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BY H. L. MENCKEN

Two Gay Rebels

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF SAMUEL BUTLER.

Shrewsbury Edition. Edited by Henry Festing Jones and A. T. Bartholomew. \$160. 20 vols. 8¾ x 6; 259+242+259+263+393+218+316+256+229+468+487+293+411+300+379+266+413+267+335+413 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

THE STORISENDE EDITION OF THE WORKS OF

JAMES BRANCH CABELL. \$190. 19 vols. 9 x 6; 270+293+316+291+295+371 pp. New York: Robert M. McBride & Company.

AFTER all, the Devil takes care of His own. Here are two men whose writings, for long years, were treated with lofty disdain, and came into notice at last only to the tune of pious objurgations, and yet here they appear in stately collected editions, with all the panoply of numbered sets, special type, and the most forbidding kind of bibliographical apparatus. Butler has been in Hell for twenty-six years, and so his laughter, if there is laughter there, cannot be heard, but I daresay that any visitor who chose to brave the perils of Monument avenue, in Richmond, would hear some powerful chuckles issuing from No. 3201. Cabell, in fact, has plenty to laugh at. He began publishing books so long ago as 1904, but it was not until 1919, when "Beyond Life" was issued, that he got anything properly describable as general notice. Before that he had been dismissed loftily as a contriver of pretty literary confectionery, mainly useful as a means of displaying the graphic talents of Howard Pyle, and almost immediately afterward—in fact, before the end of the year—he was placarded by the Comstocks as a corruptor of youth, and his "Jurgen" went under the counter and was contraband for two or three years. In one of his prefaces to the present edition he protests bitterly against being spoken of always as the author of "Jurgen"; he points out that he has writ-

ten many other books, and hints that some of them are better. They are. But let him not be ungrateful to the saga of the amorous pawnbroker, or to the smut-snufflers who tried to suppress it. Between them, I suspect, they made him. If there had been no raid upon "Jurgen" the lordly volumes which now confront a candid world would have had to wait, and maybe as long as Butler's. As it is, Cabell at forty-seven has come to a formal eminence which most other authors, when, if and as, they reach it at all, do not reach until the inexorable sphygmomanometer has sounded their doom. Immortal, he can still eat, drink and prance with arms and legs. Surely that is something.

The Storisende Edition will run to nineteen volumes, but only six have been issued so far: the rest will follow during the year. The six contain "Jurgen," "Figures of Earth," "Chivalry," "Domnei," "The Silver Stallion" and "Beyond Life," and all of them show revisions. The most radical of these revisions are in "Chivalry," which was first published nineteen years ago. The stories in it, like those in "Gallantry," "The Line of Love" and "The Certain Hour," were written for *Harper's Magazine*, then under the editorship of the sainted Henry Mills Alden, and Cabell tells in his preface, with acid humor, how they were bowdlerized by that talented editor. He bought them, it appears, mainly because they lent themselves admirably to the refined art of Mr. Pyle, and when, in 1907, Pyle decided suddenly that they had "no solid or permanent literary value," Cabell, as the phrase has it, was canned. He was succeeded as writer of texts for the gifted artist and critic by Marjorie Bowen, Basil King and other such geniuses of that forgotten day. Here, at least, he shows a

proper gratitude, sadly lacking in his remarks about the Comstocks. "Pyle . . . decisively preserved me," he says, "from becoming an esteemed contributor to the best-thought-of American magazines of the Rooseveltian era."

There are many other curious tit-bits for the literary historian in the Storisende prefaces. "The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck," it appears, was entered in a prize contest, and lost ingloriously: the winner was "Diane of the Green Van"! Like "The Soul of Melicent" (now "Domnei"), which was finished at the same time, it went reeling around the publishers' offices for a long while. The house which had done Cabell's previous books had notified him that they had "not found a sale . . . which would encourage us ever to accept any new venture," and so he was on the town. Twelve publishers in succession rejected "The Soul of Melicent," and when it got between covers at last it scored a sale of exactly 493 copies the first year. It was not until "Beyond Life," indeed, that any book of Cabell's sold so many as 3,000 copies in a year. That was in 1919, after he had been publishing books for fifteen years. But as I have observed, the Devil takes care of His customers, provided only they have patience and pertinacity. Cabell had both in abundance. And he has been rewarded.

Butler's story was not dissimilar. Though the publication of "Erewhon," in 1872, got him a certain amount of notice, it was in narrow circles, and he never came into anything approaching genuine celebrity until "The Way of All Flesh" appeared, a year after his death. He was known during his lifetime mainly as an unsuccessful painter, though there were persons who also identified him as a man who had had a row with Charles Darwin, or as the author of the theory that the *Cdyssey* was written by a woman. For thirty-eight years he lived in two small rooms in Clifford's Inn, attended by a combination valet and secretary and seeing very few friends. He had come home from New Zealand as a

young man of twenty-nine with £8,000, made in sheep-farming out there, and he lived on the income from it for twelve years. Then he lost most of it, and there ensued some years of great leanness. In 1886, when he was fifty-one, his father died, and thereafter, until his own death at sixty-seven, he was in easy circumstances. Everyone knows that Chapman & Hall rejected "Erewhon"—and on the advice of George Meredith! Butler printed it at his own expense, as he did, in fact, most of his subsequent books. His total earnings from literature were probably less than \$5,000. From painting he got even less. From music, which he tried to write in the manner of Händel, he got nothing. Two women are known to have been mashed on him, but he never married.

His intimate for many years was Henry Festing Jones, the senior editor of the present edition of his works. Jones preserved and edited the memoranda which now enter into his "Note Book," perhaps the most amusing of all his writings. Much of the matter in it was written fifty years ago, but it is still fresh and lively. So, indeed, are the things which antedate it—for example, his account of his sheep-farming in New Zealand. It would be cruel to most writers to exhume such youthful compositions, but Butler stands the test. Even his scientific monographs continue to be readable, though the controversies which inspired them are long forgotten. Mr. Jones resents with great heat the charge that Butler was a complacent member of the Church of England, and a frequenter of the communion table. The grandson of a bishop and the son of a clergyman, and himself intended for holy orders, he early revolted against infant baptism and thereafter moved slowly to complete agnosticism. His chief contribution to theology, indeed, was a pamphlet arguing that Christ did not actually die on the cross, and that the Ascension was thus the product of a false inference by the Disciples. Once he went to communion, but it was only to prove his disdain of mere

ideas, even his own. A strange man, curiously at war with his race and time. Better educated, he might have made a first-rate biologist. More of an artist, he might have come to fame as a painter or a composer. He is remembered for the writings which he took only half seriously.

The twenty volumes of his *Collected Works*, designed by G. Wren Howard of the English house of Jonathan Cape, are very sightly. The type used is a variety of the Garamond in which *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* is printed, and the paper is excellently chosen. The binding is of dark blue buckram, with white parchment backs and gilt stamping. About the white parchment I have some doubts. It tends to crack, and it shows finger marks. But the stamped lettering on it is very charming. The Cabell, designed by William Dana Orcutt, seems to me to be considerably less attractive. The type used is clear but undistinguished, the margins are overwide, the italic used for the prefaces is not as legible as it ought to be, and the binding, in dark green cloth with gilt and blind stamping, is rather formidable. Cabell has never been fortunate in his bookmakers, save in the case of the English edition of "Jurgen." His books lack the rakish gayety that marks their contents; they seem overly sedate and respectable. Of the Storisende Edition 1590 sets have been printed, of which 1550 are for sale in the United States and England. Of the Shrewsbury Edition of Butler 750 sets have been printed, of which 375 are for England and the rest for the United States. Both editions will probably go to premiums.

Babbitt Redivivus

THE MAN WHO KNEW COOLIDGE, by Sinclair Lewis. \$2. 7½ x 5; 275 pp. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

THE main substance of this sardonic skit was printed in *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* for last January; here the monologue of Lowell Schmaltz in the Pullman smoking-room is reinforced by various other outpourings, including a ringing address on "The Basic

and Fundamental Ideals of Christian American Citizenship" before the Men's Club of Pilgrim Congregational Church, Zenith City. Schmaltz is of the school of George F. Babbitt, and, in fact, one of his intimates, but the two are yet sharply differentiated. That gingery adventure in Liberalism which came so near being the ruin of Babbitt would be quite impossible to Schmaltz; he is the completely impeccable American business man, almost the *beau idéal* of the Ford Age. One could no more imagine him harboring a wild, wayward thought than one could imagine Bishop Manning harboring it, or an editorial writer on the New York *Herald Tribune*. True enough, he has eyes, and can distinguish between a knee and a handsaw, but when those eyes alight upon the buxom Miss Erica, designer for the Pillsbury & Lipschutz Christmas & Easter Greeting-Card Company, they do not proceed beyond a few cautious glances. "To tell the truth (and I'd never tell another living soul but you), one evening I did go up to her flat—But only that once! And I got scared, and just used to see her at restaurants. . . . Our relations were entirely and absolutely friendly and intellectual." Ah, that Sebastian S. Kresge, the angel of the Anti-Saloon League, could say as much! Ah, that—But perhaps I had better haul up.

Now that Lewis has filled a gallery with his Babbitts and his Vergil Gunches, his Depew LeVies and his Professor Baroots, his Rev. Otto Hickenloopers and his Dr. Elmer Ganttrys it is easy for idiot reviewers to argue that they are all caricatures, and to hint that creating them was a facile and puerile business, possible to anyone low enough to undertake it. In the whole history of the science of criticism there is no record of a more absurd error. The fact is that the business demanded a capacity for observation that must always be immensely rare in this world, and a creative imagination of the very first order. The material was everywhere, and yet, until Lewis fell upon it with his gargantuan