

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

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### The End of the Forsytes

JOHN GALSWORTHY belongs to the generation of English novelists that learned its trade and perfected its art before the novel began to flirt with behaviorism and throw dice with the unconscious. He has escaped thereby that compelling necessity to experiment which has made younger work interesting in form, novel in content, fantastic and only occasionally successful in execution, but his age and maturity have had their advantages. It is still questionable whether real novels should be written before forty, and quite certain that only in middle age is life seen sufficiently in the round to guarantee the wisdom in living (especially humorous wisdom) which is the novel's best excuse for being.

"The modern soul, in the intricate turmoil of its sophistication," was for Soames Forsyte "a book which, if not sealed, had the pages still uncut." Some younger critics would say the same of John Galsworthy, but he might well reply that the intricate turmoil of sophistication often proves to be only a flurry of excited egoism, and that a study of a mind that recognizes "the limits of human life and happiness" might be better worth a novelist's trouble than the foam and flash of much modern lingerie.

Now that "The Forsyte Saga" has reached the last tide mark of its second volume in "Swan Song,"\* this would seem to be the great accomplishment of the author. Almost alone among writers in English of our generation, he has, like Hardy, taken the problem of character, and, like Thackeray, observed the characteristics of a class and a race, and written fiction that has the texture and stability of nineteenth-century England.

"The Forsyte Saga," indeed, is a classic study of the nineteenth century, and its upper margin as "Vanity Fair" was a study of the wind-up of the eighteenth. Each depicts a perfected human type at the moment when it crystallizes into an observable and unchangeable pattern. Steyne, the Crawleys, the young Rebecca, the young Rawdon—and here, the Forsytes, Irene, most of all Soames are realized in a world they have helped to make. They know what they want, and dimly why; they have morale always, even when little morality; beside them, young Jon, Michael Mont who knew only that one was never "excused from being a decent man," even Fleur with her reckless possessiveness which makes her capture of Jon in this book more like her father's grab at a long-desired picture than the deep burning passion for Irene—they are all fuzzy at the edges, incoherent, aimless by comparison. They are, indeed, a little pathetic, and it is a sign of Galsworthy's competence as an exponent of his own generation that he is in deepest sympathy with the problems of younger men and women. But they are foils; this is not their story, nor is he the man to tell it.

The sum total of Galsworthy's contribution to the English novel is to be found in Irene and in Soames Forsyte. Irene is charm raised to its high degree, fortified by brains and culture, but uninhibited by blunted purposes and uncorrelated cravings. She is the late Victorian Helen. Others have done her better in poetry, not better, one guesses, in prose fiction. But Soames Forsyte is unique. He is a type of the possessive instinct fattened by the utilitarianism of his century and gripping first money, then art, then, and in the same category, a wife. Irene is his tragedy. Yet Soames, like all great characters in fiction, is much more than essence.

\*SWAN SONG. By JOHN GALSWORTHY. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1928. \$2.50.

### Eva and Haley

By GLADYS OAKS

HIS weighted head lay still upon her knees  
Until she heard the quivers of his blood;  
And how she loved him for her pity.  
Hers—

Hers for her comfort. Owing all his need.

She stared until his face was blurred. His lips  
Waved in her eyes like smoke. Until his brain  
Was hers to soothe. She felt her fingertips  
Loose from his mind the precious streams of pain.

She brooded . . . and the man became a world,  
And all the world a sad and beaten child;  
And ecstasy came loose in her. Uncurled  
From throat and breast. She stroked his hair and  
smiled.

Her smile as big as god's when he is human;  
O, pitied men are beautiful to women.

### This Week

"The Rise of the House of Rothschild."

Reviewed by John M. S. Allison.

"The Native Problem in Africa."

Reviewed by John Palmer Gavit.

"Bambi."

Reviewed by William Rose Benét.

"The Death of Society," and "The Age of Reason."

Reviewed by Earl A. Aldrich.

"Eva's Apples."

Reviewed by Robert Macdougall.

"Way of Sacrifice."

Reviewed by Louis Sherwin.

Off the Deep End

By Christopher Morley.

### Next Week, or Later

When Ancients Were Ancient.

By Elmer Davis.

Somehow in his lank, hard figure, his tenacious conservatism, his honesty, his code of holding fast and long, the best of that dead Victorian commercialism which dominated the world is made flesh. And readers who have followed his career from the first volume, will agree that Galsworthy has done it without artifice and possibly without intention. He wrote of a representative middle class family that sat tight and held on, and from them emerged a personality, not lovable, not symbolic, but an unmistakable not-to-be-duplicated Englishman. Soames in the early volumes, though not the villain of the piece, is certainly its most unloved member. Cold, if not predatory, insensitive, grasping, inflexible, he began by being hated, won respect when he took his beating from the mysterious emotions which human nature engenders in the female kind, and rises to an awkward heroism when his Forsyte principle of getting and holding emerges like a rock in a fluid world. Galsworthy has made a great character to stand against the background of a confident Eng-

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### Heinrich Heine

By M. GREENWOOD

IT is more than seventy years since Heine's death and more than sixty since Arnold devoted one of his best essays to him. In the last eighty years the "Lorelei" must have been sung by millions of German school children and holiday makers while some other millions of American and English concert goers have listened to "Ich grolle nicht" and half a dozen other ballads.

Judged by any such statistical test, Heine would be in the running for the position of most popular German poet even in Germany (where, down to the late revolution, not a single public monument to him existed) and, out of Germany, no other poet would be in the running at all, not even Goethe. Heine's immortality in this sense is as secure as Shakespeare's; but he himself said he attached very little value to poetical fame and wished to be remembered as a brave soldier in the liberation war of humanity. It would be easy to prove that Heine really attached much importance to his reputation as a poet (few vainer men ever existed), but it was as a "brilliant, a most effective soldier in the Liberation War of Humanity" that Matthew Arnold ranked him and it could not have been "Ich grolle nicht," which had such an effect upon Archbishop Benson that, as his son says, "the very thought of Heine made him shudder." The particular Liberation War of Humanity of 1830-56 is an old tale, but, since there is still room for doubt whether humanity has been "liberated" even now, it is interesting to cast one's thoughts back to the old campaigner and to see how a twentieth-century estimate of him squares with that of the mid-Victorian critics.

Quite recently material for judgment has been brought together. In 1926 Professor H. H. Houben published a volume of 1071 pages entitled "Gespräche mit Heine." This book contains every scrap of information about Heine provided by those who knew him in the flesh. Many of the anecdotes are of course very well known, but the book contains a good deal which will be new to those who, like myself, are not "serious students" of literature. To such amateurs, Professor Houben's book can be recommended (not to read through, but to dip into), while it should furnish matter for at least a dozen degree theses of "serious students."

Heine has one advantage over most German writers and over all German political writers in appealing to the foreigner, intelligibility. Unless school education has changed a good deal in the last thirty years in America and England, our young folk still acquire false ideas of the possibilities of German prose. We all know the jokes (from Mark Twain onwards) about the enormous length of German sentences, and although it is more than fifty years since James Russell Lowell (actually citing Heine, pointed out that "the general want of style in German authors is not wholly the fault of the language," it is a fact that the respectable authors popular with school masters are very dull reading and that even the divine Goethe (none of whose prose masterpieces and only one of whose longer poems I have ever succeeded in reading straight through) is heavy going for a young foreigner. Quite recently, two "best sellers," Emil Ludwig and Lion Feuchtwanger, have given examples of attractive intelligibility, while Sigmund Freud (in his less abstruse moments) reads better in German than in American or English. These latter names, with that of Heine, might suggest that in order to write German prose as well as most Frenchmen write French prose, it is an advantage to be a Jew. It probably is, but of course the example of Arthur



Schopenhauer proves that a Gentile may write German clearly. What is common to all these very clear writers is that they were, or are, *left-minded*, altogether abhorrent to right-minded citizens. A friend who knows Germany much better than I do tells me that the best people there think nothing of "Jud' Süß" and are contemptuous of or puzzled by its success in England. All the American and English fulminations against Freud could easily be paralleled in Germany, while as to Heine, the best people kept him out of Germany for the last twenty-six years of his life and, down to the late Revolution, one never saw his works openly displayed in respectable middle-class households.



These left-minded people were up against the majority and, as the majority cultivated an elaborate style, they cultivated a simple one. No doubt left-minded Frenchmen cultivated elaborate styles for the same reason. The left-minded Balzac's style was severely criticized by the very right-minded Sainte-Beuve. Heine had another quality which often—not always—raised him above the level of even very able left minds like Shelley and Carlyle in their polemical moments; he was an educated man. Shelley indeed knew some Greek and Carlyle knew more of many things than Heine, but neither was really an educated man. Heine had been through the educational mill, and although he would turn in his grave to hear it suggested that he owed anything to the university of Göttingen, he really owed it a good deal. He might like us to forget that he was a *doctor utriusque juris*, but we cannot. "His History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany" (possibly the book which made Archbishop Benson's blood run cold) reaches conclusions not essentially different from those of Tom Paine or Shelley and he protests at the beginning that "I am not one of the seven hundred wise men of Germany, I stand in the crowd at the doors and if their wisdom gets through to me, that is enough." But the essay contains many passages obviously written by a man who has read not as a journalist reads, but as a student reads, that is, in an orderly way. Heine had an intellectual discipline. But he had not had enough to control some fundamental tendencies.

That fine critic Walter Bagehot distinguished irregular from regular genius:

Certain minds (he says), the moment we think of them, suggest the idea of symmetry and proportion. Plato's name, for example, calls up at once the impression of something ordered, measured, and settled; it is the exact contrary of everything eccentric, immature, or undeveloped. The opinions of such a mind are often erroneous, and some of them may, from change of time, or intellectual data, or from chance, seem not to be quite worthy of it; but the mode in which those opinions are expressed and (as far as we can make it out) the mode in which they are framed, affect us, as we have said, with a sensation of symmetricalness.

Bagehot gave Chaucer as an example of this type, Shakespeare and Dickens as examples of irregular or unsymmetrical genius. The difference is roughly between a highly disciplined and a relatively undisciplined (quite possibly more powerful) mind. As we should expect most of the great scientific geniuses belong to the symmetrical class, although Pasteur, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Sylvester are conspicuous exceptions. Heine obviously falls well within the unsymmetrical class. But within that class a subdivision is possible. Shakespeare and Dickens, for example, are irregular in both matter and manner. It is easy to select from either passages which are completely detestable both in matter and manner. It is easy to select from Heine examples of thoroughly detestable matter—mere spiteful nonsense (the preface to the third part of the "Salon" and much of the essay on Börne)—but even in these the manner is usually not contemptible. Shakespeare and Dickens at their worst expressed fifth rate ideas in fifth rate language. Heine usually expressed fifth rate ideas in excellent language. In manner, Heine is almost a symmetrical genius and perhaps on that account was ranked higher by Matthew Arnold than he deserved, because Arnold attached much more importance to propriety of manner than we should now think right.

But this merit does not redeem Heine's political writings from oblivion. Not only are they deformed, even more than those of Mr. H. G. Wells, by irrelevant outbursts of personal spite, they are a mere mass of self-contradictions. If anything could surpass his dislike of and contempt for the thirty-six

reigning houses of Germany, it was his dislike of and contempt for other German opponents of the thirty-six reigning houses. He was an enthusiast for political freedom, also an enthusiast for the first Napoleon. He was as bitter an enemy of Communism as Mr. Winston Churchill, and as contemptuous a critic of England as the mayor of Chicago or the Soviet press. Arnold said that Heine's direct political action was null and added that this was "neither to be wondered at nor regretted; direct political action is not the true function of literature and Heine was a born man of letters." Of course, his direct political action was null, since he could act with nobody, but it is not clear that he had any indirect political influence because, politically, he had no ideas, good or bad, merely feelings.

It is relevant to point out here that as a poet Heine only becomes quite first-rate when he is handling quite simple themes. In lyrics the object proposed is to express intellectually simple themes in the most graceful manner and Heine's success here can be measured by a simple comparison. Among his contemporaries was a writer reckoned one of the greatest of modern lyric poets, Béranger. Both Béranger and Heine have composed lyrics on the same theme and expressing almost identical feelings, the feelings of an old soldier of Napoleon after the downfall. This is from "Les Deux Grenadiers" of Béranger:

Moi tout couvert de cicatrices  
Je voulais quitter les drapeaux;  
Mais quand la liqueur est tarie.  
Briser le vase est d'un ingrat.  
Adieu, femme, enfants et patrie!  
Vieux grenadiers, suivons un vieux soldat.

Which seems good enough until you recall the corresponding lines in "Die Grenadiere":

Was schert mich Weib, was schert mich Kind,  
Ich trage weit bess'res Verlangen;  
Lass sie betteln gehn, wenn sie hungrig sind—  
Mein Kaiser, mein Kaiser gefangen!

and then one sees that it is not nearly good enough.

I do not say that Heine's verse is technically better than Béranger's—that from a foreigner would be a mere impertinence, but I do say that its music is more completely lost when spoken by a foreigner and its content is less satisfying. We all remember more lyric poetry than any other kind and a sensible proportion of the scraps we all remember in foreign. We all quote scraps of Burns and Horace and hold that an accent which would annoy a living Scot or make a dead Roman turn in his grave cannot wholly destroy the music or spoil the pleasure of the simple expression of a simple idea. Heine's contributions to that stock are very large.

Ich grolle nicht, und wenn das Herz auch bricht,  
Ewig verlornes Lieb! Ich grolle nicht

has thrilled many thousands of people wholly incapable of expressing in German the important fact that the mother of the gardener has two pens and a pocket handkerchief. Tell any intelligent person innocent of German the legend of the Mother of God of Kevlaar and then read aloud to him, with all the inevitable mistakes of accent, "Die Wallfahrt nach Kevlaar," and he will realize without difficulty what good ballad poetry is. But a thorough command of language is not a sufficient equipment for a political writer and the question is whether, as a political writer, Heine is of any importance now. I think he is of no importance whatever.



The one common ingredient of all Heine's criticism of life is discontent. He was thoroughly discontented with existing institutions, he was completely out of sympathy with all proposed reforms, and to the self-complacent early Victorians he may possibly have been a tonic. Matthew Arnold's mission in life was to shock the Victorians, but his method of being disagreeable to right-minded citizens was different from Heine's. Mr. Chesterton has neatly compared the three English left minds of the period in these words: "If Newman seemed suddenly to fly into a temper, Carlyle seemed never to fly out of one. But Arnold kept a smile of heart-broken forbearance, as of the teacher in an idiot school, that was enormously insulting." Heine's method is that which Arnold might have adopted if he had been a more vigorous hater and less acutely conscious that he was an Oxford man. Take Heine's diatribe against the English written in 1840,

when he was no longer a young man. He asks in what consists the political superiority of the English and answers his question thus:

I believe it (the superiority) consists in this, that they are the most prosaic of created beings, no poetic illusions lead them astray, no white hot enthusiasms dazzle them, that they see everything in a dry light, keep the plain matter of fact clearly before their eyes, estimate the requirements of time and place accurately and are undisturbed in this calculation by the beating of their hearts or the stirring of generous thoughts. Yes, there is their advantage, they have no force of imagination. This lack is the whole strength of the Englishman, the ultimate ground of his success in all realistic undertakings, politics, industry, the construction of machines. They have no phantasy, that is the whole secret. Their poets are merely brilliant exceptions, in opposition to their own people, that short-nosed beetle-browed people without backs to their heads, the chosen people of prose, just as prosaic, cool, and calculating in India and Italy as in Threadneedle Street. The scent of the Lotus does not intoxicate them, the fires of Vesuvius do not warm them, they bring their tea kettles to the very margin of the crater and drink tea seasoned with cant.

So far, so good. This is just how Arnold might have written if he had not been quite a gentleman.

But Heine goes on to say things which Arnold would never have said even in verse. He wonders whether there really is anything in the tales of English physical courage, notes that "a handful of horse soldiers sufficed to chase away from a meeting a hundred thousand angry Englishmen," refers to the English hireling soldiers, and concludes that

By dint of enervating factory labor, a highly cultivated spirit of trading, religious hypocrisy, pietism, that worst kind of opium, the English as a nation have become as unwarlike as the Chinese and before they conquer them (we were at war with China in 1840) it is probable that the French would be able, if they could land, to conquer the whole of England with less than one hundred thousand men.

In the Arnoldian terminology that passage was, when it was written, a mere freak and, in the light of after events, it has become a mere violence.



Heine did not often do quite so badly as that, but he has written much not greatly above its level. His table talk is instructive. Most of the smart sayings of famous talkers are sarcasms, many only examples of pithy rudeness. Those of Heine which we all remember belong to the latter class. Here are two unfamiliar enough to stand quotation. Asked by the Paris Rothschild of his time how the wine Lacrymae Christi came by its name, Heine answered—"You have only to translate the words: Christ wept because rich Jews drank such a wine while so many poor men were hungry and thirsty." Talking about the pollution of the Seine at Paris, Rothschild remarked that near its source the river was crystal clear. "But after all, your father was a very honest man, Herr Baron," interjected Heine. Of course Heine made more social enemies than friends, and it is doubtful whether the same technic applied to prose composition deserves to make him many friends with posterity. If one compares him as a prose writer on social and political topics with three first-rate prose writers of our own time with whom he has some affinities, with Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Mencken, and H. G. Wells, the superiority of our contemporaries is, I think, clear. All three are left-minded, severely critical of the established order, all three are deliberately provocative, and two (at least) of them have used great literary art to exhibit identifiable contemporaries in an unfavorable light. The judgments of all three upon men and institutions are as harsh as those of Heine. The bitterness of the two Americans—at least in those of their writings which I have read—is almost as pervasive as Heine's and more intense than that of Wells—whom nobody would accuse of a Baldwinian optimism. I am told that there is a good reason for this.

There is certainly no shortage of philistines, in the sense of Arnold and Heine, in the England of 1928, but in an England with a million unemployed it is evidently impossible even for a philistine to pretend that all is well. But in rich America it is both possible and easy to proclaim that the philistines are really the chosen people. There is, in fact, a resemblance between the America of 1928 and the England of 1868, so, for the enemies of philistines, America may be a worse abiding place than poverty-stricken England. For an Englishman it is very difficult to believe that the intellectual level of political discussion could sink lower than that of his own country. I am assured by Americans who