

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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The Admiral's War

WHEN an ex-admiral of the United States tells us that we may anticipate a war with Great Britain in order to safeguard our high tariff, our merchant marine, and our standard of living, the most besotted book worm is driven to think beyond his books. Those same books have told him, perhaps truly, that a high tariff and a merchant marine seeking the world's carrying trade are mutually incompatible, but, like the admiral, they seem to regard our standard of living as so much wealth which can be carried off in transports or protected by guns.

If by a standard of living one means bath tubs, automobiles, radio sets, demi-education for everybody, clean collars, and a telephone, the admiral is clearly right in thinking that they have to be fought for, though one detects in his remarks more than a trace of that Anglomania which used to be so characteristic of Fourth of July orators. But if by a standard of living is meant the way in which our minds live, then it is a question whether, so far as the arts are concerned, the American standard of living is worth defending.

It may be an excellent standard for bank clerks, shop keepers, manufacturers, and even lawyers. But for doctors probably, and ministers and teachers certainly, and still more certainly for the artist in everything from words to paint, it is a very trying standard indeed, and has been since the settlement of the country. These professionals need to be bothered as little as possible with the mechanics of living and the name one calls them by indicates that their business is not making wealth but transmuting it into something more valuable. The writer, the preacher, the teacher, the musician is like an engine which runs best in a bath of lubricant. Cost and the complexity of living get in his way, divert his energy. Even if the increased expense of everything carries upward the price of his own products, he invariably is cheated. Either he gets for his music, his painting, or his teaching an increase too little to meet the rising standards of the community, or, like the manufacturers, he cheapens his product in order to sell with profit to a larger market. This latter might almost be called the American plan, and it cannot, in the professional sense, be regarded as success.

Yet can you blame him? He is quite as human as the insurance agent and the meat packer to right and left of him. It is hard to live in America and not live like the Americans, especially as some American inventions for making life expensive are singularly pleasant. But that is not the worst of it. The really unpleasant feature of the American standard is that it makes any other standard almost impossible. Like the English sparrows, it drives out all competition. There is no easy-going life of old clothes, little inns, walking trips, little houses with much living in them, here, because the country is too expensive for that sort of thing. It is more profitable to run a restaurant than to provide a café chair on the sidewalk, more profitable to conduct an amusement park than a wayside tavern in the mountains. Thus pleasant living on an economical basis finds no encouragement in our United States and is usually squalid by comparison with Europe. Plain living becomes really plain and often ugly, and high thinking is not so agreeably done in a New York tenement as in the English lakes.

Yet so long as the advertisers tell all America that they must own or do everything that anybody else does or owns in order to be civilized, and so long as Americans believe them and continue to

Miocene

By GEORGE STERLING

HERE, where this wall of sandstone leaves the ground,
Soaring in massive ramparts to the sky,
Beat once a surf that never human eye
Beheld, or human ear conceived in sound.
Dimly we trace, or think we trace, the bound
Of that forgotten ocean—slopes long dry,
Where once the wounded monster came to die,
Where now the fossils of the shark are found.

The flowers foam where foamed that ancient sea,
Their nectar given to the prowling bee.

The noon is on the pastures like a flame,
And where, long since, that mournful thunder
broke,
Whose universal voice is still the same,
The cattle drowse beneath the shading oak.

This Week

Too Good. By Henry Seidel Canby.

A Soviet Trollope. By Arthur Ruhl.

The Low Country Speaks. By Hervey Allen.

Winter Roses. By H. D.

In the Farthest East. By Norbert Lyons.

A Lover of Freedom. By Henry Noble MacCracken.

Next Week, or Later

Sir Sidney Lee's "Life of Edward VII." Reviewed by Robert Livingston Schuyler.

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strain upwards to the limit of their endurance in order to have built-in bath tubs instead of the cruder variety, and slate roofs instead of shingles, and very loud speakers, and a larger car, and a shinier kind of floor, and the new furnace that pays for itself, and so on and so on, for which see any guide to civilization at the back of the magazines, these professional folk will suffer. The sellers who cater to comfort and vanity may break through and have many of the commodities of life that are worth even more than hot water and foundation planting—they may have leisure and travel and recreation, and, if they want it, time to think. But the followers of the arts and the sciences will be poorer (though cleaner) than the Europeans; less amused, less leisured, less productive, and probably less happy. The standard of living for them is low in America, as every honest American traveler knows.

We cannot all move to Paris, nor, to judge from the results, does that seem to be the best way out, at least in literature. But it may be possible to save enough porcelain tubs, telephones, automobiles, and

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Whaling Days*

By F. V. MORLEY

IN an old text of Olaus Magnus is a crude and laughable wood-cut. It is a sea-scape. A tempest is disappearing in the background; cloud-wracks cross the sky. The seas are short and high, breaking pyramid-wise. There is a faint twilight, a dim, cold, desolate hue somehow let in from the edge of the horizon—an aimless light, fitful and sad, whose only mission is to herald sorrow. A ship is in the foreground, laboring. She has weathered the tempest; new topsails have been bent on her stripped spars; and the clumsy, bluff-bowed galleon would readily renew her fight against the sea, but that the waves have gaped behind her, and from a whirlpool, wide, black, and cavernous, a monstrous head has risen, with sea-mane falling upon half-seen shoulders, mis-shapen and immense.

The head of this Leviathan is indescribable. A thousand mingled evil elements are magnified to form this crooked serpent. His eye, cold and drear, looks not upon the ship, but upon you, the terrified beholder; yet his jaws have already fastened on the galleon, his enormous spout has risen to deluge the main-tops before it dashes down upon the deck, and in another instant his inexorable bulk will drag the ship below.

There are two things unusually sinister about this picture. The first is a strange omission. No figures populate the desolate galleon. No comrade shares with you its fate; you are alone on the deserted deck, already tilting into Leviathan's maw. And for this one remnant of time everything is still; the end is about to happen, but it will not come. The sea's curled crests hang lifeless, the sails lie back upon the yards, the wind is hushed, the twilight holds, an intermitted gloom. Everything hangs for an instant this side the void, and the instant is an agonized eternity of companionless suspense. But the brutality of the second fact is worse. It is the unrighteous appearance of the monster, when, and only when, the long strain and struggle of the storm is over. It is the final, gratuitous, infliction of evil which outrages any independence of honor and justice. It is the last chapter of Ecclesiastes. The clouds have returned after the rain.

I know not who the original engraver was, or whence he came. But his work means something—this at least, that there was a man who had seen what is not pleasant for men to see, and had registered his momentary triumph over it. And if one says, as men have said, that this picture is an example of mediæval ignorance about the sperm whale, it should be my part gracefully to disagree. It were better to admit at once that there are two kinds of whales—the whales that are classified as cetaceans, and those that are enlarged into ideas. The former are biological specimens or commercial propositions; the latter belong to a race longer-lived, changed in color as the white whale, Moby Dick, or changed in form as the dragon, the undying serpent, the something in the sea of which we feel afraid. There has always been, and no doubt ever will be, confusion as to this division; as there has always been a mutual misunderstanding between the hunter who kills whales, the scientist who studies them, the ad-

*MOBY DICK. By HERMAN MELVILLE. American Library Edition. New York: A. & C. Boni. 1924. \$2.00.
WHALING. By CHARLES BOARDMAN HAWES. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1924. \$5.00.

venturer who lusts for them, and the writer who creates them.

It would be entering the looking-glass land of paradox to suggest that the confusion started ere even the whale's spout was seen by man. But if the trouble did not begin so early, it started, perhaps, with the simple and sudden experience of a naïve man, who, from a coracle, saw a whale at sea—saw him a thousand feet long, escaped him by a miracle, and as soon as he got ashore created a new myth in the minds of his hearers, in the effort to express and to explain and to satisfy his emotion at the very thought of the imagined terrors he had experienced. Some who heard him flatly contradicted him; some did not go swimming for weeks after the narrative; and those who neither believed nor disbelieved, those fanciful folk who were amused at the intellectual possibilities of the tale, began inventing Sinbad stories, to the eternal benefit of children. Such stories prospered, as when King Juba of Numidia told Gaius Caesar that a whale six hundred feet long and three hundred and sixty feet broad had just entered a river in Arabia; as when Olaus Magnus increased these figures by half as much again in talking of his "hirsute" whales. To such stories the magi added details until the whale was fitted out with as much superstructure as an ocean liner, and even had accommodation (one-class) for passengers within.

Fancy became inventive on its own account; but occasionally the touch of real imagination enlivens classical descriptions. Job and Jonah, for example, made poetry of older fancies; and Jorath the Chaldean (who was a charming and a friendly figure) made a whale of character—a friendly whale. When hungry, said Jorath, the whale opens his mouth and emits a fragrant odor like amber, and other fish, attracted and delighted thereby, swim into its mouth and down its throat, and digest and are digested in the cavernous stomach, with never a pang. On some occasions the whale uses this pleasant breath to save and protect little fish instead of embalming them within himself. When a very wicked and venomous kind of a sea-serpent glides through the dusky waves by night, all tiny fishes take refuge behind the whale, who then repels the foetid odor of the newcomer by the sweetness of his own effusion. In the whale, continues Jorath, terrestrial matter dominates over water, and consequently he becomes very corpulent and fat, and in his old age collects dust on his back to such an extent that vegetation grows there and the creature is often mistaken for an island. The whale cherishes his young with wondrous love, and when they are stranded on shoals he frees them by spouting water over them. When a severe storm is raging, he swallows them, and they abide safely within until the storm is past, when he opens his mouth, and they come out again. A pleasant whale was Jorath's whale; and the greatest day of his existence occurred off Rimini, where he had the deepest place in the congregation of fishes, great and small and middling, who assembled there for love of good St. Anthony, and held their heads out of water and listened to the sermon in great peace and gentleness and perfect order.

If you do not care for Juba and Jorath and their followers, the mediaeval naturalists, I must plead that they mostly spoke with their eyes open to the joy of living, and a wink sometimes for the older folk who listened, and a belief always that all things were possible in nature, and an excuse to their pillows (if they were taken to task) that there was no harm in writing even though they had not actually fingered the whale. But occasionally, as a moonlit night will change at the passage of a cloud, a chill comes over these placid reflections, and a grim remark will indicate a struggle with fear.

For all that here on earth we dreadfull hold,

Be but as bugs to fearen babes withall,

Compared to the creatures in the seas entrall.

No longer is the tone that of the Psalm, but the tone of Isaiah. We see Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; he hath enlarged himself, and opened his mouth without measure. No more than in the case of Jorath are we dealing with the whale of science; save to recognize a fitting symbol for a terrible idea, and to gain that willing suspension of disbelief which is necessary for all teaching. And what was more likely to be believed amid the waste of waters than Plutarch's whale?—for whom "what thing soever cometh within the chaos of his mouth, be it beast, boat, or stone, down it goes all incontinently that

foul great swallow of his, and perisheth in the bottomless gulf of his paunch." The incarnation of this whale as the Prince of all powers of darkness on the sea is a thesis tangible enough for a Ph.D. degree. Ships go down at sea, tall ships go down, and men come back no more, and something swallows them. So is all hatred and revenge ashore focussed upon the whale, as demon of this fate; and he takes on the blackest character in representations of malignity. Hell's fire is shown through a whale's mouth, in old morality plays; and in the stained glass window of a country church in England, where a golden heaven shines upon the one side of St. Michael, the other side of the picture shows—underneath a scroll belonging to the souls condemned, whose words are "Woe to the day when I was born"—as the lowest figure of all tormentors, far down in blackness under lurid scarlet flames, the principal demon, Beelzebub, in the semblance of a whale.

The landsman may rejoice in friendly whales, or may struggle with frightful whales; but for the seaman who has to face the sea, there must be surety that the whale he is going to meet is not like those whales—neither large and deceptive as an island, nor overwhelming and malevolent as the evil one. Wherefore, whenever a whale was cast ashore, seamen looked him over, not without anxiety. One thing they learnt that mightily delighted them. In almost every case the whale's throat was closed, and he could swallow nothing bigger than a herring. After this, so far as brave men were concerned, the whale at sea was merely an awkward bulk, that might be killed for fun or profit; and they began to kill him, when chance offered, with joy and boasting. Beowulf and Othello go on record as exaggerating the facts of their achievements; partly because landsmen desired them to be meticulous, partly because these uncouth red-bearded giants wished to encourage themselves. They broke the ice; and not long after we hear of further exciting forays. By the Bay of Biscay, the longshoremen built a tower on a hill from which they might see "the Balaines which pass, and perceiving them coming partly by the loud noise they make, and partly by the water which they throw out by a conduit which they possess in the middle of the forehead." Boats set out immediately, armed with hand lances and harpoons; and half the boats were reserved for men whose sole duty was to pick out of the sea such harpooners as overbalanced and fell in through excitement.

* * *

So the myth of the terrible whale began to be discarded. A fight with a whale became merely a dangerous and inviting contest. Seamen did not lose respect for his bulk, for the power of his smashing flukes, but along the coasts his supernatural qualities seemed lessened. In lonely far-off seas there remained something mysterious, something desperate, in his appearances; but even this expectation gradually dwindled. In the year 1556 Master Steven Burrough, "Master of the Pinnesse called the Serchthrift," made a "Navigation and Discoverie toward the river of Ob," cruising doubtfully by Nova Zembla, hoping to make Cathay. Here is what happened on "S. James, his day," as the Serchthrift was "bolting to the windwardes." In the evening:

There was a monstrous Whale aboard of us, so neere to our side that we might have thrust a sworde or any other weapon in him, which we durst not doe for feare he should have overthrown our shippe: and then I called my company together, and all of us shouted, and with the crie that we made he departed from us: There was as much above water of his backe as the bredth of our pinnesse, and at his falling downe, he made such a terrible moyse in the water, that a man would greatly have marvelled, except hee had knowne the cause of it: but God be thanked, we were quietly delivered of him. . . .

That scene I take as marking the downfall of the whale. He who stood for Leviathan in earlier days, who could not be drawn out with a hook, had been cruelly massacred along habitable coasts; the frightful monster of dim, perilous seas, had been withstood and scared off with a cry. Surely there was no longer much to fear from him. All we needed was some use to put him to. And when the need for lamps made us to imitate the Eskimo in burning whale-oil, all was prepared for slaughtering the whale as rapidly and often as we pleased. In reality, it was no difficult business, though a very bloody one. The romantic vision faded, and a prosaic truth appeared—that the whale, for all his

bulk, was cowardly and helpless. We might, I feel, be gentlemen, and leave the story there.

Or we might be philosophers, and realize that in whaling man faces two opponents, the animal and the sea. An active desolation is his home; he has accomplices who sink or shatter a ship for every boat smashed by his own slow, ponderous flukes; and though we recognize that the whale has fallen from his first imaginary aspect, we may not leave the wider fight unsung. Toward the end of the whale's free period, one man arose who knew the whale in actuality and at the same time felt and saw in him a symbol of all hostile forces, all raging wild enmities of nature, all anti-human and eternal influences on the sea, all things in short for which the dragon stood in days when he was real to men. The portentous and mysterious monster was made to live again, well fitted for this symbol; the "wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk," his "undeliverable, nameless perils," and "all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds," made Moby Dick, the white whale, protagonist to Ahab in the finest work of dramatic power this continent has yet produced. In Melville you will find the rugged effort to portray the struggle between man and the universe, with all acknowledgment and recognition of the greatness that attends such contest, and with use of all the superstitions and the fears and braveries and cunning that man has learnt through seamen and the sea. "Moby Dick" is the apotheosis of whaling days; once more it has created the legendary monster of the past; and conquered so splendidly that at the end of the great conflict you come back from the silent ocean, silent; knowing the worst, feeling the best and uttermost that man may do or be; you come back as that sailorman, who, in a reverie,

Stared like the figure of a ship
With painted eyes to sea.

Conrad's Valedictory

TALES OF HEARSAY. By JOSEPH CONRAD.
New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1924.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

HERE are the first and the last story that Joseph Conrad ever wrote, and two others. "The Black Mate," Cunninghame Graham tells us in his preface, must have been written about 1884. "The Tale" and "The Warrior's Soul" were written in 1917. "Prince Roman" is of the vintage of 1911. Cunninghame Graham praises "The Warrior's Soul."

Nothing that I know of (he concluded) in any of his shorter stories equals the dramatic ending of "The Warrior's Soul."

We do not agree with this, but "The Warrior's Soul" is a memorable story. The mechanism of "The Tale" seems to us not altogether successful. Strangely enough the scene between the man and the woman, a fragment lost in darkness and no part of the real story, remains in one's mind quite as impressively as the indubitably striking impression of the fog in which the Northman meets his fate. The giving of the course that leads the Northman to his fate is a trick we have seen turned before. "Prince Roman," Conrad's only directly written Polish tale, is a horse of another color. Even the strikingly vivid drama of "The Warrior's Soul" seems to us to pale beside its sombre intensity, its quiet but biting irony. Great passages emerge, as when he who is telling the tale remarks by the way:

This looks like mere fanaticism. But fanaticism is human. Man has adored ferocious divinities. There is ferocity in every passion, even in love itself. The religion of undying hope resembles the mad cult of despair, of death, of annihilation. The difference lies in the moral motive springing from the secret needs and the unexpressed aspiration of the believers. It is only to vain men that all is vanity; and all is deception only to those who have never been sincere with themselves.

"The Black Mate," the earliest story, develops, strangely enough, a regular W. W. Jacobs tale, in the Conradian style with which Conrad sprang into the literary arena fully armed. Jacobs would have made a delicious maritime farce of it. Conrad imbues it with a certain human pathos. It is almost the slightest of his tales, as to subject, and his humor is a trifle ponderous. The brooding of Conrad which persists through all his stories rather overweighs the material.

Naturally it is a joy to all Conrad admirers to be in possession of this new volume—would it were not the last! An assuredly great writer has passed, and Cunninghame Graham's preface—a distinguished bit of writing—is a fitting valediction.