

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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Clearing the Bookshelves

THERE come times in the history of individuals as of nations when a decent respect for the opinions of mankind demands revolutionary action. The moment at last arrives when bulging bookshelves and battered bindings become an offense to the æsthetic, and when nothing short of violent measures can redeem a library from the oburgations of the orderly. What course to pursue? Cast out the rowdy members from the bookshelves? Ay, but their very dilapidation bespeaks their worthiness. Why are they so worn, but that they have grown old in the service of affection, yielding themselves to the eager until buckram and canvas could endure no more? Surely old friends are not thus lightly to be discarded. A fie upon your impulses!

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Then here, since you cannot in all conscience cast out the bedraggled volumes that have so often been the dear consolations of your solitude, at least relieve the congestion of your shelves by discarding those prim and proper rows that are so patently still in their refulgence because they have lived un-laborious days. Ah, but conscience and desire rise up to stay you. Those neat tomes are still on the horizon of your intentions; they enclose within their un-rubbed covers knowledge that you covet, curiosities of literature you have treasured against an idle or a gloomy day, obligations you owe to a liberal education. They are reproach embodied, but they are also delight in prospect. Nay, nay, let them be.

But surely those antiquated encyclopædias that stretch their bulk along the shelves can be spared. They have been superseded not once but once and again. The march of civilization has jostled them into semi-uselessness; efficient editorship has supplanted them with compendiums more coincident with the age. Yes, but since time has shrunk the records of events and personalities that figured large in the portly old volumes to brief notices in the new, where but in them can the lover of history turn for that fuller detail so much more picturesque than the pruned brevities of a recent edition? Impossible to let them go. The old encyclopædias must stand.

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We have it now! The textbooks that hide their shabby backs so deprecatingly on the bottom shelf, out with them. No, no, that were to leave yourself to the distraction of puzzling genders and confusing prepositions and irregular verbs with never a grammar to fall back upon for aid. Let the Ciceros, and the Horaces, and the Virgils in the school texts go? But can you find your way through the classics without their notes? Beware, beware, lest throwing them out you throw out your all of classical resources. At least the arithmetics can go? Oh, fearful vision of calculations to be made and no table of measures at hand. Hold fast those text books, whatever else you do.

At last, at long last, the solution. There it lies in that heterogeneous mass of books, some of them still brave in gay-colored jackets that prove them of recent birth. Not so fast. Those new books are the volumes about which conversation is eddying to-day and which you must keep on hand lest discussion should involve you in dispute. And those love stories, and romantic novels, and detective tales? Speak it low . . . they are for a rainy day. The shelves must bulge for another year.

From a Ferryboat Window

By MAXWELL BODENHEIM

GREENISH black water, sinister pain
Tossing into ever lost forms,
Heaves against the side of this ferry-boat.
Sibilant laces of sound
Break into white upon the dark water
And are whisked away.
The pain of all drowned men
Could not equal the intensity
With which the water reels out to the sky
And often, with a psychic mania,
Defies the unsuspecting push of winds.

Only sailors with the eyes of poets
Know that placid and wild water
Are alike, are veiled and open
Revolts against an earth which will not dream.

Everyman

By FRANK V. MORLEY

WHEN Mr. Colburn announced, in the modest way of publishers a hundred years ago, that the Diary of Samuel Pepys would be forthcoming in two quarto volumes in June, 1825, he hoped for such a reception as had been accorded to Evelyn's Diary on its first publication seven years before. He was not disappointed. The book achieved immediate attention. The *Literary Gazette* advertised a long review "with curious extracts to the extent of an ordinary pamphlet." This review was copied on the editorial page of the *Times*. The notice began:

Notwithstanding the extensive popularity of the Memoirs of Grammont, and the still greater attractions of those of Evelyn, we have no hesitation in stating our opinion that these volumes will outstrip them both in public estimation. For ourselves we are delighted with them; they reach the *beau idéal* of what we desire from such records. The station of the individual gave him access to the most interesting intelligence of the period. . . .

Pepys himself, the notice added, was observant and accurate, and "might well be esteemed a worthy fellow."

A century after, the attention paid to Pepys is of a different quality. The prophecy has been fulfilled. Pepys continues to outstrip Evelyn and Grammont in public estimation. But he not only outstrips them. He proceeds to immortality upon a different road. So worthy a fellow has marched out of history and into literature. The change in popular regard for him is illustrated by the story of the book. It was produced at first as a lively historical document. It is produced now as though it were a novel. It is worth while to trace that change.

In the preface to the original edition of the Diary, Lord Braybrooke emphasized its value as a record of public events, and spoke with tolerance of Pepys himself.

As he was in the habit of recording the most trifling occurrences of his life, it became absolutely necessary to curtail the MS. materially, and in many instances to condense the matter . . . my principal study, however, has been to omit nothing of public interest, and to introduce at the same time a great variety of other topics, less important, perhaps, but tending in some degree to illustrate the manners and habits of that age.

Braybrooke has shared the common fate of editors. He has been supplanted and condemned. But his plan of action when confronted with more than a million words of manuscript by an unknown man, won only praise in 1825. Further curious extracts ran along merrily in the *Literary Gazette*, and once again the *Times* quoted Pepys at length on the editorial page. A second edition of the book was prepared in 1828. A third edition, much enlarged, appeared in 1848; a fourth, in 1854. None of these claimed completeness. But nothing less than completeness would satisfy a rising generation who wanted to read between Braybrooke's lines. The Rev. Mynors Bright undertook to make a fresh transcription. His edition (1875-1879) gave about four-fifths of the whole Diary. It is not generally available, for only a thousand copies were printed. At last Mr. H. B. Wheatley, using Mynors Bright's transcription, prepared what has become the standard text. It was first published in ten volumes (1893-1899), and has been lately reissued

EVERYBODY'S PEPYS. The Diary of Samuel Pepys. Edited by O. F. MORSHEAD, with 60 Illustrations by E. H. Shepard, and 4 Maps by A. E. Taylor. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1926. \$3.50.

This Week



A Test Case. By Lee Wilson Dodd.

"America in England." Reviewed by Norman Foerster.

"Man and the State." Reviewed by Warner Fite.

"Demosthenes." Reviewed by Arthur Colton.

"The Collected Poems of James Stephens." Reviewed by John Gould Fletcher.

"Urich and Soracha." Reviewed by Theodore Purdy, Jr.

"Revelry." Reviewed by Elmer Davis.

"The Fiddler in Barly." Reviewed by Charles E. Noyes.

"Saviours of Society." Reviewed by Stephen Graham.

"Jesting Pilate." Reviewed by Montgomery Belgion.

"The Outlook for American Prose." Reviewed by Ernest Boyd.

Translations from the Chinese. By Christopher Morley.

Next Week

Christmas Book Number

(1923) on India paper. This runs to something over three thousand pages, and contains all the material of the Diary, except a few phrases which are not likely to find their way into any general edition. In spite of very careful production, there may still be opportunity for a few minor improvements. Punctuation and notes may need further attention. The index needs revision. The India paper volumes might have end-paper maps. But these are luxuries which will come in time, and the fact that one thinks of them proves that what is necessary is already in our hands—a complete text for study.

With the appearance of the standard text, one could freely examine the reasons for the continuance of the Diary, not only as an historical record, but as literature. The place that Pepys occupies in literature, as Mr. Percy Lubbock pointed out, is the place of the ordinary man.

For that place he has, it would seem, as yet no serious competitor. His name is perhaps never mentioned without an indulgent smile, a twinkle, a half-patronizing, half-roguish implication that we are all like that at bottom, that his Diary is the kind we should all keep if we were honest with ourselves. Other writers are exceptions, brains of special power, imaginations of outstanding strength; he alone is Everyman, the type of average mortality, the sum of all its desires and efforts.

Another way of putting it, is to say that whoever comes to the Diary finds Pepys and his companions understandable throughout. They are people that we know, and in whom we see our own emotions mirrored. They do more than please; they serve us. *Man weiss erst dass man ist, wenn man sich in andern wieder findet.*

Yet it was also true that the standard text could never reach all those who would enjoy it. For it takes courage to read three thousand pages with attention sufficient to perceive a story shaping through the formless document. Biographical sketches came out, to assist the faint-hearted. But Pepys is comparatively little fun at second-hand. What else was possible? Could the standard text be pruned so as to portray Pepys and his companions with the economy of a novel?



"Everybody's Pepys" is an answer to that question. It is a condensation of the Diary, within the compass of the most indolent reader. Here is Dapney Dicky, with gay trimmings. Mr. Morshead, Mr. Shepard, Mr. Taylor, are all—as Pepys was—out for fun. This gaiety in production is excellent. The dignified blue volumes of Wheatley's edition are in keeping with Pepys's position of responsibility. But they tend to make us forget that the Diary was written by a young and merry man, who was always ready for a rough-and-tumble party where ladies and gentlemen smutted themselves with candle grease and soot, until they were like devils. Pepys could imitate his fine friend Mr. Povy, who loved to live nobly, and neatly, but no one will say that his immortal decade was all dignity and quiet. The torrent of confession is most fittingly displayed in a lively binding.



But trimmings will not satisfy all questions. Has the text been treated fairly? Can anyone select without omitting passages that other Pepysians will sigh and bicker for? Well, if it is not perfect, it is the highest common divisor of what all readers will demand. For the first time, it is easy to find one's way round. The plots quicken surprisingly. The stories emerge. The most entertaining anecdotes are here, without the intervening lumber. Above all, the characters stand out clearly. From the damned ill-looking Duchess down through the alphabet to little Deb Willet, whose coming was the cause of much pain, there is none whose position in our memory is not improved by this presentation. And it is interesting to note how much is in this volume, which is not in Braybrooke. Fifty-two of Mr. Shepard's illustrations refer to specific phrases of the text. My copy of Braybrooke has only eighteen of those phrases. A great deal of what is most attractive in the Diary is obtainable only in this abridgment, and in no other edition except Wheatley's.

"Everybody's Pepys" will be successful immediately, as an apt Christmas present for those who are married, for those about to marry, for those who never intend to marry. Its real success, however,

will not be measured in one season; it will go on until Mr. Shepard's drawings "date," and the "prelims" seem odd and curious. For the text, though virtuous, is cakes and ale. Its very popularity, I think, could be the ground of a lively critical argument. Is the Diary a work of art, or is it not? It would have puzzled Pepys to say. Obviously, he avoided any conscious interpretation, any expatiation, whether of the imagination or of the intellect. He was after a transcript of experience, and achieved one marvelously well. So far the argument is with the headstrong folk who would not call the Diary a work of art. But there is more to it than that. There is leaven at work. What is it which makes it fun to read about people who might well have been intolerable to live with? Something which is apart from photography. What then governs the selection from experience? An exuberance, a greediness for all sorts of incompatible aspects of life. But is not this quality an artistic *motif*? Yes, whether Pepys was conscious of it or not. I am not sure that Pepys was unaware. There is a remark of Conrad's:

. . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning, its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. . . .

The whole effort of an artist is to disprove this statement. The effort of such a diarist as Pepys is also to disprove it. For the clubbable Pepys retired to supposedly lonely regions, and found not himself only, but truths which are common to all humanity. With regard to writing which never approaches the plane of imagination or thought, the truth of Conrad's statement is usually obvious. But it does not apply to Pepys's "Diary."



Nevertheless, we are on much less debatable ground when we consider Pepys's merits as a writer, apart from his qualities as an artist. Braybrooke apologized for the absence of "accuracy of style or finished composition." It would be more fitting to praise Pepys for an excellence of style whose essence is simplicity. In his correspondence, and in his Naval Minutes, he is occasionally labored and imitative of contortions whose elegance he admired; but the style which served him for his Diary is perfectly suited to his thoughts, which are simple, undecorated, and unlabored. His special gift for narrative rises to meet great occasions; as when he tells of fetching the King from Holland, of the Coronation, or of the Fire of London. In his greatest elevation, his words have perfect naturalness; as in the last page of all, where he bids his Diary farewell:

And so I betake myself to that course, which is almost as much as to see myself go into my grave: for which, and all the discomforts that will accompany my being blind, the good God prepare me.

And for the man behind the Diary, who wrote his faults down plainly, when all is weighed up, surely he comes out well. "Had I been born a great person," says Montaigne, "I should have been ambitious to have made myself beloved, not to make myself feared or admired." I think that Pepys could truly have said the same. The strutting came largely from his consciousness of climbing—the consciousness which is part of the fun, for one likes to read of successful men. The weighing of Pepys is, however, a matter for fireside argument. Only there may we hear the case for Mrs. Pepys—poor Mrs. Pepys, always craving notice, and not getting it even in reviews.

There is another sentence in the same essay of Montaigne (on "Vanity"), which is apt when one considers Pepys. "I see, and am vexed to see, in several families I know, Monsieur about dinner time come home all jaded and ruffled about his affairs, when Madame is still pouncing and tricking up herself, forsooth, in her closet." The point of the quotation lies in the expression of vexation. The real livewithableness of Pepys is such that it is not with vexation or with malice that we read of his domestic squabbles, but with amusement in which there is as well æsthetic pleasure. In this sense at least his claim in the Naval Minutes is true. "My aim is for the good of futurity," he wrote there, some time after his Diary days; and, one is sorry to say, added the afterthought, "though little deserving it of me."

A Test Case

By LEE WILSON DODD

HERE is a book* of short stories which, after long and as I hope searching reflection, I conceive to be a literary test case of demonstrable importance. But, first, for the sake of critical candor, I shall have to begin this review with a personal confession.

When this book was sent to me in a package with other volumes, I came upon it and stared forlornly, with a sinking heart. Ruth Suckow . . . no, I had not read Ruth Suckow, but I had read unrestricted praise of her work by H. L. Mencken, and believed I knew in advance precisely what to expect: drab, as the *cliché* runs, realism. Unselective photography. The "art" of the drab realist consisted in finding some social and intellectual backwater, some dead though unburied locality, and then in pointing a camera here and there while pushing the button from time to time at random. Thus Plate I, when developed, would reveal perhaps part of an abandoned railroad-siding, one corner of a weed-patch, and the hind-quarters of a spavined horse; and in the foreground possibly, as chance "human interest," a lame girl picking up coals, smudged, unkempt, with the blank look on her anæmic face of the physically exhausted and mentally deficient. Plate II, backyard of a village "general store," with portrait of a depressed delivery boy engaged in filling the rubbish incinerator. And so on! Each plate filled with minute touches of entirely characteristic, and utterly boring, "truth." For, surely, by the time one has come to a certain age the pleasures of mere recognition have long since palled. "Iowa interiors," I groaned—"What a lot of them! And what of *any* of them! After all, even an Editor should try to cultivate some measure of mercy. What has one done or not done to deserve this abomination of desolation!"

Thus a week passed . . . and that confounded book in its cold gray-blue slipcover lay on my table, and created all round itself an atmosphere of dull endurance under unmerited neglect. It was more than flesh could stand. There was something very feminine about that book. It meant to have its rights sooner or later. It meant to be read.—It *was* read.

Wherefore, I humbly apologize to Miss Suckow, and to her discoverer, Mr. Mencken. Miss Suckow has qualities which lift, in moments of insight, very near to genius. "Iowa Interiors" is whole strata above drab realism, the uninspired reporting which we have had so much of, and which for an apprehensive week I had had in mind.



The apology is sincere. And yet, I have not capitulated to the art of Miss Suckow. I believe that what she has chosen to do could hardly be better done. My persisting doubts cluster about her basic choice. That is why her book seems to me a literary test case, a critical problem of importance. American critics and American writers of fiction will do well to ponder the work of Miss Suckow, face this problem honestly, and make up their minds about it.

In order to state the problem fairly—indeed, to state it at all—one must begin by doing justice to a powerful mind, at once closely observant and subtly intuitive. Miss Suckow is not an unconscious artist. Behind her work lies, I suspect, a philosophical viewpoint which she is fully aware of, and perfectly understands. However that may be, it is certain that her narrative method—deliberately unemphatic naturalism—is a way of writing she has adopted; for of all fashions in story-telling naturalism is the most sophisticated, the most unnatural. The natural man as story teller is a romantic, a maker of splendid and pulse-quickening lies. The natural story teller is one whose fiery temperament and yearning imagination colors, intensifies, and transforms the world. What he expresses is not truth to external fact. That, he would inform you, were he able to reason, is work for beings of another stripe—work for the scholar, the scientist. As for himself, *he* is expressing another kind of truth—truth as to his own inner turbulence and unsatisfied aspirations. What the story teller should give you, he might add, is not a pallid pseudo-science, but the full surge of his own emotions, his un-

*Iowa Interiors. By Ruth Suckow. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$2.50.