



They swayed about upon a rocking-horse, and thought it Pegasus.—Keats

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In this department there will appear each month a signed review by at least one member of THE FORUM BOOK REVIEW BOARD, reviews by special assignment, and an occasional unsolicited review. The last are paid for upon publication at the rate of fifteen cents a line. They are limited to 300 words.

"Will Be Altered To Suit Tenants"

NO, that is hardly true. The average tenant of our great Republic would be much happier if those annoying historians would leave his pretty little bungalow alone, and would allow him to continue dreaming that the democratic suburb in which his home is located is really the finest, the most original, the most sublime and unmatched expression of human courage and ingenuity the world has ever seen. Wherefore, we had better change our sign to something like this: "Will Be Altered To Suit the Reasonable Demands of the Intelligent Patriots of the Year of Grace, 1927." For that would represent with a much greater degree of veracity what our historians have been doing of late. They have been "altering" the stately but uncomfortable national mansion of the late Garfield and Hayes periods until now it is beginning to resemble a true and reasonable home for the people of our own day and age.

It is true that in doing this, they have been obliged to send a few of the lovely old cast iron dogs to Ye Olde Antique

Shoppe, that they have been forced to hack away the ornamental wooden Gothic porch (so nicely exposed to the warming rays of the northern sun) to make room for a couple of extra showers; that some of the lovely colored-glass windows have been replaced with plain, ordinary, everyday panes of glass. But for the rest, they have stuck as closely as possible to the plans of the original builders. The edifice is just as American as it was when Tom Jefferson indulged in his favorite architectural studies. But it is American in the spirit of 1927, rather than of 1827. And for better or worse, those of us who do not belong to the Daughters of the American Revolution and kindred associations, have to live "here and now". That is a nuisance. But it is one of God's little jokes. And we may as well make the best of it.

This change in the method of our history writing has come so gradually and so quietly that the honorable opposition has never had time to recover from its first shock and offer any definite kind of resistance. Here and there in forgotten corners of the land, — such as New York City, where the leading political minds still dwell peacefully in the atmosphere of an Irish village of the early sixteenth century,

— there have been outcries of “treason”. But no one in particular seems to be paying any attention to these belated efforts at “patriotic rehabilitation” and their “true vindications of American righteousness”. Thus Pastor Weems has been relegated to the museum of historical curiosities. As for the greater part of his contemporaries, they have become classics, — and classics, as every one knows, are books about which all people talk knowingly but which no one takes the trouble to read.

All of which leads us up to the text for to-day, — the two monumental volumes of *MAIN CURRENTS IN AMERICAN THOUGHT* by Vernon Louis Parrington (Harcourt, Brace, \$8.00). Professor Parrington of the University of Washington has reversed the old theological dogma about the blessed virtues of the East: he might publish his works under the device, *Ex Occidente Lux*.

I am familiar with the duties of the true historical critic. He should faithfully go through the seven or eight hundred pages of the work under discussion. He should pay a little closer attention to those chapters with which he himself happens to be familiar. He should endeavor to discover a few misprints in private names and show his own erudition by correcting them. He should, if possible, establish beyond a shadow of a doubt that the cousin of Cotton Mather had eight boys and seven girls, and not seven boys and eight girls as the author has so mistakenly stated on page 739. He should discover that the Bibliography has omitted to mention the serious contributions to the subject under discussion by Professor Dr. Paul Lehrsamkeit of the University of Greifswald, published in the *Preussische Jahrbücher* for 1843; and furthermore, he might express surprize that his own name was not mentioned in the index. To approach a book like that of Parrington in the approved fashion of historico-bibliographical criticism would be as fair as to reproach the magnificent modern image of New York City for an occasional outburst of Paramount Pudding or Gaseous Charlotte Russe.

This, then, is a good book. It is an exceedingly good book. It reads well. This man Parrington, of whom I know nothing and about whom I can write in the most

detached of detached spirits, seems to know whereof he writes. And best of all, this learned *opus* breathes an air of perfect manners. The author seems to have accepted God’s inscrutable decision that it shall take all sorts and manners of men and women to make a well regulated world.

He has a very decided point of view of his own, and it is visible to all those who have eyes with which to see. It is a modest, well behaved, liberal point of view. The author is handy with the microscope and the scalpel, but once he has entered the historical laboratory, he leaves his own little ax behind. He may have such an ax, but it is handed to the door man for safe-keeping. If he happens to disagree with some of our defunct national heroes, he allows those heroes to explain their follies for themselves and permits his readers to draw their own conclusions without any gratuitous sneering on the author’s part. He may know that the furry animal under discussion is really a wood-pussy, but he leaves it to the olfactory organs of his audience to discover that pleasant fact.

Professor Parrington seems to have realized that no one is ever convinced of the error of his ways or views by being told they are wrong. The patient (upon very rare occasions) may allow himself to be convinced of his wicked ways by being exposed to the right ways of living and thinking. But the cure by way of the sledge-hammer and the sermon has been proved a total failure, and most intelligent historians (which nowadays seems, to mean most historians) have realized this state of affairs and act accordingly when bestowing the fruit of their researches upon an unwilling public.

Let me confess to a profound but firmly established conviction that we shall not be able to accomplish much with the present generation. Reared in the self-laudatory atmosphere of a triumphant business world, the present day citizens of our glorious Republic will reject all efforts which tend to prove that something more subtle and impersonal than their own great deeds has made our land what it is. They will remember the historical fabric with which they were familiar in the days of their youth. And they will die stoutly maintaining that the modern historians

are parlor Bolsheviks and have sold their souls to the devil and the modern school of Germanic criticism. Their children, however, will know better, and it is for these that men like Parrington labor.

Endlessly the current of soggy literature runs from the press-mills to the nearest sea of oblivion. The few things that are worth while in that dreary stream are too often allowed to be drowned before some one on shore has recognized their value, has fished them out of the dreary soup, and has shown them to the bored multitude for their ultimate delectation and profit. If, for once, I happen to be that person on shore and can shout: "READ THIS!" I shall feel much less ashamed of some of the terrible critical concoctions of my past life than I do now.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

A Neurotic at His Best

THE stunning genius of J. K. Huysmans plays like a chameleon out for a holiday in *DOWNSTREAM* (Covici, \$2.50). The book is a group of deft and startling cameos, presenting Huysmans in several important attitudes. Here is the artist in first flight, borrowing the recipe for prose poems from Baudelaire and then proceeding to concoct an even more delectable nectar; the self-conscious writer who throws his power into the prevailing movement and becomes the militant realist; and again the man with a delicate stomach. There is in this volume, so admirably translated by Mr. Samuel Putnam, a brief novel of realism, a series of Baudelairean sketches, the title piece, several engaging critical papers, and a preface to *A Rebours* written twenty years after the appearance of the novel.

I shall be content to confine myself to the fiction; the critical papers would require an entire article for themselves. In "Marthe", — the brief novel of a girl of the streets, — Huysmans is present with his inimitable command of lightning bolts. The story is stark, unpleasant, unrelenting. Because the author is Huysmans, one looks for daring, and finds it; the phrases crackle like strings of Chinese ladycrackers, with here and there the unexpected boom of a substantial explosive. Huysmans, the art critic primarily, wastes no words in padding; he has a pic-

ture to paint, and he does this unforgettably. Marthe, — the principal figure of the story, — is pitiful, glamorous, cheap, and typical. The story concerns her one great love rising and falling among a carnival of little ones.

Huysmans in realistic garb is apt to overdo his part. It is as though he said at the outset: "This is to be a realistic story. Mark these words! I will show my brothers how to do this type of thing with gusto." In the effort to attain a generally lascivious and repulsive atmosphere, Huysmans frequently resorts to the artificial. He selects words purposely, it often seems, for their shocking qualities, when milder words or no words at all would suffice. This occurs rarely, however, and the reader follows the story of Marthe hardly realizing the candid method. In the end, there is borne away a sense of fragile beauty, rather than the sheer ugliness which predominates. That is, perhaps, the essence of Huysmans's genius.

OLIVER JENKINS

India, Mother of What?

JUDGING by the mushroom growth of Hindu cults in this country, many Americans seem to believe that India can still furnish spiritual guidance to the world. But Miss Katherine Mayo in her recent book, *MOTHER INDIA* (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.75), shows that India is a sick, decrepit old woman spawning every known disease, ancient and modern, into the world. Miss Mayo has given us our first really comprehensive and impartial social study of India's seething millions.

The author goes straight to her main objective. The British have been frequently taken to task for failing to improve social conditions in India. But Miss Mayo boldly charges that the Indian people are themselves responsible for their physical miseries, for their ninety-two per cent of illiteracy, and for their almost incredible poverty in a land teeming with natural wealth. No government, she insists, could make satisfactory headway against such obstacles as these tradition-bound natives create for themselves. Climate, indifference to public health regulations, ignorance of hygiene in private life, — these are serious causes of India's backwardness; yet none can compare with the devastat-