

The Reader's Guide

Conducted by MAY LAMBERTON BECKER

Inquiries in regard to selection of books and questions of like nature should be addressed to Mrs. Becker, c/o The Saturday Review.

A BALANCED RATION

WILD GESE. By MERTLE I. OSTENSO.
(Dodd, Mead)

PUCK IN PASTURE. By E. Mac-
Kinstry. (Doubleday, Page)

AMERICA IN CIVILIZATION. By
Ralph E. Turner. (Knopf)

L. H. H., Farmersville, Texas, asks for contemporary novels, short stories and poems that have taken the small American town as subject.

TAKING "Main Street" and "Miss Lulu B." for granted, let us begin with E. W. Howe's "Story of a Country Town" (Harper). This is probably as near the truth as anyone can tell it in fiction, largely because it does not try to tell all the truth about all the towns on our map. The wind of realism, blowing so keenly in Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio" and "Poor White" (Huebsch), is tempered to the reader by the sunny spirit of William Allen White in his "In Our Town" (Macmillan), short stories of Kansas society as seen from a newspaper office, or in his earlier novel "A Certain Rich Man." Iowa is treated kindly in our short stories, in Rupert Hughes's "In a Little Town" (Harper), amusing tales whose locale is the neighborhood of Keokuk, and by Octave Thanet's "Stories of a Western Town" (Scribner) which have to do mainly with the labor troubles of their period. Zona Gale's "Birth" (Macmillan) seems to me the most successful treatment of what we call small-town spirit that we have had so far; one sees the community as a force, almost as a person, and not altogether—as in "Main Street"—as a baleful force, but taking it as it comes, for good as well as evil. I do not wonder that in the stage version ("Mr. Pitt") the citizenry troops across the stage between the scenes, holding together the plot by their discussions, one might almost say by their very presence.

Dorothy Canfield has a typical middle-western college town in "The Bent Twig" (Holt)—it must have typical qualities, for I have heard it claimed by two of them—and in "The Squirrel Cage" (Holt) she shows a town where everyone works hard at keeping up appearances. "Being Respectable," by Grace Flandrau (Harcourt, Brace), has this motif of the deadly round and though it is in a city and not even small one, its millionaires have made their own village inside the city and furnished it with emptiness.

One of the book, though, is kind, worth noting in novels about our map. As one goes to seem to soften, and New towns fare almost too well in "Blessed Cyrus," by Laura (Appleton) is a loving vable people, funny enough fectionately presented. Laura ey Dream" (Yale University ie added beauty of distance: te sketches are of a long- New England. The "Old as" of Margaret Deland (Har- its companion volumes, present a kindly, and scarce any of a writers find fault with the Even James Branch Cabell's "father's Neck" (McBride) te willing to live in that frvin Cobb's "Back Home" dge Priest" (Doran) induce feeling to old Kentucky.

Poetry has not been so kind. The small town is so far represented mainly by Edgar Lee Masters's "Spoon River Anthology." It may be an unflattering portrait, but it has certainly been hung on the line.

D. B. W., Smithfield, N. C., is going to give the German language just one more chance. He thinks now that he had two years of grammar, that if he could get something very exciting to read, it would propel him far enough to get going in time without a dictionary.

KNOW this is a good idea. German came to me first entirely by ear; in my twenty-first year I was dropped off the dock in Hamburg—conversationally speaking—and had to swim for some months. The result was a good accent and to this day an evasive way of sliding over datives. But print was closed to me until fate threw my way the opening chapters of a detective serial with thrills all over it. By the time I had reached the last pages, I found I had "exploded into reading." Then I plunged boldly into Spielhagen's "Problematische Naturen" and by the end of that the dictionary was not called in more than every page or so. Here are some shockers that I am assured by Brentano's will keep you reading with your eyes bulging out; Ernst Wichert's "Wilddieb", Green's "Der Grossmogul", Ford's "Abenteuer im Expresszug" and Dallas's "Enterbu". For the longer work, I think a play is better than a novel; Schnitzler's cycle of short plays, "Anatol", induces the reader to proceed, and for plays of his less flippant sort there is "Der Junge Medardus" and the remarkable problem-play "Dr. Bernhardt".

A. R., Bloomington Park, N. C., asks for books in preparation for a tour around the world, with especial reference to the Far East.

SIR FREDERICK TREVE'S "The Other Side of the Lantern" (Funk & Wagnalls) is a favorite book for world-cruisers; it is the record of such a tour as this, now in a popular-priced edition. A new ship-diary of a world cruise, just from Putnam, is "Trailing the Sun Around the Earth", by H. K. Hitchcock, evidently written as letters to a family circle. Another new one is "Far Harbors", by Hubbard Hutchinson (Putnam), with an introduction by Wallace Irwin, his fellow voyager. Mr. Hutchinson is the author of "Chanting Wheels", a novel concerned with labor problems; he has the writer's eye for the romantic. "Where Strange Gods Call," by Harry Hervey (Century), is a series of dramatic episodes picked up here and there in the Far East by a novelist who is also a confirmed traveller in these regions. Gilbert Collins, author of "Far Eastern Jaunts" (Holt), was one of the staff of *Punch*, and though this book is accurate wherever it sticks to the record, its most delightful pages are where it cuts loose and swings into statements as tall as Mark Twain's.

YOU ARE A WRITER. Don't you ever need help in marketing your work? I am a literary adviser. For years I read for Macmillan, then for Doran, and then I became consulting specialist to them and to Holt, Stokes, Lippincott, and others, for most of whom I have also done expert editing, helping authors to make their work saleable. Send for my circular. I am closely in touch with the market for books, short stories, articles and verses, and I have a special department for plays and motion pictures. The Writers' Workshop, Inc., 135 East 58th Street New York City

Mildred Reed

from MARY AUSTIN

"I wouldn't have believed that this is your first anniversary. As the *Review* reaches me here in the oldest city of the Republic, it seems to me to have been going on in a kind of immortal vigor like the procession on Keats Grecian Urn. Just like that! One can not imagine that it ever begun, and certainly one does not wish to imagine that it will ever cease. What I like most about it is that, more than any *Review* published, it escapes from the mid-Victorian obsession that a review, by its mere condition of being such, constitutes a kind of literary fiat. There is less of that so irritating, and to the whole cause of literature, so stultifying attempt to pass off the reviewer's personal reactions for legitimate criticism, than in any thing that reaches me here. What I seem to see, to return to the figure of the procession, is all the books of the hour with the front of their bosoms cut out like those people in Hawthorne's story, and a pane of clear glass substituted. March on, march on!"

from SIDNEY HOWARD

"—I do so like *The Saturday Review*. It has good sense, good taste, good humor and good breeding and those are rare qualities in the periodical world of our times. It has both courage and scepticism—courage in its openness of mind and scepticism—wherever a paper should have scepticism. I mean by all that high falutin' talk that it is friendly to the new and suitably suspicious of it.

I wish that I might balance this letter with some constructive criticism or suggestion, but I have enjoyed my subscription and I confidently expect to continue "along those lines."

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of LITERATURE
Penton Building, Cleveland, Ohio

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TROY AND PAEONIA
with Glimpses of Ancient Balkan History and Religion
By Grace Harriet Macurdy
Professor of Greek in Vassar College
Pp. xi + 259 \$3.75

This work contains the results of studies dealing with the culture, history and religion of the tribes which built the walls of Troy in the centuries illuminated by the poems of Homer. The author attempts to follow threads of allusion in the poems and to discover their historical value.

"Out of some fifty books on Homeric subjects which have been published in the last few years, I should put this among the first half dozen."—Sir Gilbert Murray.

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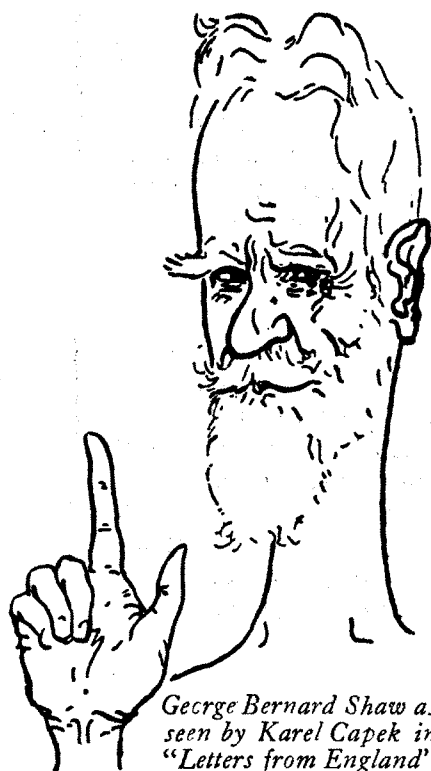
civilization? Margaret Turnbull's "Alabaster Lamps" (Reilly & Lee, \$2) gives us romance old-fashioned in flavor. The "Wings of Desire," by Maurice Dekobra (Macaulay, \$2), is a Frenchman's view of America presented in a rather second-rate melodramatic novel. Grant Sinclair's "The Roman Thou Art", displays more melodrama, with a garish Golden Gate as background, the principal character a dervish girl emerging from squalor; and in "Yellow Fingers" (Lippincott, \$2) Gene Wright gives us quite as excitingly, and far more art, the mystery, romance drama of the Gorgeous East.

Miss Lynde narrates, in "Mellowing" (Scribner's, \$2) the graphic story of a sheep and his fortune. Quite as a solid novelist, Wilfrid M. Raine presents the twenty-year novels, featuring the versus shepherds for the called "Troubled Waters" (Scribner's, \$2). Some good in. And here we West: Fred- dlers of the vorous North the plot by their discussions, one might almost say by their very presence.

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BOOKS

HUDSON TERMINAL BLOC
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Even the English admit that England is full of traditions. Many of them assert that England is founded on traditions. In fact, the honest Briton is so keen in traditions of various kinds that he does not hesitate to create new ones whenever occasion arises.

In the Balkans, however, traditions are neither so stabilized nor so overwhelming. People don't take them quite so seriously.

So when Karel Capek, famous Czecho-Slovakian author of that weird play *R. U. R.*, records in whimsical letters and delightful sketches his impressions of the most conservative country in the world—well, he pokes a few solid British traditions in the ribs—steps lightly on the toes of a few national demigods—and cheerfully shares with his readers the amazement and amusement he felt during a recent trip to the island of roast beef, constables, and afternoon tea.

LETTERS FROM ENGLAND

By Karel Capek
Illustrated by the author

Doubleday, Page & Co. \$2.00



Here Professor Capek has caught Mr. Chesterton apparently on the point of bursting into a paradoxology.

The Phoenix Nest

A FASCINATING little book of verses and drawings is "Puck in Pasture", written and illustrated by E. Mackinstrey (Doubleday, Page). The decorations recall the pen-work of *Levat Fraser*, without his mastery, but with a fantastic charm of their own. The poems are uneven but secrete occasionally an original magic. It is an extremely pretty little book altogether, with its harlequin cover. * * * *John Erskine* has now given us "The Private Life of Helen of Troy", in which satire and beauty are mingled. This is certainly an excellent idea,—to show us how things fared with Helen after the Trojan War. Here she is back in Sparta, "unrepentant, too beautiful to kill". From a glance at the book we see that Mr. Erskine makes his people talk like real people in modern life. We expect to derive entertainment from this fabrication when we can really get at it. And we shall be interested to compare it with *Edward Lucas White's* recent "Helen", which we much enjoyed. * * * A book of historical importance to America is "Gold of Ophir," by *Sidney and Marjorie Greenbie*. They develop, in this vivid history of our Clippers, the theme that it was the wealth of the Far East that had a dominating influence upon the whole discovery, exploration, and development of this continent. The glamour of China hangs over our early history to an extent that few of us realize today. * * * *Brand Whitlock's* "Forty Years of It" is the story of the first period of his life as lawyer, politician, statesman, and author. We dipped into it the other evening and became absorbed. It reveals such sound and fine common sense, such distinguished intelligence, that we can think of no bit of autobiography by a public American in recent years that can hold a candle to it. * * * *William Allen White* has composed an appreciative foreword to the book. Whitlock writes straightforwardly, with humour and mild sarcasm and graphic description. Almost always one can applaud his judgment and his modest courage. * * * *Paul Morand's* "Closed All Night," an intensely sophisticated and quite amusing companion volume to his "Open All Night", now appears in an American translation and is a fine and savoury artichoke for the lovers of artichokes. It received the *Prix de la Renaissance* in France. * * * *T. F. Powys* presents his audience with a new novel, "Mockery Gap". It is the story of a tiny village on the coast of England. It is the tale of Mr. Tarr and the folk of this village. "Sardonic whimsicality" about describes Powys's best characteristic—a phrase plucked from the jacket of this new creation. * * * The brilliant *Maurice Baring* is the author of two new volumes, "Dead Letters" (very funny), which date from the Trojan War down to the present day, and "Half a Minute's Silence," a collection of stories. These stories are said "to quietly express the soul of Russia,"

and readers will doubtless be able to compare them with the recent *Gerhardi* view of that great and mysterious country. * * * *Baring* was born in 1875, fourth son of the first Lord Revelstoke. He served in the diplomatic service in Paris, Copenhagen, and Rome, and then went to St. Petersburg, about 1904, as special correspondent. * * * In the Great War he was in the Royal Flying Corps. * * * His two-volume biographical novel "C," published last year, will be remembered as a distinguished piece of work. * * * It will be in two finely illustrated volumes. * * * *William Garrett*, the Scotch advocate-author, who has been travelling in this country and Canada, and whose detective stories have become quite popular, has put his imprimatur upon *J. C. Snaith's* "Thus Far", "an excursion by that writer into Mr. Garrett's own field of the murder tale." * * * *Ralph Barton* has been elected to illustrate a new two-volume limited edition of *Balzac's* "Droll Tales" which Liveright will bring out this autumn. Barton has just returned from Touraine where he has been securing local-color for his illustrations. * * * A number of the originals of some of the illustrations already completed have been sold by Mr. Barton to collectors. * * * "The Enormous Room," by *E. E. Cummings*, is being translated into French by *Valery Larbaud*. * * * We have much enjoyed the slight volume of *Burne-Jones's* "Letters to Katie". It shows the great Pre-Raphaelite in a new and very attractive phase. * * * *Samuel Scoville, Jr.* has written us from a bursting heart one of the most amusing letters we have had yet, beginning, "You big coward!" He refers to the fact that he fears we have "got him in bad" with *Blanche Colton Williams*. We have only space to quote part of his

effusion, *Blanche* part:
See what my stuff did for *Kit*—
used to live in Philadelphia which I'm tell-
you for wildness trots right up next Brook-
lyn and Dayton, Tenn. When he was here
he kept the old nose-bag on most of the time—
I know because I used to toastmaster for
some of the dinners people kept giving him.
Then he went bad and broke into the *Ladies*
Home Journal—it's been suppressed since he
left, repressed anyway. Well, that boy read
just one of my pieces. Within a week he'd
cleaned up, moved to York, broke away
from all them rummies what he used to play
around with and got a job on the *Saturday*
Review. I've heard them tell it that a guy
named Canby, who's a purist, has taken him
up. Well that's what Kit needed. Sydney
Williams and I did all we could in Phillie,
but then Sydney never was what I'd call a
real purist and I couldn't do it all.
As soon as ever he began to write in York
he showed what my nature pieces done for
him. He wrote something about where the
blue begins. I never got so far as reading
it myself, but I've known them who did.
With me the blue begins on Monday morning
and lasts until the next week-end unless, of
course, there's holidays come between—but then
I never was what you'd call a real willing
worker.
But now, getting back to *Blanche*, I didn't
mean nothing in my letter to you saying
that it was weird for a Professor of English
to like Harold Bell Wright's sob stuff or that
Curwood was all wrong about there being
skylarks and brown nightingales and cardinal
birds in Canada. Curwood can have ostriches
and cassowaries singing in the banyan trees
north of Montreal and I'll never peep a word
again if *Blanche's* willing to leave things lay.
I never meant to hurt that poor girl's
feelings and her so nice about honorably
mentioning me as an also ran in the 1923 O.
Henry. Now you tell it to her. You know
me. I wouldn't hurt no woman's feelings.
Anyway she had the big laugh on me because
I didn't spell "wierd" right. No one spells
"wierd" or "seige" or "sieve" or any of them
trick words right except by accident. It was
my secretary anyway who wrote the letter
and she spells by ear—no, no, I just can't do
it, hiding behind a girl. I spelled it out for
her myself.
So you tell it to *Blanche Colton Williams*,
she's willing to call the whole brawl off and
mention me honorable some more, I'll buy on
of her monograms about Harold Bell Wright
I'll even go so far as to read one of his darn
books—if I can.
Now, you tell it to her. You got me
wrong and you oughter get me out right.
* * * Well, we've done the best
could. * * * We certainly have!
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