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Points of View

The Forest and the Trees

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

The great amount of attention that scholars of English literature are giving to scientific research has its effect upon the student as well as upon the scholar himself. The young man (or woman either) who has read some literature, who likes it, and who decides to major in English literature in his university course, looks forward to the time when he will get to read many books. Perhaps he has read only selections from Chaucer's works or Tennyson's works. He has read a few novels, a few plays (mostly Shakespeare's plays), some little romantic poetry, etc. He is somehow conscious of the fact that there has been written much excellent literature, and he looks forward to the time when he can read something of a certain Spenser's works, something of Drayton's, Dr. Johnson's, Oliver Goldsmith's, Wordsworth's, Coleridge's, Byron's, Shelley's, Keats's, Browning's, and some of the productions of some other men of whom he has heard a little or whose names he has seen in "Literature and Life," or some such anthology. This student wants to read some of the great novels, too. In short, he expects to be able to study the works of English literary artists that are most highly praised. I know a certain young man who would tell this aspirant that he would read more literature in his freshman and sophomore English courses than in all the rest of his work in English up to the Master of Arts' Degree.

This certain young man, who would offer such consolation to the student who wants to major in English, is himself a student of English; he speaks from experience. Let us speak a little of this student; we may find that his advice is the result of a bitter, disappointing experience.

This certain young man has now had nearly one year of graduate work in English. For many years he had been anxious to learn something about American literature. The result of a year's work is that he now has read a few pages of the writings of Jonathan Edwards, but he has read many about Edwards—he has learned from many sources the "characteristics" of this man and his works. He has read about half of the "Sketch Book" of Irving, and half of this half he read in high school, but he has been diligent to read about Irving, to learn about his importance as a reconciler between over-sensitive American writers and English readers; he has read what Professor Boynton and some other professors have said about Irving's style. He has read about as much about Charles Brockden Brown as he has read by Brown (he has hastily read one of Brown's novels); he has been careful to learn some of the characteristics of Brown's works; he has read and heard much about Brown's works as related to the gothic romance—in fact, he has heard much about the special problem involved in such study. He has read more than two thousand pages about Herman Melville, I suppose, but he has read not more than fifty pages of "Moby Dick," and not a line of "Omoo," "Typee," "Pierre," etc.—observe, however, that he knows the names of quite a number of Melville's works, as well as the names of other American authors' works. Until recently he had never read more than twenty pages of Whitman's works, but he could talk about Whitman's "P's," his long cataloguing, his type of subjects, the "characteristics" of his works. This he had got from lectures and from required reading in histories of American literature, in special articles, in works about Whitman, not by Whitman. He had heard many a lecture on the "Frontier in American Literature," had read parts of books on this subject—books by Turner, Hazard, and others. Yet he had never read a line of half of the men whose works are frontier in spirit—in fact, he was once almost persuaded that all that was important about American literature was the frontier spirit. About Mark Twain, Bret Harte,

Bill Nye, Josh Billings, Sidney Lanier, Emily Dickinson, Edith Wharton, William Dean Howells, Henry James he has read many a page, but he has read few pages by these men and women. Why go on naming authors? It all amounts to this: he has had occasion or opportunity to read little of the works of authors, but he has been required to read many parts of literary histories, to listen to many lectures on the "characteristics," "sources," "problems," etc., of many works of art. He has read and heard about works much more than he has read the real works themselves. The proportion is terribly, yes, even horribly, out of balance. Certainly he must read about authors and their works. He would be very foolish not to take advantage of the "light" furnished by the research of scholars, not to benefit by the fruits of the works of other students and scholars. But when is he ever going to read the works by authors? Or is he to go on through life talking about what he has never read? He can continue to read about works of art, he can and must read the latest scholarship on his field. He can scarcely ever hope to get much time for reading great works; he can never hope to reread, and re-reread great works of art—he must read great works of scholarship if he continues to register for courses in the graduate school, or even if he becomes a college or university teacher.

Now this certain young man has had about the same experience in the study of English literature that he has had in the study of American literature. He is not satisfied. Let us get it straight: he does not object to some reading about works of art, but he does want some time to read the works of art themselves. Nor should we hastily conclude that his experience is unique. Indeed, he has heard the same complaint from many others. Scarcely anyone to whom he has told his complaint has failed to respond, "That's just how I feel about it." So desperate has he become—this certain young man—that he has almost decided to drop out of school a year or two and read some of these works of art that he has heard and read so much about; then he could return and hear and read some more about these and other works of art.

As for me, I think this "almost decision" just mentioned a good one. If, by the grace of God and by the kind-heartedness of his committeemen, he passes the oral examination, soon to be given, and provided he does not go crazy before that time, he will receive in June a Degree (yes, spell it with a capital "D"). I think he would do well to retire from school one year or two years and read some works of art, not forgetting a certain well-written work called the Bible, provided he can find it.

GRADUATE STUDENT
University of North Carolina.

Dishwashers and Education

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

In connection with the article of James R. Angell, June 22, I have this to say: The matter with education (?) in my native, Tennessee and elsewhere—for we are not much more ignorant than many others,—the matter with us is we sit by and see public money spent for electric dishwashers and expensive patent potato-peelers to prepare one meal a day for children, some of whom, have not a nickle for a saucer of hot grits.

This ridiculous equipment is only too often housed in expensive buildings, poorly constructed at an enormous profit,—to some favorite firm.

Diplomas are given pupils whose knowledge of arithmetic is negligible, who cannot write a page of good, correct English—pupils who know nothing of the essential elements of their native language.

Public schools, colleges, universities are filled with teachers afraid to teach "truth," afraid to enunciate "facts,"—and these teachers, instructors, and professors hold their positions by the grace of a lot of trustees, who are immensely interested in handing out honorary degrees to rich men who cannot distinguish between the "influence" of Hypatia and Texas Guinan.

Let Mr. Angell turn the glass of investigation upon the details of the way the people's money is spent in these institutions misnamed "educational" and he will find where the real trouble lies.

L. GRAHAM CROZIER
Knoxville, Tenn.

The American Scene

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

The editorial "Getting It All Down" in a recent number of the *Review* is an un-

usually penetrating and true appraisal of present day literary productivity. The torrent of books pouring from the presses will give future social historians ample documentary material. In one sense, of course, human nature is always and everywhere the same. But only the dullest person can fail to observe the influence of our many backgrounds on manners and individuals. And how well have post-war novels reflected the diversified pattern of the national life. To my mind, one of the most significant phenomena in our literature is the vigor of the mid-western realistic movement. Conservative Eastern and European critics were at first shocked by the "crudity," by the "un-American" quality, of the novels and poems in which a distinct continental note appeared. They understood neither the physical nor the racial background of this vast, newly articulate territory.

But old tabus are fast crumbling. The fiction that we Americans conform to one type and our frantic efforts at standardization, may be attributed to an unconscious realization of wide differences varying with our numerous parallels of latitude and longitude. We are slow to appreciate the vital importance of geographical environment, of the *genius loci* in determining culture and psychology. New Orleans may borrow its capital, its jazz, and its styles from New York, but it cannot change its soil or its climate. I doubt whether even boosting Chambers of Commerce or the industrialization of old agricultural regions will ever make the South a copy of the North. At least, let us hope not. The historian who attempts to get the whole American scene on his canvas will have to be also poet, philosopher, and geographer. And he cannot afford to overlook our recent regional novels.

LAMBERT A. SHEARS.
New Milford, Conn.

MR. STEWART REPLIES

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

In reply to Mr. Edward J. O'Brien's communication which appeared in *The Saturday Review* for June 8, allow me to say that the file of *The Boston Museum* in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester indicates conclusively that the issue in which "Ethan Brand" was published was correctly dated January 5, 1850.

In his statement to the effect that Hawthorne could not have written the description of Mount Graylock in 1849 since he did not go to the Berkshires until the spring of 1850, Mr. O'Brien has overlooked the facts that Hawthorne spent the summer of 1838 in North Adams and neighboring villages and that in writing "Ethan Brand" he drew many details of background, incident, and character from the copious journal which he had kept eleven years earlier.

RANDALL STEWART.

Yale University.

A Correction

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Mr. Edward J. O'Brien in his letter published in the June 8th *Saturday Review* assumes that Hawthorne did not go to the Berkshires before 1850. An examination of Hawthorne's "American Note-Books" proves that Hawthorne saw Graylock on July 26, 1838. He stayed in the Berkshires until September 11 of that year. Professor Bliss Perry has written an interesting essay on Hawthorne's summer in North Adams.

SAMUEL E. ALLEN.

Williams College.

Is Life Worth Living?

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Your editorial, "In a Hard Age," published in the issue of June 22, inspires me to approve response. It reminds me that Samuel Butler said in his "Notebook" that the question, "Is life worth living?" is a proper one for an embryo but not for a man. If a man should answer negatively (as I believe Butler infers he is like to do), it is too late for anything except suicide, which is, to say the least, taking a rather unfair advantage of the rest of the world. To the detached observer (or I had better say the semi-detached observer, for of course no one can be wholly aloof from existence) life is apt to seem a futile, tragic business, and since we are living, whether we would or no, that is a pity. We are properly employed in seeking real values, and our best means of finding them is to participate in the human contest. For we cannot know the pleasure of accomplishment unless we have struggled, and the fine flavor of rest is reserved for the fruitfully weary. Only the stars have right to detachment. FREDERICK THAYER, JR.
Oakland, Md.

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Education

- MAGNETISM AND ELECTRICITY. By *Morris Meister*. Scribners. \$1.
 THE LITERATURE OF AMERICA. By *Quinn Bauch Howe*. Scribners. \$3.
 NEW METHOD IN COMPOSITION. By *William A. Boylan, Constance W. Fuller, and Albert S. Taylor*. Scribners. 2 vols. 60 cents each.
 THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARY. By *William A. King*. Scribners. \$2.
 DEUTSCHKUNDE. By *Carl A. Krause*. Scribners. 88 cents.

Fiction

- DARK DUEL. By *MARGUERITE STEEN*. Stokes. 1929. \$2.50.

The jacket of "Dark Duel" is ill-advised in inviting comparison with "The Constant Nymph." Both novels treat of erratic, artistic households and there the likeness ends. "Dark Duel" has its merits, but they are not those of "The Constant Nymph." This dark duel is fought between two women for the love of a man introduced into the family by the son of one of them and the father of the other. This is what gives the book its individual slant: the women are grandmother and granddaughter. The rivalry is surprisingly convincing. The grandmother is a retired actress who had, in an earlier day, swept England in general and men in particular quite off their feet with her elusive charm. This charm still clings, touching her with mystery and making credible her attraction for a man in his twenties.

The granddaughter is a young artist who realizes, as the older woman does not, that there is a duel between them. Her young frustration in the presence of her grandmother's unconscious and sophisticated charm, her desire to play the game fairly, and her innate sense of her love-right at whatever subterfuge, are given with a very nice balance between the implied and the expressed. Both the women have the complexity of and are at times as inexplicable as, real people. They make themselves felt and create interest as to their motives. The men in the book are, for the most part, rather deliberately odd but are nevertheless interesting.

The story of "Dark Duel" is extremely brittle and cracks ominously as it moves along. Miss Steen puts her heroine through the stage-old situation of "offering" herself to a man for the reader's amusement and then, quite seriously, lets her go through equally threadbare experiences as if such things had never happened in novels before. The book is extremely uneven. If it were as good throughout as it is at its best it would be a remarkable novel, but in the moment of crisis the author is too prone to resort to the sensational or the stereotyped. THE IMPERFECT LOVER. By *ROBERT GORE BROWN*. Doubleday, Doran. 1929. \$2.50.

Robert Gore Brown has had the courage to attack the well known triangle in one of its best known forms: a husband and wife of social position and the other woman recruited from the shop-girl class. But where Mr. Brown has shown his individual ability is the scrupulous manner in which he attempts to give every member of his trio a perfectly fair deal. There is no villain in the piece.

Jim and Clemency Warlock are happily married. Jim is conscious of no lack in Clemency and does not even feel that she fails to understand him. And yet he cannot get the thought of the youngness and freshness of Doris Lea out of his mind. Circumstances draw him towards her with decided help from Doris herself. Desiring not to have an affair, not to be untrue to Clemency, not to be unfair to Doris, Jim yet drifts into all these things while Clemency is away. Eventually the wife returns home and the husband returns to the wife. The other woman, girl really, has nothing to return to—hers is the tragedy.

That is the frame work of the story and means very little since it is the filling in of the frame that counts. And this filling proves almost superficial. Mr. Brown has not gone deep enough into his characters psychologically. They all do what they might reasonably be supposed to do but they remain surface creatures. They seem to have no life aside from their activities. This fact and the introduction of several amusing minor characters give a lightness to the book pleasing enough in itself but slightly misfit with them.

VIENNESE LOVE. By *HUGO BETTAUER*. Macaulay. 1929. \$2.

Queer happenings in the Melchiorgasse! At number 58 shortly after dark a man wearing pince-nez and pointed beard entered and went directly to a room he had arranged to occupy until ten o'clock that

night. A few minutes later a beautiful woman flashing with jewels also entered number 58 and also hurried into the same room. Later the man left, and once outside the house quickly removed his pince-nez and beard. Still later the woman was found in

the room strangled and jewelless. At number 56 Melchiorgasse lived Frau Greifer whose avocation was dressmaking, but whose vocation was a more sinister trade and much older one. She becomes thoroughly entangled in the story through her wiles in procuring young girls to adorn her evening exhibitions. And the young girls are considerably mixed in with the mystery and several love plots that run along with it. So "Viennese Love" becomes a fairly

populous tale drawing its personnel from both high and low circles in Vienna. The vice is laid on with a rather heavy hand and the chaste young lady who succeeds in securing large sums of money from her evening visits to a house of prostitution without giving in return "even so much as a kiss" is somewhat of a strain upon the imagination. But "Viennese Love" is like that, to be taken or left alone.

(Continued on next page)

An Epigram From Every Chapter of "THE MANSIONS OF PHILOSOPHY"

- I THE LURE OF PHILOSOPHY
("Philosophy," said the medieval scholastics, "is the chambermaid of theology.")
- II WHAT IS TRUTH?
("Perhaps truth is only the common denominator of our delusions, and certainty is an error in which all men agree.")
- III MATTER, LIFE AND MIND
("We do not doubt that some things are better done by instinct than by thought; perhaps it is wiser, in the presence of Cleopatra, to thirst like Anthony than to think like Caesar.")
- IV IS MAN A MACHINE?
("If life were not an active and remoulding force, prejudiced in favor of development, there never would have been any evolution.")
- V OUR CHANGING MORALS
("It is a delicate question whether our young people find more pleasure in their strutting sins than their elders find in denouncing them.")
- VI MORALITY AND IMMORALITY
("Every vice was once a virtue.")
- VII LOVE
("It is from our great mother Nature, doubtless, that we inherit our resourceful stupidity.")
- VIII MEN AND WOMEN
("Woman triumphs by repetition, like an advertisement. If she repeats, it is because she cannot strike.")
- IX THE MODERN WOMAN
("Women have acquired souls and votes at the very time when men seem to have lost the one and forgotten the other.")
- X THE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE
("Marriage will be cast into newer and looser forms.")
- XI ABOUT CHILDREN: A CONFESSION
("Nature inoculates us with egotism that we may consent to live, who could bear to see himself in the light of eternity?")
- XII THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CHARACTER
("Nothing is the most useful thing in the world: it is often a good thing to do, and always a good thing to say.")
- XIII WHAT IS BEAUTY?
("Love is the mother of beauty, not its child.")
- XIV THE MEANING OF HISTORY
("An ideal is a material need phraseologically disguised as a moral inspiration.")
- XV IS PROGRESS A DELUSION?
("We think there is more violence in the world than before, but in truth there are only more newspapers.")
- XVI THE DESTINY OF CIVILIZATION
("Wealth alone does not make a nation great, it can give us a rotting Rome as well as a creative Greece.")
- XVII IN PRAISE OF FREEDOM
("A gentleman will have no morals but his own.")
- XVIII IS DEMOCRACY A FAILURE?
("Democracy is government by those who do not know.")
- XIX ARISTOCRACY
("The people prefer an aristocracy. With one fine exception, the individual most popular in the American press of our day was an English Prince; and the most popular woman was a Balkan Queen.")
- XX IS SOCIALISM DEAD?
("It is difficult for a country to be radical when every class in it is prosperous except the farmers.")
- XXI HOW WE MADE UTOPIA
("The greatest tragedy that can befall an ideal is its fulfillment.")
- XXII THE MAKING OF RELIGION
("The future in America will be like France today: a highly sceptical minority, and a highly pious majority.")
- XXIII FROM CONFUCIUS TO CHRIST
("As long as there is poverty there will be gods.")
- XXIV GOD AND IMMORTALITY
("The moral development of man has outrun his conception of God. . . It was Christ who killed Jehovah.")
- XXV ON LIFE AND DEATH
("Nature solaces our slavery and attaches to our greatest sacrifice our greatest happiness.")
- XXVI IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?
("Pessimism is the obverse of romanticism, the morning after imagination.")
- XXVII THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS
("Let the children play, let the young men love. When childhood is tired and youth is sad, we shall hold out our arms to them and bid them come and sit with us at the feet of Plato in the City of God.")

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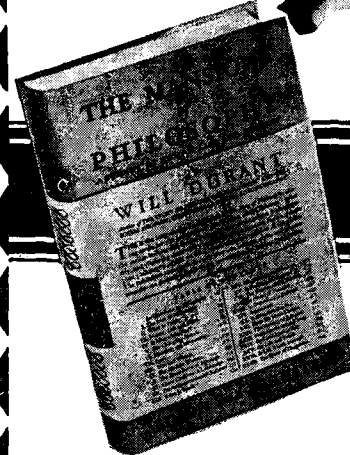
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The MANSIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

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