

Beethoven in a Novel

EROICA. By SAMUEL CHOTZINOFF. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HUGH L. SMITH
Yale University School of Music

WHY has the life of Ludwig van Beethoven, interesting and dramatic as it is, not long ago been turned to account as the basis of a novel? It is true that Romain Rolland draws upon the personality of this great genius for much of "Jean-Christophe," but not in a manner to suggest as his chief purpose the novelization of Beethoven's life. It has remained for Samuel Chotzinoff—well-known critic, performer, and a devout Beethoven enthusiast—to undertake the revivifying of the man Beethoven, in a novel to which is given the significant title of "Eroica."

In a series of episodes, treated with remarkable fidelity to facts, Mr. Chotzinoff develops the intimate personality of the pock-marked, recalcitrant youth of Bonn without resorting to any of the sentimental rot which inevitably attaches itself to the life of a hero. We looked in vain for the usual story of the "Moonlight Sonata." Against a background of well-known characters, whose personalities flash out in deft strokes, stalks the uncouth figure of Beethoven in true perspective, his own life furnishing the *raison d'être* of his works.

So much conjecture and controversy have been indulged in regarding the love affairs of Beethoven, that a hopeless tangle of fact and fiction has to be cut through in order that he may stand in anything like a clear light. Exercising the novelist's prerogative in a manner to give least offense, Mr. Chotzinoff chooses to consider the Countess Julia Guicciardi as the Immortal Beloved, treating the relations of this noblewoman and Beethoven with keen imagination and sympathy and adding details to the dénouement of this episode which are plausible in their artistic truth. Equally convincing is the treatment of Beethoven's other affairs of the heart, handled with a skilful nicety and balance which only heighten the climax of his relations with Julia.

Especially well done is the matter of Beethoven's deafness, from the first faint indication of some impairment up to the cruel realization of the certainty of his affliction, and the delicate fear of his friends' detection of the malady. Real pathos is here, as he tries to convince himself at first that his trouble is imaginary:

He struck them again, less loudly, then softly and more softly, until he knew by the pressure of his fingers that they were the merest whispers. His mind meanwhile was fearfully concentrated to catch the slightest difference between the sounds he expected to hear and those that came to his ears. After a moment his face relaxed its tension. He could find no discrepancy.

He laughed softly and called himself a fool. "Such a thing could not happen—if there is a God in Heaven," he thought. "To anyone else, yes—but not to me."

It is in such simple touches as this that the author reveals his sympathetic imagination and reaches his end with no straining for effect.

Mr. Chotzinoff's feeling for the significance of Beethoven's works as the direct outpouring of his subjective experience and philosophy is keen, and his interpretations reasonable. That portion of the book devoted to the "Eroica" is more than a mere consideration of this symphony as a dedication to a great hero. It is an exceedingly skilful exposition of the growth of a philosophy to be expressed in music. To Beethoven, Napoleon was more than a national figure, dominating Europe. He was the incarnation of the heroic life through which Beethoven himself was struggling. "To accept what life offers as one accepts the material of a novel, to wrestle with experience as one wrestles with recalcitrant tones, to share in all human emotions without encroaching on the lofty, impersonal surveillance of the mind—that was the only way for a conscious spirit to walk the earth with dignity. That was heroism. He saw himself creating a symphony worthy of his experience and new-found philosophy." This manifestation of Beethoven's romanticism comes out admirably in the novel, with a natural subtlety that is never philosophic or dull.

As much in what the author rejects as in what he includes as suitable for his artistic scheme does he show fine discriminating sensibility. The moderation and restraint of this picture of Beethoven's strength—and weakness—betoken a convincing sincerity. For those who know Beethoven thoroughly from the historical point of view, Mr. Chotzinoff's

novel will prove to be delightfully humanizing; and those to whom Beethoven is only the composer of the Fifth Symphony may enjoy this story of his life with no fear of dangerous distortion of fact or personality which will need to be corrected later on.

A Novelist to Watch

GALLOW'S ORCHARD. By CLAIRE SPENCER. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

EVERY now and again there appears an author who is a novelist not by power of willing but as naturally as the bird is master of flight. Miss Spencer is of that happy company who write with so direct a vision as to seem to be improvising as they proceed. Her book has that appearance of unpremeditation which is the triumph of art. It has an urgency and immediacy of emotion that are the very accent of life, a sequence of happening as seemingly inevitable as the inescapable encounters of actual existence. Her narrative is electric with feeling—quick with a passionate responsiveness to the beauty of nature, the pathos of dumb beasts, the calamities and complexities of the human heart. It



CLAIRE SPENCER

flows on, now robust and harsh, now delicate and almost lyrical in expression, but always simple, always straightforward, always sincere. Here in her tale, to its old men and children, its cows and its pigs, is the small Scotch village with its narrowness, its self-righteousness, and its will to conformity, ready to suspect evil, ruthless to pry it out, pitiless to bring it to punishment, and here, in lovely contrast, is the Scotch countryside with "its hawthorne hedges that smelt like sweet nuts," its "rolling fields . . . scattered with pungent, sweet-smelling heaps of cow-dung," its swollen streams that "in the dark seem as vicious and noiseless as the sea," its hillsides and orchards, its brisk winds and sodden rains.

Set in this Scotch landscape is a story of human passions, the drama of Effie Gallows who marries one man to father her love-child by another, and brings suffering and misery on those who would protect her and a cruel death upon herself. An old theme, perhaps. Yes, but new as old experience is always new for each in turn who tastes it, and as perennially fresh as sin and remorse and death. There is an inevitability to the incidents of the story as they flow from Miss Spencer's imagination which lends her tale a moving and tragic dignity. The episodes of Effie's progress toward martyrdom are unforced, logical, and convincing, and advance toward the predestined disaster with a constant tightening of emotional tension. Hers is tragedy that springs from the necessities of character and not from fortuitous circumstance, and its poignance is all the greater in that it follows not from her faults but from her virtues.

"Gallows' Orchard" is, indeed, the achievement of a singularly fresh and uninhibited talent. It is lusty with action, presenting one scene after another that is astir with boisterous life, the wedding, the county fair, the fight in which Effie's husband is killed, the trial with its buzzing of a bloodthirsty rabble, the stoning of Effie at the end. On the other hand, it has simple and touching incident, like the death and burial of Effie's child. The story is told through the

person of Schoolmaster who becomes Effie's husband after Ernest Weir's marriage to her has ended in his death, and who is the medium through which her personality is reflected. Schoolmaster himself, and Minister his friend, are characters somewhat vaguely realized, though Miss Spencer's intuition feels its way with certainty into the sources and perplexities of their affection for her. They, and even Effie herself, splendid creature though she is and dominate her story as she does, are yet as individuals less emphatically veracious than the book as a whole. It is the truthfulness of its incident, the clarity of its emotion, the intimate feeling of the author for her background, and the vividness with which she conveys scene and action, rather than its personalities, which give "Gallows' Orchard" the tang of life.

The book has a sparkle that is like the exciting quality of bright sunshine, though its portrayal of cruelty is dour enough. Miss Spencer is too much the artist to be the partisan. She passes no judgment upon her Scotch community, nor does she pour out pity on Effie. But her compassion, though unspoken, floods the book. An exacting and rigorous restraint, however, holds emotion free from sentimentality, and prevents the dramatic from becoming the melodramatic. Miss Spencer has gone far.

The Younger Generation

VILE BODIES. By EVELYN WAUGH. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

THE reader finds a clew to what "Vile Bodies" is all about in two quotations from "Alice Through the Looking Glass" and in a chronological note by the author warning that "the action of the book is laid in the near future." These are more serviceable guideposts than the publisher's hopeful description of the book as "tragedy in which comic relief overwhelmingly predominates." The tragic muse would have a hard time indeed accommodating her step to the hop, skip, and jump of this rather riotous satire. And Mr. Waugh's readable and amusing medley is about as near the original "saturikon" as anything modern can be, a hodge-podge of most things in life—politics, church, press, revivalists, motor races, airships, motion pictures, anything that comes into the author's head as meet for lampooning, and always and above everything the younger generation of the upper class in England.

One prefers not to spoil the fun by taking the author too seriously. Why look, as the publisher suggests one should, for a "theme of Hope and Frustration" when it is apparent that this young Englishman is having a perfectly good time lambasting his contemporaries? That is what gives the book any significance it may have. It is a healthy sign that people are ceasing to take flaming youth with the portentous solemnity which has afflicted the post-war generations. If the infection of laughter spreads, even the professional uplifters of youth, even the artists of the radio, may pluck up enough courage to leave off telling the younger generation how wonderful it is and how very, very right to "revolt"—whatever that means. In place of assuring youth that its holy mission is to teach its grandmother to suck eggs, it is not a bad idea once in a while to give it a spanking and send it to bed.

This is what Mr. Waugh does, and a pretty savage spanking it is, with ridicule as the birch. "Here," he says to the younger generation, "is what you are going to be like if you go on the way you are going, you perishing young idiots!" And he parades before them an array of naughty, dissipated, quite unmoral young people, with a thirst that would do credit to a prohibition country, and no standards nor any inhibitions to speak of. They are the product ("in the near future," remember) of self-expressionism, and they keep on expressing themselves until they find, with some consternation, that they have nothing left to express. As Mr. Waugh puts it, after describing an episode that might, with luck, attract the favorable attention of Boston, "the truth is that like so many people of their age and class, Adam and Nina were suffering from being sophisticated about sex before they were at all widely experienced." In the end it is evident that the author does not quite know what to do with his young people, so he dumps them into the middle of the next war, much as Alice was dumped into the middle of next week, and leaves them there. This may be "frustration," as the publisher says, but it looks

much more like a *deus ex machina* to wind up a play of which the author is beginning to tire. However, the individual scenes have been highly diverting and the satire spirited and effective.

An Epic Chronicle

THE CRUSADES: IRON MEN AND SAINTS.

By HAROLD LAMB. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1930. \$3.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

NO episode in European history is more stirring than the First Crusade. None has ever been quite like it. In that first cry that echoed over a field at Clermont an idea was born, an idea of European unity—Christendom, we used to call it—to take the place of the old Roman idea which was dead, a new idea to be the core of a new culture, a new civilization. In that first rush of mailed warriors out of the northern mists, the older and wiser races of the East first learned to know the fighting fury of the nations who face the cold Atlantic, the nations who were in the end to be their masters. The history of the next ten years reads less like sober fact than like some apocalyptic vision, some older myth of the birth and the terrible first warfare of the gods.

In choosing to tell again that familiar story, Mr. Harold Lamb has chosen wisely. As fantastic, as incredible as any adventure in the Mongol conquests, it is better documented, more compact, very much more thoroughly studied and annotated by scholars. But to a writer of Mr. Lamb's temperament and methods that is not its chief advantage. What really drew him to be the biographer of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane was, one may be permitted to suspect, a taste for the epic. And to the writer of epics a familiar subject matter is an immense advantage. Now none of us can quite believe in Tamerlane or Genghis Khan, they are as alien to our tradition as the conventions of a Japanese fairy tale; but Bohemund and Tancred, Peter the Hermit and Godfrey of Bouillon are the heroes of our nursery days! There is not a child among us but has at some time nailed two laths together and played at being a crusader, not an inheritor of this expanded Christendom to whom the very word crusade does not call with imperative recollection like a distant trumpet. So to the strangeness and wonder of the East which holds him, to that spectacular pageantry—enormous marches, doubtful battles, smoking towns—on which he loves to dwell, Mr. Lamb can add this time a story with something of the familiar charm of Robin Hood's or Jack the Giant-Killer's. This ought to be the most popular of all his books.

After only a cursory survey of Western Europe in the eleventh century, Mr. Lamb hastens to the Council of Clermont and the proclamation of the First Crusade by Pope Urban II in 1095. With imaginative fervor he recounts the gathering of the hosts, and follows the fortunes of the various divisions as they press onward toward Byzantium. As the narrative moves eastward, it gains in fulness and in interest; almost half the entire volume is devoted to the march of the main army from Constantinople to Jerusalem. In this portion of the story, with such guides to follow as Fulcher of Chartres and the Anonymous chronicler, and with the drama, with its grim crisis at Antioch and its miraculous turning point in the finding of the Holy Lance, symmetrically arranged by fate, it would be hard for the weakest writer to fail in interest. Mr. Lamb has never written better pages. No one who has read his "Tamerlane" and "Genghis Khan" can doubt his ability to write vividly and persuasively of Oriental warfare and this ability has been enhanced in his present book by a careful study of the sources and by personal inspection of the scenes of action. Naturally, after the fall of Jerusalem, the unity of interest is broken, but the further fortunes of the principal heroes are not neglected, and the whole story is brought down, with considerable detail, to the death of King Baldwin, in 1118. In an epilogue and in several discursive appendices, later events which Mr. Lamb will treat more fully, so his publishers promise, in a subsequent volume, are briefly sketched.

With the modern tendency in history which is distinctly away from the grand battle pictures and elaborate accounts of military exploits which delighted our grandfathers, Mr. Lamb has nothing to do. Only the epic really concerns him. Students who have complained that "Tamerlane" and

"Genghis Khan" have added nothing to their comprehension of the history involved, will be no better satisfied with the "Crusades." Mr. Lamb's picture of the "Dark Ages" would have been old-fashioned when Michele wrote, and one suspects that he adopts Professor Monroe's hypothesis that Pope Urban's quarrel with the Emperor was the "cause" of the First Crusade, less from a conviction of its correctness than because it is convenient, dramatic, and saves thought. Nowhere does he consider how such ignorant, poverty-stricken barbarians as he has depicted in his first chapter, could have poured forth such formidable hosts upon the East. The fleets of Pisa and Venice appear off the coast of Syria as if by magic; the commercial interests of Italy are dismissed in a sentence. All the slow, deep-rooted growth of the might of western Europe, all the complicated discussion of the complicated causes of the "First Crusade," interest Mr. Lamb not at all. Nor does he pause, while there is fighting to be described, to dwell on the "Assizes of Jerusalem" or the adjustments of the Crusaders to their new environment. History to Mr. Lamb is a pageant. Military details, of course, are better handled. But not even in this department is the "Crusades" a book for scholars. The discussion of the sources is usually perfunctory and nothing important is added to our knowledge of the events. When the facts are doubtful, Mr. Lamb follows, generally without comment, whichever of several plausible alternatives appeals to him. Missing details his imagination supplies, and no system of footnotes helps his readers to distinguish the passages which Mr. Lamb invents from the passages which Mr. Lamb transcribes. As far as this reviewer was able to determine, the researches in the Vatican, heralded in his publisher's blurb, have yielded mainly several entertaining illustrations.

But it would be unfair to judge this book by the criteria of scientific history. There will always be plenty of solemn discussion of economic causes and social consequences to occupy the solemn minority who like to read them. Mr. Lamb has written for all of us who are still young enough to be stirred by wonder and by courage. For that public he has evoked the choking dust of Asian roadways, the din and sweat, the clashing and confusion of close-pitched battles, the vanity and intrigue of princes, the brutality and superstition and simple, high-hearted faith that brought the army at last through hunger and despair, treacherous friends, and swarming, elusive, warlike foes to the promised land. Of these things he tells with scholarship enough, and with unflagging vigor. By design, this is a popular book. Historians would do well to welcome, without too many questions, any adherent to their ranks who can and does make history really popular.

The Golden Age

THE PAINTER'S CRAFT. By ROYAL CORTIS-
SOZ. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1930.
\$3.50.

Reviewed by CHRISTIAN BRINTON

DO not think to meet in these seasoned pages any hint of that stressful, aspiring modernism which so intrigues the youth of to-day. Here all is serene, lucid, luminous. It is truly the Golden Age of art that Mr. Royal Cortissoz, doyen of our esthetic critics, envisages in his latest offering. Upon perusing this book from cover to cover one is constrained to regard Mr. Cortissoz as the Diderot of his day. Not, of course, the prodigious encyclopædist, but the sound, pithy author of the "Essai sur la Peinture" and the "Salons."

Something of that same regard for the "eternal verities" of form, color, and design, that reverence for established tradition which are so characteristically French, animates with steady, glowing ardor these successive chapters, each of which, is, in essence, an apologia for the writer's particular viewpoint. And just what, in effect, is his viewpoint? It is, stoutly and repeatedly proclaimed, that beauty, "the beauty of perfect craftsmanship," is, or should be, the chief aim and end of art. In this eminently stabilized context, we encounter nothing of that stormy individualism, those tumultuous forces, social and spiritual, that periodically overturn convention and win their way to new freedom and expressional significance. It is rather the "stamp of authority," the potency of "historical precedent," that elicit the author's praise and enlist his support.

It must be conceded that such a forthright, four-square attitude toward the shifting complex of esthetic standards has much in its favor. As a result, a kind

of "inner serenity," a species of "spiritual certitude," pervades from first to last "The Painter's Craft." Only now and again, when he recalls the impious, not to say impudent, attitude of certain of his modernistically minded colleagues does the writer's olympian calm momentarily desert him. It is, in some, impossible not to admire, even to envy, the sanity and scholarly equipoise of the several sections here devoted to such disparate personalities as Velasquez, El Greco, Goya, Chardin, Manet, Renoir, Arthur B. Davies, George Bellows, H. Siddons Mowbray, and that imposing triumvirate of architects, Messrs. McKim, Mead, and White. And Mr. Cortissoz aptly concludes with a eulogy of the American Art Collector of which the cis-Atlantic Maecenas may well be proud.

Whilst passages of genuine insight and sympathetic exposition abound in these compact pages, one, however, looks vainly for some sort of centralized content, for, as it were, a more substantial body of doctrine. The constant stressing of "great craftsmanship," whether it be apropos of Velasquez, Tiepolo, Houdon, Hogarth, or Gilbert Stuart is possibly insufficient for individuals naïve enough to be in quest of creative ideas. And again, one so frequently stumbles upon sincere, though scarcely subtle, berating of the hapless protagonists of the so-called modernist movement that the desired effect is not unnaturally minimized.

And yet, one must not hold the author of "The Painter's Craft" wholly accountable for such shortcomings as the book may seem to betray. The period in which he attained to intellectual majority—the period of the "American Renaissance"—whatever else it possessed was deficient in esthetic divination. Gathered before their easels, or seated about the famous round table of a certain delectable retreat in Gramercy Park during the middle and late 'nineties of the last century was a group of men, accomplished and confident, who exalted the purely technical aspect of art, who were consummate craftsmen, but whose actual message was of modest, not to say meagre, proportions. They were eminently successful and, locally at least, famous. Yet unknown to them was already rising on the far strand of Tahiti, under the burning sun of Arles, or in the grey-green solitude of Aix-en-Provence the flood tide of an art that was soon to place what one may term the inner spiritual dynamic above the mere outward display of technique however brilliant and dazzling.

That which in no small degree mars the fine, reasoned humanism of this particular book, and its incidental revelation of a notably urbane and likable personality, is its covert and often overt antipathy toward modernism *per se*. One misses a sense of the single, continuous stream-line unfolding of the esthetic consciousness which is always more evolutionary than revolutionary, and hence in reality not to be feared. This, in fine, is the one note of dissonance in an otherwise mellow, rounded echo of the Golden Age of art and art culture by our beloved doyen.

The original letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, were recently presented to Wellesley College by Miss Caroline Hazard, former president of Wellesley, as a memorial to her predecessor, Alice Freeman Palmer. They will form part of a collection of all the first and rare editions of the poems of both Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which was given to the college by Professor George Herbert Palmer after the death of Mrs. Palmer. The letters, which were kept by the two poets, were written during the period of their courtship, and date from January, 1845, to September, 1846, the last being written the day before they left London for Italy soon after their secret marriage.

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