

The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

Captain Kid

IT began soon after the war. I refer to the war with Germany from 1914-18—an event in history which, so I gather from an occasional movie caption, can be remembered only by us older gaffers. About the year 1919 we began to hear about youth, its radiant and noble qualities. If the rulers of the great nations had only been youthful, say from seventeen to nineteen years old, the tragedy would never have happened. There would have been a glorious spirit of brotherhood in the world; warm, red-blooded generosity. All the troubles between Austria and Russia, Germany and France, Germany and England, and Germany and America could have been arranged in a few minutes, and no clothes torn. With a stein on the table and a good song ringing clear, the absurdity of shooting down these kindly Germans and Turks would have been apparent.

So also with the Treaty of Versailles. Here again was government by gray-beards. A few evil old men caused all the woe. Another group of wicked grandsires sat around a table in Chicago and selected the Republican President. Once more youth, beauty, idealism, generosity, and romance were defeated by the sons of Belial.

The world was full of eager, noble lads, panting to restore the Golden Age. The universities were full of them; they were conscious of their strength; they ran out each morning upon the college green, like young Greek gods, crying, "Youth! Youth!" In art, literature, and music it was the same. Truth and freedom were waiting in the hearts of young men and maidens all ready to make the world one gay spring song. But it was kept back, baffled and defeated by a few senile tyrants.

In Germany, where they do not leave things to chance, there was an organized "youth movement." In England young poets came back from the war, and began writing verse to show that living in muddy trenches is disagreeable; that dead bodies are unpleasant neighbors; and that shell-torn soldiers are as much a part of war as the pretty ceremony at retreat, when the bugles sound and the flag comes fluttering down.

There was an odd thing about this literature of youth. It was advertised as

joyous and gladsome, but in fact it was gloomier than the caves of Hades. Realistic and truthful it was, in a fashion, but it was the realism of a man who is blind in one eye. Two young Americans, Mr. Dos Passos and Mr. Cummings, wrote books which missed no evil sight, sound, or smell, but never by chance mentioned anything pleasant. Even in camps, safe in America, the sun did not break out of the clouds for an instant. They recalled the farmer who, at the end of a perfect season when the weather had been fair and all the crops bountiful, was told that for this year at least he had no cause for complaint.

"Well," he replied, "there ain't no sp'iled hay for the calves."

Writers for some of the modernistic magazines were in danger of losing their jobs if they allowed cheerfulness to creep in for an instant. One of them gave a description of the difficulty of his life, when each day he had to lash himself into the proper spirit of bitterness. The friends of this Gloomy Gus movement called it "The Cry of Youth."

The child poets and the juvenile writers of books commenced to stir. Nathalia Crane's poems were indeed merry and youthful, and justified themselves to all who did not have the unfortunate experience of hearing Nathalia's ill-advised attempts to read in public. Our most considerable reviewing magazine, the "Bookman," came under the editorship of Mr. John Farrar, who was as young as Shelley and almost as young as Chatterton. His youth was much stressed, and for six or seven years he edited the "Bookman" with ability. (He retired this month, having learned that the editor of a book-reviewing publication undeservedly acquires as many enemies as friends.) Under Mr. Farrar's editorship the "Bookman" was a notable magazine, but that there was any more of the spirit of youth about it under Mr. Farrar, in his twenties, than under its former editor, the late Harry Thurston Peck, who was in his forties or fifties, it would be dangerous to assert.

The cult for youth passes and flares up again. Shakespeare in "Hamlet" jabs at the child actors. Colonel Lindbergh is youthful in fact, and attractively so in appearance, but in manner grave and dignified. I have not heard that he goes out in a simple chiton and

sings hymns to the morning sun, nor that he is especially contemptuous toward his elders. During the agitation about Sacco and Vanzetti the youth business came to the front again. In some quarters the report made by Governor Fuller and the report of his three advisers was received with the remark that you couldn't expect sympathy and understanding from men so old. These elderly gentlemen were suffering from hardening of the mental arteries. They were all for hangings and electrocutions and the dismal ways of the past. Of course they couldn't be expected to look with favor upon youth, progress, and the future. If the decision, for instance, could have been in the hands of men of vision, like Mr. Justice Holmes or Mr. Justice Brandeis or Mr. Clarence Darrow, then truth might break through the fog. Well, Governor Fuller is forty-nine; President Lowell is seventy; President Stratton is sixty-six; and Judge Grant, seventy-five; an average of sixty-five years. And Mr. Justice Holmes is eighty-six and Mr. Justice Brandeis seventy, or an average of seventy-eight. Mr. Darrow is President Lowell's age—seventy.

Meanwhile, searchers have been combing the universities for flaming youth. The result has been as disheartening as it would have been in 1850, 1880, or 1900. Except for enthusiasm about athletics and college societies, the soberest and most conservative body of people in America are to be found in its colleges—the boys and girls from eighteen to twenty-two. Tradition with them is sacrosanct.

Mr. Halliburton's "The Glorious Adventure"¹ is a very popular book. It is all about his travels in classic lands. His publishers say that "He swam the Hellespont where Leander and Lord Byron swam. . . . He ran the Marathon over the original course. He scaled the Acropolis walls at night. He charged up Mount Parnassus. He danced through the Vale of Tempe."

The book itself is not as bad as that. The author, when he writes, does not pose so outrageously nor talk quite so much about glorious youth. He does have his picture taken, in offensive poses, against the background of Greek tem-

¹The Glorious Adventure. By Richard Halliburton. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$5.

ples. And he does allow his publishers to talk overmuch about sparkling imagination, the dauntless, liberated spirit of the age, and the reign of modern youth. Self-consciousness is rampant throughout. Mr. Halliburton is still in his twenties.

Mr. Robert Benchley, the author of "The Early Worm,"² is far along in the valley of the shadow. The shades of the prison house are closing over him, for his fortieth birthday is only a year or two distant. He has been writing for a number of years, and if he is not the truest of humorists and America's best living humorous writer, only Mr. George Ade and Mr. Finley Peter Dunne can dispute that title with him. Neither he nor his

²The Early Worm. By Robert Benchley. Henry Holt & Co., New York. \$2.

publisher has ever bleated about youth; and if Mr. Benchley's features sometimes appear in Mr. Gluyas Williams's illustrations of his books, they are satirized for the amusement of his readers, instead of glorified like a hero of the movies or like the chesty photographs of Mr. Halliburton. Benchley can hardly write a line which has not in it a joyous spirit of fun. He has a perfect instinct for play, and a perfect recognition of humbug and pomposity in American life. His is the genuine spirit of youth, and it will be his at sixty-five as much as it was when he delivered the ivy oration on graduation from college. This spirit has little to do with years, and it does not engage in self-conscious poses either before a camera or when he sits down at his typewriter. E. P.

Fiction

THE THUNDERER. By E. Barrington. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$2.50.

Brought up to believe Thunderer an epithet belonging exclusively to Jupiter Tonans and the London "Times," it was only the portrait of Napoleon on the jacket of E. Barrington's new novel that informed us of a third and certainly not the least terrific claimant to the title. Napoleon, except as an incidental figure upon whom the spotlight is turned for some brief moment of sordidness or splendor, has not fared well at the hands of the novelists, often as they have been tempted to essay him; poets and dramatists have been more successful. As the leading character of a novel, he usually emerges romanticized either into sentimental feebleness or some sort of impossible superman. A superman in achievement it may be admitted that he truly was, but with limitations of character as petty as the scope of his ability was great. Natural virtues, some of them important, he had; but his personal code was low and he never showed, either in triumph or disaster, nobility of spirit.

That is the essential thing which E. Barrington understands, although the portrait she draws of him, especially in the days of his early passion for the fickle and uncomprehending Josephine, is by no means unsympathetic. It is a portrait soundly constructed, neither exaggerated, mushy, nor wooden, and bears creditable comparison with known historic fact. One cannot, in justice to the author, say less of her titular hero; yet it is in her thorough and admirable presentation of Josephine and her sketches in few but true and telling lines of some of the minor historic figures, that her best work lies. It has, of course, long been impossible to regard Josephine as the snow-white innocent lamb, the broken lily, the suffering saint, sacrificed to an unholy ambition, over whose woes our grandmothers shed luxurious tears. The most good-natured of women, tolerant, kind, and indulgent to everybody, but to herself first of all, the Creole Empress from lazy and lovely Martinique was by temperament sensual, greedy, deceitful, helplessly extravagant, readily tearful, but never really penitent, always amiable—and always charming. All these characteristics E. Barrington has effectively set forth in a framework of selected fact and credible complementary fiction, with the result of an extremely vivid and truthful portrait.

The book deals with Napoleon in his family relations; battle and conquest are

merely a background, except indeed those battles royal, or rather unroyal, waged among the Bonaparte brothers, sisters, and in-laws; then indeed did Napoleon thunder mightily, rage, stamp, bang furniture, and shout unprintable language at the top of his imperial lungs. No imaginative touches were needful to heighten the violence and vulgarity of these family rows as history has recorded them, nor the piquancy of their contrast with the more than princely rank and station of the participants.

In short, E. Barrington has written a refreshingly unsentimentalized but consistently interesting novel about one of the most amazing groups of historic individuals the world has known.

GIDEON. By Inez Haynes Irwin. Harper & Brothers, New York. \$2.

The adolescent age is not a pie to furnish easy plums for novelists. Despite the author's occasional flashes of penetration into the psychology of youth, the boy Gideon Hallam remains a fictitious character. Gideon is a child of divorce. He grows up with a decided mother complex, in the riotous circle of his mother's jazz-mad friends. Before he is ready to enter college the father, of whom Gideon retains no memory, requests a visit from his son. Inhibited by an ingrowing animosity against him, Gideon reluctantly complies. The brilliant scientist-explorer father, his lovely second wife, and their charming life together are revelations to the boy.

Here is no vitriolic propaganda either for or against separating those whom God hath joined. Obviously, the elder Hallam and his first wife are happier unmarried, but their households form an enlightening contrast between two modes of living. Lipsticks, jargon, and gin in the one home; dowdiness and intellectual contentment in the other. Gideon makes his choice in an interesting climax of events.

TALL MEN. By J. S. Montgomery. Greenberg, New York. \$2.

A tale of blockade-running in our Civil War. It is agreeable reading, but with no great depth or reality. It is perfectly easy now for all Americans to read without anger of British ships smuggling rifles into Charleston and taking cotton out. The trade was profitable, and only reprehensible when the bold adventurers were caught. The battle of the Alabama and the Kearse forms a dramatic incident. The plot moves, the style runs easily, but the brave

You—

like all wise investors seek a dependable and justifiable income, yet demand safety of principal above every other consideration. Smith Bonds will appeal to you, they are safe and yield 6% to 6½%. Denominations \$1000, \$500, \$100.

May we tell you how
Smith Bonds are made safe
and pay an attractive income?

Ask for Booklet "6-37"

Our Mail Service Department

No matter where you may be you can avail yourself of the Mail Order Service of our Home Office in Washington, D. C. Your investments and inquiries will be given the same personal, efficient and courteous attention you would receive if you called at one of our offices.

The F. H. SMITH Co.

Founded 1873

Smith Building, Washington, D. C.
285 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

Branch Offices in Other Cities

Kindly send Booklet and information regarding
SMITH BONDS.

NAME _____ "6-37"

ADDRESS _____

STOPS

SHOPPING SICKNESS



and the exhaustion, faintness, nausea and dizziness caused by travel motion. Journey by Sea, Train, Car, Auto or Air in perfect comfort with Mothersill's.

75c. & \$1.50 at Drug Stores or direct
The Mothersill Remedy Co., Ltd.
New York Montreal
Paris London



25 Years In Use

THE OUTLOOK RECOMMENDS

The Pratt Teachers Agency

70 Fifth Avenue, New York
Recommends teachers to colleges, public and private schools.
EXPERT SERVICE

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

A Handbook and Guidebook for Parents

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

11th edition 1186 pages
Illustrations 3000 Schools

Descriptive circular on application
Advice TO PARENTS. Experienced staff of educators for 12 yrs has helped parents select just the right school

Information and advice by letter without charge. Write fully
PORTER SARGENT 11 Beacon St. Boston

TEACHING THE BLIND

The third year of teacher training in special methods will begin October 1. Apply to
PERKINS INSTITUTION, Watertown, Mass.