

Queen Victoria

THE LETTERS OF QUEEN VICTORIA, Third Series. Edited by GEORGE EARLE BUCKLE. Vol. I. 1886-1890. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1930.

SIDE LIGHTS ON QUEEN VICTORIA. By SIR FREDERICK PONSONBY. New York: Sears Publishing Co. 1930. \$5.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN

THESE letters will be interesting to those Americans who wish to follow closely the details of British foreign policy and the course of parliamentary politics, to that lessening group who are fascinated by the British nobility, and to that still smaller group who are curious about the appointment of bishops. No doubt Queen Victoria herself is still a matter of interest to those brought up in the tradition of the good Queen and to a wider circle who have easily read between the lines of Strachey. This volume, as the earlier ones, throws light upon her personality. To those naturally inclined, like the reviewer, to be prejudiced in favor of the Crown as a balance in English politics, this book is not encouraging. The letters are evidence that the Crown can be less a balance than an interference. To see how the Queen put difficulties in the way of Gladstone and the Liberal Party, to learn from her letters how she consulted with his political opponents as to her dealings with him, to see how she wrote to ladies of rank urging them to refuse to act as her ladies-in-waiting in order to embarrass her Prime Minister, all this is enlightening. There was no trace of the largeness of mind, wide sympathies, and imagination that distinguished the sometimes petty Elizabeth. A riot in London was intolerable, among other reasons, because it affected her health. The lower orders, whom she deeply despised, were always making trouble. So were foreign powers who seemed unaware that it was for Britain to dominate and that the interests of her children and grandchildren on the continent must never be forgotten. She pressed always for the strong policy without regard to possible consequences. Of war she had no dread. The truth is that she did not belong in Victorian England but in some small German court of the eighteenth century.

The old comment that a ruling class is not such a bad thing save for the ruling class has relevance to the Queen. Her life could hardly have made Victoria other than she was, a woman who expected infinite deference and compliance. Disraeli had spoiled her, had beguiled her into the belief that she was really ruling. When Lord Rosebery became her foreign minister, she urged him not to consult the Cabinet about policy but to deal only with herself; she had forty years experience.

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There is a good deal to be learned about Rosebery, Hartington, Salisbury, and Gladstone. Lord Rosebery does not come out too well. His letters to her have an air of sycophancy. Hartington is the same honest Cavendish as always, slow-minded and almost dull, groping his way towards the Conservatives, neither fearing nor striving to please man or the Queen. We shall not see his like again. Lord Salisbury fares well. He could be firm with the Queen and yet yield on minor matters such as the appointment of a bishop. A conservative, of the old nobility, he was in a strong position to deal with her. He was master in foreign affairs and he looked three jumps ahead both as to foreign and domestic policy. He liked to move the European pawns in the grand old manner and divide Africa in the grand new manner, but he lived in modern England and, being a Cecil, gauged the forces with which he had to reckon. Gladstone, to my mind, comes out of these letters rather well. He had to put up with much: he had to be lectured to in letter after letter, for in spite of the old story, it was really the Queen that did most of the lecturing; he had to ignore all the miserable little intrigues of the Queen against him; he had to play with the dice loaded in favor of his opponents; and he remained tactful and agreeable. Such patience is rare. It is not the fashion nowadays to say good words for Gladstone or even to give him his due. His kind of idealism has become a matter for mockery. He was almost the embodiment of nineteenth century idealism, of that Puritan elevation of purpose that ran side by side with the main chance. It is a partnership not unknown in Yorkshire and Lancashire, nor in New England and Kansas. By and by it will be discovered that the idealism was genuine and the aspiration for the higher things in this world merely human.

Sir Frederick Ponsonby's book is put together from letters belonging to his father, Sir Henry. The elder Ponsonby was the intermediary between royalty and statesmen and played his difficult role with tact and skill. He must have been amused many times, and his son has in three of eight episodes managed to get all of the fun out of storms in royal teacups. The Fatal Gun, the Pony Row Balmoral, and the Visit of the Grand Duke Vladimir are worth reading aloud. The stories of the Irish University Bill and of the Franchise Bill of 1884 illustrate further the difficulties of the Queen with Gladstone. "Queen Victoria was under the impression," says Ponsonby, "that she was holding the scales evenly between the two parties, but it is evident from this letter that she thought all the concessions should come from Mr. Gladstone." The dominant note of her character, says Ponsonby, whose discretion is usually as perfect as that of his father, was the "tenacity with which she pursued any line of policy once she had arrived at a decision. The means were immaterial; it was the end that mattered."

A Cyclopedia of Problems

AFRICA VIEW. By JULIAN HUXLEY. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1931. \$5.

Reviewed by C. BEVERLEY BENSON

ONCE visited an agricultural school in the Sudan. The morning's work began with an abominable reading of one of the "simpler" miracles—changing water into wine—to a class of children just learning English. I doubt whether an accomplished reader could have given such a selection meaning to that group. But if their souls are advanced, why worry over their minds!

Is the white man really bringing light to that continent so dark in color and culture? Can he guide uncivilized Africa on its way to modern life through the maze of pitfalls and uncertainties that beset our path? Is there any soundness in teaching literature to people who have no literature of their own? Or in teaching children to change 5,555,555 farthings into pence, shillings, and pounds amongst a people who use cattle for currency and who cannot understand why the white man does not consider an old, scraggly ox worth as much in a trade as a young, robust ox? Surely an old five-pound note is worth as much as a new one!

The problem of education in Africa is very difficult. Should we teach the natives mathematics, geography, theology, and the better life and make them unhappy and dissatisfied with the life they must return to in the bush? Should we teach them only better methods of animal husbandry and agriculture and leave to later generations the acquisition of literature, philosophy, and higher thought? The latter is just the kind of public education we used a hundred years ago—in an effort to keep the "working people" satisfied with their lot in life.

Perhaps we shall be better able to answer these questions when we no longer turn promising draftsmen into incompetent civil engineers, good garage repairmen into indifferent automotive engineers, excellent housewives into half-baked domestic science experts, or tolerable bookkeepers into pettifogging lawyers.

Mr. Huxley was sent to Africa by the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Native Education to study the educational methods in British East Africa. The present book contains only one chapter dealing with his conclusions on the "Education of the African." One cannot but agree with the principles suggested as a guide for administrators. But persons interested in education will regret keenly that Mr. Huxley has not given us a more scientific discussion of the evidence and a more detailed proposal for the future. The problem is important enough to fill a whole book—or a library.

The more casual reader, however, will revel in the best book on Africa in some years. It leaps nimbly from fiddler crabs to rift valleys (all the theories); from volcanoes to flamingoes; from weaver birds to land tenure; from schools to pigmies; from initiations into puberty to native markets; and from missionary intolerance to taxes!

The descriptions and comments on these and many other subjects are interesting, entertaining, and thoughtful. In fact, the descriptions are far more vivid and the discussions far more penetrating than those of most other recent authors who have devoted whole books to only a few subjects. A friend of mine said, "It gives me just the feeling I had in Africa—all sort of jumbled up. There are so many things to think about."

A Realistic-Romantic Novel

THE WATER GIPSIES. By A. P. HERBERT. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

THIS is the sort of thing that Englishmen often do very well and Americans hardly even attempt. It needs, in addition to a light touch, an attractive blending of sophistication, sentiment, and a certain gay insouciance, which last the English have, despite their alleged phlegm, and Americans, a more serious-minded people, have not. The method is simple: you take real scenes and real people, just as if you were a Nobel prize winner, but instead of letting the people behave as their presumptively unfortunate instincts would dictate, you play a game of make-believe with them, impishly devising situations that would be rather jolly if only that sort of people would get into them. Hence it is possible to make the best of both worlds, which is what Mr. Arnold Bennett means when, in praising that book, he says, "like all very good novels, it is both realistic and romantic"—he might have added "like some of my own," but no doubt he thought it.

Mr. Herbert has the eye that sees the magic of the commonplace. Like Chesterton, he would spring to the defence of Main Street as an enchanting thoroughfare, and Middletown's *lacrimæ rerum* would be relieved, at least, by beer and skittles—which of course is an unfair advantage that the English have.

There is, as a matter of fact, a good deal of beer and skittles in this story—homeric combats at the Black Swan, breathlessly followed by beer-swilling enthusiasts; and there is one big, dramatic moment when the championship hangs in the balance between Mr. Bryan, the gentlemanly artist, and Ernest, who besides being a socialist is the husband of Jane. Jane is the heroine, brought up by an incompetent male parent on a barge moored to Valentine's Wharf on London's river, and successively a housemaid, an artist's model, and Ernest's wife and widow, but all the time a seeker after romance and finding it in a blind and unrequited adoration for the gentlemanly Mr. Bryan.

Jane is a "good" girl, with a sense of responsibility and a proper fear of that which she learns, with only half conviction, from the movies is "worse than death," and quite unlike her younger sister, the light-loving, languorous Lily. Nevertheless, there comes the hour when Ernest, theoretic socialist but most possessive of males, has his wicked way, and Jane marries him, despite her romantic worship of Mr. Bryan and a sincere attachment for Fred, the solid and inarticulate bargeman.

One can only hint thus at the quality of this pleasing tale. It is full of humor and gentle social satire; the large cast of characters, each an individual being, is handled by the author with practiced ease, and the life of the river folk, a small and little known class whose lives are spent on the inland waters of England, is delightfully described. If Americans, as has been said, do not often write this sort of thing, they nevertheless enjoy reading it, for Mr. Herbert's story was listed among the best-sellers for some weeks after its publication, achieving that position, alas! without the aid of this review, for the belated appearance of which this contrite reviewer must take sole responsibility.

On Buying Books

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assimilation. "Huckleberry Finn" was a children's book, a provincial book, quite unaware of experiment, buried for a while by its author because he thought it too crude, and perhaps too old-fashioned. But who has written a book so absolutely good in America today?

The Saturday Review of Literature

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The BOWLING GREEN

John Mistletoe, XXVI

THERE is an embarrassing dream that many people are said to have had: that of finding themselves suddenly exposed naked in a dignified social gathering. Mistletoe never had that dream; he didn't need to, for intellectually he had known the actual experience. To find himself conducting a signed column on the editorial page of the old New York *Evening Post* was an exposure to abash the most hardy. It had its terrifying moments.

Yet he thinks with strong secret pride of his connection with that historic paper. It was an organ of truly civilized and liberal tone. There was pride in coming to it; there was pride in attempting for it, however faultily, what would not have been tolerated in any other newspaper; there was pride in being fired from it when its quality changed. He perpetrated gruesome errors and fatuities. To older people with their enchanted sadness there must have been much comedy in seeing a young energumen blundering onto sharp corners, barking apparently at random like a puppy, rediscovering with loud halloo so much that his betters had known long before. He had little discretion. His naïve speculations on religion often got him into hot water with subscribers. With excess of zeal, when the episcopate of New York was shent by one of its recurring hullabaloes of doctrine, he compiled a creed of his own. It was devoutly sincere and began something like this: "I believe in the Woolworth Building and the flukes of Moby Dick." Taken with a pinch of understanding mysticism it was really rather appealing; published as a free-verse canticle in a magazine it wouldn't have caused a ripple—but appearing in a daily newspaper it burst the blood vessels of several hundred patrons.

His employers granted him surprising latitude. His occasional musings on theophany must have caused twinges, but they were never censored. The only time he was seriously reproached was not for questioning the divinity of God, but that of Lord Northcliffe. Sometimes his superior officers moaned a little, but generally they encouraged him to discuss—even at wearisome length—topics from which profitable newspapers cannily avert themselves. As for his other crotchets, it is really laughable to consider how bored many readers must have been with his palaver about food and drink, or steamships, or the glamor of Downtown, or the crowded state of his old desk. I sympathize with the irritated subscriber who finally wrote:

When the Great Judge cleans out his desk,
In some dark pigeon-hole
Cobwebbed and grimy may he find
Your negligible soul!

Or his buzz about Hobbes, Thomas Fuller, Sir Kenelm Digby, Thoreau, Melville, Emily Dickinson, Conrad, Santayana, Montague. . . . and I mustn't forget De Quincey. It would have been hard to tell from his outgivings which was more important—De Quincey or the Woolworth Building. In fact he did not know; nor does he now. Once he said to me solemnly: "You know it's quite startling, the things you've always been told were good, really are good." When he discovered that perhaps he came somewhere near the beginning of criticism.

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The problem of what may or may not be printed in a newspaper, or how far a personal commentator may depart from official policy, is always ticklish. The traditional clientèle of the *Post*, though liberal in politics, was supposed to be Tory in matters of taste. One highly sensitive associate of the business staff was so upset by a little verse Mistletoe had heard from that pucky oldtimer Charles Pike Sawyer that he implored J. M. to take it out after the first press-run. Mistletoe was obstinate enough to insist that no one, not even at the Harvard Club, could be seriously offended by it. It ran thus:

I used to love my garden
But now my love is dead
For I found a bachelor's button
In black-eyed Susan's bed.

Among the pleasant humors of the time was the naïve credo of the same assistant executive that a newspaper must if possible be conducted by alumni of the correcter colleges. When he inquired of a certain hardboiled and long experienced Real Estate reporter, "and what was your university?" the indignant reply was "The University of Park Row."

I wonder who now occupy that 10th floor of the former *Post* building on Vesey Street, where we were so happy? And the little coop of a room with a window opening on the balcony over St. Paul's churchyard. On that balcony was the flagstaff from which the great red and blue and yellow bunting of the Three Hours for Lunch Club was first given to the breeze; and neighboring firms began calling up to ask if it was the flag of the newly established Irish Free State (the *Post's* sympathy with oppressed nationalities was always notorious.) Looking upward from the typewriter he saw the golden winged statue on the Telephone and Telegraph building, leaning against sunlight. Oh if I knew how to make it so, Vesey Street would be legendary: there must be something a little sacred about it, it has been so greatly loved. It has changed much even in the few years since it was Mistletoe's byway of surprise. When he went to work there one still looked out on the remaining half of the Astor House; he found his way into the deserted relic and explored the dusty old rooms. The red box was still on the churchyard railings, the Red Box on Vesey Street that H. C. Bunner had rhymed about, put there to receive magazines and books for shut-ins. Down the brief journey toward the river were old bookstores and hardware shops and bookbinders and restaurants and the ancient spicy groceries of Hamblet and Callanan where big coffee sacks always had their necks turned open like Walt Whitman's shirt. Opposite the graveyard was the surprising signboard of Goodenough and Woglom: *Bibles and Prayerbooks and Interchangeable Church Advertising*. There was even some sort of esoteric magazine called *The Truth Seeker*. At the pavement level was a notice: *The Truth Seeker, One Flight Up*. One day this sign vanished. Mistletoe was disturbed. Don't tell me he's found it? he wondered. But it reappeared on the opposite side of the way, repainted: *The Truth Seeker, 2 Flights Up*. It seemed that we were not even holding our own. In the strong depression of his first days' anxieties (starting a newspaper column from scratch is a painful job) he tried to hearten himself by buying on Vesey Street a copy of the *Religio Medici*. Oddly, it was that book that gave him the impulse for his final causerie four years later. During his very first week he made the mistake of rereading Bacon's essays, and concluded that the platinum and diamonds of My Lord's style might well daunt any dealer in paste pearls. But imagine a creature trying to nerve himself to run a New York newspaper column by reading Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne. Was ever anything more agreeably fantastic?

Now for four years he worked day by day actually in the city of his worship; and in that part of the city that means most to those who have her memories at heart. His job, as he imagined it, was to feel her beauty and terror and try occasionally to bring a small glimpse of it on paper. It would be silly to harp on the fact that she was beautiful then; she was, but she is even more so now; will be more beautiful and terrible still as time proceeds. All I insist is that just then seemed a brave new world. The war was over; New York had suddenly found herself the center and cynosure of human scheming. It was significant to see so many cultivated young Englishmen continually drifting in to have a look at Manhattan. In the old days they would have made their grand tour on the Continent. Now, by the shift in financial balance (I suppose finance is the deep tide that secretly governs the arts) these lads or their parents had waked to the fact that America was thrillingly interesting and must be reckoned with. And to Mistletoe the *Evening Post* was the most exciting place to be, in the most fantastic city, in the most extraordinary age.

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One did not come to such a paper unmoved by its traditions. He was always sensitive to the dignity of the past. Walking in Riverside Park with a child, he recognized dear old Major George Haven Putnam, head of the famous publishing house. He recalled from the Major's memoirs that Washington Irving once laid his hand on Putnam's youthful head and wished him luck. There was the Hudson, still flowing down from Irving's hills: why should not the ancient piety also be current? He ventured to

address the Major and present the urchin to him. The good old man kindly passed on the blessing to the four-year-old. It meant nothing to the child then, but it pleased Mistletoe to think that only one human touch intervened between that boy and Rip Van Winkle. He could even trace that blessing higher still, for (as the Major remarked) it had been given to Irving by George Washington himself.

In the office of the *Post* was Mr. J. Ranken Towse, the dean of dramatic critics, who had been on the paper fifty active years, had been there under William Cullen Bryant. To see good Mr. Towse with his black velveteen hat coming grimly down the aisle at the opening of some dubious farce, steeled to resent any affront to the higher dignities of the stage, was to perceive something of rugged human honor. One of the blessed absurdities of the office was that once a year Mr. Towse made his young colleague feel immeasurably old. The veteran had preserved, from undergraduate days at Cambridge, a passionate concern about Oxford and Cambridge rowing; in which he confidently expected even a bastard Oxonian to be equally interested. Every spring, as the contest of Blues approached, Mr. Towse was eager to discuss details of the boats. He had pored over the London *Times's* reports on the training and now was full of doctrine about some powerful Cantab at Number 5, who was an Etonian oar and weighed over 14 stone. Alas, though he had once done some sweating on the Isis, Mistletoe's curiosity in this matter had evaporated; he must have grieved Mr. Towse by his inadequate response. The desks of Mr. Towse and Mr. Finck, the music critic, were back to back in a small sanctum. Nothing was more delightful than to hear these Nestors affectionately bickering together. Mr. Finck had only been on the paper 40 years, so Mr. Towse still considered him a mere youngster. (In any argument Mr. Towse had the final advantage of being the only one of us who had worked under Bryant.) Mr. Finck's hobbies were anthropology and diet. His discussion whether Romantic Love existed among savages was a surprising one in the staid bureaux of the *Post*. In the matter of diet he was an exponent of bran, and frequently insisted to young Mistletoe that the success of his Bowling Green would depend largely upon mild wines and proper aperients. Both Mr. Finck and Mr. Towse in moments of stress would savage their assistant Charley Sawyer. Mr. Sawyer had then served the *Post* only some 35 years, and they still visualized him as an impish office-boy.

One of the special phenomena of those years was the rise of an able but peremptory generation of youths briskly disregarding of anything that had been suffered, thought or written before 1917. The Young Intellectuals (so they quite gravely called themselves) were of the opinion that American civilization was hostile to the "artist" and that Paris was the only place to live and learn. One might have wondered sometimes whether some of this was not due to subtle propaganda on the part of steamship companies feeling the post-War slack. Anyhow it was evident that many of the rising sort believed themselves immured in a crass world like the boys in the old painting of the princes in the Tower. Mistletoe, not himself much senior, should have felt humiliated to be finding American life so amazingly fecund. He read Anatole France and De Gourmont and Valéry and André Gide, and he found Aldous Huxley's *Leda* the most perfect thing of its kind since Keats. But with plentiful enthusiasm for all these, he was not able to discern that any modern had cut much deeper than Swift, or that anyone had yet outdistanced Chaucer.

God knows I am not inclined to taunt the Young Intellectuals of that era for their megrims. Every man worth salt will have his own purgatories to go through; he cannot always choose just at what period he will meet them. Luckiest those who get through the worst of them early. There is many a darker phase I might dwell on in this free-hand cartoon of an inquisitive mind. I can identify pitiable limitations, incongruities, and that bad feeling that so many know, the anger of sometimes having been dealt with like an ill-managed horse: reined in or overdriven always at the wrong moment. How rarely a man attains the blessing of complete surrender of all powers and instincts in one creative task. There was at least something of that honorable devotion in the *Evening Post* employ. Men loved her and lived for her. No smug self-deception, no skilled pleasantries in prose, can conceal a man's crises from himself. But sometimes the troubled and uneven lives have proved the most contributory.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.