

Books of Special Interest

What Is Irony?

IRONY: An Historical Introduction. By J. A. K. THOMSON. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1927.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH HAZELTON HAIGHT
Vassar College

ONE who has read Mr. Thomson's beautiful interpretations of Greek literature and history in "The Greek Tradition" and "Greeks and Barbarians" is slightly repelled by the stiff title and formal arrangement in this new volume. The sub-title, "An Historical Introduction," has a musty-dusty savor of antiquity. The headings of the chapters are colorless Roman numerals with annoying minute letters marking subdivisions of thought. What catches the eye is a quotation on the fly leaf,

The glory, jest, and riddle of the world, and an informal dedication of thanks to Gilbert Murray for his understanding sympathy.

Any thoughtful reader will find here a new type of literary criticism. Greek literature is reviewed, not chronologically, but from the point of view of an informing spirit. The subject, irony, cannot be defined, but is set forth through Greek literature itself. The word Eiron came into literature through comedy and meant the cunning, primitive man, the Caliban, who fearing the ever-present jealousy of Heaven, pretends to be less than he is. In comedy this ironical man is in conflict with the Alazon, or Impostor, who professes to be something more than he is. By their varying importance, three elements, Alazon, Eiron, and Fortune or Deity, determine the type of irony in different forms of literature.

In Aristophanes' "Acharnians" or "Clouds," the fool runs his head against the force of circumstances and falling is a comic-ironic figure. In Æschylus' "Agamemnon" or Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" the hero challenges destiny and falls, a tragic-ironic figure. And the horror of such tragedy is that the spectator foresees the fall and breathlessly awaits the events, thus be-

coming a participant in the irony of the plot. The irony of Euripides is more modern, a subjective irony motivated by an emotion too strong to tread the boards unmasked, bred perhaps of "a sadness from some defeat of high illusions."

To give any idea of the content of the book one must thus use its very phraseology. Mr. Thomson, after establishing by analysis, paraphrase, and translation the origin and essence of irony, shows that both comic and tragic irony existed in Homer; that Herodotus's History might have for a sub-title "The Tragedy of King Xerxes," and for that "the whole machinery of dramatic irony is brought into action;" that Thucydides's History, like drama, represents the clash of human Hubris and divine Nemesis until his irony acquires "tremendous force from its apparent substantiation by the naked facts;" that the great Eiron of Dialogue is the Platonic Socrates, whose irony was manifested as "emotion tempered by common sense, common sense transfigured by emotion." Lucian, at last, was the link between ancient and modern irony because he made irony satirical and used it for defense. This weapon of his was handed down to Erasmus, More, and Rabelais.

A brief review of Roman irony shows less irony in Latin literature than in Greek, and that imitative. There are particularly illuminating pages on Horace and on Tacitus who writing on "the wrath of God upon the Roman people" "with hue like that when some great painter dips his pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse" manifested the Apocalypse of the tragic irony.

But this was not all.

The tragic irony found its way into the modern world. . . . The thoughts of men about life and death may change, or at least be cheered by a new hope, but life and death themselves remain, and while they remain can never fail to provide a sufficiency of tragic matter. The problem of evil, the problem of unmerited suffering, is with us as much as with the ancients. We have dropped one answer to the Sphinx, but she has not yet cast herself from her rock. There is still on her lips that smile which we call irony. How to interpret it

is the business of philosophy, perhaps of religion. How to express it is the business of art. And this we learned from the Greeks.

That final paragraph suggests the author's distinguished style, but only the book itself with its *lucidus ordo*, fine insight, delicate appreciations, and *lo bello stile* can show how truly it presents the problems of The glory, jest, and riddle of the world.

From the Other World

THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM. By Sir ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. 2 vols. \$7.50.

ALL of us who remember our youth owe a debt of gratitude to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But even in those far-off days of "Micah Clarke," "The White Company," and the adventures of the egregious "Sherlock Holmes," he never wrote a better children's story than his "History of Spiritualism." We accompany Swedenborg to his amazing paradise; we hear the "speaking with tongues" in Edward Erving's church; we watch the incursion of Red Indian spirits among the Shakers; we listen to Andrew Jackson Davis's prophecy in mesmeric trance; we are present at the historic midnight scene of March 31, 1848, when Kate Fox snapped her fingers, crying, "Here, old Splitfoot, do as I do," and the knockings instantly responded (italics Doyle's); and thenceforth, the introduction over, we move among ever greater marvels, perceiving Henry Slade pass material objects through one another, D. D. Home fly across the air, Kate King grow and diminish, Eusapia Palladino put forth strange ectoplasmic limbs, and spooks innumerable, felt and weighed and photographed. But when one asks what basis of fact lies behind this interesting narrative he gets no satisfactory answer. The author is so careless of elementary historical scholarship that he rarely refers to his sources and when he does the footnote nearly always points to some Spiritualistic magazine. His "History" is made up largely of hearsay evidence; such statements as the following abound:

"Hundreds of respectable citizens of Buffalo are reported to have seen these occurrences."

"He was said to know no German, yet messages in German appeared on the slates."

This sort of testimony the author regards as entirely conclusive. On the other hand, the exposures of Slade, Monk, Eusapia Palladino,—and even the confession of Margaret Fox herself,—fail to shake his faith in those very mediums. The negative reports of investigations at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, the Sorbonne, and elsewhere are all discredited. The Society for Psychical Research comes in for sharp criticism because of its exaggerated skepticism! All in all, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle impresses one as perhaps the worst judge of historical evidence that could possibly be found.

Nor is one's confidence restored by "Pheneas Speaks," the record of alleged spirit communications to Sir Arthur's wife, which she obtained through automatic writing or in a state of semi-trance. Pheneas claims to be an Arabian who lived at Ur of the Chaldees before the time of Abraham. Possibly this accounts for the fact that his English never rises above the level of the first reader; yet this seems improbable because several other spirits who occasionally chime in speak in exactly the same style. The messages of Pheneas offer hygienic advice—"Take bismuth twice a day;" alluring pictures of heaven as a quiet park-like place—"We have got a most beautiful—oh, beautiful! space of green grass, very open and large, where they have wonderful games, every game," where, best of all, "There will be no motor cars or noise to disturb the wonderful beauty;" personal encouragement—"You have a great work set apart for you to do; it is a beautiful work, and . . . you will get great advancement in the other world through it;" praise of the medium—"She will be wonderful. She has God's great work to do;" much talk of the immediate second coming of Christ—to England, naturally—when "the things which are done in God's name which are cruel and wicked will not be able to exist. All shams will be swept away by then, and only truth will live . . . There will be a great change in the manner of life in the world . . . People will live for real things, not shams, for God and for their neighbors." If these messages are veridic, Sir Arthur and his wife must have come in touch with the most repetitious bore that ever got into heaven by mistake. The idea of spending an eternity with Pheneas makes the thought of annihilation very sweet.



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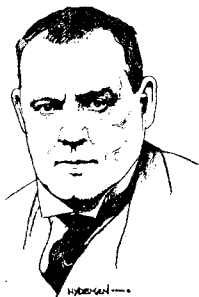
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MARXIAN STUDY. By EMANUEL
KANTER. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr &
Company. 1927. \$1.

CAUSES OF WAR AND THE NEW
REVOLUTION. By TELL A. TURNER.
Boston: Marshall Jones Company. 1927.
\$2.

WAR—CAUSE AND CURE. (The Hand-
book Series). By JULIA E. JOHNSON.
New York: H. W. Wilson Company.
1926. \$2.40.

STATESMANSHIP OR WAR? By JOHN
MCAULEY PALMER, Brigadier-General,
U. S. A., Retired. New York: Double-
day, Page & Company. 1927. \$2.50.
Reviewed by JOHN BAKELESS

Author of "The Origin of the Next War"

WHEN one considers their importance
and the length of time the human race
has been suffering because of its failure to
eliminate them, the causes of war have been
singularly little studied. Indeed, if we ex-
cept the writings of G. Lowes Dickinson,
Oscar Crosby, and a few others, there have
been practically no books of genuine im-
portance on what is, after all, the chief
problem of the twentieth century. Such
an opinion neglects, of course, the all-too-
plentiful maunderings of the professional
pacifists; but as these are for the most part
purely emotional efforts to deal with a prob-
lem that primarily demands intellectual
solution, what else can one do but neglect
them?

Nor do the three latest books on the
causes of war offer very notable contribu-
tions to the literature of this neglected sub-
ject. The fiercest of the three is Emanuel
Kanter's Marxian solution of the puzzle.
It is all quite simple—Mr. Kanter turns
you off a neat solution while you wait in
precisely one hundred and twenty-three
pages. War is due to Capitalism—with a
big C, please; and it will be done away
with by Communism—which requires an
even bigger C and, if possible, red ink.
A solemn, discursive little book, with abun-
dant allusion to primitive practices, Homer,
cannibalism, American Indians, and in-
numerable encyclopedia articles and books
by other people. Prehistoric man's sup-
posed habits, of course, offer convenient
argument for almost anything, because no-
body really knows much about them and
our unfortunate ancestors are not here to
defend themselves.

Savages and barbarians, according to
Mr. Kanter, are on the whole peacable and
well-disposed—one wonders, how he knows
—and rarely undertake military operations
more ambitious than raids to secure cap-
tives for sacrifice or slaves. But you can't
call that war. "The basis for the relative
peacefulness of barbarians is found in the
fact that private property in the means of
production, as well as the division of society
into warring classes, is nowhere fully de-
veloped." Later on in the process of social
evolution, "the State and the private own-
ership of land usher in Civilization, the
Society of War *par excellence*."

The last stage of all, which will assuredly
end this sad eventful history, is Communism
—"and in such a society," says trustful Mr.
Kanter, "War and Revolution will have
become a social anachronism." This will
be news to the Chinese associates of Mr.
Borodin, who have lately been giving an
exceedingly practical demonstration of a
somewhat different doctrine. It will also
be news to the Polish soldiers who only a
few years ago watched the Communist
armies sweep almost to the gates of War-
saw, and who of late have anticipated the
necessity of facing a war with the only
organized Communist state!

The most important part of Mr. Tell A.
Turner's "Causes of War"—and that is
not very important—consists of "brief
narratives of the principal wars from the
Spanish Armada, 1588, to the Treaties of
Locarno, 1925." His lists of the causes of
each conflict would be valuable if he had
the least idea of the distinction between
fundamental and merely precipitating causes,
or any conception of documentation. "Causes
of War" is a well-meant, futile little book,
which ends with a solemn prophecy of "the
momentous revolution that is now pending."
Let nobody, however, get excited and look
under the bed for a Bolshevik. This revolu-
tion will be merely a "war to end war."
Somehow, that phrase seems familiar.

Mr. Turner also observes that President
Coolidge is neither a visionary nor an alarm-
ist—which nobody can deny.

A refreshing contrast to this windy ideal-
ism, and by far the best of the three books,
is Miss Julia E. Johnson's unpretentious
and useful little compilation, "War—Cause
and Cure," which is primarily intended as
a guide to undergraduate debaters, but
which is equally convenient for any one
else interested in the subject. It brings
together a mass of magazine articles, some
of which, at least, are worth preserving;
and it provides an extended bibliography of
genuine value.

Brigadier-General Palmer's "Statesman-
ship or War" is a downright, soldierly book
which deals neither in lofty generalizations
nor in pious platitudes. General Palmer
is concerned not with the causes of war
but solely with the proper military policy
for the defense of the United States, which
he believes is to be found in a modification
of the Swiss system of military training for
every able-bodied male citizen. It is sur-
prising to find a professional soldier ad-
vocating reduction of the Regular Army;
but then, General Palmer is by no means
an ordinary soldier.

He distinguishes between offensive and
defensive armaments, pointing out that the
former foster war, whereas the latter pro-
mote peace; but unhappily he fails to de-
fine his terms; nor does he adequately
explain the obvious contradiction between
his conception and the maxim that the best
defense is an offensive. Presumably Gen-
eral Palmer would retort that the ocean
barriers to east and west of the United
States make an ordinary American arma-
ment defensive only, simply because there
is no other country within reaching dis-
tance. But, in spite of the traditional good
feeling, which will in all probability endure
forever, Canada might not regard a great
American army—even a citizen army—with
equanimity; and Mexico certainly would
not.

At any rate, General Palmer pins his
faith to what Washington describes as a
"respectably defensive posture,"—a phrase
which the Father of his Country encloses
in quotation marks,—which would enable
the United States to defend its Continental
possessions, Panama, and Hawaii, without
threatening other nations. The Regular
Army would then constitute simply an ex-
peditionary force, large enough for emer-
gencies, but too small to alarm other
nations, and it would also provide a staff
and other necessary organizations. But
wherever possible, General Palmer would
leave training in the hands of the citizen-
officer, choosing him carefully and demand-
ing a high standard of military attainment
to avoid past disasters with militia.

Sane and well-informed as most of Gen-
eral Palmer's book is, it is a distinct shock
to find him totally ignorant of the trans-
formation which accepted views on respon-
sibility for the World War have undergone
in the last few years.

The fact that his views on world politics
are out of date is incidental, however, and
does not invalidate his extremely intelligent
ideas of American military policy.

Russian Folk Lore

KRYLOV'S FABLES. Translated into
English verse by Sir Bernard Pares.
Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by PITIRIM SOROKIN

WHAT la Fontaine is in French, Esop
in Greek, or the "Pilgrim's Progress"
in English, Krylov's Fables are in Russian.
Published between 1809 and 1844, they
at once became classical in Russian litera-
ture; passed into Russian proverbs; became
a part of the Russian folklore; and are
still as fresh and popular now as at the
time of their publication. They are a con-
centrated expression of the wit, and humor,
and common sense of the Russian nation.
Like other classical fables, they are the
most national in their character, and at the
same time, quite cosmopolitan, equally com-
prehensive for all nations and for all age-
groups.

Sir Bernard Pares's translation has now
made them accessible for English readers,
and especially for English children. The
translation itself is a real masterpiece.
Krylov's adequate translation into a foreign
language is almost impossible. And yet,
the translator has succeeded in expressing in
English Krylov's style, idioms, metre; in
brief, he gave in English the real Krylov's
Fables. Only the talent of the translator,
and twenty years of work over the trans-
lation can explain such an artistic achieve-
ment.

Pirandello Plays

"EACH IN HIS OWN WAY" AND TWO
OTHER PLAYS. By LUIGI PIRAN-
DELLO. Translated by ARTHUR LIV-
INGSTON. New York: E. P. Dutton &
Co. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by CLEVELAND B. CHASE

IT is doubtful whether the publication of
translations of three more of Pirandello's
plays will add greatly to his reputation in
this country. Not that the plays are not up
to his standard—quite to the contrary. But
they impress us anew with the fact that he
is a dramatist with such an *idee fixe* that
he seems to have reduced play writing to a
formula. Each of his plays is only an at-
tempt to pound in with new evidence his
not so original conviction that all reality
is fictitious, and that human beings don't
act, or rather, react logically. To quote
Mr. Livingston's prefatory note, "Strip-
ping reality of the attributes that make it
seem to us most real, reducing personality
to a fleeting, changing moment, identifying
illusion with reality and vice versa . . .
Pirandello makes people over into some-
thing like ghosts . . . We experience a
certain bewilderment, a certain tense strain,
a 'torment of the spirit' . . . This mood
. . . is the essence of his art."

Pirandello has taken a leaf from the hu-
morists' manual, and has applied the *reduc-
tio ad absurdum* to logical theories about
life. The resultant discrepancies, however,
he takes with the utmost seriousness. Writ-
ers from the days of the Greeks to those of
our own Will Rogers have remarked the
contrary unwillingness of human beings to
be logical. In "Candide" Voltaire sketched
the subject with unsurpassed wit and pen-
etration. But Pirandello must needs get up-
set about it. With Latin volubility he
shakes us by the shoulders and shouts,
"Look here! Things aren't what they
seem!" To which it has ever been the cus-
tom of the world to reply, "But, of course,
they never were."

His is an amusing point of view, but he
varies the formula too little. His plays are
nothing but comments on life, and his com-
ment is essentially the same, whatever the
immediate point under discussion. An in-
telligent person will get him the first or,
at any rate, the second time. After that
his repetition of the theme gets dull. And
the unintelligent reader—or listener—
won't ever discover what he is driving at,
anyhow.

Of the three plays here translated, "Each
in His Own Way," an example of Piran-
dello's method at its best, suggests the man-
ner of the author's first Broadway success,
"Six Characters in Search of an Author."
If the latter may be said to be the drama
of writing a play, the former is the drama
of the presentation of a play. "The Pleas-
ure of Honesty" is an involved affair which
seeks vaguely and vainly for some working
definition of honesty. "Naked," the last of
the three, failed when it was produced in
New York last autumn. It takes up the
question of the wrong man does woman by
idealizing her.

Ancient Towns

VANISHED CITIES OF NORTHERN
AFRICA. By MRS. STEUART ERSKINE
and MAJOR BENTON FLETCHER. Boston:
Houghton Mifflin Co. 1927. \$6.

THIS is a book for the special reader
rather than the general public. It is
written for the student of antiquity and arch-
æology, for the reader who prefers his fire-
side travel to be touched with the authen-
ticity of historical data rather than the en-
thusiasm of a fired imagination. For a
popular travel book, its minute searchings
make for monotonous reading. It suffers
too much from the dust of class room style
and has not enough of the burning, pic-
turesque sands of the desert. On the other
hand, for those who would like nothing
better than to go with pick and shovel
along the northern strip of the Dark Con-
tinent, eyes ever on the alert for footprints
of those Roman conquerors whose lives are
so inextricably bound up with the misfor-
tunes of the ancient cities of the North
African coast, there is much interesting in-
formation presented in a straightforward
and orderly manner. The book abounds
in dates, names of battles, and famous
Roman, Carthaginian, and Arab soldiers.
In addition one will find a veritable catalogue
of museums and ruins where may be
examined everything of importance bearing
upon the heyday of the vanished cities of
Northern Africa.