

Safety First

WESTWARD PASSAGE. By MARGARET AYER BARNES. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

MRS. BARNES'S writing is, for good and bad, genteel. She has style, a style which is as effortless and as right as the style of a lady who dresses well by instinct. She writes with commanding familiarity of pleasant and dignified settings. But she has also that provincialism of the drawing-room, that ignorance of manners and ideas outside of a certain range long ago agreed on as sufficient, which has always been the disadvantage of the genteel. For a small instance, she makes her hard, clear-sighted debutante, in this year of grace, say, "I should worry!" and call a hat a "lid," two expressions which were outmoded in 1920; and for a large instance, she has a belief in the enormous value of a suitable, settled establishment, as something like a country or a church which has an unquestioned right to sacrifices, and will sufficiently reward them. When that view was really common, Mr. Grant Allen attacked it in his "The Woman Who Did"; now that it is not, Mrs. Barnes clings to it in her stories of Women Who Don't Quite.

For not all the panoramic background and skilful incident of "Years of Grace" could conceal the fact that it was a story in which nothing important happened: its heroine followed the unresisting line of conventionality, in spite of various temptations to leave the homes she did not love for men whom she did; and if she escaped the sin denounced in "The Statue and the Bust," it was only because of her youth and weakness, which perhaps made decision impossible for her. "Westward Passage" tells a similar story about a much more despicable woman. It presents seven days in the life of Olivia Ottendorf, daughter of an impoverished old New York family, divorced wife of Nick Allen, the writer, wife by a second marriage of Harry Ottendorf, the millionaire brewer. At the beginning of her voyage home she finds herself on the same boat with her former husband, who had been a desperately poor and intensely irritable genius when she deserted him, but is now America's foremost novelist, in circumstances that allow full room for flowering to the charm he always had. During the five days of the crossing, she falls in love with him again, and he (poor man) has apparently always been in love with her; the second day after landing she runs away with him, only to find that, though famous, he is not rich, that he will not at her command write the sort of books that would make him rich, and that, altogether, she will not have entirely her own way with him as with Harry; whereupon she remembers her children and her family, and returns to the doting Ottendorf.

It is necessary to be so explicit in retelling the story because the book consists of its heroine, and one cannot appreciate her and cannot, therefore, judge the book without doing so. It may be that women (who were the most numerous admirers of "Years of Grace") will find Olivia more sympathetic; but to a male reviewer Olivia, who runs away from the respectability of her home to the charm of Nick, runs away from his poverty to the stability offered by Harry, runs from him to Nick when she thinks that Nick can now offer luxury as well as love, and runs away from him a second time when she finds that he cannot, is merely contemptible. And the details of the book strengthen this impression; at the beginning, for instance, one reason for Olivia's restlessness is the reflection that, as her daughter is about to make her debut, she can no longer expect to flirt with young men; it is less harshly put, but the implication that Olivia's aim in life is to eat her cake and have it, is clear. Now it would, of course, be possible to write an admirable book about a woman who was both predatory and cowardly, another "All Kneeling"; but one has an uneasy suspicion that Mrs. Barnes, in spite of the completeness of her exposure of Olivia,

does not herself know what a wretched creature Olivia is. Certainly there is no satiric intention evident in the manner; the book is devoted to an elaborate apology for each of Olivia's actions. But a real apology is impossible, for Olivia never rises to the motives of real love or real virtue that could excuse her going or staying. We are told that she did not merely want Harry's money, that she was in love with him; but all that that comes to is that she felt that after Nick's exigence Harry's stupid, kindly devotion would be pleasant to live with; and her returning love for Nick merely meant that she thought she wanted his wit and passion for a change. The most skilful analysis of Olivia's character can show us nothing more significant than a cat carefully weighing the merits of the armchair and the hearth. It is much to be regretted, for dignity and order and gentility are in need of proponents, and Mrs. Barnes's gifts of style and invention, and her understanding of character in her own realm, might make her a valuable exemplar of them, if she would not waste her talents on such inconsequential stories.

at Eton, Robertson took up painting with Albert Moore. He was to make his mark in stage decoration and in delightful illustrated books, but his most enduring monument may well be these reminiscences. It would be unfair to discount them in a review. The books must be read. Perhaps the strangest episode is that dealing with Augustine Daly and Ada Rehan. The theory is that Daly expressed his own latent histrionic genius, with a dose of his vulgarity, through Ada Rehan by a sort of hypnosis. Certain it is that she did nothing valuable after his death. When he died suddenly in Paris, leaving Ada Rehan in utter grief and confusion, it was the outcast, Oscar Wilde, who came to her rescue and played a brother's part.

It almost seems as if the tardily domesticated old bachelor author had maintained so long that estate in order that he might observe a complete devotion to the more casual contacts. In conveying their flavor he is incomparable. The literary touch is light but precise, the wit of the essence. He writes as charmingly of his dogs as he does of great actors and painters.



EDWARD BURNE-JONES

FROM A PENCIL DRAWING BY W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON

An Artist's Memories

LIFE WAS WORTH LIVING. By W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1931. \$5.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER

TO have been the friend of Burne-Jones and of Whistler, of Henry James and Augustine Daly, of William Morris and Oscar Wilde, of Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt was indeed to have made the best of both worlds. A taste for celebrities ran in Mr. Robertson's family. His great-grandmother had heard Mrs. David Garrick say of a friend about to install the novelty of a bathroom—"Well, I thank God I'm none so dirty." His grandmother had lost her house keys on Highgate Common. A compassionate and admiring old gentleman spent half the night hunting for them and returned them in the morning, "With the compliments of S. T. Coleridge."

Among his mother's friends were two Anglo-Greek girls, the Misses Spartali, of great beauty, whose charms still live in the pictures of Whistler and Rossetti. His mother had met Dickens, but was repelled by the splendor of what seemed a spun glass waistcoat.

An uncle, James Nasmyth, was the inventor of the steam hammer and possessor of a prime attraction for any boy, a huge telescope. After a long absence at the observatory, Mrs. Nasmyth once found James with his legs sticking out of the big tube. He had been cleaning it and could not get back. "How dreadful," the young nephew gasped. "Eh, sir, it was," agreed James Nasmyth. "Man, it was the Lord's mair-r-ey I didna break the lens."

After the usual gentlemanly schooling

The Fine Art of Ballyhoo

PHANTOM FAME, or The Anatomy of Ballyhoo. By HARRY REICHENBACH, in collaboration with DAVID FREEDMAN. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

HARRY REICHENBACH, who died last summer after three decades as perhaps the chief of the movie and theatrical ballyhooers, is still at it and in his own manner still at it amusingly. Not least interesting in this story of his life is the fact that, for once, Harry Reichenbach, turning from ballyhooing others, is about the business of ballyhooing Harry Reichenbach. If in his lifetime efforts to seize public imagination he possessed the splendid material he and his collaborator, David Freedman, have here, it is no wonder that he was successful. Writing in a sense his own epitaph, he has done it in the spectacular and incredible terms of his press stunts. He is, in his autobiography, no more credible than the fictitious caliphs he brought to Broadway to boost a picture, but he is even more amusing.

His story, as he tells it, is essentially an O. Henry story. It is almost as if he had chosen to make himself the embodiment of those two most famous characters of Porter: the gentle grafter and the Haroun Al Raschid of Bagdad-on-the-Hudson. But in his life and activities he went on beyond Porter who never had the movies as a background. The gentle grafter was only the beginner. It required Harry Reichenbach, who transformed the carnival *spieler* into the public relations counsel, to make ballyhoo an art.

In his book he describes the wide range

of his activities from the employment of lions and apes in New York hotels to publicize movies; to the use of Anthony Comstock to make an overwhelming success of an obscure picture called September Morn. As wartime propagandist, he tells how, with a few simple words of wisdom, he defeated the German propagandists in Italy. Most interesting of his wartime stories perhaps is that of using Dutch laborers in German factories to carry into Germany Bibles which began properly with the story of creation, but which switched quickly to Allied propaganda to destroy German morale.

Very amusing are his reminiscent stories of the inflated egos of movie stars whom he aided, and very tragic are the consequences which in many cases, he shows, followed their swift elevation. He writes with candor of Clara Kimball Young, Rudolph Valentino, Gloria Swanson, and many others and with acrimony only of Valentino's wife and Eric von Stroheim. Less autobiographical than these stories of the great he knew (the greatest of all, he thought, was Northcliffe) are his contentions that fifty individuals in America shape the lives of all the rest as a result of publicity. It is unintentionally amusing that among those he names he calls Senator Heflin, John, in spite of all the publicity given the gentleman from Alabama. In his mistake probably lies the ironical truth behind much of the ballyhoo about ballyhoo.

The book is written in an easily read journalistic style and at the front of it is a laudatory introduction which says that the stories are all true. The author of the introduction is the tabloid *Mirror's* custodian of the truth, Mr. Walter Winchell.

Why Good Books Die

(Continued from page 341)

out, and off the rest rolls toward the junk heap, while authors, publishers, advertisers, promoters, and reviewers work like mad to assemble another train for a run no longer.

Everyone knows of this condition, but not so many realize its implications of endless futile labor in publishers' offices to launch books that are never going to be allowed to sail; of futile labor by authors who are kept busy turning out books that should never have been written, or books that are allowed to die before they can be sold; of futile labor and loss in bookshops, loaded with "plugs" by high pressure salesmanship, and forced to sell a new season's stock before they have learned how to dispose of the old.

Publishers and booksellers are well aware of this sad chaos in their business. That they seem to do nothing about it is assumed to be proof that nothing can be done. This we do not believe. There has been no effective leadership and no effective coöperation, either between bookseller and publisher, or among publishers themselves. But if the public should step on the self-starter, the lumbering truck of the book-trade might start uphill. If the readers and book buyers of such a magazine as this one should begin now to follow the books they want until they are able to buy them—refusing to be flurried by the hullabaloo over a thousand new books into not buying at all—the lives of good titles would even by that action be lengthened, and some of the energy of the publishing season would begin to be expended upon good but unsold books. A very gentle push just now would hasten the reduction of swollen lists. A demand, a very little demand, just now would encourage both publisher and bookseller to stand by a good book until customers had been found for it.

The *Saturday Review* proposes to do its part by adopting a policy of greater selectiveness in the books it reviews. We can record all the books, we can review adequately all the books of real importance, both good and bad, but to review even briefly all that are now being published is not only impossible, but futile. It is like setting a counting machine to tick off the waves on the beach. We shall let ride the flotsam and jetsam, the grapefruit rinds and ancient boxes, and wait for the waves bearing well-laden craft.

The Works of Mrs. Woolf

By ROBERT HERRICK

THE WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF. Uniform Edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1931.

WAVES. By VIRGINIA WOOLF. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

With dispassionate despair, with entire disillusionment I surveyed the dust dance; my life, my friends' lives, and those fabulous presences, men with brooms, women writing, the willow tree by the river—clouds and phantoms made of dust, too, of dust that changed, as clouds lose and gain and take gold or red . . . mutable, vain. I, carrying a notebook, making phrases, had recorded merely changes; a shadow, I had been sedulous to take note of shadows. How can I proceed now, I said, without a self, weightless and visionless, through a world weightless, without illusion?

SO Bernard, the most definitely loquacious of the phantoms in "Waves," phrases the dilemma of the modern world. But here we are concerned less with the dilemma and Bernard's reaction to it than the effect of such an attitude on the creative artist, on Mrs. Woolf's various volumes where life is projected for our inspection imaginatively. To quote again the candid Bernard:

Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have lain dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again. I am a poet, yes. . . . I lash my frenzy higher and higher. It foams. It becomes artificial, insincere. Words and words and words, how they gallop—how they lash their long manes and tails, but for some fault in me I cannot give myself to their backs; I cannot fly with them, scattering women and string bags. There is some flaw in me—some fatal hesitancy, which, if I pass it over, turns to foam and falsity. . . . Am I too fast, too facile? I do not know. I do not know myself sometimes, or how to measure and name and count out the grains that make me what I am. . . .

Such an intense consciousness of futility commonly leads to sterility, as in Bernard's case. Let us see.

"Nothing exists outside us" (says another phantom—the Solitary Traveller in "Mrs. Dalloway") "except a state of mind." Mrs. Woolf, therefore, has been concerned almost wholly with different "states of mind" from "The Voyage Out" to "Waves," which aspires to summarize all states of mortal mind. It is a curious progress from the particular to the general. "The Voyage Out," the first of Mrs. Woolf's novels included in the uniform edition now being published, presents an assortment of states of mind quite accidentally brought together on board ship and at a seashore resort in Brazil. There is subtlety in differentiation of types—all English—thrown together in a foreign hotel, and the distinctness of perception of background and atmosphere with which they are etched gives the impression of detachment that Mrs. Woolf has always maintained. Here are a small group of individuals, male and female, speaking the same language, going about the same trivial occupations, motivated by the same petty egotisms, jostled against each other by a blind chance; such is life—let us see what we can make of it! A design forms unconsciously, an emphasis, the peculiar states of mind induced in two of the young people by falling in love, which is further heightened by the death of the young woman, as accidental and unrelated as all else, nevertheless offering a crisis and an end to the tale.

"Night and Day" is a more elaborate undertaking, less unpremeditated, with more design in the picture. Here the states of mind are nicely divided between those of the older generation with their cultural burdens and the freer, if more perplexed, younger generation, specifically of two young men and one young woman, whose uncertainties of mood in relation to the young men form the main absorption of the story. A great many particulars are revealed in "Night and Day," such as the Hilberys and the Hilbery atmosphere of culture (in the best Victorian sense), the closely woven tapestry of English social life not greatly affected by contemporary strains and

shocks, but above all the state of mind of youth, and especially of Katherine Hilbery, whose indecisions and vagueness in the matter of mating provide the main motivation of the book. Katherine Hilbery (who "casts her mind out to imagine an empty land where all this petty intercourse of men and women, this life made up of the dense crossings and entanglements of men and women, had no existence whatever") is the most considerably explored of all Mrs. Woolf's characters, and "Night and Day," while not the finest, the most moving of her books, is the richest in particulars, the most purely fictional.

The complexities of Katherine's states of mind in reference to the febrile Rodney and the more glowing Ralph no doubt rendered their creator impatient (as it does the reader) with a method of presentation which gives such an undue emphasis to the emotional phases of very young people; so that in "Jacob's Room," which



VIRGINIA WOOLF

comes next, Mrs. Woolf experimented with her subject, permitting the reader to see it now and then in glimpses, darting in flashes of spot light across the years, from childhood to an early death, with occasional complications suggested rather than carried out. The result of this shift from the particular towards the general is a gain in compression, in speed, at the expense of fulness of portraiture. Jacob is any young man, in outline, very nearly. For as his creator says,

It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case, life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows.

All of which may be quite just, but if such a conviction as to the nature of human appearances becomes an obsession with a novelist it cannot fail but influence his creations: it cuts the very ground from under his projections.

In "Mrs. Dalloway," as if feeling this uncertain ground, Mrs. Woolf reverted to the more ordinary sequences, the more consecutive treatment of her material, making of Mrs. Dalloway a filled-out picture, done largely in retrospect, and as if to satisfy her sense of the universal, added to this full-length portrait the moving story of Mr. and Mrs. Septimius Warren Smith and their fate. Why? The well known fact that at any given moment of time a great many unrelated (and irrelevant) occurrences are happening in space and time would hardly seem to encourage the artist to superimpose one upon another, without more justification than that both are taking place in the same

universe at approximately the same moment to similar human beings, except—and here lies the significance—such a concatenation of human lives abruptly brought together by the novelist thickens the matrix, so to speak, gives an impression of the universal. In this way, with this logic, one might go on like the census enumerator, collecting names and data street by street, each one adding its quota to the strength of a generalization. In the case of Septimius Smith and his wife Rezia, they form an emotional relief from the circumscribed content of Mrs. Dalloway's life, the expectedness of it, the thinness of it.

In this conflict between the particular and the general, which the novelist can be imaged as perpetually waging, there comes a point when the two impulses (or insights) are held in just proportion, where the individual still remains an individual and yet the actions, the characteristics by which he is projected, are seen sufficiently *sub specie æternitatis* to give that sense of depth and width to experience that the human being craves. Such a point between the claims of the particular, noted for its own sake, and the generalized abstract, chosen because of significance, Mrs. Woolf seems to have reached in the first part of "To the Lighthouse." Nothing could be more perfect than this prolonged scene in the Ramsey household in the Hebrides, where each element of the picture is thrown up into high relief, allowed to sink back, to be resumed later with larger volume, a more intense meaning. All the cleverness of phrase, the subtlety of perception, the delicacy of finish, which Mrs. Woolf had by this time achieved, is there displayed to its perfection in creating not merely one most charming and most individual woman, Mrs. Ramsay, but many women—let us forbear to say Woman! Also the inner nature of the deepest form of the relation between the two sexes may take is there touched, revealed, and hidden, at the same moment. Here, one might add as well, prose most nearly keeps step with poetry, substituting its larger, more intricate harmonies for obvious rhythms. Alas, that such a creative moment, such an impulse could not be held, even to the finish of this short piece! But notions come in, "experiments," ideas, and *partis pris*, the general but not the universal—there is a vast difference!—and we never get to the Lighthouse.

Before such accomplishment as the first part of this book, however, one wishes to pause, to savor and ponder, to specify. Mrs. Woolf is always master of the word, rich in the figurative use of language (latterly redundant in metaphor, that vain clutch after the unseen!). She is so completely "saturated" (as one of her spiritual fathers would have said) in her material that she can play with it now this way, now that, blending in one sustained manner the technical discoveries of our technical age. She has achieved a style, her style. Which in itself becomes a temptation to further experimentation, and the results we have in "Orlando," which is almost purely a stunt, and in "Waves," which is style and very little more. In these two books the appeal of the universal has quite overwhelmed the sense of the particular. The seed of "Orlando" is to be found in the earlier books, e. g.:

The lamps of London uphold the dark as upon the points of burning bayonets. The yellow canopy sinks and swells over the great four-poster. Passengers in the mail-coaches running into London in the eighteenth century looked through leafless branches and saw it flaring beneath them. . . . Every face, every shop, bedroom window, public-house, and dark square is a picture feverishly turned—in search of what? It is the same with books. What do we seek through millions of pages? ("Jacob's Room")

As for "Waves," it cries out page upon page for quotation, so easy, abundant, sure is the flow of words on which the burden of its theme is borne. "Words and words and words, how they gallop—how they lash their long manes and tails!"

As a vehicle of expression the English novel has moved a long way from the ponderous work of George Eliot, testimony to the accelerated pace of our in-

tellectual life. It is more open to question how far the novel has moved, is moving in content; as, let us say, a record of the lives lived at any given time. For this last, surely, is one of the proper functions of literature, an inevitable function, to be the record of that civilization from which it springs. If instead of the traditional visitor from Mars we substitute a convinced communist, some one from Russia informed and acute enough to perceive differences, what can we imagine would be his reflections on the world (the English-speaking part of it) as gleaned through the pages of Mrs. Woolf's novels? He might smile benignly at the picture of Percival in "Waves," one of the phantoms who never speaks but whose existence nevertheless seems to have a profound influence on the more vocal phantoms of the tale. Percival, "lounging on the cushions, monolithic," is the ideal of English imperialism: "Time seems endless"—this is India—

ambition vain. Over all broods a sense of the uselessness of human exertion. . . . An old man in a ditch continues to chew betel and to contemplate his navel. But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude clusters around him, regarding him as if he were what indeed he is—a God.

(Gandhi seated at the council table in London would surely smile!) Our communist critic might pass over the mystical silence that falls on a London street when royalty (or mayhap a prime minister) puts his face to the window of a passing motor car as merely a playful gesture on the part of the novelist, possibly (but improbably) ironic in intention.

But he would surely not overlook the fact that practically every one of the novelist's characters existed on the exertions of others, on some unearned increment of society, for which they pay, if they pay at all, by being ornamental, loyal, or serviceable in small routine ways. Nor—what is far more important—that, although these characters chatter a great deal about literature and art and cognate matters, none of them is distinguished in action or in thought, and, most damnatory of all, they assume the futility, and the inevitability of their world. One would not need to be a communist to become convinced that no society composed of such human beings as Mrs. Woolf has projected can possibly long endure whether in England or elsewhere.

This multiple reflection of a dying race, this twilight of small souls, may very well be the dramatized intention of the novelist. But one doubts it. One feels rather that in the case of Mrs. Woolf the novelist has been hypnotized by the flow of lives around her, and that her progress from concern with the dreary particulars to her forlorn universals is but the rationalization of the intellectual in face of futility.

Is it possible that, in order to have a literature with a more vital sense of life than that I have been describing, we shall have to suffer a revolution of some sort, so that *homo sapiens* (or his successors) can regain that primitive, passionate, unreasoned conviction of the reality and the significance of the life he is living, which he is so rapidly losing? It may be so. Meantime, it is a pity that our cleverest writers—those whose words are most eagerly caught up by the quick youth of the day, who are recognized as their guides—do not seek to appeal to more of their fellow men. It is always a pity when the head becomes separated from the heart and the instincts, and no longer leads! It has not been thus in the past, Shakespeare (whose name comes so often to the lips of Mrs. Woolf's characters) is an instance, where the best mind of his age found an expression that appealed, still appeals to myriad lesser minds. There have been many others. But not a Joyce, a T. S. Eliot, a Proust. . . . Mrs. Woolf, so richly endowed, so admirably equipped for the novelist's widest appeal, should not be content with the acclaim of a clique, however distinguished its members may be.