

➤➤ The Leisure Arts ◀◀

Speaking of Books—The Theatre—The Movies

Seeing Life Whole

DURING the Christmas recess just past, the Historians convened for the reading of research papers at Boston, the Philosophers at Charlottesville and the Modern Language Association, with the related bodies, at Washington. If the members of these societies are not the cultural leaders of the country, then to whom could we ascribe this important duty? The Clergy? The Editors? So far as I was personally able to observe, these various meetings received not one word of mention in the metropolitan press.

The Scientists on the other hand assembled at Cleveland. Days before they began to determine whether the Earth is a lovely thing destined to go on forever, or a hard lump about to crumble (concerning which the President of the Scientists superfluously declared that he knew nothing) the city dailies carried feature articles on what the Scientists were going to do, reported their doings at great length while they were in session, going so far in fact as to publish some of their speeches in full, and then came up the day after with editorials on their results.

It is the situation symbolized by this deplorable inequality of citizen interest that moved H. G. Wells to bring out *The Science of Life* (Doubleday, Doran \$10). There are 2 volumes divided into an Introduction and 9 books, 53 chapters, 328 numbered sections or subjects, 329 illustrations in black and white, 1,514 pages, almost exactly 750,000 words, or about 9 volumes the size of the average American novel. Mr. Wells had as his collaborators his own son, G. P. Wells, and Mr. Julian S. Huxley. The leading author claims that the book was written because of the unanticipated success of the *Outline of History*. There is obviously a measure of truth in this; that book tended to make people history-minded.

But this book was written because people are already science-minded.

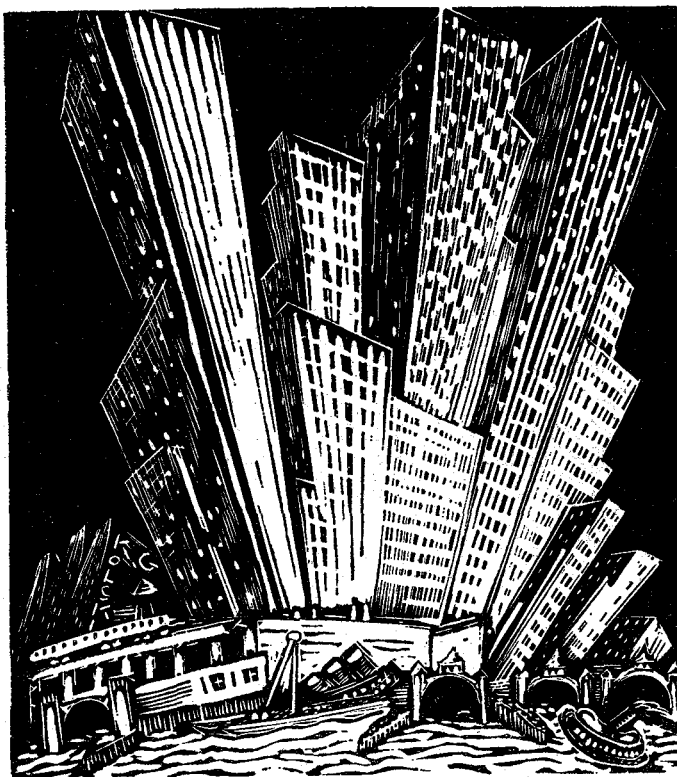
Let no man however be deceived by the word "science." Etymologically and every other way, "science" means nothing more than the body of information available at a given time on a given subject. It is what we "know." What the man who sells haberdashery from a push-cart on the East Side knows about his business is to him the science of his business. And to him it is science just as truly as if he were a Herbert George Wells editing what a Julian Huxley writes about squids and squirts. We have

connection with a joke and once conventionally. But the name of God is omitted from the index; as is also the name of the late Mr. Bryan, to whom pages are devoted in the discussion of Evolution. The triplex author (in his own language the Trinity: H. G. the Father, G. P. the Son, but let us hope that Mr. Huxley is neither holy nor ghostly) claims that Evolution "is proven to the hilt." No sane man denies it, but that statement is not a mere Britishism, it is bad grammar. In "prove" we have, what Scientists do not understand, a weak, not a strong verb.

But with Evolution so soundly proved, why did not the triplex author arrange his gigantic study on an evolutionary plan, beginning with the humble amoeba and coming right on up through the entangled scale to *Homo sapiens* as represented, say, in the mahout of the Republican Party? As it is man is all over the place. Juxtaposed to a discussion of him we find sections on newts. But jumbling and joggling are also popular today. It is the age of confusionism.

The study contains a vast deal of such wisdom as we are wont to find in such publications as the *Hagerstown Almanack*. We are assured, for example, that if a mouse falls down a deep shaft, the brute will be dazed but not dead after the nether impact, whereas if a mule is thrown down the same shaft all that will be left will be a few hard

bones and a splash on the wall. To the person who has hitherto been unfamiliar with the relative weight of a mule and a mouse this difference in their fates will henceforth be science. We are also told that, after all, even the Archbishop of Canterbury is 59 per cent water. In other words, and in the nomenclature of Science, the Primate of England is an aquatic sport. Having come out of London with its foghorns, and been printed midway between Sag Harbor and Jones's Beach, this is really matchless.



Jacket design by Gan Kolski from "East of the Hudson" by J. Brooks Atkinson (Knopf)

before us a very great work, one that will be widely discussed, sold, and read, one from which a certain type of citizen reader can get a marvelous mental clearing, but there is evidence on every page that the book was written because the authors knew that now it can be sold.

It is first of all a hopelessly godless treatise. The plants and animals do not come off any too well and man is shown to be a mechanism, with slight modification in the last chapter, a machine. God is referred to three times, twice in

In one sense the book is fictionized biography. There are four characters, all belonging to the phylum of vertebrates: Mr. Everyman, Mrs. Everyman, Master Everyman, and Mr. Mouse. This takes us without detour straight back to Mr. Britling, Mr. Clissold, Mr. Parham, and mice like gods. Nothing is left undiscussed, unless it be the great subject of Degeneration, which works just as faultlessly as Evolution, and the reason why some men prefer culture to chemistry. We are even assured that tobacco smoke blown through a handkerchief will make a yellow spot on the handkerchief. What of it, other than that the handkerchief has to be sent then to the laundry? Alcohol and its effects are treated. The Eighteenth Amendment arises: "There, as biologists, we leave it." This is the conclusion after having claimed that it is a purely ethical question. Why then was the issue brought up?

The book is a combined text on all the 'ologies, except theology, and a medicine book, a cook book, a book on sanitation, athletics, table manners, war, and other subjects too numerous to mention. As to the actual origin of life, we are told that it originated from "not-life." That means nothing, for the scientist is the first to assure us that you cannot get something* out of nothing. Moreover, this life from not-life is alleged to have originated 3000 million years ago. O shades of the gnostic and the gnostic! As to the origin of life—and with the Scientists genetics is now everything—it would have been much more enlightening to appeal to the 41 per cent flesh phase of the Archbishop and let him answer the question through the medium of conventional theology.

But despite all this welter of big figures, there is an almost bewildering conservatism about the book so soon as it touches the borderland sciences. Psychoanalysis, telepathy, gland-treatment, survival of personality after death, complexes, hysteria, and so on and on through a mighty line of bad eminences,—the triplex author calmly says: there is nothing to it. Behaviorism, American species, is put down as "manifestly absurd." The treatment of sex is the embodiment of sanity and dignity. And then in the very last chapter, the three-in-one author grows positively Victorian. He bids us be kind to our neighbors, only to tell us a little later to have a heart for any fate, still achieving, still pursuing, we must learn to labor and get our share or, due to the tricks of *Homo militans*, we as individuals will certain-

ly become in time as extinct as the auk.

I have not read all this book; no other one man is going to read it all (though you can't tell about women). But I have read more than enough of it to write an honest review of it. To the end that I may not personally become extinct, I am mailing out with this review a renewal of my dues to the Modern Language Association, and a check for \$3 for a copy of John Cowper Powys's *The Meaning of Culture*.

ALLEN W. PORTERFIELD.

The Week's Reading

"ENDING IN EARNEST" by Rebecca West (Doubleday, Doran \$2.50). These papers were written for *The Bookman*, as *Letters from Abroad*, hence their casual and episodic nature, and the frequency with which they are addressed particularly to an American audience. No one writes this brilliant chat, often wise and always astute and charming, as well as Rebecca West. In dealing with personalities she is often as sharp as the traffic will bear, and for that reason is

The Outlook's Guide to the

Most Discussed Books

This list of ten best-selling books is compiled from reports sent to the Outlook each week by wire from the following representative bookshops:

BRENTANO'S, New York; SCRANTONS, INC., Rochester; KORNER & WOOD, Cleveland; SCRUGGS, VANDERVOORT & BARNEY, St. Louis; KENDRICK BELLAMY CO., Denver; TEOLIN PILOT CO., Houston; PAUL ELDER & Co., San Francisco; NORMAN REMINGTON CO., Baltimore; EMERY BIRD THAYER, Kansas City; MILLER'S BOOK STORE, Atlanta; BULLOCK'S, Los Angeles; STEWART KIDD, Cincinnati; J. K. GILL, Co., Portland, Oregon; JOHN WANAMAKER, Philadelphia; THE OLD CORNER BOOK STORE INC., Boston, Massachusetts.

Fiction

Back Street, by Fannie Hurst: Cosmopolitan. Striking characterizations and heavy sob-stuff in a dramatic story of a rich man's faithful mistress. Reviewed January 28.

Up the Ladder of Gold, by E. Phillips Oppenheim: Little Brown. Warren Rand, the richest man in the world, tries to secure international peace by buying gold. Reviewed January 7.

Mackerel Sky, by Helen Ashton: Doubleday Doran. The author of *Dr. Serocold* chronicles the trials of young love and matrimonial adjustment under a changing sky. Reviewed January 7.

Sunset Pass, by Zane Grey: Harpers. The latest novel from the tireless pen of an old favorite. Brief review in the next issue.

Portrait by Caroline, by Sylvia Thompson: Little Brown. A deft English novel of manners and class which relates the tale of a restless wife. Reviewed January 7.

Non-Fiction

Little America, by Richard E. Byrd: Putnam. A complete account of the Antarctic Expedition. Reviewed in issue of December 24.

The Story of San Michele, by Axel Munthe: Dutton. Picturesque autobiography of a famous doctor, now available in a new edition with special preface by the author. Reviewed May 21.

Education of a Princess, by Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia: Viking Press. The autobiography of the first cousin to Russia's last Czar. Reviewed January 7.

Lives of a Bengal Lancer, by F. Yeats-Brown: Viking Press. An exciting account of a many-sided life in India. Reviewed November 5.

Mary Baker Eddy, by Lyman P. Powell: Macmillan. A faithful and authentic life of the well known religious leader. Reviewed November 19.

at her best on the general subjects of art and letters where there is little opportunity for malice. Although frequently spoken of as a controversialist and critic, Rebecca West seems, to this reviewer, to be occupied rather with the play of ideas than with the war of opinions. She is less a critic than an imaginative stylist, her criticisms being always adjusted to the needs of her creations. She appears unwilling to follow her profoundest thoughts as far as they would go, preferring to stop at half the truth and use that point as her spring-board. For this reason the determinedly serious-minded find her flippant where the rest of us find her stimulating. While Miss West was writing for *The Bookman*, the Humanist-anti-Humanist row was at its loudest. This quarrel could not hope to escape the true American "personal touch," and Miss West became somewhat involved and felt constrained to withdraw from *The Bookman*—(we should quit the Outlook at least every other week if we had to agree with every statement and approve the turn of every phrase in it)—and her article on the controversy is most interesting. It has been frequently discussed (and frequently misunderstood), and we will not discuss it here beyond saying that Miss West does not know America very well if she thinks that Rousseauism and Humanitarianism are the dead issues here which she believes them to be in England.

"THE Life of Robert Burns" by Catherine Carswell (Harcourt, Brace and Co. \$3.75). This book will not be reviewed at length here as it is the subject of Rebecca West's article in this issue. However, your reviewer wishes to recommend it to lovers of biography and of good writing. It is not only a sound biography and one sympathetic in the deepest sense, but it is also a brilliant picture of the state of society in Scotland in Burns' time, and a profoundly intelligent presentation of Scot character. Burns can be loved blindly. He can be understood only when one sees him as springing from this people, humane, pious and frankly lusty, among whom any ploughman might be as proud of his lineage as any laird, as involved in metaphysics as any dominie.

"OKLAHOMA TOWN" by George Milburn (Harcourt, Brace and Co. \$2). This Oklahoma town is presented in a manner made familiar, at least so far as contemporary readers are concerned, by Masters in the Spoon River Anthology, and in a style perfected by Ernest Hemingway. Here we have not characters and incidents of village life

*NOTE: A scientist in West Virginia University read this review and claims that "life" is not "something," etc. Arguing with a scientist is like arguing with a traffic-policeman.