

The BOWLING GREEN

A Little Back Room

IN a small and most unfashionable hotel, which in this age of grotesque discretions I suppose I must not identify, there is a little back room in the basement. Its most devoted habitués reach it by a secret rear access through a neighboring garage, not only because by such entry they evade the coat-check damsel in the lobby upstairs; but also because the more obvious road into this retreat is through a doorway misleadingly superscribed LADIE'S, which startles the delicate-minded. It is true there is still another approach, by a secret winding stair, but this very few know.

The little back room, however reached, has grown much endeared to a certain coterie of beachcombers who occasionally sit there either for secret counsel or for loquacious relaxation. There the waiters of the hotel sit for their own hasty meals, snatched at off-hours; resorting thither about the aperitive hour you are likely to find Fritz or Hans hastily leaping up and bearing off with him his hard-earned plate of chowder. And to all conferences held in that modest chamber Mike the barkeep is a party. In time past the hotel had a regular barroom on the street level; but this later era has reduced it to a mere cupboard in the basement. The bar itself is only a shelf across the doorway, but Mike still has the cunningest hand at an Old fashioned cocktail that has yet been encountered. It is he, spurred on by his admiring clients in the Little Back Room, who invented the Deep Dish Old-Fashioned, which, without any larger quantity of alcoholic spirit, exceeds in bulk and flavor any cocktail ever known. And Mike, roosting on his elbows on his tiny bar and brooding like some tutelary presence over his customers in the little room opposite, is a psychic reality to be reckoned with.

The Little Back Room, you are remarking with some reproach, is only a kind of speakeasy. Well there is even a possible suggestion in the word. In that small basement, which large plumbing pipes and valves give so nautical an air (rather like an engineers' mess in the belly of a liner) speech is easy. There have been moments when anxieties and pressures seemed to drop away; when Mike's golden calorific brought excellent meanings to utterance; when a plain tumbler was not just a glass but a chalice. The mettlesome whang of the little dance orchestra in the slippery grillroom near-by faded to a murmurous diapason; time faltered in its reeling orbit. I can think of occasions when those usually reticent became angels of candor and shot off like Roman candles. Even in the intervals of difficult decision the goddess of comedy has been known to slip in and take the seat which is always reserved for her; men, as is their saving virtue, have punctuated perplexity with screams of mirth. So if a speakeasy is a place where truth is made easier to speak, I approve it. Mike sees plenty of publicans and sinners and asks them no questions. Monday, however, is his night off; his locum tenens does not properly understand the technique of the Deep Dish.

There is no deep-laid reason for my alluding to the Little Back Room just now, except that at Christmas time, I suppose, one instinctively thinks of all wholenesses of living. It is customary to formalize the season as one of clear cold darkness and gemmed with stars (a Black, Starr and Frost season Fifth Avenue might remark) but there have been December dusks that were very chill and gray. It is regrettable, one has noticed, that the essential Christmas feeling does not usually penetrate us until the Date itself is so near that we cannot catch up. By the time we find in ourselves the Ten-Day-Before-Christmas sentiment there are only two days left. But there must be some deliberate artistry of the great ironist in the festival of peace being preceded by such billows of pressure; by all the prickliest anxieties and humblest difficulties of the year. It is then that Capital gets cowardly, that the radiator freezes and the coal runs low in the bin; that roads are crusted with sleet, fillings come out of teeth, and the mails swell with the thousand appeals of tragic need. At that time, when (in the-

ory) one would relish the generous pleasures of chance, one is most bedevilled by detail. Then if ever one would like to savor to the brim the huge punchbowl of life, to mark the slow curves of loveliness and the acute zigzags of comedy. And it is exactly then that consciousness is most teased to the tingling quick by the push of the immediate affair. Suddenly you grow honest with yourself and know you would not have it otherwise. And you may chance to remind yourself that the holiday we celebrate is in honor of the greatest artist of all, in so far as we can guess at his character. It is rather incredible that we should all pay tribute to him, for we have so little of his recklessness, his noble folly, his consuming mirth. He was never afraid of absurdity. Surely to him can be applied those echoing words Conrad wrote of the artist in general—"He appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain."

There was an evening in the Little Back Room when one of the group, partly in earnest and partly (I fear) in pure mischief, set the table by the ears by a lively attack upon the sentimentalisms of collectors. The folly of first editions and association copies was his sermon, and as there happened to be some indurated collectors present the skirmish was lively. And yet this rationalist, this anarchist, was one whom I have seen take a salt-shaker from the table and sprinkle it on the actors and round the theatre on an opening night, convinced that it would bring fortune. I must show him, however, as evidence of the amiable extremes to which frenzy can go, the suggestion of the genial Charles Heartman, auctioneer of Metuchen, New Jersey, that customers from Philadelphia wishing to attend his book-sales can take a train as early as 5:45 A. M. Mr. Heartman's instructions for bibliophiles are so charming I cannot resist reprinting them:—

If you are a collector of First Editions and wish to receive my auction catalogues regularly, please write me, stating at the same time your particular subject.

If you wish to dispose of any rare books through auction or by outright sale, this is as good a time as any to discuss the matter.

If you cannot attend this sale personally, I shall be happy to take care of your bids, with fixed prices or at my discretion. If you are coming yourself and are worried about the long session, I can relieve you. There will be an intermission and a buffet luncheon will be served.

If you are coming from New York, trains leave Pennsylvania Station in the morning at 7:05, 8:05, and 9:25. You may choose your trains according to how much time you need for looking over material. If you come from Philadelphia, you can use trains leaving 5:45 and 8:03 in the morning.

Should you come by motor bus from either direction, these busses pass my house. If you know where I am located, the driver will stop in front of the house, otherwise, ask the driver to stop at Danford's, which necessitates a short walk.

If you come by car, I am located on the Lincoln Highway and you won't have much trouble locating me.

Let's hope that we will all have a good time.

Not less pleasant was a telegram that reached me the other day from the excellent George Frisbee of San Francisco, collector and critic and student of letters. He wired:—

My singular good friend and kinsprout have indisputable evidence that Earl of Oxford did the literature credited to Shakespeare. Spencer Sidney Raleigh and other shall publish soon perhaps privately this is to prepare you for the surprise so that you can tell the gang that you knew me when.

GEORGE G. FRISBEE.

I told them. In the receptive atmosphere of the Back Room nothing seems impossible. We wait George's publication with impatience.

I must be forgiven for printing here a letter from British Columbia, which was never intended for print—but letters from Frederick Niven, one of the most genuinely gifted novelists of our time, make themselves exceptions to many rules of discretion. I only hope that he'll take it easy until he gets that too generous heart of his back under control:—

Nelson, B. C., November 1929.

A long talk I fancy this may be. I have the time for it! I am laid up. I seem to have overdone it on my last High Country expeditions and have enlarged my heart. It feels enlarged in more senses than one. I lie here with a very full heart indeed, thinking, thinking—and remembering, remembering. Sometimes I feel it might burst. Extreme athlete's heart the doctor calls it. You know I am crazy

about the High Country—away up above timber. . . . P. has just come and given me a dirty look. The doctor won't let me work yet—I mean writing work. She saw me penning this and gave that look. At once I countered: "I'm only writing a letter."

A lovely lovely day. The stern-wheeler went away out of sight just now out in the lake, white under its leisurely cloud of white steam, laying its wedge of wake behind it. I lie here and look at doings like that and in memory go back to all manner of places, thanking God for Memory. Sometimes it feels, lying here, as if life is just one packed moment. I see a creek of the mountains here passing through jungly underbrush past devil's club and huckleberries—and then I see the Grampians from the top of Goat Fell one way, and the other, the Ayrshire curves of shingle and Ailsa Craig—and then I'm five years old lying on my back in the sand of the English Hill above Valparaíso looking at white clouds away at the end of receding tall poplars—and then I'm in Heriot Row looking at Stevenson's door on one side and at a birch tree in the Gardens on the other. And my heart seems swelling and swelling!

You mention Heriot Row in one of your essays. I don't recall that you mention Pentland Hills. I used to go out there early in the morning, so early that I could get back to Edinburgh and into the office by nine, or perhaps three minutes past nine. And I lay here today and saw dew drops hanging on railings and grass-tips, still from those mornings. Reading a preface to the World's Classics edition of Alexander Smith's *Dreamthorp* the other day I found that he knew that hill above Bonaly. By the way, all the encyclopædias and biographical articles say he was born Dec. 31, 1830. But it seems pretty certainly not so. On his grave it says he was born Dec. 31, 1829. His father and mother were alive when he died, and they should know. A registration of his birth can't be found among the records but his relatives and close friends say Dec. 31, 1829. That means we draw near the anniversary of his birth. It might slip your mind. *A Lark's Flight*—worthy to stand beside De Quincey, don't you think? and that fascinating *A Summer in Skye* we might wish to talk of James Ashcroft Noble in his essay *Stevenson's Forerunner* (publisher by Mosher) uses that word of *A Summer in Skye* I think: fascinating. I've been rereading it lying here and it gives me the very reflection of a heron flying over Loch Etive as I saw it when last I was there. Dr. Johnson saw but the vast protuberances and kept looking for books in the houses. Smith saw mountains, and not looking upon himself as a great figure on tour, could sit and listen to the people talking. When he got back to Edinburgh he could read again. He has a whole lot of pictures of people in that *Summer in Skye* so perfectly done that I got bored over an article on "Visibility" in character-drawing in a recent Life and Letters. I fear the writer of it had never read Smith. Often these very very high and narrow brows make one say, Phut! They say that never this, that, or the other has been done, and I could down books, without becoming more than semi-recu to show them just where it has been done without re their ears.

Yes, at this time there are probably some who re-read, in *Dreamthorp*, the essay on Christmas. From no one could a reminder of Alexander Smith come with more grace than his fellow-Scot and fellow-artist in honorable and thoughtful living, Frederick Niven.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

A Part of Modern History

THE BLACK VENUS. By ANDRÉ SALMON. New York: The Macaulay Co. 1929. \$2.50.

PRE-WAR Montmartre and its always eccentric if occasionally brilliant inhabitants furnish the material for André Salmon's kaleidoscopic post-war novel, "La Négrresse du Sacré-Coeur," of which Mr. Slater Brown has endeavored to furnish an English version. It is said to be a *roman à clef*, in which painters such as Picasso and Derain are to be found under the names of Sorgue and Paroli, the writers Mac Orlan and Wedekind as O'Brien and Darneting, the unclassifiable Max Jacob as Septime Febur, and finally the author himself as Florimond Daubelle.

Regardless of this, Salmon has told in his vigorous cinematic style a spiral and deliberately indirect story of suicide, love, and murder, in which the principal figures are an artist's model, a professional gigolo, several beggars, and a planter whose plantation is situated on the Butte. This gentleman, who attempts to raise bananas and aloes in the very shadow of Abadie's immense dome, is worth further study. He has bought a negro slave to wait on him, and is given to dispensing rum with truly tropical prodigality. M. Salmon gives a good deal of his space to this character, who like all the other types is evidently authentic. The whole is highly colored, violent, a little cruel, and somewhat unpleasant to read, but now that the Butte has been deserted even by the tourists for the more ample spaces and less picturesque ways of Montparnasse, M. Salmon's book is more than a good novel; it is also in its rather disorderly way a part of modern history, and a not unimportant one.

Books of Special Interest

America and Music

THEY STILL SING OF LOVE. By SIGMUND SPAETH. New York: Horace Liveright. 1929. \$2.

Reviewed by EDWARD BALLANTINE

Harvard University

MR. SPAETH is a genial, enthusiastically musical person with a keen sense of humor who sees and reports vividly what is going on in the musical life of America today. He seems to be chiefly occupied with the study of popular taste and the problem of how to lead it on to higher things.

In the essays of the first part of the book, "*Allegro ma non troppo* (not too serious)," he gives a diverting account of the popular songs of the last century. Together with this he presents precious excerpts from the words which might otherwise be forgotten or unknown to most of us, as for example this stanza from "Only me" (date not given):

*One got the kisses and kindly words,
That was her pet, Marie,
One told her troubles to bees and birds,
That one was only me!*

or this from "The Simple Life":

*I dreamed that all our millionaires were
leading simple lives,
And in this strange dream the Newport
bunch were living with their wives.*

In the second part, "*Scherzo*," (not at all serious), there are some clever skits such as "The Voice"—"The voice is not ready and never will be," and one with a serious purpose, "Local Talent."

In the third group of essays, "*Andante con moto*" (quite serious), there is a good deal of thought and common sense along with much snap judgment. Mr. Spaeth has won success in addressing Rotary clubs, somewhat to the detriment of his soundness as a critic and sober accuracy as a writer. Jazz may be very easy to enjoy for either musician or layman, but a worth while analysis of it is a delicate and difficult undertaking. Mr. Spaeth's definition is too easy, "Jazz is merely the distortion of conventional music." What does he mean

by conventional music? Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Wagner, and Debussy are as different from one another as they are different from jazz. Certain freak effects consistently adopted, jazz itself is one of the most conventional forms that ever existed. There is more difference between "The Afternoon of a Faun" and the overture to "Die Meistersinger" than there is between any two fox trots. A really searching analysis of jazz may be found in Paul L. Laubenstein's article "Jazz—Debit and Credit" in the October number of the *Musical Quarterly*.

Mr. Spaeth, in the essay "How Good is Primitive Music?" dismisses all characteristics of primitive music which are not found in the works of the great classical masters as being worthless in their crudity, or as merely failures to sing in tune or time. This is unscientifically contrary to authoritative evidence. If Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms got along without the use of five and seven beat rhythms, parallel fifths, and exotic scales, why should composers who have to get along without being Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms not turn for help to these neglected resources? No one composer or school of composers can make use of all possible means of expression and keep a unified, workable style. Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, Malipiero, and others are proof of the reward of turning back or aside to effects which were not essential to the great classic tradition.

In the essay, "Symphonies for Business Men," Mr. Spaeth makes a statement which will increase the fatigue of the tired business man, and which is moreover not at all true. He says, "Melody is the sticky sweetness of music, the clogging jam which needs a background of nourishing bread before it becomes really palatable." Now, if you took away the melody from the "London-derry Air," or from the medieval chant of "Dies Irae," or from Mozart's "Voi che sapete," or the unaccompanied English horn solo from Tristan, or the song of the hermit thrush, how much would be left? And to how many Rotarians would not the melody of perhaps three of these be not jam but caviar? The jam of many a jazz piece or symphonic poem is supplied not by the

melody, which may amount to only a few crumbs, but by the rich chords and spicy orchestration. No gentle listener who says rather plaintively "What I love in music is melody" should be discouraged. The trouble is that he probably loves only a small repertoire of hackneyed though possibly fine melodies, while thousands of divinely beautiful melodies wait in vain for the homage of his loving ear."

Bulls and Bears

A HISTORY OF FINANCIAL SPECULATION. By R. H. MOTTRAM. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1929. \$4.

Reviewed by MYRON M. STRAIN

THIS ambitious project undertakes no less a task than to narrate and examine the development of the speculative trait from the time of the Suffolk flint mines, possibly in the Paleolithic era, down to the day before the November stock exchange débâcle. It is a trait that is found to have been universal and immemorial, and to it Mr. Mottram justly assigns credit for much of the material progress of the race. Nowadays the tendency is towards the participation of unprecedented numbers of non-professional speculators in the formal procedures of the established security and commodity exchanges, and a work that would convey to these newcomers some sense of the historical setting of their activities would clearly be useful, both to them and to society. I take it that this consideration has inspired "A History of Financial Speculation."

To the preparation of his treatise Mr. Mottram has brought the combined qualifications of a novelist and a banker—for he is both. That is to say, he brings the novelist's preoccupation with character in action, and the banker's peculiarly pragmatic and commonsense temperament. And along with these goes a manner so gracious and engaging that one reads the book sympathetically and wishes that he had brought certain other qualifications as well—chiefly, a firmer grasp of the historical and economic material involved, the interest and enterprise to make significant and interesting such matters, for instance, as the tedious recurrences of the nineteenth century's mysterious "credit cycles," and a more lucid expository style.

This last, perhaps, is the most annoying deficiency. Mr. Mottram is at his best in the home land of England, in the picturesque eighteenth and immediate twentieth centuries. He tells the story of law, of the Rothschilds, of Walpole and the South Sea Company, of the financial aspects of the cataclysm of 1914 and the reconstruction measures since 1918, clearly, gracefully, interestingly, and with shrewd and enlightening interpretative comment. But when he undertakes exposition and explanation the effect is not so happy. He seems to lose interest, and, losing interest, he loses clarity. He muddles the reader with vague references, and sometimes becomes so downright incoherent that it is difficult to ascertain what he is getting at. What is one to make, for instance, of such a succession of sentences as this, used in discussing the most favorable environment for speculation,—

Again, the great free cities of the Renaissance, federated or standing alone, have not maintained their ground. Against this we have to place the economic conservatism of landed communities. And the evidence is even more involved than that.

The point is not that one need cavil frivolously over rhetorical considerations which most of our American writers on economic subjects flout habitually and, perhaps, out of sheer excess of he-manliness, but that Mr. Mottram has permitted some considerable sections of his work to become needlessly difficult, dull, and uncertain reading on account of them.

This is a regrettable lapse from an unusually excellent average. Also, as I have intimated, the author does not always state his economic causes and effects with as satisfying a completeness as could be wished and, without being a historian, one is able to suspect occasional gaps in his history. The Roman speculative period, for example, is notably missing. Still, after all reservations are made, the book retains substantial and valuable merits. It is commended to those who are interested in a more comprehensive understanding of the speculative element of society than can be gained from ticker tapes and newspaper financial pages, and who are sufficiently equipped in history and economics to fill in what is missing.

The second volume has just appeared of Hermann Hesse's "Im Alten Reich" (Grethlein), a volume containing historical and artistic biographies of Cologne, Dortmund, Innsbruck, Halle, Breslau, and many other cities.

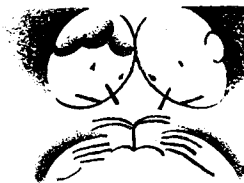
Walt Whitman

By HARRISON S. MORRIS

A brief, intimate biography based upon the recollections and researches of one of the younger group who surrounded Whitman in his later years. Mr. Morris accepts Whitman as he was, and writes without eulogy or protest; this candidness, together with his wide and deep appreciation of the best in Whitman's work, will commend him to all students of American literature as well as to Whitman enthusiasts. New points of view and significant details previously overlooked add much to the value of this important study. \$1.50 a copy.

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Virginia
Woolf

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

"A love of life, a love of freedom, and of letters." . . . Thus does the *London Times* sum up the peculiar quality,—the clear-seeing brilliance,—which pervades all of Virginia Woolf's work. And how better can one characterize the author of ORLANDO and MRS. DALLOWAY, of TO THE LIGHTHOUSE and THE COMMON READER,—and now of A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN?

Louis Kronenberger says in the *New York Times*, "Mrs. Woolf speaks for her sex with as much fancy as logic, as much wit as knowledge, and with the imagination of a true novelist." "Mrs. Woolf's feminism," says the *London Saturday Review*, "has none of the nagging note, and it has been the cause of an exquisite piece of writing. The writer's perception of humanity does not mistake a vote for everything. Has it ever done as much for feminine happiness as a sofa, a door you can shut, a key you can turn, and money in the bank? On this text a most delicate discourse has been woven."

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Picture Contest

The winners in the Picture Contest conducted in the Children's Book Number of the Saturday Review were Louise P. Bull and Alan Dodd. Both submitted perfect answers. The former selected as prize "Hitty," by Rachel Field (Macmillan), and the latter, "Courageous Companions," by Charles J. Finger (Longmans, Green).

The correct answers follow:

- No. 1—Kipling
Just So Stories
- No. 2—Dickens
Christmas Carol
- No. 3—Abbott
Franconia Stories
- No. 4—Dodgson
Alice in Wonderland
- No. 5—Alcott
Little Women
- No. 6—Harris
Uncle Remus
- No. 7—Sidney
Five Little Peppers
- No. 8—Clark
Dotty Dimple at School
- No. 9—Clemens
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn