

fore acclaimed it as "one of the finest things you have published recently." It "should make the Leonard Abbots pause before making any new groups of literary Pagans—Greek, neo, or otherwise." But Mr. Untermeyer reminded Mr. Kilmer that when he spoke of the Sappho of the Bronx as Mary J. Burke it somewhat galled Mr. Untermeyer. He might as well have said, asserted Louis, Percy H. Shelley, John D. Keats, or William G. Blake. Julia A. Moore's most promising disciple, author of "School Room Echoes" (in 3 vols.), was *actually* Mary C. Burke.

Which somehow reminds me that in the early Fall of 1912 Norman Selby (better known as "Kid McCoy") returned to our shores from England. Through the misapprehension of Belgian detectives he had been incarcerated in Brixton Jail in London. There the famous pugilist had found time to write a ballad of Brixton Jail, though it may be said to have differed somewhat from the famous jail ballad by Oscar Wilde. At least,—it went as follows:

Kindness seeds are sown by deeds,
Cultured by love's affection.
Nature's arm protects from harm
All those who need protection.

Love's bright charm allays all alarm
And strengthens the will of the mind.
So when in doubt turn things about
And view them from behind.

To return to Kilmer, he was strong in those days in his admiration for Edwin Arlington Robinson. Kilmer's poem, "Martin," obviously influenced by Robinson, appeared indeed in the *Times Book Review* in October. It is one of his poems best remembered. Meanwhile a poem by Alfred Noyes, one of the English poets most popular in America at that time, was published in the *London Daily Mail* and cabled over to appear startlingly in our own press. It was entitled "The Origin of Life" and took fundamental issue with agnostics and materialists. Our young poets remarked that, at thirty-two, Noyes had already attained the eminence of being cabled like Kipling! But the fact that *The English Review* advertised, "An event in literature: another powerful narrative by John Masefield entitled 'The Dauber' will appear in our October number" awoke more interest. *The Century Magazine*, I know on good authority, had sadly returned that very same poem to Mr. Masefield's agent as—"outside the periphery of our present needs."

(To be continued in a fortnight)

Whitman in His Works

WHITMAN, AN INTERPRETATION IN NARRATIVE. By EMORY HOLLOWAY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$4.

Reviewed by HERVEY ALLEN

LET us preface these remarks by stating that Professor Holloway has written a most excellent book. It is not exactly brilliant, but it is by far the most satisfactory text on Walt Whitman for general use that has yet come to hand, and considerable applause is in order. In short, this biography of "The Good Grey Poet" takes its place by right of scholarly achievement and manly comment as one of the best among several good and earnest books recently devoted to the reinterpretation and revival of interest in the great literary figures of the American past. Longfellow, Poe, Pinckney, and Whitman have now all received notable attention and comment during the past year or so, and this is, we take it, a significant gesture in the direction of an intelligent and enthusiastic interest in American literature.

Professor Holloway is eminently able to write a life of Whitman. He is in fact one of the outstanding authorities on Whitman, a contributor to the "Cambridge History of American Literature," and a compiler and editor of the uncollected works of the poet whose life he now presents.

"An Interpretation in Narrative" has been well chosen as the descriptive sub-title for this volume. The events of Whitman's career are, it is true, carefully rehearsed in these pages, but they become a spinal narrative by which to interpret and understand the various stages and the philosophy of Whitman's prose and poetry rather than the story of the poet's life told in order to envisage the character of the man. In other words, the biographer has simply chosen to interpret his central figure largely

by his work, using the poet's youth, and environment as a prelude, and the events of his subsequent career as a background for his writing.

It is not the intention here to indicate that Professor Holloway has slighted the purely biographical data of Whitman's career. He has, probably in order to keep his book within convenient compass, rather chosen to emphasize the literary aspects of a literary man. This biography of Whitman must, therefore, stand or fall largely on the success of the critical acumen and powers of interpretation which the biographer has brought to the task. Professor Holloway's knowledge cannot be impugned, he is generally and particularly familiar with Whitman's work, and in this book his criticism has risen gallantly to the occasion.



Nothing is easier in writing the biography of a poet than to force some specious biographical interpretation upon his utterances or to indicate some false objective source for his poetry in the circumstances of his career. The author in this case has for once been thoroughly aware of this danger, and avoided it nicely. Professor Holloway has been most successful perhaps in plainly indicating the reasons for Whitman's advocacy of "Democracy" in the peculiar twist in the poet's character which made a feeling of equality essential to his happiness, and by showing the effect upon this urge-to-be-equal of the world in which Whitman moved. From a critical standpoint, he has also been most happy in making clear that much of Whitman's imagery, which has only too often been interpreted on a physical basis, is in reality of purely spiritual significance. This book contains the best interpretation of Whitman's "Song of Myself," and of the early poems which has yet been offered. Whitman has been triumphantly rescued from the sorry comments of the literal-minded from which he has lamentably suffered heretofore.

One of the most interesting things about the study is the complete proof of the influence of Emerson upon Whitman. This has, of course, been noted before. The full extent of it is now, however, apparent. Emerson, it seems, in reality gave not only direction but outline to Whitman's philosophy. All the "seven points" of the true mystic were found by Whitman in reading Emerson, organized and aptly expressed. That Whitman put these abstract conceptions into physical imagery in his poetry, and objective practice in life there can be no doubt. Whitman was by essence and inclination a mystic. Without Emerson it is doubtful if his philosophy would not have remained diffuse and inchoate. With it, Whitman's work took on a new unity, and an inspired vigor. The peculiar form and figures of his utterance must, of course, be referred to himself alone. That is one of the chief "high points" of Professor Holloway's book. Pages 103 to 112 of that volume constitute one of the rare occasions in literary biography where something of extreme importance is going on between writer and reader.



As to the purely biographical-narrative aspects of this biography it is frankly impossible to be so enthusiastic. The narrative is entirely adequate to the author's scheme of using it as the reinforcement in the concrete of his literary criticism. But every biographer must abide by the disadvantages as well as the advantages of his plan, and in this case it is doubtful if the more expectant and requiring readers of Professor Holloway's book will not feel disappointed that a complete recall of Whitman's life has not been more thoroughly attempted. It is not the office of the reviewer to instruct the author how to write his book. In this case, in so special a field, it would be peculiarly presumptuous. Yet it is not overstepping the line to remark that if the present biographer had worked in his story and background as thoroughly as he has handled his criticism, the adjective "definitive" would have attached itself to his book. As it is, for a full understanding, a supplementary volume is still in order.

The time has now come when the full implications of Whitman's abnormality, and its tremendous implication in his life and work should be ably discussed. A full understanding of his character without a frank facing of all the facts is impossible. Professor Holloway does not ignore them, but he hunts around rather obviously to make the most of all normal affairs. A light-of-love in New

Orleans, and letters from a lady in England are about all that can be produced. The young conductors and "athletes" are handled rather gingerly. Delicacy is admirable, but it does not necessarily imply so much silence.

That Whitman triumphed magnificently over the life-long crucifixion of a feminine soul in a man's body, that by that very fact a great paternal-maternal spirit was able to contemplate, and comment with an all-embracing love, and divine sympathy, overflowing abundantly from the compressed well-spring of genius, is the supreme fact of his life. The evidences of it have engraved themselves permanently upon the tablets of literature. They are there in the kind of democracy Whitman envisaged, and in his catalogues of things, catalogues that for him were living symbols. That other people would not bring to them his poet's ecstasy for both animate and inanimate nature constitute his partial failure as a poet. The cause is plain enough.

Some of these aspects of Whitman Professor Holloway has neglected or understated, but to say that is only to aver that a very finely conceived, and well wrought biography is not the final and great book that the difficult theme of Whitman so exactly requires.

A Tale of America

THE DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS. By STRUTHERS BURT. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

VARIOUS thoughtful modern novelists have done their best to deprive themselves of an audience by entangling their ideas in an intricate web of preciosity or by placing them in the heads of dishearteningly dull protagonists. Mr. Burt on the contrary seems deliberately to have decked out his tale in the most alluring trappings he could devise. He has thereby managed unobtrusively to insinuate into a thoroughly entertaining story his very sage, witty, and fecund observations of American life and manners. Occasionally, to be sure, one has the feeling of dealing with a goodly amount of tinsel and tissue paper only to be rewarded by a momentary flash and an insipid motto. For the most part, however, one finds oneself biting through an ingratiating glacé covering to a decidedly succulent nut.

The tale swings from Philadelphia ("Mammon with a Bible in one hand and a whip in the other") to the New York of writers, artists, and show-girls; from New York to the promotion offices where irrigation projects are hatched and on to the ranch in Wyoming where such projects bring desolation. It drifts back to Philadelphia and New York again, down to Washington and off to the Riviera, before finally coming to rest among the delectable mountains of the title. Its hero, Stephen Londreth, belongs to an aristocratic old Philadelphia family and its heroine, Mercedes Garcia (*née* Wiggins), dances on Broadway in the glittering fig-leaves of her profession. Obviously the possibilities inherent in the respective spheres of influence of these two young people are as enticing as they are illimitable. And once having selected such a cosmos as the playground for his observations, the author need have not the slightest fear of losing his readers.

He will keep them for other reasons as well. Mercedes Garcia of the Escapades is not in the least the person you might expect her to be. She isn't the other thing either. Perhaps that accounts for her sudden (too sudden) appeal to Stephen, that and a common liking for the Bronx Zoo, a common objection to being physically and spiritually crowded. But of course a wealthy young Philadelphian who would desert the distinguished precincts of Spruce Street—and Mr. Burt knows them well—for a ranch in Wyoming might conceivably commit almost any unconventionality. At any rate, the author in following the curiously contrasted reserves of his hero and heroine succeeds in creating a sense of expectancy in his readers which, it must be admitted, he somewhat inadequately satisfies.

Minor themes and minor characters, however, and above all major reflections upon every imaginable subject more than outweigh the blurred and wavering portrait of the heroine in the latter part of the book. For their sake one is even ready to overlook the precipitate and inconclusive impression created by the *infans ex machina* at the close. The scenes between Stephen and a sophisticated, technically virtuous woman of the world, or between Mercedes

and Hastings, a blasé painter of beautiful women, or between Mercedes and the dark arbiters of her Broadway destiny, or between the various types of Western go-getters assembled in Dahlia, Idaho, are as penetrating as they are amusing. Moreover, Stephen's reactions to his patrician relatives, Mercedes's estimates of her foes and friends ("Damn Gentlemen!"), and especially the vigorous generalizations of the free-lance, Vizately—half Quaker, half Pole, and one of the best figures in the tale—often are not only delicately wise in themselves but are phrased in tickling and quotable aphorisms. These things, one feels, rather than the exotic problem created by the relations between Stephen and Mercedes are the real occasion for the story.

If the whole were as good as its many parts, one might express unqualified enthusiasm for Mr. Burt's achievement. He has attempted so much, however, that complete success was perhaps impossible. Lack of incisiveness in the development of some of the characters, irrelevant or insufficiently coordinated incidents, and over-many sententious apothegms, slightly patterned superficialities, do not altogether conceal a certain uniformity, if not monotony, of substance: the characters, differentiated as they are, too frequently voice the author's conceptions rather than their own. But these are minor flaws in a work of over four hundred and fifty pages that is in the main serious in intention and skilful in execution. Most of the book is excellent, all of it is entertaining, and its attitude throughout is sensitive, civilized, and urbane. More ambitious in design and more popular in appeal than the author's "Interpreter's House," it will probably be even more widely read.



Mulatto

By LANGSTON HUGHES

I AM your son, white man!
Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.

You are my son!
Like hell!

The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
Full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.

Juicy bodies
Of nigger wenches
Blue black
Against black fences.
O, you little bastard boy,
What's a body but a toy?

The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.
What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere.
What's the body of your mother?
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
A nigger joy,
A little yellow
Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother.

The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
O, sweet as earth,
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white.

The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
A nigger joy.
I am your son, white man!
A little yellow
Bastard boy.

The BOWLING GREEN

Letters from a Fortress

A FORTRESS, I suppose, is exactly the opposite of a jail. A jail, theoretically, is a place any one can get into but no one gets out of. A fortress is a stronghold you can leave when you choose, but no one can enter without your permission. People break out of jail, but break into fortresses.

It is well to have some kind of fortress, however impalpable, if you want to talk about things that seem important.

Some time ago I read that a number of Christians in Brooklyn had offered objections to a proposal to erect a statue of Buddha in Prospect Park. Which set me wondering how Buddhists may feel about the little images of their prophet which I frequently see in drugstores. They are used as an advertising symbol for a large firm of importers, they stand on soda fountains or cigarette counters smouldering a small fume of disagreeably sweet incense, they bear in large letters the name of the company that distributes them. I am very ignorant in such matters, but Buddhism has always interested me as a logical and beautiful system of belief, and I presume that such images are regarded as rather sacred by its devotees. Is it not a little painful to them to see their emblem of divinity used as an advertising device? What would our Brooklyn Christians remark if they found, in shops in the Orient, a crucifix used as a rack for the display of cigarettes or sweetmeats?

It is a particular pleasure to me to see George Gissing's "New Grub Street" put back into print, in the frugal and legible format of the Modern Library, with Harry Hansen's sagacious little introduction. The Modern Library, by very alert editorial supervision, has become associated—even in its curious linoleum smell—with things genuinely worth reading; it has long since outgrown the somewhat jejune Dowsonism of its beginning; in those dark 'teens of Greenwich Village all cats were Dorian gray. I am sorry, though, that the merchandising spirit who wrote the jacket-copy for this new edition thought it necessary to step up the voltage of Mr. Hansen's very temperate remarks. Where Mr. Hansen in his introduction speaks of Gissing as "a capable stylist," the jacket transposes it to "a stylist second to none." This of course is absurd; except in occasional adjectives of *pannus purpureus* Gissing was hardly a "stylist" at all—in his novels, at least. And this was due not merely to the monotony of grimness in which he wrote, the dogged weariness with which he plowed through the statutory three volumes; it was due also to a certain chosen dryness of temperament. Such passages as the Athenian sunset in "New Grub Street" are very rare. In "Ryecroft" and in "By the Ionian Sea," books written not for drudgery but for delight, Gissing allowed himself more gamut.

"New Grub Street," of course, is a book so well worth reading that one is cautious against over-recommending it. It is full of Gissing's special virtues of sober, gainly, competent narrative; the admirable treatment of dialogue; the fine, dull, conscientious, workmanlike efficacy. So rarely, so very rarely, does he ignite into a real flash—as for instance his admirable irony in calling the chapter where Reardon dies, "Reardon Becomes Practical." Sometimes he has lapses of really deplorable fatigue or sloth: as where, by giving one chapter a clumsy label he deprives the reader of all suspense in a critical turn of his plot. It is a book that gives the layman a very painful and disillusioning picture of the world of publishing and reviewing. Whether it was quite fair toward the London of the '80's I cannot say: Mr. Hansen judiciously points out that the very moment when Gissing's bitter novel was published (1891) was the time when so many fine things were feathering in more fortunate quills. Beaded bubbles were winking at the brim of many a rich purple-stained ink-well. But I think that any honest pilgrim of the Grub Street of today must confess that even at their worst, in the publishing world we have known, things have never been quite as sordid as Gissing suggests.

It was Thomas Mosher, tireless amateur of the neglected, who kept Gissing alive for a few readers in this country. I well remember the amazement of a publisher, twelve years or so ago, to whom I suggested a general reissue of Gissing's works. He had never heard of him. (It is really incredible, sometimes, publishers' powers of inaudition.) Now perhaps the time is come for a reprint of one or two other things: "The House of Cobwebs," for instance, a volume of short stories in which G. G. showed how much he might have done in that form if the mechanism of the day hadn't been geared to three-deckers. And when will Mr. Doran republish Morley Roberts's "Private Life of Henry Maitland," that most singular of pseudo-biographies?

A very eminent punster and typographer writes:

Your recent comments on *The Folder* lead me to confide to you that one of my long-standing (though not in type) ambitions is to print, some day,
Roosevelt's *African Game Trails* in elephant folio.
Erasmus's *Eloge de la Folie* in foolscap folio.
A *History of Wines and Beers* in two tall quartos.
Kingsley's *Water Babies* in small quarto.
Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* in as many octavos as necessary.
Hamerton's *Sylvan Year* in 12mo.
Freud's *Works* in sextodecimo.
Two *Years Before the Mast* in 24mo.
And why not an edition of *Leaves of Grass* on esparto paper?
Also, will you kindly tell me: When you published *Thunder on the Left*, were all Rights reserved?
Typographically yours,

BRUCE ROGERS

There's a little scrap of paper in Rosy's private collection that brings you very close to some great and vanished things—into the very "shadow of a magnitude." And, among bookmen anyhow, it's hardly necessary to explain who Rosy is—of course Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach of Philadelphia, probably the greatest of all the world's booksellers. And by the way, his series of dictations in the *Saturday Evening Post*, now current, are not being missed by those of us who have learned to listen respectfully when the Doctor speaks.

The scrap of paper I refer to is a bill from the Mermaid Tavern. It was preserved in the family of the Goodyears—Andrew Goodyear was the host of the Mermaid in Shakespeare's time—and it gives you a pretty good notion of the sort of dinner you'd have had if you had dropped in to eat with Shakespeare and Drayton or Ben Jonson. When they spoke of "meat and drink" in those days, that's exactly what they meant. Vegetables, you'll observe, weren't on the menu at all.

The document—I believe it's never been published before, and so we are specially in Dr. Rosenbach's debt—goes like this:—

Visitation Dinner

1588
September
14
Superfine bread xi d.
Beer & ale xiiii d.
Wine ii s. xi d.
Sugar x d.
Boiled beef x d.
Roast beef v s.
Boiled mutton iii s. iii d.
Capon y s.
Fire iii d.
SUMMA xx s. iii d.

ANDREW GOODYEARE.

Some of the items are not easy to decipher. I was a bit uncertain whether that "capon" might not have been "capers," for the proximity to Boiled Mutton certainly suggests caper sauce. The gorgeous thing about the whole menu is its extreme Britishness. Only add a cabbage or a brussels sprout and it might well be tonight's dinner at any Fleet Street ordinary.

There was a tradition (wasn't there?) that it was at a drinking bout with Drayton, Shakespeare contracted his fatal fever? But the Elizabethans died young not from too much drinking but from too much meat. Strange that such heavy diet bred—as Herrick said of the "nobly wild" Mermaid evenings:

"words that have been
So nimble and so full of subtle flame
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.