

sons. And there is this to be said for our diarists and intimate chroniclers, that they are utterly without the drop of poison that often embitters the personal accounts of former periods.

Mr. Hansen's execution is unequal. His first chapter, Of an Ancient Tavern, is an uncommonly limpid and agreeable piece of writing. In his actual accounts of Sandburg and Anderson and Masters and the others he alternates between a terse simplicity of statement and vague Babbittish *clichés* in which he cannot himself quite believe. Thus he tells us on the one hand that Sherwood Anderson is a man "who gathered into himself all the torment of life" and, on the other, that Carl Sandburg's first volume of verse had a "clean outlook."

Of the actual portraits those of Sandburg and Anderson are not only the longest but the most interesting. We have here, as we have also in Dreiser, something in literature that is, if not new in its origin, new in its development. Sandburg once drove a milk-wagon; Anderson was, during several years, a common laborer. Artists have had such beginnings before, Keats, for instance, and Hebbel. But these Europeans strove, almost from the beginning, to rise out of their early environment intellectually and to connect themselves by instruction and reflection with the central literary and philosophical traditions of Western civilization. Keats became ardently Hellenic; Hebbel developed his dramatic theories by an appeal to Plato and Hegel. Sandburg, Anderson, Dreiser have been content to remain in the deepest sense of the American peasantry from which they sprang. They want, of course, to turn a stream of fresh ideas upon their land and people. They will sit, like Dreiser, cursing and blaspheming against the intolerable stupidity of their folk. But they do not, by an acquired and aristocratic culture, seek to remove themselves from that folk. Hating it, they remain of it. Something of the spirit of Whitman, something of a new way of conceiving of both life and literature is undoubtedly here. And it is truly an American way. A great way, too, irrespective of the momentary aesthetic perfection or imperfection of this or that product, if it can indeed be summed up in some such excellent way as Mr. Hansen sums up the basic attitude of Sherwood Anderson: "He was trying to apply his philosophy that life is not a mean thing to be tamed and held to hard and fast canons, but a beautiful wild thing of ecstasies and dreams, something that must be lived deeply to be understood." And that attitude and that conclusion is, curiously enough, nor in such very different phrasing, the attitude and the conclusion of Faust, of Goethe, of whom Mr. Anderson probably knows little or nothing. So that the spirit of creative freedom is found to be the same by men coming from different ends of both the physical and the spiritual world, and this Mid-Western peasant movement in American literature allies itself naturally and hearteningly with the wisdom of the great sages of the past.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN

A Shavian Sacrifice

The Sacrificial Goat. By Ernita Lascelles. Boni and Liveright. \$2.

THE most astonishing fact about *The Sacrificial Goat* is that it is a first novel. The virtuosity of the writing, the ease with which full-bodied characters (in a limited milieu, it is true) are made to express individuality, the witty dialogue, the easy mastery with which Miss Lascelles wields the baton over her ensemble—all acquit the writer of the offense of being a novice. Indeed, impeccable as is her craftsmanship, one misses the quickening of the tempo, the cry in the dark, the aspiration to untried heights that mark the achievement we call a promise in our younger novelists. The pains of spiritual growth, the epic struggle of youth to reconcile life to principle, the falterings on the wayside are, for Miss Lascelles, occasions only for sharp and mirthless ridicule and veiled contempt, pity being discarded as *démodé* in a modern novelist. She does not permit herself to sanction an uninterrupted rapture. The bubble must be pricked.

Miss Lascelles is tireless in paradox, unwearied in her flashings—even if they be only in the pan—and as cerebral as only a pamphleteer turned novelist can be.

Perhaps that is why *The Sacrificial Goat* is called a Shavian novel. Apart from the fact that the best lines in it—Shavian to the core—are assigned to Edward Moreby, who is made to act and talk in a manner that we instinctively associate with Shaw in his salad days, the entire treatment of the novel is Shavian. It is sincerely so, for Miss Lascelles does not imitate; having naturally inhaled Shaw, she as naturally exhales him in Moreby, no inconsiderable part of the book.

The plot is based on the too familiar triangle, with Joan Candler as the wife, David Tasker the husband, and Edward Moreby the pursuer and pursued, and with a supporting cast of divergent types that would give verisimilitude to a richer and more original conception. It is in the picture she draws of David Tasker that the pamphleteer in Miss Lascelles emerges. Somewhat in the character of a feminist Shavian, she grips David and pushes him into the faces of her readers as the quintessence of male illusion and fit subject for the liberated woman's mockery. David and Joan meet as members of a provincial company and marry at the end of the tour. David, a feeble poseur, is rendered somewhat too pitiable for acceptance, and in the battle with Moreby is simply extinguished, except in a muscular conflict, to which Miss Lascelles succeeds in giving a total effect of unreality. The assumed love between Joan and Moreby seems too cerebral for credence. Joan, become a successful actress and something of a social favorite, succeeds in putting her husband out of the picture altogether. He returns, blown to London from New Zealand—whither he had gone to make a home "away from it all"—by gusts of jealousy, and finds her yet his, Moreby having virtually repulsed her. And Miss Lascelles leaves her puppets locked in embrace, with the tart and inconclusive comment: "Well, well! Poor devils."

HARRY SALPETER

Victoria's Laureate

Tennyson. Aspects of His Life, Character and Poetry. By Harold Nicolson. Houghton Mifflin Company. \$4.

TO admire the eminent Victorians is no longer to court reproach; to sneer at them is a slightly outmoded convention—the attitude "dates" a man. Mr. Nicolson is, as he admits, a product of "our scavenger age," and is therefore in no position to blame Tennyson for being a product of *his* age; yet he cannot quite forgive him for not escaping the faults of the mid-nineteenth century, when matrimony was regarded as a sacrament, the church was a divine institution menaced by atheistic or agnostic science, and the British Empire was an institution hardly less divine. In choosing this subject for the exercise of his critical talents he has made himself a Balaam, for though he apparently came to curse he has, on the whole and with certain restrictions, stayed to bless. His book would have been better had he taken to heart the wise words lately uttered by Mr. A. C. Bradley to the effect that to be incapable of enjoying poetry because the poet's opinions and ideas are not ours is "an altogether perverse attitude toward poetry, or, for that matter, any other product of imagination." Judged by such a standard where would Dante be? Where Duccio? Botticelli? Palestrina? Shelley? Perhaps the Victorian era is still too near us to permit of criticism of its greatest poet untrammelled by dislike of the characteristics of Victorianism. The act of faith by which when reading Dante we become fourteenth-century Florentines, when hearing Palestrina Tridentine Catholics, and when reading Shelley Godwinian revolutionists, is an irksome task when we turn to Tennyson. The Victorian garments sit uneasily upon us. Yet for the nonce we must adopt the poet's thoughts and emotions, must look at life—at morals and politics and science and religion—from his point of view. This Mr. Nicolson has not done; there has been no "will-

ing suspension of disbelief." He divorces the poet from his time; blesses the one and condemns the other.

As one result of this unnatural severance his book presents us with a vast and yawning lacuna; the Tennyson of the middle years, of Farringford, of the domestic poems and the "Idylls of the King" appears before us as no more than an insubstantial ghost. Alas for this gray shadow, once a man! The critic actually and deliberately ignores the Arthurian cycle; he thinks it fairer and wiser "to leave this period for the judgment of future generations." Yet he recognizes "the magnificent poetry which the 'Idylls' contain." Surely this is the *gran refuto* of Tennysonian criticism. The "Idylls" are, on the whole, a failure, and are likely to be judged a failure when the age in which they were written has sunk into the remote past; but the failure is one that should be inquired into on aesthetic and poetic grounds. The mere current ideas that have been woven into the texture of the poems have nothing to do with the matter. We do not all subscribe to the doctrines embodied in St. Bernard's hymn to the Virgin; but we all recognize the supreme poetry of the last canto of the "Paradiso." Moreover this abrupt and unphilosophical dismissal of the work of Tennyson's middle period produces a curious effect from the biographical point of view, an effect which it is difficult to describe. Tennyson seems suddenly to become old. At one moment he is young, unknown (or known only to be ridiculed), introspective, melancholy, mystic, glooming upon the Lincolnshire fens or haunting dim and noisome London taverns, wreathed in tobacco smoke. We turn the page, as it were, and find him illustrious, complacent, visited by the nobility, bothered by tourists, wreathed in a somewhat tinsel majesty. How the change came about is not made very clear. In particular the "ten silent years" between 1832 and 1842 remain almost as much a blank, almost as open a field for speculation, as the "seven silent years" of another and greater English poet.

The attempt to separate Tennyson and his age results, however, in another and more welcome contrast: the contrast between Tennyson the lyric and mystic poet and Tennyson the voice and "prophet" of his period. All that is excellent in his verse Mr. Nicolson attributes to the former; all that is complacent, ephemeral, optimistic, domestic, in the nature of a compromise—Victorian, in a word—to the latter. The greater Tennyson appears in much of his earlier work; in the earlier sections of "In Memoriam"; in the songs in "The Princess"; in "Maud" (where the old genius again flamed out); and it reappears in some of the work of his old age. The lesser Tennyson held undisputed sway over the "reading public" and over his own genius during the years, roughly, between 1860 and 1880. Mr. Nicolson considers that in his views of sex and of politics Tennyson reached an unworkable compromise, characteristic of his time; whereas in his religious opinions he inquired far more profoundly and was more at one with the genius of his earlier years. For the change from "the black, unhappy mystic of the Lincolnshire wolds" to "the prosperous Isle of Wight Victorian" Mr. Nicolson blames the Cambridge group of "the Apostles" who first inculcated in Tennyson the doctrine of the poet's "mission" and convinced him that it was his business to guide and to teach. His knowledge of Shelley's failures and Keats's triumphs should have taught him better; but for better or worse the apostolic doctrine fastened itself upon him and shaped much of his later verse. When free of it he could write "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," "The Bugle Song" and "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white." Burdened with the Wordsworthian duty to shed benignant influence upon his fellow-men he could but accomplish such things as "Enoch Arden" and "Aylmer's Field."

Following in the steps of the late Thomas R. Lounsbury Mr. Nicolson has accomplished some admirable pages on the subject of contemporary criticism of Tennyson; it may surprise some Georgians to learn to what an extent their strictures were anticipated sixty years ago. The critic is genuinely moved to enthusiasm in dealing with aspects of Tennyson's art. He has

drawn a convincing and on the whole sympathetic portrait of the solitary brooding young poet and of the majestic figure of the last years at Aldworth. The "scavenger work" has been exercised mostly upon the central period; and the scattered sneers and deprecatory remarks are generally pardonable for the neatness with which they are turned. One may forgive much in the critic who does not stoop to deride Tennyson's love for Hallam and who delights in the lyric triumphs of his inspiration. The portrait that is finally achieved is that of a great personality and a great genius; more imposing, more majestic than, perhaps, Mr. Nicolson intended or quite realizes.

SAMUEL C. CHEW

Children and Gentle Beasts

A Century of Children's Books. By Florence V. Barry. George H. Doran Company. \$2.

The Story of Mrs. Tubbs. Dr. Dolittle's Post Office. By Hugh Lofting. Frederick A. Stokes Company. \$1.25. \$2.50.

The Kitchen Porch. By George Philip Krapp. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

Knee-High to a Grasshopper. By Anne and Dillwyn Parrish. The Macmillan Company. \$2.50.

MISS BARRY'S account of children's books begins at a time when Cinderella and Robin Hood and Goody Two-Shoes were names as yet unspoken. And it would probably astonish children who regard those names as somehow associated with the foundations of the world to hear how recent that time was. In the middle of the seventeenth century children's books were still moral, instructive, and grave; for example, the "Token for Children," containing "an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives and joyful deaths of several young children," or the "Wyse Chylde of Thre Year Old," who was not at a loss when asked: "Sage enfaunt, how is the skye made?" Even in those days there was the "Gesta Romanorum" and Aesop; but until "Pilgrim's Progress," "Robinson Crusoe," and "Gulliver's Travels"—none of them really intended for children by their authors—children were compelled to be quietly edified rather than amused. Miss Barry has told her story with possibly too much detail and unfortunately has omitted an index, but it is a valuable record of various theories of education and their effects on juvenile literature. She does not, however, clear up the mystery of Mother Goose, and until that is done the last, last word will not have been said on the subject.

Without apparent theory, moral purpose, or a desire to be instructive, Hugh Lofting has proceeded joyfully to the making of literature. In this third volume of the admirable Dr. Dolittle's adventures, and in "The Story of Mrs. Tubbs," a shorter story for smaller children, he has added to that rare list of juvenilia which includes Alice and her companions. Like Alice, Dr. Dolittle's friends are animals, and such animals: Dab-Dab, the accomplished duck housekeeper; Gub-Gub, the appealingly greedy little pig, and Speedy the Skimmer, the swallow who almost succeeds in annihilating time and space. Their adventure this time is a bird post office on a house-boat just off the coast of Africa, where tea is served every afternoon with cucumber sandwiches on Sundays, and where care is taken to provide the very best pens to write with because, of course, post-office pens are usually so bad. The enterprise is uncommonly successful, as anyone might have foreseen; "the post-office safe could hardly hold all the money taken in and the overflow had to be put in a vase on the kitchen mantelpiece." The book is filled with excellent suggestions for householders: pincushions served with the fish, for example, to stick your fish bones in instead of having them spread along the edge of your plate, and a speaking tube which leads to the open-air outside, into which any conversation, imperative but hardly suitable for the table, can be spoken. A thoroughly delectable book, in short, and rendered more so by the illustrations, done