

## Eccentric Souls

CONFLICTS WITH OBLIVION. By WILBUR CORTEZ ABBOTT. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1924. \$4.00.

Reviewed by GAMALIEL BRADFORD

WITH the interest in biography so widespread as it is at present, it would seem that there should be an extensive and eager public for these brilliant studies of eccentric souls. It is true that, as the author frankly admits in one instance, there is no very direct connection with immediate problems, but as he justly urges there is constant illustration of "the most fundamental of all problems, human nature itself."

All the figures studied are set solidly and substantially in their background. Professor Abbott's erudition is not only extensive and thorough, it is manageable, malleable, comes at call, without intruding itself unseasonably. You feel that he is equally and firmly at home in the England of the Tudors and of the Restoration and in the England of the nineteenth century. And his familiarity with the darker and more obscure corners of American Colonial history makes itself manifest as soon as he takes up comparatively shadowy personages like Governor Wentworth and Colonel Scott. In one or two cases it may perhaps be said that the background is a little too extensive for the ordinary reader, who is chiefly interested in drama and passion and does not care for facts or general principles. But the intelligent and judicious will not complain.

Through all this group of extremely varied characters runs a thread of unity, which is suggested in the title of the book and most interestingly developed in the preface. All of them alike were engaged in a picturesque and dauntless struggle with oblivion, somehow, somewhere to establish their names and their achievements in the memory of men, with a color and a resonance that should not die. They were not all of them very particular as to the quality of their glory, but the quantity of it appealed to them vastly, and seemed to be the thing of greatest importance in the world. And it is most fascinating to follow the shifting surge and turmoil with which in these remote or typical examples the bubbles of reputation rise up and swell and fade away.

There is Pepys, who was a great, a hard-working, a faithful public servant, and he is universally remembered as a dissolute man of the world who bared a seamy soul to the world's haggard curiosity. There is Disraeli, who glittered and sparkled, and made his contemporaries wonder, but cannot hold posterity. There is Cromwell, who seems to have made his name eternal, because he identified himself with a cause which became permanently interwoven with the whole life of his country, and there is Sir John Wentworth, who is forgotten because he identified himself with a cause that went down to deserved or undeserved defeat. There is that strange villain, Colonel Blood, burrowing in all the hideous secrets of a hideous time, sure to be found wherever crime and horror were, likely to have been forgotten altogether except for the one picturesque adventure which has united his name forever with the Tower of London and the crown of England. There is Colonel Scott, who also ran an obscure and infamous career, like Blood, and then turned up with a historical achievement, which may not have been his own at all, but just in time to settle a great international controversy two hundred years after his death. All of them, and some in very startling ways, fought the old battle with oblivion, which has always engaged the keenest efforts of humanity and always will.

And I could have wished that Professor Abbott might have elucidated a little more the effect of modern conditions on this eternal struggle. One of the greatest inventions of the nineteenth century was publicity, and the importance of the many-tongued murmur of publicity as an agent in the conflict with oblivion can hardly be over-rated.

The lesson of it all would seem to be that it is much better to live and die in simple, undistinguished, domestic content, or discontent. Yet surely every one of us knows something of what Professor Abbott justly calls the great tragedy, "that one shall ask more of life than life can give." And every one of us, good and bad, young and old, rich and poor, every one of us does detest oblivion.

## The BOWLING GREEN

### Between Two Chapters

BETWEEN two chapters of a task that completely absorbed him, a dream more real than any reality, a workman paused, and came (as they say) to life.

Every day (he said to himself) is an artistic whole: it comes out of nothing and goes back to nothing, like a perfect story. Even if empty, futile, or absurd, it is an orb of transaction. It is (you can't escape the phrase) rounded by a sleep. What is that word they have for people who are blundering somewhere too close to facts? Yes, morbid.

Every day, could he control his impatience, offers the workman the analogies he needs. Loneliness, self-disgust, postponement, mirth. Though he added "mirth" as an afterthought: for he suddenly realized that there are days when you don't laugh. Of course one can always laugh on a moment's notice; but he was thinking of the sudden whoops of unpremeditated cheer. Such mirth as Pan and Cupid utter, sitting on a stump, when they think of the solemn rotarians on Olympus. These dejected them from the mountain-top because they were too mischievous for heaven and kept spilling their ambrosia on the table-cloth. (Bibs had not been invented.) So, with no place in heaven they had to suffer on earth as though they were men. They found it more fun: no wonder they laugh.

The workman saw it was difficult to keep his mind from going back to that crystalline abyss between the chapters. Yet he felt it wrong to go back at that moment: for the task was one in which reason, calculation, sense, could play little part. It had to be dreamed. Every man is sometimes interrupted in the course of his doings by a fit of brooding. But think of a task that is entirely brooding. He refreshed himself by adhering to that thought that every day offers the analogies one needs.

This workman had had, in one day, not less than six adventures. (1) A friendly parson had told him that another parson had told him "Every preacher should read 'Typhoon'." This turned on a bulb in the workman's mind: a whole chain of colored bulbs, as on a Christmas tree. (If one goes out they all go dark). Yes indeed: every preacher ought to read "Typhoon": he had never thought of it as theological fable before. But it is, now isn't it? (2) He was savage to a dog that had erred. This was a rambling dog of less than no reputation who had, at a critical passage of the workman's reverie, interrupted him by a gross misbehavior—which was not, perhaps, its "fault." (Imagine talking of a dog's "fault." I can hear Pan cackling on his stump). He chastised the poor brute, thrust it out into a very cold night. Soon he was troubled and went on the porch to whistle. But there was no answer. This set him reading Meredith: he remembered the poem about thrashing a dog. It is not a well-known poem, for Meredith marred it by stilted lingo. He thrashed the English language as well as the dog. He was not so good, maybe, at the simpler moralizings. His extraordinary jargon required subtler themes for its felicity. Take "Lord Ormont and His Aminta": magnificent passages, but how perilously close to Ouida is the general flavor.

(3) He saw a cat come up from the cellar and find unexpected scraps of fish in her plate. She flung herself upon them with a passion that revived his admiration of life. She crouched (her little propped elbows showing the lighter fur) purring and guzzling in ecstasy. He imagined how a tiger would look at a similar feast. (4) A child four years old, wearing only her shirt, was standing at a basin gravely washing her hands. He told her that a letter had come for her; that when she was ready for bed it would be read to her. She gave him brown eyes of solemn excitement. "And then I can have it?" she said. (5) He was chopping a dead tree, by a frozen pond. The sharp axe shore clean patterny slants into the pink wood. "She must have some of the noble flavor of wood-cutting," he said, thinking of someone in the task he was working on. "I've dipped her too far in darkness." (6) He woke from a dream. I will tell you the dream.

There was a tropical sand-beach; and for some unknown reason it was imperative that he and another man should swim, at once, to the town that could be seen a mile or so away across the water. The town was on cliffs that were lilac against sunset; a lighthouse winked jewel-pale in the honey-colored light. Others were on the beach, hastening them on. They had run down to look for a row-boat, which wasn't there. They must swim. There was no inkling as to the nature of the danger, but there was instant necessity. They waded into the water, which was shallow so that they had to wade a long way, the other man a little ahead. The sandy bottom was heavy and sticky, the water in that ruddy light seemed thick and viscid. It was full of strange weeds, ferns, clinging sponges of vegetation; there was a feeling of crabs. At last the water was deep enough for swimming, but as they threw themselves forward for the struggle it seemed like liquid glue. They toiled and threshed in that warm slow element, like flies in molten amber; the level sun gilded them with mocking light, the distant cliffs deepened to violet, night was onward. The other man drew slowly, slowly ahead. It was impossible, it couldn't be done, it ended.

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Among the thousand haunting analogies of every day, how is the workman to choose those which will minister to his job? Well, that is his affair. Reasoning can help little. He ensues that "selected proportioned illusion of life" of which Walter de la Mare spoke in his lecture on *The Supernatural in Fiction*. He cannot compete with life itself in its fecundity. Just as psychic or physical shocks happening to the gravid woman will have their effect on the unborn child, so is it with a writer in travail.

It is a hard doctrine (said the workman, as he timidly returned toward that strange emptiness lying between the ink and the vision) but it seems as though every day is the microcosm. Every day, from toothpaste to toothpaste, is an artistic whole; it offers the fables we need if we have the courage to scan them. There, at the edge of his crystalline abyss he stands waiting the uncalculable bridge of dream: and the work itself must be rounded by a sleep. What was it Anatole France said? "No book is worth writing if you can completely understand it."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Harry Worcester Smith, of Lordvale, Worcester, Mass., has printed, for private circulation, a charming edition of "The Warwick Woodlands," by Frank Forester (Henry William Herbert). Herbert, although born an Englishman, was generally accepted as the greatest writer on American field sports of the Nineteenth Century. As a matter of fact, when one considers the wide range of his writings and the charm of his style, it may be safely said that the present century has produced no one to equal him. His monumental "Horse and Horsemanship of the United States" in two volumes, illustrated by steel portraits and wood engravings by F. O. C. Darley, which was published about the middle of the Nineteenth Century, has never been superseded as an authority in its own field. Besides "The Warwick Woodlands," Frank Forester wrote many other volumes on shooting, fishing, and sport of various kinds. He was also the author of several novels which enjoyed considerable vogue in their day.

In his sporting library at Lordvale Harry Worcester Smith has probably the most complete collection of Frank Forester's books in existence, comprising every edition obtainable. This is the second reprint of "The Warwick Woodlands" for which Mr. Smith is responsible. In 1920 he published the Warwick Valley edition, which was a reprint of *The Warwick Woodlands* as published in 1851 by Stringer and Townsend, the first illustrated edition of the book, which was originally published in 1845.

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Under direction of Professor Robert F. Fuerster and financed by a \$60,000 contribution from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Princeton University has collected in the last two years one of the largest and most exhaustive libraries dealing with the labor problem. It contains 11,500 books, pamphlets and other publications, forming a special section of the university library.



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## Books of Special Interest

### French Etching

A HISTORY OF FRENCH ETCHING.  
By F. L. LEIPNIK. New York: Dodd,  
Mead & Co. 1924. \$12.50.

Reviewed by PAUL J. SACHS  
Fogg Art Museum

AS a work of synthesis this handsome, richly illustrated volume of 190 pages and 106 plates arrests our attention. A careful reading of and testing of its contents will not, in spite of minor errors and occasional inaccuracies, disappoint the reader who comes to it without preconceived notions of what a work on "French Etching" ought to be, or conceivably might be.

The author, although thoroughly familiar with his material and the whole corpus of French Prints, does not aim to do for the French field what those very best of all catalogues produced by the scholars of the British Museum do in such masterly and authoritative fashion for the patient student of Early Italian Engraving, or Primitive German Woodcuts. Nor does Mr. Leipnik pretend to combine the graceful qualities of a sensitive man of letters with the sprightly originality of a print expert, as only Ivins of the Metropolitan Museum has in recent years taught us to expect whenever he sets his learned and fluent pen to paper. None the less this substantial volume is a welcome addition to the growing print literature of our day. Among the works in English it takes its place alongside of those books of reference that are useful to the specialist, even though obviously designed for the amateur and collector.

In the preface we are put on our guard:—"The principal aim of this book is to serve as a guide and assist collectors in the selection and classification of plates." In spite of the inclusion of a few essays on such interesting figures as Callot, Claude Lorraine, Meryon, Legros, Manet, and Forain—in short, the most notable of the French etchers from the Renaissance to our own day,—this is not a volume that most print lovers will care to read from cover to cover at one sitting. It is rather a book to be confidently consulted at the moment of placing some little known treasure into the beloved solander boxes, so that specific data presented clearly and in concise form may be noted on the white mount.

Its well printed pages teem with information about many of the distinctly secondary figures that crowd the stage during four and a quarter centuries. In a word Leipnik aims to do in restricted fashion for France, and for etching only, what Hind in his admirable "Short History of Engraving and Etching" does for all countries in the two fields. Leipnik's book thus serves as a useful supplement to the necessarily too brief accounts of minor French etchers in Hind's standard work.

The book affords ample evidence that a close acquaintance with their works has enabled the author to understand and appreciate the aims of the many artists he lists, but we regret that he fails to make clear to the uninitiated collector by as much as a technical hint how characteristic etched results that he delights in are actually achieved. We stress this because his comments might in many instances apply quite as well to paintings, wood engravings, or lithographs. To be sure, we are warned at the outset. "Some readers," he says, "may expect hints on technical matters. I do not propose to supply them." We venture to believe, however, that in any consideration of the etched work of an artist some account should be taken of his manner of using his lines; some account of drawing and composition; some account of the ideas he stresses. Mr. Leipnik devotes ten pages of his one hundred and ninety to Callot, and says: "It is the problem of light which occupies him constantly." And yet the illustrations of Callot's work can not in them-

selves serve to make clear to the novice the means that Callot employed to produce the effect of light. Even in a non-technical work why not mention the fact that Callot used a series of bitings—the very thing for which he was especially important in the history of etching since he was one of the first, if not the first, to establish the practice.

The inclusion of a carefully prepared bibliography is one of the most useful features of this welcome work of reference.

### A Royal Road

BOYS' OWN ARITHMETIC. By RAYMOND WEEKS. Illustrations by USABAL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1924. \$2.00.

Reviewed by CASSIUS J. KEYSER  
Columbia University

HERE is a book that will gladden the hearts and brighten the eyes of millions of boys if they get a chance to read it. And they will get the chance if their fathers and mothers and their other teachers discover the book and learn what it really is.

It is not a book of arithmetic as commonly understood. It is not one of those dead and deadening things known as textbooks. It is a living bit of literature based on arithmetic. The author makes no claim to being a mathematician, though it is evident that he could have been one had he so elected. Neither is he a professional teacher of arithmetic. He is an eminent professor of romance languages and literature in a great university. But he was a boy once, is now a father of boys, and, though mellowed with the wisdom of experience and years, he is still a boy at heart. It is that rare and amiable genius that enabled Mr. Weeks to write this book of charming stories for the amusement and education of children, causing them to learn while laughing, and to laugh while learning.

He has thus employed a most important principle of humane education. For laughter is not sub-human like eating and sleeping, for example. Laughter is a human thing.

*O Laughter, divine river of joy,  
Thou art the blessed boundary line  
Between the beasts and men.*

Nay, laughter is even divine. Did not high Olympus often ring with the laughter of the gods?

I have said that the book is literature; it is literature based on arithmetic, and the manner fits the matter as neatly as the bark fits the tree. There are more than a hundred short stories. The list of their titles is itself a poem—far more galvanic than the Iliad's famous list of ships. Here are a few samples chosen at random: Race between ten boys and a Cinnamon Bear; Opossum eating persimmons; Red mule Absolum; Smile of a crocodile; Dog scratching off fleas; Cats in Catalonia; Moving power of a hornet; The boy, the bull-dog, and the ice-cream; Standing a fraction on its head; and so on, with the range and diversity of a live boy's manifold world.

In each story there lurks an arithmetical problem; it leaps forth to challenge the boy just as he finishes the reading. What grappling and battling will result, especially if two boys are playing the game together. Fortunately, not all the numbers mentioned in a given story are essential to its problem for else the boy would not have the delight of discriminating what is essential from what is not. Fortunately, the stories are not so arranged that the problems are presented in the order of increasing difficulty, for else the book would not be true to life. Neither would it be true to life if it did not set some problems whose answers are cumbersome and some that seem to be genuine but are not. The book is profusely illustrated by Usabal, who has caught its spirit of humor and fun.

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