

to the *World*, spent some years on the Philadelphia *North American*, engaged later in syndicate work, then became a game protector in Florida, and finally an amateur horticulturist in Connecticut.

It is a record more diversified than most but the merit of the book lies outside the chronicle of happenings and the expected fund of good stories. It lies in the spirit of the author. He has always had a good time and doesn't care who knows it, and he tries to help his readers have a good time too—this in an age where the most highly admired books, and the most widely circulated, are those which try to infect the author's customers with his own acute acidosis. Joy books are rare and they have a scarcity value.

A further virtue of Mr. McDougall's is that he doesn't give a damn for anybody. This shines out the more strongly because his story is inevitably, in large part, a story of newspapers and newspapermen. Most books of that sort are written either by executives, or by earnest young men who hope to become executives if they display sufficient adeptness in office politics. Accordingly, journalistic history comes pretty near being a subdivision of hagiology. But McDougall's chronicle will never be included in any volume of the *acta sanctorum*. He says what he thinks, regardless, a quality all the more laudable since his career is principally identified with the newspaper which above all others has erected the worship of the genius of Rome and Augustus into a state religion, the *New York World*.

Don Seitz's book about Pulitzer was probably as free from pious reserve as any official biography can ever be, but none the less it was official and its character is written on every page. Read it with McDougall as a commentary and it is like putting lemon juice on invisible ink. Seitz states the facts, or as many of them as discretion permits; McDougall whittles the statement to a point.



The bulk of Mr. McDougall's book is devoted to New York in the eighties and nineties, and to the gay companions of that epoch when our town was still small enough for a good mixer to know everybody. One reads about the gallant spirits and the merry life—and presently recalls, with a jolt, that this is the age whose shame has been described by Robert Herrick in doleful novels, whose stiff and varnished innocence has been depicted by Edith Wharton, whose low mortal ideals and parochial culture have become a commonplace of American social history. Read McDougall, and it sounds like the Golden Age.

This reviewer did not have the felicity to be alive during much of that period, or to be taking notice during any of it; but he suspects that his own glands are not so well balanced, his liver and kidneys not so copperlined, that he would have found it quite as aureate as did our happy author. One who knows McDougall only from his book may even suspect that any age in which he lived would have been golden enough, for him. Doubtless, like everything else, it looks better in retrospect. None the less he has been or says he has been, a happy man, and recognizes his obligation to set down the secret of success. You will find it in bits, here and there; and if it won't fit everybody the author may at least say in extenuation that it has fitted him, that just as four hours' sleep and abstinence from cigarettes made Edison, so this regimen made McDougall:

The one quite common error of sacrificing health and strength for money or a boss I have not committed, for I have lost no opportunity for play as I went along instead of waiting until I had leisure for it; and because I played diligently I am still virile and joyous and so much ahead of the game. . . . I have observed that the more senile of my old comrades are those who have clung like barnacles to one job, and that the ones who have been fired the oftenest are the most resilient. . . . All employers love the humble toiler who imagines his job is the only one on earth, just as they dread and suspect him who sits lightly on the perch, knowing that his wings will carry them anywhere.

There is the prescription, ladies and gentlemen; take it or leave it. For the rest, McDougall is as bad a parsnagnafer as any other autobiographer; whether he rolls his own or signs a tailor-made one by Burton J. Hendrick; but at least he takes the curse off by splashing it on with a thickness that can deceive no one except social historians—as when he credits tornados with waiting till he gets to town, and ascribes the post-war popularity of prize fighting to cartoons in the *World* in the early nineties. Once Americans could generally do this sort of thing, and appreciate it; but our age will probably take these statements seriously as it takes everything else.

## The BOWLING GREEN

### A Brief Case

JOHN MACY seems to me to have done the almost undoable. He has written a sketch of the world's literature from the beginning down to our own day—from the *chansons de geste* to Edgar Guest, one might say, though that would be wrong—which is swift, scholarly, informal, and has the true thrill. This is the kind of job that has to be done over and over again, for each generation: sorting over the baggage of the past to see exactly how much of it we absolutely need to carry in our own brief-case. But I don't suppose it has ever been done with more genuine piety and charm. Mr. Macy's brief-case ("The Story of the World's Literature," Boni & Liveright: 592 pp., \$5.00) costs the reader less than one cent a page and gives him enough to ponder for a year. For three months now I have been dipping into it, reading a few pages in bed at midnight, and delighting in the skill and courage with which Macy has tackled this impossible task. He has been so successful because he never thought of it as a task. It is not like many books of that sort, just a manual. It is a cordial: it has the heart of literature beating in it. Jack Macy was the right man to do this book because he understands the continuity of literature: a kind of chain-letter coming down the ages from the unguessable hearts of long ago who had their torments also and hankered to share them: like that mythical "American army-officer" who starts all the chain-letters. If you want to know the kind of book this really is, it makes one take a small slip of paper and write down the things you swear you simply must read or re-read—such as "The Arabian Nights," "The Golden Ass," Caesar's "Gallic War," Virgil, Malory, Voltaire, Don Quixote, and the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table."



It is a thoroughly humane book, with no unworthy compromise with the scoffish tendency of the age. Jack climbs the beanstalk of scholarship into fairyland, but he does not set out to kill all the Giants. He finds, as we all do, that for the most part the people we have been told were great, really are great. Cicero is not a dull writer just because we were forced to read him immaturely; Burton and Thomas Fuller are just as entrancing as Lamb said they were. The conversational simplicity of Mr. Macy's method, with his lively humor, his shrewd asides, his deep feeling for the profound and tragic emotions, never slips into lack of dignity. He quotes Pascal's great *mot*—"When one sees the natural style one is astonished and delighted; for one expected to find an author and one finds a man." That is what one finds in this book. How fine a sagacity in his remarks by the way—

We who lie on this side of the great romantic period are inclined to discover all the gold and jewels of Donne and his successors and to think that Pope's well moulded metal is not so precious. This is a mistake from the point of view of criticism, from the point of view of pure amateurish enjoyment. Every poet, every artist should be appreciated, judged, treasured by the best that he did in his kind, no matter what other artists before him or near him or after him may have done. And of excellent specimens of two different kinds who shall say, who need say which is the better?

The book is delightful precisely because it is written from the standpoint of "pure amateurish enjoyment." "I have been bothered all my life," he tells us, "to determine which are major and which are minor poets." "We need not be abashed by great reputations, and Pamela is little better than what we should now call pretty good moving-picture stuff." "Dr. Johnson's verse is negligible." "It seems to me that Stevenson for all his praise of youth, his gay courage, his scrupulous devotion to art, and his immense popularity, was a reactionary, an old-fashioned man, and that while he was polishing his sentences the fine new thing was being done by another artist who also polished his sentences but had stouter metal to polish, George Gissing. I will stake my reputation on that judgment." It is not necessary to agree with all Mr. Macy's comments: to take merely one instance, the Dr. Johnson who wrote the Prologue for the Drury Lane opening, and the poem

about the death of Dr. Levett, does not seem to me a negligible versifier. But I have not found a single judgment in the six hundred pages that is not applaudable or relishable because one can understand why Mr. Macy feels that way.



There is a fine courage in Mr. Macy's method: he deliberately sets aside what must often have been a strong temptation to linger over his special favorites. He never relaxes the austerity of his intention: to show us the great river of human writing as a constant flowing stream, not as a succession of items. As he said long ago, in his fine little book on American Literature, "novels are suckled at the breasts of elder novels." And in the good talkative brevity of his tale he strikes off many a spark. Of Meredith, for instance: "He requires for full understanding a reader who can match his brains against the author's, and for that matter so do Shakespeare and every other man of genius." "Let us reiterate one principle on which this brief survey of literature is based—namely, that any intelligent person can read anything ever put on paper without the slightest moral damage. And unintelligent, humorless people are safe because they will not read literature or will not understand what they try to read." There are wonders in the human mind, as Marlowe's great lines remind us, "which into words no virtue can digest," and Macy's summary is hearteningly aware of this. He knows, as so few of the boilers-down of literary history seem to have known, how small a proportion of the world's literature has ever actually got itself written. It surrounds, like a sunset glow, the poor actual shreds and tatters of men's hearts that lie for us, so neatly parallel, on the printed page. Something of this aura, this golden trouble, this feeling of hunger and anger and ecstasy, he has touched into life. He knows that all art is "begotten by Despair upon impossibility."



The other day, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 45th Street, I overheard one man say to another a familiar phrase that is pleasantly expressive of much contemporary psychology, "I got a terrific kick out of it," I heard him say; that was all; I have no notion of the nature of the impact. It is true that just now especially human nature seems to be eager for whatever can give it this desirable flutter behind the ribs, this warmth on the cheekbones. For those who have learned the great secret that in communion with the vanished hearts of literature lies perhaps the greatest and most delicately durable "kick" of all, Mr. Macy's book will be a happiness. I can imagine that some experienced scholars of world-literature will point to flaws of proportion, to omissions, or sketchiness; but the author himself admits these. The truly important thing is what a too severe scholar might even miss, the subtle dignity of this very colloquial and conversational book. It has the dignity of passion: the dignity of dealing with literature as it deserves, as the living expression of human joy and suffering. It is written in what can only be called a profoundly religious spirit; for these great lives who wrestled for us to say their weirds are the most sacred saints we have. A woman told me that when she saw the words "O rare Ben Johnson" on the stone in Westminster Abbey (it is spelled there with an h, I think) her eyes were wet. That was the true spirit of religion. That is the religion that Mr. Macy understands. His book is full of it; it ends with the word Amen; and, however absurd it may seem to the cynical, the feeling that it often implants in the reader is the humble prayer that he too, even in his littleness and perplexity, might somehow strive to add something to this noble story of men's hearts. So it is not only a brief-case, but a breviary.



This haphazard comment on Mr. Macy's book would be even more incomplete if one did not add a word as to the unusual drawings by Onorio Ruotolo, which are uneven in excellence, but at their best are superb. Mr. Ruotolo has remarkable power and imagination; some of the portraits, while perhaps making too direct a bid for one's sentiment, are extraordinarily impressive. I call your attention, for instance, to those of Dante, Tolstoy, and Poe.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

