

part of traditional landscape. We are to believe, on the best authority, that we betray our provincialism if, when speaking of novels and novelists, we permit the mention of the best of the English writers until after a long list of Russians have been named. There is, says the voice of authority, a virtue called characterization, and the Russian novels have it, but the English in but an inferior way. Very well. Yet suddenly we remember there is more characterization in the last popular novel by a candid young lady than in all Greek drama. Where are we now? There is more characterization in Proust than in all Shakespeare. So what of it? Modern novels are full of characterization, good and bad, but good and bad together they all soon die. There is a chance, as "Macbeth" still lives on, that we may be mistaken in supposing that characterization is as important as we have been told. We may as well be called provincial as anything else if we decline to displace the author of the Wessex tales. For it may still be true that the earth and the sky and the force we call life transcend in their mystery any character, however heroic or pitiable. The earth itself is the oldest of characters; it was here when the earliest of us arrived. What word was given to it? We cannot learn that; but if you read again the first chapter of "The Return of the Native," or watch at night with Gabriel Oak on the summit of Norcombe Hill, with its "ancient and decaying plantation of beeches," while he revives a new-born lamb by a fire in his hut and looks to the stars to see where the earth has got to in the heavens, then the shadow of Something which is greater than mortal life begins to fall upon your reading. There is an undertone to Hardy's great passages which is like the murmur of an unseen ocean. We have a conviction of continuity then, though the stars are passing Norcombe Hill, which is, perhaps, only an illusion. But we need not trouble to prove our conviction. A poet has evoked beauty, which cannot be proved. Yet it is there, even if it is undescribable. For a bare instant we feel the riddle can be solved. A light from nowhere transfigured, for a moment, our gray and accustomed levels, and though the light is withdrawn its revelation is remembered.

## An Irish Mystic

VOICES OF THE STONES. By A. E. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1927.

Reviewed by HERBERT GORMAN

**A. E.** BELONGS to that older Irish group that is disassociated from such men as James Joyce, Brinsley Macnamara, and Forrest Reid. The difference is mainly one of literary approach if we ignore the obvious fact that the older man writes both poetry and prose, while the second group confines itself entirely to prose. The very fact that A. E. feels the constant necessity of self-expression in sheer poetical forms is a pertinent clue to the deep-seated differences between him and the younger prosateurs. For him life is still to be approximated and touched in sublimated forms. He is a mystic venturing upon the secrecies of the soul with symbols and faint rhythms and subtle words. Standing apart, as he does, from those younger men who are, first of all, analysts and dissectors of consciousness and sub-consciousness, he may be affirmed as a traveler of the superconscious. A. E., of course, is a patent mystic, and "Voices of the Stones" offers again that lovely and aloof pilgrimage through the high twilight world of symbols, nuances, and overtones. In his "boat of soul" he once more travels by magic mountains whereon the gods walk, speaking softly to one another.

"Voices of the Stones" is a small book, yet in it A. E. has packed illimitable suggestiveness. With delicate rhythms and other worldly imagery he pictures states of the soul and flings across his world the impalpable mantle of his mystic thought. In the lamentable night that surrounds the soul he dreams on the ancient gods and a worthier existence and he grasps at the humble stones that have still retained "their morning star of purity immutable."

The desire to enlarge on A. E.'s genius (for manifest genius it is) is importunate but the difficulties of comment render it almost impossible in a few paragraphs. What is one to say about this high mysticism that constantly touches life with its pale wizard wand and translates it into strange

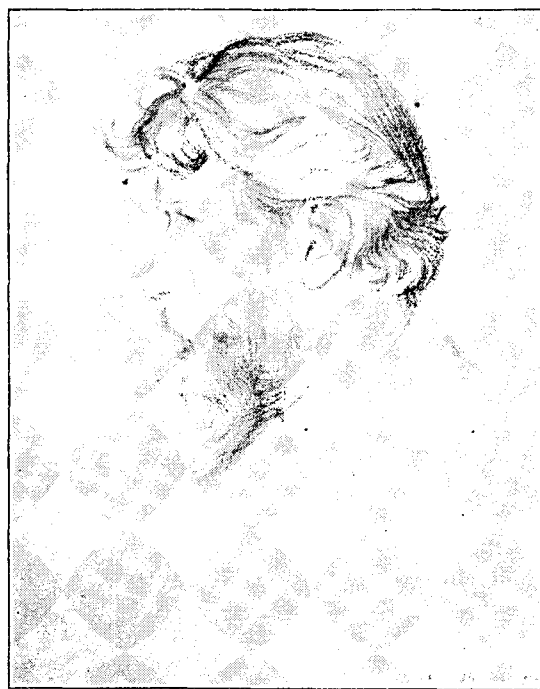
glooms and glows? The celestial presences are always about him and although he may swear that he is no more than a brother to the stones he is eternally conscious of a world to which this earth is no more than a shadow. He feels the urge in the mountain wind.

The cold limbs of the air  
Brush by me on the hill,  
Climb to the utmost crag,  
Leap out, then all is still.

Ah, but what high intent  
In the cold will of wind;  
What sceptre would it grasp  
To leave these dreams behind!

Trail of celestial things:  
White centaurs, winged in flight,  
Through the fired heart sweep on,  
A hurricane of light.

I have no plumes for air:  
Earth hugs it to my bones.  
Leave me, O sky-born powers,  
Brother to grass and stones.



GEORGE RUSSELL (A. E.)

From "Twenty-four Portraits," by William Rothenstein, (Harcourt, Brace).

## Idle Tonnage

THE FORESHORE OF ENGLAND, or Under the Red Ensign. By H. M. TOMLINSON. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1927.

Reviewed by CAPTAIN DAVID W. BONE

**I**T is of the flag of Britain's Mercantile Sea Service that Mr. Tomlinson writes; in particular, of shipping moods and movements during the industrial depression of 1925. A sober theme enough and one calling for vision and insight on the part of the author else the reader could draw no more from it than from a Governmental Blue Book.

Mr. Tomlinson visited the seaports of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the winter of 1925 to gain first hand impressions of the state of shipping affairs. "The Foreshore of England" embodies his conclusions. The book is, necessarily, planned upon the lines of journalism, and if ever proof were needed that the gap between journalism and imaginative literary work is small and negotiable, it lies between these covers. Very few writers, however, could invest the stark and sober details of such a survey with the dignity and glamour that Mr. Tomlinson imparts. Quite long ago I read, in some newspaper, an epic of the sea: the story of seamen's efforts to bring their ship to port against all that the twin demons of fire and tempest could resolve. Tomlinson wrote it as later I learned. Then came "The Sea and the Jungle," with which there is little comparable save Conrad at his best. This author's literary history since then is well known: "Gallions Reach" establishes him in a position that few writers could attain.

Much of Mr. Tomlinson's writing has been of sea life, and it is therefore an appropriate circumstance that he should come to survey the ships and

the seamen (that he so obviously regards with affection) during the time of their travail, when sailormen were tramping the dockside streets in need of employ, when fine ships lay idle for want of cargo, when shipwright and engine-fitter stared blankly at the closed work-gates of the shipyards, the cunning of their handwork diminishing day by day for want of grip upon their familiar tools.

What, in other hands, would be but a gloomy recital of plants of industrial stagnation in the seaports, is by him rendered strangely arresting. His facts and figures can be read in objective description of dockside street and palatial shipping offices, of poverty and squalor in Welsh mining villages and "vanity bags" behind the plate glass windows of Queen Street in Cardiff.

\*\*\*

And Mr. Tomlinson admits the weakness of even personal investigation into the distress that, in 1925, reached inland—well beyond the docks and the seaports. "You may get any opinion you desire by choosing your man," he writes: and those questioned by this author were rarely other than the manual workers, the sufferers—as always—in any industrial depression. It is perhaps, on this account, understandable that he casts doubt upon the opinions of the shipowners, but, even in the expression of his dubiety, the artistry of the writer is evident. He weaves a warp of far voyaging into the prosaic pattern of a slump in freights. Writing of Liverpool and the Mersey shipowners:

Their city, however, does not itself reflect their misfortunes. The business premises of those magnates by the Mersey would make the stately pleasure-dome which Kubla Khan decreed by the river Alph seem a mere bungalow after all. It is not easy to suppose that these offices and warehouses register but progressive failure. Indeed the Mersey with its towers and shipping is so impetuous and tonic in its effect upon a visitor that he is fairly sure that important shipowners, who would persuade us to prepare for the towing to her last resting-place of a stately liner now past her day, and in the melancholy splendor of a nation-wide sunset, would look comic if their dark bark turned out after all to be the latest Cunarder on the morning tide.

Such writing comes as a glint of sunlight upon a dark horizon, and it is of sombre sea lines that Mr. Tomlinson writes in this book. Throughout his lengthy tour he found the shipping industry in a very bad way. The sudden volcanic boom that followed upon the close of the great war had subsided in dust and ashes. The ashes fell heavily upon the seamen and the workers, but some of the dust—or so Mr. Tomlinson maintains—was gold dust for the whilom owners who sold out at the peak of the boom.

... They were halcyon days. Shipowners who had bought their ships at the bottom of the market, who reaped all the advantage of the years of the fabulous freight rates, then in 1920, floated companies, made themselves directors at fixed fees, and bought their ships from themselves, on the higher scale, with the money the public had provided. It looks, on the face of it, like anarchy. It seems, in a real sense, treachery to the men who perished. But no: it was, of course, the outcome of sound economic laws, to question which would be Bolshevism. We should like to question them, though we dare not. We should like to know what these sound laws have done with the money since then. Where is it? Is it like the lovely golden clouds of Hans Breitmann's party? All we know for certain about it is that it numbs, like a dead hand, the efforts to revive trade and to make our ships pay in their competition with increasing foreign tonnage. It checks shipbuilding and depresses the standard of living for seamen and shipwrights. It is largely the cause of the gloomy views of our future we see so frequently reported.

\*\*\*

In his mood (always his mood) of intense sympathy with the manual worker, Mr. Tomlinson is somewhat heated in his attitude toward the shipping employer. He makes no mention of the National Maritime Board, a "Board" that has been instrumental in maintaining seamen's wages and service conditions at a level with which few industrial occupations ashore could compare. One is not convinced that the industry suffers in more than a temporary and casual degree from the action of certain shipowners who sold out at the height of the boom in 1919-20 and retired to country estates to batten upon War Loan Fives. Investments at that rate of interest would have little appeal to them. The melting pot of an industry with which they have small acquaintance, but great hopes of aggrandizement, has probably absorbed a portion of their gains. In turn, the cinematograph men (let us say) may look to shipping to retrieve a loss. Sea transport is a vital necessity.



## American Catholicism

THE CATHOLIC SPIRIT IN AMERICA. By GEORGE N. SHUSTER. New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by THEODORE MAYNARD

THE present animated discussion of Catholicism in America unfortunately rises not (as a rule) from an interest in the theological system, the philosophy, or the artistic creative power of Christendom, but from a widespread concern about the hypothetical connection of the Church with secular politics. The possible nomination of Governor Smith as the Democratic candidate for the Presidency has brought the matter to the boiling-point. Mr. Shuster's book is, therefore, exceedingly timely; and we may be grateful to him for lifting his level of argument above the politics of the day, and for dealing with it in the general light of Catholic culture.

The phrase "Catholic culture" is likely to strike the vast majority of Protestant Americans as odd. And it is perfectly true that what is generally recognized as culture is not, as a rule, conspicuous in such members of the Church as the average American meets. He thinks of it with some excuse in terms of "wops" and "harps"—firemen, policemen, bootleggers, and ward-politicians; for, unless he is very intelligent, highly educated, and widely-travelled, he has no means of escaping from his own provincialism. There has never been in the United States—except in isolated spots—an example of Catholic culture permeating all departments of life. There has been, and there is, on the contrary a strong Protestant tradition, which never shows itself more strongly than in the instances of such intellectuals as attempt to escape from it. The American is never able to look up, as did William Cobbett, at the front of a cathedral created under the intense inspiration of medieval Catholic genius, and to exclaim, "The men who built that were not benighted!" Indeed, should the American Protestant happen to wander into a Catholic church in this country, he will find (unless he is exceptionally lucky) gim-crack architecture, Barclay Street statuary, and maudlin music.

But all these things are likely to give him a false impression. Even in the matter of ecclesiastical music enormous strides are being made, and the children now being trained in plain-chant according to the Justine Ward method are destined to effect a revolution in the next generation. The revival of plain-chant is only one indication out of many that American Catholics are about to enter into their full cultural inheritance.

\*\*\*

Yet they still lamentably lag behind their co-religionists in other countries. In England, for example, there are less than two million Catholics; in America there are twenty millions. But in England, despite the terrific handicap of an established Protestant church, Catholics maintain themselves, without any apology, in every sphere of intellectual and social life. Indeed, I think it could easily be shown that they have an influence, in every department of life they touch, immeasurably preponderant to their numbers.

How is it then that American Catholics effect, by comparison, so little? My explanation, given after ten years spent in various parts of the United States, is that they suffer—almost as much as do the Jews—from an inferiority complex. They are touchy; they start at the slightest sign of a threat; they are even afraid of the Ku Klux Klan. A few of them are actually Prohibitionists. Though the Volstead Act is demonstrably opposed to Catholic principles, they hesitate to oppose it lest they should be thought "un-American" by the Baptists of Kansas and the Methodists of Iowa. It can be nothing but timidity, plus the insidious working of a Puritan atmosphere, that has impelled such a man as Colonel Callahan of Louisville, Kentucky, to join dry leagues and to have sat at Bryan's side at the Dayton trial.

Yet in no country in the world is Catholicism in a more fortunate position than it holds here. In America there are a hundred amorphous sects into which the sharp sword of Catholic logic, properly directed, could cut as into butter. And in America there is the positive constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. Though the Church is indifferent to forms of government, and will, under necessity, adapt itself even to extreme autocracy, there has never been a political system which so

perfectly accords with her nature as does that of the United States. A fact which makes the apprehensions of the Klan absurd.

Mr. Shuster's book offers a thoughtful, if hardly a brilliant, survey of the problems confronting Catholicism in America. He offers many valuable suggestions—particularly that the current anti-Catholic bigotry is as much social as religious. It is rather ungenerous and obtuse of him, however, to go out of his way to attack Mr. Mencken. For though I am not a devotee at the shrine of St. Henry of Baltimore—whose limitations I recognize at least as clearly as does Mr. Shuster—Catholics ought to be able to see that he is the most redoubtable ally the Church has in this country.

Mr. Shuster has, nevertheless done a useful piece of work. It is a pity that his book shows too frequently laboriousness and a certain incoherence, due to the fact that it seems to have been largely patched together from *Commonweal* editorials.

## The Splendid Commonplace

SPLENDOR. By BEN AMES WILLIAMS. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

MR. WILLIAMS'S title, which at first seems dissociated from his novel, really points its meaning. The book is a detailed recital of the life of an average American—at any rate, an American who is of mere average intellect and energy, though morally he is something better; a good citizen, an exemplary husband and father, an honest, uninspired, plodding worker. He happens to be a mediocre cog in the newspaper machinery of Boston. He might equally well have been an ineffectual bookkeeper in Denver or civil servant in Pittsburgh. Whereas most novels find their significance in the unusual, and make splendor the attribute of the distinctive man or deed, Mr. Williams finds splendor in the sense of duty, the unselfishness, the instinctive loyalty of his commonplace hero and the equally commonplace wife; he finds splendor in their petty joys and achievements, and their resignation under numerous woes and humiliations. He finds a certain splendor also in the panorama of American life from 1880 to 1920, which these people watch passively and incuriously, but which forms definitely a part of the novel.

\*\*\*

The honesty of Mr. Williams's novel, an honesty which informs every paragraph and line as well as the whole main conception, gives it its chief distinction. In his power of observing the commonplace and recording it interestingly the author is simply a lesser Howells, but in his thoroughgoing honesty he yields precedence to nobody. His hero, Henry Becker, grows up in a blacksmith shop in the West End of Boston, gets a modicum of schooling, and from office-boy in a newspaper shop slips into a reportership. His whole life is spent with the *Tribune*. He climbs to be copyreader and finally State House correspondent; and then, not choosing to satisfy his boss's grudge against legislators whom he knew to be honest, he is demoted. In the end we see him back where he had begun, in the reference room or "morgue," a place for boys and old men. But in the long interval he has married; he has reared children, put his son through Dartmouth, and seen his youngsters establish their own homes; he has supported his hardworking, maltreated sister, wife of a swindler, and his failure of a father-in-law. He has had pathetic frustrate dreams of something better—of publishing a novel about Africa. He is not a failure; he is certainly not a success. He has had a shabby, commonplace, dutiful, healthy life—and as Mr. Williams suggests, there is a glint of splendor about it.

Mr. Williams possesses a sensitive perception, and sometimes, as when he pictures the breakdown of the abused sister under her troubles, his narrative is poignant. He makes a deftly changing background of the social and political flow: the first streetcars, "Wang," the Chicago World's Fair, bicycles, the Cuban War, automobiles, the trust problem, Curtis Guild as Governor, and all the rest. His style lacks beauty, and he often seems uninspired; but he has produced a solid study of the ordinary, normal individuals and families upon whom our social stability depends, followed through the changes of decades, and treated it all with a reverence which the commonplace rarely receives.

## A Bit of Swedish Comedy

CHARLOTTE LÖWENSKÖLD. By SELMA LAGERLÖF. Translated from the Swedish by VELMA SWANSTON HOWARD. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company. 1927. \$2.50.

MISS LAGERLÖF'S latest novel, the first in several years, is distinctly one of her lighter productions. It is, in fact, a Swedish comedy of errors. The various misunderstandings and conflicts which furnish its tragic-comedy would be blown away like fog before a wind if the principal characters only faced them at critical junctures with common sense; but as they resolutely refuse to comprehend each other, the tangles become more intricate until they have to be cut, not untied. When the heartache and irritation are greatest, the reader is expected to be most amused. For once Miss Lagerlöf is not intent upon hiding serious purpose in imaginative and poetical form; she is intent simply upon being gaily entertaining.

Yet this gay trifle, for such it is, has its deeper aspects. One character, the heroine, is worthy of Jane Austen; and indeed the whole book, with its restricted and highly conventional social scene, its petty but intense drama, and its careful miniature-painting of half a dozen people, reminds us not a little of the Englishwoman's novels. The main difference is that it is a little more fantastic and high-spirited, a little less serious. It presents the tight little world of Swedish provincial society of the present day, or a generation ago at most; a world prim, religious, respectful of wealth and social rank, and given a quaint charm by its ingrained folk-customs and its rural modes of thought. Normal, quiet people get along very well in such a world. But one unconventional or abnormal person throws its accustomed movements entirely out of gear; it becomes filled with confusion, and its inhabitants are shocked to find everything topsy-turvy. Miss Lagerlöf has introduced both the unconventionality and abnormality; she has made an unconventional tomboy of a girl and an abnormal young religious fanatic fall in love with each other.

The whole countryside surrounding Korskyra Deanery become participants in the quarrels, misunderstandings, partial reconciliations, and final rupture between Charlotte and the curate. A curate is a piece of neighborhood property, and the humblest parishoner claims a right to know why he becomes engaged, breaks his engagement, tries to marry a peddler-girl, and behaves generally like a lunatic. Its gossips claim the right to misconstrue and criticize every action of Charlotte from the moment she breaks with Arthur to the hour of her angry marriage with a rich foundry-master. Throughout the book the curate is preposterously perverse and unreasonable; Charlotte is preposterously chivalrous in her desire to take on her own shoulders every ounce of public blame; and the foundry-master, with all his strength and sense, has a way of putting his foot in at precisely the wrong time and place. The result is a crazy jumble of incidents, a succession of riotous exits and entrances, with the sewing-circle of the neighborhood serving as chorus, and the calm shrewdness of the dean and his wife elucidating the motive of the young people and furnishing a little rational guidance. The end cannot be called satisfactory; Charlotte's marriage is safe but highly untrapturous. Still, it is as good an end as the tangled *contretemps* of the story permit, or as life itself often permits. Miss Lagerlöf has written a diverting if comparatively unimportant tale, revealing herself and her Swedish people in an unwontedly gay and capricious light.

### The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.....Editor  
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.....Associate Editor  
AMY LOVEMAN.....Associate Editor  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.....Contributing Editor  
NOBLE A. CATHCART.....Publisher

Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., Henry S. Canby, President; Roy E. Larsen, Vice-President; Noble A. Cathcart, Secretary-Treasurer, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Subscription rates, per year, postpaid: in the U. S. and Mexico, \$3.50; in Canada, \$4; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere, \$4.50. All business communications should be addressed to 25 West 45th Street, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 1, 1879. Vol. IV. No. 29.

Copyright, 1928, by The Saturday Review Co., Inc.