

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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Retrospect

THE literary season just ending has been short in achievement but long in diversion and surprise.

A play closely imitating in its dramatic structure the old-fashioned "histories" of Shakespeare, and pungent with ideas upon war and the United States army which would have jailed the authors in 1919, has had a triumphant run. The success of "What Price Glory" was not due to its profanity, nor to the shocks to super patriots which it liberally distributed; it was not due to plot, for the play had none; it was not due to war interest, for that has notoriously been a bad investment for producers and publishers. "What Price Glory" succeeded because in its life boiled over into the raciest dialogue ever heard on the American stage. Text books say that dialogue can never make a drama successful on the stage. Talk made this one.

Another play, Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms," after being approved by the intellectuals, was harried by censorship, and passed on to success as an honest but daring presentation of the real New England of sin and inhibition. "Desire Under the Elms" is about as representative of New England as a gasoline filling station on the Boston post road. Its characters are European peasants, intensely expressive, who remark that the sunset is "purty" to indicate that puritanism has inhibited them, and then give utterance to every emotion, animal, spiritual, vegetable, that animates their rather unpleasant souls. The best parts of the play are the seduction scenes for which censors would have condemned it. These are done with strength, restraint, and honesty. The conclusion is melodrama, and "Desire to Imitate Hauptmann" would be a just title for the whole. It is stagey, interesting melodrama to which literary aspirants have crowded in order to see New England exposed and truth unveiled.

An original and moving novel, "The Constant Nymph," came out of the void from an unknown author and gave the reviewers a bad month. The publishers thought it was naughty and said so in vivacious advertisements. But it was not a naughty book of the sophisticated how-pleasant-to-be-wicked school of the moment. It was a touching tragedy, handled with a fine disregard of convention and made vivid by characters interesting not for their immorality but because, unlike the people around them, their love of music gave them an inexorable ethics of their own. Fortunately, by this time the general reader has read "The Constant Nymph" as well as the highly diverse opinions of its critics.

Mr. Michael Arlen, having studied the success of Mr. Aldous Huxley in mixing sex and intellectualism, decided that bootleg literature could be made more saleable by adding a few ingredients. He kept the sophisticated libertinism, duplicated the wit, then brightened the mixture with a strong dash of social snobbery. The flavor in "These Charming People" was still too rare for the populace, so in "The Green Hat" he increased the sex to make sure of a "kick" and then dosed with sentiment, going back to Ouida and other back stairs writers for the proper note of erring beauty in distress. To create a heroine who was naughty and blasé and witty and wastefully rich, and at the same time noble and honorable and proud in misfortune—that was an achievement to make stock promoters and Florida realtors jealous. Mr. Arlen should be awarded the Barnum medal of brass.

Other incidents of this lean but juicy season have been the first faint signs of the revival of historical

Conrad's "Suspense"

BEGINNING next week, and continuing until September, the *Saturday Review* will publish serially Joseph Conrad's last novel, "Suspense." This was the tale that filled Conrad's mind in his last days; he had written about 80,000 words when he died. Among those who have read the manuscript there is an interesting disagreement as to exactly how the author intended to finish the story. As has already been announced, this magazine will invite readers to join in the argument after "Suspense" has been printed here. The novel breaks off in a passage which is strangely and even thrillingly significant when considered as the last public words from Conrad's hand.

"Suspense," though unfinished, will stand as one of the most vivid and shadowy tapestries from the hand of this great weaver. It returns to the Mediterranean scene and the Napoleonic epoch that strongly occupied the author's imagination in his last inland days. Forms and suggestions never quite brought into the scene stir and shift thrillingly in the story; and in its foreboding paragraphs the sensitive reader will surely discern some of those overtones of human destiny that Conrad was always eloquent to echo. This, from over the horizon, is the last word of the great romancer. The silence that follows a well-loved voice is always charged with special meanings.

This Week



"Punch and Judy." Reviewed by John Peale Bishop.

"The Crazy Fool." Reviewed by Henry Seidel Canby.

"Helen." Reviewed by Naomi Mitchison.

"Seventy Years of Life and Labor." Reviewed by Winthrop D. Lane.

"The English Speaking Nations." Reviewed by the late George Burton Adams.

Next Week, or Later

On Poetry. By Clemence Dane.

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romance in "Drums"; the capture of Mr. Mencken and his *Mercury* by his old enemies, the college professors; the collapse of *vers libre* when it was discovered that much good prose was being spoiled to make bad poetry; the distressing plight of the vendors of indecency who learned at the presentation of Congreve's "Love for Love" that they were children in the game, and vulgar children too; and finally the long expected disappearance of the younger generation, who have turned wisacre, dogmatic, and conservationist. The young in 1925 are all either under twenty or over forty.

Nocturne in a Library

(The Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Poem)

By ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

I

BOOKS on the tables—books along each wall—

Books in proud bindings—torn books in a heap—

Some books content with century-hallowed sleep,
And others that on quiet midnights call
Until they wake me from my dreams, and hale
Me shivering down to listen to their story,
While stars go by in unregarded glory,
And dawn comes up, cold and estranged and pale. . . .

O long-time friends! What other power than you
Can nourish our old passion?—hold us true
To the young faith which once our hearts avowed?
When in the solitude of the evening light
We keep your quiet vigil with the night,
You bring the sun. The day brings back a cloud.

Here where the lamplit room's book-guarded space
Is all the world, and not an alien breath
Enters to this small citadel,—this vast place
Where dead men's voices break the hush of death,—
Here through the night-hours I turn well-loved pages

That in my youth seemed eloquent of a plan
Divined by eager poets, confident sages,
Of the great destiny and high worth of man.
Still the tall spires of their heroic vision
Rise clear before me, as they did of old.
And yet a savage laughter of derision
Jangles now in my heart. The night grows cold.
Soon the first pallor will tremble in the sky—
And then, I know, these midnight dreams will die.

Like the recurrence of an old despair,
Dawn soon will turn the windows slowly grey.
Yesterday whirled our hopes like leaves in the air;
Now comes the chill wind of another day.
Yesterday whirled us in the tempest-boast
Of wars that saved a world for liberty:
Today dawns tragic, now that we have lost
Even our faith we had an enemy.
Today looks in through the blank window-pane
Upon the dreaming dupes that late we were,
And whispers—"What the world endured, was vain;

In vain the high hearts found their sepulchre
By a certain river, or in a certain wood.
I rise, a new day, flushed with future blood!"

Cruel and evil and aloof and cold
This dawn confronts us. For the secret breath
Of war-lords like the ones we knew of old
Today, in council, still are whispering death.
Again they weave their intricacies of hate
Which, on some other dawn, inevitably
Shall be the arbiters of the young men's fate—
Shall be the swift tornado from the sky.
In every land is raised the old device
Of greed and terror, ignorance and hate.
That which we swore should never happen twice
Grows strong,—without our gate, within our gate.
And high-and-low and near-and-far conspire
To heap the rich fuel, and invoke the fire.

II

I will not look at this. . . . I will return
To my calm lamplight; and, as years ago,
Take down the sacred volumes—slowly turn
The nobly singing pages that I know:—

Listen again while the young Shelley's voice
Speaks beautiful madness, better than our truth.
Upon his sunlit peaks, I will rejoice
In the unlimited eager hopes of youth.
Or I will watch the ghost of Goethe move
Through its vast dream-world, where is still a place
For liberal human hope, and generous love,
And the slow-gathering wisdoms of the race—
And live his golden days, and feel his trust
That life is more than wind whirling the dust.

III

Yet—I put down the volumes. . . . There is gone
The god that in these pages once we found.
Too swift, too pitiless has our fate whirled on
That we turn back to that once-holy ground.
No magic can restore, ever again,
The confident promise of those earlier years.
For we have seen the very sunlight wane,
And watched our world go down in blood and tears.
Towers of our spirit crumbled in their pride
When century-carved cathedrals fell in flame.
A hope of ours died where each soldier died;
And we endured all of each nation's shame—
Shame, for the race of which we were a part
That held such treachery in its secret heart.

And so, tonight, seeing the hopes that fail,
Seeing the brute that is a part of man,
I think that Galahad and his Holy Grail
Had best make way for some less gilded plan.
We, lewd and savage cousins of the ape,
May well cease boasting of our family tree,
And with a certain modesty try to shape
A dream more consonant with reality. . . .
—As a poor madman, guessing that his brain
Inherits some defect of fatal blood,
Accepts the curse of an accursed strain,
And halts, midway in his grandiloquent mood—
And for one honest hour, ceases to boast
His lordship of that forest where he is lost!

IV

We, the so-doubtful heroes of today—
We children of all irony, all despair,—
We proud explorers who have missed our way—
We, Icarus-brood hurled headlong through the air,—
For us, what guide and leader can suffice?
What champion or what prophet or what sage?
What herald of an Earthly Paradise?
What golden hero from the Golden Age?
Who—save the ancient, tattered, unhorsed knight—
The renowned windmill-warrior, sore and spent—
That luckless champion who in every fight
Proved his cause lost beyond all argument. . . .
Yes! deck the lean horse! Bring the rusty lance!—
And let Don Quixote ride forth toward romance!

See how he rides, that battered ancient shade—
(Our hero, or else hero have we none—)
Don Quixote, vanquished, and by fate betrayed,
The sorriest scarecrow underneath the sun:
Intent upon an adventure of no ending—
Passionate on a quest without a goal—
To the dull prose of tavern-keepers lending
The flaming poetry of his giddy soul—
Careering through a world that has no place
For the quaint chivalry that the legends told—
Seeing brass basins turn to helms of gold—
Finding the Virgin in the harlot's face:
The dupe of an archaic lying vision—
Time's fool. . . . the ages' jest the oaf's de-
cision. . . .

See how he rides! Indomitable still,
With Roland's horn still echoing in his breast—
Spending the riches of his knightly will
On mirthful lords, and hussies sore-distressed—
And by an hundred unperceived defeats
Proving what his old heart will never learn.
The lesson each ironic day repeats
Is nothing to him; for his hopes still burn
High, steadfast, starry in the heavens ahead;
And giants must be slain, still, in the dark;
If chivalry from this grim world has fled,
He will lift up his pennon, as a mark
For every shaft of pitiless destiny,
Though laughter shake the earth and rock the sky.

O dauntless hero of the rusty mail!
You knew the appalling truth before you died—
Knew that your knighthood was of no avail,
And that the old romancers all had lied.
Yet shall your followers, to the farthest age,

Still saddle the lean horse and grasp the lance,
And seek your dusty highroads of romance,
And your vain wars against the giants wage.
For comedy is in our deepest blood;
We breathe frustration from the very air.
O great Don Quixote! Let your reckless mood
Still be our light, through midnights of despair—
That we, though knowing all that once you knew,
Hopeless and grim, adventure forth with you!

V

When all our troubled errandries are done,
And faiths and lures alike have lost their sway,
And but the subtle body, rotting alone,
Is left to prove the daring of our day;
And if we won, head-high, or if we lost
Is now no matter anywhere; and unswerved
The seasons roll, indifferent to the cost
Of pageantries we ruled or faiths we served—
Then of the passion whose attainment was
So serious business while we lived and sought,
Perhaps some faint and ghostly flush shall pass
Out of a vase or song or tower we wrought,
And rest one moment upon men as blind
As we were, bent on hopes we leave behind.

I trust the young—who, dreaming, shall awake
On sudden Springs and capture, fluttering by,
These gleams of memory—capture them, and make
Old lights to flicker on new wings that fly.
Then such a dreamer shall, in one, bear fruit
Of all that from our million Junes could live,—
From pulses quenched, lips even whose dust is mute,
Hopes whose so mighty part was fugitive.
He shall inherit us; and not yet come
Into the full enthrallment of his day,
Shall feel, within his bosom, stir the bloom
Of all our Springs, a thousand years away—
The moment's mirror of our final light
In infinite dust vanishing down the night.

So out of horrors that could break the heart,
Did the heart keep its bitterer memories,
There desperately survives some rarer part—
Old, meager consolations such as these.
And when the baffled spirit dares to brood
Alone with its own destiny face to face
It finds, in that grim midnight solitude,
Some ancient smouldering altar of the race.
With hard-won fuel we feed the little fire,
Shielding its hesitant flame against the blast—
We, heritors of an unfulfilled desire
That it burn brighter than in the somber past.
At midnight, by the ghostly flame, alone,
We pray,—beside that altar's blood-drenched
stone.

A Gentleman and Journalist

PUNCH AND JUDY AND OTHER ESSAYS.
By MAURICE BARING. New York: Doubleday,
Page & Co. 1924. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JOHN PEALE BISHOP

THE battle of Waterloo was won, we are told, on the playgrounds of Eton: after a hundred years it appears that to no one were the results of that victory more disastrous than to the scholars of Eton. The French recovered from the Napoleonic dream, and, as is their custom, turned the long bitterness of the awakening to intellectual profit. To prove the point one need only cite the name of Stendhal. The English, on the other hand, proceeded after 1815 to cut themselves off from the continent; during the XIXth century very few ideas were imported and a far too many German princelings; and the result was, among other things, that that class to which one has a right to look at least for good taste and a mundane appreciation of the arts, that class whose males are all old Etonians, Harrovians, or Wykehamists, relapsed into a not very noble barbarianism. The English cannot be left alone; their instinct for civilization is too poor. And in the XIXth century the separation from the continent was more complete than it had been at any time since Chaucer.

The XVIIIth century English gentlemen may not always have crossed the channel for fine reasons; all the fashionables, we are told, flocked over to Paris to see Damien tortured for five hours before being dragged fragmentarily in four different directions by horses who left only his torso before the spectators. But at least they went abroad, and being abroad were not impervious to ideas. They

had not yet acquired the conviction that it was up to them personally ("England expects every man to do his duty!") to see that the sun never set on the British Empire. And they were not, on their return, looked on askance if they happened to admit an admiration for, say, the writings of Voltaire. Now, I am told, it is the usual thing in cultivated society to suspect those critics who return from Paris to assert the superiority of French to English painting of having been unduly influenced by the laxity of the Napoleonic Code in regard to pederasty.

It is necessary to speak of the intellectual decadence of the English upper classes in connection with Maurice Baring's "Punch and Judy and Other Essays," because the book is not only addressed to the contemporary cultivated Englishman but is, in almost every paragraph, influenced by his ignorance of the true English tradition and his indifference to continental standards. And it is because one is constantly aware of that fact that Mr. Baring is more attentive to his audience than to the material under his hand, and not because they may or may not have been originally published in journals, that his essays fail for the most part to rise above the level of agreeable journalism.



These essays are a selection from the work of twenty-five years—a small saving from the oblivion of old journals. And the fact that Mr. Baring has wanted to recover some of his boyish pieces from the nothingness to which they belonged strikes, I think, the keynote of his mind. Throughout his life, apparently, he has been animated by one desire: to bring the ordinary cultivated reader to an appreciation of certain works of art, which, for one reason and another, have been largely neglected in England. Doubtless only a gentleman of generous mind could have conceived such an aim; unfortunately, the motley collection of objects which he seeks to restore to admiration are evidence rather of his generosity than of any fine passion for distinguishing between works of the first order and the masterpieces of fifth-rate minds. It is enough for Mr. Baring to discover that a book, a play, or an actress has fallen into neglect for him to set out once more upon his noble literary and theatrical rescue work.

We find him, for instance, intelligently complaining of the reception given by fashionable London to a performance of Dryden's "All for Love," and in the same essay lamenting that Mrs. Patrick Campbell did not see fit to play in Henry Arthur Jones's "Michael and His Lost Angel." "Here again," he says, "was one of those factors that are inseparable from theatrical life, or rather from life. An author writes a masterpiece which demands the qualities of a particular artist for its interpretation. The artist 'cannot stomach it.'" How, in a book where so much space is devoted to Racine, can one speak seriously of a masterpiece by Mr. Jones? It is only among ragpickers that the difference between one piece of rubbish and another becomes important, and it is after all rather futile to interrupt *their* discussions with any talk of Racine.



He returns again and again to Racine, explaining his qualities so as to be understood by those who cannot read French verse, attempting to explain such enlightened compatriots of his as Maurice Hewlett that it is possible to write poetry in the French language. It is not only possible, it has been done.

French poetry exists. We are confronted with the works of Marot, Villon, Du Bellay, Ronsard, Louise Labé, Malherbe, Corneille, Molière, Racine, La Fontaine, André Chénier, Alfred de Vigny, Alfred de Musset, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Béranger, Baudelaire, Gautier, Sully-Prudhomme, Théodore de Banville, Paul Verlaine, Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Henri de Régnier, and Madame de Noailles.

An amazing list and inexplicable unless one happens to remember that Mr. Baring believes that the world is always right in the long run. Even so, it seems to me that a list of French poets which should include both Villon and the Comtesse de Noailles ought to count to two hundred and fifty instead of twenty-five.

Somehow, Mr. Baring seems more than any of those others who are bent, with more scrupulous gaze upon reestablishing some sort of intellectual contact between England and the Continent, a voice crying in the wilderness.