

## The Dr. Riggs of His Day

WEIR MITCHELL: His Life and Letters. By ANNA ROBESON BURR. New York: Duffield & Company. 1929. \$6.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL

**M**R. WEIR MITCHELL'S life as he lived it, and as Mrs. Burr tells the story, was one long series of triumphs. Many greater men than he have not received the recognition that was their due until after death. But with him, from the beginning, it was success all the way. Scarcely an honor that can fall to a physician passed him by. Universities and medical academies vied with each other in crowning him with laurels. Honorary degrees and appointments came from Harvard, Edinburgh, Bologna, Rome, Johns Hopkins, Berlin—but one cannot name them all, Mrs. Burr's list fills almost five pages. Distinguished physicians, from Oliver Wendell Holmes to Sir William Osler and Dr. W. W. Keen, were rivals in their praise of him. His famous "rest cure" was supposed to have revolutionized the treatment of nervous disease.

More amazing was his fame among his contemporaries as writer,—as novelist and poet both. Mrs. Burr notes the growth of his self-esteem and says that by late in middle-life his vanity was colossal. "Who can blame a man for self-conceit," she asks, "when critics so lost their heads as to assure him that 'Hugh Wynne' far surpassed 'Esmond,' that 'François' gave a far better idea of the French Revolution than 'A Tale of Two Cities,' or that his 'Ode to a Lycian Tomb' was finer than 'Lycidas'?" Aldrich went so far as to write him that there were but two great American novels: "The Scarlet Letter" and "Hugh Wynne," "the long, slow, stiff novel," to quote his biographer.

Hardly less extravagant was the tribute to his charm as a man that won him such correspondents as George Meredith, Henry James, Andrew Lang, Phillips Brooks, Charles Eliot Norton, among many others. Nor could there be question of his claim as "decidedly a South of Market Street person," the greatest distinction to which a Philadelphian can aspire. To the certainty of genius that John Hay found in "Hugh Wynne," he added "the reserve of a gentleman," and Dr. Mitchell's comment was "that last did please me." There was not a touch of snobbishness in this pleasure. The "South of Market Street" Philadelphian is too sure of his position to be a snob.

It must be admitted that time has dimmed the glory of his greatness. His medical discoveries and methods do not seem of quite such surpassing importance today as they did yesterday. This may be because, as Mrs. Burr suggests, in his, "more than any other type of practice, the personal handling was the whole matter." More probably, because women now have such a multitude of occupations that less leisure is left them for rest cures. Even in Philadelphia, during his lifetime, sceptics here and there whispered that "Dr. Mitchell's cure" was with many women in that sacred section South of Market Street a symbolic social rite, like going to the Assembly and the Dancing Class. It marked the patient as one of the elect, one of the chosen Philadelphians. Dr. Mitchell's literary laurels, too, are somewhat tarnished. "Esmond" and "Lycidas" still hold their own, have not been overshadowed by the masterpieces of the popular Philadelphia doctor. The critics of the present generation could manage to read "Hugh Wynne" and not lose all sense of proportion in the reading. Altogether, it seems as if Dr. Mitchell is apt to be best remembered as a man of strong and alluring and amusing personality, a type of that fine old Philadelphian who is rapidly disappearing with so much else that gave Philadelphia its character.

Fortunately, Mrs. Burr belongs and therefore understands. Also, she makes the reader whose misfortune it is not to belong understand with her. In her pages we see Dr. Mitchell as she describes him, tall, handsome, blue-eyed, admirably dressed, fastidious as to gloves and handkerchiefs and neckties, with a pleasant fancy for cologne: a brilliant talker; the centre of Philadelphia's intellectual set, conspicuous at "Wistar Parties" and the Franklin Inn; married into the Cadwallader family; a famous diner-out, enjoying a good dinner, good champagne, a good cigar to the very last, and he lived to be within a month of his eighty-fifth birthday.

It is curious that so typical a Philadelphian should have belonged to the first generation of his family born there, his father having come to the Quaker

city from Scotland by way of Virginia. The older Dr. Mitchell is introduced to us by Mrs. Burr when he was "a tall, ruddy young gentleman, with an open, blue gaze and most engaging manners," attracting the attention and approval of Sir Walter Scott by his kindness to a young mother and baby in a stage coach traveling between Ayr and Edinburgh. The son had the advantage of being brought up in the old Philadelphia where Penn's traditions still lingered—the old Philadelphia where roses and honeysuckle and lilacs bloomed in pleasant "back yards," where humming birds flitted from flower to flower, where the watchman called the hours through the night and the cry of the hominy man was heard through the day; the Philadelphia unswerving in its faith that Cadwalladers, Biddles, and Whartons were the salt of the earth; the Philadelphia of the fine old Madeira that was Dr. Mitchell's inspiration for perhaps the best book he ever wrote—"A Madeira Party"; the Philadelphia where dining was the supreme pleasure, a cherished ceremony, the evening's reward for the morning's business.

To the Philadelphian who writes this appreciation the most vivid memory of Dr. Mitchell is of the diner-out in his old age, shaking with the nervous trouble that overtook him in his later years, but eating his terrapin with unabated appetite, drinking his champagne with unabated thirst, and, at the end of dinner as at the beginning, talking with an eloquence and humor that not the youngest of the party could rival. His achievements in literature and medicine may never again be rated as high as he rated them through, not undue conceit, but the self-confidence that helps a man to perform to the best of his ability whatever tasks life may bring him. He was a devoted son, a more than generous brother, a loyal husband and father, a kindly patron to the young who deserved his patronage. But he had the wisdom to get for himself in this world the greatest gifts it holds in store for any man—hard work and a capacity for pleasure. It is to Mrs. Burr's credit that, fairly overwhelmed with the facts of his career, she has yet succeeded in giving a faithful portrait of the man who was a striking, outstanding figure in his day, a true Philadelphian of the old school.

## On the Horizon

THE NEW AMERICAN CARAVAN. Edited by ALFRED KREYMBORG, LEWIS MUMFORD, and PAUL ROSENFELD. New York: The Macaulay Company. 1929. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HORACE COON

**T**HE first of the "American Caravans" was a colorful explosion, the fireworks promised much; the second was a less brilliant rocket of much the same tone throughout; and now the third appears, a mildly exciting pinwheel, not without force and momentum, but restricted to a narrow radius and illuminating for only a moment one corner of the native scene. It is a relief to discover, for one thing, that the hard-boiled fad is passing. Nothing of the Hemingway school is to be found in this volume; the editors have had the foresight to deflect its movement toward other goals. They have uncovered this year nothing sensational. What one finds instead is sincere, self-critical writing, wrought out of sweat and whipped-up nerves; the concentration is all upon varying and individual conceptions of what constitutes first-rate prose and poetry. No vital struggle is evident to say something; in fact the reader is likely to suspect that these writers have amazingly little to say; the struggle is to say it perfectly.

There are no fresh explorations of character, no experimental investigations of the modern consciousness, no revolutionary visions of life, no loud, authentic voice of unquestionable genius. Rather it is competence within the narrow circle of sex and self. These themes apparently furnish the most profound experiences, but to revolve around such obsessions, while it may result in expert expression, only tells us the familiar conclusions once again. The final impression, particularly from the short stories, is of a mass of neurotic writing, torn from goaded and lacerated nerves rather than from any normal functioning of the creative process.

From the newcomers the two most moving stories are Pearl A. Sherry's "Intact" and Joseph Mitchell's "Cool Swamp and Field Woman." The first is an essentially feminine mood realized with admirable success; the second is a masculine attitude which is communicated with a Sherwood Anderson flavor,

but with greater intensity, especially in the sense-impressions. "York Beach," by Jean Toomer, is a stiff, dull record of a hypersensitive writer who thinks like a philosophical sophomore. "Cataract," by S. Guy Endore, is lush and torrential, "Gild Your Enemy!" by Gerald Sykes, is a Dostoevsky phantasy about a nasty little boy; Joseph Vogel contributes a delightfully satiric picture of a Jewish wedding; E. E. Cummings offers some of his irresistible, if you like it, nonsense, and Robert Cantwell presents a technically interesting analysis of an emotion. The novel, "The Obelisk," is a brief autobiographic repetition of a sensitive boy growing up and going to Harvard. The childhood scenes have even more vividness and authenticity than such narratives usually possess.

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The chaos and hysteria implicit in the other writing breaks out violently in the verse. Phelps Putnam's rhapsody in spite of minor stumblings has the march of true poetry, Marjorie Allen Seiffert's ballad is amusing, Clarence E. Cason has some ingenious verse; Evelyn Scott, who writes a poetical prose, gives us some of her prosaic poems. Isidor Schneider, Stanley J. Kunitz, Helen Pearce, and Leon Sraiban Herald show us more and perhaps too much of the work with which their followers have been familiar, while John Gould Fletcher and David Carter send some excellent selections.

No more devastating criticism of the poetry in this "Caravan" could be made than to apply to it the standards set up by Yvor Winters in the fragment of his essay on "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit through the Poetry Mainly French and American since Poe and Baudelaire." This, in its complete form, may well become a valuable contribution to contemporary criticism. "The true function of the poet," he says, "is to organize the facts of life into a new and more dynamic synthesis." Of Archibald MacLeish he remarks, "it is criminal for genius to be needlessly unintelligent," and to Eugene Jolas he offers the alternative: "the abandonment of his doctrine or the suicide of a gentleman." He also makes apt criticism of T. S. Eliot. Mr. Winters has done some energetic thinking and vigorous writing, yet it may be still doubted whether hard thinking will lead inevitably to better poetry.

Imaginative literature finally comes into its own with the last contribution in the volume. The Paul Green play, "Tread the Green Grass," justifies the whole "Caravan." In bringing forth such works the publishers deserve the support of all who are optimistic about American culture, for here is a drama of religious lunacy which, whether it can be staged in this form or not, adds indisputable evidence that there is in our land an abundance of themes and a plethora of material to furnish the sort of creation for which we have long been waiting. As a piece of writing it is magnificent.

The "Caravan" this year is shorter and more compact than before. There still exists no market for the artistic short story in America. It is fated either to mechanization or futility. While the "Caravan" exists we can feel comforted that here is a place where the unconventional, serious, idealistic writer can find a voice. Blurbs should not permit us to expect a new crop of full-grown geniuses every season. Appearance in this annual gives confidence to young writers to go on and work hard, and every year some publisher gains from it the courage to accept one more novel or book of poems.

The *Saturday Review Co.* takes pleasure in announcing the election of Mr. John Corbin as a director of the company, to succeed the late Jesse Lynch Williams. Mr. Corbin has had a long and distinguished editorial and literary career. He has been assistant editor of *Harper's Magazine*, and later dramatic critic and editorial writer for the *New York Times*, dramatic critic for the *New York Sun*, and literary manager of *The New Theatre*. He is the author of many books and has just completed a volume on the life and times of George Washington.

The directors of the *Saturday Review Co.* are:

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## A Galsworthy Trilogy

A MODERN COMEDY. By JOHN GALSWORTHY. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOMER E. WOODBRIDGE  
Wesleyan University

WHEN a distinguished author republishes a series of three novels in a single volume, he challenges certain questions. Do the stories bear rereading, and do they gain or lose by being read continuously? When the trilogy is itself a sequel to an early trilogy, comparisons are inevitable. Is "A Modern Comedy" as good as "The Forsyte Saga"? It is a reviewer's first business to attempt answering such questions. "The White Monkey," "The Silver Spoon," and "Swan Song" are eminently rereadable, and they gain immensely by continuous reading; each perhaps a little fragmentary in itself, they fall into their places as parts of the larger and more impressive structure. In some respects "A Modern Comedy" is inferior to "The Forsyte Saga"; it is much less rich in varied and vivid types of character; it is less successful as the portrait of an age. The nineteen-twenties are too close to us for such a portrait; perspective is impossible. But in other ways "A Modern Comedy" has the advantage of its predecessor. It has a more organic unity, a clearer and more symmetrical plan, dominated by one great figure as tragic finally as Père Goriot,—the figure of Soames Forsyte.

This last seems to have come about contrary to Mr. Galsworthy's intention.

This "Modern Comedy" (he says in his preface) "is staged against a background of that more or less fixed quantity, Soames, and his co-father-in-law, light weight and ninth baronet Sir Lawrence Mont, with such subsidiary neo-Victorians as the self-righteous Mr. Danby, Elderson, Mr. Blythe, Sir James Foskinson, Wilfred Bentworth, and Hilary Charwell. Pooling their idiosyncrasies, qualities, and mental attitudes, one gets a fairly comprehensive and steady past against which to limn the features of the present,—Fleur and Michael, Wilfrid Desert, Aubrey Greene, Marjorie Ferrar, Norah Cufew, Jon, the Rafaelite and other minor characters.

If this represents Mr. Galsworthy's main purpose, he must be said to have failed. In the first place, this group of young people is not fairly representative of the present, as the older Forsytes are representative of the late Victorian era. They are the gilded fringe of the present, not its warp and woof. To show us the present as he showed us the 'eighties and 'nineties in "The Forsyte Saga," Mr. Galsworthy would have had to take a group of people who are still rising in the social scale through contributing something to the solid work of the world. These dabblers in the arts and in love-making are only trying to escape boredom; they are, in the main, such a group as may be found in any period among those who have too much money, too little character, and nothing to do. There are probably more of them today than in the last years of Victoria's reign, but except individually they have no more real significance now than then. In the second place, as individuals they are not profoundly interesting. Only two of them, Fleur and Michael, are characterized with any fulness, from the inside; the others are seen clearly but more or less superficially. Michael is modern and charming, and admirably drawn, but like his father he is rather a light weight. Fleur is even more fully revealed to us; we know her inside and out, but we are not quite sure that she is worth knowing so well (she has now played a prominent part in four novels). Her character, modern only on the surface, is essentially very simple; she is the spoiled girl, moderately clever, entirely self-centered, and strongly possessive, who has married the wrong man and is trying in a variety of ways to make it up to herself. She is not big enough or complex enough to be deeply interesting.

But if Mr. Galsworthy has failed to accomplish what he says he attempted, he has succeeded remarkably in doing something else. Soames Forsyte, coming out of the background where his author intended to place him, runs away with the story and saves it, somewhat as Shylock saves "The Merchant of Venice." When the reader begins to weary of Fleur and her transparent trickery, and of that cheerful and ineffectual angel, Michael, Soames has only to enter,—whether to buy a picture of an impoverished nobleman, to match his wits against a rascally dead-beat, or merely to pay a visit to his baby grandson—and reality enters with him; instantly our interest revives. The evolution of Soames through the six Forsyte novels is worth

recalling. He was originally cast for the part of the villain, and plays it in "The Man of Property." He there stands for what his author most cordially detests,—the possessive instinct, unmitigated by any imaginative understanding of others. In the second and third novels of the Saga, he gains, bit by bit, Mr. Galsworthy's grudging sympathy; partly by his tenacity, partly by his practical shrewdness, partly by his refusal to surrender to the bitterness of his disappointment in his first marriage, partly by his complete absorption in his only child, Fleur.

It is this last which in "A Modern Comedy" redeems him from his narrower self; through his long and constant watching over Fleur, his intense and passionate need of understanding her, he achieves finally an insight, an imaginative sympathy, which enable him to foresee her every decision. He understands, though he will never quite admit them to himself, her shallowness and egotism, the hopelessness of expecting from her any adequate return of his love. Here as in his marriage he is thwarted, but again he never surrenders. Without an instant's hesitation he gives his life to save her from a result of her own folly, and thus, at least temporarily, succeeds in conveying to her a sense of something real



Cover design for "Hudson River Bracketed."

outside of her own desires. His final brief dialogue with her is the most poignant scene in Mr. Galsworthy's novels, thrusting to the heart like Lear's last scene with Cordelia. The evolution of the villain into the tragic hero is complete. And yet Soames is never whitewashed or sentimentalized; he remains the careful, shrewd, possessive, Victorian man of affairs. Mr. Galsworthy's original dislike of him has happily saved him from idealization. He will remain one of the most memorable characters in modern fiction. What a fool, the reader reflects, was Irene not to see that in Soames she had a man worth a dozen flimsy Bosinneys or spineless young Jolyons!

If Mr. Galsworthy had written nothing else, the six Forsyte novels would insure him a permanent position among English novelists. The two trilogies dealing with the fortunes of one family, and presenting, with whatever imperfections, the pictures of the end of one era and the beginning of the next, are a unique achievement. In "A Modern Comedy" as in "The Forsyte Saga" Mr. Galsworthy has shown us his characters against a rich background of English life,—Parliament, the law courts, business, sport, philanthropy, art, unemployment, the general strike, the post-war sufferings of the poor. The only class which is unrepresented, or very inadequately represented, in his gallery is the lower middle class, which he knows least about. If he has not interested us very deeply in Fleur and her lovers, he has recreated their setting with extraordinary completeness and vividness. He has given us a chance to meet again among his minor characters such delightful acquaintances as Holly and Val Dartie and June Forsyte, and has introduced us to such a variety of new people as Wilfred Benworth, Marjorie Ferrar, Hilary Charwell, and Victorine Bicket. But it is not the brilliance and variety of these portraits that will draw us back to his book; it is that least showy and attractive of the Forsytes, Soames, the villain, who has proved so strong that, against the will of his somewhat puzzled creator (Mr. Galsworthy admits in his preface that he "knows not precisely what Soames stands for") he has become the hero of the cycle.

The best seller of the season in Italy is "Alberto Moravia's novel, "Gli Indifferenti," a first novel of unusual power. The action of the story takes place in a span of three days.

## In the Willow Pattern

HUDSON RIVER BRACKETED. By EDITH WHARTON. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CATHERINE GILBERTSON

INTO her first complete study of a writer and a writer's background and problems, Mrs. Wharton has gathered up enough of what Mr. Percy Lubbock called "the adventure of her rare and distinguished critical intelligence," to give it, intellectually at least, the flavor of autobiography—delectable for genuine lovers of her work, despite the fact that its very fulness robs it of something of the clear-cut definiteness of design that has distinguished the rest.

"Hudson River Bracketed" is the architectural style of "The Willows," an old house on the Hudson, "impregnated with memories, . . . thick with tangible tokens of the past." To young Vance Weston, whose "own recollections could only travel back through a succession of new houses, . . . all without any traces of accumulated living and dying," it is not only a revelation of his own poverty of spiritual background, but also a soil in which his mind may strike root "deep down in accumulated layers of experience." Through its influence—its treasure of books, its vista of generations of gracious living—the boy, who, at nineteen, has invented a new religion, at twenty-four, is moved to exclaim to his grandmother that "the greatest proof of the validity of a religion is its age, its duration. . . . Who wants a new religion, when the old one is there, so little exhausted or even understood, in all its age-long beauty?"

This young writer, "the raw product of a middle-western town, . . . trying to tell the world about things he isn't really familiar with," and his heart-breaking child wife, married in romantic heedlessness, and "Halo," sympathetic friend—symbol, like "The Willows" which is hers, of the quiet wisdom, the emotional control, the ordered beauty, of a well-treasured inheritance from the past—, are all near and dear to Mrs. Wharton. Indeed, nothing more comprehending, more compassionately just, has come from her pen than her account of the struggle of the soul of Vance Weston to use its wings; its brief Icarian flights, its cry for freedom, its hunger for warm, human understanding, its passionate need of a sustaining faith.

Frank commercialism that would tie him up to real estate, is against him; and a more insidious commercialism in the world of letters, that would turn him into a clerk. Poverty and Laura Lou cut him off from leisure and the more gracious living that charms his imagination and draws his senses. The age in which he lives, "this after-war welter, with its new recipe for immortality every morning," has shaken his faith in himself. But these are trifles compared with his own sense of inner destitution. Not ignorance of books merely, but "the meagerness of his inherited experience, the way it has been torn off violently from everything which has gone before, strikes him with a pang of impoverishment." Like Lily Bart and Ralph Marvell and the little Wheelers, if in a different way, he is a victim of the national love of tearing up roots, forsaking "the old house stored with memories," moving on, getting ahead,—of what, or where, or why, few know or care.

His artistic salvation, however, lies in the very realization that ignorance of the past accounts for the sense of unrelatedness in the present; that insensibility to those mysterious forces continually at work beneath the appearance of things, is responsible for the shallow brilliance, the merely superficial accuracy of our literary photography; that there can be no great books unless writers have felt "the beauty of continuity in the spiritual world," have heard "that footfall of Destiny" that rings out "in the first pages of all great novels, as compelling as the knock on Macbeth's gates, as secret as the opening measures of the Fifth Symphony."

Those of us who have browsed among Mrs. Wharton's books, for twenty years and more, will find much here that is happily reminiscent.

But we would not leave the impression that "Hudson River Bracketed" is merely a treatise on the dilemma of the writer. It is an absorbing story. Vance and Halo and Laura Lou catch hold of the heart strings. And the book has, besides, a fair share of significant background portraits, done in the best manner of the "Comic Spirit."