

Parallel Revelations

THE MAURIZIUS CASE. By JACOB WASSERMANN. New York: Horace Liveright. 1929. \$3.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

FOR the great army of readers, whatever the critics may decide among themselves, the function of the novel is to tell us a story; and, no matter for what qualities the illuminated may praise him, it remains the chief claim of Jacob Wassermann upon the attention of his public that he is probably the greatest living narrative artist. Not the most prolific, perhaps, nor the most consistent, but, at his best, the most completely absorbing. No other writer whose work is now being offered to the English reading public has the power so completely to envelop the mind of his readers in the net of his tale, so authoritatively to command a suspension of disbelief which becomes less merely "willing" than absolutely involuntary. The world of Jacob Wassermann may not be, one sometimes suspects that for all its cunning documentation it certainly is not, quite the real world, but it has a sustained reality of the imagination which asserts an equal validity and represents a higher artistic achievement. When Wassermann is at his best, the minds of his readers are his, to do with as he pleases. And there are many pages of that best in his latest book to be translated, "The Maurizius Case." Gratefully, one surrenders to their spell.

From the first, in this new book, the reader of Wassermann—and who, these days, is not one of his readers?—is on familiar ground. The idealism of youth, the sorrowful wisdom, the even sadder ignorance, of age; the conflict between the generations, sharpened in the turmoil of post-war Germany to dramatic tenseness; a generous determination that truth and justice shall prevail, at whatever cost, struggling in vain against the impossibility of blotting out the past: these are the themes. Etzel von Andergast, seventeen years old, becomes convinced that his correct and unapproachable father who uses "justice" as the iron rod of his authority, has built the foundations of his great career as a prosecuting attorney upon an unjust conviction. Alone, and with no weapons but enthusiasm and native shrewdness, Etzel sets out to find the one man who knows the truth of the affair and wring from him the confession which, he supposes, is all that is necessary to right the wrong that has been done. Meanwhile Herr von Andergast is led by his son's departure to reopen, privately, his old investigation. As father and son, working independently and by very different means, draw from the minds of the convict and his betrayer the long hidden truth, the story of Maurizius, his wife, his false friend, and his fatal mistress, is unfolded in a sequence of parallel revelations. It is the method of "The Ring and the Book," simplified and knit together by a finely maintained suspense. The story of Maurizius is, except for its element of mystery, commonplace enough, sordid and pitiful rather than tragic. But the manner in which it is elicited, the analysis of the light of truth as it is refracted in half a dozen different personalities; the subtle interweaving of motive and counter-motive until what has been obscure at last becomes clear,—this is altogether admirable! This provides pages which Wassermann has nowhere surpassed.

It would be pleasant to end on a note of unqualified approval. But Herr Wassermann's novels, in spite of the narrative power which he is able to display, are never without flaws. And these flaws seem not unconnected with the quality his critics have often most admired, his "profound ethical insight," his "serious criticism of life." One can afford to be patient with the crochets of one's favorite story tellers. When the adventures of Becky Sharp are interrupted by an essay on pecuniary culture one skips or reads on according to one's tastes and is none the worse. But Herr Wassermann, in common with his generation, affects a complete objectivity; the criticism, therefore, must be implicit in the text. And the criticism of life and of society, as seems inevitable among modern writers when such criticism goes beyond a smile or a sigh, begins to warp the plot. The sad fate of Maurizius, when that rather dull and shallow person finally escapes his prison, may be necessary to our comprehension of the injustice that society has done him, but it is immaterial to the story, and except for the fine glimpse of Anna Jahn, the fatal mistress, grown old and respectable, it is a mere drag upon our interest. The final, rather hysterically written scene

between Etzel and his father may contain much of what Herr Wassermann has to say of youthful idealism and man's inhumanity to man, but it is a bungling conclusion to their silent struggle, and decreases our opinion of Etzel without any dramatic gain.

One ventures such strictures with hesitation. A certain "tendermindedness," an oversensitivity to cruelty and injustice, to ugliness and pain is the penalty the artist often pays for the thin skin he must wear. And to express one's revulsion and disgust in concrete realizations, even at the cost of the plot, is to err, at least, on the side of nobility. Herr Wassermann is too much the artist to err far. And in the end, whatever may become of the moral, the story, in this as in his other books, continues to command our complete admiration.

Pictures of the Past

SHORT AS ANY DREAM. By ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE

IN her originality of handling the historical novel, Miss Sergeant has produced a distinguished book, remarkable for its freshness and beauty. One hardly knows just how to classify it—novel, epic, biography, cluster of episodes strung on a thread of family history?—It might be any of these, and yet it is something more as well, and that *more*, whatever one may call it, is what gives the book its real significance, its arresting beauty of appeal. Miss Sergeant has drawn these living pictures from the past of a New England family, and set them before the reader with such vitality and power, that one cannot but think the publishers have missed to some extent the real core of her production by announcing it as "a history of American gentle folk," "an epic novel of New England," for its value is not in its subject matter, but lies rather in the originality with which that material has been presented. It is this which catches the interest, and which in seeking to describe the book makes one conceive of it in metaphor. One figure after another rises in the imagination. In its swift and delicate breathlessness it is like a stone flung skipping across a pond. The stone is the progress of the narrative; every time it touches the water there is the ripple of an incident, a chapter in the lives of human beings. The pond across which the author has flung her skipping stone with such admirable skill, is the background of the family. In this case the family is the New England one of Penton, but Miss Sergeant has made them stand for more than themselves, for the whole of human intercourse.

Again one thinks of the story in terms of a kaleidoscope through which one peers for a moment at some bright pattern of color, then with a quick turn of the hand obliterates that combination to bring to birth some other. In the same way the author sets for us one bright pattern of life after another drawn from the past history of this Penton family: pictures of New England, of Minnesota, of California: then with a quick turn of her art these are dissolved in pictures of the present time. Her present, however, is always one through which the past shows, like some diaphanous garment beneath which one glimpses the color of a brighter fabric.

The book is suggestive also of a motion picture in its disjointed, swiftly moving scenes, being strongly reminiscent in this respect of "John Brown's Body," although, of course, not done in poetry as was Mr. Benét's epic.

A skipping stone, a kaleidoscope, a motion picture, one may think of them all in perusing this book only in the end to realize that the author herself has given us in the title the absolutely right descriptive figure of her book—a dream. "Short as Any Dream,"—that is what in truth it is, and one may well pause a moment to compliment Miss Sergeant on the felicity of the name she has chosen. It is exactly what a title should be—and so rarely is—the seed out of which the whole book is seen to flower.

Yes, a dream. The author has cleverly succeeded in giving the impression that the book has been dreamed rather than written. The last scene in the present before the narrative plunges back into the past, is of "Hope" in her New York apartment surrounded by the Penton furniture, pulling out the bundle of old letters. Then with the turning of the next page, Hope has vanished—or perhaps more truly, gone to sleep to dream about her ancestors—

New York is gone, and gone the year of nineteen twenty-eight, and here is Nancy Penton in the New England of a century ago.

It is no doubt this dream-like quality which she has sought to convey which has so frequently kept the author from finishing her episodes. Time and again a situation is developed, characters elaborated, and then Puff! out the whole scene goes like the brief candle. So it is in a dream. So it is also no doubt in real life; nevertheless with all due respect to the author's skill, this method all too often disappoints the reader and makes the book at times exasperating to peruse. One must have an alert mind, and a good memory for genealogy, to keep track of the story as it skips disjointedly from one period to another. In view of this difficulty one is inclined to quarrel a little with the author and proof-readers who have permitted the slip of speaking of the Cunningham baby as "Jackie" in one place, and "Dick" in another. These Pentons and Cunninghams are hard enough to follow without the author herself forgetting their names!

Disjointed and exasperating as the book undoubtedly is at times, and somewhat dull and prosaic as it occasionally shows itself when the author's sureness of touch momentarily fails her, nevertheless it is on the whole a masterly piece of work, and one which no reader interested in the trend of American fiction can afford to miss. We are grateful to Miss Sergeant for the originality of her attempt, and hopeful of what her future may have in store.

Tragic Frustration

THE SOUND AND THE FURY. By WILLIAM FAULKNER. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is an original and impressive book. In manner it is a new departure in the stream-of-consciousness school. It is in four parts, the first a day as it passes through the mind of an idiot, a man of thirty-three with the intelligence of a three-year-old child; at any casual reminder, a place or a name, he is carried back to something similar that happened long before, giving hints of uncomprehended events that stir the imagination like a half-remembered nightmare. The second part, eighteen years earlier, reaches one through the mind of his brother, a boy whose mind has been strained to the breaking-point by what has happened, and who has resolved to drown himself; his thoughts give the tragic occurrences more clearly. The third part, in 1928 again, is in the mind of a third brother, and shows what the life of the family is like, now that the catastrophe is past, and they are living on with the effects as best they can. The fourth part, the next day, is told in the third person. It will be seen that there is a plainer architecture than in most books of this kind, a steady progression from fantasy to fact, and a steady movement toward externality and away from emotion.

That is to say, the tragedy constantly deepens; for the book is a tragedy of the kind that has appeared in literature almost within the memory of man, that of frustration, futility, imprisoned monotony, of

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,
There's this little street and this little house.

The story is concerned with the decay of a great Southern family, *racé* and fine to the point of fatal weakness. Only the last of the men of the family, Jason, the *I* of Part III (and he, though coarse enough for anything) is embittered by his helpless and pitiless struggle against the wellbred weakness of the others; he systematically robs his niece and cheats his mother, and succeeds only in over-reaching himself. These people's tragedy is not in the seduction, the suicide, or their other great calamities, but in the existence that is finally left them, on a shrunken plantation, with half a dozen shiftless negroes, in a round of deadly monotony centered in the idiot son, Benjy.

Benjy is one of those idiots of whom some psychologist has guessed that they would regard pain, if they could feel it, as a welcome surprise. Once during the day he watches his finger stray to the fire and sees it start away, without any idea that he has hurt himself. That is symbolic of the mortal stupor by which, in one way or another, every character is prevented from really suffering from events. Quentin, the suicide, comes nearest it, and is happiest,

but when we see it he has already resolved upon drowning himself, and is upon the very verge of sanity; he breaks his watch to put himself outside time, and has almost put himself outside ordinary emotions as well; he is fey. Jason is a normal brute enough, but deadened by a harsh cynicism that speaks of Benjy as the Great American Gelding and jokes about Quentin's death. The others have their drugs: mother religion, father witty, useless philosophy, Uncle Maury drink. If only one of them could feel sharp pain at anything, there would be hope or at least exaltation; but there is only a dull resentment of the life narrowing and hardening around them. The last incident is trivial but terrifying: Benjy is taken for his usual drive, but because they pass the monument on the right instead of the left, he bellows in wordless rage till they go back and take the unalterable way.

In his writing Mr. Faulkner shows a remarkable knack of opening a vista of horror with a single sentence, as when Quentin thinks of Benjy "rolling his head in the cradle till he rolled the back flat—they said the reason Uncle Maury never did any work was that he used to roll his head." His power is shown almost as much by what he does without as what he uses. There is deliciousness in the figure of Gerald, the self-conscious aristocrat, the complete Man Who Does the Right Thing; there is an exquisite tenderness in Quentin's thoughts, at Harvard, of the negroes at home; but for the most part Mr. Faulkner rigorously denies himself humor and tenderness; here they would be in his way. This is a man to watch.

Man Thinking

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. A Study in *Litteræ Inhumaniores*. By NORMAN FOERSTER. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1929. \$1.

Reviewed by HARRY HAYDEN CLARK
University of Wisconsin

THE American Scholar" by Norman Foerster will mark the dawn of a new and more fruitful epoch in the study and teaching of literature. No one interested in literature and the destiny of America can afford not to give this slender blue book his deepest consideration. The man who has revolutionized the study of American letters has here turned to an appraisal of the methods of literary scholars, in general, an appraisal distinguished by his usual discrimination, justice, and wisdom.

The first five chapters lay a mine of gunpowder under literary study which is merely descriptive, mechanical, and aimlessly acquisitive. Professor Foerster argues that the scientific spirit, devoted to description rather than evaluation, has seduced the literary scholar to a progressively dangerous preoccupation with (1) language, (2) literary history, (3) general history, and (4) psychological history, at the expense of what should be his ultimate object: "the critical determination of the worth of literature to man, its human benefit and use." He concludes:

In our exaggerated emphasis on mechanical technique, in our failure to perceive that thoroughness demands far more than this technique, in our blindness to the need of discipline in taste, imaginative insight, and critical acuteness and breadth, in the rareness of such qualities as reflection, poise, proportion, and sanity, in the sterility of general ideas that renders much of our instruction external and phenomenal, in the absorption in time and relativity that causes us to confuse literature and literary history, and literary history with history, in the undertone of futility which often betrays a romantic purposelessness in place of a clear-minded dedication to the humanities, in the recurrent note of cant in our enthusiasm for contributions to the sum of knowledge, above all, perhaps, in the cheap worship of success and pursuit of the novel and sensational, American scholarship is only too clearly reflecting the contemporary paradox of strenuous production in the outer world of action accompanied with disintegration in the inner world of thought.

In the last four chapters, which are constructive, the author elaborates the argument that the highest end of literary scholarship, the evaluation of the human significance of literature, can be best attained not by the study of history, of change, but by the study of what is changeless, by a criticism whose criteria are based inductively upon certain "constants," upon the changeless "law of taste," upon the "unity of memory running through the ages," upon the qualities which all great works of art have in common. "Literature can be understood only when studied with the instruments it itself employs, which are philosophical—ethical and esthetic in vital fusion—vastly more than they are

scientific." The methods of such a comprehensive criticism Professor Foerster has outlined in detail in his masterly "Conclusion" to "American Criticism," which won the high distinction of being placed on the League of Nations list of 1928.

Many of the contemporary evils in scholarship are charged to an imitation of German methods, "already old-fashioned and even anachronistic." The author advocates "abandoning the German doctorate and emulating the French," for "surely France is closer than any other nation to the ideal of a well-rounded scholarship: a scholarship at once scientific and critical, close to the facts but dominating them through general ideas, taste, and critical insight, contributing to knowledge in the best sense, and developing rather than warping the scholar himself." Indeed, the best testimony of Professor Foerster's right to speak as the champion of such a scholarship is the deep respect shown in France, as illustrated by the resounding review accorded "American Criticism" (in the *Revue Anglo-Américaine*, February, 1929) by the distinguished Professor Cestre of the Sorbonne. In the April issue of the same journal Professor Cestre concludes, "M. Foerster combat le bon combat, et l'on ne pourrait souhaiter meilleur champion à une grande et aussi juste cause."

Since opponents of "The American Scholar" will probably tend to evade the central argument and shift their emphasis to the confessedly debatable details regarding the requirements for higher academic degrees in the last chapter, it may be well to stress the fact that the suggestions of that chapter in no way lessen the validity of the central argument already outlined. It is encouraging to note that Professor Foerster draws support from a dozen of the profoundest scholars and critics: from a president and secretary of the Modern Language Association of America (Professors Ashley Thorndike and Carleton Brown), from such men as Professors Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, Stuart Sherman, Feuillerat, Cazamian, Angellier, Legouis, Stoll, Dean Heller, and the late W. C. Brownell. He might also have cited Dr. Canby's advocacy of the necessity of supplementing scientific with esthetic criticism in *The Saturday Review* for March 2, 1929. A crusader in the vanguard of the most authoritative and soundest scholarly opinion, Professor Foerster has set a model for the literature of controversy in his dignity, his serenity of mood, his poise, his fairness, and his conduct of a perfectly scaled technical argument without losing sight of its universal implications.

"The American Scholar" makes its author the standard-bearer of all who devoutly believe that the higher esthetic and ethical destinies of America lie in the hands of our educators. Professor Foerster's plea that the sort of scholarship advocated would attract creative writers, students of genuine literary ability now "repelled by a training that emphasizes everything but literature," is of the highest significance, for ultimately, I believe, our universities must be responsible for the creation of a sound and unified social imagination, based on the unity of memory linking the ages, without which it is futile to hope for a great American literature. For great art has always been organic with and supported by the life and vision of a whole people. An imaginative ideal must have dwelt in the minds of a whole age before a writer can body it forth with the concentration, the brooding intensity, and the unerring congruency to human nature demanded of great art. And this unity of imagination can be developed most effectively by directing the best of the younger minds in our universities to a study of taste of the ages, of "the universal and unchanging in man, 'the underlying and permanent significance of humanity.'" Not until we bridge the existing chasm between the literary scholar and the creative writer can we view with optimism the future of American letters.

No less portentous is Professor Foerster's book to the cause of American ethical life. In a chaotic present the most reasonable and fundamental guide is the life of the past studied with discrimination as to its promotion of happiness or of despair. European romanticism, with its faith in natural goodness, primitivism, absolute liberty, *laissez-faire*, and nature and material things, was galvanized into a life new and hysterical by its transplantation to the vast material resources of a frontier America. Our countrymen have been living mainly in terms of this outworn European romanticism, the value of which was discredited by its own advocates over a century ago; Wordsworth confessed he had

"too blindly reposed" his trust in this "fond illusion," and Coleridge discovered in dejection that man "may not hope from outward forms to win . . . the life whose fountains are within." But the Pied Piper, the matchless lure and abundance of "outward forms," of material and natural resources, drowned the warning voices of Europe, enamored America of change, and has seduced even the scholar. In our national disintegration our salvation may well lie in the true scholar, loyal to his trust, who shall be, as Emerson said, Man Thinking, the delegated mind of society, whose high function shall be the purposeful and discriminating interpretation of the discoveries man has made, in terms of beauty, regarding "the conduct of life" and the path to happiness. We must seek aid in more venerable traditions, carefully winnowed, which have won the unchanging respect of the ages for their ministry to the deepest and most universal need of man, for their ministry to happiness.

The Liberator

BOLIVAR, the Passionate Warrior. By T. R. YBARRA. New York: Ives Washburn. 1929.

Reviewed by C. H. HARING
Harvard University

WE are offered within the year a second popular biography of Simón Bolívar. If this "Washington of South American independence" still remains a man of mystery to the North American reader, it is through no lack of attention on the part of our indefatigable book-makers.

Mr. Ybarra's volume, however, is a welcome improvement upon that of his immediate predecessor, Michel Vaucaire. Ybarra is a native of Caracas in Venezuela, whence came Bolívar himself. His great-grandfather, affectionately referred to in the dedication, was a friend of the Liberator and a faithful companion-in-arms; and he himself grew up in an atmosphere of adulation of the national hero, which permeated not only his own home but the whole city, and is the very breath of life to the patriotic Caraqueño today. The book, however, although written by a Venezuelan, does not come to us through translation. The author has lived many years in the United States, was long on the staff of the *New York Times*, and writes with a sprightliness and verve that betray his journalistic training.

What Michel Vaucaire saw as through a glass darkly, Ybarra perceives with the sure instinct of a native, supported by a wealth of intelligent reading of the available sources. The narrative is chronologically and geographically accurate—no small asset in current popular biography—and as a reflection of the many-faceted personality of Bolívar it is eminently successful.

Although the author's aim, as he states in the Foreword, "has been to present [the Liberator] as he was, without unduly enhancing virtues or condoning faults," he is obviously filled with a consuming enthusiasm for his subject. In his style, too, there is often a redundancy of rhetoric that proclaims the Latin temperament. But this is perhaps as it should be, for it echoes the flowery exuberance of Bolívar himself, and mirrors the picturesqueness of his remarkable career. As a mere repository of bald fact, the book is not the ultimate word about Bolívar's life, and its picture of the Spanish colonial régime which he helped to overthrow is today a bit old-fashioned. But as the verisimilitude of one of the greatest statesmen and military leaders that America has produced, it is to be heartily recommended.

In his own day Bolívar, for his services to the cause of independence in the New World, was held in high esteem in the United States. The family of George Washington sent to him in 1825, through Lafayette as an intermediary, a locket containing a portrait of Washington and a wisp of his hair, a gift which the Liberator cherished to the end of his life. In 1930 the Spanish-American nations propose to join in commemorating the centenary of Bolívar's death. This book comes, therefore, as an appropriate reminder to North Americans of his extraordinary personality and achievement.

The famous house in Gough-square, London, which Dr. Johnson occupied for over ten years, and in which he compiled the greater part of his dictionary, is to be preserved for Great Britain. It was purchased many years ago by Mr. Cecil Bisshopp Harmsworth, and he has now formed a body of Governors to hold the property in trust for the nation.