

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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The Milk of Emerson

EMERSON is the George Washington of American literature. He has been made into a plaster saint, very cold plaster, very high-brow saintliness, and his philosophy has been used to get children up in the morning, and has been warmed over for boosting religions, and adapted for advertisements of bath tubs and real estate. Hitch your wagon to a star, has been the motto of many an American speculation.

Well, it is comfort to find the man more human than his smug descendants who reduce his maxims to platitudes, and syndicate them through the press. It is a gratification to have a book of his own that smashes plaster, lets the warm blood run, and restores the man, as W. E. Woodward and Rupert Hughes have recently been restoring the human Washington. "The Heart of Emerson's Journal"* is a condensation of the ten volumes published some years ago by Dr. Emerson and Waldo E. Forbes (not Edward Waldo Forbes as it is stated in the Preface of the new book); it might well be called The Heart of Emerson, for Emerson's first and warmest thinking went into his Journals, and was merely strung together afterwards for his lectures and essays.

This Emerson, self-revealed, is by no means the impeccable mentor which his imitators, all the way to Elbert Hubbard and beyond, have pretended to be. He is humorous, he is vain, a man naïvely longing for company worthy of his own intellect and desiring to shine therein; he struts when he sets down a self-conscious epigram, with an air of looking it over; he is querulous and craves sympathy, he is afraid he will die before he becomes famous, he is often inconsistent. Only a man both great and very human could work out the theories of pacifism and non-resistance which less original men have been rediscovering ever since, and yet, most amazingly, in the heat of the Civil War decide that only fighting settles such controversies, and accuse Grant at the end of too great generosity in the terms of peace. He was human in other senses also. Wealth, he wrote, loses much of its value if it have not wine. "I abstain from wine only because of the expense."

Surely this is no theorist, but a true child of Adam. But he is more than mere man. With Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton he comes near to representing the total formative idea of young America. The belittlers will have difficulty with this journal of a transparently great soul which reads like a Bible of American idealism. There is the intense ambition for self-betterment in it, the boundless hope of success, the self-reliance of the pioneer, the half mystic withdrawals toward nature and the woods which so many Americans have experienced, the humorous self-criticism—"great race, but though an admirable fruit, you shall not find one good, sound, well-developed apple in the tree. Nature herself was in a hurry with these hasters and never finished one." Even that curious mixture of puritanism with its opposite which is so typically American that every critic of puritanism from Cooper and Whitman down to Mencken becomes half puritan himself, is in Emerson. He praises Shakespeare because his characters are done in sport and left with God, and in another breath accuses Boccaccio of giving all his attention to a

*The Heart of Emerson's Journals. Edited by Bliss Perry. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1926. \$3.

In His Own Country

By LORD DUNSANY

A NEW thing came and they could not see,
A new wind blew and they would not feel it.

Out of a world of wizardry,

With a scent picked up in Araby,

And a charm for the hurried mind to heal it,
And a song blown west from Arcady;

A new wind blew and they would not feel it.

Their watchers looked for a wind to blow;

And the new wind sang, and they could not hear it.

It slipped at dusk by the mean dull row

Of their narrow houses from fields of snow

In a magical land: they were very near it

For wonderful moments, and did not know,

The new wind sang and they could not hear it.

If they had heard it, who could not hear,

If they had learned it, who would not listen,

They had seen lost fairyland near, so near,

And the tarns of elf-land shimmering clear;

They had seen those pinnacles beckon and glisten

That now will never be seen by them here;

If they had heard, but they would not listen.

This Business of Writing

By WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

Editor, *Emporia Gazette*

MAN reflects his moods upon his arts. The spiritual history of a time and a place is found in its attitude toward beauty. When the Kingdom of God comes it will come in beauty. During the ten years passing western civilization has lost much of its faith, has let go its firm hold on hope, and has forgotten something of the buoyant love of humanity which was built upon faith and hope. So the arts in Christendom from the Caspian Sea west to Honolulu have been full of uglinesses, dishonesties, gaucheries. The cubists have come with their crashing colors and their springing angles, revealing devilish indecencies. Sculptors have sought out of the marble all its mocking sarcasms. Man is depicted from his bestial side. He is made to stand on canvases and in bronze and clay as a ruthless, cunning, greedy brute, and music is strident with tonal combinations that were unutterable twenty years ago. The wholesome barbaric yawp of Whitman fifty years ago finds modern expression in salacious gibes, obscene oglings, nauseating profanities. Prose writers shed their verbs like little boys shedding their pants to exhibit their rhetorical indecencies and to shock the playgrounds. Poetry is full of gibberish about unimportant matters largely connected with the procreative viscera of dull people. In the fictional and dramatic alcove of art we have the rise of the Goddam School of Expression. Now the Goddam School of Literature was bitten by a terrible inferiority complex sometime during the War. During the War and after the Goddam lost faith, gave over hope, and spat upon love; they said in their hearts "man is a beast. In picturing him we shall forget all of the organs of his body, his brain, his bowels, his circulatory system, and devote ourselves to considering the caprices of his reproductive intestines."

Which intestines are no more important for man's well being or ill being than other groups of his physical functions. Nor is his sex machinery less important than his assimilative equipment. But they of the Goddam School refused to consider more even in the guise of a beast as a whole man. Instead they kept prodding around his lower bowels with some kind of low mischievous obsession that they were revealing life. In every few chapters to release their repressed spiritual inferiority, they came as near to bawling out the short and ugly words of obscenity as the postal law would permit them; and failing in that, they stuck into their manuscripts a lot of staccato Goddams to release the pressure of their low spirit.

Now, human life is not a mechanical process. Convince man it is and you rob him of his faith, hope, and love, and he will jump off the planet and leave it as flat as the pagans thought it was. One thing has persisted through all man's journey in this wilderness ever since he came down from the trees. That is his inextinguishable optimism, his unswerving hope, his unfailing faith. This faith and hope in the last period of his journey for two thousand brief years in the long millennial procession, have flowered into a slowly growing love of his kind, tolerance for its weaknesses, belief in its strength. By hooking up his growing social altruism man is building a civilization in which he is using more justice than ever was used on earth before. Man's growing belief in his own essential nobility in the

This Week



	PAGE
Qwertyuiop	359
Paumanok	363
By Christopher Morley	
The Novel Crop of 1926.....	376
By William Lyon Phelps	
Peter's Pence of Literature.....	378
By Count Hermann Keyserling	
Unappreciated Fauna	406
By William Rose Benét	
The Nonesuch Press.....	408
By Louis Untermeyer	

Next Week, or Later

H. L. Mencken. By Walter Lippmann.
Theodore Roosevelt. By John Corbin.

sex excitement which is intense only at rare intervals, and can be appreciated, in any case, only by the continent. He is titillated by a ballet dancer in Boston, but decides that while she may be bad for the boys from Harvard, a good student of the world like himself should see, hear, and presumably experience, everything that is the best of its kind. And yet he believes (with the Prohibitionists) that a sect for the suppression of intemperance or of loose behavior to women would be more useful than either Orthodoxy or Unitarianism which only attack

(Continued on page 364)

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last two thousand years is welding a chain of faith in the wise and benevolent purposes of his god. Some time as he sees farther into matter with the telescope and the microscope and with the cat eyes of science which peer into the dark places, man will throw that chain on to some great wheel of life and pull humanity out of its low estate into another and higher plane of life. To keep man's faith in his destiny alive through the creation of beauty, and so to urge man on to the Kingdom of God, is the purpose of art. After an artist has demonstrated that he can use his tools skilfully, his usefulness depends upon the faith that is in him, upon the hope that he reflects, upon the love which dominates his work. Old Paul was no fool; the greatest of these is love.

Now, through the years of this passing decade in America, the leadership which we call fame in the business of writing has largely been in the hands of those who believe in a mechanistic universe. Generally speaking, the business of cherishing for us Americans our ideals in the wise purposes of God and the essential nobility of man has been in the hands of the women. They have carried the torch of idealism—Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield, among the fiction writers. But one man has gone straight ahead through all the orgy of sex expressionism, through the cachinnations of Goddamism, and the gibberish of impressionism, gaily and wisely describing the American scene in his plays and novels. He has glorified man as the child of God, a wayward child perhaps, weak of course, petty, peevish, dirty, often abominable, but always carrying in his heart that nobility which marks him from the beast. That man is Booth Tarkington.



Two books have come from him this year which might have been written in 1899, the year he first came skidding across the literary stage with "The Gentleman from Indiana." The two books are a novel "The Plutocrat,"* and a book called "Looking Forward,"* which he describes as "inspiring essays." Now, Booth Tarkington's most ardent friends, one of whom is penning these lines, would not claim for him that he is our most highly skilled literary artist. Once in a while Tarkington writes a swayed-backed story. Probably one who loves life and enjoys its robust moments could imagine no more gorgeous pastime in a literary heaven than to sit down forever and read novel after novel of Booth Tarkington for the first ten chapters. After the tenth, here and there, the novel's back does begin to break. Nevertheless they are good novels, honest stories of our times. They depict us Americans as we are, raw, strong, selfish, hard, with a certain raucous and often gargantuan laughter at the finer amenities of civilization. But always we are depicted with love, with an understanding heart, with a dynamic faith in our arrival at some useful destiny in the loving purpose of a wise and patient God. The sheer, naïve daring of Booth Tarkington in using the words "inspiring essays" on the cover of a book in these degenerate days shows his scorn for the Goddam School and all its works and ways. And oh! the joy of the verbs which always adorn his staunch sentences. He is not afraid of inspiration. He seems to say on every page: life is real and life is earnest and the grave is not the goal, and what's the matter with old Longfellow anyway? Why stick your snoots up at him? Longfellow told the truth. When Booth Tarkington makes a story he is affected by the same inhibitions of good taste which kept W. D. Howells and Mark Twain from the broader excursions into rabelaisian racontage. And to those who would agonize over the methods of these authors Tarkington would answer: "Well, what's the matter with Mark Twain and Howells? They were artists in their day, who reflected their time frankly and with much more skill than if they were free to take their pictures from alley fences and barn walls where childhood's unfettered fancies worked with chalk and nails and bricks." Tarkington might contend that the pictures were better on the whole because of their polite sophistications than the crude and artless sketches of another age. Tarkington's work has lacked no verisimilitude of reality because he has idealized man. His heroes are not wax and plaster; they bleed even if they do wear trousers. His heroines lack no vitality because their sex appeal is subtle and crafty. The

THE PLUTOCRAT. By BOOTH TARKINGTON. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1926.
LOOKING FORWARD. The same.

America of Tarkington's midlands is no less terrible because he believes that it has a place in the orderly processes of a divine plan only meagerly revealed. The flat spiritual sterility which characterizes the canvases of many of his younger contemporary novelists who think they are realistic when they are merely dirty, has never attracted Tarkington into any phase of imitation. He has held his banner high proclaiming his belief that man is fundamentally decent despite man's meannesses and weaknesses and that God is essentially good in spite of an occasional democratic victory or other holocaust.

"The Plutocrat," Tarkington's offering this year, is a story which might easily have lapsed into unnecessary nastiness; unnecessary because the sex weaknesses of his central figure are more artistically assumed than described. In writing "The Plutocrat," Tarkington has not dipped his flag to the pagan gods who sit in the high places of our synagogues. He is not ashamed of being wholesome nor is he afraid of "clean mirth." In the book of "Inspiring Essays" which are really little sketches in defense of his philosophy, he has stated the whole case for idealism in parables. The book of "Inspiring Essays" is as lovely a thing as Tarkington ever has done. His parables hold up to the end. He makes his case unflinchingly. He is as wise about the weaknesses of men as the bitterest cynic. But Tarkington's wisdom is that loving wisdom which made Jesus, the Galilean, founder of our idealistic school of art, nickname the blustering James and John "Sons of Thunder" and call the stalwart understanding but chicken-hearted Peter—"This Rock."

Any Old Thing

ODDLY ENOUGH. By DAVID McCORD. Cambridge, Mass.: Washburn & Thomas. 1926.

Reviewed by ARTHUR W. COLTON

THE approach to laughter by way of Bergson is so difficult that one never arrives; the theory may be right but the treatise is totally unillustrated. It contains no substance of the smallest chuckle. Yet it seems so logical, "It must be so," you conclude, "probably I shall never laugh again."

And then a simple coincidence comes along. Instead of Bergson, you read W. W. Jacobs, his nightwatchman's tales; or J. K. Jerome, his Stage-land; or the immortal Mark, his sketch book; or something by a new man, just budding out with his first book, like this "Oddly Enough;" and lo! the world is not grey and philosophical at all, nor bitter in the mouth forever because of the war, nor anxious about its complexes, but full of the old foolishness that is wiser than philosophy, closer to reality than "realism," and able to tell you more what life will be like a hundred years from now than all the psychologists and sociologists together. A hundred years from now it—or the best of it—will bustle along like a brook, just as it used to, and there will be cakes—perhaps even ale—in spite of the virtues, and ginger will be hot in the mouth; and every now and then, for mystical but sufficient reasons, the lungs of man will begin to crow like chanticleer.

If Mr. McCord, in his little volume of essays on "any old thing and the next thing to it," does not everywhere and always omit the somewhat stale jest and the thing that has more the manners than the substance of humor, it is a sin for which we all need forgiveness. There are few of such things in existence so winged that they fly altogether in the flue. Charles Jacob's "That We Shall Rise with the Lark" is one of those that run like Ariel every minute on the top of the wind. Mr. McCord's "The Hall Closet" is one of his best. "Half Hours at Sea" and "Of Serious Question" are successful excursions into the land of irresponsible joy. There used to be more of this kind—relatively at least—than there is today. We have been growing solemn, not to say sour, grave, not to say grievous.

In "An Imminent Chapter" he runs into a vein of ivory that has some bite in it. It begins with: "The fifteen years just gone, I fear, will go down in history as the period in which America sent her shock poets out to meet the beauty of the world." That is good writing. And it ends with something about "the solemn fall of tears where youthful sniffers are—taking remarkably to heart a little trouble they ran across in Dostoevski," which is rather good too.

A Bookman

IN QUEST OF THE PERFECT BOOK.

Reminiscences and Reflections of a Bookman.

WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT. Boston: Little

Brown & Co. 1926. \$5 net.

Reviewed by TEMPLE SCOTT

MR. ORCUTT writes very pleasantly and with enthusiasm of all his subjects—the perfect book, the distinguished acquaintances he made both here and in Europe, the high esteem in which his novels were held, the kindness he met from those whose help he sought in his search, the delightful times he experienced on his travels, and the gracious hours he passed with the courteous Dr. Biagi in the Laurentian Library. His lightome yet sincere spirit in the recital of these reminiscences and reflections has a catching quality in it, and I, for one, have enjoyed it *con amore*. There is, too, a benevolent camaraderie about the manner of this recital which is quite insinuating, and affects one almost touchingly. When I had finished the reading of the story of his "quest," I was in a burning mood to write him an order for the perfect book, and had he been sitting with me at that moment, I should certainly have written it.

But I was alone, and turning the leaves of his book idly in musing. As I sat thus I began to feel the spell of Mr. Orcutt's wizardry gently leaving me. And then I bethought myself that while I had been deeply interested in the expository overture of the perfect book, and had listened open-mouthed and wide-eyed to his descant on the triumphs of typography, the lure of the illuminated book, and the achievements of William Morris and Cobden Sanderson, I had not, as a matter of fact, had the perfect book explained to me, nor had I been initiated into the elements of its perfection. It occurred to me then that I had been about to buy a pig in a poke, and I dubbed myself an impressionable ass. Still, I said to myself, partly by way of self-vindication, the man who, as he tells me in this story, has served so long and so ardent an apprenticeship at the University Press, should know a perfect book when he sees it. Why not take him at his word? No, I had suddenly conceived a longing to see this perfect book with my own eyes. I, too, had served some apprenticeship at printing, not at the University Press, I admit, but I thought that what I had learned at the Chiswick Press, of London, might here stand me in some stead. I would, therefore, postpone the fatal deed.

I had before heard of the Humanistic type and had been greatly impressed by what had been told me. So I turned, critically this time, to the specimen page of Petrarch's "Triumphs," given in this book. I confess that the more I looked at it the greater was my disappointment. So far from attracting me, it actually repelled me.

Mr. Orcutt says that Professor Eliot Norton gave the finished volume his unqualified approval, that Mr. George W. Jones, of England, pronounced the type "the most beautiful face in the world," and that the jury appointed by the Italian Government to select "the most beautiful and most appropriate type face to perpetuate the divine Dante," chose the Humanistic type. Faced by these large expressions of approval, I hesitate to pipe out my own feelings. Yet I think I could summon a jury of experts as adequate as those cited by Mr. Orcutt who would pronounce a different verdict. Perhaps, it is a matter of taste, and about that, of course, there can be no dispute. I will, therefore, simply confess that my own taste is inhumanistically inclined, at least in so far as the present type specimen moves me. It irks me and gives me the fidgets. I don't know whether it's printed type or handwriting, and I feel like "punching" it again.

Of Mr. Orcutt's "In Quest of the Perfect Book," as a piece of bookmaking, I have nothing but praise. The type is very readable and of a fine lineage, the press work is good, the illustrations are excellently reproduced and have been selected with discrimination. My personal feeling is against "tailing" off the endings of the chapters, as has here been done, but that also may be a matter of taste. The beginner in the study of bookmaking, either as an art, or as a hobby, will find that Mr. Orcutt's book will lead him to further studies and will send him adventuring on his own; and if he never finds the perfect book—which is more than likely—he will certainly have a good time trying to find it.