

# **THE MARGIN OF HESITATION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649138678

The margin of hesitation by Frank Moore Colby

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**FRANK MOORE COLBY**

**THE MARGIN  
OF HESITATION**



THE MARGIN OF  
HESITATION

BY  
FRANK MOORE COLBY

*Author of*

"IMAGINARY OBLIGATIONS" and "CONSTRAINED  
ATTITUDES"

UNIV OF  
CALIFORNIA



NEW YORK  
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1921

## CONTENTS

I	TROLLEY CARS AND DEMOCRATIC RAPTURES	2
II	THINKING IT THROUGH IN HASTE.....	11
III	THE LANGUAGE OF FEMINIST DEBATE....	23
IV	PLEASURES OF ANXIETY.....	48
V	HATING BACKWARDS.....	58
VI	AFTER THE WAR IN THOMPSONTOWN....	71
VII	INTERNATIONAL CANCELLATION.....	85
VIII	THE LESSON OF LITERARY WAR LOSSES...	93
IX	ON BEHALF OF HAROLD McCHAMBER....	106
X	SUBSIDIZING AUTHORS.....	113
XI	INCORPORATED TASTE.....	119
XII	BARBARIANS AND THE CRITIC.....	126
XIII	REVIEWER'S CRAMP.....	135
XIV	HOW TO HATE SHAKESPEARE.....	145
XV	CONFESSIONS OF A GALLOMANIAC.....	154
XVI	THE CLASSIC DEBATE.....	173
XVII	THE CHOICE OF BAD MANNERS.....	189
XVIII	TAILOR BLOOD AND THE ARISTOCRACY OF FICTION .....	205
XIX	OUR REFINEMENT.....	213

THE MARGIN OF HESITATION

## THE MARGIN OF HESITATION

### TROLLEY-CARS AND DEMOCRATIC RAPTURES

If the appearance of the people on both sides of the car shakes your confidence in the future of democracy; if, while your eye travels along those two deadly parallels of blank-featured human latitude, you mutter to yourself, "Blood will tell, and after all class systems *are* necessary," and wonder what the world will come to when it is left to the plain people, such exceedingly plain people, for example, as those five awful ones nearest the door; and if you feel all your radicalism oozing out of you, including the initiative and referendum, recall of judges, short ballot, and proportionate taxation of swollen fortunes; and if, as six more of them get in each with a face like a boiled potato, you begin to distrust the whole foundation of popular rights, even trial by jury, even habeas corpus; if, I say, this sort of thing happens to you now and again, as no doubt it does, there is always an easy means of consolation.



## 2 THE MARGIN OF HESITATION

Photographs of European royal families were published almost every week during the war, and can be obtained from the files of the newspaper supplements. Clip them and paste them properly and they will cure this phase of democratic melancholy. I have here a set of Hapsburgs whose faces if placed side by side would be as desolating as anything ever contemplated in the subway. Line a trolley-car with these Hohenzollern heads (without any helmets on them, naturally) and no one would suspect the presence of any person above the rank of gasfitter. He would merely suspect that the car was headed for the borough of the Bronx. Add to the rich supply of wooden visages in the various branches of these two families, all the pudgy, inane, commonplace, unpleasant, or commercial countenances possessed by the members of every other royal or ducal dynasty for the past century or two; place them in two rows with only the heads showing, and you will feel as you would feel on the way to Coney Island on a Sunday afternoon, except perhaps that you will miss the kingly features of the Long Island railroad conductor, or the royal bearing of his youthful heir apparent, the brakeman. My own collection of royal personages—and I have no reason to think the photographs inaccurate—makes every morning subway trip seem like a royal progress.

## TROLLEY CARS AND RAPTURES 3

But though reconciled to the future of democracy, including that of the people in the subway, I cannot be sanguine about it. The pleasures of the advanced thinkers who assure me of it are denied me. I never have any luck in picking out the signs of the times. Even when I do succeed in catching up with an advanced thinker I never share that bright and early feeling. For example, I once got abreast of a man much admired in his day for mental forwardness. I forget his name, but recall that it was short and energetic, and suited to this Age of Steel—something like Chuggs, I think. He had been pent up as a young man in some college professorship, but had broken away and was lecturing on progress along all the principal railways of the country.

Professor Chuggs was one of those who assure us at short intervals that the present moment is the most egregious moment of the most egregious year of the most egregious century that "the world has ever seen," and that the next moment will be more egregious still. He wrote a good many of those articles before the war which declared that China is turning over in her sleep and that Persia is buzzing; that in the waste places of Africa five business men will soon be blooming where one blade of grass had grown before; that through the mighty arteries of commerce the life-

#### 4 THE MARGIN OF HESITATION

blood of civilization is coursing to the extremities of the earth; that already there is open plumbing in Patagonia and that steam drills are busy in Tibet. He used correctly all the terms employed in his business, including "giant strides."

His magazine, "The On-Rush," which was defined in a sub-title as "A Handbook of the Coming Cataclysm," announced as its policy the avoidance of conformity with "every bourgeois conception," which, in its application seemed simple enough; for the writers had merely to find out what a bourgeois conception was, and then take a flying leap away from it, no matter in what direction. It opened with a "Hymn to Moral Rapidity," of which one stanza ran, as I remember, something like this:

One thought in the bush is worth two in the head,  
And a dogma's the clutch of the hand of the dead;  
So pull, pull away from the sands of Cathay,  
And forge to the forefront and strip for the fray.  
Up and off with your mind in the morning.

So it tossed systems of philosophy about like bean-bags, hit off each classic writer in a phrase careless but final, was on familiar joking terms with all the sciences, explained woman, silenced history summed up everything and everybody—the human race, the fathers of the church, genius, love, marriage, and the future state. In short,