

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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ARTHUR PATRICK REDFIELD, PH.D., LL.D.  
A Typical Product of the Age of Knowledge. (See Nelson  
Antrim Crawford's "A Man of Learning," an  
ironic study of our intellectual leadership)

### Kit Carson in the Flesh

KIT CARSON: THE HAPPY WARRIOR OF  
THE OLD WEST. By STANLEY VESTAL.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1928. \$3.50.

Reviewed by EDWIN L. SABIN

ONE may sometimes wonder whether, if we of this day might gain admittance to that Valhalla where historic personages are gathered, we should find them to be anything like our mental pictures of them. The doubt arises. If, as is frequently the case, we are taken all aback by our first close inspection of distinguished contemporaries, what chance is there that, translated to the company of the illustrious reincarnate, we may at once exclaim: "There's Washington! There goes Napoleon! There are Custer, and Sitting Bull, talking with Frémont! How natural they look!"

Few of us, however, would fail to recognize Kit Carson, restored to his prime: that slow-speaking, short-legged, long-bodied, full-chested, flat-faced, fair-complexioned little man, with thin "baby" hair (according to Mrs. Frémont) brushed back (according to his biographer Dr. Peters) "à la Franklin."

Kit might be a disappointment, at first sight, as he was to a number of hero-seekers in his day; but when he got into action—wagh!

And after reading Stanley Vestal's "Kit Carson" we should moreover recognize many of his associates whom time heretofore has submerged—and particularly if they had reverted to type: as, for instance, the formidable Sol Silver (so-called by reason of the Kiowa silver rings in his ears, taken, along with the scalp, from his former red owner), with his Osage badge of honor tattooed into the hairy skin of his chest and his immense bush of black Mexican whiskers; Bill Mitchell, ex-Comanche, so to speak, habituated to a red gee-string and open-order Injun leggin's; and the bearded Missourian Ike Chamberlain, Carson's lieutenant, of the flapping wool hat and of stature so bulky that he required an especially built saddle. That these gentry of a plains-and-mountain rank and file long obscured by the deeds of their captains were real performers the writer of this article will honestly testify.

It was high time that the career of Kit Carson,  
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### Diadems and Fagots

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

To each they offer gifts after his will,  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.  
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,  
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily  
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day  
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,  
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

WE hear little now of De Quincey's once famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, and for an excellent reason. The literature of knowledge has eaten up the literature of power, and is serenely unaware of the prophecy that it was soon to be superseded. "Knowledge is power" is the modern text, and we have put our own definition upon knowledge, as the representative series of books listed below\* may indicate. Even "literature" nowadays has changed its meaning and signifies anything that is read. Hence I suggest a variant of De Quincey's terminology and shall write of short-sighted and far-sighted literature, meaning what he meant, but thinking particularly of our own time. For above the wranglings over estheticisms, romanticisms, and classicisms, monistic, pluralistic, anarchistic, democratic, and aristocratic in literature which engage critics in what often seems a whirl of words, one fact emerges with painful certainty:—our literature has become like our life, opportunistic, analytical, short-sighted, and that is a cause of causes for symptoms over which the intellectual have worn out many typewriters without perceptible clarification.

American criticism particularly has become a conflict of personalities, Mr. Mencken against Mr. Babbitt, French ideas versus English, New York against the country. Like their blood brothers, the historians and the psychologists, American critics have tried to isolate literature from life, and make complex laws for phenomena that spring from causes too simple to interest subtle minds overtrained in dialectic and analysis.

The collective books of an age represent no more and probably no less than the collective mind of that period, hence if there is any principle, bias, philosophy, prejudice common to all or most of them, that should be the first object of search for the critic, and until it is found the intellect goes glimmering like an unskilled doctor prescribing (perhaps successfully) for pimples and aches in the joints when the real malady is unknown.

I do not set up for a universal doctor, like those enviable schoolmen of the Middle Ages, who so willingly explained all in the heavens above and the earth beneath, and yet I venture to point to one general characteristic of the books we are reading that seems more basic than the peccadilloes of realism or the question of style. The strong, the well-read, the "typical" books of America (and of Europe, too) are prevailingly books of knowledge, clear-sighted like knowledge, short-sighted like most knowledge which is not also wisdom. Poets of prophetic and moral strain are modest now and thankful for a thousand readers, preachers are voluble with the overemphasis of the little-headed; it

is the book which tells us what we are like, and why, and what to do about it in order to become more successful, which leads in modern literature.

The ruling passion of this civilization (and please to remember that if I write in large generalities I am thinking concretely in terms of books) is success. The ideal of our ancestors was happiness. By success, I mean an adaptation of the human animal to his immediate environment which will give him an advantage in acquiring what happens to be most desired at the moment, and in being what happens to be most approved. Success is a realizable ideal, for it means having what others have, being what others are, and its key is knowledge. By happiness, I mean a personal sense that the deepest aspirations of the individual have been satisfied. It certainly does not involve success, though it may; it is seldom a realizable ideal for its key is a control over life quite impossible of mass production. Knowledge helps it a little, but the imagination much more.

The great discovery of this century was that the barriers to success could be thrown down if you only knew enough. With more knowledge of agriculture the food supply could be readily increased. With a knowledge of credit wealth could be made to breed for many if not all. With a sounder comprehension of psychology man could be taught to use his brain properly instead of improperly. With a deeper knowledge of physics and chemistry our earthy environment could be changed from static to dynamic, space could be narrowed, time crowded with events, and labor given a leverage upon production.

Books throughout this century show a growing obsession with the knowledge that could accomplish all these things. Plato, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare look across the ages, but the typical twentieth cen-

### This Week

"The Oxford History of the United States."

Reviewed by David S. Muzzey.

"The Living Buddha."

Reviewed by Theodore Purdy, Jr.

"Henry Hudson."

Reviewed by William MacDonald.

"Suicide."

Reviewed by Raymond Pearl.

"Post-War Germany."

A review by Arthur Ruhl.

Books on Crime. Reviewed by Edmund Lester Pearson.

From a British Musketeer.

By Hamish Miles.

### Next Week, or Later

Dorothy Richardson's "Oberland."  
Reviewed by Earl A. Aldrich.

\*"The How to Succeed in Life Series. In 1000 volumes, including books on psychology, banking, correct English, easy childbirth, practical religion, astrology, the credit system, applied personality, what the well-dressed woman wears, thought culture, prosperity, successful speculation, and character reading; also the best poetry, fiction, drama of the day. The appendix contains the world's best detective stories and the world's best sermons." All publishers.

tury book is concerned with here and now. It is saturated with the spirit of science—let us know the truth—but innocent of the further assumption that the truth will make us free. Not freedom, not happiness, not the wisdom which tells how to live, is the concern of our modern books, whether they crudely deal with the factors of success, or subtly contribute to our knowledge of the causes of failure. Why should these aspirations burden modern minds since we all believe that to master our physical environment guarantees success, and that success is an end in itself!

Was there ever a civilization so little concerned with how to live? We preach of it, naturally, but in phrases often meaningless because they are drawn from books that express sets of ideas now archaic in practice. The university to-day is powerful beyond all comparison in teaching measurement—which is science—and weak beyond comparison in stirring more than faint queries as to what shall be done with success when we have it. Only a few rebels ask in terms that are really searching where our strenuous industrial developments lead, or what Standard Oil or United States Steel can do for ultimate happiness. To question the relative value, say of preventative medicine, where no thought extends beyond the preservation of efficient workers able to run machines, seems absurd because it is completely outside our habit of mind. We are intoxicated by our success in controlling nature and energizing the brain. And what drunkard cared for the morrow! Our major effort is toward immediate success in the use of tools, particularly that great tool, the body. The minority that still thinks in terms of happiness, that would speculate in beauty, or rest in spiritual content, taking those satisfactions not to be gained by mastery of the object which by age-long proof are indispensable to human nature, has the psychology of a minority. Poets are lyric not epic, analytical not synthetic, moralists perfunctory, except in diagnosis, philosophers either merely descriptive or grumbling voices heard only by the discontent. Mr. Durant makes philosophy popular by turning it into biography and explanation. No fire spreads from his book as from Emerson or Goethe. It is a text-book of useful knowledge which teaches how to understand what philosophers have thought. The reader is more knowing for having read it—but quite untouched by the need of a philosophy of his own. Only unsuccessful people need philosophies and we propose to be successful!



The Sunday newspaper, as others have doubtless remarked before, is a complete simulacrum of the age—astoundingly efficient and effective, an encyclopedia of everything that happened last week, our complete substitute for meditation upon the way of life. From a Sunday newspaper our civilization could be reconstructed—a little sketchy as to facts, but entirely indicative of the kind of knowledge we regard as sufficient. Indeed the Sunday newspaper is our one complete intellectual achievement, containing by description or implication everything else. A million words on keeping up with living—and next to nothing pertinent or powerful on what the devil we are going to do with all this acceleration of the means of life.

I am not a medievalist (which is one of the diseases with which this era of knowledge is infecting our finer spirits), I am not even a rebel against this age, although I should welcome a few fanatics who could stir up thinking. Culture, as is evident, has always developed by the trial and error method, which means an overemphasis upon successful experiments. Scientists so long as they remained philosophers never learned to measure with that inhuman concentration upon mere things which has given them their present success. Democracy would never have got so far along the road if good minds had not set themselves the task of distributing the knowledge that enabled the peasant to use his mind as a tool. If we are all to live together in Babylonian movie palaces, which seems to be the collective ideal of the nineteen twenties, the magical secrets of how to succeed in business, how to express the personality in clothes, how to seem educated, and even civilized, with the minimum of energy diverted from money making, must be made accessible. A society based upon credit and supported by a neck and neck race between production and consumption must be informed as to the terms of its subsistence. For society must certainly stay alive, whether it knows how to live or not.

Therefore this overemphasis upon knowledge

about things is clear-sighted even if it is short-sighted. We are overemphasizing success no more than the Middle Ages over-emphasized hope, and the Renaissance joy. We may long for Platoes and Goethes, but certainly do not crave Elizabethan sanitation, spinning wheels, or buggies. We may not be enamored of subways, tariff millionaires, tabloids, or neurotic women, but they are by-products of the same overemphasis that has made the world an economic unit, conquered some disease, and abolished much poverty.

And yet poverty of mind is not being abolished, nor aimlessness abated, nor philosophic vision increased. It is natural, I suppose, and yet deplorable, that our literature, which is not bound to hunger, vanity, and fear, not even to success, should be dazzled, cribbed, and cabined by the triumph of knowledge over the imagination.



Consider with a brooding mind the list of hypothetical books with which this essay began, adding such examples as you choose from your own shelves, not neglecting belles lettres.

Note that in our day most of the best poetry is analytical and ironic. Frustrate man, the end product of success, is the theme of T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, A. E. Housman, Edgar Lee Masters, Humbert Wolfe, Edwin Arlington Robinson. We read it to learn more of the imaginative mind under stress of inhibited desires. Or if not frustrate man, then the singer searches a mode of life in sharp retreat from the industrialized world—Frost in New England, Housman in the neo-paganism of Shropshire. Either poetry bows to the modern need for more knowledge of the creature man, or it is a literature of the minority, not in strong rebellion against short-sighted success, like Whitman, Browning, Emerson, but plaintive, esoteric, and expecting no world acceptance. Read Emerson's essay on 'The Poet' and see how our banners are lowered and our drums muffled since our leaders lost interest in how to live. The beautiful life is now a solace for the defeated, a vision too ethereal for the gross uses of earth. It is when the poet reveals new aspects of the mind (as William Ellery Leonard, or Hardy, or Masters) and thus contributes to scientific knowledge that he is most in tune with prevailing interests.

More striking is the example of fiction, the true mirror of this age. Mystery stories, romances of adventure, historical romances are only more lengths in a continuing tradition, and prove nothing except a desire to dream awake which exists presumably even in Paradise. Romance can be used for great ends, but has not so been used in this age. Strong writers have gone in for facts. They have told to the democracy the truth about ordinary unheroic man. They have followed the psychologist in tracking pathology to where it lies curled in the heart of the normal. They have exposed the barrenness of farm life, the vapidness of the half-educated, the tyrannies of sex, the anarchies of a knowing philosophy, the slow effects (as in Galsworthy) of a loosening grip upon the conduct of life. It is easy to fit titles to these descriptions.



The novelists have trotted behind the steam callopie of experimental science. They have set up their laboratories in the spirit, their controlled experiments, their analysis of things as they are, or seem. This is the effect upon the artistic temperament of a drive for efficiency—it pretends, like a sensitive child, to be scientific too. This is the root of realism and the cause of naturalism. Tell us, we ask of the novelists and dramatists, what we are like, in terms that our imagination can understand, so that we may get knowledge from our reading, and learn to control the circumstances which so inexplicably interfere with our success. Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, Joyce and May Sinclair, are read, like the tracts of the early 19th Century, for their information. "Why Men Fail" is the title of a psychological disquisition and "Elmer Gantry" the name of a novel, but the two books belong to the same philosophical category.

The novels that are discussed and taken seriously as exponents of the group mind are therefore likely to be text-books dressed in narrative form. They can be listed under heads—as "pioneer life," "intellectual life in New York," "expatriates," "the young girl and obstetrics," "sex appeal and what happens," "strong bodies and weak wills," "disintegrated personalities," "the unconscious versus the conscious."

To call all this realism is just a means of classification for esthetic analysis, and is very likely to confuse these modern social studies with books where the facts were a means not an end. The true description goes much deeper. These are books of knowledge not of imagination, literature where the vision is short though terribly clear, books that tell what living is as a contribution to the escape from failure or as a guarantee of success. They are "true stories" read by collectors of facts.

But what the belles lettrists do half-heartedly and with constant aberrations toward imaginative creation of life ideally considered, the writers of the "How to Succeed" library do without mental reservation. Their quite unliterary books boldly confess what modern literature is about. The "key books" of this age are practical psychologies, the manuals of health for everybody, the guides to successful behavior which crudely expose our beliefs and our desires. A philosophic critic of a later century will say that this generation was persuaded that by taking thought it could add a cubit to its stature, and often did so, but as to what good the cubit did there was seemingly no concern. He will say, this was an age of measurement—expand the dollar, shorten glands, adjust environment, lengthen life, weigh illusions, study mankind with all the instruments of precision which Pope lacked; in this age they believed that with enough knowledge success was certain, or if not success, insight into the causes of failure. Art therefore was sterile except where it contributed to fact.

Readers of this attempted survey may think that it is too sweeping. They will cite H. G. Wells, saying that there is a typical modern author, all of whose books are written on the one theme of how to live. I answer that no better example than H. G. Wells could be found for my thesis, since here is a writer trained in science, as all literate authors of the immediate future are likely to be, who, thanks to his early baptism in the religion of science, has already lost his awe of new facts and realized that knowledge alone is not going to be enough. But observe that his ideas on how to live are all conditioned by the popular assumption of the age that once man is efficient he will be happy. In every one of Wells's serious books some simple rule of sociology, hygiene, or politics creates the possibility of a Utopia which, incidentally, always has a cockney look and smell to it. Having learned measurement, Wells thinks that by applying measurement we may be saved. He is plucky, and relatively far-sighted, but a little naive.



More cogent is the objection that authors by hundreds are protesting against the ideal of success, even when they are most pertinent examples of its insidious influences. This is true. The poets, novelists, and dramatists, with the less fashionable clergy, have always filled the front benches of the opposition, yet never, it seems to me, have they been less effective than now. If we forget the Elmer Gantrys of religion, the clergy may be said to be against mere knowledge to a man, but they play from weakness not from strength, they speak with the hollow voice of the radio preacher who knows that tens of thousands will cut him off at the third platitude. The writers are in like case. They are strong when they contribute to knowledge, weak when they transcend it.

These statements are made by way of definition since my purpose is not to condemn books which, measured by standards of pure art, may very justly be said to reflect and interpret the spirit of an age. And yet it is easy to pass on to criticism if one considers the kind of life they serve and represent. Has American life, for instance, grown less aimless anywhere, anyhow, except in the increase of material efficiency? Are there half as many of a growing population concerned with what they will do with success when they get it, as in, let us say, the generation of Emerson? Is one-tenth, or one-hundredth as much intellect devoted to the use of wealth, the conduct of life, the cravings of a civilized mind for order, discipline, beauty, content, as to the control of machinery, the increase of production, the comfort of body? The answers, of course, are obvious, and so long as they are obvious the fact that literature follows instead of leads may be natural, but is not a subject for congratulation—no matter how subtle the analysis, how "true" the representations of the strains and stresses of industrialism. As long as we

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