

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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### Milk and Water Reviewing

THE story of John Keats's manful facing of his impudent and scurrilous reviewers has never been better told than by Miss Lowell in her recent "Life." Her caustic pen scratches out for good and all the once familiar picture of a gentle spirit killed by cruelty, and turns upon Wilson, Lockhart, and Croker with satisfying vehemence. It is the hard insolence of Lockhart's youth that she particularly excoriates—youth sold to the need to be brilliant regardless of justice, and wrapped in snobbish intolerance.

In our day we have escaped from political reviewing; and in this country, at least, slashing criticism inspired by angry prejudice and barbed with sneer and innuendo has gone out of fashion. Scurrility in America comes not from pedants like Croker or intellectual snobs of the Lockhart brand; it is more likely to spring from left-handed attempts at publicity or from the vanity of the immature seeking gratification in smartness. When criticism takes a jazz tempo it is offensive but harmless.

Perhaps dislike of violence has carried us too far. The milk of contemporary criticism is entirely too sweet; those healthy acid bacteria that improve authorship have no chance to develop. In the attempt to find some good in everything, and hurt no one's feelings, what might be called the negative encouragement of a slap on the part most needing chastisement does not get inflicted, and many a writer of brilliant promise reaches fatuous self-satisfaction without being told with force and conviction that, in spite of popular success or the esteem of the literary, he is a failure professionally until he turns promise into achievement. There are only a half-dozen novelists, and about the same number of poets and playwrights, now practicing in this country who, from a professional standpoint, have really mastered the art of writing. In Great Britain, where the amount of talent is no greater, if so great, the curve of professional achievement runs a little higher.

Too much reviewing is done with one eye on the publisher and the other on the supposed desire of the reader to be told only pleasant things. Such reviewing is not only futile as criticism but mistaken in its aim. If the reader has intelligence enough to read a book, he craves assistance in discriminating between the goods and the bads that mingle in all works of art. Appreciation worth anything requires its foil of depreciation. If you do not know diffuseness when you see it, how can you savor conciseness? If to your tolerant taste no difference exists between sentiment and sentimentality, there is no use talking to you of truth. The motto for too much American reviewing is Matthew Arnold's "sweetness and light"—minus the light.

The dominant influence of science is responsible for the modern attempt to be dispassionate in analysis and just in criticism. Democracy has taught respect for capability wherever found. To sneer at a poet for being an apothecary would nowadays seem, as well as be, irrelevant. But science in its insistence upon fact (the so-called news of books) has blurred the final aim of criticism, which is to ascertain not usefulness but achievement. It has made us careless of the value of reading if only the book is readable. We have been better at assessing books of fact than books of imagination.

And democracy has given us an unhealthy tolerance for all honest effort, as if every egg should be praised because some day, some how, it might produce a chick. "The humanity of the United States

### As I Was Among the Captives

By JOSEPH CAMPBELL\*

HOPE is the air by which a captive lives;  
But the long summer day I groan, and feel  
Grey walls like bony hands clutching my  
throat.

It is his sun; but from the winter sky  
Filters no crystal light thro' cobwebbed bars.  
White lambs, wild roses, honeysuckle vines,  
Dead leaves, deep-throated windstorms, drifting  
snows

Processionally pass, a dark mindflood,  
Drowning sweet liberty in soul despair.  
War's iron-written law is paramount:  
He hunts my dreams, poor rebels, to the hills,  
And holds my body fettered closely here.  
Yet, captive as I am, I walk more free  
Than yon drab-tunicked sergeant on the roof,  
Chained to his Vicar's gun, or that poor slave  
Swept from the out-of-works of Malpas Street  
To do six hours of sentry go, and sleep,  
And pace the sherds again; why, then, am I,  
Like Richard Lovelace, cavalier and bard,  
Mewed in an earthly cage, but free of soul,  
Not to be pitied. This despair will pass.  
These loveliest and thrice-most-sacred things  
Intense thro' veils of pain one day will shine  
With nearer, clearer beauty. This dark stream,  
Sprung in the mind, that drags bright joy to death,  
Will ebb and flow, and on its second flood  
Will come the tear-soaked bread I cast away,  
A saving Eucharist.

### This Week



"An Affair of Honor." Reviewed by  
Lloyd Morris.

"Mrs. Dalloway." Reviewed by  
Richard Hughes.

"Hesperides." Reviewed by Louis  
Untermeyer.

"Washington Irving—Esquire." Re-  
viewed by Stanley Williams.

"The Dogma of Evolution." Re-  
viewed by W. L. Sperry.

"Women of the Cæsars." Reviewed  
by Grant Showerman.

George Edward Woodberry. By  
John Erskine.

### Next Week, or Later

Thomas Hardy. By William Lyon  
Phelps.

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The Weekly News-Magazine

can never reach the sublime," wrote John Keats in a letter also quoted by Miss Lowell. He knew next to nothing of the United States, but his poet's instinct made him feel the danger to art of standards erected by the crowd.

\*The author took part in the Irish Revolution.

### Beauty and Calisthenic

By FRANK JEWETT MATHER, JR.

"WHAT is it doing?" was the question that C. Anstruther-Thomson\* always asked of a work of art. To her a beautiful thing did a great deal. Her rapture had physical accompaniments. She breathed more deeply, she balanced, her chest rose with the upward thrust of Gothic vaulting, she felt the elastic movement from the nape of her neck all along that lovely reversed ogive of the back of her head which one may study in Sargent's drawing. These tensions characteristic of a state of contemplation in which calm and excitement strangely blended, she observed until under the strain of such introspection she broke down. Not, however, until she had done her part in those remarkable æsthetic experiments which under the editorship of her friend Vernon Lee were in 1897 published as articles, and reprinted as a book called "Beauty and Ugliness" in 1912. The last twenty years of her life were largely spent in showing in the galleries poor Londoners what the works of art were doing. From her diaries and from the papers prepared for her gallery talks her friend has composed a book as intensely alive as it is necessarily casual.

Only England could have produced a career at once so unlikely and so fine as Kit Anstruther-Thomson's, for England alone preserves that unbounded faith in the instincts, the humors as the Elizabethans called them, which such a career implies. Kit Anstruther-Thomson was the daughter of hardriding county gentry of Fifehire. Her education, she avowed, had been entrusted to the stud groom. Her distinguished London acquaintance gave her the small talk of art. On her own account she dabbled for eight years, partly in sculpture with Dalou, in London, then in painting with Carolus-Duran in Paris. Then, probably catching fire from the æsthetic socialism of Ruskin, she decided to teach the poor to appreciate art. She writes "I gave it (painting) up in 1892 and took to looking at pictures instead of trying to paint them, intending later to make it my business to show the galleries to the East End people of London." So the artist passed quietly away with the young woman of fashion. The sportsman survived, to master swimming and jiu-jitsu in middle life, to interpret the Venus de' Medici as a ship under sail, to proclaim the centaur, as combining the great qualities both of man- and horse-flesh, a sort of superman.

If I have hinted at the merely whimsical side—a delightful one—of this fascinating creature, I hasten in justice to add that she took her new vocation with all seriousness. Before venturing to show the East-enders the pictures, she must first know herself what the pictures were all about. There followed the most intense and prolonged analysis of her own experiences of beauty, and at last discovery:

About the middle of March, 1894 (she writes), I discovered what I take to be the physiological connection between Man and Art from noticing one day that my breathing involuntarily altered as I looked at different pictures. . . . In April, 1894, we went to Rome, where I made experiments with an analogous result upon sculpture . . . noticing that I saw the statue of the Apoxyomenos much better during the noise a stone-mason was making on the floor close by while filing a marble slab. The short, rapid strokes of the file affected my breathing, and as a result the statue looked animated. When the workman

\*ART AND MAN, Essays and Fragments. By C. ANSTRUTHER-THOMSON. With an Introduction by Vernon Lee. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1925. \$4.



stopped the statue looked distinctly tamer. Following this indication, I made experiments all the time I was in Rome.

At this time, 1894, she had been for some years in active partnership with the gifted critic, Vernon Lee, had aided her through months of nervous depression, had helped her half-brother, the poet Eugene Lee-Hamilton, to shake off a bed-ridden habit of years' standing. In Vernon Lee, already famous as a critic of things Italian, in Walter Pater's vein, "Kit" worked a kind of æsthetic conversion—a renunciation of the historical-literary method in favor of direct observation of the impact of the work of art. The chief results of their joint investigations are available in their stimulating book "Beauty and Ugliness." In the present volume we sense the joys of the actual quest more keenly than in the systematic work. Returning to the passage quoted above, what its writer had hit upon was that an experience of beauty has physical features, is one of pleasurable tension, which tension, in her own case, could be enhanced by a secondary experience of sense apart from the contemplation of the work of art. What she had failed to notice, apparently, was that the noise of the file on the marble merely increased the nervous tension, was a stimulant. Conceivably a glass of spirits might have worked as favorably.



Let us follow a few of her experiments. She shows to her East-enders the squat and ugly contour of a Greek water jar. Then she begins to apply its ornament, noting what it does to the form. A spike pattern at the foot pinches in the broadness and raises the whole form. A band of palmettes about the middle still further pulls in its obesity, and the vase looks tall and slender. It rises and thins into positive gracefulness when the figure decoration is traced over the shoulder. We share mentally in all these drawing in and raising processes.

Again we have a bit of Greek vase decoration with jumping hares. By a slight modification of similar and nearly symmetrical spirals, one serves as a springboard for the hare in flight, while the other serves as a hurdle or dead check to the hare whose leap has merely begun. To cap the demonstration, she redraws the pattern badly, and it has no aiding or checking motion. The live lines have died from the draughtsman's neglect. One could not wish for more telling examples of what we mean by vitality in design.

Such analyses have surprising bearings on archæological problems. For instance, Furtwaengler's reconstruction of the Lemnian Athena of Phidias, by applying a head at Bologna to a torso at Dresden, is rejected for lack of rhythm. But change the position right for left, placing the spear in the right hand, and the splendid head fits the body. A similar study of the Medici tombs makes it highly probable that the actual arrangement is by Michelangelo, a matter frequently doubted. But how otherwise account for the necessary relations between the figures seated above and the nudes uneasily balanced on the sarcophagi? The strongly bent and contorted figure of The Thinker serves to hold up the Twilight and Dawn which otherwise would seem to slip away. Even the pilasters seem to pull the figures up into stability. Contrariwise the artificially counterpoised figure of Giuliano, in the other tomb, needs to be upheld by the Night and Day, as Caryatids, and even the pilasters seem to need their support. These opposite rhythms of suspension from above and of support from beneath could hardly have come about from chance, from a pupil's design, from misunderstanding of Michelangelo's conception. Incidentally the roughness and smoothness of the stone cutting in the four great figures is shown to have a "pace value," speeding the eye or arresting it as the occasion demands.

Other extended analyses are made of what the Aegina Marbles, the façade of Notre Dame, certain sculptures by Greek artists or by Desiderio, certain modern paintings did to this most responsive observer. But rather than follow the quest in too many directions, let us test the method in a single striking instance. The subject is a Greek vase.

In looking at a Greek vase the first thing we notice is that its base seems to be pressing hard upon the ground. (It is a curious fact that it is only in art that we actually see the pressure of an object's weight upon the ground! A cart-load of bricks doesn't look as if it pressed on the ground, while a terra-cotta vase weighing six ounces does.) The terra-cotta vase does more than merely press, it grips the ground with its base, and our feet grip the ground in

response. . . . When under the influence of the work of art we do grip the ground, the action brings with it a feeling of security, of confidence, which it is difficult to believe is the result of so slight a cause. Perhaps, though, the thing is of more importance than it appears, for after all, it is putting us into closer touch with the outer world by the one point of direct contact that we have with it.

Next the rising roundness of the vase brings an urgent message to the whole of our upper body. We raise our ribs and hold them raised, breathing more freely from an expanded chest. And as long as we look at the vase our ribs do not collapse, both in inhalation and exhalation we hold them firm.

And this holding up on the part of our ribs has a curious influence on our powers of vision: we continue to have a quite steady view of the vase even while we breathe out, whereas in ordinary life it is only while we breathe in that we see things very vividly.

Thus we see twice as intently and continuously as we did before while "this consecutiveness of vision gives us a strangely agreeable sense of evenness and continuity."

Similarly the upward-striving neck brings our own head into alert poise, the handles suggest stretching movements of our own shoulders and arms upwards, constituting a sort of grasp on the air about us. Finally the almost always uneven balance of a Greek vase forces us out of our usually passive balance into an active and slightly shifting one.

The whole experience is one of an active serenity of a heightened sense of living. The vase "has the power of corroborating to ourselves the reality of our own existence, and in so complete a fashion that the very act of being alive, of living, becomes a wider, a keener, a more complex act all the time we go looking at it."

These citations show the rôle of the work of art in this æsthetic. It is the successful conductor of calisthenic exercises—actual or imagined—in a sensitive observer, exercises which give a sense of enhanced and richer and more spacious living and which presumably correspond to the rhythms that guided the creation of the work of art. Before discussing the validity of the view, a word on some similar theories. Out of her own experience C. Anstruther-Thomson had independently arrived at or near the two chief æsthetic discoveries of the 1890's—Karl Groos's "inner mimicry" and Theodor Lipps's Empathy (*Einfühlung*). Groos had noticed that the work of art causes small mimetic responses, sometimes imagined, sometimes actual. Later he came to see that these were probably experiences only of persons of motor disposition. Lipps reverses the direction, asserting that we impute our own activities to the work of art and enjoy our thus projected selves. Personally I do not think the direction matters, if, as I presume, Lipps would have conceded, it is the work of art that makes us feel ourselves into it. We should then be giving back our inner mimicry to the source from which we drew it. Anstruther-Thomson's motor experiences would fit nicely either into the scheme of Groos or Lipps.



What may seem more important is whether these calisthenic responses are real or imaginary. In myself I feel them as real, quite as Anstruther-Thomson did, in changes of respiration and slight exhilarating shifts of balance. Vernon Lee dutifully drops many a foot-note warning us that these calisthenics may be and probably are entirely mental. To a psychologist I conceive that the issue matters greatly; to a student of æsthetics it seems to me to matter rather little. Enough that a part of the experience of the rhythms of beauty is either the reality, or the helpful illusion, that our own body participates in these rhythms.

Do we experience beauty because we have moved? or do we move because we have experienced beauty? It was the moment of the Lange-James hypothesis, and Anstruther-Thomson would probably have identified the experience of beauty with what to common sense seems merely its physical aids or concomitants.

More important is the question, What puts these rhythms and their potentialities of calisthenic into the work of art? Here Anstruther-Thomson fails us. Confident of the value of her experiences and desirous chiefly to pass them on, she was satisfied when she had them clearly defined. The initial term of the æsthetic transaction, the artist's contribution, did not deeply interest her. Evidently two views are possible. These are either calisthenic exercises of the artist indulged for their own sake, or they are incidental results of the endeavor to

express deep experiences grounded widely in the artist's head and heart. If so, the calisthenic would be merely a middle term, like those simple electrical vibrations on the intervening telephone wire that are speech at the beginning and end. Is the transaction very limited and specialized, or does it grow out of the general thinking-feeling of the artist and into the general thinking-feeling of the observer? If so, there is a penumbra at both ends which, while it may defy exact definition, is far more important than the palpable rhythms that play between the soul of the artist and the soul of the lover of art, and surely as worthy of investigation as are these intermediate rhythms.

Evidently, such introspective exercises as those of Anstruther-Thomson have the defect that they introduce into the experience of beauty an alien element of ambush. With the keenest and most instinctive sense of beauty, Anstruther-Thomson was of course playing a double part, lying in wait for her naïve reactions. This possible fallacy, with its potentialities of auto-suggestion should neither be exaggerated nor minimized. It is the constant paradox of all psychological research by introspection. The difficulty of the route has to be put up with, for there is really no other road that leads so far. What is solid value in this book is the freshness and veracity of the æsthetic adventures it enshrines in a vivid, most personal, and delightfully unliterary English.

I have read dozens of treatises on æsthetics without feeling sure that any of the authors had ever really thrilled to a work of art. No such doubt attaches to Kit Anstruther-Thomson's confessions. They are authentic and give us far more trustworthy material than we get from the laboratories. Excellent use has been made of this material by Vernon Lee in an introduction which interweaves enchantingly an intimate memoir with a general sketch of æsthetic. I cannot give it here the attention it deserves or even adequate praise. It is the necessary complement to the genius at once so penetrative and so volatile of her life-long friend.

No account of Kit Anstruther-Thomson would be true without a hint of her fantastic side. It is deliciously nonsensical in such extravagances as her essays on the centaurs and on the Venus de' Medici; it is divinatory in her words on the early masterpiece of her friend John Sargent, Carnation, Lily and Rose. Hear her as she tells her East-enders:

It is just dusk, you see . . . at dusk flowers begin to take command and people become of no importance: I don't know how it is. The flowers are whispering to each other and round about are the lanterns, swinging like some fantastic dance. In the middle are the children lighting the lanterns—at least that is what they are supposed to be doing—but really they are stirring some sort of magic potion, some elixir brewed out of perfume and of dusk, and it flares up as they stir it.

"Sentimentality"!! I hear all the incorporated and unincorporated æsthetic gradgrinds of both worlds hiss through their beautifully made artificial teeth. But I am sure the great and simple hearted virtuoso who has just gone would have accepted this reading of his single fantasia.

Winners of the Pulitzer prizes in journalism and letters for 1924 were recently announced. Awards in letters were made as follows:

"For the American novel published during the year which best reflects the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood" to "So Big," by Edna Ferber (Doubleday, Page).

"For the original American play, performed in New York, which shall best represent the educational value and power of the stage in raising the standard of good morals, good taste, and good manners" to "They Knew What They Wanted," by Sidney Howard.

"For the best book of the year upon the history of the United States" to "A History of the American Frontier," by Frederick L. Paxson (Houghton Mifflin).

"For the best American biography teaching patriotic and unselfish services to the people, illustrated by an eminent example, excluding, as too obvious the names of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln" to "Barrett Wendell and His Letters," by M. A. De Wolfe Howe (Atlantic Monthly Press).

"For the best volume of verse published during the year by an American author" to Edwin Arlington Robinson (Macmillan).