

Points of View

Bryant and Illinois

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Few persons among those fairly conversant with literary matters associate the poet, William Cullen Bryant, with the early history of Illinois. Yet the Bryant family, with the exception only of the poet, migrated from Massachusetts to the Illinois frontier in the thirties of the last century. On the two or three occasions when he paid them a visit his mind was impressed by their natural surroundings and these impressions were subsequently transmuted into the best verse we have on Illinois landscape. Thus, "The Prairies" had its inception on the occasion of a memorable horseback-ride over the Illinois country from Jacksonville northward when he first visited his brothers in 1832. Of his impressions on that occasion he has left a vivid account which anyone may see in its diary form in the second volume of his prose works. I may now add, on the authority of a member of the Bryant family, that on a later visit, when the brothers had taken up their permanent abode near Princeton, Illinois, he came back from a ramble through the neighboring woods one November afternoon and wrote the well-known lines beginning, *The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year, / Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere.*

All of the Bryant brothers had versifying propensities. A volume of John Bryant's poems was published by Appleton's in 1855, and has since been reprinted privately. Most of the poems relate to Nature; some are overshadowed only by the fact of his brother's greater renown. As a poet of occasions he was superior to his brother, and was always called upon at the family reunions held until a few years ago. Much family history is lost to scholars since the diary which the mother kept to the day of her death was carried off a score of years ago by an unscrupulous "investigator."

Recently I enjoyed a morning's conversation with a nephew of the poet, a man well in the seventies. Naturally the talk drifted to the best known member of the family. "Uncle William was not the large man that his pictures suggest," said my host, "but his brothers were all tall men. They were great walkers, and very fond of the out of doors. I can still see Uncle William coming out of the orchard on one of his visits, tapping the trees with his cane. He did not visit us often, for he was a busy man of affairs. His work on the *Post* during the stormy period when Greeley edited the *Tribune* frequently drew him into political discussion. Like his brothers, who maintained a station on the Underground Railroad, he was strongly opposed to slavery. Abraham Lincoln, whom he had met at the head of some raw recruits on his first visit to Illinois, consulted him often, and regarded his advice very highly."

ERNEST E. LEISY.

Bloomington, Ill.

Simple Aesthetics

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Some time ago there appeared in your stimulating journal an announcement of the forgotten truth that fiction is great by virtue of its character creation. However something should be added to this just utterance. Great authors create notable characters, but these characters need have no great character: their living quality is in their talk; and in talk which has nothing to do with the author's story—the plot, and its development—but is simply interesting in detachment. The prince, master, and model of story-tellers is Homer—both for plot and character-making. But all of the action of the plot in Homer's forty-eight books could be put into two books. It happens that Achilles, Ulysses, and Ajax are great, and that in "Twelfth Night" nobody is—but they are delightful both because what each character says is picturesque, of general interest as a speech, as an exhibition of an individual's posture, and a representative utterance of some recognizable sort of man—eccentric or usual.

Now the notable characteristic of our clever moderns is, that with the exception of W. D. Howells, Clemens, and Harte, not one has added a character to the literary list since Mrs. Poyser. Silas Lapham and Bartly Hubbard have become known; Jack Oakhurst and Huckleberry Finn are known. Has any character outside of those forenamed authors' books taken on an objective life anywhere, since Mrs. Poyser? The *Egoist* is no household word: in fact, it is not a char-

acter, but a name, and says nothing that delights with its absurdity or sense, apart from the author's self-expression. In Henry James, for one example of many, not a single character utters a speech which is delightfully apart from its context. He speaks solely for the purpose of telling the author's story for him, to carry on the author's plot, or to exhibit himself as a character, not as an entertainer. "Maisie" is a touching and beautiful creation—but "I do! I do!" is the summit of her beautiful utterances (and in its situation it is beautiful) all that she says is simply to show Maisie to the reader, without any picturesqueness in itself. Quite different are Nestor, Phoenix—who makes only one speech, but lives—Agamemnon, Ajax, and the rest, all of whose speeches carry the reader with them through simple interest in what is said, and the character's looks, which the words visualize, entirely irrespective of Homer's story. Mrs. Poyser furthers the narrative of "Adam Bede" not at all; Mrs. Gamp assists the plot of "Chuzzlewit" a little, but any nurse of few words could have done as much. Mrs. Gamp, Captain Costigan, Fred Bayham, old Osborn, Dick Swiveller, Micawber, and the host of other Dickens's vitalities live by what they say, and how they look. So does Theodore Colville, in "Indian Summer"—so do the Langbriths and other Howells people. These personages walk and talk of themselves, walking off on their own legs, independently, and of course to mention what Dickens's folk are, or what Juliet, Iago, and the rest, are, is superfluous enough.

All this projectivity, objectivity, has completely disappeared from the novel; with the—doubtful—exception of Anna Karenina, no one cares a button about—or knows the name of—a Tolstoy character; nobody wants to—each has an itch and a scratch, all are skin-sore—or ought to be. Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has written one charming book, "Joanna Godden," and Joanna is a live person, but nothing she or any other character in the book says, will ever become a household word; it has no interest but to tell the story and the book describes her actions. The same with the genuinely beautiful character of Clara Middleton ("Egoist"). She says nothing universally amusing, and as for the other people in the "Egoist," they are things of naught. Adrian, in "Feverel," writes most entertaining aphorisms, yet Adrian will never live as a type character, and modern novelists not only do not create notable characters that become household inmates of the reader's home grounds, but they do not try to. Their novels are not on that plane; their characters must tell the author's story, or else analyse themselves—they have no generalizations—all is microscopic and laboratory study. It is striking—and it is Art, but at present, if for always or not, the art of Tom Jones, Shandy, and the Vicar, is *passé*—"as the French say" (as Mr. James says). The sole exception to the now universal rule is an author who would be ruled out by the serious modern critic, as merely a joker. He is never seriously reviewed, though often reviewed with a tribute to his harmless gaiety. But—in his humble way—this man has created characters of a rich individuality, and in one little masterpiece of his, the characters simply walk the streets, sit at tables, do, live, breathe, and talk and are life at our elbow, as we see it every day in delightful or exasperating persons, and every word they utter is juicy, in itself. "The Little Warrior," by one P. G. Wodehouse, is (God forgive me!) the most delightful book (*me judice*) since Howells's "Indian Summer."

FRANCIS DANE BAILEY.

New York.

Letters from Egypt

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Permit me to add my cordial agreement to the eulogy of "Letters from Egypt," by Miss Bard. As she does not mention it, I may note that there is a second volume, "More Letters from Egypt," of equal interest, by the same writer.

WM. H. DALL.

Washington, D. C.

An Answer

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Mr. Stephen D. B. Hyllebourne (Points of View, November 20th) will find relief from the responsibilities of authorship in Browning's Asolando. The line runs—

"Oh, to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!"

PHILIP M. HICKS.
Swarthmore College.



Look through the pages of this excellent number of *The Saturday Review*, oh Gentle Reader; read the many criticisms; scan the advertising columns; make up a list of friends and relatives; mother, father, Aunt Belle, Uncle Ed, little Jimmie, Tom, Ruth, Mr. Robins, all of those to whom you wish to show affection and appreciation at this the time of year which custom has established as a period for the making of gifts; take a street car, subway or elevated railroad train—your Ford or Rolls Royce—and, carrying both this periodical and the list, hasten to the nearest bookstore or book department member of the *American Booksellers Association*.

The haste is not necessary because of the possibility of certain books not being in stock at the last moment, for while this condition is possible it is more than likely that your bookseller has carefully acquired a sufficient number of copies of every title to supply all demands. But doing one's book-shopping early gives one the opportunity to more carefully examine the very large supply of books and to choose more wisely those that will best please each person on the list. Should you be doubtful of the fitness of any book ask the bookmen and women to tell you something more about it.

* * * * *

What? You did not intend giving books? May I ask if there is a better sort of present than the one that gives pleasure, imparts knowledge and grows more pleasing with age and continued use? Of course everyone wants books. If you are not certain just which ones are wanted ask your bookseller to find out for you. Or give book bonds, or orders on your bookseller, so that the recipient may make his or her own selection.

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Nowadays the passion for the giving of gilded unecessaries and handsome unusables has given way to a sane effort to make presents useful. Let us therefore follow this sensible tendency and give BOOKS.

ELLIS W. MEYERS,
Executive Secretary,
American Booksellers Association

P.S.—A subscription to *The Saturday Review of Literature* is also rated as a worth-while gift.



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A SHIRTSLEEVES HISTORY

UNDER the above enigmatical title, an extraordinarily humorous, candid, anonymous, documented, *Inside History of American Literature and Publishing from the Dawn of a New Sentiment* about the time the furnace was lit in 1912, down to the publication of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," starts on page 359 of this issue. The anonymity of the compiler will be scrupulously observed; the inside story of a contemporary era told with as much frankness, humor, fairness and intimacy as possible.

Another feature, to start in an early issue, will be a series of essays by Henry Seidel Canby upon the great figures of American literature, Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Emerson, Poe, Mark Twain, Whitman and others, against the social background of their times—what they were as men and writers, but also what they drew from the unique American experience and what they meant in the development of an American type of mind and a distinctly American literature.

The Saturday Review in 1926-27 offers its most ambitious editorial program. It will publish, as hitherto, essays by the best pens here and abroad, which interpret and illumine the life that lies behind literature as well as literature itself.

All subscribers to *The Saturday Review* have received the announcement of special rates for Christmas Gift subscriptions and those who are planning to adopt this suggestion for the remembrance of "kinsprits" should not delay too long in forwarding their instructions to

The Saturday Review
of LITERATURE

25 WEST 45th STREET, NEW YORK CITY

The Nonesuch Press

By LOUIS UNTERMEYER

LESS than five years ago three young writers, then unknown, decided to become publishers of books which would delight the scholar as well as the mere collector. The three were David Garnett, later well-known as the author of "Lady Into Fox" and "A Man in the Zoo," Vera Mendel, translator of two of Ernst Toller's most difficult plays, and Francis Meynell who, besides being Alice Meynell's son, was one of the most sensitive typographical experts in the country. Since 1922 thirty-four works have been produced, each of which is now a collector's "item." The subscription list is so large that all the limited editions (and the Nonesuch Press brings out little else) are exhausted on the day of publication and bibliophiles who have neglected to put their orders in in advance have paid premiums which might well be considered fantastic. But the Nonesuch are not merely exquisite examples of the printer's art. Although a Chinese craftsman, ignorant of a single sentence, would admire the dignity of spacing, the restraint of decoration, the pure design of a page, these are eminently for those who use books for reading. Exceptional discrimination is evident not only in the physical properties of the volumes but in the very choice of titles. The list of limited editions published before 1926 includes the Poems of Andrew Marvell, reprinted from the unique copy of the 1681 edition in the British Museum; The Love Poems of John Donne, in which readers will find that superb piece "The Ecstasy" so inexcusably maimed by "Q." in his Oxford Book of English Verse; the Writings of William Blake, in three (imperial 8vo.) volumes; "The Anatomy of Melancholy" in two large volumes illustrated boldly by E. McKnight Kauffer; and The Bible in five volumes of which the Apocrypha and three volumes of the Old Testament have been printed.

During the summer of 1926 two volumes appeared which caused something of a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic. One was the English Poems of John Milton in two volumes with 53 illustrations by William Blake; the other was The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, which included certain poems so racy that the officials in charge of preserving the nation's virtue refused it admission into the United States. Undaunted by this public rebuff (or advertisement) the Nonesuch trio went ahead with their illicit plans which include (for 1927) The Divine Comedy (to be printed in Italian and English) with forty double-page colotype reproductions of illustrations by Botticelli; The Pencil Drawings (about seventy-five in all) of William Blake; Cobbett's rare "Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine in England and America;" and the inauguration of a new policy: the determination to publish two "new and original" books by contemporary authors each year, the first of which will be Romer Wilson's tragi-comedy "Latterday Symphony."

So far the Nonesuch Press has issued only five "unlimited" books. One of those is the delightful "Tale of Mr. Tootleoo," a children's book of the first rank; the other is that "sociable anthology" "The Week End Book," now in its third edition and seventeenth impression. The first (and far away the best) of its kind, sincerely flattered by hasty though inept imitators, it is (as the prospectus describes it) "for people who work in towns and week end in the country. . . who know the Oxford Book well enough and other anthologies too well; who sing on the road or over the fire what songs they can remember; who often wish they could think of a new game to while away the evening; who experiment frequently in cooking and occasionally in physic . . . and who have been known to trespass in their walks." The collection, which already has earned the grudging admiration and unlimited fury of every other anthologist contains five excellent sections of poems to read aloud (Great Poems, Hate Poems, State Poems, The Zoo, Epigrams); Seventy-One Tunes (Chanties, Folksongs, Negro Spirituals, Ballads) with music; Games, with and without paper, indoor and outdoor; Food and Drink and How to Get It; First Aid to the Injured (and there have been people who took it seriously); and the helpful finale on The Law and How to Break It. The end-papers are Game-boards (checkers and draughts), blank pages for supplementing each section—there are even forms for "Qualities," a variation of the old Confessions game.

But the volume which most readers will hail with the loudest (or lewdest) shouts is Mrs. Amanda M'Kittick Ros's novel "Irene Iddesleigh." Not since the works of Julia Moore, the Sweet Singer of Michigan, or James Byron Elmore, the Bard of Alamo, has there been such a treat for the *cognoscenti*. "Irene Iddesleigh" has been out of print for years (it was published in 1897) and the members of the Nonesuch Press, who had been passionate celebrants of Mrs. Ros's alliteration (she being also the author of "Dora Delaney" and "Poems of Puncture") have been lucky enough to republish this rare classic, in a limited edition of twelve hundred copies, in a format which "in all its details (except the too white paper) has been carefully adapted to the character of the book." The story beggars retelling, the style is beyond description.

Every chapter begins sententiously with an utterance as oracular as: "When on the eve of glory, whilst brooding o'er the prospects of a bright and happy future, whilst meditating upon the risky right of justice, there we remain, wanderers on the cloudy surface of mental woe, disappointment and danger, inhabitants of the soiled sphere of anticipated imagery, partakers of the poisonous dregs of concocted injustice. Yet such is life."

All of which proves that the Nonesuch Press has, and in an entirely new way, done it again!

Books and More Books

(Continued from page 406)

along sociological lines, would probably be much gratified to get Keyserling's "The Book of Marriage" (Harcourt, Brace).

And now, at long last, we come to those friends, always most numerous in the acquaintance of all of us, whose preferred reading is fiction and who are eager to keep up with the best of the new novels that are published. Since Mr. William Lyon Phelps has in another place in this issue taken up certain of them at some length, and since many of the others have already had extended consideration in our columns, we shall now merely list them by title, with only an occasional word of characterization. All of the following are novels of more than average interest: "The Preface to a Life," by Zona Gale (Appleton), a book (and here we begin immediately to do what we had determined not to) which for part of its length is admirable in its realism and then slides off into what is either pathology or mysticism, but which is nevertheless exceedingly interesting; Ford Madox Ford's "A Man Could Stand Up" (Boni); Lester Cohen's "Sweepings" (Boni & Liveright); "The Romantic Comedians" (Doubleday, Page), by Ellen Glasgow; "The World of William Clissold" (Doran), by H. G. Wells; "Debts and Credits" (Doubleday, Page), by Rudyard Kipling, a collection of short stories which represents that author in all his versatility; "Her Son's Wife," (Harcourt, Brace), by Dorothy Canfield; "A Deputy Was King" (Knopf), by G. B. Stern; "Good-Bye, Stranger" (Macmillan), by Stella Benson; "Introduction to Sally" (Doubleday, Page), by "Elizabeth;" "My Mortal Enemy" (Knopf), by Willa Cather; "The Silver Spoon" (Scribners), by John Galsworthy; "Iowa Interiors" (Knopf), by Ruth Suckow; "Early Autumn" (Stokes), by Louis Bromfield; "Power" (Viking), by Lion Feuchtwanger; "The Sun Also Rises" (Scribners), by Ernest Hemingway; "Beau Sabreur" (Stokes), by Percival Christopher Wrenn; "The Time of Man" (Viking), by Elizabeth Madox Roberts; "A Fiddler in Barly" (McBride), by Robert Nathan; "Mrs. Socrates" (International); "Candaules' Wife and Other Stories" (Putnam), by Emily James Putnam; "The Black Angels" (Day), by Maud Hart Lovelace; "The Dark Dawn" (Dodd, Mead), by Martha Ostenso; "The Elder Brother" (Dial), by Anthony Gibbs; and "Show Boat" (Doubleday, Page), by Edna Ferber; "Almost Pagan" (Bobbs-Merrill), by J. D. Beresford; "A Manifest Destiny" (Brentanos), by S. D. Howden Smith; "Five Hundred Dollars" (Little, Brown), by Herman White Chapin; "The Unearthly" (Cosmopolitan), by Robert Hichens; "Mitya's Love" (Holt), by Ivan Bunin; "The Ninth Wave" (Harcourt, Brace), by Carl Van Doren; "Janet Thurso" (Harcourt, Brace), by Alexander Moray; "Hilda Ware" (Holt), by L. Allen Harker; "The Grey Coast" (Little, Brown), by Neil M. Gunn; and "My Son John" (Minton, Balch), by E. B. Dewing.