

Mr. Scheffauer's book, in places, makes rather curious reading. He is an American by birth and education and he has remained in constant contact with Americans; nevertheless, his long residence abroad gets a touch of foreignness into his discussion of his own country. He sees it most clearly as it was before the war; the vast changes that have come during the last decade sometimes to leave him rather bewildered. But of all the books in the present list, his is the one most likely to be of value to a foreign reader, for its fundamental judgments are based, not upon superficial observation but upon solid experience, and so they are seldom inaccurate. He should come home and then write another book. The America of today would surprise him, and perhaps appall him.

### *The Husk of Dreiser*

ARLIE GELSTON, by Roger L. Sergel. New York: B. W. Huebsch.

THIS novel, the first by the author, a young journalist of the Middle West, seems to have made a very powerful impression upon the Young Intellectuals. Within a week after its appearance I began to receive letters from them, urging me to read it and enclosing encomiastic reviews of it. Unluckily, I was engrossed at the time in legal business of a nightmarish variety, and so I had no appetite for prose fiction. But of late, delivered by Providence, I have gone back to the vice of reading it, and, among other highly commended volumes, I have got through "Arlie Gelston." I can only report that it seems to me to be a respectable, but entirely undistinguished work. The story it tells is dull and often actively unpleasant, the people it depicts are mainly stiff and unplausible, and the English of the author seldom gets beyond the obvious. A palpable follower of Dreiser, he misses completely the quality which gives Dreiser most of his solid dignity and significance as a novelist.

That quality, of course, is the capacity to enlist the emotions of the reader—to

make him feel for and with the people of the fable. The notion that Dreiser is a mere representational realist, which is to say, a mere photographer, is utterly absurd. It is held, to be sure, by his chief academic opponents, and it seems to be held, too, by some of his imitators, but it is absurd nevertheless. The virtue of such a book as "Jennie Gerhardt" does not lie in the fact that it is accurate and life-like as representation; it lies in the fact that, in some way that is hard to analyze, Dreiser manages to make us see the world through Jennie's eyes, and so gives us an understanding of her pitiful tragedy. Superficially, she is simply a girl of loose morals, living in contempt of the Mann Act. But actually, in Dreiser's highly skillful hands, she becomes a representative of the agony of all womankind. The last scene of the book, with Jennie looking through the train-gate as Lester's carcass is loaded into the baggage-coach, is surely not mere photography; it is poignant and unforgettable tragedy. To argue that it cannot be tragedy because Jennie is a poor simpleton—in other words, that simple folk cannot know disaster and despair—is to argue plain nonsense.

This evoking of emotion is the essential business of the novelist, as it is of any other artist. A novel that neglected it, however brilliantly done otherwise, would be a bad one, and doomed to a swift forgetting. There is, of course, such a thing as lifting mere representation to such heights of skill that the lack of emotional substance is momentarily overlooked, but on second thought the reader always notes that something necessary is lacking. Thackeray discovered this fact when he published "Barry Lyndon," unquestionably the best of all his novels as representation, but now so far in the shadows that I seem to be the only man left alive in the world who still reads it. Sinclair Lewis came near going over the same precipice in "Main Street." "Babbitt" shows how he discerned his danger, and took measures to remove it. "Babbitt" is certainly not all mocking;

there is also pity in it, and one touch of that pity is worth all its humor. For when art ceases to reach the feelings it ceases to be art and becomes science—and a book of science cannot be a novel. If only H. G. Wells could take in this simple fact, his sales would be vastly greater than they are today, and a public alienated by a long succession of thinly disguised tracts would be wallowing again in such charming things as "Tono-Bungay" and "Mr. Polly."

Mr. Sergel, it seems to me, fails on all counts. His people are not competently represented, and he is quite unable to project their feelings into the reader. His Arlie Gelston is stupid and dull without being pathetic; her story has the impersonal emptiness of a series of fractions. One gets the feeling constantly that it is all one with her whether she does or she doesn't—that she moves through life in a sort of idiotic haze. Such persons exist, and they are of great interest to the psychiatrist. But they are as hopeless in novels, *i. e.*, in art, as persons without faces.

### *Brief Notices*

ANTHROPOLOGY, by A. L. Kroeber. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

An excellent introduction to the subject, designed for the general reader and chiefly based upon American material.

LETTERS FROM W. H. HUDSON, 1901-1922, edited by Edward Garnett. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company.

Obviously, a "made" book. Three-fourths of the letters are trivial, and only once or twice does Hudson say anything worth hearing.

TENNYSON, by Harold Nicolson. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

An extremely amusing and instructive account of the Poet Laureate—in his later

days as much one of the noble ruins of England as Stonehenge. The first purely literary biography in the Strachey manner.

TRAVELS IN ARABIA DESERTA, by Charles M. Doughty. Two volumes. New York: Boni and Liveright.

A stately and dignified edition of this most curious and baffling work, for years almost unobtainable. There is no need, at this late date, to review it. Its partisans regard it with almost fanatical reverence; its critics find it tortured and dull. I can only report that I dislike its innumerable affectations intensely, and yet find myself reading it.

SAM SLICK, by Thomas Chandler Haliburton; edited with a critical estimate by Ray Palmer Baker, Ph. D. New York: George H. Doran Company.

"Sam Slick" is an important work to the student of early American literature. It introduced the Yankee to fiction, it was one of the first American books to become popular in England, and it founded that American school of humor which culminated in Artemus Ward and the early Mark Twain. But reading it today is not unlike reading the debates in Congress during the Pierce administration.

MONETARY REFORM, by John Maynard Keynes. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

A vigorous argument against the gold standard by the author of "The Economic Consequences of the Peace." It would be more convincing if it were less cock-sure.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NAPOLEONIC LEGEND, by Albert Leon Guérard. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

A charmingly penetrating and ironical reconsideration of the known facts about the Corsican. An iconoclastic but extremely valuable contribution to history. Who will do Lincoln in the same way?

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