

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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A Credo of Reviewing*

ANNIVERSARIES, of course, are of no importance except insofar as they offer opportunity for mental stocktaking. We should pass over in silence so little peculiar a one as the eighth birthday of the *Saturday Review* which the present issue marks were it not for the chance it gives us of reiterating our credo of reviewing, and generalizing on some of the problems it involves.

We believe, it should not need the saying, that the first and absolute prerequisite of literary criticism is honesty. And by honesty we do not mean merely freedom from the influence of author or publisher or advertiser, or freedom from personal grudge or enthusiasm, but that higher integrity which implies an ever-present consciousness of the sanctity of literature, of the obligation of the critic to his subject, his profession, and his public, of the necessity that is upon him for greater knowledge than he is called upon at any particular moment to use, and of the fact that to be a true critic he must wear always a curious, an eager, and an open mind. Back of all sound criticism must lie sound feeling and sound thinking, a reasoned philosophy of life, a disciplined emotional outlook. Or else is criticism nothing more than response to sentiment or mood. Scholarship alone will never make the constructive critic, though without scholarship a great part of criticism loses validity. Imagination, insight, and understanding, though they are indispensable to all good criticism, and can make fair shift without a large background of learning in certain fields of interpretation, never constitute high criticism unless they spring from a knowledge that allows them to range their subject in time as well as in place. It is knowledge wed to imagination that makes the creative critic.

We believe, what is but a further extension of the idea of critical integrity, that reviewing to be trustworthy must be detached, that it cannot be the mouthpiece of a school or an individual inflexibly set upon a theory, though inevitably criticism that is sufficiently distinguished to a degree establishes a norm of judgment. As a corollary, we believe that a journal of literary criticism to carry weight must represent the views of a widely divergent group of contributors, each indisputably an authority in his field, each aware, if not persuaded of, theories in conflict with his own, and each a searcher for the truth and not the partisan of a prepossession.

We believe the cardinal sin of a reviewer to be the exploitation of himself instead of the interpretation of his subject. While we hold that the public is better served in regard to certain types of books by the review that presents or discusses their subject matter in relation to their field as a whole rather than analyzes the volumes in detail, we are certain that there is no place in a just literary journal for the critic who uses it for the mere display of his own erudition, for the advancement of personal peccadilloes, or the waging of personal controversies.

We believe that reviews to be potent must be well written. The object of criticism in the abstract is to give currency to the "best that has been known and thought in the world," and in the concrete to appraise and characterize the product of contemporary writing. Pedantic criticism, technical criticism, dull criticism, defeats its own object; it will never command a public except in such fashion as an index to a book commands readers, that is, as a necessary implement to further information.

We believe that good reviewing does not mean facile writing, that it means a sense for form, a knowledge

* From the issue of July 11 to the end of the summer the editorials will be written by Mr. Benét and Miss Loveman.

Impeccable

By MELVILLE CANE

EACH line ran fleet and flawless,
In perfect pairs, each rhyme;
No vocable, no syllable
But served the general chime.

Each adjective was fitting,
Each fitted noun correct,
Each metaphor and simile
Enriched the proud effect.

One sought in vain the tasteless,
Inept or crude or wrong,
One could not find the slightest lack
Of art, detect the faintest crack
To extricate the song.



"Music at Night and Other Essays."

Reviewed by EDWARD CUSHING.

"The Memoirs of Marshal Foch."

Reviewed by T. H. THOMAS.

"Bedford Forrest."

Reviewed by A. HOWARD MENEELY.

"Dwarf's Blood."

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT.

"The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea."

Reviewed by JOHN CURNOS.

"After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie."

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM.

Pegasus Perplexing: A Charade Contest.

Next Week, or Later

What Is the "Modern Mind"?

By KENNETH SAUNDERS.

of style, clarity of intention and manner, grace that exists not as an end but as a means to that end which is the dissemination of ideas. We believe that good reviewing presupposes apprising the reader of the content of a book, of its aim, the measure of its achievement, and of its value not only in itself but in relation to other work that has preceded it in its field. This is the *sine qua non* of all criticism, but it is not all of criticism. We believe that the higher criticism uses this basis as the springboard to the only critical writing which is prepotent and creative,—that which is an interpretation of letters as a commentary upon life. We believe that reviews of a few lines in length can on occasions be as useful, and as completely do justice to their objectives, as lengthy discussion. But we believe also, that criticism that aspires to be more than news reviewing, frequently deserves and demands space for the elaboration of ideas as well as the statement of specific judgments.

We believe that criticism is an art as well as a science, and that as the one and the other it demands disinterested enthusiasm and eternal vigilance. We believe that it is worthy of enlisting the highest talents and that when it enlists them, it is literature. And we believe always in hoping.

Toward a New Scholarship

By NORMAN FOERSTER

DURING the period 1900-1930 research in language and literature contented itself with elaborating aims and methods established more than a century ago under romantic and scientific auspices. The essential nature of this research may be symbolized by such names as Herder and the Schlegel brothers—or shall we say Darwin and Einstein? In its ideology its central idea was that of evolution or growth or development or mere change, an idea worked out in the eighteenth century by romanticism, in the nineteenth century by science. Closely associated with this idea was the idea of relativity—the conception that, as species in nature, the swan and the dove, for example, are incomparable in their modes of beauty, so also different poets are incomparable, the work of each having its own beauty, and different critics are incomparable, the point of view of each having its own validity. In respect to technique, our research was scientific—as scientific, at least, as its materials permitted. In the field of language, especially, its materials seemed to many scholars to permit the creation of a genuine science, a science indispensable for the understanding of human society, and in the training of literary scholars this science was long given an extraordinary emphasis.



In the field of literature, the only subject that lent itself in large measure to the technique of science was literary history. The final end aimed at by research both in language and in literary history was understanding of literature. It was believed that the attempt to understand literature, to see the thing as it really is, involved above all a study of the causes that produced the literary results, so that attention was naturally focussed upon origins, sources, influences. Since these causes are infinitely complex, there was danger in seeking to trace the history of literature in *vacuo*; consequently scholars found themselves more and more deeply involved in general history,—political, social, economic, and so on,—and finally in psychological history, the study of literature in terms of the inner history of the author and his times. Again, it was believed that true understanding of literature depended largely on understanding of the language, words and their combinations being the medium of expression, so that the study of language was pursued not only for its value in the interpretation of human history, but also for its value in the interpretation of literary masterpieces. It was likewise perceived that we must, of course, have the most accurate, the most pure, texts of all authors studied, so that much energy was given to the principles and practice of sound editing.



In all of these and other activities, a constant effort was made to employ the method of science, both in the collection of data and in processes of reasoning. Demonstrable fact tended to be prized above all else, and a factual or mechanical frame of mind tended to dominate in research, in publication, in teaching. The process of studying literature came to be thought of as a scientific discipline, a certain type of "learning," the result of which was a more or less remarkable erudition. The ideal scholar came to be thought of as a sort of sleuthhound or detective, preternaturally keen of scent, a sensational Sherlock Holmes. The qualities of scholarship were held to be accuracy and thoroughness. While non-scientific qualities were often extolled when they happened to manifest themselves, little or no effort was made to develop such qualities. Naturally enough, the scholarship of an age permeated with scientific thought and scarcely

any other thought was, so far as the art of literature permitted, a scientific scholarship.

It would be superfluous to celebrate the achievements of this type of scholarship, its triumphs in language, in literary history, in the making of trustworthy texts, variorum editions, bibliographies, and concordances, and above all, in firmly establishing a respect for fact. Everyone is aware of these triumphs, and daily reminded of them. Everyone is agreed as to the virtues of the important books that are the fine fruit of this scholarship, books like Professor Root's edition of Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" and Professor Lowes's masterpiece of historical recreation, "The Road to Xanadu," to name only two recent examples. The mode of research that attained a sort of culmination in the past thirty years has performed a vast amount of work indispensable for the understanding and consequently for the appraisal of great literature. This is simple truth and must never be forgotten. Today, however, I see no danger of our forgetting it; the danger is rather that of remembering it too complacently, of resting content in our labors and smugly refusing to envisage the new labors that lie before us, of shunning the application to our own scholarship of that law so prominent in our ideology, the law of change.



The signs of change in our scholarship are the same as the signs of change in the modern temper generally: an increasing aimlessness and weariness, an increasing suspicion that the premises of our thought are inadequate. We are beginning to see more clearly, in our scholarship, the defects of our qualities. They were less apparent thirty years ago, when the classical and Christian traditions still performed a lingering service in offsetting the one-sidedness of the scientific vision of life and of education. More and more our defects stand forth nakedly. They are becoming the wonderment even of the natural scientists, who, instead of being flattered by our attempt to scientize letters, are concerned lest we lose contact with those distinctive qualities of literature which give it a place in life and in education, those unscientific qualities which, it seems, many

betray the cause of letters, since the scientifically minded will gravitate to other fields better suited to scientific discipline, and those not scientifically minded will be repelled. Let us note the outspoken warnings of leading minds in the humanities, the English historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, for example, who points to the danger that history faces, of "wasting much of its force by not knowing well enough what to do with the ever-increasing mass of facts. . . . We have, as historians, not only to collect facts, but to think about them." Similarly, Edwin Greenlaw, professor of English literature at Johns Hopkins, warns* us that at present "our greatest need is for the reinterpretation of literature in the light of our immense accumulation of facts. To prevent a new scholasticism, to make full use of the deeper and richer interpretation which will come to us if we seek it, to complete the union between scholarship and life which was one high aim of the early humanists, is the greatest duty confronting graduate depart-

*English in Modern Education: Aims and Method, *School and Society*, April 21, 1917. In a book on "The Province of Literary History," however,—a book published in March, 1931,—Dr. Greenlaw supports the *status quo*. He defends our present scholarship against the attacks of Dr. Canby and the academic humanists, whose program of literary study, as he conceives, consists of "preparation for writing leading articles for the *Saturday Review of Literature*." He represents the humanists as believing that literary history is the same as "pedantry" or "futile antiquarianism" and that "the incubus of research must be driven out at all costs," although no humanist has expressed these opinions. And in answer to these alleged opinions he states as the central thesis of his book that "we need literary history as well as literary criticism," a truth that neither Dr. Canby nor any of the humanists has ever denied.

Since Dr. Greenlaw charges me with not recognizing the extent and value of the province of literary history, I may refer the reader to my "American Criticism," pp. 252-53, "The American Scholar," pp. 8, 12-13, 21-22, and "Toward Standards," pp. 36-37. With Dr. Greenlaw, I insist upon the use and deplore only the abuse of literary history.

I am further charged with seeking to impose a single method of literary study upon everybody in disregard of the scholar's "right . . . to the utmost freedom." I hope that the present article delivered originally as an address more than a quarter of a year before Dr. Canby's book appeared, is answer enough. The time seems to me, when we must liberalize the single literary study which is still imposed, by the spirit of the letter faileth, on young scholars from

ments of literature. Classical and modern language departments must cooperate with the department of English in this task, since literature of all periods and races is to be involved in the movement."

This, indeed, must be the program of a School of Letters in the decades that lie before us. If the cause of letters is not to be discredited in the twentieth century, if it is not to perish in scholasticism or Alexandrianism, if it is to be reasserted, boldly and not apologetically, if it is to offer something which science cannot offer, if we are to show that letters are strong where science is weak just as science is strong where letters are weak, we must hold before us as exemplars in the coming time, not Bacon, not Darwin, not Einstein, whose realm is not our realm, but rather the humanists of the Renaissance, above all, Erasmus, who was indeed a "man of letters" in the full sense. If we could recall in the flesh, one figure from the past, one person speaking with authority in the realm of letters, I imagine we could not do better than summon that extraordinary "citizen of the world." With incomparable irony he would lay bare the follies to which we are still dedicated, and annihilate them in ridicule; nor would he fail to interpenetrate his devastating wit with pointed suggestions of conversion to more adequate ideals.

In a sense, Erasmus is still easy of access, thanks to the invention of printing in the Renaissance and the labors of scholarly editors and historians ever since. We are in a position to guess, with some accuracy, his outlook upon the present scene in literary education and scholarship. He could hardly fail, on the one hand, to do justice to our achievement in the past hundred years, nor, on the other hand, to propose a decided shift in emphasis for the sake of a similarly great achievement in the next hundred years.



To begin with, we need, he would assert, emphasis on other and more relevant backgrounds than those we have been exploiting. In language, we need emphasis on the nature and process of taste, if we are to go beyond the results of the scientific study of words and syntax. In addition to the various historical backgrounds to which we now give atten-

tion, we need to turn to other parts of that whole. Each art throws light on the others, and on the meaning of art in general. Again, we need emphasis on philosophy, with which literature has an intimate relation, each giving a *Weltanschauung* in terms of its own technique. The scholar should know early, and at first hand, Plato, Aristotle, and other makers of landmarks in the history of thought. He should also acquire from some study of philosophy an interest in ideas, a desire to think, to speculate, if his special labors in scholarship are to serve intelligent ends. We need, once more, a knowledge of religion, which is still another sort of *Weltanschauung*, a knowledge of some of the great religions of the world, particularly the history and literature of Christianity; and along with knowledge, if possible, a serious interest in religious experience. In regard to foreign languages and literatures, our background needs are urgent. The classical scholar cannot have a vital understanding of the ancient world unless he is also at home in the modern world; he should know intimately much of English literature and if possible one modern foreign literature. The scholar in the modern languages, on the other hand, needs, even more imperatively, a knowledge of the ancient world and of Greek and Latin in the original, if he is to understand the modern literatures profoundly inspired by antiquity. In answer to those who hold that the ancient languages, especially Greek, can be dispensed with, we may declare, with the humanist Guarino, that "those who are ignorant of the Greek tongue decry its necessity, for reasons which are sufficiently evident."



So much for changes of emphasis among the backgrounds of literature. But backgrounds, the influences that exert a formative effect on literature, we too often forget, are less important than the foreground, literature itself. From the study of causes we must pass to the study of results. Beyond the study of language, of literary history, of general history, of philosophy, of fine arts, lies the study of literature, the end of all our elaborate propædæutical activity. Finally arrived at creative literature, how are we to deal with it?

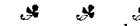
In the first place, we are to study it from the creative point of view. We are to study it from the

inside, we are to see it, so far as possible, with the eyes of the creative artist. By means of the work of art, we are to seek to return, in the language of Benedetto Croce, to the artist's inner expression, the intuition that he chose to externalize. Here the method of science and the factual mood of science will no longer avail; we need, rather, emotion, esthetic sensitiveness, the power of dramatically projecting ourselves into another personality, for which all our propædæutical activity supplies little more than negative guidance. Insight of this sort may be a gift of the gods, but like other gifts, such as the insight of the scientist or detective, it may be developed by exercise. It may even be prepared for by still another kind of propædæutical activity, namely, practice in original creative writing, the attempt, however uninspired, to do what literary artists do—that is, write poems, stories, or plays. For the literary scholar, perhaps the best laboratory after all is pen, paper, and wastebasket. If he accomplishes nothing more, he will learn to write readable English.



In the second place, we are to study literature from the critical point of view. We must seek to develop taste, that is, unconscious criticism, which in the end rests upon conscious criticism. We must learn to take a lively and serious interest in values, since values are the very *raison d'être* of literature. To the literary artist the world and human life in the world are something to be valued, not something to be described and explained in the manner of the scientist. To the poet everything is good or bad, nothing mere matter of fact. And the scholar must follow the poet, rather than the scientist. He must deal with the values found in the world and human life by writers of the past; he must interpret these values, and to interpret them he must have a point of view of his own, a scale of values to which they may be referred. At least until the romantic movement, there was a fairly consistent scale of values in the tradition of humane letters, stretching all the way from Homer to Goethe, perhaps the only scale of values really appropriate for the scholar who would deal seriously and sympathetically with the artistic thought of the past. I am well aware of the chaos

of values that has since come into being. In the coming years must face this problem and make his choice for the sake of his scholarship. From some point of view he must deal with the value of literary works, asking all three of the questions framed by Goethe: "What did the author propose to himself? Is what he proposes reasonable and sensible? And how far has he succeeded in carrying it out?" He will not fail to deal resolutely with the second, the most difficult of these questions. Even in history, as Preserved Smith remarks, the witness of each document must be cross-examined not only in the light of the whole history of the epoch, but also in the light of "the whole of the historian's philosophy."



In literature, at least as much as in history, our most significant truth can only be partial or provisional. But the search for significant truth we cannot surrender in favor of a search for insignificant truth. If our present literary scholarship is to be justified by its fruits, if our research in the realm of change and relativity is to attain its rational end, our scholars must turn more and more to a higher research in the realm of the constant and permanent, which is the realm of criticism. Our future scholarship, seeking to surmount the method and mood of the Modern Language Association and similar organizations, has much to learn from the expressionism of Croce in Italy, the impressionism of Cazamian in France and Oliver Elton in England, the *Geistesgeschichte* of Unger and Korff in Germany, and the critical humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More in America.

Rising above our mere scientism and historicity, we shall confront the problems that concern scholarship rather than learning. As Donaldson declared three quarters of a century ago, "Not all learned men are accomplished scholars, though any accomplished scholar may, if he chooses to devote the time to the necessary studies, become a learned man." Our goal is not erudition but scholarship, the union of accuracy, thoroughness, culture, taste, and critical judgment. To produce men and women capable of such scholarship, we shall have to renovate our education, eventually, all the way from the primary school to the graduate school. One essential step we may take at once, however, by elevating the requirements for the doctorate, which should be made