

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Belles Lettres

REVOLT IN THE ARTS. By OLIVER M. SAYLER. Brentano's, 1930. \$3.50.

This "survey of the creation, distribution, and appreciation of art in America" is divided into two sections. One half is a rapid, comprehensive survey of the new movements today in all the arts; it deals with the nature of the "revolt" and its implications. The other half, which is called A Field Survey, is a series of statements from "leading exponents" of the arts; though in this collection the genuinely distinguished people outweigh the complete nonentities who so often make up such symposia, it is quite worthless.

As for Mr. Sayler's own essay, he has attempted to do in a synoptic survey what Mr. Sheldon Cheney has essayed more monumentally in his books on modern architecture and modern art; he has Mr. Cheney's passion and ready convictions; likewise he has some of Mr. Cheney's faults, his too facile approval, "too soon made glad, too easily impressed"; and, apart from this, he does not appraise with any rigor the difficulties of producing genuine art in a society governed by pecuniary standards and given to conspicuous waste. But the value of a book like this lies in the questions it raises, not in those which it solves; and it is Mr. Sayler's merit to raise interesting questions on every page of his own discussion.

THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND IN ITALIAN LITERATURE. By Edmund G. Gardner. Dutton. \$3.75.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA. By R. H. U. Bloor. Beacon Press. \$1.10.

LIBERTY AND RELIGION. By Sydney Herbert Mellons. Beacon Press. \$1.50.

THE DIVINE ELEMENT IN ART AND LITERATURE. By William Lawrence Schroeder. Beacon Press. \$1.50.

AMERICAN CRITICAL ESSAYS. Edited by Norman Foerster. Oxford. 80 cents net.

ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS ON THOMAS COOPER. By Maurice Kelley. Orono, Me.: University Press. \$1.

Biography

WAR LETTERS OF FALLEN ENGLISHMEN. Edited by Lawrence Housman. Dutton. \$3.

A WILTSHIRE CHILDHOOD. By Ida Gandy. London: Allen & Unwin.

MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS. By Hamlin Garland. Illustrated by Constance Garland. Harpers. \$3.

ENGLISH BLOODS. By Roger Vasson. Graphic. LIFE OF LINCOLN. By William H. Herndon. Boni. \$2.50.

WILLA CATHER. By René Rapin. McBride. \$1.50 net.

MESSALINA. By H. Stadelmann. Dutton. \$5.

THE BOOK OF MY LIFE. By Jerome Cardan. Dutton. \$3.50.

THE MEMORIES AND CORRESPONDENCE OF MME. D'EPINAY. Translated by E. G. Allingham. Dial.

THE MEDICI. By G. F. Young. Modern Library. 95 cents.

RICHARD HENRY TIERNEY. By Francis Talbot. New York: American Press.

LAZARE SAMINSKY. By Domenico de Paoli, Leigh Henry, Leonida Sabaneyeff, Joseph Yasser, and Leonballas Block.

CALIFORNIA GRINGOS. By H. A. Van Coenen Torchiana. San Francisco: Elder. \$2.50.

Fiction

LONG BONDAGE. By DONALD JOSEPH. Stokes. 1930. \$2.50.

Examined in retrospect, this novel is lightweight, though as we are reading, we continually expect something of interest to develop within a few pages. Mr. Joseph seldom surprises us, except by an occasional magnificent infelicity, such as the death of Nathan or that of Malcolm. Usually he is content with the obvious, and he apparently cares little whether that obvious is apposite or helpful. Furthermore, his novel lacks point: Mr. Joseph seems to be laboring under some idea, but we never find out what it is.

The narrative covers the first forty years in the life of Lucy Lannerton, a Southern belle. The lives of her parents have been unhappy, the mother dying from the indignity and shock of the father's infidelity. Lucy, too, finds her husband unfaithful, but she continues life under his roof; some years later he is accidentally shot during the manoeuvres of the local militia. Her two sons die; one of heart disease, the other by drowning. Through all this intended tragedy the memory of Lucy's one great love lives with her, and on the last page she finds happiness with the one who has been waiting all the long, long years. The plot

is unbalanced and badly motivated, and the characters are quite without distinction.

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION. By LLOYD C. DOUGLAS. Chicago: Willett, Clark & Colby. 1930.

The jacket of this book describes it vaguely but not unfairly as "a novel of strong color and varied interests—dealing with strange, transforming life forces." The writer, an American clergyman in Montreal, attempts in it to show how one may live powerfully and gloriously by absorbing other personalities into one's own. His characters are vividly portrayed, although his central figure becomes somewhat misty and withdrawn as the tale unfolds. With its hospital background deftly and understandingly drawn, the story is told with dramatic effect, and although essentially tractiferous, it is wholly free from exhortation and harangue. The idea of achieving a magnificent personality is not new, but Dr. Douglas's method is quite different from that of the personality racketeers, and no commercialism soils it. It is a readable and refreshing story, with an unusual message.

MR. GUMBLE SITS UP. By DOUGLAS DURKIN. Liveright. 1930. \$2.

This is an ambitious tale, using fantasy and symbolism to put forth an obscure message. Some readers will say there is no message; others that there is one of real significance. A novel suffers when every reading results in a radically individual interpretation; with such variety, the suspicion is inevitable that the book may really mean nothing at all.

Meaning aside, "Mr. Gumble Sits Up" is a simple little tale of a man who during his own funeral sat up suddenly and demanded to be readmitted to life. But the living would have none of him. His wife, his debts, his trade—these things he abandoned, therefore, and wandered in search of something vague, something to be decided upon as he went on, down the length of the road that led away from his village. He met some unhappiness, some pleasure—and finally his end. Such is the straightforward, hardly unconventional framework of the story. But, in contrast, the impression that we get from the events and the characters is not straightforward. We are made to feel that the surface is nothing, hardly real, and that below the surface is the true meaning, the ironic mystery of life. But we never really get to these substrata, for all that their presence is inescapably felt. Thus a superficially simple tale demands interpretations that range far and deep.

Mr. Durkin writes with some affectation. His sentences boom and echo a bit too loudly. But he has a warm and sympathetic spirit, and he makes Mr. Gumble a most delightful character. There is a pleasant glow of well being emanating from most of the scenes and the characters, and we are inclined to chuckle and smile as we read. Every so often we are brought up short by an extra heavy chunk of sententiousness, or by a too clever phrase. But in general the book makes good reading, for as we go along we forgive the preciousness and the obscurity. Only at the end do we realize that we have not the slightest idea of what Mr. Durkin is driving at.

THE THIRD DAY. By GEORGE MANNING-SANDERS. Liveright. 1930. \$2.50.

The invention with which Mr. Manning-Sanders begins his second novel is not new, but its use has been honorable and its freshness remains unimpaired. As "The Third Day" is a comedy of resurrection, it must of course begin with the apparent death of its hero—a death compassed in satisfactory if not wholly convincing fashion by the painter Humphrey Daine, who sets fire to his house, places a convenient skeleton in his bed, and flees to begin a new life elsewhere. The wanderings of the first few days over, he is glad to settle in a small village as a laborer, though he soon finds his new existence no more free of anxiety than the old in which he suffered so much. In fact the inhabitants of St. Raimé's, the parish in which he finds sanctuary, as presented by Mr. Manning-Sanders are second only in general unpleasantness to the far from merry villagers of Mr. T. F. Powys. The trials and tribulations of a young man supposedly afflicted with amnesia, the subject of universal suspicion and endless gossip, can easily be

(Continued on page 525)

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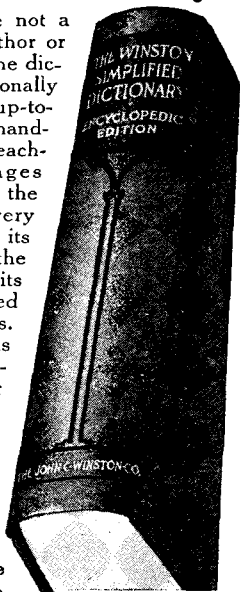
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Sinclair Lewis and the Nobel Prize*

By ERIK AXEL KARLFELDT

Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

Translated by NABOTH HEDIN

THIS year's Nobel prize winner in literature is a native of a part of America which for a long time has had Swedish contacts. He was born at Sauk Centre, a place of about two or three thousand inhabitants in the great wheat and barley land of Minnesota. He describes the place in his novel "Main Street," though there it is called Gopher Prairie.

It is the great prairie, an undulating land with lakes and oak groves, that has produced the little city and many others exactly like it. The pioneers have had need of places where to sell their grain, stores for their supplies, banks for their mortgage loans, physicians for their bodies, and clergymen for their souls. There is coöperation between the country and the city and at the same time conflict. Does the city exist for the sake of the country, or the country for the city?

The prairie makes its power felt. During the winters, long and cold as ours, terrific storms dump their snow in the wide streets, between low and shabby houses. The summer scorches with an intense heat and the city stinks, because it lacks both sewers and street cleaning. But yet the city, of course, feels its superiority; it is the flower of the prairie. It has the economic threads in its hands and it is the focus of civilization; a concentrated, proud America amidst these uncouth serfs of foreign origin, Germans and Scandinavians.

Thus the city lives happily in its self-confidence, and its belief in true democracy, which does not exclude a proper classification of the people; its faith in a sound business morality, and the blessings of being motorized, for there are many Fords on Main Street.

To this city comes a young woman, filled with rebellious emotions. She wants to reform the city, inside and out, but fails completely and comes near perishing in the attempt.

As a description of life in a small town, "Main Street" is certainly one of the best ever written. To be sure the city is first and foremost American, but could, as a spiritual milieu, be situated just as well in Europe. No one of us has suffered as much as Mr. Lewis, however, from its ugliness and bigotry. The strong satire has aroused protests locally, but one does not need to be keen-sighted to see the tolerant strain in this sketch of his native city and its people.

Back of the puffed-up complacency of Gopher Prairie lurks, however, jealousy. At the edge of the plain stand cities like St. Paul and Minneapolis, already little metropolitan centers with their skyscraper windows gleaming in the sunlight or the evening's electricity. Gopher Prairie wants to be like them and finds the time ripe for a campaign of progress, based on the rising war price of wheat. A stump speaker is imported, a real rabble-rouser of the peppiest kind, and with blatant eloquence he demonstrates that nothing will be easier than for Gopher Prairie to take the lead and arrive in the 200,000 class.

Mr. Babbitt, —George Follansbee Bab-

* (Address at the Nobel Festival, Dec. 10, 1930)

bitt—is the happy denizen of such a city. It is called Zenith, but probably cannot be found on the map under this name. This city with its enlarged horizons hereafter becomes the starting point for Mr. Lewis's critical raids into the territories of Americanism. The city is a hundred times as large as Gopher Prairie and, therefore, a hundred times richer in hundred per cent Americanism and a hundred times as satisfied with itself and the enchantment of its optimism and progressive spirit is embodied in George F. Babbitt.

As a matter of fact, it is probable that Babbitt approaches the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of faith, and without hesitation he considers God's purpose with man to be that he should work, increase his income, and enjoy modern improvements. These commandments he feels he obeys and he therefore lives in complete harmony with himself and society.

His profession, real estate, is the highest in existence and his house near the city with its tree and lawn, is standard, inside and out. His motor car is of the make that corresponds to his position and in it he whizzes through the streets, proud as a young hero amidst the dangers of traffic. His family life also corresponds to the bourgeois average. He has a wife who has become used to his masculine grumblings at home and the children are impertinent, but that is what one expects.

He enjoys excellent health, is well-fed and thriving, alert and good-natured. His daily lunches at the club are feasts of instructive business conversations, and stimulating anecdotes; he is sociable and winning. Babbitt is furthermore a man with the gift of speech. He has learned all the national slogans and whirled them about with his flowing tongue in his popular talks before clubs and mass meetings. Not even for the most elevated spirituality does he lack sympathy. He basks in the company of the noted poet, Chalmers Frink, who concentrates his genius on the composition of striking, rhymed advertisements for various firms and thereby earns a good annual income.

Thus Babbitt lives the life of the irreproachable citizen, conscious of his respectability. But the jealousy of the gods broods over a mortal, whose happiness grows too great. A soul such as Babbitt's is, of course, incapable of growth; it is a ready-made article from the start. Then Babbitt discovers that he has tendencies toward vice which he has neglected—but not wholly, one ought to add. As he approaches fifty, he hastens to make up for the neglect. He enters an irregular relationship and joins a frivolous gang of youths, in which he plays the role of a generous sugar daddy. But his deeds find him out. His lunches at the club become more and more painful through the silence of his friends and their aloofness. They give him hints that he is spoiling his chance of future membership in the committee of progress. Here it is naturally New York and Chicago that loom before him. He then succeeds in recovering his better self and it is edifying to see him kneel in the sacristy of his church, where the pastor gives him absolution. And then Babbitt can once more devote himself to the Sunday school and other socially useful activities. His story ends as it began.

That it is institutions as representatives of false ideas that Mr. Lewis wants to get at with his satire and not individuals, he has indicated. It is then a triumph for his art, a triumph almost unique in literature, that he has been able to make this Babbitt, who fatalistically lives within the borders of an earthbound, but at the same time pompous, utilitarianism, an almost lovable individual.

Babbitt is naive and a believer who speaks up for his faith. At bottom there is nothing wrong with the man and he is so festively refreshing that he almost serves as a recommendation for American snap and vitality. There are bounders and Philistines in all countries and one can only wish that they were half as amusing as Babbitt.

To the splendor of the figure, as well as that of other speaking characters in the book, Mr. Lewis has added his unparalleled gift of words. Listen, for example to the conversation of a few commercial travelers, sitting together in a compartment on the express to New York. An unsuspected halo falls over the profession of selling. "Their romantic hero was no longer the knight, the itinerant poet, or the cow boy, but the

great sales manager, who had an 'Analysis of the Sales Problems,' on his glass top desk, whose title of nobility was his rank as 'professor of business administration,' and who with all his young cohorts devoted himself to the universal profession of selling—not selling anything special to or for anybody in particular, but just to Sell."

Martin Arrowsmith is a work of a more serious nature. Lewis has here attempted to represent the medical profession and science in all its manifestations. As is well-known, American research in the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, and medicine, ranks with the best of our age, and it has several times been greeted as such from this very platform. Tremendous resources have been placed at its command. Richly endowed institutions work without ceasing on its development.

That even here a certain number of speculative purposes want to take advantage of their opportunities may be regarded as inevitable. Private industries are on the alert for scientific discoveries, and want to profit by them before they have been tested and finally established. The bacteriologist, for instance, searches with infinite pain for vaccines to cure wide-spread diseases and the chemical manufacturer wants to snatch them prematurely from his hand for mass production.

Under the guidance of a gifted and conscientious teacher, Martin Arrowsmith develops into one of the idealists of science and the tragedy of his life as a research worker is that after making an important discovery, he delays its announcement for renewed tests until he is preceded by a Frenchman in the Pasteur Institute.

The book contains a rich gallery of different medical types. There we have the hum of the medical schools with their quarreling and intriguing professors. Then there is the unpretentious country physician, remembered from Main Street, who regards it as an honor to merge with his clientèle and become their support and solace. Then we have the shrewd organizer of public health and general welfare, who works himself up into popular favor and political power. Next we have the large institutes with their apparently royally independent investigators, but under a management, which to a certain extent must take into consideration the commercial interests of the donors and drive the staff to forced work for the honor of the institution.

Above these types rises Arrowsmith's teacher, the exiled German Jew, Gottlieb, who is drawn with a warmth and admiration that seem to indicate a living model. He is an incorruptibly honest servant of science, but at the same time a resentful anarchist and a stand-offish misanthrope, who doubts that the humanity, whose benefactor he is, amounts to as much as the animals he kills with his experiments. Further we meet Gustaf Sondelius, a glorious Titan, who with singing courage, pursues pests in their lairs throughout the world; exterminates poisonous rats, and burns infected villages, drinks, and preaches his gospel that hygiene will kill the medical art.

Simultaneously runs the personal history of Martin Arrowsmith. Lewis is much too clever to make his characters without blemish and this man Martin suffers from faults which at times seem obstructive to his development, both as a man and as a scientist. His best help as a restless and irresolute young man, he gets from a little woman he has encountered at some hospital, where she was a menial, and he begins to drift about the country as an unsuccessful medical student, he looks her up in a little village in the far west, and there she becomes his wife. She is a devoted and simple soul, who demands nothing and who patiently waits in her solitude, when bewitched by the siren of science, her husband loses himself in the labyrinths of his work.

Later she accompanies him and Sondelius to the pest infected island, where Arrowsmith wants to test his serum, and her death in the abandoned hut, while her husband listens distractedly to another and more earthy siren than that of science, seems like a poetically crowning final act to a life of primitive self-sacrificing femininity.

The book is full of admirable learning which is certified by experts as accurate. Though master of light-winged words, Lewis is least of all superficial when it comes to the foundations of his art. His study of details is always careful and thorough as that of such a scientist as Arrowsmith or Gottlieb and in this work he has built a monument to the profession of his own father, that of the physician, which certainly is not set up by a charlatan or a fakir.

His big novel "Elmer Gantry" is like a surgical operation on one of the most delicate parts of the social body. Presumably it would not pay to search anywhere in the

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