

Introducing Whitman

THE MAGNIFICENT IDLER. By CAMERON ROGERS. Illustrated by Edward A. Wilson. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1926. \$3.50.

TWO PREFACES. By WALT WHITMAN.

Edited by Christopher Morley. The same. \$1.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

WALT WHITMAN, like most writers who have boiling within them the elements of greatness, needs no praise, but only what he clamored for so egregiously throughout his lifetime, to be read. Yet to be read, and read sympathetically and intelligently, Walt requires both an introduction and an interpreter. He had none of the social graces himself, though such intense sociability, and his poetry has few of the literary graces. It does not invite the youthful taste nor does it conciliate the literary mind. Its idealism, far from being a representation of everyday life, is an abstract from a vision of democracy which was a prophecy in Whitman's own day and is now almost a reminiscence; its beauty is attained through discord and when not beautiful his poetry is raucous or confused.

Walt Whitman, like so many American writers of real distinction, lived in two times. He was behind his age, and he was ahead of his age. He was in the rearward of Western culture, education, and refinement, and the knowledge of those means of artistic expression which a great tradition had put into the hands of every trained writer. As an artist he was self-made, and self-making in art, even when it preserves originality, leaves its mark upon achievement. The self-made writer wears his style with a difference, and the difference is not always desirable. He seldom escapes from self-consciousness when he writes, and his effects are gained by sheer force rather than easy simplicity. Walt clubs his diction into verse for fear his idea will escape him.

But Whitman was ahead of his time also. He grasped, before the social philosophers, the coming dominance of the plain human man, unprivileged, unspoiled by too much civilization, yet freed by science and a new continent from "chill penury" and given hope. With an intense love of the human species characteristic of the great optimists, he sought this *homo vulgaris* in an America where opportunity had made him common, and drew from him an ideal of democracy which could not be expressed in the conventional language of aristocratic poetry. He gave poetry a new rhythm, and almost a new language, and then magnificently deciding that he himself was the typical man of the new dispensation, proceeded to make himself, in every aspect that he knew, the subject of his verse. The brew was not mild, for in pursuance of his object Whitman put in his passions, his vanities, his brutal desires, his fantastic hopes. It was not clear, for Walt was no philosopher to square his perfect democrat with a possible society, and no classicist to express all that he did express with equal success and harmony. But in spite of confusion, bad taste, absurdity, and occasional flat dullness, he did achieve a unity and was quite right in speaking all his life of the "Leaves of Grass" as co-existent with, and all expressive of, himself and what he would mean for history. Few poets can say as much of their work.

A lyric of Housman's needs no introduction and little explanation. It lives in itself and stands by itself. But the readers of "Leaves of Grass" must first understand Whitman, for without him, and the peculiar conditions of his vanishing America, and his impassioned idealizing of those conditions, and the theory of man which he drew therefrom and which, like all theories of man that have their bases in experience, has potential truth that outlives immediate application—without these comprehensions the reader is buffeted among extravagances and makes port only in the most familiar and not always the best of Whitman's poems.

For such an introduction Cameron Rogers's "The Magnificent Idler" is perhaps the best provision yet made. It is a biographical sketch in which the fancy of the author has freely recreated from known evidence the life, and especially the early life, of Whitman. The title is unhappily chosen, for an idler to such purpose as Whitman's is of course no idler at all, even though magnificent in his capacity for doing nothing long which the low world calls work, but the virility and the intense

humanity of this handsome giant with a man's brain and a woman's heart are excellently described in narrative as lucid as Whitman's own diction is knotted and perverse. "The Magnificent Idler" is a book for those who have not read Whitman, not for his familiars, and as such it will do good, and is, furthermore, good reading.

Alone, however, it is not enough. Enough of his life is there, except for its political phases which Mr. Rogers has not fully penetrated, but there is a gap between the last chapter and Whitman's own work. There is not enough in "The Magnificent Idler" to account for "Passage to India," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," or "Columbus," or "Song of the Broad-Axe," though "Drum Taps" is provided for. The Idler that Mr. Rogers describes is simply not enough of a man to write this poetry. His soul conflicts are not sufficiently great, his vanity is not sufficiently great, his prophetic visions are not virile enough, one might say that his confusions are not deep enough. The book will introduce Whitman, it does not explain him.

Fortunately, in default of the definite critical study that has not yet appeared, a little book has just been published that will go a long way toward making Whitman the poet intelligible. It is Whitman's own, and yet since most editions of "The Leaves of Grass" do not contain them, it is probable that many readers of the poet have never seen the Preface to the 1855 (the first) edition of the "Leaves" and his "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" of 1888, now edited in separate



JOHN DAY

The famous sixteenth century English printer and bookseller, in "commemoration of whose honorable tradition" the new publishing house, the John Day Company, has taken its name.

form by Mr. Morley, who hopes, with good reason, that they will find their place in the teaching of English and history in our colleges and schools. Here is Whitman's complete program set forth at the moment of his greatest vitality, and his own later criticism of it, both in a prose intended not to celebrate but to explain. The 1855 Preface is one of the remarkable documents of American history; it is a theory of poetry, a theory of democracy, a theory of the American idealism which Whitman professed. Indeed, there are few more significant passages in nineteenth century criticism, whether esthetic or social, than the best of this astonishing document; the prophetic frenzy, the vast egoism, the sadly mistaken view of the future do not mar their value, both as history and as a vision of hope:

The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. . . . What is marvelous? what is impossible or baseless or vague? after you have once just opened the space of a peachpit and given audience to far and near and to the sunset and had all things enter with electric swiftness softly and duly without confusion or jostling or jam. . . .

The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. . . .

All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. . . .

Have patience and indulgence toward the people, take

off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons. . . .

For the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy. . . .

Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances. As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances.

It is such passages and the poetry that they preface that the lovable, selfish, idling Whitman of Mr. Rogers is never quite capable of. For the Preface is essentially religion of the optimistic, rhapsodical type which America of the 'forties had been breeding in so many directions, but focussed through a poet's brain. Whitman writes as a seer whose revelation is that the people have the seed of grace and that America is the Chosen Land of the people. It was then; but in religious fervor, and in the breadth of our joy of life we have declined steadily since the Civil War. Therefore it is best for the reader of Whitman to learn first of him, and then go to this "Salut au Monde" which was the Preface to this first real poetry, and afterwards, prepared, expectant, and (if he is prudish) conciliated, on to "The Leaves of Grass."

The Giant Wakes

THE ADVANCING SOUTH. By EDWIN MIMS.

New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by ARCHIBALD HENDERSON

University of North Carolina

IT is not without significance that the author of the volume under review was designated by Walter Hines Page in 1911 to write a series of articles on the South for the World's Work. "The Advancing South" may be regarded as, in a sense, a greatly magnified edition of that series. For thirty years Professor Mims, at Trinity College (now Duke University), the University of North Carolina, and Vanderbilt University, has been forwarding the cause of culture and literature in the South—in the class-room, from the lecture platform, in books (notably "The Life of Sidney Lanier"), and stimulating essays innumerable. It is to men of this stamp—Mims, Alphonso Smith, William P. Trent, Edgar Gardner Murphy, William Garrott Brown, William E. Dodd, Walter Hines Page, to mention a few of the most conspicuous—that the advancing South owes inspiration for its present impetus in intellectual, social, and cultural progress. The comical refutation of the boisterous and indiscriminating ballyhoo, intitled "The Sahara of the Bozart," was Mr. Mencken's own admission not very long afterwards that he was swamped with contributors from the South for his new magazine of criticism and causticity, the *American Mercury*.

These new Southern writers and critics had been on the horizon all the while; Mr. Mencken just didn't happen to see them! But with commendable honesty—and obviously he was in no sense responsible for the existence of writers of whom he was not even aware—he made the announcement that for the first two years of the magazine's existence the South had supplied twenty-three contributors and fifty-five contributions, while New England had supplied only twenty-four contributors and forty-one contributions. A brilliant editor, with a genuine *fleur* for recognizing ability, Mr. Mencken quite naturally gave recognition where recognition was due: to the writers of the New South.

A mere catalogue of the phenomenal advances, intellectual and material, of the South in recent years, as set forth in Dr. Mims's excellent study and summary, is forbidden by limitations of space. The chapter titles are: On Judging Public Opinion in the South; Walter Hines Page; Friendly Critic of the South; Broomsedge and Life Everlasting; Looms and Furnaces; The Scholars and Critics of Chapel Hill; Colleges Under Fire; Pens That Are Swords; From Romance to Realism; The Revolt Against Chivalry; The Ebbing Tide of Color; Ecclesiastics and Prophets; A Glance at the Future. With the most outspoken frankness and a refreshingly antiseptic honesty, Dr. Mims abandons all the familiar exculpatory "rationalizations," banishes "inferiority complexes," and "defensive intellectual mechanism" to the limbo of forgotten things, and disdains the glib and classic "alibis" of the unsuccessful.

He describes in vivid phrases the state of the South today, the darker no less than the brighter phases of the social situation. In a number of vital personal sketches—of Walter Hines Page, Clarence Poe, the *illuminati* of Chapel Hill, Charles Holmes

Herty, D. A. Tompkins, George Gordon Crawford, for example,—he shows the energetic, crusading spirit of the new South actively at work. Speaking as one who, for a quarter of a century, has labored unceasingly and waited confidently for the coming of the new day, I see here no false dawn, but a genuine, it may be a glorious sunrise—of a day heralded by our most profound, liberal, and humane regionalist in contemporary fiction, Ellen Glasgow; our leading novelist of romance, Mary Johnston; our greatest letter-writer, Walter Page; poets of distinction and achievement, Olive Tilford Dargan, DuBose Heyward, and William Alexander Percy; a new luminary, T. S. Stribling, whose "Teef-tallow" is a broader, greater work than "Main Street;" James Branch Cabell, the new Poe of a new No-Man's Land, Poe-ic-tesme; an austere creator of works of deep reflection, quiet beauty, and gracious art, Willa Cather; the arriving dramatist of squalid lives and black souls, Paul Green; a penetrating social critic, tilting rampantly for honesty and righteousness, Gerald Johnson; and a magazine of national thought and international literature, the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

Against the giant hindrances of Dayton and Ku Klux Klan, of religious intolerance, narrow obscurantism, and political stagnancy, of lack of leadership and restricted political and social thought, may be stressed as countervail the gradual but accelerating impulse towards self-consciousness, self-criticism, and—let us pray!—self-satire.

A Piquant Study

THE POLITICAL EDUCATION OF WOODROW WILSON. By JAMES KERNEY. New York: The Century Co. 1926. \$4.

Reviewed by CHARLES SEYMOUR

Editor of "The Intimate Papers of Colonel House"

MR. KERNEY, who is editor of the *Trenton Evening Times*, has made an interesting and in certain respects an important contribution to literature dealing with President Wilson. He came into contact with his subject at the outset of Wilson's political career and the contact was never entirely broken, for he gives us very significant notes of two conversations with the ex-President a few months before his death. We are permitted to assume from internal evidence that many picturesque incidents of Wilson's life here included were given the author by Mr. Tumulty, incidents which the Secretary to the President, because of lack of space or other reasons, did not include in his own book. Certain inaccuracies are apparent but they are of minor importance; so far as the reviewer has been able to determine, the details of the study are based upon reliable evidence and are at times exceedingly piquant. An unfriendly critic might complain that the book is too much concerned with what has been called the "ward politics" of the Wilson administrations, both state and national. That is, however, what the title leads us to expect and what Mr. Kerney is peculiarly well qualified to describe. Both lay reader and historian will be glad to study the manœuvres that led to the nominations and elections and the curious sidelights thrown upon the politics of appointments. They will be especially grateful for the chapters dealing with the first two years of Wilson's political career in New Jersey, which form the major and the most valuable portion of the book.

Mr. Kerney writes of Wilson in a friendly and sympathetic tone but also with great frankness; he is anxious to explain rather than to eulogize. Given the character of the New Jersey political atmosphere, it is not surprising that various incidents appear which will furnish ammunition to historians unfriendly to Woodrow Wilson. There is much in the book which attests the personal charm of the Governor, his oratorical ability, his courage, and his capacity for leadership; but ample space is devoted also to his summary treatment of such supporters as Senator Smith, Nugent, Martine, Record, Harvey, and others whom Mr. Kerney evidently regards as primarily responsible for Wilson's early political success. He writes of the New Jersey Governorship as a step in his career rather than as a permanent contribution to the political welfare of the state. He is not afraid to entitle one of his chapters "The Fierce and Unlovely Side," and he gives due emphasis to political inconsistencies; he even touches upon the topic always raised in the case of a President, whether of the nation or a university, that of personal veracity, and reports that Wilson

"spoke at times with some mental reservation as to facts."

The chapters dealing with the close of Wilson's political career are especially interesting because the author's exposition of Wilson's relations with the Senate, while conceived in a tone always friendly, is condemnatory in its verdict.

When he got in a fight nothing was relevant but the fighting; the serene judgment of balanced understanding was impossible. With the coming of increased power he had walled himself in. . . . Thus isolated, he found it easy to convince himself that he had devised the correct pattern for human behavior and that those who differed from him were "blind and ignorant."

The time has not arrived for us to make up Wilson's final biographical balance sheet; but if the historian of the future places confidence in Mr. Kerney he will be inclined to the opinion that the great President's nature was so contradictory that almost anything could truthfully be said of him, good or bad.

A Mexican Tragedy

THE ROSALIE EVANS LETTERS FROM MEXICO. Arranged with comment by DAISY CADEN PETTUS. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by ERNEST GRUENING

THIS collection of letters to her sister narrates a woman's struggle in Mexico to defend her property and maintain what she believed to be her rights to it. It is a vivid tale of high adventure in the midst of revolution. As one of those revealing side-lights of a period often more prized by historians than an official record it is not unimportant.

Rosalie Caden, an American girl living in Mexico, had married Harry Evans, an Englishman engaged in business there. In 1904 they acquired an old hacienda—a plantation—in the state of Puebla and bent their energies to making it productive. Their irrigation works made it grow more wheat, corn, and chile than ever before. When chaos broke in the century's second decade they left Mexico. Returning alone in 1917 to see what had become of their estate, Mr. Evans was taken suddenly ill and died. The next year his widow returned to Mexico impelled by financial necessity and sentimental attachment to recover their property.

What ensued is an episode in the agrarian phase of the Mexican social revolution. San Pedro, the Evans' hacienda, was among the many large and prosperous estates destined for expropriation and repartition among neighboring villages. The most important plank in Mexico's revolutionary program aims to destroy the previously existent feudal system of land tenure, and its consequent peonage, and to restore to the villages communal land to cultivate with their own labor. Certain rules and restrictions have been laid down by the Mexican government to make this program effective. But in its execution they have been lamentably honored in the breach.

The Evans case is illustrative. The human element—cupidity, official ineptitude, lack of imagination, stupidity—complicated and distorted what in the abstract is a sound program, responding to a fundamental national need. Mrs. Evans's narrative of her four years' resistance to the enactment of the agrarian laws is a terrific and passionate attack on the program, or rather on its misapplication, on Mexican officials, on Mr. Charles Beecher Warren, the American commissioner and later ambassador to Mexico, on nearly everyone who did not sympathize with her struggle.

It is difficult to read her telling of it dispassionately. She was a gallant woman—cultured, brave, and high-spirited. One cannot but thrill to the picture of the lithe and determined little figure swinging along on horseback in the crisp luminous air of the Puebla valley, beneath the snow-glittering volcanoes, singing her battle-cry, "Nous sommes les enfants de Gascogne," driving off the enemy—the "rabble" they always were to her—tearing down their flags, the markers which the villagers had placed to denote the new boundaries:

The last (flag) they had put on a mound too high for me and not room on top for the horse to stand—only to dash up on one side and down the other. Before they could stop me I forced the horse up, caught the flag-staff in passing and with the weight of the horse broke it off! It was really exhilarating—I have never stormed a citadel or captured a flag before. . . . The *agrarios* fired on me, but even that only added excitement and pleasure. I got off with the banner and blocked off Diego and Iago and would not let them return the *agrarians'* fire as their bullets

fell short. Nor would I run, but walked the horse slowly back to the hacienda—with Diego and Iago keeping their guns ready if they attacked us. We planned to charge them with a volley if they came near, but they never did.

And so for four years this slender woman pitted her brain, her energy, and her indomitable spirit against a government and a people; took up man's weapons and fearlessly faced odds of a hundred to one, until at last she was foully murdered from ambush. She would die but she would not surrender. Her struggle was an epic. Throughout she maintained the pioneer tradition that is passing from the earth. Whatever may be advanced in extenuation of the attendant circumstances, Mrs. Evans is, for one supreme reason, entitled to unqualified admiration and respect for her course and convictions. For them she died.

Yet her story must be read with the understanding that it is *ex parte* testimony. However incorrect may have been the acts of Mexican officials with whom she came in contact, however they may have transgressed in her view or actually, essentially she was resisting the law of the land and its constituted authorities. She gloried in it! Even her staunch and unflinching defender, Cunard Cummins, the British chargé, vainly advised her to desist. Strong partisan that he was, he refers in an official communiqué to "a not unnatural exaggeration sometimes observable in her words." Under the strain of conflict her letters reveal an increasing bitterness, an obsession of herself as a crusader. "Joan of Arc," "an international heroine," she approvingly quotes others calling her.

"I adored your saying," she writes her sister, "Great Britain might fail me, not I Great Britain!"

That ample reservations should be made till the other side is told, is the more necessary in that her publishers have sought to transform the book into an indictment and give it the character of an international exposé. The jacket draws the inference which Mrs. Evans herself nowhere does that her husband's death was "sudden and suspicious," gives special emphasis to a casual reference of Mrs. Evans's to the Mexicans as "the money-minded race," and exalts her denunciation of persons in the Mexican scene she scarcely knew while she was smarting under a deep sense of injury and frustration. The fundamental issues she totally ignores; of the grim background which created the conditions in which she became involved, she says not a word.

That word needs, in all fairness, to be said. The Evans tragedy is inseparable from the greater tragedy of a nation, of a whole race. The deadly heritage against which a people has been struggling for generations claimed in her another needless victim. The tragic resolution of her case benefitted no one. Doubtless it has been a factor in President Calles's disarming of the agrarians and in his unrelenting efforts to swing the revolutionary reforms into evolutionary channels. The last word in the long story of which the Evans case is a dark and pathetic chapter remains to be written, and it may not be written for some time.

Of particular interest to Americans, in view of his wide acquaintance in this country and his close knowledge of American affairs, is the recent announcement that J. L. Garvin, editor since 1907 of *The London Observer*, has been selected as editor of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in succession to the late Hugh Chisholm, M.A. Mr. Garvin has made a name for himself as a student of public affairs second to none among his English contemporaries.

In our issue of April 10th the reviewer of "William," by E. H. Young, named Jonathan Cape of England as the publisher. Harcourt, Brace & Co. handle the book in this country.

The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., Henry S. Canby, President, Roy E. Larsen, Vice-President, Noble A. Cathcart, Secretary-Treasurer, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Subscription rate, per year, postpaid: In the U. S. and Mexico, \$3.50; in Canada, \$4; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere, \$4.50. All business communications should be addressed to Noble A. Cathcart, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Entered as second-class matter, at the Post Office, at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Vol. II, No. 44.
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