

The Reader's Guide

(Continued from preceding page)

literary world: the witnesses, characters in the novel, appeared in costume, and in London the whole thing took four hours and twenty minutes to get to a verdict of manslaughter. It is like getting a new Dickens novel to read the report, especially when G. B. S. jumps into the party with searching and irreverent questions. The report of the Philadelphia trial was privately printed for the Fellowship there (the Secretary is Mr. J. K. Thompson, 333 Saunders avenue, Philadelphia) and "Scenes from Dickens: Trials, Sketches and Plays," by J. E. Jones, was published by McClelland & Stewart, Toronto.

Now—I wonder what other book, unfinished or not, would keep so many people so excited for so long!

W. F. B., Lausanne, Switzerland, asks for reports in English on the "adepts and magicians of India," saying that he is "not interested in so-called metaphysical works dealing with the subject in a wildly speculative manner," but in genuine scientific information.

I REFERRED the matter to Houdini, who has not only the largest library on record of the literature of illusion, but a remarkable theatrical collection in general, and he tells me not to believe the travellers' tales at all:

All the books I possess give the cold, clear facts that they are simple, clever sleight-of-hand performers, and all the miracles you read about, throwing a rope up and growing full-sized trees, which is a myth that was started by Chaucer. Their snake-charming prowess is remarkable, but nothing abnormal.

I want to go on record, irrespective of how high the authority is, that I claim that the tricks as mentioned above have never been performed, and I am personally willing to give \$5,000 a week to anyone who will perform the throwing-the-rope-up-in-the-air in the open spaces. I have just received a clipping from London where they had brought an Indian adept over to show at the Wembley Exhibition. He was advertised greatly; 800 people bought admission tickets to see the rope-climbing trick, but the money was returned to the mob, the proprietor apologizing for the imported magician's inability to do the trick.

So what can I tell W. F. B. but to read any traveller's report and believe none? It is a land conducive to hallucinations, anyway.

Points of View

Cyril Hume's Novel

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

"Cruel Fellowship" did not bowl me over. I found in it things that seemed very youthful, unduly so, perhaps, and better things that didn't seem distinctive. I could join in a deep compassion for Claude Fishers as a class, but not in Cyril Hume's for an un-gifted individual. At the same time I saw, and should have thought all clear eyes must see, that the novel was quite a performance, and that, following "The Wife of a Centaur," it established Cyril Hume as a young author to watch with respect.

The trouble with the review by George D. Meadows in your issue of June 13th appears to have been that Mr. Meadows got a book of a kind he ought never to get. That kind may be very large with him; it would probably include George Moore, and certainly anything cognizant of any modern idea of the sway of the libido in conduct and personality. He began by reviewing the "jacket," and when a mature reviewer does that, you can diagnose irritation past discernment. And he is mature. "Those of us whose literary categories and prejudices were moulded in the era that ended" when the war began. Mine were. They haven't petrified. "You're getting old," says a character of Shaw's, "and you try to make merit of it, as usual." I do not impute senescence to Mr. Meadows.

"Our apprenticeship to Meredith and James, and even our"—how liberal of us!—"acceptance of Hardy and Gissing, was no preparation for our service of those who now write 'merciless portraits of human souls.'" The "merciless portrait" wamus is not Hume's but the jacketeer's, and Mr. Meadows can be challenged to cite one merciless stroke of Hume's own. Hume was so afraid you would either find him sentimental or infer that he was telling his own story that he adopted the device of the sage, dispassionate commentator, South. But even South is not merciless, and as for Hume, if he were more so, he might be better off.

"The novel reeks of sex." That is, sex reeks; for the novel is utterly decent. "It is the emotional Odyssey of a mediocre and unattractive character"—exactly, and since it is interesting this is just the praise to give it—"from the precocious nastiness of certain scenes in his boyhood"—Who would have supposed that anybody, of any age, today, could so misdirect his indignation over that barn loft episode?—"to . . . an attack of passion compounded of romantic love and rampant sexuality for," Billy, correctly labelled. A hot froth of words at possibly the best thing in the book. "Could Mr. Hume so far have bent the knee to idealism as to let his Fisher pull himself out of this mess?" To idealism? To Mr. Meadows' taste in endings. Was that moulded by Meredith or James?

He praises the dog part, without the least indication that he understands it; he mentions the dog's "rather despicable puppyhood"—dear, dear! then, for he must himself make a pleasant ending for his castigation, he says the dog's death has "something of the sublimity of Greek drama." He admires Hume's "sensitiveness for the moods of nature" and "description in which beauty becomes almost poignant." Of this "there can be no two opinions." Well, here is another. Some of "Cruel Fellowship's" nature stuff is charming, and some is the washiest writing Hume is guilty of.

I perceive that I betray irritation of my own. I know nothing about Mr. Meadows. Of congenial fiction he may be an accomplished and illuminating critic (though "Greek drama" and "poignant" lead me to doubt even that), but if so, why put him in a wretched light, and do a young author injustice, by letting him betray an unreasoning generic antipathy?

HARRY ESTY DOUNCE.

Comfortable English

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

Americans are generally supposed to have a genius for making themselves comfortable. The minority that is more deeply interested in things of the mind sees in this national ability a great spiritual danger. But there are ways in which intellectual people can imitate their practical fellows to advantage, and one way is making it more comfortable to express themselves. There are times when the *sermo vulgaris* is more logical, not to say more colorful than the speech of the educated. Unfortunately the mysterious "genius of the language" does not always influence the educated to recognize the occasional superiority of popular speech; and if the "genius of the language" declines to act, conscientious philologists (who in the days when they were called schoolmasters were satirized for being ignorant of the existence of this "genius") may take it upon themselves to speed up the process of natural evolution.

One of the instances of awkwardness in construction in what is called "correct English" is the locution "different from" which in the *sermo vulgaris* is "different than." When the phrase is made adverbial, in the *sermo vulgaris*, in such expressions as "he does it differently now than he used to" we have a perfectly simple and adequate statement. Whether it arose by analogy with such expressions as "he does it better than he used to" or not is of no importance in this connection. I merely argue that if "than" may be used as a conjunction to express comparison as in the sentence quoted, it is perfectly logical to use it as a conjunction to express contrast, since contrast and comparison are of the same psychological pattern. (We "compare with" and "contrast with," and not merely because of the common etymological element.)

Academic speech says "he does it differently from the way in which he used to"—which is awkward and long; vulgar speech says "he does it differently than he used to"—which is brief and simple. Is there any doubt of the superiority of the vulgar construction?

Another troublesome point in academic English is the absence of a contraction of the negative interrogative form for the first person singular of the verb "to be." We may say "aren't you?" or "isn't he?" but we have no equally short and unaffected way of asking the same question about the first person. The *sermo vulgaris* says "ain't." This comical little word is perhaps the most shocking that vigilant school-teachers have to fight through "Good English" clubs. Now if "ain't" is used for the third person singular, I for one should sympathize with them in their distress, but perhaps on different grounds. I should object to the use of "ain't" in the third person singular for the pedantic reason that it never belonged to it originally and that the form has a contraction of its own. To the use of "ain't" in the first person singular I should have no objection whatever. If we may say "isn't he?" for "is not he?" why should we not say "ain't I?" for "am not I?" The only cogent objection from academic people would be that "it simply isn't done." But the cogent counter-objection is that "it's simple when it is done."

A third difficulty and the last of those I discuss simply as instances of a great number is the capitalizing of the first singular of the personal pronoun. May I quote from a letter printed in Mr. Broun's column in the *New York World*:

" . . . I should like to point out that there is no good reason for writing *i* with a capital letter, unless linguistic conservatism [more accurately, orthographic conservatism] is considered a good reason. In most other modern languages it is the second person that is politely distinguished by a capital. Perhaps the *i* is hateful to Professor Gauss for orthographic rather than phonetic reasons. [This mild irony is provoked by a statement in a book review written by Professor Gauss.] The diphthong *ai* is no more unpleasant in repetition than the vowels used in the other pronouns. But the written *I* standing up in a bold and rather uncompromising position does indeed make it more difficult for us to express ourselves personally with force and without being immodest."

RALPH MARCUS.

New York City.

Washington Irving

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I wish information concerning manuscripts, diaries, journals, or letters written by or about Washington Irving, particularly those which have reference to his life prior to the year 1836. I shall be grateful for any assistance which may be offered me by your readers, and for your kindness if you will print this letter in full.

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THE "FIRST" FINE "KASIDAH." ONE of "The Fifty Books of 1925" selected as fine examples of typography and book making by the American Institute of Graphic Arts for exhibition at the Grolier Club and elsewhere was Burton's "The Kasidah," published in a limited edition of 2,000 copies by Alfred A. Knopf. This has been mentioned frequently as the "first" fine edition of "The Kasidah" printed in this country, which is a mistake.

The first fine edition of Sir Richard F. Burton's "The Kasidah," was published by Thomas Bird Mosher in Portland, Maine, in 1905. It was a medium quarto, limited to 125 copies on Van Gelder paper, 15 on Japanese vellum, and 10 copies on pure vellum parchment. It attracted much attention among lovers of fine typography and soon went out of print.

Mr. Mosher was frequently urged to reprint it, and in 1915 he brought out another edition of 250 copies, on Van Gelder paper, half vellum boards with Arabic design in gold on cover. There were, also, 20 copies on Japanese vellum, which were immediately sold out. This, too, was a medium quarto. A few copies, of this edition, we believe, still remain unsold.

The first "fine" edition of "The Kasidah" was, therefore, published twenty years ago; and the second, ten years later. Both rank high among the beautiful books that Mr. Mosher gave us. Mr. Knopf's edition cannot claim an earlier rank than the third "fine" edition, and is not comparable with either of the Mosher editions.

BOSWELL AND THE REVOLUTION

AN autograph letter that should make a strong appeal to the American Johnsonian collector will be sold at Sotheby's in London on July 1. It is a four-page quarto letter written by James Boswell to Dr. Hugh Blair on February 24, 1777, referring to the American War of Independence. Boswell writes:

"Will you forgive me, My dear Sir, if I take the liberty to expostulate with you a little in the spirit of sincere meekness, and with a sincere candor towards those who think differently from what I do. To enter at large upon the controversy concerning the Rights of the Americans, would be very improper in a friendly letter. It is enough for me to say that although no man in His Majesty's dominions is more attached to the Crown than myself, for I am indeed a Tory in the true sense of the word; and whatever I am, I am with warmth, yet after much study and thought

I am of the opinion that Taxation of our Fellow Subjects in America by the Representatives of the King's Subjects in Britain, whose interests are not blended with theirs, as it is with yours and mine, though we are not represented, is inconsistent with the principles of our constitution of which the Americans are partakers as much as the Irish. I therefore think that the war against them is not only injudicious, but unjust, and that their resistance is not rebellion."

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BOOKSALES IN LONDON

THE active period in American book-sales ends in May; in London, in July. The last two months have been a busy period in London auction rooms, with many Americans in attendance and good prices prevailing. Several important sales are yet to be held. On June 29 and 30, and July 1, an important sale will be held at Sotheby's in which selections from a dozen consignments will go under the hammer. For instance, there are first editions of Ainsworth, Dickens, Jefferies, and Surtees; books with colored plates; sporting books; publications of the Kelmscott Press; original drawings by Thackeray; a choice collection of books on angling; works on ornithology; books once owned by Napoleon; important early

English literature; French illustrated books of the eighteenth century; rare Americana; and a selected portion of the Schlesinger collection of musical manuscripts. There is a fine series of literary letters addressed to Jacob Tonson (1656-1736), publisher and secretary of the Kit-Cat Club, including such famous names as Addison, Congreve, Dryden, Otway, Pope, Steele, Vanburgh, and Waller. An item sure to attract a great deal of attention is a British Legion Album the contents of which was brought together two years ago for disposal in aid of Field-Marshal Earl Haig's appeal for ex-service men. The book was allocated among the subscribers by ballot, and is now offered for sale by the winner. It contains a very remarkable collection of autograph letters, messages, inscriptions and quotations, signed; drawings in watercolor, pen and pencil; and many signatures contributed by some 600 authors, musicians, artists, statesmen, naval and military leaders and other contemporary celebrities, laid down in a folio album of handmade paper and bound in full levant by Zaehnsdorf.

NOTE AND COMMENT

VOL. XXX of the "American Book Prices Current" will be published in July.

It is reported that the Nonesuch Press edition of the writings of William Blake has been oversubscribed.

The manuscripts of the late Oscar Fay Adams, author and lecturer, have been presented to the Boston Public Library by his literary executor.

A unique collection of the first editions of Thomas Love Peacock, comprising twenty-three volumes, said to be one of the best in existence, recently brought £130 at Hodgson's in London.

Recently in the same London sale in which a Kilmarnock Burns brought the record price of £1,750, the remarkably high price of £380 was paid for the rare, suppressed first editions of Lewis Carroll's "Adventures in Wonderland."

The renewal of interest in printing has resulted in a dearth of the literature pertaining to typographic arts, and dealers in second hand books find themselves short in a class of books which for a long time was in little demand and lay neglected on their shelves.

Samuel Butler's first editions present a singularly attractive field to the collector who has a fondness for difficult undertakings. It appears that 200 to 300 copies

was about the average to 1899, and the most cases of the recently were und

Professor W. E. Verity, Bolton, T. notated bibliograph James Howell (1 some fifty titles. H "Epistola HoEliaae," 1645 by Humphrey M tion appeared in 1647, so on until the fifteenth. brought out in this cou printed limited edition by a. flin Company.

The current Caxton Head Catalogue issued by James Tregaskis, Great Russell Street, London, is devoted to English books printed prior to 1640, and to rare works of English literature of later date. Many famous collections are represented, among them Heber, Huth, and Christie-Miller. And here are many rare editions of George Wither, Thomas Fuller, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Andrew Lang, Milton, Shakespeare, Shirley, and Waller.

The highest price, £6,800, ever paid for an American book secured for Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, the rare book dealer of this city, the translation into the Indian language of Richard Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," sold at the Royal Society's recent sale in London. John Eliot, apostle to the Indians in the middle seventeenth century completed the translation of this book and it was published in 1664 at Cambridge, Mass. It is the only known copy and was presented to the Royal Society in 1669 by Governor Winthrop of Connecticut.

The library of the late Frederick K. Trowbridge, banker and member of the Grolier Club, containing about 3,000 volumes, mostly in collector's condition, including a First Folio of Shakespeare and first editions of English authors of three centuries, together with many rare and valuable authors' manuscripts, has just been purchased by the Rosenbach Company of this city for upwards of \$250,000, the most valuable private library to appear in the market this season.

Arthur Swann, manager of the book and print department of the American Art Association, has been elected vice president of the association. His many friends among collectors and in the book trade will be glad to hear of the recognition that has come to Mr. Swann.

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