

Points of View

The Crime Club

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Some time ago you offered me, among other booksellers, a chance to express a point of view about books from the angle of our profession. It was a good chance and I regret that I have been so occupied with the immediate problem of inducing people to buy books that opportunities of this kind have had to be lost.

Both Chris Morley and Benét on the detective story in the *Saturday Review* of recent dates, have neglected to say why such a strange assortment of people belong to "The Crime Club." It would be fun to have the psychoanalysts and the psychologists report on the qualities of character common to the strange band of individuals who seek to have their brains completely side-tracked by a parody on crime. When you group Woodrow Wilson, Amy Lowell, Lord Balfour, Professor Kittredge of Harvard, and a host of other people whose occupations necessitate use of the brain, the proposition seems rather fascinating. But, on second thought, psychoanalysts seem to find plenty to do without entering the detective story field, which after all is a playground.

I, and other addicts, recognize, of course, that detective and mystery stories are in a class by themselves—in somewhat the same way as the dime novel. The thing to achieve is mechanical perfection, and if there is a fair amount of success the final click of someone "getting his" results in complete satisfaction. Reality has little if anything to do with the reader's complete removal from the realm of ordinary day or night, and his intense preoccupation with the book in hand and the problem in mind.

As to style and fashion, I have wondered why some genius did not decide to put a bit of reality into the accepted pattern—adorn a character or two with so many human attributes that it would come to life. But the whole point is that if the story is real and taken from court records, it becomes Tragedy—the fun has gone and instead of a hilarious state of tension, complete demoralizing depression results. It takes an artist's nice discrimination to avoid the pitfalls of reality, and to rise to heights where the reader never realizes that he is perusing parody, but is transported to a familiar realm all his own—happy, terrifying, exciting, bloody, a world of misunderstanding, turmoil, intrigue, selfishness, a stage on which the actors strut in and out of mock tragedy, in parts that correspond to human records on police blotters and in newspaper headlines the world over. But—everybody always "gets his!" Otherwise we would be a perfectly undesirable group of citizens.

By the way, there are no stereotyped methods in "THE OLD DARK HOUSE," by Priestley, the master of the light essay, who turns his original mind to wind, rain, dark and a household who little expected wet travelers to seek a haven in their eerie midst. And "THE GREEN MURDER CASE," by Van Dine, has caused me more excitement than any detective story since the days of Sherlock Holmes.

MARION ELZA DODD.

The Hampshire Bookshop.

Apropos of Beard

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

When a great work prepared by specialists is received with almost unanimous praise, it becomes one who is not a specialist to tread softly. Detailed criticism requires thorough scholarship and prolonged examination. No review of Professor Beard's volumes that I have seen has revealed such study. Many of them lead one to think that the reviewers could qualify for their task under the statement sometimes credited to Sydney Smith that "he disliked to read a book before reviewing it for fear he would be prejudiced." Considerable of the reviewing that comes under my eye reads like this, or else is a somewhat "jazzy" repetition of the publishers' announcement.

Certainly Professor Beard's work is easy and delightful reading, so much so that it suggests sometimes a doubt as to the validity of its conclusions. Not that a dull literary style would confirm either the facts or the conclusions, but a certain free and easy jauntiness of style raises the suspicion that the writers have only scratched the surface.

The volumes seem to be without plan or order or goal, and they give the impres-

sion that this is also true of our civilization. A mass of facts have been assembled, but not always mastered, nor has their bearing always been discerned upon the progress of the country. Here is wide knowledge but little wisdom. It appears that "The Rise of American Civilization" is just as lacking in plan and goal as is this history of it. One is led to wonder how our Nation evolved at all.

Again, the general impression is that religion has had little to do, at least that was worth while, with our Civilization. Rather it has stood in the way of our normal development; its spokesmen have been narrow and unsympathetic with human progress, and it has been so divided into warring sects and groups that its influence has been practically nil, or worse, harmful. Of course this attitude is not found expressed in words, and there is much about religion in the volumes, but there is no clear cut, definite statement, for example, or two great facts in our country's history; first, that religion lies at the very foundation of our national life. With all their faults and misunderstandings of the Christian faith, the Pilgrims and the Puritans, the Dutch and the Germans, the Huguenots and the Quakers, the Scotch-Irish and the Cavaliers, were religious folk and built their state upon a religious foundation and put into its whole subsequent growth a positive, controlling religious content.

There is a meager and imperfect treatment of the "Great Awakening" of the eighteenth century. It is enough to say here, that this religious "Awakening" probably did as much, if not more, to prepare the Colonies for Independence and to act with even the little unity manifested through the long and weary struggle than any other single force. But no one would learn this from these volumes.

This failure to appreciate the deeper meaning of religion in the life of the Nation runs through the whole treatise. It is treated with a certain condescension, as if it did not touch the deepest springs of national life, and was not one of the chief forces, as great or greater than political and economic forces, that, for good or ill, has determined the "Rise of American Civilization."

To conclude, while there is much of value here, while I have read with intense interest these pages, I lay aside the volumes without any clear vision of the "Rise of American Civilization." This may be partly due to the reader, but I am quite sure that it is also partly due to the writers who did not have it either. They were mastered by their task, rather than being its masters. They have given us a valuable informing work, but they have not given a final nor wholly satisfactory history of our national development.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

Geneva, N. Y.

A Curious Item

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Perhaps you will be interested in a curious item I have found in the Harvard stacks. Surely many strange forms wander among the camp-followers of literature.

In 1740 there appeared "The Oddity: A Poem. Of near 250 Lines in One Continued Rhyme. Being a Letter from a Sailor to his Sweetheart." Thirty-six years later it was enlarged into "The Oddity, An Humorous Poem, Being a Love Letter from a Grub-street Poet to his Sweetheart; Consisting of no less than Four Hundred Lines, in one continued Rhyme, all ending in ation; in which, only one Word is used twice throughout the whole Poem, and even that, in two different senses. By Tantara-bolus, Great Grandson to Perriwigdum Funnidos." This expanded version has a dedication "To Britannia," dated "New-Year's Day, One Thousand, Seven Hundred and FAST ASLEEP, a six-page preface, and at least one interesting allusion:

*He is puzzled most strangely at the American Taxation,
As likewise their stoppage of Non-Importation.*

In this *tour de force* the lines are very rough and the love message (signed Frank Hopewell) is subordinated to a "long Declaration, In my Friend's Commendation," but the four hundred rimes on -ation are there. Shall we regard "The Oddity" as a sort of retaliation on an age that had an inclination for identity in termination?

RICHMOND P. BOND.

Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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ESTHER KORBLES
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The Wits' Weekly

Conducted by EDWARD DAVIDSON

Competition No. 29. Mr. Mencken's April Americana reports that Mr. Billy Sunday has announced an intention to have himself skinned after death, the skin to furnish a drum for use in street Revival Parades throughout the United States. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the poem most nearly resembling what Mr. Vachel Lindsay might write on hearing such a drum beaten in Springfield, Illinois. (Entries, which may be fragmentary, but must not exceed forty lines of verse, should reach *The Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of May 7.)

Competition No. 30. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best brief inscription, preferably but not necessarily in verse, for a Memorial to President Wilson at Geneva. (Entries should reach the *Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of May 14.)

Competitors are advised to read carefully the rules printed below.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH COMPETITION

The prize for the best parody "If Swinburne had written 'The Man with the Hoe'" is awarded to E. A. Markburne, who is requested to furnish the Editor his name and address.

IF SWINBURNE HAD WRITTEN "THE MAN WITH THE HOE"

Yea, with toiling downbent
He beholds but the sod;
Brute-browed and forspent,
Growing kin to the clod,
For his body is plundered of pleasure,
his soul become barren of God.

He hath delved, he hath deadened
In thralldom his thought;
Long labor hath leadened
Lithe limbs unto naught;
For his eyesight no sunrise is red-
dened, no sweet starry symbols
are wrought.

Who hath muted his heart?
Who hath stricken his brain,
And enchained him apart
From swift passion and pain?
Who hath darkened the dawn of his
dreaming, his spirit hath smitten
and slain?

Who shall lift up his face
From the doom and the dearth,
With a guerdon of grace
Meet to brighten new birth?
He is broken, the toiler is broken,
enslaved with encumbrance of
earth.

Whom the high gods had made,
Framing fluctuant fire,
Is befouled and betrayed
Beyond grief or desire;
Lament, for a brother is broken, and
cry, for the end shall be dire!

Lo, unhappy are ye
Who have shapen his dower!
What wild harvest shall be
In that death-stricken hour
When the high gods avenge in red
ruin the reign of your miscreant
power!

E. A. MARKBURNE.

It was more than normally difficult to decide between the best entries this week. Homer M. Parsons (who always puts up a tough fight) and R. Desha Lucas, like the majority of the competitors, chose to parody the Swinburne of "Poems and Ballads." Both wrote well; but E. A. Markburne remembered the likelier mood and the manner of "Songs Before Sunrise" in some stanzas modelled on "Hertha," and these, though rather more serious than the occasion demanded and insufficiently marked by Swinburne's weaker peculiarities, on the whole deserve the award. David Heathstone, attempting one of the poet's most protracted metres, lost his breath at the start only to regain it in the middle of the course.

From the bed of his birth to his
grave he is bowed by the weight
of the rod,
Disinherited, plundered, profaned,
who was made to the glory of
God;

To trace out the courses of planets
that soar through their heavenly
way:

To rise with a song and rejoice in
the virginal birth of the day,
When her maiden mouth is alight
with the flame of musical
speech,

And his eyes new-born of the night
see yet no power out of reach.

Let the heart of the rulers be sick:
let the high priest cover his face
For the thing they have given to
God, this mortal whose soul they
debase.

The parodies by Homer M. Parsons and R. Desha Lucas must be printed in full.

THE MAN WITH THE HOE By ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

I

Weary he stands with the weight of
years,
Heavily hanging upon his hoe;
With dull eyes empty of hopes and
fears,
And back bent double with worlds
of woe.

Who slanted his forehead and robbed
his brain
Of the swiftness of rapture and whirls
of pain?

And robbed his soul of the sweet sad
tears
And the luscious laughter the
Maenads know?

Over this Lout did the Lord God
fashion
Bowers of blossom and fanes of
fruit?

What does he know of delights
Parnassian;
The flight of the nymph, and the
fawn's pursuit;
And the gushing grape, and ivy that
falls

Down from the breasts of the Bac-
chanals?
Oh, it was cruel to curb his passion
And give him the heart of a gelded
brute!

Masters of men, when the graves are
risen
And winged ghosts to the Throne
repair,

What shall be said, what answer
given
When this dumb Terror shall face
you there?

How shall you stand there, dimly
dumber,
With hands that tremble, and feet
that cumber!

Bent like a reed by the high winds
driven,
To fall from heaven to hell's des-
pair!

HOMER M. PARSONS.

II

TOUJOURS VIEL CINGE EST DESPLAISANT.

O'er a soil you infer is infertile—
Shorn of lust and of laughter and
bleak—

Forsaking the rose and the myrtle
For the sake of the legume and
leek,

Sags a figure with virtue afflicted
That squalidly, stolidly stands,
By a dolt of a dauber depicted,
With a hoe in his hands.

From the hoe to the hose of Dolores
Let us turn for unrighteous re-
lief;

Ah, the pang in thy transports,
Amores,
As the flash of the lightning is
brief.

On her lithe limbs, lascivious, lingers
The gaze of one fain to transgress
And the silk men caress with their
fingers

Returns the caress.

But these fingers are calloused with
planting,

With hoeing and harvesting crops;
That the gay ones may go gallivant-
ing,

He must toil till he drearly drops.
Though his plight may perhaps be
pathetic

Ere the hoe and the hoer we take,
Let us flaunt, as a subject poetic,
The trull and the rake.

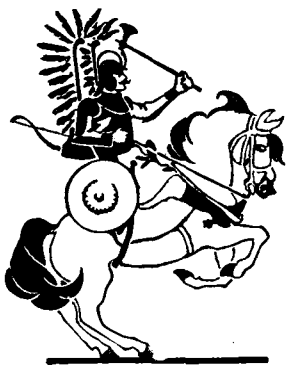
R. DESHA LUCAS.

RULES

(Competitors failing to comply with rules will be disqualified.)

1. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Competition Editor, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City." The number of the competition (e.g., "Competition 1") must be written on the top left-hand corner. 2. ALL MSS. must be legible—typewritten if possible—and should bear the name or pseudonym of the author. Competitors may offer more than one entry. MSS. cannot be returned. 3. *The Saturday Review* reserves the right to print the whole or part of any entry.

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