

that Hamilton Gibbs's is the best talent of the three as a novelist. For Philip Gibbs has always been, and by all signs is likely to remain, a most indifferent novelist; his greatness lies in other directions. And beside the freshness and power of "Soundings," the novels of Cosmo Hamilton are literary shallows on which, here and there, have been erected moralistic breakwaters and lighthouses flashing the Ten Commandments.

Candor without offense and equally without preachment is, on the contrary, characteristic of "Soundings," from Nancy's moment with Curly on the hill, through her question about Bob: "Is it Bob—or just man?" and on to that hour when, being twenty-seven, she says to her father: "Don't you think that any girl ought to be able to admit to herself, perfectly frankly, that one day she would like a child?"

All that candor requires is achieved with an equal emotion, directness, and beauty in regard to Bob, whose chum has just called him a despicable cad and who is under the necessity of confessing, in words of one syllable or thereabouts, the fault of his makeup.

For "Soundings" is an emotional novel. Its very great emotion is conveyed directly, and often dramatically; in its method is a good deal of the ardor of the dangerous ages. It is not "emotion recollected in tranquillity," compressed like a spring. It is not aimed solely at the reader's imagination, but at his nerves—and perhaps at his memories. There are touches here and there reminiscent of A. S. M. Hutchinson—nothing more than a word or the turn of a phrase. It is, one feels, what Mr. Hutchinson ought to have done if he were not emotionally epileptic.

Fairly known to America by the republication last year of his fine war book, "Gun Fodder," Hamilton Gibbs should become much better known by this novel. Actually it is something like his sixth or eighth book, and by no means his first novel; practically, so far as America is concerned, it introduces a new and interesting novelist.

## Brilliance and Briliants

THOSE BARREN LEAVES. By ALDOUS HUXLEY. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1925.

Reviewed by T. K. WHIPPLE

IN "Those Barren Leaves" Mr. Huxley has closely followed the formula he used for "Chrome Yellow." He has shifted the scene from an English to an Italian country-house, but otherwise little is changed. Like its predecessor, the present novel is a record of a house-party, in which is gathered a group of diverting eccentrics who make love in what time they can spare from their perpetual conversation. And, as one of them exclaims, "what a classy conversation!"—ranging over all topics from love and death and art to the Etruscan language and the breeding of mice and rabbits. As in "Chrome Yellow" there was the pathetic episode of the dwarfs, so in "Those Barren Leaves" there is the pathetic episode of the half-witted Miss Elver. And it is all clever and amusing and well written—that is, suavely and somewhat ornately written. The performance is fully up to Mr. Huxley's reputation as a lavish entertainer, brilliant and sparkling; and even if some of the sparklers are not genuine stones, the stage-effect is as good as ever. Mr. Huxley has never assembled a better cast of characters: Mrs. Aldwinkle, rich, romantic, sentimental, and middle-aged; the ingenuous pair of young folk, Irene and Lord Hovenden; Mr. Cardan, the cynical epicure and indefatigable talker; Miss Thriplow the novelist, so much the victim of her own poses that one never learns what, if anything, she is really like; Chelifer, the poet who fled all the amenities in search of "reality," which he thinks he has found in editing *The Rabbit Fanciers' Gazette* and in living at Miss Carruthers's boarding-house in Chelsea; Calamy, whose natural bent toward love-making and whose predilection for mystical contemplation ill agree—and so on. "Those Barren Leaves" is an excellent example of the smart, sophisticated novel, and very post-war.

They like my books (Miss Thriplow is speaking) because they're smart and unexpected and rather paradoxical and cynical and elegantly brutal. They don't see how serious it all is. They don't see the tragedy and the tenderness underneath. You see . . . I'm trying to do something new—a chemical compound of all the categories. Lightness and tragedy and loveliness and wit and fantasy and realism and irony and sentiment all combined. People seem to find it merely amusing, that's all.

Surely Mr. Huxley could not have written that

passage without thinking of his own works. Nor is his protest altogether without justification, for, impossible as it seems, many readers seem to have missed the marked tragic theme in "Antic Hay"—a theme which is still more marked in "Those Barren Leaves." From the beginning Mr. Huxley has shown a fondness for the rôle of the broken-hearted buffoon, and has given us many variations on the theme of "Pagliacci"; in his last two novels, he has depicted a Dance of Death, has grown more and more macabre.

His tragedy might be called the tragedy of incongruity. He is nothing if not ironical. He has a keen eye for inconsistencies of all sorts—for the disagreement between circumstances and human wishes, between facts and human beliefs, between flesh and spirit, between action and purpose, between emotion and intelligence. By a process of disintegration, he reduces human life and human beings to a chaos of warring elements. He likes to blow little bubbles of sentiment in order that he may prick them, especially he likes to mix the categories of the mental and the mechanical. For instance: "The greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. . . . The tragedies of the spirit are mere strummings and posturings on the margin of life, and the spirit itself is only an accidental exuberance, the product of spare vital energy, like the feathers on the head of a hoopoo or the innumerable populations of useless and foredoomed spermatozoa."

Mr. Huxley's tragedy is also the tragedy of freedom. Most of his people are sceptics who have emancipated themselves from belief in anything, have freed themselves from the last scruple, restraint, or prejudice—"religion, patriotism, the moral order, humanitarianism, social reform"—says Chelifer—"we have all of us, I imagine, dropped all those overboard long ago." The result is boredom and futility. Nothing matters; what can one do save seek oblivion in the distraction of the senses, in ever cruder and stronger sensations? Thus in the end Mr. Huxley's is a tragedy of nervous exacerbation, beneath which always beats the refrain of Ecclesiastes. His work is a treatise, in twentieth-century terms *de contemptu mundi*, or perhaps *de contemptu vitae*. But at the end of "Those Barren Leaves" is heard a note which heretofore has been absent from his writing: in the best mediæval manner, Calamy forsakes the world to try to lead the meditative or contemplative life. Perhaps this action is merely another of those vagaries to which Mr. Huxley's characters are given, such as Chelifer's editing of *The Rabbit Fanciers' Gazette*; but I think not. For one thing, throughout the final discussions as to the nature of reality there runs an almost H. G. Wellsian solemnity. For another thing, it is natural that nowadays disillusion should continue to lead where it has always led, to mysticism, and that scepticism should still lose itself finally, as it has always lost itself at last, in an O Altitude. Not, of course, that Mr. Huxley commits himself; but he seems to suggest, with somewhat more seriousness than is usual with him, that in mystical contemplation there might possibly be an escape from the inanity of life.

I do not wish, however, unduly to moralize Mr. Huxley's fantasies. They remain, when all is said, chiefly means of amusement—amusement for those who enjoy sophistication. Mr. Huxley may complain if he likes that his readers don't see the tragedy and the tenderness underneath, and we readily grant that the tragic element is there—but we may retort that it is no more than a spice which adds piquancy to the entertainment, like the doleful melodies which are jazzed in the "blues." It is true that Mr. Huxley's theme is "All is vanity and vexation of spirit"; nevertheless, what matters is less the theme than the treatment of it. To talk of mixing lightness and tragedy and wit and irony and sentiment is all very well—but the result of the mixture turns out to be merely amusing. How could it turn out otherwise? To write tragedy in terms of burlesque is, after all, to write burlesque; to write romance in terms of farce is to write farce; to speak flippantly of pathetic matters, or of anything else, is to be flippant. When Mr. Huxley puts his fantastic puppets through their antics, the spectacle is diverting, but it cannot well be moving; and those of Mr. Cardan's persuasion who say "True, I like to be amused. But I demand from my art the added luxury of being moved," will necessarily care less for Mr. Huxley than for more single-hearted and simple-minded writers who are unsophisticated enough to afford them that luxury.

## A Colorful Autobiography

THE WIND AND THE RAIN. By THOMAS BURKE. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1924. \$2.

Reviewed by WILBUR NEEDHAM

THE author of "Limehouse Nights" has written an unconventional autobiography, without dates and anecdotes, that is very like some of his tales, and no less readable. It begins abruptly in a talk with a young composer over the corners they have turned in life, and it ends suddenly at a point where there are no more corners to turn. Perhaps there will be more, later; but if it is to be, as Burke says, "in the straight," this sequel cannot help but be less interesting.

In a swiftly moving, colorful prose, Burke relates the story of his early days in Limehouse, allowing himself some latitude where the bare facts would rob the narrative of its smoothness; and he is enabled to do this because he has not tied himself down to academic biography. His family was sunk in sordidness, but it always remained clean despite surroundings, and Burke himself appears to have kept his own garments clean. Standing before the shop window of Quong Lee of Limehouse, looking in but not daring to enter, the little boy finds himself at one of the corners of life, and when the silent old Chinaman beckons him to enter and presents him with a stick of ginger and his friendship, Burke turns the corner and enters a little into the life of Limehouse that he was later to know intimately.

But another turn is before him, and for four years he lives in an orphanage, under a restraint and cruelty against which his timid nature does not dare rebel. With the death of the uncle whose life he had shared for a time in a one-room house and in the kitchen of a big house at Greenwich, he finds the orphanage glad to wash its hands of him by renting him out to a "hotel" in Caledonian Road, wherein queer things go on that he only half understands. From this house he is taken by Creegan, a musician friend he had known before, to go into business in London, for Creegan sees what the boy has fallen into; and here begins the business career of a sensitive youth who is always in revolt against his work and his associates. From office boy to clerk, with little adventures on the side, the story takes him; and then he learns to parade newly discovered gods like Keats and Beethoven through his drudging office hours, not comprehending the real significance of what he reads and hears, but groping toward a love of literature and music. He has something to say, and he says it on paper. For a time, there are no results but the usual rejection slips, pencilled by kindly editors. And finally a manuscript accepted.

Of course, the path is not cleared of brambles in this easy fashion. There are more corners to turn; more poverty to face when his temper loses him his job; and only the kindness of a former companion at the orphanage, turning up as a clown in London vaudevilles, saves him from drifting into a vagabondage of the London streets.

At times, Burke writes clearly, a master of English for the moment; but at other times he drops into careless or sensational language all the cheaper because it comes from a man who is by no means to be ranked with hucksters of mediocrity; and, again, he buries an insignificant matter beneath a mass of confused and twisted verbiage, thick as a London fog. But whatever you say of Thomas Burke, you cannot say that he is not human and colorful and interesting.

### The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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## Professor Byron

PH.D.'S. By LEONARD BACON. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1925.

Reviewed by GORDON HALL GEROULD  
Princeton University

HOW subdued to what they have worked in are likely to be the hands of other men than dyers is well illustrated by the volume containing two satiric tales in verse that has just been published by Leonard Bacon. Let me say at once that it is a thoroughly delightful book: a book to chuckle over and to meditate upon afterward. Leonard Bacon is a poet to be reckoned with, and—which is my immediate point—a poet who ought to cast up accounts for himself. Let us not quarrel with him for his whimsicalities, because without them he would be less considerable than his proper self. At the same time, "Ph.D.'s" is not a happy title. I grant that it is unusual—even strikingly grotesque. I grant that the two stories which make up the volume have to do with persons who went to the bad and became doctors of philosophy. To that extent, and to that extent only, the title is adequate, for the poems are very much more important than it implies. They are important, indeed, in spite of the academic tinge wherewith their maker—perhaps because of the hand to which I have alluded—has colored them.

The publisher's announcement, which a reviewer may not, of course, honestly quote except in derision, says that these tales "are destined to rejoice the hearts of the unorthodox." I wish that might be true, for I suppose the unorthodox—though I don't quite know who they are—to be reasonably good people and perhaps numerous. My fear, on the other hand, is that Mr. Bacon's work has so rich and nutty an academic flavor that it may be appreciated by the orthodox and neglected by the unorthodox, unless perchance its merits are proclaimed in and out of season by those in a position to realize how brilliantly and truthfully he has satirized certain phases of academic life and at the same time cultivated a form of story-telling neglected for many a long day.

I do not know that I am a proper person to recommend the poems in this way, for I may not be sufficiently orthodox. How can one be sure of orthodoxy, indeed, without examination by a council or a synod? Yet I must confess myself an impenitent lover of "Beowulf," at which Mr. Bacon flings one or two of his barbed darts in passing; I give some of my time to the instruction of embryo doctors of philosophy; and I have written numerous monographs—and purpose to do so again—as dull as anything penned by Professor Schäferlein. Wherefore I take it that I ought, delighting in these tales as I do, to urge them strongly on those whose withers are unwrung by the poet's malice. It seems to me a duty to point out that they are not merely the gibes of a reformed professor at some of the less praiseworthy aspects of his former trade, but, despite their academic color, quite masterly examples of satire in story form, with an application, moreover, beyond their more obvious content.

I hope that neither Mr. Bacon nor any of his friends will be hurt, even for a moment, by the heading of this notice. It is meant as a high compliment, and should so be taken. When has a poet appeared who could be called any sort of Byron? Not in our time, I believe, if ever. And the author of "Ulug Beg" and "Ph.D.'s", notwithstanding his academic preoccupations, is Byronic in several ways. Not an imitator of Byron. I do not mean that. I mean that he tells his stories with something of the gusto Byron put into his, that he manages verse with a careless freedom that suggests the noble lord, that he slashes with his satiric blade in refreshingly Byronic fashion, and that, like Byron, he both loves

and hates the circle of life from which he has emerged. Byron could not forget the aristocracy of England when he turned his back upon it, and Leonard Bacon has not yet forgotten, it appears, his former academic estate.

The only reason why one could wish him to forget, since his professorial experience has led him to produce these delightful satires, is that they show him capable of writing tales of larger scope. If he can make the story of a female graduate student readable, and the end of a poet *manqué*, who became a Cambridge don, well-nigh tragic, he can surely deal with persons of more human significance and with plots inherently more exciting. One hopes he will remain Professor Byron, for both his learning

It is a solid merit of his story-telling that he is really interested in people, and interests us in his characters accordingly. Quite amazingly, even the persons most unsympathetically and satirically treated, like Professor John Percy of Columbia and Professor Schäferlein of Vienna, come to life under his hands. They are portraits, after all, and not mere caricatures, or—if you please—they are portraits in caricature like some of Dickens's men and women: truer to life than most attempts at creation. I suppose the point is that they are creations rather than analyses, differing in this from the much-lauded figures of "The Spoon River Anthology." Sophia Trenton is paler than John MacIntyre of the second tale, but perhaps inevitably,

since only a rather anæmic creature could have worshipped Professor Percy as she did. I should possibly have been tempted, like her idol Percy, to call her a "type," except for the poet's awful warning:

He said she was a type. Beware of him  
Who says that anybody is a type  
Of anything. It means his sight is dim  
And all his fruitage of the mind un-ripe.

Though Individuals wither—life is grim—  
They yet retain the individual stripe.  
And the different manners in which people act

Is what makes up the fun of life in fact.

There is wisdom as well as fun in that, as in so many of Mr. Bacon's passing comments. He is interested in the human animal, as I have said, and the specimens he himself exhibits are not dried and catalogued specimens, in spite of their academic connections. Rachel Stein and the benignant Master of Martyrhouse, different though they are, are "very well," as Thomas Gray said of Mrs. Slipslop.

Another delightful attribute of Leonard Bacon is the bold assurance with which he handles verse. It is one of the traits that link him to Byron, quite as it is one of the traits by virtue of which Byron is a great poet, no matter what nonsense is written about him. There have not been very many poets, after all, who have combined large ease in verse-making with the power of evoking beauty through the rhythmic phrase. The minor poet never gets the combination, though he may sometimes get poignant beauty. Is it not true that most contemporary verse whether it calls itself "free" or acknowledges itself fettered, is comparatively pinched, as if the poet were a little afraid of his medium? If he takes liberties, he is likely to display them with the pride of a naughty boy making faces behind the back of his nurse. Or he throws beauty to the winds in his struggle for freedom—all the beauty of line and color, that is, relying on a slippery grasp at vague impressions set forth in sprawling phrases.

Mr. Bacon is not afraid of his medium and, though he writes satires, succeeds in writing poetry. He is always workmanlike, and he is bold because he can afford to be so. It is a temptation to quote at length: not passages culled, as is the frequent habit in reviews of verse, to prove that the maker can, after all, strike a high note now and then; but this stanza and that which one longs to share with the unfortunates who have not yet read the book. What could be more magnificent, indeed, than the outburst about "Beowulf," to which I have already referred? Utterly wrong though I hold it to be as an estimate of that noble and greatly misunderstood poem, I cannot withhold my admiration for the diatribe itself.

Oh, wherefore art thou Beowulf? I wonder.  
Nameless barbaric bard, what have you wrought?  
Pithecanthropic semi-epic blunder,  
Here and there sullied by a human thought,  
Or fancy fainting 'mid dull blood and thunder,  
Feeble, but to the reader overfraught  
Like beauty almost, as he plods rebellious,  
Cursing the flame that spared Cotton Vitellius.

But it is impossible to choose wisely among so many felicities. I must beg the reader of this to become at once the reader of "Ph.D.'s"—in spite of



Censers swinging over Lincoln's house in Springfield, Illinois. To appear in the new edition of "Collected Poems," by Vachel Lindsay (Macmillan).

and his impetuosity are essential, but one would like to see what he could do with themes richer in event and color. America can furnish him with plenty of them.

Of the tales in the present volume, "The Dunbar Tragedy" is unquestionably better than "Sophia Trenton," which, though witty and abounding in truthful pictures of pedantry incarnate, as well as of folk who are fools of a different stripe, is relatively thin in texture; or perhaps it only seems thin because its mate is so much fuller and richer. It would be unfair, and it is quite unnecessary, to give away the plots, although in a sense the plots matter least of all. The manner of their telling is what counts: the artful appearance of leisurely loitering and the real forward rush that keeps the reader moving on its tide. Few poets of our time have caught the trick of narrative. Alfred Noyes has it, of course, in one manner, and John Masefield in another. Leonard Bacon obviously owes something to Masefield, just as he owes something to the late Lord Byron; but he is no more imitative of the one than of the other. He is his own man, and among other things he is a story-teller.