

tic-classic difference. Which is why the romantic-classic debate is so sterile. The issue is between the unified and the dismembered universes. It is not a poetic problem though it will probably be solved by a poet. The restoration of man to his position of dignity and responsibility at the center of his world—not at the center of one of the arbitrary worlds of science—must first occur. Once there, once seen again, naked on the hull of a blond planet with the sun over him and the stars behind, there will be no poetic problem left. There will be nothing for the medicine men to do.



In the large square room the bent heads, the heads bowed together, like the heads of people looking for a track through grass, and the voice speaking, stopping, speaking, stopping, running on ahead, waiting, running on ahead. Backward through the mind. The truth lies backward. The truth has been known to Plato—to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—to Professor Pollard reading the notes in the margin of his Jowett. The truth is something-that-has-been-known. Plato and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Professor Pollard have known it. They have been included. Trees grow out of them: flowers open as their hands. The low red autumn sun, heavy and round in the metallic air, descends toward the roof across the court. Professor Pollard faces it through the window. He seems to bow.



Becalmed at dusk by the gray cliffs. On the windless sea the shifting of flat light. The grey gull beats across the cliff face invisible but for the rhythm of his wings. The snoring of porpoises passes in the surge to seaward. And suddenly the land breeze, a draught of hot air bitter with pines. The earth breathing, the earth released from the real sun and alive. The earth alive. The earth is alive at night. . . . It is not true. These are the wooden trees. The touch of metaphor upon the cheek no longer. Pan in a long-tailed derby among the asparagus. Nature, the spayed bitch. We have been into her too deep and too sharp. The magic is out of her and the meaning. The voices that used to speak with authority from brooks and trees, the Voice that with even more authority from a Mountain, the gestures of fleeting goat-form and fleeter thighs signifying at least direction, the half-horse, half-man speaking credibly to man the numb and incredible fact of horse, or half-tree, half-girl performing inwardly the miraculous metabolism of tree into talk, the goddess herself offering between corn-heavy breasts the actual communication with earth—are simply Not. Leaving young men alone with the awkward incommunicativeness of say a hill or an acorn. A long silence broken occasionally by exclamations of surprise.

We have been into her too deep. We have taken the god out of her and only with god in her could she speak to us. God was one like ourselves but having power over nature. Now he is one like ourselves but powerless. Over nature. Over us he has still the power we gave him when we created him to rule both us and her in our behalf; to interpret to our spirits and make reasonable her foreign cruelties and to give material fulfilment to our ghostly wills. Like an aged and impotent king whom habit still obeys he rules us. His commands, now secret whispered, though powerless beyond, still trouble us. Our egos, like the egos of conspirators, are exalted by this perpetual listening within. And our wills are defeated because the weight of the defeated will is on them. We hug our spiritual essences and remind ourselves that we are not in nature. We are not only flesh. We have our destinies. No man knows what.



Alone and without interpreters before the opaque and resolute otherwise of hardened earth, of walls, of doors, of heavens, dig out in words, in paint, in marble its impenetrable. Force up the living marble into the possibility of knowledge. Here on the blank white page the meaning. The rustling flight of crows at dusk from the fish-rotten beaches. The hickory leaves, shrivelled at the edge, brown at the tip, curling into dried shells, and the coarse dusty green leaves of the wild sunflower on the bluff. The south door of the cathedral at Bruges opening to the body of the dead woman; the wall of time. The rearrangement of the furniture in the room making possible. . . . Bayonne, the wet leaf smell, the wet bark smell, the barges. The negroes undressing with their white wives under the fig tree on the beach. Meaning. . . .

The shaped stone: nevertheless and equally impenetrable.

The whole law of human thinking is the necessity of believing that of the universe which will make consciousness supportable. Consciousness in an unconscious universe, ignorant of man, obscurely and inanimately logical, consciousness in a universe over which consciousness has no possible control, is the unendurable tragedy. Death, meaning the destruction of consciousness without cure or consolation is not to be borne. Because he must, therefore, man has believed that the universe was made for him, spirit, by a god mindful of him, or he has believed that the universe was controlled by gods like himself and with whom he could deal, or he has believed that he himself by spells and magic could control the universe. It is not shameful that men have believed these things. Without them we are three dimensional beings in a world of two, invisible to it and yet subject to it, the third dimension only serving to give us a sense of our fate. And those beliefs are no longer possible because, though we still need to believe them, the intelligence with which we believe is not the slave of the need but of those phenomena which appeal to the intelligence and these are now incompatible with such faith. We now perceive, in spite of ourselves, that the external universe exists independently of our consciousness and that between it and consciousness there is no more possibility of communication than between a granite block and the square root of three. There remains to us our emotional conviction that the universe is real. And we attempt to enter it again with our minds, with our bodies, by representations of it in art—we, the intelligent, the forever exiled, who have made our lives outside of life.



The conquest of the cosmos by Science. But it is no lordship. It gives mankind no position of honor. It is no more a conquest than the collection of rain is a conquest of rain. It is a finding out How. You learn what you can do with electricity. A monkey learns what it can do with a nut.

The great modern sickness of boredom has its roots there. We do not wish to be kings. We wish to know How. And we know. And we are bored. To death.



There was one day. . . . There was a perfectly clear day of off-shore wind and the water was clean and shadowless and ice green and the thumbsmudges of wind were blue over green going seaward and the wind was seaward and the sounds of the railroad yard and the yelping of dogs and her voice singing that thing of Stravinsky's blew out to sea and far out on the sea the shoulders of the little waves were running backward up the slope of the sea with half hidden vanishing white flanges and there was a white butterfly falling against the green sea and the sun was behind the house and the wind was behind the house and her voice came out through the open window clear as green water, flowing like the loops of light on the ribbed sand in the shallows, fading out like the seaward wind on the sea, leaving the clear green silence. There was that day.



Nevertheless we shall return. . . .

Entering at night upon an almost windless sea that harbor in the Mediterranean, shadowing in across the long slippery reflections of the quay-side lights, the sound of the accordions moving over the water and the long tenor voices from the *Place* under the plane trees—the anchor falling with a throb of chain through the deep water. . . .

## Things That Are Past—

(Continued from preceding page)

imagination is released again to ask, "Cui Bono?" or "What is a man gained; if he shall gain the whole world—?" and all the other penetrating questions which the search for love, beauty, and happiness will always arouse. A great literature can never be founded upon discontent, but that is often its first itch and tweak. We shall probably get Great Books when thought has an evident greatness in proportion to things being done, when it sharply differs (as in the late eighteenth century) from things being done, and thus becomes not a public utility, but, in the words of earlier dreamers who felt that they were dealing in greatness, an evening and a morning star.

This is emphatically not true now of the thought stuff of our literature, and that is why it does not possess, no matter what may be its other merits, either Magnificence or Magnitude.

## Keeping Up with Civilization

BOOKS AS WINDOWS. By MAY LAMBERTON BECKER. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1929. \$2.

MOROCCO BOUND: Adrift among Books. By EDWIN VALENTINE MITCHELL. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1929. \$2.50.

ONCE AND FOR ALL. Selected by David McCORD. New York: Coward-McCann. 1929. \$3.

THE POET AND THE LUNATICS: Episodes in the Life of Gabriel Gale. By G. K. CHESTERTON. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY

TIME was, when it was generally understood the likeliest way to get lost and swallowed up by darkness was to venture beyond the frontiers of civilization. In these days most mortals are sore beset by the difficulties of keeping up with civilization. Constant is the danger of getting lost from civilized view, and swallowed up in utter darkness as to what is actively going on, even while, say, taking a course of six lessons in typography in order to look with respectable intelligence at the type faces employed in a modern newspaper. Such a prodigious lot comes up in the meantime. Various devices are being got up all the while by which the ardent but bewildered may subscribe to civilization, in this aspect or that, as it flies. These multitudinous phenomena are very probably a necessary part of the cultural steering gear of our complicated time. Nowadays, even book collectors (as a bookseller, later to be mentioned, notes) read; and even the reader erstwhile famous for having a book now collects another one. In the intellectual welter, as every study club knows, the devil takes the hindmost.

May Lamberton Becker, it need hardly be remarked in these columns, has been one of the most valuable pieces of cultural steering gear of our period—this whirligig of transition and concepts changing on you while you lunch. It has, I happen to know, mystified and exasperated publishers' scouts that, happy in her fealty to her thousands of debtors by mail and word of mouth, she has cared so little to be a book author. The present volume gives a very fair indication of the professional equipment that has established her as the Mr. Foster of contemporary literature. Further, "Books as Windows" distinctly possesses the quality of engaging reading; abounding in the happy line, it holds the comfortable tone of as between one reader and another. And, touched throughout with simple anecdote and the warmth of personal living, it is steeped in human wisdom as well as literary values.

When Mrs. Becker thinks of a book she thinks of what is technically termed a "reading copy"; her own book, very properly, is unembellished by illustrations of "association" interest; her shingle takes no note of "parchments"; and it would be startling to come upon her in a literary pub. To the author of "Morocco Bound" a book is not so much a window as it is an aroma. In his pre-bookshop days practicing law, in 1920 Edwin Valentine Mitchell with two hundred dollars in the bank went professional bookman and revived the civilizing influence of Hartford, once the publishing center of the United States. With wholesome bite as to book-lover sentimentality, with a captivating flair for the droll, and a fetching urbanity, he tells his story as a publisher, editor, and dealer, in one of the most colorful discourses on the book world that I have come upon since I became a book-clerk sometime following upon the close of the Civil War.

I knew a man who when asked what he'd like for dinner answered, "Something delicate and lots of it." So, recently, it seems to be with popular taste and the caviar of Letters—the Essay. The latest of the now innumerable anthologies in this field (if another doesn't appear before this piece) is a decidedly unusual looking volume of the sort. Springing away from the customary schoolbook effect, "Once and For All" has a refreshingly large and easy air. David McCord exercises a very inviting turn of mind in his selection and in his own introductory essay.

Mr. Chesterton, certainly, is among the essayists. When, however, he plays upon the currently fashionable crime horn he pretends that he writes detective stories. "The Poet and the Lunatics" presents the paradox of all his novels—very poor novels but delightful books. These new tales are very bad detective stories but make a very good book.



## Goat's Head on a Martyr

IDOLS BEHIND ALTARS. By ANITE BRENNER. New York: Payson & Clarke. 1929. \$5.

Reviewed by CARLETON BEALS

THE solar plexus of Miss Anita Brenner's interpretation of Mexico is art. She punches this central theme with right good gusto and with such expert intelligence that she sends out quivers into the very extremities of the Mexican body social. One may not agree that esthetics comprises the major nerve center of Mexican conduct, thought, and achievement; but fortunately theory has not dimmed Miss Brenner's alertness, and her blows rather serve to galvanize the whole Mexican subject into vital action. Indeed her concept of Mexican art is as broad as Mexican life itself. It is Mexican life, poetically described. But this amplification imposes equally broad obligations. These have not been shirked in "Idols behind Altars," though they have not all been solved.

One suspects that in choosing her esthetic approach at the expense of economic, political, and social considerations, Miss Brenner is pleasantly indulging herself in that trait of Mexican *vacilada*, or flirtatious inconsistency, which she describes so aptly, and which makes at times rather jumpy connections between her major beloved nerve center and the more prosaic liver, intestines, and kidneys of the Mexican subject. She defines *vacilada* as "caricature without a moral," "a boiling down of cosmic frustration," "a goat's head on a martyr." It is further described as "a mestizo mask, fusion of bland Indian iron and Spanish picaresque baroqued by a fantastic history to irresponsibility."

Her title, "Idols behind Altars," is in itself of a piece with this *vacilada*. Both "idols" and "altars" are, with Miss Brenner, not religious or sociological symbols, but thus placed in significant and incisive juxtaposition, are a repetition of her major motif—art shot through with bizarre caricature. Ostensibly she is justified in her approach because the capstone of the book is the last third, dealing with the modern Mexican art movement. The first two thirds deal with the general Mexican scene, redefined in terms of esthetics. Thus Miss Brenner is no sterile art critic. She has utilized the only possible interpretation of the modern art movement consistent with its own manifestation—she has interwoven it with the very blood and sinew and soul of Mexico itself. The artists themselves have considered their labors to be one mighty piston of the fighting machine of social regeneration which has so plowed up the soil of Mexico during the past decade and a half.



To many readers, doubtless, the earlier portions of Miss Brenner's admirable book will seem confusing. There is a deal of joyous regurgitating of undigested reading; there are many old and futile generalizations brilliantly and startlingly restated; the style is breathless, like Queen Mab, "edged with intolerable radiance"; there are not enough platforms for rest and resurvey of the grandiose panorama. Yet for the average reader confusion will result less from these praiseworthy faults than from Miss Brenner's refusal to grapple her victim in a final decisive clinch. Her refusal is voluntary, true to her Mexican material and to the esthetic criterion she has set up. As D. H. Lawrence pointed out in his book of essays on Mexico, the white man hews out his thinking in straight lines against the will of the world; the Indian's thinking curves itself to the more complex spirals of nature. Lawrence's idea is perhaps just a poetical apperception of one aspect of the "Primitive Mind" grappled with scientifically by Professor Boas. Certainly the Indian demands no rigid system of beliefs, only tabus. If he ventures into the realm of metaphysics, the completed edifice promptly shifts to a poetic symbol rather than final truth. His world, inevitably, remains adventurous with chance, as should the world of any intelligent polytheist and animist. Miss Brenner, avoiding Lawrence's super-tourist awe of the Indian as a remote, incomprehensible being, avoids the other pitfall of attempting to wind him up in the shroud of white man's logic. Rather, she attempts to reduplicate, in a sophisticated fashion, his own mental processes. Thus, to the confusion of Nordic logicians, she has adopted the *symbol*; but being well-grounded in anthropology, she has not permitted her poetry to become untruthful.

Miss Brenner's record of modern Mexican painting is exceedingly valuable; it turns over a little-tilled field. Only a few scattered articles and chap-

ters, a few specialized brochures, have preceded her. Her account of the Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors and of the various painters is a record which the world will someday thank her for having preserved. She is the Vasari of the modern Mexican school and quite as delightful as Vasari. No pedantic art criticisms here, but precious vignettes of the local scene. Her criticism is an admirable fusion of personal anecdote, critical insight, social comprehension. It is true she apportions her favors in accordance with some special dispensation of *ex cathedra* mysticism of which lesser critical mortals know nought of the rites. Thus her space emphasis irritates. Goitia is given more pages than the majestic Diego Rivera. Goitia, after all, is outside the main current. He is an ivory-tower painter, even though his ivory tower be an Indian hut smelly with pigs and clattering with chickens who let white guana fall on his canvasses. After all Don Diego is the only arduous survivor of the group. He has proceeded with ground-quaking tread from his monumental frescoes in Chapingo, the Preparatory



ONE OF THE WOODCUTS IN "GODS' MAN"

School, and his double-patio, three-gallery world of the Secretariat of Education, to his present grandiose panoramas in the Department of Health Building and the National Palace. No painter, past or modern, has had any more epic scope and opportunity than Diego, not even Michael Angelo and Rafael in the Sistine Chapel, or Gozzoli in the Pisan Campo Santo, or Giotto in Santa Croce. And Diego Rivera is the only mural painter in Mexico who not only has reached epic power, but who has organically and satisfactorily solved the relationship between the fresco and his architectural boundaries. Miss Brenner's treatment of Diego, though good, nevertheless, to me, seems inadequate. And she has given too much importance to Jean Charlot and not enough to Mérida. She penetrates José Clemente Orozco best of all. Personally, in spite of her ability—so much greater than Lawrence's—to get at the root of indigenous life in her earlier chapters, I wish that she might have compressed them for the benefit of the third part. We should have known more about Abraham Angel, that nineteen year old rustic Giorgione, and his ethereal simplicity; more of Revueltas and of the boy Paecheco. Yet all in all, this book is a glorious record of a glorious decade in the history of the world's great painting.

Perhaps it is too much to have expected Miss Brenner to have given a picture of the twilight that has now descended. One dislikes to puncture her optimism. But the major painters have been scattered by the violence of Mexican life—into politics, into exile, into the oblivion demanded by local intrigue. Rivera, because he is a master intriguer, a Renaissance poisoner of lesser reputations, as well as a Renaissance buccaneer painter, alone survives to mount the Palace staircase in the flame of his color. The tidal wave of Indianism, of nationalism, of self-seeking individuality, has receded. Industrialized order reaches steel fists over the Rio Grande. Mr. Morrow becomes the real president of the land. Mexico no longer stands as a beacon

for Latin America; it no longer harbors the spiritual and moral dissidents of a continent and a half as Miss Brenner describes in her final chapter. The upthrust of the racial-economic revolution has ended, and with it the valiant deeds of its painter-fighters. Miss Brenner has left us an invaluable historical record of the *primitivi* of the Mexican Renaissance—or is it just a Risorgimento? She has told us of the local Giotto's, the Cimabues, the Buoninsegni, the Lorenzos of contemporary Mexican art. But that movement, for the moment, has been dammed. The future has been aborted. Two things must happen before Mexican painting can reach full maturity. The Czardom of Diego Rivera will have to sink into historical perspective, permitting new tendencies, of which Toomayo is one expression; and Mexico once more will have to rise up against the foreign invasion and rediscover its soul.

However this may be, Miss Brenner's book is a brave searching for some of the best truth of Mexican life, by one who has lived pulse to pulse with Mexico and Mexicans; and her picture of the world to the south of us drives home the unpleasant knowledge that the despised Mexican, in spite of his poverty and backwardness, has found more of life's inner meaning than perhaps we monarchs of the world's prosperity and progress. It is a book that must make us re-examine all of our most cherished credos.

## A Novel in Woodcuts

GODS' MAN, a Novel in Wood Cuts. By LYNND WARD. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1929. \$3.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER

PICTURES in narrative series without reinforcement of text are of course no novelty, but the appeal has been to a familiar subject matter. Here we have a distinct novelty, an original novel told in about one-hundred-and-twenty woodcuts without the aid of words, and not merely told but told with strength and eloquence. The story itself runs a poetical, sometimes melodramatic course with implications of allegory. The themes are well chosen for graphic suggestion. We follow the fate of a young artist through grimmest disillusionment, through temporary solace of love and work to a death hastened by the Fiend, who ironically is presented as the artist's protector against a mocking or hostile world and as the source of his inspiration. The romantic themes proper to such a fable are handled with great power and with unflinching picturesqueness. Workmanship and interpretation are extraordinarily sustained. Plate after plate is a joy for resonant relations of black and white, for superb structural line, and for emotional appeal. Everything is quite first rate, and the book must be read in woodcuts, and doubtless will be widely read.

There should be no quarrel with the old-fashioned, elementary simplicity of the plot. Perhaps the author has learned from the old chapbooks, that it is only these elementary motives that go well into pictures. Greatest are the tragic or sardonic cuts. Indeed some tragic sense of life inspires the whole creation, but there are also delicious idyllic episodes, superb assertions of the greatness of sea, sky, and mountains while the sheer decorative beauty of many cuts recall the perfections of old black and gold lacquer. Incidentally the book is a final refutation of the happily waning delusion that a literary subject matter is detrimental to the artist. It is merely detrimental to a poor artist who lacks the intelligence to cope with such themes on pictorial terms. In designing his wordless novel Mr. Lynd evinces with sensitive intelligence rare emotional power and naturally and entirely flexible and responsive technique. This is an *editio princeps* for an entire category, and collectors will be wise to take it in while the taking is good.

Orlo Williams, writing to *John o'London's Weekly* of the Bagutta Prize says: "Literary prizes, of the type of our Hawthornden prize, are a very recent innovation in Italy. The 'Premio Bagutta' has recently been awarded for the second time. It is worth 5,000 lire, and its award causes the intensest excitement in the literary world of Italy; also, it has this distinction, that it was instituted, and is awarded, in a pothouse." The prize this year has been awarded to Giovanni Comisso for his "Gente di Mare," a description of the author's voyages on board a Chioggian coasting vessel, which plied between the Italian and Dalmatian coasts.