

# ANTI-CABELLUM—By Capt. Rupert Hughes

MR. JAMES BRANCH CABELL is much more ferocious than I had judged from his work, and I am sorry I attracted his lacerating attention. I have just enough strength and spite—to revert to the consideration of facts, since there is nothing else that so annoys him. Admitting that I deserved what I got for being foolish enough to interrupt the dreamy babble of his essays, I must ask for a little further space.

I wrote complimenting THE TRIBUNE on praising so enthusiastically so fine a novelist as Mr. Cabell, but I felt called upon to point out that as a historian of Greek, medieval, and Elizabethan art and letters he gave an utterly false and disproportioned account of them. I quoted his statements verbatim and answered them with history.

In his answer to me he ignores all but one or two of my citations, and turns and rends me with his super-Mollatian satire. And here also he proves his avoidance of what he so Cabellably denounces as "a too sparing employment of untruthfulness."

He rushes to "Who's Who in America" for ammunition to destroy me with and selects a few facts and a few lies for my complete maceration, omitting everything that would mar his caricature.

BT as I complained before, he selects too carelessly. I would not spoil his excellent satire by failing to enjoy its fine careless capture, but I must again call him to account as hopelessly unfitted to deal with what he so frankly hates, and that is the truth.

He says that my article is "a curiously learned performance even for a Western Reserve graduate." This is meant to annihilate both the university and this particular product of it. But Adelbert college has always maintained a high standard in its classical curriculum, which I took both in the required and the elective courses and supplemented with voracious reading, taking second honors on graduation and delivering a salutatory in Latin.

I had studied Greek art at my mother's knee. At Western Reserve I studied the Greek philosophers and poets and playwrights. I took a course in Greek archaeology and wrote a monograph on Praxiteles, reading for that purpose every word that exists about him in ancient Greek.

Years after I was concerned in the possession of an alleged statue of Praxiteles now owned by Mr. Rockefeller. I recognized at once that it was what it pretended to be, yet a very beautiful work, and I visited the principal art galleries of Europe searching for information on which to base its proper ascription. I had quite a wrangle with the papal curator of the Vatican over some Greek fragments.

I contributed many articles on art to Scribner's and other magazines and an article on American sculpture to the tenth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. This I state to show that I have some right to discuss sculpture.

In common honesty Mr. Cabell might have quoted from "Who's Who" the statement that after graduating from Western Reserve I took a master's degree at Yale. I specialized in the history of satire, particularly Elizabethan satire. I spent most of my time in the library, taking home armloads of books to read of nights. I read everything that I could find in Greek, Latin, Italian, early French, Spanish, German, and French satire.

I read before the Modern Language club a thesis on Bishop Joseph Hall's "Vergilium," which Hall erroneously claimed to be the first English satire. I remember blandly stating that Hall was greater than Pope, because Pope attacked the individuals of his own time, while Hall satirized the vices in general. Prof. Lounsbury, a great scholar, whose knowledge made him the more human and reasonable instead of affected and superior, rebuked me gently, and stated that anybody could berate evils in general, but it took art and courage to deal with one's own contemporaries minutely. And that such contributions to literature were much more valued by posterity than the generalizations of bookish men.

I still wince with shame at the grandiose scholasticism of my thesis, but I never forgot the lesson. I got a clearer vision of what true scholarship is and I came at length to try to be a scholar in my own period.

AFTER various editorial rovings I landed in London with the Encyclopedia Britannica company and soon was assigned to the Historians' History of the World. For four years my job from 9 a. m. to 5 p. m. was to read history, searching particularly the original sources and the latest historical verdicts. I spent months in the British mu-



Richard Pryce

Mr. Pryce is the author of "The Statue in Wood," a novel of high merit which will shortly be reviewed in these columns.

seum, made two trips to Paris for work in the Bibliotheque Nationale and later spent years in the libraries about New York.

I am not so foolish as to pretend that this constitutes me a historian, but it gave me, I think, the privilege of taking Mr. Cabell's measure as a chronicler. It also taught me that from ancient Assyria to modern Guatemala people always have been people; also that Cabells always have existed to speak with disdain of everything modern and native and rhapsodize only over an imaginary golden age.

The past-praiser is found in the most archaic papyrus. Even Horace roasted him in the well known phrase "laudator temporis acti," for the Romans suffered from those who thought that only Greek was artistic. Dante was considered cheap for writing in the dialect of his town instead of in Latin and for putting his neighbors into hell and heaven. Gower and Chaucer apologized for not writing in polite French. And Mr. Cabell thinks I am a mere sensationalist because I try to make faithful portraits of New York City, in as many of its phases—rich, poor, gentle, criminal, tragic, gay, lazy, and swirling—as I can reveal without forgetting that as a novelist it is a duty and an art to build a plot and tell a story.

Mr. Cabell speaks with amusement of my "Music Lover's Cyclopaedia," a work on which I spent three fierce years of toil, and which contains thousands more of names and definitions than any other musical directory in any language. He does not mention the research among manuscripts shown in my pioneer work, "American Composers," nor the vast amount of reading involved in the very serious work "The Love Affairs of Great Musicians." He does not mention my volume of poetry, "Gyges' Ring," a dramatic monolog in blank verse, nor my sonnets and other verse contributed to the Century, Scribner's, etc.

But he mocks "The Lady Who Smoked Cigars," plainly knowing nothing about it. It is a very short story, hardly more than the transcription of what I heard a very wealthy American woman tell at a London dinner table of her early experiences when she and her husband were penniless prospectors. She was a very quaint and beautiful character, and I am proud to have given her beautiful deed what publication it has had.

AMONG my plays he mentions "Tommy Rot," with which I had little to do except to get the deservedly bad notices, and "Excuse Me," for which I do not apologize. He ignores "Alexander the Great," a poor thing, but very ambitious, and "The Bridge," a serious treatment of the gulf between capital and labor.

I quote all this autobiography because Mr. Cabell presents me in his ignorance and indifference as a man of "an ingenuity hitherto devoted to the contrivance of mysterious murders and an indignation until this reserved for the iniquity of millionaires." As usual he has not read the work he so gayly dismisses—not that I blame him,

though it is surprising to find him among the millions.

As a matter of fact, I have contrived only one mysterious murder (Shakespeare used many) and I have never attacked the iniquity of millionaires. I have always defended them from the usual literary cartoonists.

Mr. Cabell next destroys me thus: "It is undeniable that there have always been writers who were unable to venture in imagination beyond the orbit of their daily lives; and so have devoted their talents to the making of ephemeral chronicles of ephemeral conditions, to the delight of a vast number of equally unimaginative people." He goes on to refer to "What Will People Say" and "Empty Pockets" as types of that sort of work, not alluding to the many books, poems, stories, plays, and essays far beyond the orbit of my daily life.

I can't say, of course, till long after both Mr. Cabell and I are dead which one of us has written ephemeral chronicles; doubtless both of us have. But I insist that the spiritual conditions I describe are not ephemeral, and I can honestly say that my novels of modern American life are written with all the scholarship I have, all the indefatigable urge to research, all the longing for truth which impels me, and which Mr. Cabell despises. And I am happy to say that my heartiest support comes from scholars and men of high literary ideals, who realize that my program is earnest and honest, and have compared it with Balzac's.

Mr. Cabell simply will not use the truth. In implying my "vast number of unimaginative readers," he flatters me outrageously. I have not a vast number of any sort of readers, except in so far as the magazines I contribute to have big circulations. I wish I had more readers. I should esteem it an honor. Mr. Cabell seems to assume that the more readers a man has the less worthy he is as an artist.

Let me warn him solemnly that if he does not choke off Mr. Burton Rascoe, Mr. Cabell will find himself eternally disgraced, for THE TRIBUNE has a vast number of readers who will buy almost anything the book page recommends. I love Mr. Rascoe's enthusiasm and I think he is doing American letters a service in crying up Mr. Cabell, who really ought to have several more readers.

ONE final personal word: Mr. Cabell keeps harping on my captaincy and refers to me as one of "these bluff military fellows." He likes this so well that he uses it again, and a third time refers to my "sturdy military humor."

I wish to God I were indeed a bluff military fellow, for then I should be in the regiment I served twelve years with and now in France suffering the gas attacks of the enemies of our country, instead of being kept back here by a slight damned deafness and undergoing the perfume asphyxiation of Mr. Cabell and a bombardment of tuberoses by one who affects a learning he lacks and proclaims himself an imaginative artist because he is superior to the truth about either the past or the present. Since he will have it that I am a bluff military fellow, I may say that his writings in this field give me the Cabelly-ache.

As for the rest of his answer, he alternately ridicules me with lah-dadah flippancies and pretends that I have stated truisms which he was about to pronounce artistically in future essays. This is the usual method of argument, but it does not correct the particular misstatements to which I objected in the essay in question. They are just as glaring now as before he pooh-poo'd me to death.

Just once he answers a specific charge specifically, and that is when he protests against my allusions to lost dramas and to the satyric farces of Athens. He insists that neither I nor any one else "can pretend to

speak with authority save that of casual mentions."

But what I said was none the less true for his denying it. I said that the three names he mentioned as summing up Greek dramatic art—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes—did not adequately represent Athenian dramatic art as it was, because there were other playwrights far more popular than any of them, and because the indecent knockabout farces were so prevalent.

He points out "some trivial difference" between the choruses of "The Clouds" and of "I May Be Gone for a Long, Long While," and thinks me answered. I might pick out some of our best lyric poetry and contrast it with some of Aristophanes' more characteristic lines and business, but THE TRIBUNE would not print them.

Mr. Cabell seems to feel that imagination and truth have some horrible quarrel. But there is a logic of fantasy and a logic of history. I, too, have an imagination, and I can enjoy "A Midsummer Night's Dream" as well as the next one, both elfin poetry and horseplay. I enjoyed "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck" immensely.

But I think that I have said enough and more than enough about both of us. As Theocritus might have ended an idyll: "And now, Captain, do you return to your mysterious murders, and you, Cabellus, to your reveries by the pool of the lotuses."

## An Epilogue

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

WITH pardonable gusto I have read every word of Capt. Rupert Hughes' painstaking and enthusiastic article dealing with himself from the time he left his mother's knee, and I congratulate the captain upon his strategic removal to a topic concerning which he speaks with authority.

For nobody can well deny his dicta to be unanswerable now that Capt. Hughes confines himself so rigidly to the accomplishments and exploits of Capt. Hughes and meddles not at all with the makers of literature as to whom I had erroneously assumed the captain intended to favor THE TRIBUNE readers with some ideas.

Instead, it seems that nothing of the sort has ever entered his head or else the captain has quite unaccountably transferred the exposition of his literary notions to the Cosmopolitan Magazine, wherein we have the captain's standards stated in gratifying directness. In the June number one discovers that Capt. Hughes' ideal of a really "brilliant artist" in literature is Mr. Robert W. Chambers, whose "masterpieces" and "triumphs of art" have aroused the captain to a three page outburst of naïve and touching reverence, but little inferior to that with which he speaks of the fruitage of his own fierce years of toil.

So I elect to return good for evil and, in spite of his harsh words, I shall even now magnanimously indorse, in addition to Capt. Hughes' fairminded tribute to himself, his paper upon "The Art of Robert W. Chambers." With this I obediently return to my reveries and wish him all prosperity in the commission of yet other amiable crimes.