

## BOOKS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

### Plays for the Young

THE SCHOOL DRAMA IN ENGLAND.  
By T. H. VAIL MOTTER. New York:  
Longmans, Green & Co. 1930. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ERIC S. DRAKE

THERE are two elements in historical studies of this nature, content and perspective; Mr. Motter has given us a book as excellent and scholarly in the one as it is rudimentary in the other, but though one cannot overlook its faults, it remains a book that no lover of drama in its full scope can afford to miss, and the reader will the better appreciate its value by realizing the limits within which these values hold.

The main thesis of the work, that there has been in England a vital connection between the drama of the schools and that of the theatres by way of the universities, is hardly epoch-making, but what is of interest is the wealth of detail with which the thesis is supported, even to the conditions under which the children lived and acted. Mr. Motter's documentary researches have taken him into the dim past, and the reader cannot realize these dramatic stirrings in the ancient English schools in pre-Renaissance days without a certain responsive thrill. From Winchester and Eton the story is followed through the major "public" schools to modern days, with one chapter on some of the lesser schools, and one on the present situation in the light of the past. The author's conscientiousness and accuracy are beyond quibbling about, and he shows an excellent discrimination in differentiating between the characteristics of the various schools; but there we part company; by the time the final chapter is reached, he has become the victim of his own method.

The main rhythm of school drama is rightly noted, reaching its climax in the 'seventies of the sixteenth century, passing through "competition and defeat" to the Commonwealth, and thence through "dependence and imitation" to modern times. Then, in rather less than three hurried pages, all this is put into relation with the future. By a false perspective, Christ's Hospital and Rugby are seen leading the way to a new independence and vitality.

That is not so, essentially. There is a revival of drama in English schools, but it is not wrapt up with the individual school, often with the individual headmaster, as it was in the beginning. In bending over his documents, Mr. Motter seems to have missed the new orientation, which is based on a very different view of the child and of life from that of the traditional "public" school; and no less important, it is based on a very different attitude to the audience. It makes such a vital appeal to the child's imagination that it is looked on as somewhat uncanny and not quite respectable, and for that very reason is suspect even in schools that pride themselves on their dramatic traditions. It is not a fulfilment of those traditions, but a disruption both of them and of the whole scholastic philosophy on which they are based. But all this can hardly be unearthed from manuscripts; it hasn't reached that stage yet; it is still fluid and vital. At the same time it is almost incredible that Mr. Motter has not made some contact with it, and that he can write a book of such thoroughness in other respects without even mentioning the Perse School and the influence of Mr. Caldwell Cook. If Christ's Hospital and Rugby hold the lead in this matter (which is very doubtful), it is quite incidental; the historian must look for something bigger than these or any other schools, a new continuity, a shift in perspective.

Again, the author shows by a half truth the limitations of his knowledge. He says:

I have heard that there are schoolmasters who think Shakespeare the only permissible author for the school stage; I have even seen fourteen-year-old Henry Fiftys, and although I have avoided nine-year-old Lears, I was once asked to cast a particularly blushing youth of fifteen as Caliban. Such performances are anything but educational; they are anarchic. . . .

This plausible sneer does not alter the fact, though it may obscure it, that it has been demonstrated that boys of twelve or thirteen (i.e. in the maturity of boyhood, not in the monkey stage nor in blushing

adolescence), can act adult plays, and especially Shakespeare, with an intensity and an abandon that are quite startling. To deny this is as sane as denying that boys of the same age can sing adults' songs and anthems with a loveliness and penetration that are the despair of adults themselves.

But a whole book could be written on this subject. It is hoped that Mr. Motter will consider his work merely as an introduction, and expand his last chapter into a second volume, based on several years spent out of the library and in the field. The considered opinion of an American on such a topic would be of real value. In the meantime, we are glad that Mr. Motter has gone as far as he has; it is significant that it has been left to an American to do this particular piece of work.

### A Stalwart American

THE LIFE OF CHARLES G. WASHBURN. By GEORGE HENRY HAYNES. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1931. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ROYAL J. DAVIS

THERE is a well-founded tradition that Justices of the Supreme Court are careful to avoid any discussion whatever of a case which is before them or which may come before them except among themselves. For a Justice to bring up such a subject himself with a person not a member of the Court would be a most surprising occurrence. For a Chief Justice to do so would be doubly surprising. Yet no less a member of the country's highest tribunal than Chief Justice White sought the opinion of an outsider upon no less important a matter than the Standard Oil and American Tobacco Company cases.

The incident is related in the words of the man thus honored, Charles G. Washburn, who, having mentioned the conversation to a friend, was urged by him to make a record of the unusual occurrence. The date was February 11, 1911. Mr. Washburn was serving his second and last term in Congress, to which he had been elected as a Representative from his native Massachusetts. Seeing Chief Justice White pass his house that Sunday afternoon, Mr. Washburn walked out, shook hands with him, and told him how glad he was at Justice White's recent appointment to the Chief Justiceship. "I am very glad to see you," replied Mr. White, "and have been meaning to call on you and wish that you would walk with me, as there are some matters I would like to discuss with you and have your opinion upon." He continued:

You know we have these cases before us under the Sherman Act. I realize the great importance of the decision to the country and also the great importance of a unanimous decision, particularly because the Court has been so evenly divided heretofore. I want to talk with some one familiar with business conditions, and I know that you have had business experience, and I would like the judgment of a business man.

Justice White proceeded to put a definite and pertinent question:

Do you think that, if I can get the Court to unite on a construction of the first section of the act which will relieve nine-tenths of the cases that are likely to arise, remaining operative upon the very few combinations which are clearly monopolies, it would be a conclusion which I would be justified in advocating?

This question points toward the famous "rule of reason" laid down in the decisions in the two cases three months later.

Another bit of hitherto unrevealed history concerns Washburn's Harvard classmate and friend, Theodore Roosevelt. In a letter to Lord Bryce dated July 5, 1916, and relating to the political situation of that summer with special reference to Roosevelt, Washburn wrote:

I saw him on Sunday, June 4, on my way to the Convention (the Republican Convention). He then told me, three days before the Convention met, that he would not head a third ticket, but he asked me not to repeat this, because it would weaken his influence over the Republican Convention, and he then intimated very strongly that he thought Hughes the only man in sight whom the Progressives would accept.

Even without these significant disclosures the biography of Mr. Washburn would well

repay reading. It presents a sturdy, reticent, somewhat Puritanical, but public-spirited New Englander, a man of precise expression and of scholarly tastes as well as business ability, who mellowed as he grew older and who prized family associations more highly than political or any other success. His devotion to his mother and her pride in him make a most attractive picture. Serving only two terms in Congress, he gave his chief public service to his State. He became a member of the Massachusetts Legislature and of the State Constitutional Convention and was appointed to various bodies by Governors Crane, McCall, and Coolidge. He was always mindful of local duties and opportunities to an extraordinary degree. And he would have counted himself fortunate in his biographer, for excessive laudation would have displeased him almost as much as the glossing over of a limitation.

### "A Good Woman"

HER BODY SPEAKS. By AARON MARC STEIN. New York: Covici, Friede. 1931. \$2.50.

ONE is often appalled at the damage that a technically good woman can do, when her goodness is not reinforced by intelligence and self-knowledge. Mere abstinence from evil is often the poorest guarantee of wisdom or a wholesome influence over others. Mr. Stein's novel tells of the tragic events caused by the refusal of Edith Kent, an unmarried woman of thirty, to accept life as it is, and to admit to herself the truth about herself. Hemmed in by her own notions, reticences, and hypocrisies, in a crisis she went entirely sour and became the instrument of convicting an innocent man of first-degree murder. When a perfectly simple act of genuine thought would have cleared up the entire mess, she spoke from chaos and the result was evil. One life was lost, and four others were seriously broken, all because of wretched habits of mind induced by her virginal flight from reality. The speech of her body was the gibbering of an idiot.

Mr. Stein makes the madhouse of Edith Kent's mind quite convincing. His analysis of her progressive hysteria gives every indication of being sound and reasonable. Throughout the novel, we come upon this or that explanation of Edith Kent (or of the other characters) that strikes home either to us or to the people whom we have known intimately. And though the lesser characters are not so successful, they are never near failure. Edith Kent's maid, Martha, is given some of the best parts of the novel, and Martha's young man, Jim, is excellent though of small importance. Richard Clegg, the lawyer with whom Edith is half in love, is the least acceptable figure in the novel. Mr. Stein does not seem sure just what to do with him nor just what sort of a person he is supposed to be. His attentions to Martha are not wholly credible. But all in all, the analysis of the characters, their emotions and situations, is admirably done. And no one of us is sufficiently without sin not to have a personal interest in Mr. Stein's psychological surgery.

All this is told in a heavily stylized manner. The stream of consciousness device, which is used through almost the whole narrative, often enables Mr. Stein to get directly at the thoughts and emotions of his characters. However, it is likely that the novel would have been more successful if it had been told in the more conventional method of third person narrative. More than any other kind of fiction, the novel where action is revealed solely through the workings of the characters' minds, needs a writer with resourcefulness, agility, and sensitiveness; by evidence of this book, Mr. Stein has but little of these qualities. Ploughing ahead, he is more of the speculative psychologist than the literary artist. The result is a number of tiresome pages and a good deal of forced writing. But in spite of this radical defect, the novel remains well worth reading, not for its story but for its analysis of motive and for its merciless spotlight cast upon a not uncommon form of intellectual and emotional dishonesty. The integrity of Mr. Stein's own mental processes is never once suspect.

### A Political Murder

THE HERO. By ALFRED NEUMANN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CLINTON SIMPSON

IN this novel, Alfred Neumann tells the story of a political murder and its consequences for the murderer. Hubert Hoff, a member of the Nationalist party in a European country, kills the Labor prime minister of the country out of motives which are partly political and partly personal. Hoff is a dancer in a café, and he has three friends—a girl who is his dancing partner, a dwarf who worships him as a hero, and David Hertz, a man to whom he feels bound in a curious psychic relationship and who is described as his other self or "double." The crime committed, Hoff is plagued by the dwarf, who gives him commonsense advice on how to get away. Hoff, however, confesses to the girl and, in a round-about way, to Hertz. Driven still further by his desire to rid himself of his guilt, he confesses to the prime minister's wife (who thinks him ill), the police commissioner (who thinks him mad), and quickly disintegrates mentally and physically, ending in an insane asylum.

It is quite a tale, at times truly well written and exciting. Herr Neumann has written some historical novels, and, as in them, the characters in this one seem to be in costume. "The Hero" is not a novel that grips one as the real story of a real murderer—that is to say, the story of the murder is real, but Hoff is not a real character. A newspaper account of a murder often holds our attention as effectively as this novel does, and to that degree "The Hero" is a good story. But we expect more than a circumstantial narrative of the events accompanying and resulting from a deed of violence if the novel is to be a good novel.

Herr Neumann does, it is true, hint at meanings that lie beneath the surface of his tale. Some significance is attached by the author, we may be sure, to the strange relationship described between Hoff and his "double." The author himself must feel that it is not very clear, for on page 213 he allows his characters themselves to try to explain it—to us, not to each other:

"Herr Hertz" (said Hoff) "for God's sake tell me—and use clear, simple language—why are we interested in each other?"

"Because our fates are similar!"

"There's no such thing, Hertz, there's no such thing! Those are mere words!"

"Because we are very much alike as men."

"What on earth does that mean?" cried Hoff.

"Are men who are very much alike therefore one? Is that what you mean?"

And on the preceding page, Hoff thinks to himself:

Is there really such a person as David Hertz, or did I invent him in order to have a partner in my cogitations? Perhaps he is only a kindly, soothing spirit. But whether he exists or not, we are one. We are one and the same man! At the most we have made two of one, so as to be able to argue about our doubt and despair! We are merely the dramatization of one conscience! But we are neither friends nor foes! In the end we cannot give each other anything! It is a terrible fiasco, a fiendish duel with a mirror!

In "The Idiot," Dostoevsky has two characters who are not "the dramatization of one conscience." They are symbols, but they are also human, and Dostoevsky did not have to explain them. Hoff and Hertz, in "The Hero," are, as Hoff almost says, mathematical signs. They are not human, at least in their relation to each other, and therefore require explicit explanation.

The Richard Aldington Poetry Award has been divided this year and goes to E. E. Cummings and Walter Lowenfels. The award goes annually to the ablest young American poet chosen by the editorial committee of the Paris magazine, *This Quarter*, subject to Richard Aldington's approval. The committee did not want the award to go to a poet like Lowenfels who has expressed himself to the effect that poems worth a prize cannot be written to-day. Richard Aldington did, on the basis of Lowenfels's earlier books. So a compromise was effected, and the award was divided.



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Dear Dr. Moore—

We are naturally much interested in your book, *The Case Against Birth Control*, as on the 28th of this month we shall publish Margaret Sanger's autobiography, *MY FIGHT FOR BIRTH CONTROL*. Probably you do not approve of Mrs. Sanger, and will not be pleased by her book; yet we think you will find it fascinating reading. Even those who, like yourself, have fought Margaret Sanger and her cause for twenty years must admire this fearless woman who overcame persecution just as she overcame poverty and tuberculosis; whose energy and courage and brilliance make her one of the commanding personalities of our day.

Everybody seems to be talking about Katharine Brush's *RED HEADED WOMAN*, now running in the *Saturday Evening Post*. We shall publish the book on October 3rd. Booksellers tell us it's even better than *Young Man of Manhattan*. Certainly Lil Andrews, the small town beauty with big town ideas, will take her place as a great character in American fiction.



As Mahatma Gandhi approaches London, the Orient grows more and more and more important. Sherwood Eddy's *THE CHALLENGE OF THE EAST*, coming on the 24th, is the final word on a vital topic. . . . Upton Sinclair's novel, *THE WET PARADE*, just published, has already raised howls of fury, but it's selling fast. Sinclair steps on everybody's toes—but they can't help reading him. Thomas Rourke's *THUNDER BELOW* holds its place as the season's most arresting first novel, and O. Soglow's book of drawings, *PRETTY PICTURES*, though slightly vulgar, is on display in all the best homes.

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## Recent Mystery Stories

Reviewed by WILLIAM C. WEBER

"MY PARTICULAR MURDER," by David Sharp (Houghton Mifflin: \$2) is not only reasonably clever as a murder story but is decidedly amusing. It is a mystery for the literate. There is a certain grim humor in the discovery of the corpse by a professor of philology who on second thought decides that it is much more important that the lecture he is scheduled to deliver shall start on time than that the machinery of the law be set in motion. The decision is unfortunate, since the professor is suspected of the murder and gets into all sorts of scrapes. He tells his own story in a pleasant offhand style, as if murders and mysterious master criminals and the like were small things in a philologist's life, and the effect is delightful.

To Kenneth McGowan, who collected the twenty-three detective stories in "Sleuths," the 583 page Omnibus book published by Harcourt, Brace (\$2.50), must be awarded the palm for a new idea. There have been other good collections of short detective stories, but this is the first *omnium gatherum* of practically all the great sleuths of fiction from Dupin and Sherlock Holmes to Lord Peter Wimsey and Craig Kennedy with, addition extraordinary, a biographical sketch of each detective preceding the tale of his exploits. In some cases the author supplies the biography, in others the editor. They are all done in the proper "Who's Who" manner. We learn, for instance, that the hobbies of Mr. Reginald Fortune are gardening and marionettes, that the blind detective Max Carrados is a numismatist and the author of "Tetradrachms of Syracuse," that Lord Peter Wimsey has in preparation "The Murderer's Vade Mecum, or 101 Ways of Producing Sudden Death" and similar interesting information. The chief attraction, however, is the stories themselves, which are without exception shining examples of the mystery in miniature. It will be a long time before anyone surpasses this collection.

One has but to read a sentence on page 114 of Vernon Loder's "Death of an Editor" (Morrow: \$2) to know that the author is English. An official of the Foreign Office, tracing the stolen papers that are a part of the story, bemoans the tendency, presumably uncommon in England, "among newspapers to forget the purveying of news and attempt the purveying of politics." At that Inspector Brews "grinned mildly. *The police have no politics.*" Italics ours. Beyond that statement, outlandish to American readers, the story is entirely credible. It is one of those English country house affairs in which a famous editor is found dead in his study and all the guests—an oddly assorted lot—are suspected. Inspector Brews methodically sifts all the clues and by processes that the reader may follow step by step eventually nabs the murderer and his accomplice. One also learns that dentists are not called "doctor" in England. Who says detective yarns are not instructive?

If "police have no politics" in England one has only to read "In Cold Blood," by Armstrong Livingston (Bobbs-Merrill: \$2), to realize that he is back in the Land of the Free. In this tale district attorneys disport themselves in the lowest of dives and connive with criminals to blackmail millionaire daughters and so on. Jimmy Traynor, "ex-burglar detective," and his fellow worker, Tommy Hibbert, the almost too perfect female impersonator, trace the missing letters and clear Jessica Partridge of murder. The action is rapid-fire and the dénouement surprising.

In "The Silver Scale Mystery," by Anthony Wynne (Lippincott: \$2), the portly Dr. Hailey comes into his own again. This is undoubtedly the best Dr. Hailey story since "The Sign of Evil." The scene is a castle in Scotland in which rules a despotic old lady. The old lady is murdered and then in stunning succession two detectives who attempt to trace the murderer are also killed. So subtle is this criminal that not a trace is left behind, and the countryside comes to believe that the crimes are the work of some diabolic visitant who lives in the sea beside the castle and visits the grim old building to work out an ancient curse. But Dr. Hailey is not prey to the old wives' tale and at last solves a mystery which is as thrilling as it is simple in its final explanation.

Philip MacDonald gathers together a garish assortment of characters in his latest Anthony Gethryn story, "The Crime Conductor." Moving-picture stars, actors, actresses, dope fiends, impresarios, all gather under the roof of Willington Sigsbee the famous entrepreneur, who, before the eve-

ning is over, has been murdered—presumably drowned in his bath. Colonel Gethryn soon shatters the drowning assumption and proceeds to ferret out the criminal from the evening's visitors. The method used in telling the tale is interesting, the characters extremely well developed, and the conclusion a real smash.

The next two mysteries considered in this cabinet of crime should not be read in succession—though they do clasp hands very prettily for reviewing purposes. The methods used by Inspector French and Lord Peter Wimsey to solve the murders recorded in "Mystery in the English Channel" (Harpers: \$2) and "Suspicious Characters" (Brewer, Warren & Putnam: \$2) are so similar in their concentration on details—mileage, time tables, miles per hour that motor boats can or cannot go, time it takes an artist to paint a picture of a given scene when he is, or is not, copying the style of a brother artist unfortunately deceased—that the poor old bean fairly whirls before the final page is reached. Mark you, they are both good stories. We go on record here that Dorothy Sayers's book, "Suspicious Characters" (called "The Five Red Herrings" in England, to our mind a much better title), is likely to hold the palm for the best all-round mystery novel of the year, and Freeman Croft's "Mystery in the English Channel," while not quite up to the standard of "Sir John Magill's Last Journey," is so small a let-down that it will not disappoint his admirers. "Suspicious Characters" is placed in Scotland (map and all at your disposal), in an artist's colony. All the artists squabble like sparrows, but their concentrated hatred explodes on one Jock Campbell, a bumptious person who is finally killed. There are five suspects—all artists—and the maze that Lord Peter and the Scottish sleuths thread before they pin down the man who murdered the Campbell is among the most intricate in mystery fiction. But you must take it slowly to get real enjoyment out of it.

There are three killings in "Mystery in the English Channel." Two of the corpses are found in a motor launch drifting in the Channel with not another boat in sight, though the bodies are still warm. Every clue that Inspector French runs down comes to a dead end until he notices two slight depressions on the stern of another motor launch that figures in the story, and then the end is near. Beware of depression.

## Good Historical Romance

THE BLANKET OF THE DARK. By JOHN BUCHAN. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1931. \$2.50.

NO novelist of our time conjures up more enchantingly great eras of England's—and Scotland's—past than John Buchan, and the primary value of his historical romances is due to the rich and profound order of his scholarship rather than to anything exceptional in his equipment as a writer of pure imagination. He has never, in the historical novel, shown to higher advantage than in his present work, a tale of Cotswold England in the closing years of Henry VIII's reign, England enveloped in the "blanket of the dark," with the avaricious nobles, the starving poor, outcast gentry, thieving adventurers, vagabonds, men of the greenwood, all banding together in revolt against the tyranny of the despot. Mr. Buchan takes the liberty of creating for his hero a character which has no existence in history, a mythical son of that famous Edward, Duke of Buckingham, who died in 1521 without male issue, barbarously executed by his king.

This youth, then known simply as Peter Pentecost, reared in ignorance of his exalted lineage by rustics and priests, is hailed from the pious obscurity of his Oxford studies by the revolt's lordly leaders, restored by them to his hereditary rank, raised to the status of contender for the throne, and invested with command of the insurrectionary forces. These stirring pictures preliminaries of the outbreak of the rebellion prepare the way to the climax of the story, which is brought to pass when into the very heart of his enemies' country, as if casually scornful of their menace to his majesty, scantily attended, rides gargantuan King Henry, a hunting of the stag. In those memorable closing pages of the book, Peter, alone and separated from his followers, rescues the King from drowning in a flooded forest stream, holds him captive through the night, but in the morning is himself taken captive and sentenced to death by the thankless sovereign. Peter escapes, and there the story ends.

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