Thomas Wolfe, of Asheville, have placed him in the front rank of novelists. "Look Homeward, Angel," and "Of Time and the River," are open to criticism on the ground of not being at all times a true-to-life picture of the region treated, but one cannot deny that they are powerfully and beautifully written, with gusto to spare.