

## Essays by John J. Chapman

*Letters and Religion, by John J. Chapman. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press. \$2.50.*

THIS small volume of short lengths—and of shorter ones—has not quite the structural unity that its title implies. Unification is to be sought for less in the author's present pages than in his own mind and nature. In terse and sinewy fashion he speaks a word for the classics, hushes down the obstreperousness of recent science, calls for a measure of quietude amidst the hurly-burly of the modern day, and bows a head, chastened by experience, to the teachings of Christ. Making a fusion of such elements in this latest gathering of Mr. Chapman's essays, the reader arrives at a consolidated impression of the book and the man.

Here, as elsewhere, he is stoutly for the classical authors; and those of us who have been inclined to believe that the chief defense of the ancient texts came from professors narrowly concerned for the safety of vested interests, may find in these pages a better reason. Art and letters, our essayist maintains, speak a language that comes from behind the work rather than from within it. The Greeks and Romans are permanently "there." Horace represents an "eternal type of gentleman" who appears periodically whether under tyrannies, democracies, or socialisms; and one reason for the persistence of such a phenomenon is that civilization is a continuous stream and passes on with the race.

Mr. Chapman's allegiance is all to a non-scientific past. He scales down science to a "branch of domestic convenience." He pronounces it a bad influence on all forms of literary and artistic and moral criticism, because it deals with externals and cannot cope with the personal mystery that lies behind every act and thought of our lives. If science fails us in authoritative views on education, that is because the education of the young has always formed a part of the religion of every age. The Roman virtue and Roman piety, to which Horace—once more—owes so much of his power and charm, were implanted in him as a part of his religious training. "It was much more than a philosophy or than a psychology—the discipline of the ages that lay behind it. Thus is the levity and flippancy of our present younger generation sufficiently accounted for.

Against the excesses of an over-strenuous day our author counsels quietude, relaxation, submission: it is often as good to relax the mind as to relax the muscles; sheer waiting becomes almost the essence of religious truth. Passivity is found passim. Quietism hovers over every page. Throughout one feels the wings of Molinos beating the air, and asks how soon he will alight. That event finally occurs toward the end, on page 111—the book, as I have said, is short—where the Spanish mystic, resembling a tapestry record of centuries of pious experience, makes any of our recent New Thought handbooks, "with their crude dogmas, arbitrary psychology and rough dealing," seem like a rag carpet. Such—this last—is hardly the magic fabric to waft one away into a state of "mystical receptivity and rest." The essence of Molinos's value would seem to lie in teaching one how to accomplish holiness by not trying to accomplish it.

The most extended of these brief papers is one concerned with the Story and Sayings of Christ. Pause is

made on the "domestic miscellaneousness" of Christ's teachings—on their comprehensive serviceability in the exigencies of daily living: the Sayings have inexhaustible meanings ambushed in their texts and enter men's hearts in the wake of grief. "A man must have been disgraced and in jail to know many of them." Wer nie sein Brod—as put by the "altissima poeta" of the Germans, rather than by an American essayist in a moment comparatively relaxed and homespun.

A manly, unaffected book, this; full of independence and frank-mindedness; touched here and there with the Emersonian and gnomic; in sturdy reaction from most of the admired idols of the day; and charged with that articulateness which gives shape to the unexpressed thought of the many. After a weary and trying generation of days, the tide seems to be turning; and numbers of the dissatisfied should catch this book as the turn is made.

HENRY B. FULLER.

## Sandoval

*Sandoval, by Thomas Beer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.*

THE contagion of Hayes-Garfield romance has spread to the younger generation, and Mr. Thomas Beer tries his dexterous hand at portraying post-Civil War society and its scandals. The first shock of apparent anachronism in his distractingly impressionistic style diminishes when we recall the period of Manet and Renoir, and we perceive Mr. Beer as a chronologically justified "pointilliste," creating his effects of personage and setting by the sparkling interplay of descriptive highlights. The simplicity of the dialogue and the sound construction of the narrative contrast agreeably with the complication of their background—although the chief interest of the book lies in manner rather than matter.

D. B. W.

## Contributors

LYTTON STRACHEY is the author of *Eminent Victorians*, *Queen Victoria*, *Books and Characters*, and *Landmarks in French Literature*.

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—Charles H. Shinn (Fresno Republican).

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