

A Page for Poets

Conducted by Henry Goddard Leach

Former President, Poetry Society of America



It would be fairer to devote 4 pages instead of one to 36 new books of verse presented here for review this month. In the interest of brevity, however, we compress them into 4 groups judged by their quality: *B*—poetry of distinction, *C*—verse of merit, *D*—verse of originality, *E*—verse of local or personal rather than national appeal.

B—POETRY OF DISTINCTION

COLLECTED POEMS, by E. E. Cummings (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.00). The works of our most bizarre and original contemporary American poet make a rare collector's item for the many, a book of horse laughter for some, a treasure of fierce beauty for the few.

U. S. 1, by Muriel Rukeyser (Covici-Friede, \$2.00). Steel and silicosis, a radical symphony of symbolism and action.

SHADOW OF THE PERFECT ROSE, by Thomas S. Jones, Jr. (Farrar & Rinehart, \$2.50). The most tranquil, the most magical of all American mystics.

THE NEW WORLD, by Edgar Lee Masters (Appleton-Century, \$2.50). From the speculations of Strabo the geographer to the "crumpled roofs of Acoma" here is unfolded a complete and stirring epic of America.

VOICES FROM THE FIELDS, edited by Russell Lord (Houghton Mifflin, \$2.00). These are the natural poems of a splendid folk, the American farmers, sturdy, tender, and true.

POEMS, by Louis MacNeice (Random House, \$2.50). This young friend of Auden and Spender is more lyrical and traditional in his rhythms than they. He is a calm reincarnated Greek keenly observing the complicated world of today.

POEMS, by Rex Warner (Knopf, \$2.00). Another British friend of Lewis, Auden, and Spender; infinitely observant but loving allegory more than photography.

C—VERSE OF MERIT

NATURAL HISTORY, by Raymond Holden (Holt, \$2.00). These poems are finely polished mirrors of sensitive observation.

ETCHED IN WORDS, by Gertrude Ryder Bennett (Putnam, \$2.00). Here is a buoyantly popular poet who does not forget her responsibility as an artist.

AFTER EDEN, by Emma Gray Trigg

(Putnam, \$2.00). This Virginian poet knows the joy of living in restraint but in fullness.

TWELVE POETS OF THE PACIFIC, edited by Yvor Winters (New Directions, \$2.50). Poems of sunlight and unclouded vision.

ONE HUNDRED POEMS FROM THE PALATINE ANTHOLOGY, by Dudley Fitts (New Directions, \$2.50). A de luxe book of the best of the Greek epigrams deftly turned into sparkling English idiom.

A BOY OF CLARE, by E. H. W. Meyerstein (Oxford, \$1.50). Brave pastoral rhymes from East Anglia.

D—VERSE OF ORIGINALITY

THE UNTILLABLE HILLS, by W. W. Christman (Driftwind, \$1.75). A New York State dirt-farmer poet in the tradition of Walt Whitman.

STREAMS FROM THE SOURCE, by Helene Mullins (Caxton, \$2.00). Helene Mullins is a poet by inheritance rather than by artistry.

THE PLAINSMEN OF THE PLAINS, by Malinda Bell McCrossan (privately printed). A philosophical epic of the Dust Bowl.

GRASS OF PARNASSUS, by Arthur Henry Goodenough (Driftwind, \$1.75). A representative selection from this popular ballad writer of Vermont.

PICK UP THE PIECES, by Arthur Morris Dinsmore (Stratford, \$1.00). Plain and rollicking humor.

FLAMES FROM A CANDLE, by Helen Regan Skillern (Caxton, \$1.50). The gentle lyrics of a mother in Idaho.

ARMATHEON AND DAPHNE, by Mary Ellis Robins (Dorrance, \$1.50). A philosophical poem based on an ancient Greek setting.

E—VERSE OF LOCAL OR PERSONAL APPEAL

DREAM'S SHADOW, by Barbara Hallett (Driftwind, \$1.50). The posthumous verse of a New England poet of sensitive passion and graciousness.

POEMS, by Margaret S. Hosmer (Herald-Silhouettes, \$1.00). Rich in wistful cadence.

POEMS OF FAITH, by Edith E. McGee (Stratford, \$1.00). Sincere religious verse.

PRAIRIE PHANTASY, by Frances Vejtasa (Dorrance, \$1.25). Epigrammatic.

AT ANCHORAGE, by Mary Wimborough

Ploughe (Poetry Publishers, \$2.00). Honest verse for fireside recitation.

FROM A CURVING BOWL, edited by C. B. McAllister (LANTERN, \$1.00). Earnest craftsmen at work on a variety of themes.

UP TRAIL, by A. A. Wickenden (Poetry Publishers, \$2.00). Lusty Canadian pioneer verse.

SCENES AND SOUNDS, by Robert F. Keagle (Christopher, \$1.25). A happy fisherman in the Poconos.

THE WITCH OF ENDOR, by Alice du Pont Ortiz (Christopher, \$1.50). Eerie balladry of witchcraft.

OUT OF THE HEART OF KENTUCKY, by Daniel Maurice Robins (Christopher, \$5.00). An open record of Lincoln in plain rhymes.

ORDERED CHAOS, by Clare Louise Burt (Christopher, \$1.50). Metaphysical.

LET ME LINGER, by Mabel Ingalls Wescott (Meador, \$1.50). The good life of Vermont and New Hampshire done into rhyme.

SIXTY SELECTED POEMS AND SONGS FOR OUR LITTLE ONES, by Clifford Gough (Meador, \$1.00). Melodies from the Dakotas and Montana.

A BARD FOR A MOMENT, by Guy J. Bond (Meador, \$1.00). Amiable verse of the Kentucky hills.

THE OVERLAND MARKER, by Frank E. Breithaupt (Meador, \$1.50). Household verse of prairie pioneers.

HE PLAYED THE GAME FAIR, by DeWitt Miles Benham (Meador, \$1.00). The thesaurus of a Baltimore pastor.

Anthems

*Why do the candles glow more pure and white
Upon her hands and upturned face to-night?*

*She sings the anthems in the choir loft
Her voice more tender and her eyes grown soft.*

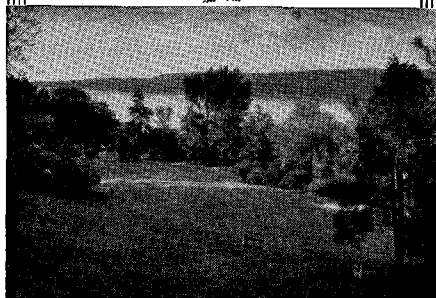
*O, God, forgive her, singing in the holy place,
That bright, new adoration on her face;*

For strange it is how, dreaming, woman-wise,

She keeps remembering her lover's eyes.

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TOASTS

The ANONYMOUS author of "A Businessman Looks at the Army" is 42, married, and the father of three children. Prior to his term of active army duty he had been a real-estate broker, salesman of farm implements, and printer. At present most of his energies go into free-lance writing.

FRED C. KELLY has been in Europe much of the time in recent years, observing and writing about political affairs. His last article for THE FORUM, "Can Trust Companies Be Trusted?" (in 1932), raised ructions.

HAROLD LORD VARNEY has emerged in recent months as one of our leading journalist spokesmen for the conservative viewpoint.

ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES, author of *This Land of Liberty*, was formerly Editor of the *Dictionary of American Biography*. He lives and writes in New York.

THOMAS J. COURTNEY is State's Attorney of Cook County, Illinois, whose vigorous drives against racketeering in Chicago have brought him into the national limelight. He began as a civil-service employee in Chicago, served as clerk and chief clerk of the city council, and was elected in 1926 to the State senate, where he became Democratic leader.

SIR JOSIAH STAMP, widely recognized as one of the world's leading economists, recently returned to his English home after a visit to America.

ALVIN F. HARLOW has written theatrical biographies, essays, and both fiction and nonfiction for magazines but is possibly better known as a historian of transportation and communication. He has contributed to a number of magazines.

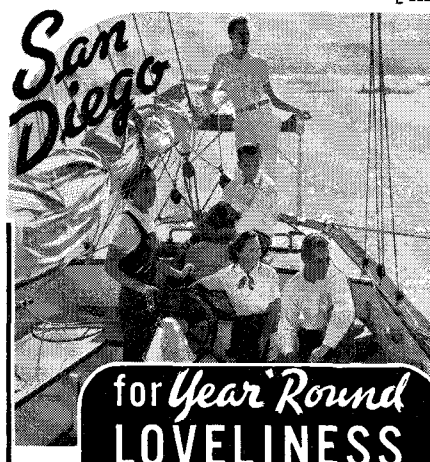
FRANCES FROST'S most recent books were *Innocent Summer*, a novel, and *Road to America*, a volume of poetry. She has been working on another novel, to be called *Village of Glass*.

MORRIS LLEWELLYN COOKE has been active in many water and power conservation movements. He attributes a great part of his deep concern with conservation problems to the distinguished engineer Arthur J. Mason.

FORD MADDOX FORD, the brilliant British novelist, essayist, and biographer, was last found in these pages in the summer of 1937, when he wrote two articles for THE FORUM on "The Sad State of Publishing."

WILSON CHAMBERLAIN is an American journalist who has spent much time abroad, particularly in Paris, and whose career has embraced both newspaper and free-lance writing.

SVEN NILSON is a native of Sweden who was educated in this country and subsequently taught at the Universities of Minnesota and Oregon. At present he lives in Hartford, Connecticut, and is devoting himself to writing.



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THE RECORD REVIEW

PURCELL. English Music Society, vol. I. Isolde Menges & William Primrose, violins; Ambrose Gauntlett, viola da gamba; Bernard Richards, cello; John Ticehurst, harpsichord; Keith Faulkner, baritone; the International String Quartet (Columbia set 315; 3 10" & 5 12" records, \$14.50).

MOZART: SYMPHONY No. 40 IN G MINOR. Sir Thomas Beecham & the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Columbia set 316; 3 records, \$5.00).

BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY No. 1 IN C MAJOR. The Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conducting (Victor M, AM 409; 4 records, \$8.00).

MOZART: CONCERTO IN D MINOR FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA. Bruno Walter & the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Victor M, AM 420; 4 records, \$6.50).

BRAHMS: TRIO IN A MINOR, OP. 114. Ralph McLane, clarinet; Sterling Hunkins, cello; Milton Kay, piano (Musicraft album 15; 3 records, \$5.00).

SANDBURG: FROM "THE AMERICAN SONGBOOK." Carl Sandburg, accompanying himself on the guitar (Musicraft album 11; 4 10" records, \$4.50).

ACCORDING to Mr. Alec Robertson, the author of a learned brochure accompanying the Purcell records, England's greatest composer lacks the homage which is his rightful due. The greater portion of his music has been neglected, and has withered among the dust of the archives in English libraries. Columbia, however, has been revivifying his compositions and placing them before the public. This album contains nine four-part fantasias, one five-part fantasia on one note, the

"golden" sonata, three songs, and two catches.

The effort expended in recording this music should be well compensated for by the gratitude of those who like Purcell's works and of those who have not had the opportunity of making their acquaintance. Many passages indicate his advancement over his times, as his music foreshadows much of Bach's style and Handel's idiom. The fantasias, free developments in fugal form, spin polyphonic and homophonic webs around simple themes. Neither daring nor new departures in form, the sonata and the songs are nevertheless impressive. The catches are lusty tavern tunes, sung by the common people. Here, then, is an indication of Purcell's varied talents. Although the recording is quite excellent, the performances good, and much of the music enjoyable, I cannot share Mr. Robertson's sycophantic devotion for Purcell.

WALTER and Toscanini have reputations for their Mozart. So has Sir Thomas Beecham. Yet even his reputation scarcely can account for his new recorded version of the G-minor symphony. Whether it may be because of the brilliance of his orchestra, his conducting, or Columbia's recording work or of all three factors combined, this set makes all previous versions obsolete. Mozart's music is completely Anglicized. It is clear, deliberate, and vigorous — and tinged, still, with the touching qualities inherent in its materials and its working out. Smoothly are the parts blended; Sir Thomas is a stickler for detail. His beautiful phrasing makes the music breathe. Presumably beneath their outward aloofness, the English experience the true emotions — or so it would seem after hearing this performance of the G-minor symphony.

WHEN Ormandy took over the Philadelphia Orchestra, he started with a handicap; he had been preceded by Stockowski. But this new version of Beethoven's first symphony is the latest indication on records that Ormandy belongs to the first-line conductors. If his conception of this symphony is too theatrical, too egotistical, and lacking in the humility forced on us by Beethoven, the performance so sparkles that doubtless Beethoven could overlook Ormandy's irreverent tempos and showmanship. Also Beethoven would be forced to admit that few orchestras could give his music such life, such singing tone, and such sensuous appeal. As for Victor's contribution to the piece, it is noble, except for the recording of the very quiet marking out of the rhythmic figure by the timpani in the slow movement.

A FEW years ago Victor released a recording of the Mozart concerto, with Edwin Fisher as soloist, accompanied by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Since this set still sounds fresh and brilliant, one may ask why Victor decided to compete with its own product. The new Walter performance is more romantic than the Fisher. His Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he is also the conductor in this recording, is a better, more resonant band. Its quality of tone emphasizes the lower frequencies, to believe the records, with the result that it suggests often a tepid liquidness. In addition, Walter's treatment of the music is rather broad for its character. Sometimes a lack of precision is noticeable between the piano and the orchestra, which circumstance is a natural result when the soloist is also the conductor. Despite its shortcomings, this interpretation is appealing. A question arises, then, as to which of two fine recordings is to be chosen. Should you prefer a crystal, well-articulated performance of Mozart, as I do, choose Fisher; should you want a romantic, poetic, often sentimental Mozart, select Walter.

PHILIP HALE detested Brahms's music almost until the critic's death. If his abhorrence, which extended particularly to Brahms's orchestral music, also included Brahms's chamber music, I respect Hale's judgment that much less. The clarinet trio, a late work, is Brahms at his best. It contains all the composer's inventiveness, impetuosity, and tenderness to excess — but to a wholly ingratiating excess. The performance by the gentlemen concerned satisfies all the desiderata for Brahms's music save one. While the playing is vital, rhythmical, pulsating, and imaginative, the tone of Mr. McLane's clarinet is too austere and cold to harmonize with Messrs. Hunkins' and Kay's soft, velvety richness.

THE eight songs from "The American Songbook," a collection of folklore, contain enough variety to cut a cross section of several emotions of our people. Some of the songs are pleasing; others are dull. Those which are dull may be so only because of Sandburg's uninspiring manner of presentation. He purported to recreate the songs as the "folk" sing them. In this effort he has failed, for the interpretations are too consciously studied. It is obvious that they have been prepared for performance and not sung spontaneously. All this, however, does not detract from the enjoyment of listening to the records. "The Gallows Song" and "The Horse Named Bill" belong in every record collection. Apart from some needle scratch, the records are well made.

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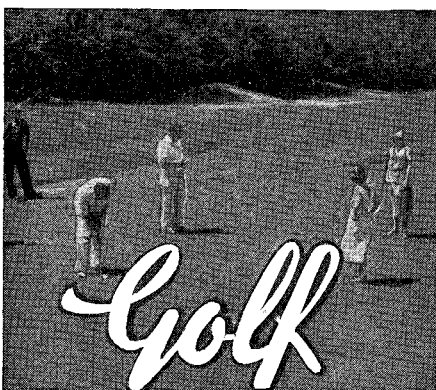
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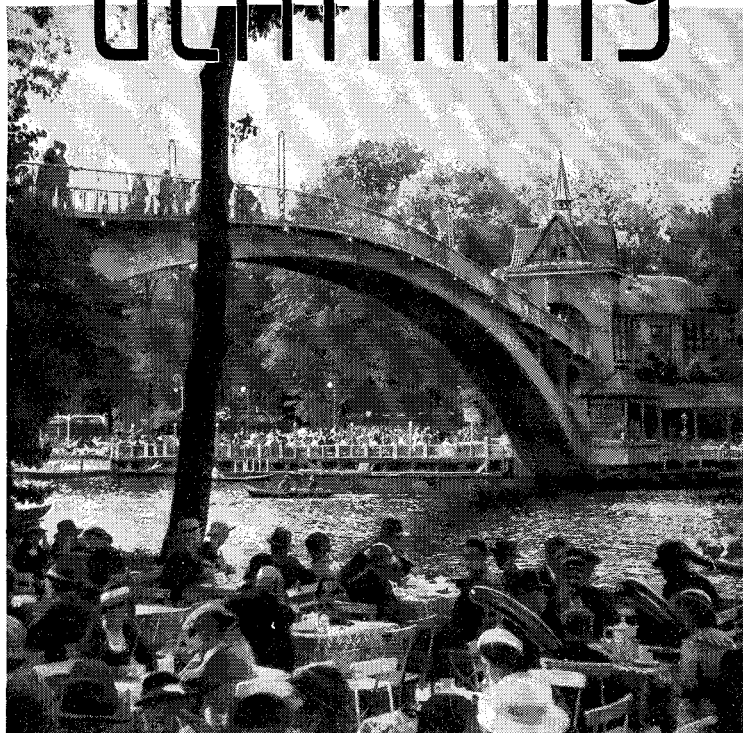
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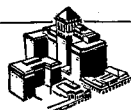
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OUR ROSTRUM

These columns are open to brief letters commenting upon any article or subject that has appeared in THE FORUM. Because of space limitations, the Editor must reserve the right to publish letters only in part.

OUR LYRIC NATURALISTS

"Naturally the language of science doesn't adapt itself readily to ordinary conversation or inspire poets. *Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home* would be difficult if one were compelled to address this little spotted beetle as *Coccinella dipunctata*, *Coccinella dipunctata*. — Herbert B. Nichols in "Does Science Make Sense?" February FORUM.

*Dear Professor Herbert Nichols
How your FORUM paper tickles;
Scientific Nomenclature
Shocks your high poetic nature.*

*I heard today a childish voice
Would sure have made your heart rejoice;
I saw her sitting on the sod
Just trilling to a hexapod.*

*Coccinella, coccinella,
You are such a careless fella;
Should you not be home returning;
Don't you know the place is burning?*

*Coccinella, coccinella,
Leave your stalk of blue prunella;
Never mind the juicy aphids,
Though seductive as Priapis.*

*Coccinella, coccinella,
Whether red, or black, or yella,
With elytra double spotted,
Or, perhaps, just single dotted,
Don't you hear me tell you, Stop it!
When I speak you'd better 'op it;
For the only thing that matters
Is those helpless dipunctatus.*

*Coccinella, Coccinella —
So — ad lib — it's easy, fella.*

MAYNARD D. FOLLIN

Dunedin, Fla.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

To the Editor:

I have read the anonymous article, "Servants Are Humans" [March FORUM] and enjoyed every line of it. . . .

. . . The State will have to step in and regulate the hours and set minimum wages. . . . Living conditions . . . can only be remedied through trade union organization. I . . . cannot place much hope in the education of the household employer. . . .

ROSE SCHNEIDERMAN

Albany, N. Y.

Do You Know

when to say "introduce"?
when to say "present"?
how to become a writer?
when to use "would" and "should"?
how to increase your vocabulary?
how to tell a story?
how to clinch that deal?
how to find just the right word?
how to stop stuttering?
how to overcome a lisp?
how to fight timidity?
how to gain friends?
the art of being a secretary?

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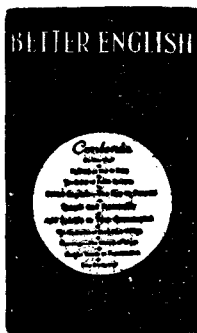
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WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN CONNECTICUT

Roger Burlingame

Recently a resident of Connecticut lost a court battle for the privilege of swimming in his private pond, which is also part of the watershed of a utility system furnishing a public water supply. Mr. Burlingame and a group of his friends, who otherwise enjoy the seclusion of their Connecticut estates, large and small, have had a long and bitter acquaintance with the operations of this public-service corporation. They are afraid not merely of being unable to swim in their own lakes but of being summarily deprived of their land without means of securing fair compensation. The water magnates have been bowling over all opposition for years, but they have caught a tartar in Mr. Burlingame, and he is giving them the needle unmercifully. If they ever get his land, they'll deserve it.

I'M NOT SENDING MY SON TO COLLEGE

James Carroll

The average father, whether or not he is a college man himself, wants his son to be one, if he can possibly afford it. Whatever the reasons for this common desire, it is one of the factors heavily responsible for the annual procession of young men from our halls of learning in numbers that would have seemed incredible not many generations ago. Mr. Carroll, realizing sensibly that his son has no special abilities that might be specifically fostered by advanced study, is afraid that college would make him feel superior without giving him the equipment to justify the belief, in a material sense, thus perhaps condemning him to a lifetime of unhappy frustration. The money he might have spent on a college education the boy will get when he is ready to go into business for himself.

WEEK-END PIONEERS

Ralph Haley

Are you thinking of buying a place in the country this year? Thousands of city dwellers cherish the belief that paradise is a quaint little farmhouse in the hills to which they might flee if the city's mad pace grew too swift for them. Mr. Haley is one of these — with reservations. Even in paradise, somebody has to wash the dishes, and the plumbing in Eden is curiously out of date.

F O R U M

and Century

HENRY GODDARD LEACH, *Editor*

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THE BOOK FORUM



AMERICA GOES TO WAR — Charles C. Tansill (Little, Brown, \$5.00).

HEREDITY AND POLITICS — J. B. S. Haldane (Norton, \$2.50).

THE POLITICOS — Matthew Josephson (Harcourt, Brace, \$4.50).

DANCER IN MADRID — Janet Riesenfeld (Funk & Wagnalls, \$2.50).

CHILDREN OF THE RISING SUN — Willard Price (Reynal & Hitchcock, \$3.00).

HUMOR AND HUMANITY — Stephen Leacock (Holt, \$2.00).

OPERA FRONT AND BACK — H. Howard Taubman (Scribner, \$3.75).

HELEN'S TOWER — Harold Nicolson (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.50).

LETTERS FROM ICELAND — W. H. Auden & Louis Macneice (Random House, \$3.00).

SHIPS IN THE SKY — Gunnar Gunnarsson (Bobbs-Merrill, \$2.50).

SOMETIMES by writing history a man makes it. If Charles C. Tansill hasn't done just that, he has come very near with *America Goes to War*, a history of those three harrowing years before April, 1917. Once more he asks the old question: How could this country, passionate for neutrality, be drawn into the conflict? Never before has so clear, so searching an answer been given; and never has the story of Wilson's forced retreat to the front assumed such tragic inevitability. It is this dramatic quality of the book, even more than the new material presented, that makes it striking. By a very miracle of organization, Dr. Tansill has given life and an overwhelming sense of suspense to his documented day-to-day record. Scrupulous observer that he is, he never oversimplifies his story. There are no villains in his piece. There are rather big businessmen, diplomats, statesmen, in the role of the Furies, with Wilson and his neutral America valiant but doomed to follow that first steel submarine plate sent, not too *sub rosa*, to Canada for transshipment. We cried out for an embargo on trade with belligerents; but a depression hit us, and we were persuaded that sales of war goods to the Allies could ease the crisis without endangering our peace. And so the reasoning went at every step, from trade to loans, to vaster loans, to troops — with Germany's unfortunate high command blundering enough to reinforce the argument. In 1914 there was no such bold handwriting on the wall as *America Goes to War*. If you have any faith in the preventive power of enlightenment, this book should give you hope.

THE other day in London, a tall and bulky scion of one of England's distinguished families led an angry throng to Downing Street in protest against Neville Chamberlain's allegedly profascist policies. The spectacle of an aristocrat leading a mob was news — the more so because this chief demonstrator was also a world-famous geneticist, Mr. J. B. S. Haldane. Why and how his unique interests in both the forum and the laboratory fuse is shown in *Heredity and Politics*. His conclusions are heresy — at least to those politicians who believe that by sterilizing their opponents (or, as they would have it, their inferiors) they can make the world safe for themselves.

Writing with an American audience in mind, Mr. Haldane has chosen examples largely from the American scene. Not that he ignores Germany — where burgeon such elaborate racial doctrines. Hitler's baroque biology comes in for a good ribbing; but the tendency of Americans to erect superstitions about race into laws is what really concerns this very lively professor. Eugenics, he says, is no field in which to find panaceas. Indeed, he goes so far as to show that thus far the results of research on human heredity are largely negative. That is, almost any given theory can be demolished, although new ones are not yet ready to take the places of all that are destroyed. The fault, it appears, is not only with our genes that we are underlings but with today's manifold economic jeopardies. And sterilization is as hard to justify as killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

POLITICS pure and simple — or, rather, politicians seldom pure and never simple — furnish Matthew Josephson with material for a facile and vigorous sequel to his *Robber Barons*. The economic leaders of the turbulent, ripening America which grew out of the Civil War were the heroes of the earlier book. Complementing these manipulators, who usually kept off-stage, were public officials and "bosses" ever in the spotlight. In *The Politics* Mr. Josephson tells their story and the story of their curiously indistinguishable parties.

All the exuberance of those who gilded an age is caught in this abundant book. From President Johnson and the days of ruinous Reconstruction to Mark Hanna and his man McKinley, American capitalism expanded at an unparalleled rate; and the author shows that politics adroitly kept pace. There were graft, abuse, demagoguery in an era that saw the Crédit

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The Book Forum

mobilier scandal and the headlong surrender into private hands of what remained of the public domain. But running through it all was a quintessential vitality.

It is emphasis on this vitality, on the action, of the political world that saves *The Politicos* from being merely ex post facto muckraking. Blinding himself to none of the fabulous corruption which is a matter of record, Mr. Josephson studies it from a mature point of view. He sees there is not much use in flogging a dead dog but he also sees the use of studying all the symptoms of disease surrounding the animal's incorrigibility.

WAR and politics have flushed a whole covey of books about Spain but none so colorful as Janet Riesenfeld's *Dancer in Madrid*.

Very young and American and headstrong, the author cajoled her way across the frontier during the first days of the revolt. She had a professional engagement as a dancer to keep — and she was going to marry the handsomest man in Spain. Innocent of factions and causes, she found herself almost immediately in the midst of behind-the-lines intrigue. The story of how her sympathies turned to her friends the Loyalists while her fiancé was smuggling arms as a spy for Franco is sheer melodrama. But, softened by an almost childlike directness in the telling, Miss Riesenfeld's adventures never seem so terrifying as they must in reality have been. Her book is touching and gallant rather than tragic — which is probably just what she intended.

WHATEVER Willard Price may think about the grandiose philosophy of Japan's empire builders, he has affection and admiration for the Japanese people. He has followed them into all the countries where their trade or colonies take root and in *Children of the Rising Sun* he records his long and fascinating quest. He visited in the Mongol tents of Manchukuo and saw how these nomads are being fitted into Japan's huge industrial scheme. He learned in a Korean convent how the agrarian 80 per cent of the 122,000,000 people in north China, Manchukuo, and Korea are used to "subsidize industry and defense" and to realize Japan's national ambitions. He surveyed the Philippines, swiftly surrendering to Nipponese traders.

To explain the drive behind all this vast expansion is something like squaring the circle, only a good deal more disturbing. Sooner or later the whole world, Mr. Price believes, will have to reckon with Japan's urge to power. The outcome will depend partly on how well we Westerners understand the East. By his fortunate knack for combining travelogue with shrewd analysis, Mr. Price has given us a lift along the way.

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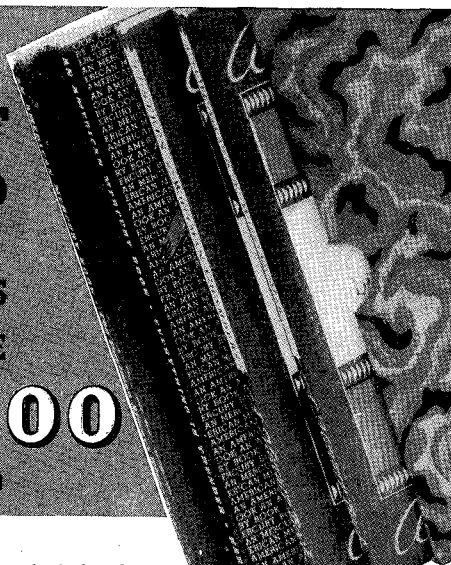
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The Book Forum

THE new book by Stephen Leacock, called *Humor and Humanity*, is his confession of faith. He stoutly believes and offers the evidence to show that the quality of the world's humor is getting better and better. By this he means that the whole idea of what is funny has improved through the ages — from the savages and the Greeks who laughed at physical suffering, through the only less painful eras of practical joking, to Mr. Pickwick and Tartarin and maybe Charley McCarthy. Humor has become "the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the artistic expression thereof."

As one of the kindest of humorists himself, Mr. Leacock has abounding faith in his craft. He even maintains that within certain limits you can teach people to be, if not better, at least funnier. So lucid and persuasive and amusing is this little book of his, you will have to dig deep into a store of arguments to prove him wrong.

AN excursion ticket to Cloud-Cuckoo Land is *Opera Front and Back*, by H. Howard Taubman. Here in one book — fat as a basso, lively as a tilt between rival prima donnas — you have the whole story of that mad and amusing world, the lyric theater.

Mr. Taubman loves the opera with a devotion and an irreverence that make every page a joy. He relishes its foibles and its vitality; he pays full account to its splendor. When he takes the stuffing from its shirt with one hand, he salutes its spirit with the other.

The unregenerate who thank heaven for the radio that filters out all sight of operatic acting will read with at least respectful awe how the complex mechanics of the show is managed. The prompting of stars who forget their parts (and even the greatest of them occasionally do), the perfect timing, the intricate control of scenery and props require skills of a high order. There are geese and horses to be trained — though the Metropolitan's team has been on the job for 25 years and knows the cues.

Even the fanatical operagoer can learn from Mr. Taubman facts he never dreamed of. And all the way through his book runs a brisk current of anecdotes of the sort that singers seem to produce constantly on a mass basis. By his orderly and careful arrangement of all this material, Mr. Taubman has given his book solidity as well as grace. This is an entertaining, a sterling piece of work.

THROUGH his biographies of British statesmen, Harold Nicolson has done much toward making plausible to Americans that strange phenomenon, the foreign and colonial policy that emanates from Downing Street. *Helen's Tower*, the life of Lord Dufferin, is among his best.

The Book Forum

Dufferin was gracious, gifted, brave. Whether or not he was a great man, Mr. Nicolson believes that he was a very great diplomat. Although this writer's emphasis is on Dufferin's personality rather than on his career, it is nevertheless the story of his public life that rewards the reader most. In it is reflected much of the change and upheaval of Victorian England and much of its intricacy and charm.

Lord Dufferin was Mr. Nicolson's uncle by marriage only, yet a feeling of kinship between them illuminates the book and makes it as much an autobiography as a loving portrait. Perhaps because he is an intensely shy man, Mr. Nicolson has developed this double-edged kind of writing into an art of his own; and it is here most effective.

M. L. ELTING

IN Iceland many strange books were written down on sheepskin in the Middle Ages, but no stranger book has ever been written about Iceland than the travelogue of two young British poets, a left-wing proletarian and his imaginative but more orthodox friend. In *Letters from Iceland*, with rhymed letters, memoranda, collected aphorisms, and odd statistics, these realistic, metallic, modern minds play gaily over the habits of the "duck-shaped" island whose people are per capita the most literate and the thriftiest and whose women are the most indifferent to attractive dress of any civilized nation. In the kindly but devastating criticism of this book the greatest sculptor of Iceland becomes one of the world's worst. Every page sparkles with surprises. Most pungent are the notes on diet. There is, for example, whale tail pickled in sour milk. As to half-rotten shark: "Owing to the smell it has to be eaten out of doors. It is shaved off with a knife and eaten with brandy."

IN contrast, we have a new saga by a contemporary Icelandic novelist. The scene of *Ships in the Sky*, by Gunnar Gunnarsson, is an old Icelandic farm. The realism of medieval sagas is retained in this book, but, instead of the broad, bold lines of feud and revenge, Icelandic literature now gives us the delicate detail of daily living, the brooding of the hen over her eggs and the boy over his toys. *Ships in the Sky* is the autobiography of a child in his eighth year, but such is the intelligent, sensitive observation of the Icelandic mind in a milieu that is at the same time impoverished but regal that this tale, like an old saga, is at once world literature in whatever language it is well translated.

H. G. L.

(Beginning on page 278, Mary M. Colum discusses the new books listed below.)

THE SUMMING UP — W. Somerset Maugham (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50).

A POET'S LIFE — Harriet Monroe (Macmillan, \$5.00).

THE YEARLING — Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (Scribner, \$2.75).

CLAUDE BERNARD: PHYSIOLOGIST — J. M. D. Olmsted (Harper, \$4.00).

THE CULTURE OF CITIES — Lewis Mumford (Harcourt, Brace, \$4.50).

THE DEGREES OF KNOWLEDGE — Jacques Maritain (Scribner, \$6.00).

(And on page 284 John W. Gassner reviews briefly the following books on the theater.)

THE THEATRE IN CHANGING EUROPE — Thomas H. Dickinson (Holt, \$5.00).

ENCORE — Daniel Frohman (Furman, \$3.50).

TO A LONELY BOY — Arthur Hopkins (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50).

THE MORNING AFTER THE FIRST NIGHT — George Jean Nathan (Knopf, \$2.50).

THREE GREEK PLAYS — translated and edited by Edith W. Hamilton (Norton, \$2.50).

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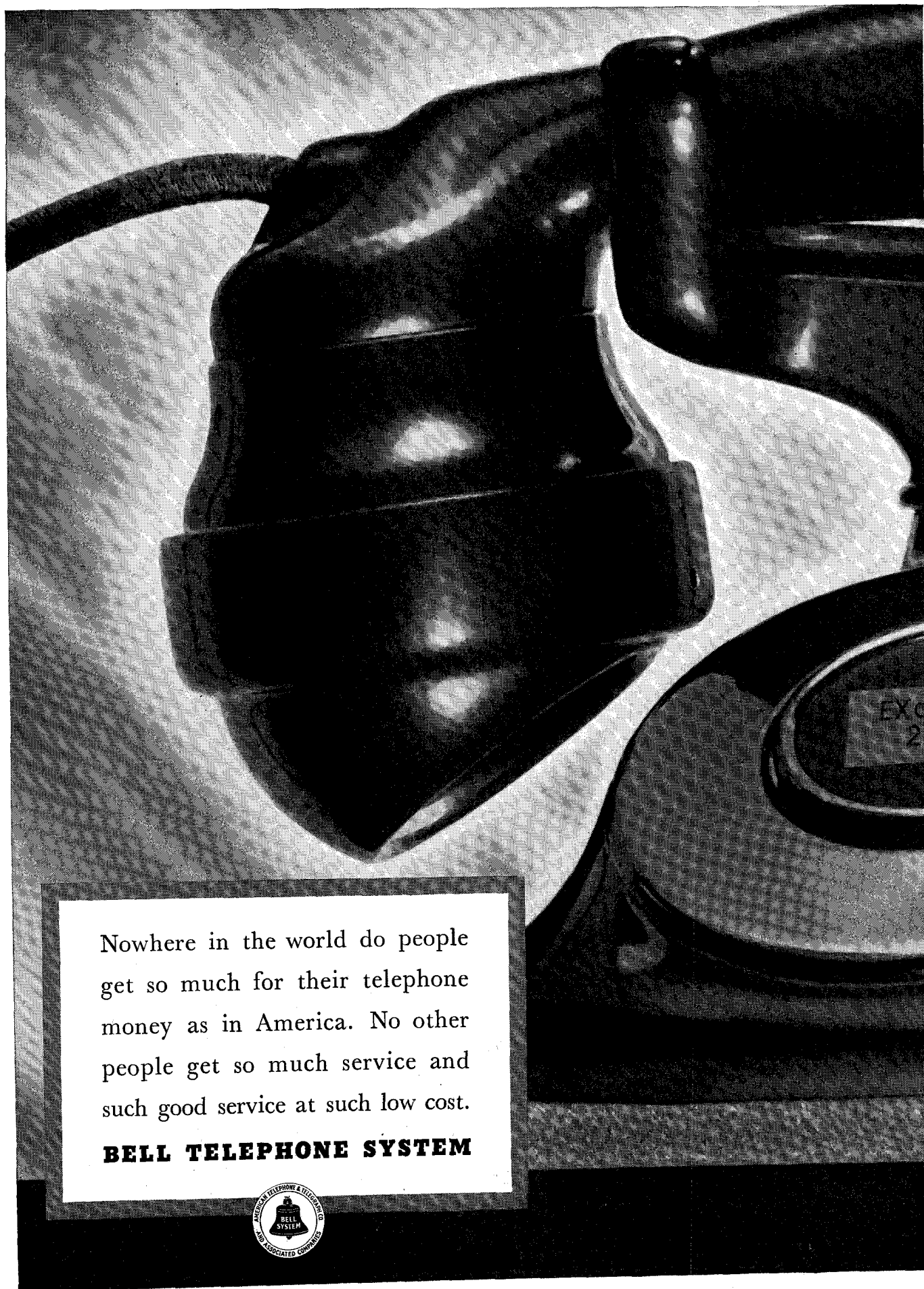
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