

American Civilization

THE GOLDEN DAY. By LEWIS MUMFORD.
New York: Boni & Liveright. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LLOYD MORRIS

IT is a pleasure to testify to the significance and distinction of Mr. Mumford's book. "The Golden Day" is a notable contribution to that body of criticism which aims to interpret American civilization and culture as expressions of experience. Treating our imaginative literature and our philosophy as a key to our culture, Mr. Mumford has composed a history of the American mind that is likewise an account of the principal experiences by which that mind has been nourished. It is an admirable piece of exposition, skilfully organized and lucidly presented. And, above all, it is incessantly provocative; occasional vigorous dissent from Mr. Mumford's opinions is an evidence of their original vitality.

The task which Mr. Mumford undertakes in "The Golden Day" has been implied for over a decade by our more thoughtful writers of fiction, but neglected by all of our critics with the solitary, able exception of Mr. Van Wyck Brooks. For it is our novelists, chiefly, who have discovered that life in contemporary America is subordinated to mechanism and completely absorbed by instrumental activities, that for lack of any relevant object the mechanism and activities have become ultimate ends. This perception, communicated in our recent fiction as protest or indictment, supplies both the origin and the conclusion of Mr. Mumford's study of the development of American culture.

It is to the collapse of the mediæval synthesis, and the subsequent disposition of men's interests to become increasingly external and abstract, that Mr. Mumford traces the roots of the American mind. Protestantism, commercial expansion, and science were the agencies of disintegration in Europe, liberating influences at first, for they freed the mind from bondage to a set of symbols which had become irrelevant to experience. But they had the effect of turning the mind away from life and toward mechanism, an effect finally made secure by the industrial revolution, the new theories of political rights, and the development of utilitarianism. The Romantic movement, regarding Nature not as a source of culture but as a substitute for it, completed the process by producing the pioneer, who discarded the available remnants of culture, lapsed into barbarism, failed to produce a culture of his own, and ultimately, by deserting the idea of nature for the idea of progress, prepared the way for the inventor-industrialist's cult of power and the inauguration of a dehumanized, mechanistic civilization.



The period from 1830 to 1860, the period of New England's intellectual ascendancy, is Mr. Mumford's "golden day."

An imaginative New World came to birth during this period, a new hemisphere in the geography of the mind. That world was the climax of American experience. What preceded led up to it: what followed dwindled away from it; and we who think and write today are either continuing their first exploration, or we are disheartened, and relapse into some stale formula, or console ourselves with empty gestures of frivolity.

Specifically, Mr. Mumford regards Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and, in lesser degree, Hawthorne, and Melville, as the formulators of the only authentic indigenous culture produced by America. It was the distinctive genius of each of these men to reinterpret institutions, habits, and doctrines in terms of their actual significance in experience. The experience happened to be altogether novel, and the consequence was a set of values, a series of ideal objects, representative of the national life and directly applicable to it. With this much of Mr. Mumford's contention no intelligent reader is likely to disagree, though vigorous disagreement with the detail of his exposition is often possible. One finds him neglecting the criticism of Emerson's doctrines which Hawthorne embodied in his romances; one finds him accepting Whitman's rhetorical enthusiasm as the equivalent of a coherent philosophy; but to point this out is by no means to invalidate his argument.

The Civil War brought the "golden day" to an end; when the war passed the belief in idealism had disappeared; there was no longer a desire to recast actual experience in new forms and symbols,

and what took its place was merely an acceptance, under various disguises, of the chaotic stream of existence. Mr. Mumford traces the course of this acceptance in its principal exponents; Howells, Bierce, Mark Twain, William James. He studies the succeeding development, the effort to transplant the culture of the past, as it is exhibited by Henry Adams, Henry James, George Santayana, by collectors of bibelots like Mrs. Gardner. And finally he studies the culture of our contemporary mechanistic industrialism; the novels of Theodore Dreiser, and the instrumental theory of John Dewey. Like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Mumford perceives very clearly its essential deficiency, its neglect or incapacity to imagine a concept of the humane life toward the fulfilment of which our practical activities may be directed. "We are living," he remarks, "on fragments of the old cultures, or on abortions of the new, because the energies that should have gone into the imaginative life are balked at the source by the pervasive instrumentalism of the environment." It is, obviously, a new definition of the humane life capable of enlisting our allegiance that we require as the basis of a new culture. Mr. Mumford does not seek to formulate that definition; he is content with a statement of its insistent necessity in our national life.

The Woman Question

CONCERNING WOMEN. By SUZANNE LA FOLLETTE. New York: A. & C. Boni. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALBERT JAY NOCK

AS far as I am any judge, this book contains everything that is worth knowing about woman's place in society, and nothing that is not worth knowing. As a thorough-going lover of the ideal of human freedom, I have regularly read the literature of woman's campaign for emancipation, and I have just as regularly been put off it by defects that this book is free from. No other writer that I have read, from Mary Wollstonecraft and Mill down to Ellen Key, has any but the most incomplete and dissatisfying idea of what women's freedom really means, what its essential implications are, or how it is actually conditioned. Miss La Follette is the first to show a competent knowledge of these matters. Her principal thesis, in her own words, is that "it is impossible for a sex or class to have economic freedom until everybody has it, and until economic freedom is attained for everybody, there can be no real freedom for anybody. Without economic freedom, efforts after political and social freedom are nugatory and illusive, except for what educational value they may have for those concerned with them."

This is something like. Miss La Follette wastes no words to prove what we all know, that to make women only as free as men are is nothing worth sweating blood for. A woman with a vote, for instance, is as far from the ideal of freedom—even political freedom—as men are, and that means about as far as she was before. Indeed, it is rather noteworthy that American women did not get the vote until men generally came to feel that as far as freedom is concerned, it was little worth having. Miss La Follette shows that if men and women alike once get economic freedom, there is no way to stop their taking whatever measure of political and social freedom they want. Nor does she use the term economic freedom in a loose demagogic sense. She is well trained in fundamental economics, and therefore knows exactly what economic freedom means, and she invariably speaks of it with scientific strictness. She is the first writer to discern the relation of fundamental economics to the status of women, and to trace that relation through all the secondary so-called "problems of sex." It is this that primarily sets her apart from all others in her field. When she gets through with her thesis, there is simply nothing to say. I cannot think of an objection or criticism that she has not anticipated, nor can I find in her reasoning a single trace of weakness, confusion, or obscurity. As a piece of logic, the book is faultless, if I am a competent witness—at least, I may say that any one who can find a break in it has better eyes than mine. My impression is that whoever rejects Miss La Follette's conclusions can do so only by the rather ignoble means employed by Alcibiades when he stopped his ears and ran away from hearing Socrates talk.

So much for the book's main thesis. Its main

purpose is to invite the women of the United States "thoughtfully to take stock of what they have really got" by their efforts after freedom "to consider whether it is all they want, and to settle with themselves whether their collective experience on the way up from the status of a subject sex does not point them to a higher ideal of freedom than any they have hitherto entertained."

Here again comparisons are inevitable. Is it not a novel experience for women to be addressed in this tone, especially by a woman, and a very young and ardent woman? I think it is rather more than novel. I suspect it is unique. Miss La Follette maintains this tone throughout her work without once lapsing into a proprietary or pontifical accent. She writes with dignity and restraint, always scholarly, never dull, pedantic, or patronizing, always forceful, never bumptious. Her sense of justice never deludes her into hardness, fanaticism, hysteria. Above all, she has left the agitating and offensive cant of sentimentalism miles out of sight behind her. This combination of qualities has never before, appeared in this field, to my knowledge, and it gives Miss La Follette's book a second distinction equivalent to the first.

The book has also a third characteristic which impresses me greatly, though perhaps I cannot hope to carry many along with me in my appreciation of it. I have the utmost delight in a modern writer who shows true respect for the excellence, opulence, and dignity of the English tongue. Many of my younger contemporaries seem to have a good deal to say, and one regrets that they do not exercise more care and better taste about the way they say it. Miss La Follette's manner is truly classical; not the Attic manner—it is too rapid for that—but nevertheless classical. I think I do not exaggerate when I call it a great manner, for what she has done is to inform her writing so sincerely and powerfully with her own personality, within the bounds of a strictly classical style, that it becomes individual; and this gives her work the genuine distinction which many nowadays seek to counterfeit by the aid of smartness and eccentricity. Miss La Follette has a fine instinct for the right word. When she does not find it lying on the top of her mind, she does not lazily use its second cousin, but hunts around until she finds it. She has also a seventeenth-century instinct for order and balance, harmony and cadence, in the structure of a sentence; she writes to gratify the ear as well as to enlighten the eye. It is an excellent exercise and rather good fun to take a writer's sentences and paragraphs to pieces and rebuild them to see if one can do them as handsomely, or more so. I play this game now and then with various writers, and do my fair share of winning, but I have not yet managed to win once in my little gambles with Miss La Follette's book.

In sum, then, Miss La Follette presents an entirely new and complete view of a great subject, draws it out with a great power of logic, and, as I think, in a great style; and her mode of address to her readers is consistently elevated, dignified, urbane, moving. This much may be regarded as enough, I believe, to make a valuable book. Considering the cartloads of rubbish that have been dumped from the press around this subject, it is no doubt a good deal to ask American women to take up with another treatise on "the woman question." I speak frankly and with all sympathy, as a fellow-sufferer who himself goes at such books with very long teeth. But speaking quite as frankly, if I ever found out that I had "thrown out the baby with the bath," as the Germans say, and let Miss La Follette's book go by, I should always feel that prejudice had made me incur a serious and disabling loss.

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Leviathan

WHALING NORTH AND SOUTH. By F. V. MORLEY and J. S. HODGSON. New York: The Century Company. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by SCHUYLER ASHLEY

TODAY, though men may not yet "draw out Leviathan with an hook," they capture him in abrupt and almost disdainful fashion. From the bows of steam-driven "whale-chasers" they destroy him with explosive harpoons of one hundred pounds weight; jam, with a long lance, a compressed air-line into his vast side and blow him up; then, tail foremost, tow him into a factory ship, ignominiously, with shorn flukes and white swollen belly staring to the sky. A spirited account of this bustling industry is to be found in F. V. Morley and J. S. Hodgson's book. These authors are as candid as they are informative; there is little enough in their careful, unembellished pages to substantiate the suggestion on the jacket that modern whaling is a "high-hearted and romantic pursuit."

Morley, an Oxford Rhodes scholar saturated in the tradition come down from Oother through Moby Dick, observed the business in northern latitudes where it is a waning enterprise. He brings to his consideration of the fleet and station of a Shetland Island whaling company an easy familiarity with the legends that soar above Leviathan like his own spout, with science which has curtailed but also confirmed his greatness, and with the standardized ruthlessness of modern whaling, inevitably saddening to a romantic. He can even find place for a tentative and ingenious prognosis of "the next phase,"—capturing the whale alive, starting whale-farms, and breeding him. It is a fantastic but welcome digression. One turns again to it gladly after finishing the book, a little weary of wholesale slaughter with extermination implicit in the formula of whale-guns, cutting-machines, and steam. Morley's one hundred and twenty pages of palatable and highly concentrated information are well spiced pemmican of blubber and whale-meat.

J. S. Hodgson, an expert moving-picture photographer without undue respect for the amenities of mere writing, is an observer of another stamp. His was the opportunity to observe the real high-seas fleet of the whaling industry; factory ships and catchers that steam from Norway ten thousand miles down into the Antarctic, manned by crews of absolutely matchless deep-water men.

These whalemens liked Hodgson, as was most natural. He was a craftsman, new-fangled, but in the true succession. While they fashioned "knebls" or spliced manilla hawsers, he tinkered with his high-speed shutters or polished his Pathé moving-picture camera. Hodgson used to brace his tripod against the gun platform in the very eyes of the whale-chaser and, when green seas were breaking over, and a big fin-whale coming under the gun, he would ply his trade while Bernsten or Skontorp at the gun above plied his. In the present volume truly magnificent illustrations—a huge blue whale caught just as the harpoon with forerunner still taut strikes him; or the Southern Maid coming in with eight whales alongside—prove the efficiency of both artificers.

Everything is here in "Whaling North and South" save poetry. And even that may some day be discerned again in the life of the men who hunt whales. But it must come from the inside, from an artist who is in a whaler to run a winch, do a trick at the wheel, and stand the cold, interminable watches in the barrel. Young Oxford men aboard for a few weeks' stunt will not do; no one knows that better than Mr. Morley whose honest unwillingness to be considered anything but the most casual of observers—"You just go out with some Norwegians and watch them shoot," he explains)—is charming in a book where he had such chance for heroic posing. Nor is Hodgson the man to see Moby Dick again; he is far too much the absorbed specialist.

Perhaps somewhere in a country school in Norway a hulking, big-shouldered young schoolmaster with Ibsen and Knut Hamsun in his veins is even now fretting out his days. Some morning in a fit of gloomy impatience he will sign on with the Southern Whaling Fleet. Scowling, white-faced, full of what Melville with intimate familiarity used to call the "hypos," he will watch the shores of his native fiord drift past. What will follow may be safely committed to the knees of the gods.

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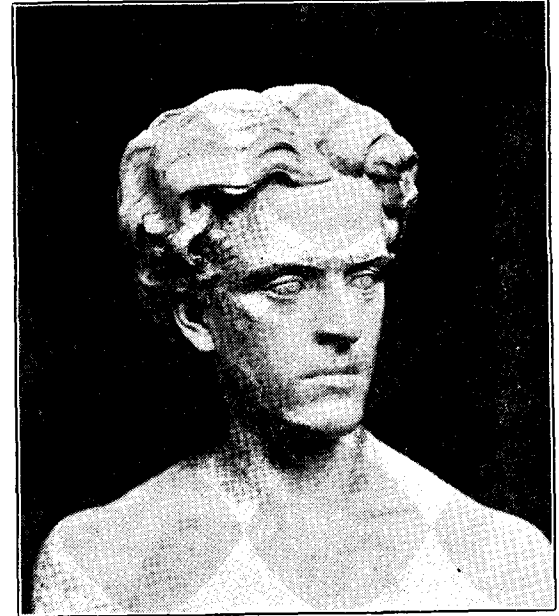
I HAVE spoken of Owen Johnson in connection with the Authors' League of American that took its first toddling steps in 1912. This able writer, the son of Robert Underwood Johnson, then editing the *Century Magazine*, had stirred things up considerably by standing literary father to "Stover at Yale" in 1911. Early the next year Dr. Henry Van Dyke announced himself as feeling the seriousness of the problem into which Mr. Johnson had probed. The book involved a discussion of the Senior Societies at Yale. Of course, Dr. Van Dyke was a Princeton man; nevertheless, Mr. Johnson, in a book that did not for a moment equal his "The Varmint" or "The Tennessee Shad" had attacked forcefully and with spirit certain sacrosanct collegiate institutions. So much so that the Senior students in New Haven retorted by attacking Stover as coming "from the narrow-minded type of man who has not been a leader." This was, you might say, inevitable. Mr. Johnson simply sat tight and his book sold widely. It developed a fair enough thesis. The author rebelled at the button-moulding of college life and ranged himself on the side of the independents.

Another Yale man, Brian Hooker, had meanwhile written "Mona," an opera, for music by the late Horatio Parker. Native opera was then being encouraged, as now, by the Metropolitan Opera Company. "Mona" was awarded their competitive prize. And in 1915, I may parenthetically add, another opera by Hooker and Parker, "Fairyland," received the prize in the competition of the American Opera Association. In that same year Brian Hooker gathered together his lyrical poems. He had also tried his hand quite successfully at "period" stories in *Harper's*, stories reminding one somewhat of the earlier Hewlett, though not of the later Cabell. More recently this same writer's new translation of Rostand's "Cyrano" had received deserved praise. Today, we are of course awaiting Edna St. Vincent Millay's opera, "The King's Henchman," Deems Taylor having composed the music,—a renewed encouragement of purely American talent on the part of the Metropolitan.

As I recall it, Owen Johnson reviewed the book of "Mona" in *The Bookman* at the same time that Brian Hooker reviewed "Stover," both men having been coeval Elis. This fact, however, did not affect their critical attitude toward one another's work. And if I seem, in this comment, to favor the graduates of one particular college it is simply that I pick them as characteristic instances of the college-bred writer. I might add the name of Sinclair Lewis (who later went through the same educational mill) to emphasize the point that, however standardized our students may seem to be in their undergraduate environment, their paths are apt widely to diverge once their feet are set upon the roads of literature. No three writers, certainly, could be more temperamentally different than these three Yale men, Johnson, Hooker, and Lewis; nor could they express themselves more differently; just as, if one chooses more recent examples from Harvard (say John Dos Passos and Robert Hillyer) the same contrast is at once apparent. Independent thinking and expression is, of course, the life-blood of all good writing, while, in the process of formal education it is considerably discouraged by the young idea *en masse*. The pursuit of literature has not yet assumed the importance it might well be accorded in our institutions of learning, despite the energizing influence of certain teachers. So usually the man who writes at an American college figures more or less as an excrescence on the student body. He must find his own way thereafter; and, in most cases, the markets for modern writing in America being highly commercialized organizations, new work is led to conform to mere current stereotype. The artistic impulse ever has a fight on its hands; and, not infrequently, surrenders.

Of course the artistic impulse may take many strange forms. I recall a poet of the period I am treating who sought to revive in his verse the rather purple passions of the Nineties in England. Early in 1912 Richard Le Gallienne (a true knight of the Nineties) took up over three columns in the *Times Book Review* assailing, yet somewhat commending, the work of George Sylvester Viereck, the exotic literary manifestation whom I have in mind. He

declared that Viereck was really more of a poet than he himself knew, despite his addiction to such words as "sonant," "priapic," "phallus," "incubus," "paramour," "involitient," and to his glamorous gallery of Lilith, Ashtoreth, Phryne, Nero, Mes-salina, and the Borgias. The earlier Swinburne and the works of Wilde were, obviously, somewhat responsible for Viereck. But later on he wrote a Bull Moose battle song! A better poet, John Gneisenau Neihardt, born in Illinois, educated in



Bust of John G. Neihardt done by his wife, a pupil of Rodin.

Nebraska, and then literary critic of the *Minneapolis Journal*, had meanwhile been advancing from the striking but uneven poems in his "A Bundle of Myrrh" and "Man-Song" of earlier years to the rhythms of "A Stranger at the Gate." His cycle of epics of the West, through which his reputation has since been greatly enhanced, were, however, yet to come. He had lived among the Omaha Indians to study their character and history and had produced some effective stories of the Indians which, like his collected poems, have recently been gathered together. Viereck represented, on the one hand, stale, effete derivations. Neihardt, on the other, despite his own purple passages, was a genuine singer from the West. I remember the late John Reed, the most striking young rebel of that time, a man with brilliant journalistic gifts and poetic, who left magazine work to espouse the cause of Labor and finally to die in the Russia that held for him a great vision, reading and applauding "Man-Song," by Neihardt. In the same house with Reed, on Washington Square, lived Alan Seeger, now famous for his death with the Foreign Legion in the Great War, and for his single poem (one out of many) "I Have a Rendezvous with Death." Reed, with his round boyish face, modern enthusiasm and burlesque and satiric humors was a striking foil to the strange dark boy who seemed to belong entirely to the Age of Chivalry. Both young men were of high courage in their respective fashions. Seeger was the eternal dreamer, Reed the active fighter. The latter had allied himself with Eastman and Dell on the *Masses*, but his restless curiosity and desire to be where things were happening took him to Mexico, to Germany as a correspondent before America entered the War, and thereafter wherever trouble was hottest. To read his "Sangar" today, a striking and virile pacifist poem which Harriet Monroe published in *Poetry*, to remember his brilliant light-verse fooling for the Dutch Treat Show, to recall his eager, generous, and belligerent spirit, is to reacquire oneself with the fires of youth burning with a rare intensity.

A very different type (though quite as courageous), was Joyce Kilmer, who, with Seeger, was one of our first acclaimed poets of the Great War. Kilmer also sought adventure and battle. He was destined to die beguiled by the bright eyes of danger. But his temperament and philosophy led him to conversion to the Roman Catholic Church and to become a thoroughly convinced and militant churchman. He had passed through his younger, rather preciously æsthetic period when we find him writing for the *Times Book Review* in 1912. He had just contributed a paper on the Pseudo-Pagan which brought forth much comment in the *Book Review's* pages. Louis Untermeyer, whose first volume of poems, "First Love," had appeared only the year be-