

## The Breed of Laughter

THE RING FENCE. By EDEN PHILLPOTTS.  
New York: The Macmillan Co. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by EARL A. ALDRICH

IT is a good review that can make even one point about its subject, and a good book that gives the reviewer one real excellence to talk about. "The Ring Fence" is therefore like the mistress of the Boar's Head Tavern, a thing to thank God on, for it has at least three excellences, and demands three points. In the first place, it has form, and the form has magnitude. To the confirmed novel-reader, who may be tired of novelettes, or of attenuated biographies, this means something. It means a chance to admire the dexterity of the craftsman who can spin three threads of narrative at once, without for an instant confusing his reader or letting him forget any part of the story; and it means that there is a substantial expanse of pleasure before him.

In the second place, "The Ring Fence" does not force its characters. Dr. Johnson would have said that it observes decorum, but the word is out of date in both letters and manners. Dr. Johnson would have meant that the characters are true to type, that they act and think and talk as Devonshire farmers and poultrymen and publicans act and think and talk; they are not the vehicle for the author's theories, or sentimentalized, or made over into primitive great strong men. They are sturdy and shrewd and illiterate and racy as peasants are in life and ought to be in literature. Evidently Mr. Phillpotts loves them, and loves them too well to make them into anything more than they are. Moreover, he is too good an artist to force them into molds, or to color them by his own dreams. He sees in them and their daily lives enough matter for a story without falsifying them in a *tour de force*.

Finally, "The Ring Fence" has humor, rich, abundant, never-failing. Its inexhaustibility is amazing. One would say that it could not last the book out; but it does last, and it is as good at the end as at the beginning. These Devonshire people are in the genuine tradition of English fun. Think of what that is, how genial it is, what a tang it possesses! The folk troop up in droves; Shakespeare's countrymen, and Smollett's; Scott's and Dickens's; George Eliot's and Hardy's. Here are Phillpotts's, and they are of the same stock. The breed of laughter runs clear and true. Yet it will not do to quote their good things, any more than Falstaff's, for they are too much bound up in the character for that, and lose their flavor as wild apples do when not eaten out of doors. But the book is full of them, nearly four hundred pages, and we can say with John Dryden, "Here is God's plenty."

## Is Modern Religion Modern?

DOES CIVILIZATION NEED RELIGION?

By REINHOLD NIEBUHR. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by BERNARD IDINGS BELL

IT must be indicative of something that the annual output of published treatises on matters mystical has more than doubled in the last five years. It may, perhaps, imply that more and more of us are "fed-up" on mechanism. The demand seems greater than the adequate supply. If this were not true, we should not find such a deal of rubbish issued, with jackets containing appealing blurbs and insides containing nothing to speak about. Under a somewhat banal title, which one suspects was devised by the publisher rather than by the author, Mr. Niebuhr, pastor of Bethel Church in Detroit, has written one such book which deserves to be read. Its thoughtfulness, simplicity, and sincerity are a pleasant relief in a flood of volumes about religion almost all of which are either sentimental or deadly dull.

It is not likely that Mr. Bruce Barton's public will welcome Mr. Niebuhr's work. He lacks a bouncing sprightliness. But to those who, like this reviewer, find the rotarian approach to such matters as love and death and God somewhat of an impertinence, this lack will seem a virtue even though it probably will result in a comparatively small and discriminating sale. Mr. Niebuhr's thoughts are not easiest approached with "Cheer, cheer the gang's all

here" as a prelude. Its philosophy is also unwelcome to the booster. The author says plainly that most contemporary religion, certainly most Protestantism, in its reaction against the Reformation doctrine of man's total depravity, has "evolved a sentimental over-estimate of human virtue which is no nearer the truth." He insists that modern churches are making this mistake "at the very time when science tempts men to despair. . . . Modern religion is, in short, not sufficiently modern. In it eighteenth-century sentimentality and nineteenth-century individualism are still claiming victory over the ethical and religious prejudices of the Middle Ages. Meanwhile life has "moved on" and, Mr. Niebuhr thinks, we have grave need now-a-days of "a religion which is not unqualifiedly optimistic. . . . Sentimentality is a poor weapon against cynicism." This man seems to know more than most parsons do about the twentieth century. He is refreshing in this; most preachers seem still to be living in the nineteenth. Here is a man with penetration enough to perceive that the churches "would have done well to consult Thomas Huxley more and Herbert Spencer less," and who knows that modernism is a reflection not of the scientific spirit but of Rousseau and romanticism.

Mr. Niebuhr's practical demand is for a new asceticism. The author convincingly states that this must not be Puritan in nature, since the Puritan was an ascetic not for the glory of God but for the sanctifying of economic power. When he says that the new asceticism must not, either, be monastic in nature, he somehow does not seem on such sure ground. He does say that monasticism fled the responsibilities of economic power. How he can make out a case for that contention is a little difficult to see. Certainly Henry VIII did not suppress the English monasteries because they were economic non-participants. Moreover, monasticism did in the Middle Ages produce exactly those "spiritualized technicians" for whom Mr. Niebuhr longs, who shall "conquer and exploit nature in the interest of human welfare but scorn to take a larger return from industry than is justified by carefully scrutinized needs."

In some sense at least, the author thinks, what Christianity, Protestant as well as Catholic, must have if it is again to inspire respect or to furnish to an increasingly despairing society a dynamic now lacking, is not more modernists but more monks, not a new faith but some new friars.

## So Is Now Official Sinning

(Continued from page 161)

him up on an exceeding high mountain and showed him the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. Thereafter Dan Meredith, though he turned to look back occasionally, never thought originally or acted bravely; and the reader who follows this biography of a politician forgets that Huston is writing a novel till the last pages bring the tale to a dramatic and ironic conclusion.

Mr. Huston's narrator is, at the outset, an ordinary newspaperman who takes things as he finds them without blowing up in futile indignation; and he keeps that attitude pretty successfully through the book. He shows you what politicians are and how they behave, and in the main lets you draw your own conclusions; he calls theft theft, now and then, but he does not go out of his way to denounce it, possibly feeling that any denunciation would be pointless in a book addressed to the American voter. There are times when mere constation is effective enough, for those who have ears to hear. So far as what Mr. Mencken would call the gaudier aspects of our rulers are concerned, his moderation may be surprising and disappointing. His politicians are mostly hard drinkers, and the dryer the drunkener; but they are not much given to women. "The common condition was a sort of unhappy chastity," a chastity due to fear; no sensible office holder would do anything that would give a woman a chance to blackmail him, whereas if he sat around a hotel room and got drunk with the boys nobody would give him away. Besides, no politician in this moral age and nation could afford even a friendly separation from his wife; "he might steal, or wreck a bank, or surround himself with criminals in office; but he might as well come out against prohibition as disclose a conflict with the woman to whom he was yoked." Moral cowardice and party regularity are the cardinal virtues; "the thing that was not

wanted, the thing that would disqualify, was originality."

Mr. Huston has the art that conceals art; his novel becomes a novel when it suits his purposes, but in the main it is, and reads like, the best sort of political reporting, faintly tinged with editorial comment. There are some shrewd and discerning observations on women in politics; the old-time male politician distrusts the woman politician who drinks like a man, swears like a man, and is a good deal more willing than the men to go in for promiscuous amours. He distrusts her because he likes the old-fashioned woman; but the old-fashioned woman follows her lead with enthusiasm. "The good wives of the solid citizenry envied her complete freedom, her defiance of feminine restraint, the determination with which she went toward her purposes, public and private."

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You will find here, too, a good deal of sound comment on the newspaper business, as exemplified by the all too common type of newspaper in our middle-sized cities whose motto is "Fairness and futility," the paper that prints the news unless someone of prominence would be annoyed by it. And you will find occasional observations, the more deadly because of their sedulous moderation, of the sentimental muzzy-mindedness of the business man who is satisfied with an eloquent speech at the Rotary luncheon and lets the politicians steal the state out from under his nose, who cries for a "business man's candidate" and then votes against a perfect specimen of the type, when the ruling class orders him beaten. And, among the incidents, you will find a faithful news report of "that form of good time known as the 'party,'" a gathering of Indiana politicians and their wives for the purposes of getting drunk in company, which is as veritistic, and as horrible in its implications, as the more convincing passages of "The President's Daughter."

It is a hideous world of callous selfishness, hypocrisy, moral poltroonery; of a complete indifference to things of the mind and total absence of things of the spirit. "You are talking about something these fellows haven't got," says an old newspaperman to a young idealist. "They haven't got any spiritual side." Yet such, in the main, was the governing class of this enlightened republic in the Age of Normalcy, and the golden prime of cautious Calvin Coolidge. And hereafter? We shall see next November whether there is any public demand for courage and clear thinking; if not, there is no visible reason why this sort of thing should not go on indefinitely.

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No one has drawn this picture so convincingly as Mr. Huston, because no one has done it with his scientific fidelity to the observed evidence, his conscientious refusal to be led astray into the tempting bypaths of satire and burlesque. True, American politics could hardly be burlesqued, but it has been tried. Only when Mr. Huston contrasts something else with this moral and intellectual nightmare does he strain the credulity. For he brings his narrator, at last, to New York. And there he meets workers in the arts who are unselfish and devoted servants of abstract ideals, eager to give the credit for collective achievement to others; men and women who are well mannered and temperate, among whom is neither filthiness nor foolish talking, nor fornication, nor covetousness, but rather giving of thanks; an austere and consecrated race, bent on painting the thing as they see it for the God of things as they are. New Yorkers may not recognize the picture, but Mr. Huston lives in South Bend and comes here seldom. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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## History with Bristles

THE HISTORY OF MUSIC. By CECIL GRAY.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1928.

Reviewed by CARL ENGEL

Division of Music, Library of Congress

SOME of the most interesting among recent books in English that deal with music have been published by the firm of Alfred A. Knopf. They are not textbooks for the student; nor are they the prim and sober treatises of dispassionate scholars. This publisher has had the sense to select writers, personal and penetrating in their views, who look upon music as a part of life and on musicians as primarily human. That is an approach which the cultured layman willingly follows. And music is a subject that nowadays suffers much tossing about in general discussion, though it is oftenest speared on the prongs of borrowed opinions. To sharpen them, the reading public has no better whetstones than the books of the fervent "interpreter" and his handy dicta.

Such books have the merit of kindling the imagination and drawing the fire of dissension. There can be no doubt about the conspicuousness of this merit in "The History of Music," written by Mr. Cecil Gray, which forms the latest volume in the monumental "History of Civilization," edited by Mr. Charles Kay Ogden. Mr. Gray's is a book with barbs and bristles, and as such commends itself to everyone who prefers a provocative to a soothing author. Provocation can be stimulating, or just vexatious. It depends on the weight, the skill, and the grace of the argument.

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Mr. Gray set out to write a "History of Music" different from any other, and he succeeded. The success, however, does not go so far as to impress anyone who is slightly familiar with the subject that the difference, in this case, is always synonymous with superiority. It is not the fault of Mr. Gray's pen. His style is lucid, terse, and often brilliant. He can be dangerously persuasive. And the danger is the greater because Mr. Gray, professing to write "for the average, intelligent music-lover," goes about treating the history of music pretty much as he sees fit, and then tells his readers, who have no means of checking his assertions, that for every statement of fact that he makes he can adduce "the opinion of at least one of the most eminent modern authorities."

The uneasiness begins on the first page of Mr. Gray's history, when he throws Gevært, Riemann, and Ambros on the same junk-heap, and tells us that all the studies which these gentlemen have devoted to the music of the ancient Greeks have produced nothing more than "the vaguest idea of what it was actually like." This, in Mr. Gray's opinion, is enough to dismiss the whole question of ancient music and consider it as non-existent. "Our almost complete ignorance" of the music of antiquity, far from being a misfortune, Mr. Gray deems a distinct advantage. Mr. Gray writes: "That the Greeks wholly failed to recognize and appreciate or, more accurately perhaps, chose deliberately to ignore and neglect, the peculiar aptitudes possessed by music as a medium of artistic expression, can be seen in the fact that they regarded it almost exclusively as a mere branch of literature." What on earth does Mr. Gray mean by that? And be it said, parenthetically, that his history would have soon been stumped without that blessed little word "almost." It is likely that the sense of rhythm was more pronounced in the ancient Greeks than their sense of melody was. But why need their melodies have resembled ours? Here, exactly, lies the interpreter's duty and opportunity to retrace, if he can not explain, that strangely belated and variable development of the melodic and harmonic sense—a development unparalleled in any other art—and make a brave guess at its beginnings. For the history of music is really the history of hearing.

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Mr. Gray would have found food for thought in Carl Stumpf's "Die Anfänge der Musik" and Jules Combarieu's "La Musique et la Magie," two books not listed in Mr. Gray's condensed Bibliography which contains many less important works. Since it is in connection with the history of civilization that he is considering the history of music, the part that music played in the Greek state, ritual, games, dances, social life, should not have been without interest. And of these things we have some fairly telling records. Karl Bücher, in his excellent

"Arbeit und Rhythmus," reproduces an ancient Greek terracotta group in the museum of the Louvre, representing four women kneading bread to the sound of a flute. Work-songs accompanied the cutting of corn, the turning of the hand-mill, the pressing of grapes, the spinning and weaving, and numberless other occupations. These were perhaps not artistic expressions, but they are highly significant in the relation of music to civilization. Mr. Gray would have served his readers well had he done no more than glanced through Athenæus (who wrote some eighteen hundred years ago) and quoted his remark that, while formerly "decorum" was carefully attended to in music, "now people meddle with music in a random and inconsiderate manner." And Mr. Gray might have added a quotation from the "Promiscuous Banquets" of Aristoxenus, written some five-hundred years before Athenæus, to the effect that "since music has become entirely ruined and vulgar, we, being but a few, will recall to our minds, sitting by ourselves, what music once was." By such glimpses as these we learn to appreciate better the eternal truth that "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*."

Equally strange is Mr. Gray's approach to Gregorian Chant with which, to his mind, the history of music should begin, and does begin so far as his own book is concerned. The average, intelligent reader is asked to believe that Gregorian Chant was a sort of revelation sent from heaven, that it had no connection with any earlier musical practice, and that "music alone was immediately capable of voicing the innermost truths of Christianity in wholly fitting language." Compared with this alleged feat, all the miracles of the New Testament fade into insignificance.

It would take a longer review than can be attempted here in order to point out all the really sound parts of this book—such as, for instance, the splendid "Outline of Musical Aesthetic" at the end—or to pick up the author every time he slips on the ice of his own cleverness. Mr. Gray stated in the preface to his "Survey of Contemporary Music" that "No doubt it is good to be right, but it is even better to have the courage of one's conviction." In his "History of Music" Mr. Gray is very frequently right, and when he is wrong, his courage, bordering upon temerity, is always magnificent. It is not Mr. Gray's boldness that will disturb the readers of average intelligence. What is it that makes Mr. Gray's very defiance seem so pedantic, what is it that weighs increasingly upon the reader as he passes from chapter to chapter of this remarkable compendium? Perhaps the answer is that, better still than being right or having the courage of one's conviction, is the ability now and then to smile—yes, to smile at one's self, even when engaged in the solemn business of interpreting history.



## Three at Carmel

By MARY AUSTIN  
I

HOW white the beach at Carmel was that day!

Woman white and curving  
round the discarded sapphire-shot, silk dappled  
heap of her garment  
That lisped and lifted, bowed full  
to the wondrous long line of her,  
lapsed and revealed her.  
Behind us the dunes breasted shoreward,  
Moon cusped to the tussocks of tawny pale,  
trumpet shaped minulus  
and apple-hued sea grass.  
Low on the foreshore, Jack London and Sterling\*  
and I together.

Flickered the drift wood fire,  
copper, steel blue, and splints of emerald.  
Voices of women dartled and swerved like swallows  
or poised for our question and answer.  
For one of us was a poet, and one  
New come from the Sea Wolf's adventure,  
And one had walked with the Trues  
in the land of Lost Borders.

If I told what the Trues had said, to Jack London  
Who might just have come ashore there

\* George Sterling committed suicide in the prime of his poetical creativeness.

From the Long Serpent, eyes blue as sea ice,  
bright as the sun blink on the Arctic ledges,  
If Jack believed, or disbelieving, prophesied  
in the name of economic determinism,  
Or if Sterling lifted the face Jack said  
was a Greek coin run over  
by a Roman chariot,  
And demanded of Chaos an answer to man's un-  
searchable pain;  
Who forgets, who remembers, when words are  
merely  
the twang of the string to the spirit's speeding?

Suddenly the bay, smit by the low sun's wheeling  
flanges,  
Burst in green fire, with ash flecked-edges,  
And Sterling unfolding his lean length  
leaped from his clothing  
like a young white scimitar cleaving the breakers  
Crying, The sea, the sea!  
And the rest followed.

## II

I remember the walk through the woods,  
the secret look of the pine boles,  
Warm hollows between live oaks where amber lilies  
float in the wine of light,  
The flower foam at the edge of Sterling's meadow;  
The wind out of Sur with the smell of wild honey  
and yerba buena, answering each to each like  
speech;  
Bursting spray heads over Lobos, torn surges reveal-  
ing  
between gulfs in Time's outer garment,  
timeless sea gardens.  
Oh, ever remembered, the incense smelling, resilient  
cypress boughs where we lay;  
The perpetual flicker of talk, life litten,  
like the flick of the wind and the sun overhead  
in the pines' long needles.

Who that sat by them ever forgets the pitch pine  
fires?  
And Jack London, ringed with admirers  
Proclaiming the Social Revolution?  
Or Sterling, alert and alien as a faun  
who has followed a slim-footed maiden  
home to her village,—  
Whom the gods, for his disaffection, have bound  
to the pure, austere service of Beauty,—  
Between deep quaffs of social indignation, reading  
lines from the Wine of Wizardry  
and the House of Orchids!

## III

How was the time unfaithful  
that they have left us?  
Sterling self slain, not looking backward.  
And Jack, for whom the Revolution  
to which his soul was a candle, proved laggard  
Guttering sootily out in his votive lantern.  
Few there are who remember how we three  
raised the roof of Sterling's cabin  
Till it burgeoned and grew to the Elder Ash Tree  
While all the winged hopes of the world  
preened themselves in its branches.

Would they come back if they could  
to the spacious, work-filled mornings?  
To the meals eaten in friendship,  
Wine, which some undeserving  
quirk of my nature forbade me,  
and love play?  
And for those two the releasing  
high moments of madness.  
For Sterling, who followed the faun's way,  
Had all the wild-creature instinct for his own best-  
ing.  
Knowing his work done, and only Beauty immortal  
He gave himself clean to Beauty;  
Leaped from his garment of flesh  
as that day on the beaches  
naked he went to the sea.  
So beauty received him.

There I shall find him again, where Beauty awaits  
me.  
If ever I walk in Carmel woods, if ever on Lobos,  
I shall hear him shout in the morning surf  
undulant, sapphire sparkled.  
I shall see him run with the warm noon wind  
where the leopard bright herd grass wavers,  
When the winds of Sur go wing and wing to eve-  
ning blueness  
My friend shall come out as a star  
and I shall know him.