

The Reader's Guide

Conducted by MAY LAMBERTON BECKER

Inquiries in regard to the selection of books and questions of like nature should be addressed to MRS. BECKER, c/o *The Saturday Review*

W. L. K. Lester, *South Dakota*, asks who has written the best ending to "Edwin Drood."

WHEN I told a famous Dickensian in London, some years since, that I was on my way to Rochester to go over the ground and up the tower and down into the crypt, in the hope that somewhere I might pick up a clue hitherto overlooked, he showed something not far from resentment. This story, he inferred, was not meant to be finished. Something not unlike impiety seemed to him to attach to such an endeavor. It was, I think, the sort of feeling that makes us hold back as long as possible from reaching the solution of a detective story—not only to spin out our enjoyment but because the solution is always a let-down and something of a disappointment. Here we have the one detective story in which no disappointment is possible. Why spoil it?

Nevertheless many have tried. The first was an American, "Orpheus C. Kerr," who in the very year of Dickens's death brought out a burlesque, "The Cloven Foot," in which, by the way, Edwin returns. Then came another American effort, "John Jasper's Secret," which I read in a village lending library long ago: it was pretty weak. Then a "spirit pen" in Brattleboro, Vermont, took a hand; I read that, too, as nearly as anyone has been able to read it, for it was dense as reinforced concrete. Then came "Gillan Vase's" "A Great Mystery Solved," in 1878, in which Mrs. Sapsea's part is worth noticing. "The Complete Mystery of Edwin Drood," by J. Cumming Walter (Chapman, 1912), gives the history, continuations, and solutions from 1870 to 1912; since then several more have appeared, and the official report of the "Trial of John Jasper, lay precentor of Cloisterham Cathedral in the county of Kent, for the murder of Edwin Drood, Engineer," heard by Mr. Justice Gilbert K. Chesterton with a special jury (of which Bernard Shaw was a diligent member) was printed by Chapman in 1914. This is the "solution" that most pleases me, possibly because it leaves Edwin alive, for I could never hear in the cadence of the last words written about him before he disappears, the beat of the approaching foot of the undertaker, always to be discerned when a Dickens character is about to be violently taken off or feel in Edwin's own words the charnel breath of blank verse that shows he is not long for this world. One could not have doubted, for instance, that Nancy would soon be with the angels in "Oliver Twist," when her parts of speech took so sudden a turn for the better.

"The Problem of Edwin Drood," by W. Robertson Nicoll (Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), is a classic study of the subject; Andrew Lang's "The Puzzle of Dickens's Last Plot" (Chapman, 1905) is celebrated; it agrees in the main with the most popular of the "conclusions," that of R. A. Proctor's "Watched by the Dead" (Allen, 1887). "The Mystery in the Drood Family," by Montagu Saunders (not Summers), came in 1914; "Keys to the Drood Mystery," by Edwin Charles, goes in strong for motive, brings out a curious preoccupation with Macbeth, and actually finds a cryptogram, *Edwin Drood*, in the inscription on Mrs. Sapsea's monument. Mary Kavanagh's "A New Solution to the Mystery of Edwin Drood," published by Longmans, Green about 1919, began well by reminding one that it is unlikely Edwin should die, considering that the sympathies of Dickens are always on the side of his hero, but when she went on to intimate that Tartar might be Drood in disguise, I just gave up. "About Edwin Drood," by H. Jackson (Columbia University Press, 1911), points to the walk taken by Crisparkle when the jewelry of Drood is found, and brings out the evident intention of tying this up with the hypnotic powers of Jasper.

The very last thing I expected was to be presented at this late day with a genuine piece of new evidence of constructive value in the Drood Case, the only piece of higher criticism that has been added for years. This is to be found in *The Bookman* for February, 1930, the title being "John Jasper—Strangler" and the author the Reverend Doctor Howard Duffield, president of the New York branch of the Dickens Fellowship; it was he, indeed, who gave me the letters of introduction that made my Rochester walk easier. I will not say one word about the nature of the brilliant new idea here to be found, beyond stating that it is amaz-

ingly convincing, uncommonly well documented, and—now that you are told—so clear that like all hidden things once discovered, the mystery seems mainly that no one caught sight of it before. It does not complete the story, and I am permitted to believe that the Trial arrived at the right verdict, but it certainly did not have this bit of contemporary evidence. This is a fine number of *The Bookman* for my purposes, by the way; I have already recommended articles in it to two other correspondents, but not the one about Ernest Hemingway.

HERE is a matter that must take precedence of a long line of letters waiting for print. G. V., *Glenside, Pa.*, tells me of a young girl in the grip of a disease slowly cutting off her contacts with the outer world. She is bedridden and has been blind for several years: now her hearing is going. Music and literature have been her only occupations, and now these are being taken away: her friends, who have taken turns in reading and playing to her, feel that the situation is desperate, and beg the readers of this department to tell them if there is anything that they can do. The girl reads Braille, and is now making attempts at digital lip-reading; some of us may have valuable suggestions for acquiring this technique. Someone may also know something about the electrical device known as the Phipps Unit, enabling the deaf to receive radio broadcast by contact with the jaw, or another form of receiver which may be held between the teeth and operates by "bone transmission." G. V. says this sounds too good to be true, but they are going to try everything.

I need not tell you to send any information you may have, that might meet this case in any way, to this department. Indeed, I do not see why in this instance I may not break the rule of the department that no names be given, and tell you what this inquirer told me, in response to my letter: "The name of this brave little lady is Bertha Mullin, and she lives at 125 East Meehan Avenue, Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, Penn. Drop her a line sometime; her mother will spell it out to her by some form of sign language. It is needless to say that Bertha, who knows and loves the *Saturday Review*, would be overjoyed to hear from you. She's really a remarkable girl, very talented musically, draws very well, even since becoming blind, and has a good working command of words."

That is more than I have, when I think of her.

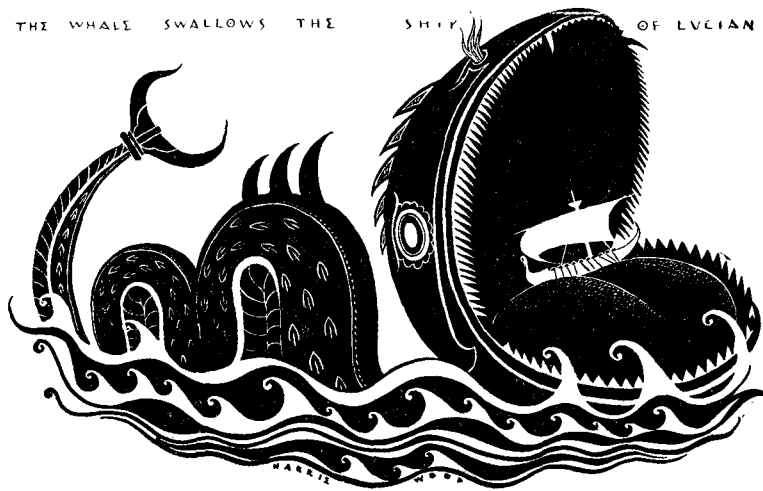
P. M. W., *Baltimore, Md.*, asks for a simple and popular handbook of parliamentary procedure, easier than Robert's "Rules of Order."

"HOW to Organize and How to Conduct a Meeting," by Henry and Seeley (Hinds), is one of the simplest; "Parliamentary Usage for Women's Clubs," by E. A. Fox (Doubleday, Doran) is easy; another that progresses by twenty-four simple graded lessons is the "Primer of Parliamentary Law," by Joseph T. Robert (Doubleday, Doran). It would be worth while keeping Hall and Sturgis's "Textbook of Parliamentary Law" (Macmillan) on hand; this is not a manual for consultation during meetings, but a series of lessons on the principles involved, with exercises of various kinds.

H. H., *New York*, asks for books about Holland.

FRANK, get "The Flavor of Holland," by Adele de Leeuw (Century), for just what the title says. Then "The Netherlands Displayed," by Marjorie Bowen (Dodd, Mead), a sumptuous volume, and her admirable "Holland" (Doubleday, Doran). "Holland of To-day" (Penn) is one of George Wharton Edwards's color-illustrated gift-books, very lovely. "Come With Me Through Belgium and Holland," by Frank Schoonmaker (McBride), is a useful little guide; "The Spell of Holland," by Burton Stevenson (Page), a handsomely illustrated work; "Through the Gates of the Netherlands," by Mary E. Waller (Little, Brown), a good travel record; "Things Seen in Holland," by C. E. Roche (Dutton), a small handbook full of pictures. Read the "Small Souls" group of four novels of society at the Hague, by Louis Couperus (Dodd, Mead), and the novels of Jo von Ammers-Kuller, of which the latest is "Tantalus" (Dutton).

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I [FROM AN EDITORIAL]

I want to persuade my readers to secure the current issue of *The Bookman*. In my opinion, this is the most important and the most significant number ever printed.

I have known *The Bookman* from its birth in England, October 1891, and have but to turn around in my chair to reach for the first eleven volumes. In 1897 I left England and a little while later transferred my allegiance to *The Bookman* in America, whose first editor was, I believe, Professor Thurston Peck. In all these years since I do not recall a single issue which, for interest, insight, and courage, comes up to the one that lies on my desk at this moment.

Glenway Westcott's appreciation of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Chesterton's characteristic outburst on "Magic and Fantasy in Fiction," Francis Hackett's essay on "The Post-Victorians," and Hamlin Garland's "Roadside Meetings," would, by themselves, make any magazine notable. But that which makes this issue so worth while for the student of contemporary tendencies in literature is the space that it gives to, and the attitude it reveals toward, humanism. Not to speak of the rather militant controversy between Allen Tate and Robert Shafer on what Mr. Tate called "The Fallacy of Humanism," there are two other articles that should be read by everybody who would understand what all the excitement is about.

Mr. Seward Collins, the editor, devotes his whole article on "Chronicle and Comment" to humanism. In fifteen two-column pages Mr. Collins gives his readers the most thorough and intelligent review and exposition

of the humanistic movement it has ever been my good fortune to read. It would be impossible to give in a few paragraphs the gist of this comprehensive essay. I think there is scarcely a point at issue between humanists and anti-humanists on which Mr. Collins has not something illuminating to say. The whole movement is here set forth with a sympathetic understanding and a clarity of expression that makes the essay of immense value to those of my readers who know of humanism only what its enemies have ignorantly said of it.

But the chief place is given to Mr. Paul Elmer More's article on "A Revival of Humanism." It is far more than the review of *Humanism and America*, which it modestly pretends to be. It is an answer—and a magnificent answer—to all those sneering critics who delight in pointing out that humanists "can't even agree among themselves," and who draw the damning conclusion that humanism is nothing but confusion worse confounded. That there should be divergencies in so critical and delicate an attitude toward life and letters as humanism implies is a foregone conclusion, the human mind being what it is. But the truly impressive thing is the unanimity of humanists on certain essential and revolutionary views and attitudes.

W. E. L.

In the *Foxboro (Mass.) Reporter*,
March 29.

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