

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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### Notes of a Rapid Reader

ADAM AND EVE. By John Erskine.

PROFESSOR ERSKINE'S three books of heroic dialogue would all have been burned in Puritan days, and violently disapproved of by Queen Victoria. She would very distinctly not have been amused. One remembers that in the latter years of her reign, "Vanity Fair" was called cynical. The villains of these books are all reformers; the heroines, ladies of what used to be called "easy," but now "natural," virtue. The same public that bought "The Story of Philosophy" buys "The Private Life of Helen of Troy" and "Adam and Eve." It suspects that philosophy can tell it some things about human nature that are not explained in the newspapers.

Only very "hard-boiled" or very "soft-boiled" people should read Professor Erskine's books. The first will find nothing to disturb their own prejudices, and the second will be curdled to their own good. But other readers are likely to have their mental pockets picked. Scholars who publish best sellers need watching for they have more brains than ordinary writers, and hence more persuasiveness.

DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP. By Willa Cather.

Miss Cather is growing restless in the old forms. The novel irks her. First she tried the *nouvelle*, or long short story, and wrote a masterpiece in "A Lost Lady;" then she built "The Professor's House" according to the structure of a concerto; now, for the "Archbishop," she chooses the method of chronicle history. Instead of providing suspense and a climax, she depends, like history, upon interest in men and events. It is the honest way, if you can succeed with it. She has.

RED SKY AT MORNING. By Margaret Kennedy.

Generally felt to be inferior to "The Constant Nymph." And so it is—and so are many books. This second important novel by Miss Kennedy proves that she is a novelist, not just a flash of genius made up of luck and a good memory. It has fabric, structure, depth. The twins are rare creatures, and although apparently she made a biological error and gave them qualities that belong only to twins of the same sex (unless indeed she means that they were, substantially, of the same sex), that makes little difference. What the book lacks is a character as poignant as Tessa, and a background as amusing as Sanger's circus.

JOSEPH CONRAD: LIFE AND LETTERS. By G. Jean-Aubry.

Strange correspondence of a genius who could not ever believe that he had arrived—who, to the end, sees himself as a sea captain trying to be a writer, a Pole endeavoring to be an Englishman.

GALLIONS REACH. By H. M. Tomlinson.

A novelist weaves a tight fabric which will hold, when done, a complete story and all its characters. But suppose the part is more interesting than the whole! Suppose that you are skeptical of wholes, and believe that going down by night to the sea and a ship (see the opening of "Gallions Reach") may be enough to set one reflecting on the sky, the earth, and the waters between! Tomlinson is not a novelist, but a great artist in prose, a great maker of narrative, who is not yet fully appreciated because we expect him to do the conventional thing—write a long story with a plot to it. He never will with complete success. But how many novels of the year when "The Sea and the Jungle" was published have worn as well?

### Winter Day

By ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

GRAY misty world of snow  
Where fluttering to and fro  
The clear frost-petals fly  
Under a leaden sky—  
Into your mists I seem to pass  
Through the protecting glass,  
And seem myself a snowflake, hurled  
By wild winds up and down the world—  
Asking of this short hour  
Nothing except to feel that power  
Which sustains snowflakes till in the end they must  
Fall down to dust,  
Having swept half the heavens: I ask no more:  
Others have asked a greater gift before,  
And yet, for all their pleading, rest not now  
Gem-like on any winter-sacred bough.

### The Younger Generation

By FRANK SWINNERTON

A NOVELIST (name, sex, and nationality unstated) is advertising daily in the London *Times* for a press publicity agent; and a lady has just attempted to commit suicide in London because her first novel has been rejected by a firm of publishers. These two facts, taken together, form an illustration of the change which, in the years following the War, has come over what may be called the literary life. They are very significant.

In older days, if we are to believe the treasured legends of biography, authors had the fine free habit of starving. This habit they indulged cheerfully, because they had embraced a precarious and a despised craft and because they accepted the consequences of their choice. Very few of them committed suicide. Hardly any, indeed; for death by slow starvation is not, strictly speaking, *felo de se*, and a fast is oftentimes beneficial to health. Moreover, fasting and labor, they felt, might perhaps, one day in the dim future, lead to fame. It was a distant and a difficult goal; but thought of it sweetened much suffering. So much for the past that is legendary.

Even within living memory, a man or woman who failed in literature seldom proceeded to extremities. He or she turned to some other calling which might produce a livelihood; the impulse to scribble the days away died naturally; and aspiration lapsed. Or it revived, and in later, maturer years the baffled genius became again active, with results in proportion to his originality, his skill, and the taste of the public. In those days, however, writers wrote because they had something to say, a story to tell in verse or prose, a philosophy to impart, a vision to reveal. They believed, moreover, that if what they wrote was good it would find its own way to the world's heart. Times have changed. Literature is no longer a labor of love. It is a fashion; and it is a career.

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One reason for this change is that while robust young Englishmen were away fighting the world's battles in the great War, literature fell into the hands of the theorists. The theorists had a splendid time, and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves, because there is nothing a theorist so much despises as an accepted practice. And they did their utmost to apply to literature the jargon which they had already picked up for the criticism of painting and music, as well as the jargon used in that particularly stupid and fanciful hobby of the pretentious, psychoanalysis.

The theorists were successful. As infectious germs leap triumphantly into the human system when that system is suffering from exhaustion, so theorists have most power when the world or any part of it is prostrate. The post-War struggles of the young have been struggles with infectious germs; for the result of this capture of art and literature by the esthetic theorists and the experts in neuroticism has been the sterilization of art and literature. Just as in painting the young artist has been trying to approximate to the first scribbles of savages, so the young author has been led to give way to eccentricity, pretentious silliness, insincerity, and the humor of the latrine. Upon one side there has been a sophisticated dread of the commonplace; upon the other side a purely intellectual (not imaginative) effort to find significance in the babblings of the cretin and the moron. All in obedience to esthetic theory; all the product of creative sterility. And the struggle has made young writers and artists.

### This Week

"Genius and Character." Reviewed by Arthur Colton.

"Notable British Trials." Reviewed by Edmund Lester Pearson.

"Up the Years from Bloomsbury." Reviewed by J. Ranken Towse.

"Trinc" and "The Tall Men." Reviewed by Stephen Vincent Benét.

"The Human Body." Reviewed by Percy G. Stiles.

"Dreams." Reviewed by Joseph Jastrow.

"Tombstone." Reviewed by Bernard De Voto.

"Translations from the Chinese." Reviewed by Leonard Bacon.

"The White Man's Dilemma." Reviewed by Henry Kittredge Norton.

"The Plough and the Stars." Reviewed by Oliver M. Saylor.

"Black Stream." Reviewed by Allan Nevins.

Salutation. By T. S. Eliot.

The Folder. By Christopher Morley.

### Next Week, or Later

The Case of Julien Green. By Abel Chevalley.

#### NOTE IN GENERAL.

If you want fiction, go to the writers of biographies. They are novelizing history, and soon the life of every interesting figure, from Burns and Shelley to Queen Victoria and Calamity Jane, will have a rise, a climax, and a dénouement, like "David Copperfield" or "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." If you must have history, go to the journalists, who have locked the historians in their filing cases and run off with their clothes. Or to the novelists, who are the only writers that can now be counted upon to give a documented, yet imaginative, picture of the present or the past.



self-conscious to a degree which would be considered ludicrous if it were not such bad manners nowadays to laugh at the amateurish and the puerile.

We have had since the War a succession of experiments in form, ranging from the weak little sketch masquerading as a Chekhovian short-story, and the irregularly chopped lengths of prose which saved our young poets the pains of rhyming and were called "free-verse," to pure gibberish and the undigested catalogues of sensations and sensitiveness which have been described as great novels. The superficial characteristic common to all these forms is their self-consciousness. The essential characteristic of them all is their meaninglessness. They get nowhere.

Nevertheless, the writers of such contemporary works are persuaded that pure art, pure truth, can be conveyed without the labor incident to invention. An invented story such as the old novelists, poets, and dramatists told is beyond the power of the young writers of the present moment. They would rather be satirical at the expense of their friends and benefactors; they would rather trickle out a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand words of pretentious futility, than be at the pains of constructing anything so vulgar as a coherent story. For them the story is as out-moded as Frith's "Derby Day," or that picture, the painter of which I have forgotten, which was once so popular under the name of "The Hopeless Dawn." Secure in their formulæ, they smile superciliously upon a world which has not reached their intellectual eminence. There is something, they tell us, called "The Younger Generation," which is taking charge of the esthetic future. "The Younger Generation" is rich, experimental, fearless, and imposing. It is revolutionizing Art.

And yet . . . And yet it seems to me that I see in this confidence a flaw, an almost defensive aggressiveness, the slight tremor of the youthful impresario, who says, "Oh, you're not supposed to look at that! It's not finished yet." Am I wrong, or is there some lack in the young of something which may be called moral stamina? The lady whose book was rejected, for example, can she ever have taken to heart the now-despised poet's words about that

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake?

Did it ever occur to her that her book needed revision, or that she had sent it to the wrong publisher, or that her talent lay in another direction? Apparently not. Like Charles Lamb's play, "Mr. H.," she was damned by a single hiss. Similarly, has the novelist who requires a press agent no real confidence in his own ability to create a reputation by normal means? Does he think that the public has to be managed and cajoled into supporting a genius? Or is it perhaps just that he cannot wait for fame? That he is impatient of the reputation that comes slowly by way of good work?

If he thinks this, it is possible that he is not alone, for I notice a similar weakness in the behavior of many of those who so bravely speak of "the Younger Generation." They band themselves together—it is always a bad sign. They praise each other's works. They are easily discouraged and annoyed. Only favorable things may be written or said of them. An adverse criticism, and either they are crushed or their blood is aflame. The gas-jet or the poisoned chalice opens a way to oblivion for the crushed, and the correspondence columns of the offending journal are seared with frantic insults from the affronted. A foul injustice has been done, not only to the individual, but to the whole of that Generation which is putting every other generation in its proper place.

Such sensitiveness to criticism is no indication of genuine self-confidence. On the contrary, it is proof of a very dangerous and regrettable element in the constitution of the doctrinaire young. The young man who cares first of all for his work can afford to disregard adverse comment. But the young man who is bent upon cutting a figure in the world thinks less of the work than of the effect which it is to produce. It is the second young man who is desirous of obtaining press publicity, who resents criticism, who engages in leagues with others of his own age and styles his league "the Younger Generation." The first young man devotes himself to

the task of producing work which shall endure even adverse comment. Which is the wiser of the two? Which is the more likely to stand comparison with the great writers of the past? The young person who advertises for a press agent is evidently bent upon extensive publicity. We have no assurance that he deserves it. The would-be suicidal young lady is to be assisted by the benevolent magistrate; but we have not been allowed to read the report which led the publishers to reject her book. In each case it is the writer rather than the work that fills the picture. It is the writer who has been rebuffed, not the great book which has been refused. It is the writer who is to receive publicity, and not the immortal work of his pen.

The truth is that the young of the present day are too much occupied with themselves. Never before has Narcissism reached such a pitch as it has done today. The novels written by these young novelists and esthetes are about young novelists and esthetes; the plays are all about amoral damsels who get drunk and remove their clothing for the purpose of arousing the amorous desires of young playwrights and esthetes; the poems are all collections of fastidiously-chosen but not very intelligible words about the poets themselves, their thoughts and feelings, and those who have offended them. There is no creation, no imaginative effort, nothing but a series of self-portraits, self-studies, self-defences. We never leave the stuffy little studios of the esthetes, which seem to the esthetes themselves to constitute all of the world that is worthy of artistic treatment. The young writers are absorbed, not in the job of doing good work, but in themselves, their enemies, and the problem of their own success.



Now in life there is no real substitute for work, and in literature and art there is no substitute for creative imagination. And the attempt to make works of art out of esthetic formulæ is a futile attempt. One could as easily make a rose according to rule. Nor can the artist create unless he is single-minded. Whether he is thinking, therefore, of his formulæ or his career, the esthetic is equally incapable of making a work of art, because a work of art results only from the complete absorption of the artist in his own invention. Moreover, easy fame is as useless to the artist as it is alluring to the conscious or unconscious charlatan. If there is indeed something which can be called "the Younger Generation"—it is very questionable,—those members of it who have talent will discover before long that publicity, stunts, and formulæ never have produced and never can produce the genuine article. Imitation works of art, built according to plan, are no more than curious oddities, like waxen or paper flowers; and esthetic booms are like every other kind of boom—they come to an end, with discredit to all who have been concerned in them. The young writers who at present are in love with themselves, and who are using all sorts of devices for making their names familiar to the public, will gradually learn that they have become a nuisance. Either they will realize in time that they must work and create, as the great writers of the past have done, or, with the rest of "the Younger Generation," they will be overwhelmed with ridicule and carried into that dreadful purgatory of the ambitious, oblivion.

## Portraits

GENIUS AND CHARACTER. By EMIL LUDWIG. Translated by Kenneth Burke. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1927. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR W. COLTON

ONE hears much of "the new biography," of portraiture in place of the narrated lives, but so far as the practice of Mr. Bradford and Mr. Ludwig goes, it belong to an ancient and honorable tradition. Plutarch has inspired many generations to do the same, if haply it were possible. But the effort is after the personality of the man rather than his value or effect on the world of his time and after him. Therein a biographical essay by Messrs. Bradford or Strachey or Ludwig on—let us say—Burke or Bismarck or Burr, would differ of course from one by Macaulay or Lord Morley. It is more an effort of creative imagination in handling the same materials, and less of record and outlook.

But the ultimate values are still personal to the

writer. Mr. Ludwig's portraits of Germans are his best, as one would expect they would be. He understands the Goethean problem better than he understands the Shakespearian. His Wilson is lamentable. It is a dialogue between Wilson and Washington that does not come within recognition distance of either of them. His Voltaire is not very interesting, though, on the other hand, his Balzac is. His Rhodes is not bad, but his Von Stein is admirable. His parallel of Byron and Lassalle is strained. He is not very successful with these "stunts."

Mr. Ludwig is not as subtle as Mr. Strachey, or as well balanced as Mr. Bradford, but he is brilliant and vivid, and never smart or impertinent—the pit-falls into which so much recent biography has fallen. He has been more than fortunate in his translator.

## Murder au Fait

By EDMUND LESTER PEARSON

TRIAL OF ABRAHAM THORNTON (1817). Edited by SIR JOHN HALL, Bt. New York: The John Day Co. 1927. \$3.50.

TRIAL OF MRS. MAYBRICK (1889). Edited by H. B. IRVING. The same.

BURKE AND HARE. (1828). Edited by WILLIAM ROUGHEAD. The same.

TRIAL OF MADELEINE SMITH. (1857). Edited by F. TENNYSON JESSE. The same.

TRIAL OF OSCAR SLATER. (1909). Edited by WILLIAM ROUGHEAD. The same.

TRIAL OF HERBERT ROWSE ARMSTRONG. (1922). Edited by FILSON YOUNG. The same.

(All in the Notable British Trials Series, under the general editorship of Harry Hodge.)

Reviewed by EDMUND PEARSON

Author of "Murder at Smutty Nose"

THERE was a May morning, and a stile in a meadow. It was very early,—before three o'clock—but as the country was England, it was surely broad daylight. On the stile sat talking a young man and a girl. They were still lingering on their way home, and had been loitering through the fields and lanes since midnight, at which prudent hour they had left a country dance. The girl was very pretty; a little less than twenty years old. The man was four years older, rather stout, heavy-featured, and a little awkward. In the manner of his time—a mode briefly revived two or three years ago—he wore closely cropped side-whiskers near his ears.

His clothes, to use a novelist's phrase, were those of "a young buck of the Regency," and to the intelligent readers of the *Saturday Review* I do not need to describe what they were. This is lucky, for I do not know myself. He may have worn boots and "small-clothes," but as he had been to a dance they might have been pantaloons and shoes. The date was only two years after Waterloo, so the pantaloons are doubtful. It is possible to be precise about the girl's costume: a white "spencer," a white muslin dress, a dimity petticoat, white shoes and stockings, a straw bonnet with yellow ribbons.

There on the stile they sat and talked; apparently innocent, certainly obscure and humble folk; dwellers in a tiny village, who had just attended a dance at a little rustic tavern. Another guest, who had been seeing his sweetheart to her home, passed them, and said "good-morning." The man replied; the girl hung her head, and concealed her face under her bonnet.

Since we hear so much about the evil conduct of young people today; about flappers and their boy-friends; and about unchaperoned dances at road-houses, it is instructive to consider this couple, sitting on a stile in the days when our great-grandmothers were young, and when—so we are told—loose conduct was simply impossible. Young Abraham Thornton did not own a motor-car, to facilitate mischief; nor did Mary Ashford carry a pocket flask of gin to promote flirtation. There had, however, been beer at the dance, and Thornton probably took his share. That night he had seen Mary for the first time, so there is something almost shockingly modern about the rapidity of their acquaintance. The stately courtesy of more ceremonious days seems to have been mysteriously absent. It is said—although he denied it—that on seeing her, and being struck with her beauty, he made a