

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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THE NAVIGATING COMMITTEE OF THE THREE HOURS FOR LUNCH CLUB, FELIX RIESENBERG, FRANKLIN ABBOTT, AND CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.  
From a drawing by Muirhead Bone

### "Dizzy"

DISRAELI: A PICTURE OF THE VICTORIAN AGE. By ANDRÉ MAUROIS. Translated by Hamish Miles. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1928.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN  
Cornell University

MAUROIS has written of Disraeli as Trollope wrote of that rising young poli-

Dizzy's letters to his sister. Dizzy was not unmindful of their charms, but more aware of what they could do to push a young man forward in the world. It is this world that catches the attention of the French student of Disraeli, the England of great country-places set in shrubbery, surrounded by gardens, and sloped off in terraces, the England of duchesses indoors and peacocks on the lawn.

Maurois belongs to the new school of biography, and yet he is carrying out carefully evolved notions of biography which, seemingly a kind of cross between those of Lytton Strachey, Samuel Smiles, and E. T. Raymond, are entirely his own. From beginning to end he is following chronology only to study character. Events there are in plenty, but they are wholly by way of setting forth and interpreting the mystery of Disraeli, and of explaining his rise in the world. One can read through the book and enjoy it and know little about the issues and politics with which Disraeli was concerned.

He tells us in the *Yale Review* for January that he took up the subject because Disraeli is "the romantic who attempts to transform ideals into reality." Shelley had attracted him for the same reason. This note runs through his narrative. The young Disraeli tells the three Sheridan beauties that the most desirable life is a "grand procession from manhood to the tomb." Life "was not to be a religion but an art"; he "liked to fashion himself with his own hands like a work of art" and "was always ready to touch up the picture." When the power of which he had dreamed came to him, it was twenty years late, he was old and tired; "an old romantic no longer duped by fanciful illusion . . . a cynic but ardent." At seventy-seven he "had not ceased to believe in the efficaciousness of action, but he wanted that to be mapped out and limited. It was only in designs on the grand scale that he had lost confidence."

It is hard for one of Liberal prejudices to resist saying that Disraeli cared for nothing but power and the favors that went with it, beauty, splendor, and wealth. The heroes of his youthful novels become Prime Ministers and take duchesses out to dinner, and he himself lived to bask in the friendship of one greater than a duchess. It would be

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## Christopher Morley

BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

A COLLECTED edition is no longer a guarantee of immortality, but if it is issued while the man is still heartily alive, at home perhaps at work on an additional volume at the moment when you are turning the pages, it is a challenge to criticism. This is no monument to a sealed fame, nor a testament of completed virtues, but a trial balance of reputation. Here, and so far only, are the books of Christopher Morley.\*

Some day, far off I trust, a younger critic will have to tighten his belt to that mood of impartial constriction in which unbiased criticism is made. I hope that he succeeds, as I hope always that the truly scientific critic will attain that nirvana of abstraction in which literature is assessed without prejudice and without loss of the highly personal impressions which alone seem to make criticism alive and enduringly useful beyond its facts. This is the critic's dilemma—either he knows too much or feels too little of his subject—and until a greater than Aristotle tells us how to avoid it, books on esthetics will too often be more interesting in the work-

exerting his great talent for rhythm and word as a euphuist or antiquary, writing brave language a little too fine—there I like him least. It is the best genius that controls in "Thunder on the Left," in "Where the Blue Begins," in "Inward Ho!" in the best of his "Translations from the Chinese," and some of his other poetry. Puck Morley I would not forego, though I cannot always praise him; as for the Stylist, it is a law of the world that the feathered cock should strut now and then, and what cock of letters has not, Shakespeare with Ophelia, Ruskin over his Venetians, Emerson when he remembered the pulpit from which he was hatched.

To discuss any writer as a stylist, outside of a rhetoric, is a ticklish business; it is too much like describing an egg by its shell. Nor is there much illuminating criticism of humor or humorists as such. A man is not humorous—really humorous—because he wants to be; he may fabricate his wit, but his humor, as the medieval psychologists knew, comes from an excess of some quality seeking relief.

with admitted bias, with that dangerous sympathy that comes from hearing a man's voice in his works. And I choose to do so, in part, because the detestable practice of professional "blurring" has put a shame upon friendly appreciation which Charles Lamb never knew. When many are paid to praise, the friend stands aloof. And this is unfortunate, since in the sum total of criticism there are insights which may come only to one not over critical, who can say:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself—

It is not the whole of criticism, yet it is an essential part.

\* \* \*

There has been abundant comment, friendly and unfriendly, favorable and unfavorable, critical and blatant, upon the writings of Christopher Morley, but little which seems to me to approach his green escape by its open door. He has been dismissed with the easy name of humorist, whereas his humor is only the bubbling over of a rich nature which, without his joy in living, might have taken tragedy for its issue. He has been labelled Stylist, and set on a shelf by those who adore literary language without due discrimination between that passionate love of English which has given him power when, like George in "Thunder on the Left," he has his Great Moments, and those junketings with fine words which this drunkard in vocabularies will sometimes indulge in. For Christopher Morley is not one stylist, he is three. A master of lovely, supple English, lifting in the presence of beautiful emotion to a superb prose—that is Morley the First and Best. Then there is Morley II, a bad boy of letters, a punster without restraint, whimsical, witty, using the oldest tricks as well as the newest inventions. This is the journalist Morley, good, but too puckish to last. And finally, Morley III, Morley writing style, Jacobean, Johnsonian, Lambish, Stevensonian,

does not spring directly from the same source, for while love of living can make a man fervid, tolerant, expansive in his observation, it cannot make him an artist, and may (and sometimes does in Morley's case) result in boisterousness, diffusion, over-ripeness of imagery, ornateness of style. And yet his virtues are all magnified, and, in a sense, defined, by this passionate gusto for experience.

And love of living as a passion is precisely the quality which this mechanical world of the twentieth century most often and emphatically lacks. I do not refer to the outcries of the "life is hell" school of literary expressionists, who complain that

## This Week

Some Recent Poetry.

Reviewed by *Louis Untermeyer*.

"Christianity Past and Present."

Reviewed by *David S. Muzzey*.

"A New Englander in Japan."

Reviewed by *E. H. Vickers*.

Mr. Moon's Notebook.

By *William Rose Benét*.

"Cities of the Plain."

Reviewed by *Theodore Purdy, Jr.*

"Red Rust."

Reviewed by *Allan Nevins*.

Translations from the Chinese.

By *Christopher Morley*.

## Next Week, or Later

Tabloids and Truthful Tales.

By *Struthers Burt*.

\* The Haverford Edition of the Books of Christopher Morley. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. 12 volumes. \$60.

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science and prosperity have not done away with pain and despair. Yet surely not the most confirmed praiser of the present would maintain that we taste, bite, chew, and swallow life with the eagerness of the Elizabethans, the heartiness of Dr. Johnson, even with the delight of Charles Lamb. It is significant that men no longer weep when they rejoice, nor find in their poetry the eloquence of a Wordsworth to express the intensity of their sensations:

I cannot paint—  
What then I was. The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion.—

I do not mean to describe Christopher Morley as a man born out of his time. He can be as modern as Joyce when his perceptions are on the alert, although his pose of an ancient hearty (of which the heartiness is no pose) may deceive the uninitiate. Yet in this respect of vital enthusiasm he inherits a faculty biologically conditioned out of most of our writing race.

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I write in memory of personal contacts—the mirth of the man, his capacity for mighty friendships, his wide-ranging curiosity, his red-faced indignations, his tireless enthusiasms—never measured nor repressed—for beauty of action, or word, or tower rising in the sunset sky of New York. But the tide of his abundant life flows through his work where all may feel it. Sometimes it is like the tide of his own beloved harbor of New York, encumbered with flotsam and jetsam, the scums and the derelicts of emotion, where he sees more beauty or humor than the most charitable can allow, yet the insweep from the greater ocean is always pulsing beneath. Even in his lesser, though much-loved volumes, like "The Haunted Book Shop," the love of books gets such a transmutation into words as it would be hard to find elsewhere; and in his trivialities—for like all literary journalists, Morley will be trivial rather than not write at all—there is a sparkle of electric current along the wires of conventional plots which half redeems the artifice. But in the work that is really his own, in which meditation has ripened the fruits of living—in some of his poetry, but more of all in the prose of his "Inward Ho!" and in the narrative of "Thunder on the Left," there is a beauty, grave yet vibrant, when his excess pours into the sufficient tranquillity of art. I think of that exquisite passage of Phyllis bathing, or of the dusk when "like fluid privacy the shadow rose and flowed restfully about them; faces were exempt from scrutiny; eyes, those timid escapers from question, could look abroad at ease. Reprieved from angers and anxieties, the mind yearned to come home under the roof of its little safe identity. . . . Come home, come home to yourself, cried the incessant voice of darkness." I remember the humane and humorous narrative of Mr. Gissing in his department store; Conrad and the Reporters; the wise pungency of "Inward Ho!"

For literature, in some moods, is a very hollow voice. What is the virtue and service of a book? Only to help me to a more genuine realization of myself, to live less gingerly and shabbily. If it has done that, away with it; I have no wish to see it again. Sometimes, late at night, I see the damned things stacked up in tormenting rows, mere bricks of paper, and say I'd throw them all into the furnace gladly for the kingdom, power and glory of pouring out my own heart. They are only useful as a consolation for that stark dumbness and terror that comes upon one phiz-à-phiz with life itself.

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Critical appreciation in this age of the exaltation of the commonplace has gone to a different kind of talent—to ruthless expositions of mean desires and animal impulses, and to skilful virtuosos on the cynical side who can make brilliant pictures of dull, dirty lives. But I think that the popularity of Christopher Morley is based upon a sound instinct for joy and pathos, sentiment and beauty, in the nobler varieties of humanity, who after all have their place even in a democracy of neurotics, schizoids, morons, and the emotionally unstable. The great grip upon the sweets of living of a Falstaff, who could say "I have more flesh than other men, and therefore more frailty," is quite incomprehensible in a tabloid, a novel by Dreiser, or the columns of a sophisticated weekly, but not to Christopher Morley and those who love him.

Like all men whose superabundance finds relief in humor, Morley is sometimes sententious, and it is this that has given him a reputation for philosophical obscurity in his more serious work that he not merit. The conclusion of "Thunder on

the Left" puzzled many with its suggestion of a great mystery, and the metempsychosis of men into dogs in "Where the Blue Begins" was given a weight of possible meaning which it does not deserve. Morley is not a symbolist like Eugene O'Neill, nor yet a philosophic critic as Cabell would be, nor a social thinker like Shaw or Wells. He is the Quaker in literature, a very different and not uncommon phenomenon. He has the inner light, which means no dogmatic certainty of explanation, no great subtlety, but rather a radiant conviction of significance in the universe, and a constant power of refreshment at its central, spiritual fires. To such a man—as to Emerson—it is not necessary to reason the power of beauty, the joy of friendship, for he has them, he feels them, they are possessed. And hence all formalism, every restriction upon the full-flowing possibilities of life, is an enemy to be attacked as jocundly as the fly on the window pane. Morley's villains are always dead men—ossified bishops, business hacks, belittlers, the pre-dacious, mean creatures who have lost their souls.

This is the tragedy of "Thunder on the Left," and its major theme. Those children who leave by the author's will their plane of time and are projected into a possible adulthood, what happens while they live in an inevitable but not yet existent future? The pathos of it is too terrible. Martin, their messenger, who is to go back to his own time, must not know all. He must not know of the cruel accidents, meaningless by any philosophy, which punish life for living; but he cannot escape the penalties of growth in an adult world—the soul that is sucked out of Ben by a soulless wife, the mind of George divided and struggling between loyalties, Joyce who might have loved him and cannot, Phyllis who loves too late. In this book, the best that he has written, and one of the best books, I think, in recent fiction, in spite of the tricky mechanics of the end, there is no subtle philosophy, but only the deep conviction that life takes with one hand what it gives with the other, and that safety lies only in loving life and hating the lifeless.

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One begins to see why, his quips and cranks aside, Morley writes only of Moral Man. I do not mean man with a moral, or man that behaves morally, for this author's revision of the Ten Commandments would, I fear, exclude him from any sect except the Stoics or the Epicureans, between which I see him wavering with a mug of beer in one hand and a New Testament in the other. It is in man with a moral sense that Morley is interested, in all too human man, excessive man, amorous man, Gargantuan man, man fully equipped with throat, stomach, and all his organs, functioning on a high-power current, full of ozone, rich in vitamins, the natural man of the theologians, who yet is aware of self-control, conscious of duty, desirous of beauty spiritual as well as beauty physical, pathetically determined to live like Wordsworth's Happy Warrior, not as Caliban or as Mr. Dreiser's or Mr. Anderson's self-accommodating heroes. This is another radiation from Morley's inner light, and it is his demon, his control. It sets him among that rare company which the sparse and lean of the world have always distrusted and mere loose livers rightly disliked—the Ben Jonsons, Shakespeares, Goethes, Whitmans, who dare to open arms to all of life and yet will not take all life in. It is not caution—that is the morale of another kind of man—but a resultant of can and cannot in desires that can neither be reconciled nor excluded. Philosophy we do not get from such men (except Goethe), but from the greatest, unforgettable examples of what life may be that are more vital than life itself, and from lesser men, a brave imagination that throbs with the blood of eager existence and yet is aware of the flaming sword.

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I am using these great instances to explain the complexion of Morley's mind. Yet that mind has its own individuality, and in nothing more than in its attitude toward man—and woman. Christopher Morley is a man's man by choice, one would say. His companionship outside his own country dwelling is among men. Men drink and talk and laugh with him; he was, they said at college, a rake among scholars, a scholar among rakes; he is not to be found at literary teas or dinners of the intelligentsia. Look for him rather in back offices where pipe smoke reeks, at round tables behind closed doors, or setting the room aroar while the host's wife upstairs fears for her best china. Yet women love him and his works. They are his best readers; they for-

give him the puns not made for them or his relapses into the humors of Thomas Hood, and they encourage his occasional sentimentalism, when, his love of life's phenomena become a little groggy, he sweeps all the scenery to his eager breast.

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And they are right. For Morley is a novelist of women more than men. His men are variants of his own divided and questing spirit, such as George Granville and Mr. Gissing, or they are viewed as friends expansively carried to the full sympathy of that name, "kinsprits" he calls them, who reach his imagination because they share both his gusto and his restraints. Hence as a maker of complex male characters, or as a biographer of "kinsprits," he is limited. From him you get a Conrad, a Whitman that is not the whole man, though certainly his richest part, a hero in his capacity of friend of all the world, scarcely a character, seldom a portrait. Men, Christopher Morley can do when their auras are visible, when the light they shine with is his also.

But women he knows with a deeper intuition, and more power of objective realization. He does not, I think, know much about many women, but those that he takes into his imagination come there whole and with both spirit and flesh about them. Dead women—dead for him because the love of life has gone out of them or is inhibited—he neither likes nor understands; but if, as with Phyllis in "Thunder on the Left," they are all too human in body and still vital in soul, then he has perceptions transmissible into language which are better than all the analyses in the world. Like all males who love experience, he is afraid of them (as of no man), and indeed, to understand and to sympathize one has to be a little afraid. The familiarity of the ruthless psychologist sees too much for synthesis. Indeed, as a creative artist, busy with flesh and blood rather than with meditation, Morley's future would seem to concern itself with women and men caught by their own rich impulses in the web of circumstance and struggling like George and Joyce and Phyllis not against each other, but toward the inner light. And it is because he loves life so manifested as well as the joy of living, that Morley is an artist.

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Well, a friend might say more for you, Christopher Morley, but he could say no less. An enemy might say differently; he might urge a promise of greatness still meagre with only three or four books of this handsome set of red that argue a life long enough to be worthy the college from which it takes its name; an enemy might say that you are too eager to open the world's oysters by dozens, too ready to clap sentiment on the back and daff realities aside; and yet, I believe that even a less friendly critic than I must subscribe to your abounding vitality and your happy moments of admirable art.

## Plays of the Season

Still Running in New York

**BURLESQUE.** By Arthur Hopkins and George Manker Watters. Plymouth Theatre. The personal equation beneath pink tights and putty nose.

**THE GOOD HOPE.** By Herman Heijermans. Civic Repertory Theatre. A European repertory veteran ably revived on our only repertory stage.

**PORGY.** By Dorothy and DuBose Heywood. Republic Theatre. The rhythms of negro life interpreted in pulsing drama.

**ESCAPE.** By John Galsworthy. Booth Theatre. Leslie Howard *et al.* in the dramatist's latest—and last—play.

**THE IVORY DOOR.** By A. A. Milne. Charles Hopkins Theatre. An ironic and whimsical fairy tale for grown-ups.

**AND SO TO BED.** By J. B. Fagan. Bijou Theatre. A satiric and pungent comedy based on a presumable day in the amorous life of Samuel Pepys, Esq.

**THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA.** By Bernard Shaw. Guild Theatre. A debated and debating play set squarely on its feet at last by sound acting and discerning direction.

**THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS.** By Sean O'Casey. Hudson Theatre. The Irish Players lift the curtain on a Dublin tenement under the rebellion.

**PARIS BOUND.** By Philip Barry. Music Box. A young American playwright comes into his own with a triumph of the casual.

**THE ROYAL FAMILY.** By George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. Selwyn Theatre. A wise, witty, and tender comedy of the actor at home—back of "back stage."

**MARCO MILLIONS.** By Eugene O'Neill. Guild Theatre, alternate weeks with "The Doctor's Dilemma." Venice's star travelling salesman is counting his profits when Romance knocks at the door.

**STRANGE INTERLUDE.** By Eugene O'Neill. John Golden Theatre. The Theatre Guild as experimental laboratory for O'Neill's newest, longest, most original, and most provocative play.