

## Points of View

### The Other Side of the Shield

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

I have just been reading "Jeremiah Tries Reading." I live in a little house on a side road in the country. To the west and south and east the view is unobstructed for miles as we live on a high place, sort of a hill. I read that article, and then I looked out across the hills—toward Chicago, where the crime of the age is supposed to be centered. Between here and there are—how many folks? I have no idea. But—plenty. Most of them troubled by the depression, but—all right folks.

I have looked out toward the neighboring farms and wondered what the people living upon them would say about that rather amazing first paragraph of your article. The crime and muck of the age isn't half as well known as it imagines it is! If you were to ask me the most important news item of the day right now—and I answered what was uppermost in my mind—I would reply, "The Stewarts lost a sow last night." The fact that four new little pigs are without a mother today is far more important than that there's a political mess in Washington or that some well insured bank was robbed last night. And that is humanity. Everything you say in that first paragraph is true. But—there is never a picture with but one side.

The chief reason no writer has tried to write sanely is that the curse of syndicated newspapers is upon us and there is no humanity, no sense of honor, no personality at all in that sort of thing. It's just a huge, vicious monster with a fiendish lust for dividends. Any organization without personality, without individuals personally responsible to the people of their community or audience, is going to be a menace. It can't be otherwise. Nothing matters but dividends. All right—more papers sell with lurid, exciting stories than with sane news. It's nobody's fault. It's a condition of national mind. And writers must cater to that mind if they expect publicity and sales. Now, we are beginning to realize the damaging effects, and we suddenly sit up and look

about and take notice of the wrong phases of the movies, the radio, the papers, and magazines. If we could stop syndicated news, we would see and hear a very different world. If we had a newspaper in our town which printed news of our town, we would have murder stories so seldom we would remember them for years. As it is, we have no local paper. Our newspaper is a Scripps affair, and we get a few local items if they happen to feel in the mood to print them. Every small city is the same now. All crime is advertised like a *Graf Zeppelin*. Well—if we would all stop reading it, talking it, or listening to it—there is nothing so sure to kill as silence, the ignoring of a subject.

It's been a terrible year. We are one of the less than average families caught in the whirl and left stranded, and there isn't any open way out, so far. We have no salary checks and no money, but an alarmingly increasing stack of debts. If we were to tune in on those speakers on the radio who tell us just how tragic the conditions are we might feel so sorry for ourselves that we would take poison, or try to hold up oil stations or join some "red" group so we might yell about it all. But we happen to be interested in flowers and gardens and baby chicks and getting some wren houses up, and the airedale got hurt in a fight, and there are woods to watch for the appearance of some *Erginina bulbosa*, and a neighbor who can use some help cutting wood.

No, we don't need to make more laws, nor reform anything seriously. We need to laugh at ourselves, and make a garden. Have you any idea how many folks are going to make gardens this spring for the first time, at least in years? When the cities were booming, the farms were deserted. Now, everybody who had a bit of land has gone back to it, and those who didn't, have bought or rented some. Potato bugs and tomato worms are marvellous competition to interest in lesser criminals. If some of the leading writers of pessimism would only join some good horticultural society it would just about save the country! As that is one of my own pet hobbies, I happen to

know more of that than of any other phases, and I know so many interesting things, fascinating things, of far more importance than worrying over a deplorable phase which will pass soon. No one phase ever lasted forever yet! It's so big a world we can still find whatever we look for, I think. It would be nice and quite a glorious thing if someone would write beautifully about all the lovely things which are true about us Americans, but no book is read by everybody, so ever so many folks would never know it had been written. Life is a heap like the radio, isn't it? We tune in, or out, according to our individual tastes. I tune in on talks by a fine old gardener, by tree and flower experts, also the music of symphonies and certain folk singers. Often there are voices telling me it isn't safe to be alive or that the country has been sold out by somebody for some reason. Well, if I listen to or read that sort of thing a while I always have to take the dog and go for a walk back over the hills and smell the trees and feel the good, solid earth and remind myself that, regardless of the static, the great god Pan is piping on the river's brim just as truly now as a million years ago or hence.

We are travellers; why should we take our vehicle, named Earth, so very solemnly? We will have finished the journey before the worst happens anyhow! We have taken ourselves too seriously. I wonder if we have been a bit too sure of our own importance? We make such wise-sounding statements about the universe and human nature and religion and all the rest of it, when, if we would just go to some gypsy camp and follow their pattern for a season we would learn that after all there isn't any problem but of our own making. Let us go to a hilltop with Walt Whitman, on his birthday this spring maybe, and realize that so long as there are Leaves of Grass—God's in the same old heaven, and behaviorism is expressing human conceits today, and always. But presently there will be tulips. And new radishes and lettuce, and the earth will produce food and foliage and flowers. Politics and crime may go on, but regardless of anything, the important fact in creation is that Spring is sure, and almost here.

I seem to have written half a book. I didn't mean to do that. But it is a gray day, and time means little out here on the hilltops.

I wish magazines wouldn't run unsigned articles. Now I have to write some sort of inane sounding request for some clerk to figure out because I do not know who I want my letter given to! Please tell somebody who may know how to make the wheels go 'round that I want to vote—emphatically—for signatures!

ETHELYN RINN.

Kalamazoo, Mich.

P. S. Maybe I'd better not start asking for votes. I haven't paid for my paper and so can't be a "member in good standing." When I was a child, people took eggs or potatoes to the editor. I wonder if I couldn't send the editor a hen or maybe some nice, green onions. I have never seen the home of a New York editor—not a really editor—but as I have seen everything else in the world on fire escapes there, I would think a perfectly good editor would be able to keep a few hens on the fire escape!

### Verbum Sap

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

Won't you please pass along to the person who has been writing the mournful editorials about the bitter seasoning of hate in modern American fiction, the following story from our collection of family anecdotes? Ask him to remember not only the well-known axiom that hate is much more pungent literary flavoring than good-will, but this little tale of international cookery when next he speaks about the dull pens and pallid diluted talents of those few writers who still, once in a while, feel that they can bear up and enjoy their meals even though living in the U. S. A. and belonging to the human race.

A cousin of my father's, a great favorite with that generation of our family, went to Mexico years ago as a mining engineer. He was in charge of an important undertaking, which kept him far in the back regions of the country. Adaptable, energetic, interested in his work, proud of his success in it, he rather enjoyed those Mexican years—all but the cooking. Every letter that came back was full of laments over the amount of red pepper and other fiery condiments with which Mexican cooks spoiled (for him) the excellent raw materials they used. Racial habits are hard to change, cooking habits are impossible to change. He tried rewards, he tried dire threats, but of course as everybody of experience would have known to

begin with, his food continued to taste, as he used to say in his wistful letters home, as though it were Vesuvius and Mt. Aetna in full eruption. "Take chicken!" he would write in those homesick letters. "When I see the cook plucking a chicken, I can just taste one of Aunt Martha's fricassees—that gravy made with cream, poured over her biscuits! The tears fairly come to my eyes when, at dinner-time I get—what I always get at dinner-time: the same old mouthful of red-hot hell."

Or soup. "If I can just live," ran his nostalgic refrain, "till I have had a plateful of tomato-bisque soup, full of the real savory flavor of ripe tomatoes, instead of this one everlasting Mexican flavor of red pepper!"

Well, after so long a time, he came home. I well remember the dinner which was prepared for him by his devoted family, one of the banner dinners of my childhood. It was late August, happily, just the season for the best broilers. And tomatoes hung red-ripe on all the vines. What a pleasure it was to everyone to prepare a perfect home dinner, just the kind that Cousin George loved, just the dishes he had so often written about from his tropical exile! Such golden-brown, white-fleshed chicken. Such rich full-flavored gravy. And such a tomato soup! Made out of ripe tomatoes and summer cream. Suave, smooth, spicy.

Cousin George's eye lighted up when he saw it. "Ah, this is getting back to God's country!" said he, dipping his spoon in.

I don't need to tell you what he said. You foresaw it accurately from the first of this story. So I won't tell you, except that it rapidly ran the gamut from "Seems as though this soup was a little flat, isn't it? Pass me the salt, will you," to a "Great Scott, what's the matter with this chicken! No taste to it!" And ended with—of course, what did you expect?—"Why, everything on this table tastes like so much bread-dough! For Heaven's sake, somebody give me some red pepper!"

MARTHA HULME.

### "Pompilia and Her Poet"

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

My "Pompilia and Her Poet," reviewed in your issue of March 21st, should have been ascribed to Brentano's. I wrote you that the change was made one month after the book appeared but evidently word did not reach your reviewer. I enjoyed his summary tremendously. After an unbroken chorus of praise in letters and reviews, I had begun to fear something was wrong with a book that could not arouse antagonism anywhere. I am reassured by his wiping it off the map in that delightful last sentence: "It is only just to add that a book which under no circumstances could have possessed real value has profited rather than lost by its allocation to Miss Gaylord."

There are a lot of circumstances in life remote from an esoteric scholar, but I value sturdy denunciation as a tribute. However as Brentano's can't sell Miss Gaylord and want to sell the book, do let me say that I made it most emphatic in the preface and on the jacket that I wrote "Pompilia and Her Poet" unpretentiously in the hope of making the Brownings enjoyable to the myriads who, in 1931, either do not know them or who have the mistaken impression that they are intellectual giants to be shunned. I have been surprised and delighted to have Browning scholars like William Lyon Phelps, Richard Burton, John Hall Wheelock, Dr. Armstrong of Baylor, Dr. Russell of Stanford, Dr. Fairchild of the University of Missouri, and many others appreciate my intent and acclaim my book in lectures, comments, and reviews. "De Gustibus—!"

HARRIET GAYLORD.

Yonkers, New York.

### "Lo Cunto de li Cunti"

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

At the suggestion of the Librarian of Congress I am venturing to ask your help in tracing copies of any editions of the following work in any libraries in America, not mentioned in the Union catalogue of the Library of Congress. The work in question is: Giovan Battista Basile [Gian Alesio Abbattutis] "Lo Cunto de li Cunti" (or) "Il Pentamerone." The first edition appeared in Naples in 5 parts (1634-1636) while the most recent reprint was that issued in 1927 in New York (Burton's English translation).

Cav. Benedetto Croce and myself are preparing a new edition with full bibliographical details. It is for these latter that I am writing to you for information.

N. M. PENZER.

12 Clifton Hill,  
St. John's Wood, N.W. 8, London, Eng.

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## Young Germany

By HENRIETTA B. VON KLENZE

THREE books have appeared within the last few months which serve—together—to flash a searchlight over certain significant reactions of the youngest generation to come to maturity since the war and—perhaps even more the “peace”—set German life to a new tune.

Hans Johst, already well known for his dramas, among which his fairly recent “Tomas Paine” is of especial interest in America, has painted in gray colors—but not without a melancholy charm—a dying generation. In “So Gehen Sie Hin” (München: Albert Lange, 1930) whose subtitle “Ein Roman vom Sterbenden Adel” might be translated “Tale of a Dying Aristocracy,” a group of noblemen and their families—some German, some exiles from Russia—who have found a last refuge on the shores of the beautiful Starnberg See in the neighborhood of Munich seem literally to fade away like the last remnants of snow in the April sun.

It is hardly correctly named a “novel” since the trickling plot does not serve to focus the characters. Rather is it a series of sketches, tenuous as the lives of the actors themselves who seem like players left behind after the curtain has gone down and the audience has gone home by some oversight. These people have all had their day. The men have served and some with bravery in the war. The women have been leaders of society; their ease of manners, their unconscious elegance clings as close as ever during a picnic in the woods when the princess builds the fire and the duke cooks the mushrooms while they discuss their waning fortunes with humor and a lightness of touch that yet fails to conceal their desperate plight. “What training have we had that would enable us to make our living in this modern world, even if we were perfectly willing to ‘do anything?’” asks one of the group. And a careful stocktaking reveals of marketable assets hardly enough to equip a chauffeur. So they drift as long as maybe, selling their last belongings, dismissing servants. The princess finally goes back to her American home where by letters she can maintain intact her really tender relations with her aging husband—relations that easily survived an occasional infidelity, but which she dare not put to the test of living a life together in dinginess. The Russian nobleman uses his last nest egg—a sudden windfall in the shape of an entirely forgotten investment made in the old prosperous days—to go on a little trip to Paris with the young duchess. Meanwhile the executioners take possession of his villa—what would have been the use to stave them off with the sum that paid for the Paris trip? And after the trip and its disillusionment he turns chauffeur. The duchess becomes the really tragic figure. Her little spree has shown her the futility of a mere change of venue. Now for the first time in her life the seriousness of life becomes apparent. Her not very prepossessing husband appeals as after all a sterling character and a refuge. But it is too late. To save his face she has foresworn herself on her return. Both know it, but according to their code it is not talked out. Instead she is “accidentally” drowned while skating and the two widowers (the duke and the prince) go to Italy to vegetate till the end. Only two—characteristically the two youngest—of the group promise to find their way in a world where work becomes the *noblesse oblige* of a new generation but where their old ideals of fidelity to a definitely conceived code of honor—whether its premises receive universal approbation or not—will still give them a basis on which to build a new life.

There is a loveliness not altogether unlike that of the “Cherry Orchard” in this autumnal scene. And the charm of their manners, the delicate courtesy of their intercourse, the grace and humor of their conversation, the exquisite taste of their surroundings make one wonder regretfully whether the modern world is not losing something very precious in the “Fading Aristocracy.”

At the very opposite end of the scale stands Arnold Bronnen's “Rossbach. Der Spielmann des Neuen Reiches” (Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt, 1930). If Johst's tale was played on muted strings this is a song set to martial music. Rossbach, a very much alive person whose story is told partly in the form of an interview, partly as a modern epic, was an officer in the war and a freelance on threatened border districts where, as on the Polish frontier, active fighting between bands was going on long after peace was signed. He was a rebel against constituted authority long before the war, being ejected out of his military school

for insubordination and taking up his military career again upon his private initiative. He belonged to the generation of young officers who came to their majority about 1910 and who felt stirring in them the rebellious spirit which marked the civilian youth of that day and which must have been particularly trying to the military authorities. To them “initiative” became the watchword instead of “theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.” This spirit is admirably depicted by the dramatist Fritz von Unruh—himself a member of this generation—in his dramas: “Die Offiziere” (1912) and “Prinz von Preussen” (1914).

After the collapse of Germany, the Revolution, the Treaty that tore away large sections of Germans from the mother land and condemned Germany to remain virtually unarmed in the midst of enemies armed to the teeth, such men as Rossbach found it hard to believe that these conditions were to be permanent and irremediable. Hence he became for five years a freelance, ready to take part in any *Putsch*—whether Kapp, Hitler, Ludendorff or whatever—that promised to bring relief to insupportable conditions. Finally in 1923 he became convinced that the time for such uprising was definitely over. In Munich, after the defeat of the last *Putsch*, it came to him that a consolidated government had emerged from the chaos. And when Hindenburg became president, he definitely gave up his defiance—but not his hopes of a rejuvenated and invigorated homeland.

Now comes a most characteristically German note into the activities of this undefeated youth. He disbands his military followers and forms—a *Spielschar*, i.e., a wan-

dering band of musicians, singers. What country but Germany would at so desperate a time see in music the hope for a regeneration of its youth? It is a rejuvenation with modifications of the German *Wandervogel* movement with a goodly injection of Boy Scout ideas. The style of the narrative is terse, vital, dynamic, and suggests Spring to the other's Autumn.

This same spirit of youthful hope and dare forms the substance of the third book to be discussed here: Frank Matzke's “So Sind Wir” (Leipzig: Reclam, 1930). Its subtitle “Jugend Bekennt” could be rendered “Youth's Program.” It is both a program and an exposition of the young generation's beliefs and disbeliefs. The outstanding impression on the reader is one of gallant courage, the courage that comes up smiling in desperate situations. An old verse serves as a motto for one chapter: “I live and know not how long; I die and know not when; I go and know not whither; I wonder I can be so gay.” Not gaiety but cheeriness is the prevalent tone of this confession. “We are of the generation that saw the war from the rear only, that ran about playgrounds when the big killing was going on,” but that came into its adolescence in a world in chaos, a world bereft of its old faiths, its old values. A world that had to be reconstructed from the very bottom. Oswald Spengler's “Untergang des Abendlandes” became their cosmos and they neither had the faith in the orthodox God of their forebears (in the most literal sense we can say “we have lost our God”) nor can they accept the nineteenth century's substitute “Progress.” For the impressions of their childhood and youth make them doubt whether any progress in any real sense can be claimed for the world they found. Often the far past seems to them to show a more advanced humanity than their own day or that of their imme-

diat predecessors. But since they must live in this world—whether it be the best or the worst of all possible worlds they have no means of determining—they mean to live gallantly and unafraid but also, as far as possible, unfooled. So they refuse all calls upon their sentiment or all claims to penetrate their inward reserve. And this demand for reserve and objectivity is related to the new moral code evolved by themselves after the debacle of the old order. “We do not believe in license—not because we are afraid of punishment now or hereafter, but because we have an instinct for decency and cleanliness. But we will not accept your tenets on your mere say so. We will examine for ourselves whether chastity is an absolute value or not. But we know already that decency is a reward unto itself.”

One very grateful element in the “Confession” is the author's realization that these values are as relative as were those of the past. “We are but a wave in the stream that is without beginning and without end. But this one wave—our wave—is at the moment in the ascendant. For a moment it rests and all about it are only valleys. This moment is our own. . . . Before we ourselves have disappeared, our time will have passed. Another wave will sweep ours away. We are no more the beginning of a new world epoch than were our predecessors. We simply are alive now.”

Professor H. J. C. Grierson, who selects the books to be awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prizes, has been Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in Edinburgh University since 1915. This year the fiction prize went to Miss E. H. Young's “Miss Mole,” and that for biography to Major Francis Yeats-Brown's “Bengal Lancer.”

## A NEW BOOK

by A. E. (George Russell) of whom  
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## A. E. (GEORGE RUSSELL)

This Irish poet, philosopher, essayist, artist, and agricultural economist is now delighting American audiences on a lecture tour of this country, and American readers with his new volume of poetry, *Vale and Other Poems*, which has just been published. “It seems to be,” says the *New York World-Telegram*, “a distillation of the essential quality of all his poetic work.”

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