

A Brave Chronicle

THE STUMP FARM. By HILDA ROSE. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. (An Atlantic Monthly Publication.) 1928. \$2 net.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS chronicle of the Rockies and Canada, which attracted wide attention in the pages of the *Atlantic*, is as heroic a story as the annals of pioneering in any age or place afford. The narrator and heroine is a frail eighty-six pound woman whose health broke down in schoolteaching, and who went west to recover. Marrying another consumptive nearly thirty years older than herself, she settled on what they hoped would be a ranch when they got the stumps out, had a baby, and endured such loneliness, hardship, and privation as might have daunted any mountaineer of rugged health. The Montana country was unprosperous. In 1921 we find her writing that "if daddy can stay well and work—he's a dreadfully hard worker for his age—and if we get hay, and if we get that pig fat enough to butcher, and if we have good luck with the cows so we get lots of milk, and if our vegetables grow, we'll have enough to eat anyway next winter." The country was also socially barren. The other pioneers with whom Hilda Rose could associate were for the most part an undesirable lot. Irregular unions, illegitimacy, and the most flagrant evil-living abounded; "when I moved up here fourteen years ago there were seven women who lived with two husbands apiece"—for an extra man was needed to work the farms. But Hilda Rose formed a woman's club, started a debating society, held a box-supper for the I.W.W.'s in the logging camps which realized \$28.75 for charity, and otherwise bestirred herself to make the region better. Then the boy got bronchial pneumonia, the father's health grew worse, and the crops failed. "Conditions are very hard," she wrote at the end of 1923. "The struggle for bare existence is awful, but one gets used to it. Every penny should be used for at least a dozen such urgent needs that I have carried a dollar with me for days, laid it in front of me, and ate debating what it should go for." Finally in 1926 the struggle had to be given up, and the Rose household set out for a new and better home.

The most interesting and poignant portion of the book is this second half which describes the new pioneering venture far north of Edmonton, Alberta, on the Peace River. At the beginning they were fifteen miles from the nearest white settler. The winters were eight months long, with the thermometer often sixty below zero, and sometimes seventy or eighty below. At first they planned a dugout, but old trappers told them that the danger of a river flood made it unsafe; and before they could cut enough poplar logs for a cabin, Mr. Rose fell ill, cold weather overtook them, and they had to face the first season in a tent.

Such freezing cold! The big wood heater in the tent and the old cookstove had to be kept red-hot to get any comfort at all, and my poor feet were so cold. A tent is such a draughty place to live in, when it gets 40 below zero.

Fortunately on Thanksgiving Day a white settler drove up with four other men to their rescue, and in a half week of hard work built a one-room cabin, with a tar paper roof, which Mrs. Rose at once pronounced "heavenly." But for that kind act they might easily have perished, for in February Mrs. Rose was totally disabled by a fall. Not until the summer of 1927 was the family really on its feet, and though Mr. Rose worked hard in the garden and the boy shot game and tended fur-traps, it is pretty clear that the *Atlantic* furnished the final and indispensable sheet-anchor. Mrs. Rose's letters, to her friends, written without the slightest thought of publication, were admirable literary material. They described the wild scenery of the Peace River Valley, where she never ventured to go out of sight of the house without her dog, lest she be lost; the cycles of wild life, with the rabbits breeding heavily, the minks and foxes multiplying with them, an epidemic then sweeping away the rabbits, and the minks and foxes disappearing; the "poor dam breeds," who want to be white and are pathetically grateful to be treated as such; and the habits of the full-blooded Indians. If there is a better description of how an Indian mother tends her baby than Mrs. Rose gives, it would be hard to find it.

The chronicle closes with a letter of Oct. 19,

1927, which strikes a hopeful note. This far northern country, nestled under the Caribou Mountains, is steadily filling with settlers, a land-office is opening, and a government road is to be built. The Canadian Government will furnish a semi-monthly mail service. We may hope that this mail will carry to the *Atlantic* material for a sequel to this story of indomitable courage, of cheerfulness in adversity, of family devotion and community spirit, of insurmountable obstacles somehow surmounted; a book which deserves a wide reading, and will leave every reader a wholehearted admirer of the mistress of the stump farm.

Toward Renaissance

DESTINATIONS: A CANVASS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1900. By GORHAM B. MUNSON. New York: J. H. Sears & Company. 1928.

Reviewed by G. R. ELLIOTT
Amherst College

PERHAPS the distinctive literary achievement of the twentieth century will turn out to be the creation of a new criticism, particularly in America. The need, at least, is crying. The naturalistic movement that has been running hard in literature for a century and more is now a whirlpool of dregs. The creative imagination today goes shallowly round and round. It can be cleared and set forward in a new course only through a large effort of the critical mind. That effort, God knows, is particularly needed in America. Also the opportunity for it, Mr. Munson knows (and I hope God knows too), is particularly open in America. On account of our post-bellum status in the world, "we have unemployed energy which might be tapped for the effort of discovering the ends of existence"; moreover, "our liquid fragmentary state would be favorable for the reception of new master ideas and master impulses." The scene is set. All we want is the right type of critic: "the man who has lost his illusions concerning wealth and sex and art and social reform, but who has turned searcher with a vengeance, who is desperate and practical, skeptical of himself, energetic to the point of gratuitous effort, and unified by his object, which is self-knowledge and self-development toward a clear but utterly remote standard: with a handful of such men in our environment, we could begin to hope for a Renaissance as a by-product of their main direction."

Gorham Munson himself has "turned searcher with a vengeance." And his new book seems to me the most promising thing that has recently happened in American criticism. His thought is immature and piecemeal (his age is thirty-two) and his style is often clumsy enough. But his whole attitude is fresh, large, and timely. He believes that the time has come to "take up afresh the whole problem of the function of art and attack it from the angle of art serving the human development of the artist, and not from our customary angle of the artist serving the ends of art." There is too much accumulated cant about the artist's "search for truth," "worship of beauty," and so on. The imaginative writer pretends to a degree of objectivity that he is far from possessing (Mr. Munson's most pointed demonstration of this is in his essay on Marianne Moore), complacently ignoring the fact that the nature of his work is mainly determined by his own predilections and limitations—by the human stuff within him. Most of our present authors are animated by a disguised desire to gratify "one or another type of self-love." To face this motive frankly, is to put ourselves in position to consider such a question as this: "What is one to do in order to write from a sincerely-held purpose of discovering knowledge, enhancing consciousness, and acting in accord with one's knowledge and state of being?" Obviously a critic who talks this way is in danger of confusing human motives with literary results; but our critic himself states the danger and is generally on his guard against it. He insists that if we are to have better writing in America we must search for ideas that will aid the "human development" of our oncoming authors, and raise them above a "subjective bondage" masquerading as artistic freedom.

From this standpoint he canvasses our twentieth-century writers so far, disposing them into four symbolic groups: the Older, Middle, and Younger Generations, and the Rainbow Makers. The first group,

the O. G., notably Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, is classical in outlook. Related to them in spirit is Robert Frost, to whom Mr. Munson recently devoted a separate volume. The second group, which comprises most of our best known writers today, "is the romantic spirit in full insurgence." This M. G., for Mr. Munson's purposes, is, roughly speaking, N. G. Its motivating ideas have proved unfruitful; being either trivial, as in the two widely different cases of Theodore Dreiser and Vachel Lindsay; or too wavering, as in the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, who "oscillates between gazing at the religious possibilities of man and a consideration of the naturalness of man's desires and appetites that leads toward a tentative paganism—he does not move very far in either direction." And now, revolting from the M. G. and searching eagerly for firm and fruitful ideas, comes the Y. G., represented in this book by Kenneth Burke, Hart Crane, Jean Toomer, and, eminently though unintentionally, by the author himself. As for the Rainbow Makers—Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and the like—they are those who, with a certain hard brilliance of mind and art, have stood aloof from the special emotionalism of the M. G. and serve to connect the "adult ideology" of the O. G. with the "nascent ideology" of the Y. G.

It appears, then, that the immediate way of progress for the Y. G. is to take stock of the aims of the O. G., More and Babbitt, which have been badly misrepresented by various members of the M. G. Those two "Elder Critics" appear to Mr. Munson, not aloofly moral and intellectual, but vibrant with "old-time highly charged currents of life" and possessed of "a certain power, comprehensiveness, and elevation which their modernistic opponents have not acquired." Yet he severely criticises the style of More and Babbitt (a truer criticism, I think, would be that their literary manner is deficient in persuasiveness); and he is very far from tying himself to them. He treats them with the same promising combination of zest and detachment which he applies to all the others; for instance, Wallace Stevens, whose poetry is a "well-fed and well-booted American dandyism of contentment"—yet provides a "minute but sustained harmony floating above the chaos of life." Mr. Munson's idea is simply that More and Babbitt, preëminently, can help the Y. G. to "tap sources higher in level than the prevalent culture."

He himself has been tapping Plato, Aristotle, and other great original sources. At present, as he tells us toward the close, he is launching upon the Mahabharata. I hope he won't spend too much of his next ten years upon that vast Hindu epic. A need nearer home is that he should discover just where he stands in relation to Matthew Arnold, by whom he is more swayed than he seems aware. Arnoldian thoughts move through his book alongside ideas from More and Babbitt—and the gears don't engage. The fact is that More and Babbitt, whom I take to be the two chief critical thinkers in English since Arnold, have urged a certain radical change in the Arnoldian critical outlook. Mr. Munson should find what that change is and decide to what extent he accepts it. That is his nearest problem. However, he turns to the Mahabharata because his imagination craves food, new food, "a new symbol for the youth of America,"—a great poem which, "being unfamiliar in its mythology and therefore outside of our education, may act as a touchstone to determine the strength and sincerity of one's pursuit of the unattainable," of Perfection. Well, there is a certain work in our own language which now fills this bill in every item. Two centuries of reaction and misinterpretation have succeeded in making it "unfamiliar in its mythology" and in putting it *really* "outside of our education." Incidentally, it would help Mr. Munson to face his critical problem in regard to More and Babbitt and Arnold; for Milton was a great critical intelligence. However, the main point is that our poetic imagination (as I am claiming elsewhere) has now come into a dilemma which can never be fully solved until we discover the present meaning of our own supreme epic; that we can never have a real Renaissance until our "Paradise Lost" is regained.

A lost section of a medieval manuscript by Gonzalo de Berceo, the earliest known Castilian poet, has been discovered by Professor C. Carroll Marden of Princeton, who has just returned from Spain, where, under a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, he has been pursuing research.

The BOWLING GREEN

(In the absence of Mr. Morley, Mr. Bennett's article has been substituted for the usual Bowling Green.)

Current Events

IN some educational institutions (they deserve that dreary appellation) there is a detestable practice of conducting courses in Current Events. The class subscribes to one of those periodicals that go in for concentrated information, such as *Time* or the *Literary Digest*. Then they try to excogitate answers to such questions as these:

What and where is Esthonia? How does it figure in the week's news? (If you had not taken this course you would have thought that Esthonia was a new kind of nervous malady, curable by osteopathy. And what harm would that have done you?)

Summarize the chief points in President Coolidge's address to the International Congregation of Girl Scouts.

Did they get any forrader at Geneva last week? Why not? What are the Nobel prizes? Who got them this year? For the last ten years?

What is the importance of the index number? What is it for the current week? (I may not have got this right. I mean the thing that Irving Fisher invented.)

What did Mussolini suppress last week?

And so on, and so on. All big pompous events, you see. Obvious subjects for editorials, themes for public speeches, the sort of thing you feel you ought to be interested in, but manifestly aren't, for they are all concerned with the imposing façade of life, with Movements and Tendencies and Public Figures and Policies and Critical Issues. But, thank Heaven! life is not so dull as that. And there is no reason why a course in current events should not be interesting, exciting, and even instructive. It all depends on what current events you select from the great mass provided by the daily papers and other sources.

Nowadays one is not allowed to make a criticism unless one is also "constructive." I find it hard to understand why, after cleaning one's face, one should also be required to superimpose a smile on it. However, I accept the challenge. If courses in current events must be given, then I know how they ought to be managed. And just to prove that I am in earnest I give an example of my method.

My first current event is from the *London Daily Telegraph* and is called Welsh Family's Escape.

Mr and Mrs —, of Duffryn-road, Alltwen, Pontardawe, and their ten children had a wonderful escape from death yesterday morning, when a huge boulder, estimated to weigh about ten tons, became dislodged and careered down the mountain side. After travelling about 150 yards down a steep surface and gaining great speed, it was diverted by a wall, and crashed into a bedroom of the — house, in which three of the children were sleeping, and strangely enough did not wake them, although the crash was heard by many persons in the neighborhood. Before the course of the boulder was checked it crashed through the bedroom, kitchen, scullery, and bathroom of the house. Most of the furniture in these rooms was smashed, but none of the twelve inmates was injured.

That is such a fantastically unreal episode that the mouth of the commentator is almost stopped. Think of having "no small bit of mountain" come crashing right through your house without injuring anyone! Where were all those twelve people when it struck? Were they all in the other bedroom, or were they drawn up stiffly against the walls to let the boulder through? Heaven only knows what queer Welsh *mores* we might not discover if we were to follow up such queries. But these are trivial questions compared to that other that we have all been longing to ask. How was it that while ten tons of rock hurtled through their room the children slept on? What would not the mothers (and fathers) of the world give to know what it is that Welsh parents give their children to make them sleep like that! The reporter lost a great opportunity there.

This single incident, you see, takes us right to the heart of the lives of the Welsh people. I defy my students not to be interested. A year from now you will find them absorbed in the Mabinogion.

We pass now to a piece of description which offers a pleasant contrast to that failure in reporting, for

it shows to what incredible heights the journalistic imagination can attain. Our source is *The Weekly Irish Times*.

The Rostrevor police have found at Killowen Point two large cases of eggs, packed in sectional cardboard receptacles. They were washed ashore from the s. s. Connemara, which was wrecked a fortnight ago. The contents of one case were found intact, while in the other box only a few eggs were broken. This contrasts strangely with the state of some of the bodies washed ashore, which were battered beyond recognition.

I do not think that in the whole range of journalism you will find anything to surpass the simple brutality of that statement. Yet a quite unintended brutality. I picture the unhappy reporter, desperately searching for news. He hears of, or discovers for himself, these cases of eggs. But eggs—eggs—two cases of eggs aren't news! Yet they are too good, metaphorically speaking, to be thrown away. How shall we make an "item" out of them? Pause for a few moments and imagine yourself confronted by that problem, and then I think you will find it hard to praise duly the brilliant originality of that transition—"This contrasts strangely with . . ."

My next current event happened in 1656, so it is not, strictly speaking, current; but since I read about it only yesterday, perhaps it may qualify. The scene is in Paris. The circumstances: the controversy between Jesuits and Jansenists on the subject of Divine Grace and human Freedom. The struggle was bitter. The Sorbonne was deeply involved. Then, from his retreat at Port Royal, Pascal suddenly threw confusion among the embattled theologians with his "Lettres Provinciales." Here is the effect (in part) of his first letter at the Sorbonne.

Le chancelier Séguier, à la lecture de la première lettre, faillit avoir une attaque, et dut être saigné sept fois. . . .

There's triumph for you! Could any review, however laudatory, bring you the same thrill of ecstasy as the knowledge that your book had made it necessary for your opponent to be bled seven times? Think if I had written an article attacking Materialism and I were to learn that some High Priest of Materialism, on reading it, had suffered the complete destruction of all his synapses, wouldn't I be happier than a scholar with an honorary degree?

Indeed, to be serious for a moment, I see here a hint for taking reviewing out of the realm of the impressionistic arts and making it a branch of the science of measurement. Why should not the review of the future simply record the reviewer's pulse, temperature, respiration, blood-pressure, opsonic index, lingual complexion, and so forth, before and after reading? Reviews would be much shorter and no less significant than they are today. Indignant authors would not besiege the correspondence columns with complaints, for after all if the reviewer was nauseated or if his temperature did drop to subnormal, these are objective facts, and the author has no "come-back." Publishers' puffs would be purely statistical. "The average increase of blood pressure of fifty-two selected readers of this book was 11.9." Last, but not least: when we used the word "reaction" we would mean what we said. "What sort of reaction did you get from the reviewers?" "Oh, pretty fair. Temperature averaged 99.8, but the thyroid coefficient was 'way off. I don't quite understand it."

My next is from *The London Observer*. It is headed

BURIED 100,000 PEOPLE. FUNERAL OF CEMETERY SUPER-INTENDENT.

The funeral took place yesterday of Mr. —, superintendent of — Cemetery, who died suddenly on Wednesday last. Deceased, who was seventy-five years of age, entered the employ of the London — Company at the age of thirteen, so that he had completed just over sixty-two years of service. For the past forty-one years he held the post of superintendent and during that period had conducted just over 100,000 funerals, and it is computed that prior to becoming superintendent he witnessed or assisted at at least 25,000 interments. During the war he was responsible for all the military funerals, nearly three thousand in all.

— Cemetery is the largest cemetery in the world. There are two railway stations inside the cemetery, complete with waiting rooms, refreshment rooms, and bars. There are also six churches inside the walls. Last year the staff held their Christmas dinner in one of the refreshment rooms.

After reading that to the class I would send them away to think over it. At the end of a week I would give them a two-hour examination. Four questions. Do not attempt more than one.

1. "Necropolis." A meditation in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne.

2. Shakespeare in modern dress. Scene: A bar in a cemetery. Enter two grave-diggers.
3. Elegy in a City Churchyard, by The Superintendent.
4. "Merry Christmas." Scenario of a play in the Russian manner. Scene: The Refreshment Room of a large cemetery. Time: Christmas night. The Staff of the cemetery are discovered at dinner.

So much for my students. For myself, I am moved to conjecture what sort of man this superintendent was who passed all his life in so dense an atmosphere of mortality. Was he prosperous, successful, and "bright," or did he sometimes have bad dreams? Did the spectacle of this interminable procession to the grave make him hard and stoical, or, since he could say, with more poignant realization than most, "Yesterday, today, and tomorrow we die," would it not have been natural for him to add, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry"? I prefer another picture. I see him as quite detached from the human significance of the daily holocaust. The professional manner of regard must have become a fixed habit with him. Mercifully enough. Mercifully for him, because how else could he have preserved his sanity? And for others, because *il faut mourir*, monsieur, and *someone* has to superintend these places. And, towards the end of his life, professional pride can hardly have failed to enter in. Sixty-two years of service! Saul hath slain his thousands; yes, but we are creeping up towards the 100,000 mark.

And then? Then a vision rises before me. I wish I could draw, I see it so clearly.

The scene is just outside the main gate of the cemetery. No one is about at this hour of the morning except an old woman who sits huddled up on a stool or box at the base of the cemetery wall, her head and shoulders covered with a shawl. She is knitting. She reminds you of *les tricoteuses* at the end of "A Tale of Two Cities." A funeral cortege approaches. The gates open for it. The old woman looks up for a moment, and, as she does so, you catch a glimpse of a gray bony face slashed by a malign charnel grin. No mistaking that grin! It is Death. As the hearse disappears through the gate the old woman croaks wheezily to herself,

"One hundred thousand . . . and one,"

and falls again to her knitting.

I could go on indefinitely. But I see a hand uplifted at the back of the room. Ah! It is the editor. "Please, sir," he is saying, "you've gone five minutes over the hour already."

Eh, bien, mes enfants, la séance est levée. (But I hope it is not to be *la dernière classe*!)

CHARLES A. BENNETT.

The recent death of Stuart Mason, the bibliographer of Oscar Wilde, seems to have coincided with a renewal of the familiar controversy between Lord Alfred Douglas and Frank Harris, in the details of which, not being entomologists, we are frankly not much concerned, except that it offers an item of legitimate trade interest. Rumors lately current that Douglas had obtained substantial damages from London booksellers who had sold copies of Harris's "Life of Wilde" seem to be confirmed by the following letter printed in the December 15 issue of the *London Times Literary Supplement*: "Sir,—Referring to the short notice in your last issue of the 'New Preface to the Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde,' will you allow me to say that in spite of Mr. Frank Harris's admission, contained in the preface, that practically every word he wrote about me in his 'Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde,' is false, and in spite of his expression of his desire to do me 'tardy justice' by what he describes as 'this frank confession,' his book, unamended and containing all his admitted libels on me, is still being sold by booksellers in London and elsewhere? A little more than two weeks ago I received from a leading bookseller in the West End of London a full apology, an undertaking not to sell the book again, and £200 in compensation for having sold one copy of it. Two other leading booksellers have apologized and undertaken not to sell the book in future and have offered monetary compensation. My object in asking you to give publicity to this letter is simply to give a warning to any booksellers who may happen to have copies of the book in their possession. My solicitors have instructions to proceed immediately against anyone who sells or attempts to sell the book.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
"ALFRED DOUGLAS."