

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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### Education for Authors

**P**UBLICLY, everyone commends education; privately, many condemn it. "He was ruined by a formal education" is a familiar statement; as familiar as "Thanks to escaping a formal education, he became a writer of real originality."

There is truth in both remarks, but not the truth which the speakers, indulging in the supercilious pose of the emancipated mind, believed they were uttering. Education is the most pervasive and lasting of influences, especially a bad education, and if it gives the mind rules without power of thinking it handcuffs the intellect to convention. And it is equally true that the naturally fine mind which has to educate itself, and *does* so, is unbeatable. So is the castaway on the desert island who survives by learning to subsist on his own resources; but we do not recommend desert islands as a universal experience.

When education is no more than discipline—and the idea that it should be just discipline lurks in many a teacher's consciousness—it crushes the buds of originality as fast as they put out, but to grow undisciplined minds is not the answer to the problem. It is a hundred times easier to point out men and women of distinction who have suffered for lack of a formal education than the reverse.

This country is a classic example, for almost since the founding of the republic we have had a more or less—chiefly less—effective elementary education, and abundant instances where self-education was the only way to get beyond it. The tragedies and mishaps of American literature are more often due to this self-education than to the formalities of rigorous discipline.

The New Englanders in literature were perhaps miseducated for the profession of *belles lettres*. If Emerson had been more conscious in the Harvard of his day of anything æsthetical that was not at the same time mathematical or moral, the result—for his poetry especially—might have been excellent. And one feels that Longfellow's severe training in linguistics over-developed the imitative already in his nature.

The real illumination comes when one turns to the self-educated Americans who also were men of genius—the tragic Poe, for example, with his gift for critical penetration and his quivering sense of beauty. His stories are marred by extravagances, his poetry breaks from its best into defects of taste, his mind, in spite of its keen sense of form, cannot control its richness, and is always pursuing half philosophies, and taking refuge in assumptions of range and profundity. It is inconceivable that more formal education would have tamed his genius; certain that it would have made him less tawdry at his worst moments, more free at his best.

And that other American genius of the first rank, Walt Whitman—the most sympathetic critic must admit the vagaries of his philosophy, the unnecessary eccentricities of his technique, the cocksureness of his opinion, the lack of order and the lack of taste in his efforts whenever the flame of his genius wavered. Surely a little more formal education would not have hurt Walt. Perhaps it would not have carried his poetry higher, but it would have salvaged much waste if only by giving him more power of detachment from his obsessive ego.

Education, as we practise it, is a very imper-

### Winter Bondage

(New England)

By HARRIET SAMPSON

**T**HE evening falters by the hemlock hedge  
Watching beneath the bough the amber sun  
Loitering in grandeur, for the day is done  
In winter when it reaches the granite ledge  
That tops the sloping pasture. In a wedge  
One faded sunbeam with a streaky run  
Brushes the stubble. It has scarce begun  
When darkness crawls upon it through the sedge.

"Come, daughter," mother warns, "too late to sew.  
You'll try your eyes. The work will always keep."  
And so I poke the fire to make it glow,  
And hear my father, through with milking, say,  
"The moon is full. A real good night to sleep."  
O Lord! What use this day? What use this day?

### This Week

A Challenge to Utopians. By *Pitirim Sorokin*.

Experiences. By *Briton Hadden*.

What Is Style? By *Henry Seidel Canby*.

Ravin's of Piute Poet Poe. By *C. L. Edson*.

### Next Week, and Later

Huxley's "Those Barren Leaves." Reviewed by *T. K. Whipple*.

The New International Encyclopædia Supplement. Reviewed by *Lincoln MacVeagh*.

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fect instrument, and it is patent that a man can be educated in the current sense without knowing as much of the true values of life as an uneducated Arab. But that may mean only an immunity to all but the most utilitarian effects of education, or an education badly administered. In any case, it is easy to cite many American authors of the last twenty years who did not know enough to get the best from their talents, did not know how to control their thinking, or handle their facts. The American novelist and short story writer especially has displayed a frequent lack of education. He has depended upon natural aptitude and a mechanical technique. No one who reads widely in current American books can fail to note the results. Many well-known writers are makers of books, and yet they do not know their own trade. They do not know literature one-quarter as well as a lawyer must know law. They are trying to express their thoughts for the benefit of others with a half-training in thinking. Education never made a genius—but without it many a genius would have been only a freak or a sensation.

### American Sagas

By T. K. WHIPPLE

**A**S everyone knows, the latest fad of the intelligentsia is discovering the United States. This is the cult of which Mr. Gilbert Seldes is high priest. He and his acolytes wax analytic and æsthetic over Charlie Chaplin, Fanny Brice, Krazy Kat, Ring Lardner, and "How Come You Do Me Like You Do Do Do." And, indeed, why not? The rest of us may be amused at the delighted surprise with which recent graduates of Harvard "discover" what everyone else has been familiar with since earliest childhood—but the fact remains that Mr. Seldes has secured for our popular arts a recognition that they never had before. Already jazz has invaded Carnegie Hall, and before long everyone may be attending recitals not of Lithuanian, Swedish, and Bantu folk-songs only, but of American as well. The negro spirituals have arrived; why not the ballads of cowboys, lumberjacks, and Kentucky mountaineers?

While the boom is on, I wish to put in a word for the tales of the American folk. In Paris, according to hearsay, one of the more recent literary finds is James Oliver Curwood, whose art is discussed at length in periodicals and reviews. My own nominee, however, for the position of American *tusitala* is not Mr. Curwood, but Zane Grey.\* Mr. Grey has received justice only from his millions of devoted readers—and some of them, I fear, have been shamefaced in their enthusiasm. The critics and reviewers have been persistently upstage in their treatment of Mr. Grey; they have lectured him for lacking qualities which there was no reason for him to possess, and have ignored most of the qualities in which he is conspicuous. The Boston *Transcript* complains that "he does not ask his readers to think for themselves"; Mr. Burton Rascoe asks sorrowfully: "Do Mr. Grey's readers believe in the existence of such people as Mr. Grey depicts; do they accept the code of conduct implicit in Mr. Grey's novels?"

One thing at least is clear: Mr. Grey himself emphatically believes in the truthfulness of his record. Above all else he prides himself upon his accuracy as a historian. In the foreword to "To the Last Man" he says: "My long labors have been devoted to making stories resemble the times they depict. I have loved the West for its vastness, its contrast, its beauty and color and life, for its wildness and violence, and for the fact that I have seen how it developed great men and women who died unknown and unsung." And he asks: "How can the truth be told about the pioneering of the West if the struggle, the fight, the blood be left out? How can a novel be stirring and thrilling, as were those times, unless it be full of sensation?" One must admire and be thankful for Mr. Grey's faith in his own veracity, but to share it is impossible. Zane Grey should never be considered as a realist. To Mr. Rascoe's questions, I can answer only for one reader; but I should say that I no more believe in the existence of such people as Mr. Grey's than I believe in the existence of the shepherds of Theocritus; I no more accept the code of conduct implicit in Mr. Grey's novels than I do the code of conduct implicit in Congreve's comedies. At the very start I grant that Mr. Grey does not portray the world as I know it, that he is not an expert psychologist, that his is no

\*Mr. Grey's most recent book is the just published "The Thundering Herd." New York: Harper and Bros. 1925. \$2.



refined art in the subtle use of words—that in competition with Henry James, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Laurence Sterne, he is nowhere.

But what of it? There is no reason for comparing him with anyone, unless perhaps with competitors in his own *genre*. If he must be classified, however, let it be with the authors of "Beowulf" and of the Icelandic sagas. Mr. Grey's work is a primitive epic, and has the characteristics of other primitive epics. His art is archaic, with the traits of all archaic art. His style, for example, has the stiffness which comes from an imperfect mastery of the medium. It lacks fluency and facility; behind it always we feel a pressure towards expression, a striving for a freer and easier utterance. Herein lies much of the charm of all early art—in that the technique lags somewhat behind the impulse. On the whole, it is preferable to the later condition, when the technique is matured and the impulse meagre. Mr. Grey's style has also the stiffness of traditional and conventional forms; his writing is encrusted with set phrases which may be called epic formulae, or, if you insist, *clichés*. These familiar locutions he uses as if they were new, to him at least—as if they were happy discoveries of his own. So behind all his impeded utterance there makes itself felt an effort towards truth of expression, truth, that is, to his own vision, for we must never ask of him truth to the actual world as we know it.

That Zane Grey has narrative power no one has denied, but not everyone is pleased with his type of story. To a reader whose taste has been formed on Howells and Bennett, Mr. Grey's tales seem somewhat strong. They are, of course, sensational melodrama, as "improbable" as plays by Elizabethan dramatists. They roar along over the mightiest stage that the author has been able to contrive for them. They tell of battle and bloodshed, of desperate pursuits and hair-breadth escapes, of mortal feuds and murder and sudden death, of adventures in which life is constantly the stake. These stories move on the grand scale; they are lavish in primitive, epic events. Mr. Grey does not dodge big scenes and crises, in which plot and passion come to a head; he has distinct liking for intense situations, and he has the power which Stevenson so admired of projecting these high moments in memorable pictures. In "Riders of the Purple Sage," when Lassiter throws his guns on the Mormon band and saves the Gentile youth, when Venters from his hiding place in the mysterious canyon watches the robbers ride through the waterfall, when at last Lassiter rolls the stone which crushes his pursuers and forever shuts the outlet from Surprise Valley—these are scenes which linger in the mind. Very different obviously is this art from Mrs. Wharton's when she condenses the tragedy of three lives into the breaking of a pickle-dish, and from Sinclair Lewis's as he takes Babbitt through a typical day at the office—but what of that? Though melodrama is not in style at the moment, the human taste for tremendous happenings is not likely to die for some centuries yet. Mr. Grey has the courage of his innocence in tackling difficulties which cautious realists know enough to avoid.

And no more than in his stories does he dodge the heroic in his characters. His people are all larger than life-size. They may be called cow-punchers, prospectors, ranchers, rangers, rustlers, highwaymen, but they are akin to Sigurd, Beowulf, and Robin Hood. Just at present, heroism, of all literary *motifs*, happens to be the most unfashionable, and disillusionment is all the cry. But it is tenable surely that the heroic is not incompatible with literary merit, and perhaps even that a naïve belief in human greatness is a positive asset to literature. Certainly the writings in the past which humanity has singled out for special favor most of them have this element, notoriously strong in all early literature.

Of these heroic figures Mr. Grey's portrayal is crude and roughewn. Their speech is often far from the talk of actual men and women; we are as much—and as little—conscious of the writer's working in a literary convention as when we read a play in blank verse. His characterization has no subtlety or finesse; but, like his style, it is true—again, of course, I mean true to the author's own conception. That conception of human nature is a simple one; he sees it as a battle of passions with one another and with the will, a struggle of love and hate, of remorse and revenge, of blood-lust, honor, friendship, anger, grief—all on a grand scale and all incalculable and mysterious. The people themselves are amazed and incredulous at what they find in their

own souls. A good illustration of Mr. Grey's psychological analysis is the following from "The Lone Star Ranger":

Then came realization. . . . He was the gunman, the gun-thrasher, the gun-fighter, passionate and terrible. His father's blood, that dark and fierce strain, his mother's spirit, that strong and unquenchable spirit of the surviving pioneer—these had been in him; and the killings, one after another, the wild and haunted years, had made him, absolutely in spite of his will, the gunman. He realized it now, bitterly, hopelessly. The thing he had intelligence enough to hate he had become. At last he shuddered under the driving, ruthless, inhuman blood-lust of the gunman.

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In Zane Grey's conception of human nature, nothing is more curious than his view of sex. In "Riders of the Purple Sage," a young man and a girl live alone together for weeks in a secret canyon; in "The Lone Star Ranger," the hero rescues an innocent girl from a gang of bandits and roams about Texas with her for a long time—and all as harmlessly as in "The Faerie Queene" Una and the Red Cross Knight go traveling together. Nothing shows more clearly how far away Mr. Grey's world is from actuality; his Texas is not in the Union but in fairyland. His heroes, to be sure, have occasional fierce struggles with their "baser natures"—a difficulty, by the way, from which his heroines are exempt. Not all his women, however, are altogether pure; from time to time a seductress crosses the path of the hero, who usually regards her with indifference. These women, incidentally, are often among the best-drawn of Mr. Grey's characters. In his treatment of sex as in other respects Mr. Grey is simple and naïve; his conventions are as remote as those of the mediæval Courts of Love, and must be taken for granted along with the other assumptions of his imaginary world.

Mr. Grey's heroic ideal looks a little strange in the twentieth century. It is; it belongs more naturally to the sixth century; it is the brutal ideal of the barbarian, of the Anglo-Saxons before they left their continental homes. Like them, Mr. Grey cares above all things for physical strength, for prowess in battle and expertness with weapons, for courage and fortitude and strength of will, for ability to control oneself and others. Where the Anglo-Saxons emphasized loyalty in thegn and generosity in earl, Mr. Grey more democratically insists on loyalty and generosity between friends, and on independence and self-reliance. And to this code he adds an element which is no doubt a kind of residuum from Christianity: he likes to see hatred and desire for vengeance supplanted by forgiveness and love. The process of purification or redemption is a favorite theme of his; sometimes it is brought about by the influence of a noble and unselfish man or by the love of a pure and innocent girl, but more often by the cleansing effect of nature in the rough. If one is to take Mr. Grey's ethics at all seriously, one must of course find fault with them; although such morals are better, no doubt, than those inculcated by Benjamin Franklin or Mr. Ben Hecht, still one would no more care to have one's sons adopt Mr. Grey's *beau idéal* than one would care to have one's sons adopt, say, the "Saga of Burnt Njal" as a program of life. Without wishing, however, to return to the human ideals of the Bronze Age, we may insist that a story-teller's merit is not dependent on the validity of the lessons which he teaches. There is enough of the savage in most of us so that we can respond imaginatively to Mr. Grey, without our all rushing off to the wilds to be made men of.

Not that Mr. Grey regards nature as always a beneficent force. Rather, he portrays it as an acid test of those elemental traits of character which he admires. It kills off the weaklings, and among the strong it makes the bad worse as the good better. Nature to him is somewhat as God is to a Calvinist—ruthlessly favoring the elect and damning the damned. Mr. Grey sees in nature the great primal force which moulds human lives. Not even Thomas Hardy lays more stress on the effect of natural environment. The stories themselves are subsidiary to the background: "My inspiration to write," says Mr. Grey, "has always come from nature. Character and action are subordinate to setting." This setting of desert, forest, mountain, and canyon, great cliffs and endless plains, has been made familiar to us all by the movies if not by travel; but as seen through Mr. Grey's marveling and enhancing eyes it all takes on a fresh and unreal greatness and wonder. For his descriptive power is as generally

recognized as his narrative skill; indeed, it would be hard for any one so overflowing with zest and with almost religious adoration to fail in description. Mr. Grey's faculty of wonder, his sense of mystery, is strong; it shows itself in his feeling for the strangeness of human personality and also more outwardly in the air of strangeness with which he invests his lonely wanderers or outlaws who from time to time appear out of the unknown—but most of all it shows itself in his feeling for the marvelous in nature. So far as he indicates a religion, it is a form of nature-worship; when he is face to face with the more grandiose aspects of the earth's surface, he feels himself in the presence of God.

Mr. Grey differs from many nature-lovers, that is to say, in that his fervor is altogether genuine. His enthusiasm is not assumed because it is the proper thing; on the contrary, he feels much more than he can manage to express. And here, I think, we come to the secret of his superiority to most of his contemporaries and competitors: he is sincere and thoroughly in earnest. He really cares, he gets excited about what he is writing. His books have not the look of hackwork. It is true that they are uneven, that he has not been immune to the influences of his own popularity and of the movies, that he must often have worked hastily and carelessly—but never falsely. He is genuine and true to himself, an artist after his fashion. Furthermore, he possesses a powerful imagination, of the myth-making type which glorifies and enlarges all that it touches, and in his best work, such as "Riders of the Purple Sage," he uses his imagination to the utmost. The whole story, the situations and people and settings, are fully living in his mind, and he gets them into words as best he can. Of course he has an amazing, an incredible simplicity and unsophistication of mind, a childlike naïveté—but that is what makes him what he is, a fashioner of heroic myths. At the present moment, when the primitive is all the vogue in the arts, and Viennese and Parisian sculptors are doing their best to be archaic, in Zane Grey we have a real, not a would-be, primitive miraculously dropped among us; yet we accord him no recognition at all—except an astounding popularity.

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If, that is, his popularity is astounding, if is not rather but what should be expected. Most Americans seem to have a strongly ingrained hankering for the primitive and a good deal of the childlike quality of mind, possibly as an inheritance from our three centuries of pioneering. Whenever a holiday comes along, we reproduce primitive conditions and play at pioneering as much as possible. The age of the pioneers, especially in the West, is taking on more and more the air of an heroic and mythic period. The glorification of the red-blooded he-man, the pioneer ideal, is a national trait, and even those who have learned better cannot rid themselves of a sneaking respect for the brute in their hearts. If you doubt the simplicity and innocence of Americans, watch their reactions to Michael Arlen and Jean Cocteau and their forlorn efforts to imitate Ronald Firbank and to understand and admire "Ulysses." They are like stray Vandals wandering bewildered through the streets of Byzantium. Only the pure in heart could be so impressed by decay and corruption, just as only a man from an Iowa village could have written "The Blind Bow-Boy." No, the American forte is not sophisticated disillusion—it is much more likely to be something on the order of Zane Grey's work. Of course every one is at liberty not to like such literature, which belongs by right to the infancy of the race, and to disagree with Mr. Grey's view of the world. Indeed, if one asks of books a valid criticism of life as we experience it, Mr. Grey has little to offer. But let us look at him for what he is, rather than what he is not. Then, whether we happen to care for his work or not, I think we must grant him a certain merit in his own way. We turn to him not for insight into human nature and human problems nor for refinements of art, but simply for crude epic stories, as we might to an old Norse skald, maker of the sagas of the folk.

R. H. Mottram has just been awarded the Hawthornden Prize of £100 for his first novel, "The Spanish Farm," which was published last fall. The Hawthornden Prize was established in England in 1919 by Miss Alice Warrander and is awarded each year for the best imaginative work by a writer under forty years of age.