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## Points of View

### Poets and the Machine

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

"Poems of the Machine Age" by Mac-Knight Black in your number of September 8 seemed the most satisfying poems on a modern subject this reader has lately seen. They were perhaps only indications of what may come later from the same writer but, if one may judge from personal enjoyment, they were not shaped for an occasion but resulted from emotion unhindered by popular amazement. This is a step in unconscious sophistication and familiarity with new material which must be achieved before we can expect to have any really interpretative verse of an advanced industrial age. Mr. Black's poems deal with subjects ordinarily considered outside the realm of poetry and not yet in the realm of the vernacular. That they attain to beauty rather than to novelty is reassuring.

It is interesting to note that in describing a power-house, a Corliss engine, and reciprocating engines and the mood they produce in the beholder, nearly all the associations in the poet's mind are with natural objects—sky, flowers, sun, eagles, stars, white pear-blossoms in April. These are things with which a poet has kinship and in terms of their ancient language he still describes the most modern facts of steel, power, and electricity. The source of his imagery and to a great extent of his emotion still resides in the only reliable store he possesses, that of individual and racial experience. We have lived with the sun and stars for ages, but the monsters of man's mechanical genius are still too new to us to exist in images in their own terms. At least not yet to the point of becoming abundant in the pages of poetry.

For the most part the phenomena of industry and science remain on the horizon of the poet's consciousness. He is fully aware of them but has not yet possessed them completely enough to give them forth again in his own language, a language which must be divorced from technical associations but distilled with a new magic. This is a process which must be slow if it is to convey a mature emotion in a distinguished manner. Hence the impatience in certain quarters with poets who are tardy in their response to the wonders of an industrial-scientific civilization seems to be lacking in understanding of the creative mind itself. It is the reporter but not the poet who concludes and signs his impressions from the top of a sight-seeing bus. What if it takes a whole generation to produce poets capable of absorbing the marvels of the machine age to the point of emotional and esthetic saturation? What if the poets do continue to find some fascination in life and love this side the factory and laboratory doors? After all, there is something as pleasant as a new invention in the fact that in a world of development and vast enterprise the seasons manufacture sun and snow with the undisturbed certainty of a perfect engine, and unsupplied by current or gasoline.

HILDEGARDE FLANNER.

Altadena, California.

### A Challenge

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

The October 20 issue of your magazine contains a review of "Rising Wind," the author of which is Virginia Moore. The last paragraph puts forth the sweeping observation that the book is full of "amusing errors in printing." Your unknown reviewer then proceeds to name a particularly humorous one, viz., "as when Mrs. Carver is described as wearing about her throat 'a fissure of Valenciennes lace.'" "A fissure of Valenciennes lace."

If your reviewer is under the impression that proofreaders deliberately create such humorous substitutions he or she has never been in the position of having and keeping a job.

It happens that I am the reader who was the cause of this unwarranted hilarity on the part of your brilliant critic. Granting that the word should have read *fichu* and not *fissure*, why should the proofreader be charged entirely with the crime, if it be regarded as such. Shouldn't Miss Moore come in for a little chastisement? Fissure it was—in her manuscript.

Honestly, now, when authors, and women authors in particular, can't describe women's apparel accurately, should proofreaders be excoriated for not being experts in that direction?

In closing, I challenge this "unknown" to a debate on literature or to an engage-

ment in a spelling match (old-fashioned or modern) to be "referenced" by Dr. Vizitelly, one of the rules of such a contest to be that the meaning of the words spelled shall also be interpreted by the contestants. Furthermore, I can promise this same "unknown" a hundred percent better written book-review, by confining it to the material at hand, and not indulge in petty quibblings that characterize minor critics' reviews.

BOB ROLLINS.

Elmhurst, L. I.

### "Home Life in History"

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

To the review of the interesting book "Home Life in History," by John Gloag and C. Thompson Walker, recently published in *The Saturday Review*, may I add a few words of appreciation for this very delightful rendering of the pleasant narration of twenty-four centuries of living in England?

To put between the covers of one book a coherent epitome of living, with suggestive facts and illustrative material that really informs, is a task well worth the doing, and when the style of the book carries one on from page to page with continued interest, the authors are to be praised and certainly the book justified.

Beginning in the distant past when Britain was a Roman Colony, describing definitely what the manner of living was, including the housing, heating, and food, as well as the manners and customs, with citations of authorities on which the descriptions are based, is a valuable contribution to a little known period. It is worthy of careful study.

Then follows the period of Saxon holding, their ways of living and how they fared in their daily life and what manner of living they had. Here again are most important facts definitely stated and the whole humanized and clarified by the outline presented.

Of the eighth century in England we knew little; through this book any reader has added to his stock of information and has had a very pleasant time in increasing his store of facts, again well authenticated. The description of furniture and furnishings is well handled and the feasts and ceremonies clearly described, with here and there a glint of humor that evokes a smile—a cheerful smile. The section reads like romance; still it is a factual presentation of the episodes of that period hitherto unobtainable.

The coming of the Danes was a tragedy to the Saxons and the wedding of their manners and meals, religion and customs, is an interesting narrative based on careful research. It is good to know about all this.

Of the Norman Conquest in the twelfth century there is good reading, the stories of the occupation of England and the forced adjustment not only to new ways but to a new tongue, makes an epoch of intense interest, and this also creates deep interest in the record of events. It was not a peaceful occupation by treaty rights but by forceful occupation and stern re-

mindings of conquest. Again the people of England were required to adjust themselves to the new order; no matter how they detested the Norman, he had come to stay. The story of the adaptation of the people to a new format of life, with strange language, strange food, and strange people, is vital.

Feudal life is well defined, with careful outline of details carrying a flavor of color in the home, with the ways of hospitality and the forms of living, the observance of religion and the methods of marriage, with an interesting account of foods.

There is a running and vigorous story of the Black Death and the causes which led up to it, which is concrete and worthy of inclusion, for it is enlightening and definite.

The better known fourteenth century is well treated, and the dissolution of the monasteries and nunneries is fairly set down. The Elizabethan period with its richness of color and the development of literature and drama is most comprehensive.

In fact, "The History of Home Life" furnishes a survey in a single book, that the reading of a dozen books could not provide. True, it is boiled down to a few pages, but each section is definite in fact and clear in portrayal. The authors did an enormous amount of research to gather their facts, and those who care for the study of the beginnings of our present mode of living are to be congratulated in being furnished with so concise a study. It is a good stout book of three hundred pages with notes that are valuable. The illustrations of homes and appliances embellish the book.

CLAUDIA Q. MURPHY

New York City.

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## The Reader's Guide

CONDUCTED BY MAY LAMBERTON BECKER

Inquiries in regard to the selection of books and questions of like nature should be addressed to MRS. BECKER, c/o *The Saturday Review*.

G. B. W., Hartford, Conn., asks for some books on middle age or maturity. "While I am interested in technical psychological works more or less corresponding to various well known volumes on Adolescence and on Senescence, I can find these listed in the Psychological Index. But there must be many other books on this subject which, while not technical, are interesting and valuable. I would be glad if you would help me to form a bibliography on this topic, in which, as the years go by, I am becoming increasingly interested."

GLENWAY WESCOTT says in "Good-bye Wisconsin" that the Middle West is a state of mind of people born where they do not like to live. How far this covers the population I have no means of knowing; one has but to come back to the States on a slow steamer and listen to the talk of returning tourists from Topeka and points West, to discover that in their comparisons Paris, London, and New York do not always come out ahead. It must be, however, the state of mind in which much of its realistic fiction is produced. Its novelists have in Sauk Center no continuing city, nor even, it would seem, in Chicago itself. When Mr. Wescott revisits Milwaukee he wears a *beret*, apparently that Wisconsin may be advised that his heart is not here when his head is—though as the *beret* has already taken the place of the label-plastered suitcase as proof that a young man has made his first trip abroad, it is clear that some other gesture of distinction must soon be devised. Naturally the Middle West is attractive to a writer in this frame of mind only when seen over the shoulder, when, like any landscape we have left behind, its outlines may take on the soft shades of desirability.

Middle life in fiction is something like the Middle West in this respect; it looks better to most people the nearer they get to its western exit. If I steadfastly refuse to set a date on either this doorway or that of the year through which one goes into the period, it is for reasons readily to be inferred from a glance through the B's in "Who's Who." Dates change their looks anyway, depending on the direction in which you look at them; in Willa Cather's "Death Comes for the Archbishop" (Knopf) there is a lady who risks all sorts of loss rather than admit to fifty-three when she prefers to have been forty-two on her last birthday. "Ah, mon père," she weeps, "je voudrais mieux être jeune et mendiant, que n'être que vieille et riche." Such captiousness could not be understood by any really young person; having owned to forty-two, what on earth could matter after that? You can guess how old Dickens was when he wrote "Pickwick" by the advanced decay of old Mrs. Wardell; a middle-aged person of to-day gets a bad jolt when he figures out the actual number of her years. When we were very young there was no middle-age; people were young and they were old, and senility set in at an age that would scare you. Susan Ertz, who is young and pretty, manages to get the distinctive savor of middle-aged romantic happiness in "Afternoon" (Appleton), but she had already practised throwing her mind ahead a few decades, her most popular heroine being Madame Claire. Inez Haynes Irwin's Phoebe and Ernest stories concluded with one in which the parents of these active adolescents were shown enjoying their dividend years, their children now married and settled, and there was a play on Broadway, whose name I cannot recall though French undoubtedly publishes it, in which the happiness of a middle-aged American honeymoon is made complete by the slipping off by both parties of the juvenile discomforts each had used to win the other. Bess Streeter Aldrich specializes in pleasant prairie mothers of middle-age, like the one in "The Cutters" or "Mother Mason" (Appleton), and "Jen Culliton," by N. G. White (Appleton), is a reassuring study of a farm-woman whose life is broken at an age when most women are getting ready to call it a day, but who starts over again and builds what proves to be another lifetime of usefulness. But the classic of recuperation is W. B. Maxwell's "Mrs. Thompson" (it is published, republished, and is now out of print) which I used to lend to women suffering from Karen Michaelis's "Dangerous Age," which came out in the same year. This hysteric, pseudo-

medical novel continued to exert a sort of underground influence for years, mainly from its title, until Rose Macaulay blew it sky-high with "Dangerous Ages" (Liveright). In this the only one of the four heroines, twenty-fourty-sixty-eighty, who is not dangerous to herself or the community in some way, is the one who has reached the anchorage of the latest date. It is a sound, ironic book; like Miss Macaulay's "Told by an Idiot" (Liveright), it has the tolerant good-humor of middle life, generally mistaken for an improvement of the temper, but more often the result of discovering how few things there are that are still worth making a fuss about.

According to Mr. Hergesheimer's "Cytherea" (Knopf), which was in its day supposed to be an important document of middle age, there is a specified year in which man's foot itches to be free. I do not see what wives are to do about it, unless as brides used to be advised in the 'nineties in Germany, they begin at once to fatten their husbands so that by forty-six they cannot run. The Arnold Bennett man seems not to wish to run; as in "Clayhanger" and "The Roll Call" he prefers to stop around and enjoy the matrimonial tug-of-war that, like the fleas on David Harum's dog, keep him from brooding on being a dog. See the solid citizens of middle life in social England under the Forsytes! How much more they manage to get out of living, for all their Edwardian livers, than young cormorants like Fleur! English writers, especially the more established in popularity, are more kind to the forties than we are apt to be; even Hugh Walpole's "Maradick at Forty" (Doubleday, Doran) does not get its terrors from the birthday. Somerset Maugham's man in "The Moon and Sixpence" (Doubleday, Doran) did make a typical middle-aged breakaway, but then he was taking the trail of Gauguin. "Babbitt" had made forty-six revolutions on the carousel of his life before he began to clutch at his birthdays as at gold rings that turned out—even when he caught them—to be a tawdry brass. In Howells's day they did not clutch: in "Indian Summer" and in "April Hopes" there are discreet contrasts not only of Spring blossoms with shorn fields, but of green apples with the sweeter fruit of ripe September.

I have already sheered off from dates, nor do I find in these novels any signs of uniformity in the process of becoming middle-aged or more so. But there is one phenomenon that does distinguish it for many men and women, especially such as live consciously, richly, and with a relish. This is the discovery which may be made gradually or by tripping over it in the road, that, as Yeats says, somewhere about his fiftieth year, with an all but unbelievable surprise,

*But who could have foretold  
That the heart would grow old?*

There is that note in some of Sara Teasdale's most beautiful later verse. A novel that sounds this note may have, I think, a chance of distinction if it is the work of a writer like—well, say like Willa Cather, for she has already sounded it more clearly and in a more golden tone than in any other novel of middle-age that I have read. This is "The Professor's House," in whose later chapters Professor St. Peter takes account of years. The all but suicide that saved his life comes in the trough of the wave, and gives him just the energy not to go under, but rise with the flood. I have heard it said that the German nation might have long since committed suicide had it not been for its habit of taking a good strong cup of coffee at four o'clock in the afternoon. The English use tea to get the vitality past this point of low ebb, and I have heard that in days less pure than ours this used to be called the cocktail hour in America. Life, as it approaches its four P.M., would be all the better for a shove to get it past the down curve onto the upward slope, and a novel that would without preaching show men and women that there really is an up-curve coming, and a long evening ahead, would have its uses. For as one may learn with some surprise from Verhaeren, whose "Afternoon" has been admirably translated into English verse (Dodd, Mead), this time of day really has charms worth waiting for.

(Continued on next page)

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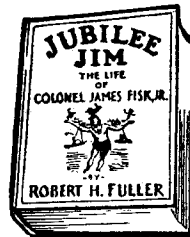
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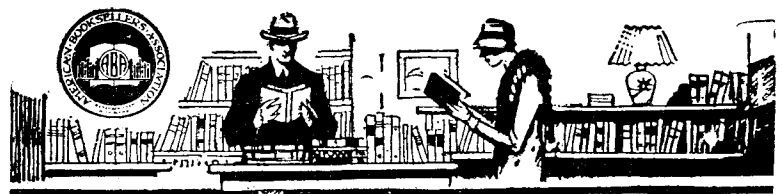
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