

The Life and Death of the *WORLD*, on page 662

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

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### Station *WORLD*, New York

**I**N a novel shortly to be published by a brilliant young Englishman, the hero, whose name is Juan by right of descent from the famous Don, visits America with full intent to live to the full the much celebrated American life. His first day in New York is quite as eventful as the first days here of most English visitors. He sees all the sights, including the yaks making love at the Zoo, and rounds out the evening with a murder in a night club, but his chance companion, a Jewish musician, sighs wearily. "New York," he says "is dull." Underneath the surface variety is an astounding monotony of experience. Noise, excitement, violence, lasciviousness, megalomania, but few things to like, and fewer still to love.

Poor jaded fellow, lonely in his noisy Zion, he represents nevertheless more of us than will readily admit the charge, but not so many as yesterday when there was still the *World* to read. For where thousands upon thousands are gathered together, as in our modern cities, institutions take the place of the homeiness of the small town, and the intimacies of close acquaintance. We have no neighbors, thousands upon thousands must have no real friends. How pitifully the radio tries to project its tea parties or grocery store gatherings over the air, manufacturing in some plushy studio a synthetic atmosphere of friendliness that carries its insincerity over the wave length.

Newspapers and magazines are more successful, although most so with the naive who do not see the tongue-in-the-cheek of the more palpable sob-sisters and hearty-my-boys. But when a magazine or a newspaper does become the thing it wishes to be, a corporate personality, a symbolic character, an individual, then if it dies or is destroyed by harsh economics or bad management, we feel for a while like the little Jewish musician. New York, America, is noisy and successful, but dull, or at least, duller than yesterday.

We do not write (to borrow a word from another Englishman) in a mood of depressimism. The old order changeth, and all that sort of thing, of course, and if character and personality disappear with the death of one beloved institution, character and personality of a different kind may come in others. *May*; that is the sticking point. For in spite of a half dozen instances which anyone could name, the grim circle of machine-made writing seems closing upon us at the moment when we need personality and character in institutions most, when living for megalopolitans is becoming more stimulated and less human, more excited and less humorous, more varied in externals and more jaded within, more monotonous because of the constancy of change.

There remain plenty of excellent newspapers in America, and many which as mere organs of news far excelled the *World*. But the readers of that departed journal must feel a lack of the flexible and the incalculable, of the fearless and the witty, when they read today. Something very human and yet civilized; something courageous yet never sentimental; some of that devotion to the lost causes which are perhaps the only causes never finally lost; in news and editorials and criticism alike a heavy charge of that liberalism which stands in plucky inconsistency between the conservative and the radical, and is never successful because the material universe, whatever else it is, is certainly not liberal, and is never finally defeated, because it is a function of a generous spirit the roots of which lie at least as

### Near Sight

By MARGARET EMERSON BAILEY

**M**ARCH more than other months, requires near sight. Far vision, used for seeing winter through In wide, white sweeps of beauty will not do For what has been employing overnight The stubborn bark to work for its own good. Upon the smallest branch each twig is set, Persuaded to that point, with a rosette Of utter softness, breaking through hard wood.

In what a little while each bud will fling Its cap on mad March winds o'er any hill And loose a wave of greenness on the land. This is the moment then to take our fill Of such minute precisions as make spring The lovelier for lying close at hand.

### Mark My Words!

By HILAIRE BELLOC

**W**RITING men use, among other phrases, some which carry with them their own fate. And when I say writing men, I include myself. I mean journalists, publishers, hacks, scribblers, my brethren of the deplorable trade, this refuge of the incompetent. Such phrases are: "never more shall we see . . ." and "one thing is certain. . . ." Of these tom-fool challenges to the gods, none gives me more pleasure than the emphatic "mark my words . . ." coming at a climax of rhetoric.

I was a little over thirty years of age when I first began to notice the Act of God in this particular affair—or, as pagans would call it "the Woolen Feet of the Gods." Here you must allow me to digress, for in digression lies the multiplicity and therefore the fulness of writing.

The pagans worshipped gods; the Fathers of the Church, reacting with natural violence against the pagans, called those gods devils. But worse was to come, for there arose a generation so meagre that it would not have any gods at all, and it said that even the poor old pagan gods in spite of all their guts and go were figments of the brain. Now I, for my part, hold strongly to the following doctrine, which if any man deny, he is a donkey without wings: That the gods of the Pagans are lesser spirits, some evil but the most of them good fellows enough, and carrying out the purposes of a High God not very much more consciously than we do ourselves. There are then, let us take it, gods of the wood and the stream, of the air and the storm and the sea, and of fire, and of companionship and of repose, and of the hearth especially.

But what about their Woolen Feet? At first sight the phrase might seem discourteous—I will not say disrespectful because I see no reason for worshipping pagan gods, much as I like them: but I say discourteous. A man or god does not like being told he has eccentric feet or hands or knees or shins or any part of his carcass. But the truth is that the pagans spoke here in metaphor. What they meant was that the Higher Powers follow us up slyly from behind without a sound, until they get within clubbing distance: then fell us to the earth. That is what they meant by "the Woolen Feet of the Gods." I will now end my digression and come back to the main stream—though that with some reluctance, for what is more pleasant than to get off at a junction, trundle through the countryside upon a one-line railway to Market Harrimore and Castle Wantring and Bishops Carvey, and other dirty little holes?

What is more pleasant than to stand upon firm land and watch the laboring barque upon the troubled sea? So asks the Latin poet, and I more pertinently answer that it is much more pleasant to eat green Marennes oysters, when these are in season, and not stricken with a disease as they have been during the past few years.

What is more pleasant than to leave the main course of a great river, and to plash slowly through backwaters, undisturbed by the launches and by the villa gardens?

But all good things come to an end. So I must return to my thesis.

I say I was a little more than thirty years of age when I first began to notice that the expression "mark my words . . ." was explosive: that the

### This Week

"Theatre Street."

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL.

"The Economic Life of Soviet Russia."

Reviewed by MAURICE HINDUS.

"Liberty in the Modern State."

Reviewed by JOHN CORBIN.

"The Jesting Army."

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT.

"Portrait of a Diplomatist."

Reviewed by FEDERICK W. HILLES.

Trade Winds.

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

"Royal Charles."

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY.

"The Name of Action."

Reviewed by HULBERT FOOTNER.

Round about Parnassus.

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

"Liebste Mutter."

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL.

The Reader's Guide.

By MAY LAMBERTON BECKER.

### Next Week, or Later

The Early Chinese Novel.

By PEARL S. BUCK.

deep as greed and fear—much of all this was lost for our time when the *World* died.

The pessimists think that liberalism is dying too, and the depressimists make copy of its demise. Dying perhaps in the slipped phase in which most of us have known it, as a safeguard, an expectation, and as the other name for progress; yet no more dead than hope. But one of its best transmitting stations is closed. There will be no more *WORLD*, New York.



words were indeed marked, and accepted as a defiance. But it was five years more before I began to systematize the great affair, to set down record, to discover at last the awful law that the mere use of these words involved two necessary things: first, their being laughed to scorn by events; secondly, the stamping of their author upon the middle of the forehead with the word "Fool" in flaming letters and with the gift of oblivion. For those who must play the buffoon with Providence and set themselves up for prophets are not allowed to remember their errors, lest they should be corrected, and so from very shame avoid future occasions, but are rather lured on to make bigger mountebanks of themselves than before.

At last I acquired method in all this affair. And now after so many years, not only can I give you example upon example but every two or three days when I hear the Sacred Sentence again I thrill to it and fix the memory of it in my mind and await the inevitable crash.

All those years ago, when I was first beginning to treat the thing methodically, I came across a passage today significant. Myself a pro-Boer I read in my pro-Boer daily rag over the signature of another pro-Boer: "Mark my words! This war" (the South African war was then fizzling) "will prove the end of these inhuman conflicts. The public opinion of this country will henceforward impose a universal peace for ever, and her United Empire will become a model for the world."

I made no comment then and I make no comment now. But almost immediately another man came out with another: "Mark my words," he roared in print, "the English people will rise as one man and compel the Government to make peace and give the Boers their independence"; and within five minutes after I had gone into my club a man had said to me: "Mark my words, victory is at hand"—he talked as though it were the Second Punic War—"and henceforward we shall hear nothing more of the South African Dutch."

From such origins my study or rather science began.

I have pursued it so fruitfully that today I have 157 major and 2,372 minor examples of "mark my words. . . ." In only 418 examples has not the irony of God fallen upon them like a ton of feathers or an obliterating fall of snow. And those 418 cases include the case of the man who wrote "Mark my Words, rents will rise in Bloomsbury; it is only a question of time."

A Frenchman comes next on my list. He wrote in the year 1902: "*Croyez Moi!* (Mark my words). We shall recover Alsace-Lorraine from the necessity of things, without firing a shot."

He mercifully died not long after, being an old man, and nothing more than a Paris journalist like any other. But in the very same week an English tourist whom I met in those parts bade me mark his words and mark them well: which were to the effect that within fifty years the whole world would be talking English. He had had his back put up by the inability of the people in his hotel to understand him.

But when I come to this great chapter of the book called "Mark my Words!" the chapter of the coming universality of the English language, I must beg you to allow me to expand. I know not what fool first started it, but I heard it first with my own ears in the office of a magazine very popular at the time and edited in Mowbray House on the embankment in the year of Our Lord God, 1889.

A thing called Imperialism was growing in full blast in those days and one of its high priests had just come back from South Africa.

Why Dutch South Africa, of all places, should have seemed to him a symbol of the spread of the English language God only knows, but so it was. He and those about him loudly proclaimed through their journals that English would be the universal tongue and they also, all those years ago, gave the limits of time wherein this delightful thing would happen. They also wrote "fifty years." It seems to be the ritual phrase. Well! there are ten more years to run. But then the man who invented that graphic piece of prophesy, "The Russian Steam Roller," wrote, later on, in the war, I think about 1917—in one of those futile books which pretended to be contemporary diaries and were published in a spate after the Armistice (his was called, if I remember rightly, "Dining with the Rich during the European War") that all the world would be talking English "in fifty years."

I suppose my little grandson, if he lives to a hearty

old age, will read the footlers of the year 2,000 assuring him that the world will all be talking English in fifty years; unless, indeed, by that time even the footlers have grown ashamed of their foolery: unless, indeed, by that time sharp experience, the stern schoolmaster of fools, has humbled their foreheads.

And surely a little experience is enough. Get you to the Riviera while it still pants out its miserable life and hear in any one of its horrible hotels "The Universal English Language," hear it from the black man and the yellow and the brown, hear it lisped by the Levantine, hear it with a noise like twenty brass bands from the teetotaller of the Middle West. Then before you go mad, get up the hills into the olives, shut your eyes, and dream a little while of the deep meadows of the Severn and of the rich voices of mowers, resting from the scythe. Let your mind sink into a half sleep until you are right back in Arcadia. When you have received this beatitude stumble up half awake, get you downhill again to the damnable hotel, listen to the English of China, Kalamazoo, Houndsditch, and Seringapatam, and ask yourself whether, indeed, the world is going to be like this in fifty years.

The truth is that this "fifty years" is but an imaginary, a fetish phrase. It is like the carrot held in front of the donkey's nose or like the ritual words: "Next year, Jerusalem," or William Rufus's "Next Year, Poitiers," or the more amiable "Wait till next Christmas!" with which I am accustomed to soothe my younger dependents when they demand large sums of money, powerful cars, and journeys to the Hesperides.

But this phrase "fifty years" is not the only one. There is also the besotted ape who uses the phrase "Mark my words, in ten years."

I knew one of these who lived a little before the war and had a great deal too much money. He busied himself with the beginning of petrol ("Not understanding how the dooms begin" as the poet sings). Two of his remarks still buzz perpetually in my soul. The first was as follows:

"Mark my words! In ten years not a horse will be seen in the streets of London."

The second was this:

"Mark my words! In ten years we shall drive in five minutes from our club in Pall Mall to our offices in the city."

Would I could call him back from Hades and his companionable devils, this man of 1912! Here we are in 1930 and are there horses in the streets of London? Are there? Did not I myself, who am entitled to far better treatment, slowly crawl in a taxi only last Thursday, the Ascension, behind a van drawn by one huge horse who had suffered all that horses can suffer and was ready for dissolution and so to Heaven? Did he not pace his funereal progress all the way down a narrow gut between a place where the street was up and the pavement, holding up behind him an innumerable procession of taxis, omnibuses, Rolls Royces belonging to rich lawyers, Fords belonging to Generals, and Baby Austins belonging to Little Dot?

And what about driving from "Our club in Pall Mall to Our offices in the city in five minutes?" We were to have done this in ten years—that is in 1922. I repeat, here we are in 1930, and do we spin from Our Clubs in Pall Mall to Our offices in the city in five minutes? Oh God, oh Montreal! Once more do I desire to call him back from the society of the damned and to set him out in the high noon of traffic from "my" club in Pall Mall, not indeed to "my" offices in the City, for I have none, but to the Mansion House, the residence of the Great Lord Mayor. I warrant him that before he has fumed in his third Chock-a-Block he will wish himself back with Beelzebub.

So never let us mark any of their words. They are not worth marking. Only one thing in this world is worth hearing, which is the voice of love, whether domestic, vagabond, sacred, or profane; to which I might tentatively add the noise of the flute on still summer waters at evening—a very grateful sound.

But, mark my words, all emphasis in prophesy, all insistence on particular judgment are a noisome burden.

*Scribner's Magazine* announces that the \$5,000 prize in its long short story contest which closed September 20, 1930, has been awarded to John Peale Bishop for his "Many Thousands Gone." The judges were Malcolm Cowley, an editor of the *New Republic*; Gilbert Seldes, critic and author; and John Hall Wheelock, editor and author. The winning manuscript was selected from 1,672 entrants.

## A Russian Prima Ballerina

THEATRE STREET. By TAMARA KARSAVINA.  
New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1931. \$5.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

ALL the early part of Karsavina's reminiscences—her childhood in old Petersburg, her years as a pupil in the convent-like Imperial ballet-school—have the warmth, richness, and charm of a well-written and tender romance. A romance, indeed, it is, in a sense, that this now mature woman and artist is writing, for the little girl of those days is something finished and done and outside herself; part of another life and another age, as is that once imperial city and the Russia in which she learned Pushkin's poems by heart, dreamed of graduating one day from Theatre Street, prayed before the ikons and learned to dance.

There hangs over all this part of the *prima ballerina's* story a fragrance of the eighteenth century, as it hung, indeed, over that old Petersburg—the mingling of the formal and delicate; sylphs of the ballet fluttering behind the majestic Renaissance columns of Theatre Street; the *chinoiserie* of the Great Catherine's little theatre in the woods at Tsarskoe-selo; social obscurantism warmed by a patriarchal and peculiarly Russian friendliness.

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The ballet school and the little girls who went through their seven years of arduous, meticulous, yet sheltered and pleasant training there, had their place and future as definitely and respectfully fixed as the Foreign Office or any other branch or caste in the Imperial hierarchy. It had, literally, all the austerity and cloistered serenity of a convent. There was the all-knowing head mistress, the beadle wearing the imperial arms. One studied as girls would anywhere else in a "finishing" school, as well as learned to stand on one's "points"; walked a little in the garden, but knew nothing of the outside world. These little ladies were to be turned out, eventually, so that in addition to being artists of the ballet, they would be as nearly as possibly indistinguishable in manners and appearance from the ladies of society who watched them from the front.

Where else but in old Russia could there have been such a scene as that after a Lenten performance when the Emperor Alexander

expressed a wish to eat pancakes with the artists! All flew into commotion "as at a pike's bidding," as the Russian fairy-tale has it, tables were spread on trestles all along the stage, and everything provided. . . . Marie Feodorovna sat at the head of the table, and every one came up with his plate while she filled it out of a big dish of pancakes placed in front of her. She put on a little apron for the occasion. The Emperor alternately sat or walked among his guests and had a gracious word for everybody.

How remote from our Protestant and utilitarian West is that brief glimpse of the ballet-master making the sign of the Cross over his little pupil as the first notes of the orchestra's introduction sounded on the evening of her debut (it was no further away than 1912!) in a *pas de deux* in the last act of "Javotte." How perfect, in its way, the admonition of the great dancer, Marie Sergueevna, to the students who threw down their shabby coats for her to walk over when she emerged with her inordinately jealous husband from the stage-door one rainy night—"'*Rassemblez donc vos pelisses, Messieurs,*' she said, and passed on!"

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The latter half of the book, after Karsavina has arrived; after she had broken through the enameled shell of that old Russia which was itself crumbling to pieces; when she danced in Stockholm, Paris, Buenos Aires; in London, in the "two a day"; when Sargent was painting her portrait, and she finally begins to gossip familiarly of such unglamorous subjects as Hugh Walpole and others of the literary shop—all this is quite another story. Interesting enough, perhaps, in its hurried, diary-like way, but without the perspective, the rhythm, the nostalgic charm of that other life, which, with its whole soil and framework, is so completely gone.

Notwithstanding this almost inevitable difference—so often it is more interesting to climb than to arrive!—the whole story is out of the ordinary and worth while. Few artists have ever written of themselves more intimately and persuasively, and we get to know, first and last, not only the *prima ballerina*, but a woman of charm, intelligence, and character.