

# AN OUTLINE OF HEROES

By Gerald Hewes Carson

PERHAPS in the current popularity of "outlines" we may discover that ubiquitous but always dimly seen individual, the "general" reader. Studied in the light of the non-fiction section of the best seller lists, he acquires mind and personality.

The general reader is a delightfully undisciplined person. His voracity for assorted information is characteristic only of a democratic society such as ours, where it is possible to begin at the bottom and work up. The general reader is at, or near, the bottom, and eager to work up, through certain healthy stages of self-dissatisfaction and mild intellectual curiosity, to the

delectable heights where knowledge is available in synthetic form, put up in convenient, plainly marked, and nationally advertised packages.

This omnipresent individual, the general reader, has implicit faith in "experts", and in the absolute character of all human knowledge. For him art, literature, science, and anthropology have now been made attractive and palatable through the medium of easy generalization. For him, too, the Gentleman with a Duster has written "Seven Ages", "a modest effort to assist . . . the plain man, whose education has not helped him to trace the genealogy of his own opinions". The Gentleman has built his narrative upon the life and work of seven men who have affected profoundly the Anglo-Saxon heritage. The seven heroes of human thought are Socrates, Aristotle, Jesus Christ, St. Augustine, Erasmus, Oliver Cromwell, and John Wesley. The merits of each are set forth in a facile and insinuating style, and from each is distilled a special, unique quality, which furnishes "average persons" with clichés for the easy recollection of the race's mental pilgrimage these last 2,200 years.

Socrates was "the originating genius of common sense" — "a realist in the region of idealism". Aristotle "laid the foundations of all the positive sciences". Jesus taught the true inwardness of man's relation to God, bestowing upon the human heart "the increasing consciousness of the immortality of spiritual values". St. Augustine envisaged the moral law as ruling a world state — Christendom. Erasmus saved the humanism of classical literature for modern England. Cromwell ladled off the dross of a materialistic age. John Wesley revealed to men "that religion is a power personal to the individual soul".

These are the conclusions of the Duster. We must recognize, of course, the limitations of his summary on this grand scale: conclusions must be stated without their premises, or presentation of evidence to support the premises; huge gaps in history must be bridged in a paragraph; all philosophers, princes, and scientists other than the Seven must be assigned positions distinctly subordinate to what the Duster has selected as the presiding genius of the age; and complex matters must be stated with an unqualified, emphatic, illusive simplicity.

The presentation is vivacious, felicitous, and sound enough for its purpose. One can scarcely challenge the Gentleman's selections for his first five heroes. But as to Cromwell, whom the Duster, like Carlyle, Frederic Harrison, and Theodore Roosevelt, admires exceedingly, and John Wesley, whose influence has become formalized and sectarian, there is room for a sharp division of opinion. Science, in the last three hundred years, has molded society far more subtly than expanding political or religious ideals; has, indeed, been largely responsible for whatever liberalism religion and politics have reluctantly assimilated. My own nominations for alternates in the Duster's symposium would be Newton, Darwin, or Mendel — Newton, who propelled the intellectual forces of the eighteenth century; Darwin, who revolutionized the science and caused a restatement of the evangelical religion of the nineteenth century; and Mendel, who, one may safely predict, will fix the trend of biology (and so, the social mind) throughout the twentieth century.

Seven Ages. A Brief and Simple Narrative of the Pilgrimage of the Human Mind as it has Affected the English-Speaking World. By A Gentleman with a Duster. G. P. Putnam's Sons.