

The BOWLING GREEN

Human Being

XI. TELL ME EVERYTHING

WHAT, then, is a human being? Hubbard, looking over his notes, had to ask himself. How might one attempt to describe the incredible phenomenon? A creature alternating sixteen hours of mischief with eight hours of innocence; aware of death at every street-crossing, yet rarely scathed; a moving eddy of self-consciousness wasting most of its time in irrelevant necessities and seizing desperately upon casual laughter. A toy balloon blown into the Park—a blind man singing on the street—a spark when the key meets the lock it fits. Then, engrossed in this impossible inquiry, the biographer became more antic. It was not likely that the ultimate definition, having eluded *Æsop*, the Bible, Shakespeare, and all the French aphorists, would accidentally run down from the small black cistern of Lawrence Hubbard's Roe pen. But he was happy, very happy, in watching what came forth. A human being, he wrote, is a whispering in the steam pipes on a cold night; dust sifted through a locked window; one or other half of an unsolved equation; a pun made by God; an ingenious assembly of portable plumbing; a folder of Unfinished Business; a mob of intuitions governed by foreigners; a parliamentary assembly in which the minority is always right; a tropical island with a high protective tariff; a temporary compromise between the impulses of self-preservation and self-destruction; a diminishing variable of Certainty; a superb actor in a hokum play; the chorus of a song whose verse everyone has forgotten; a trained animal who distrusts its trainer; the only animal concerned to identify itself.

Words, he concluded, are a commodity in which there is never any slump. Talk is the greatest industry, and all human beings move in clouds of it—not merely their own, but in the rumors and representations of others, to which they are sometimes painfully sensitive. If so, they hurry back into the all-forgiving ego. But how extraordinarily well-trained they are, on the whole. He remembered with delight how he had seen the sudden shift that takes place now and then at a formal dinner party, when the hostess switches over to talk to the man on the other side. With a soft creaking of shirt bosoms and a turning of white necks the pairs simultaneously rearrange themselves all round the big table. Marvellous creatures! In just a few million years an anthropoid of uncertain temper had drilled itself to such genteel deportment.

But what are you going to do about people when you're not with them? Into what far-away loneliness do their minds travel? What uncanny thoughts do they think? You can visualize them, see them walking, laughing, sulking; see their amusing clothes (so remarkably a part of themselves), the delicate way their hair grows, their bright serious eyes; hear their unmistakable voices repeating favorite opinions. Does all that go on, just the same, and you not there? Yes, they are pursuing their own relentless privacies, but are they real? Even if they were dead, would they be any farther away? You grope clumsily toward them, but is it really they you seek or some new reassurance of yourself? Hubbard thought with amazement of Minnie Hutzler. How keen and cool her gaze: if you passed her on the street you would never guess about the electric spark. The phantoms of so many friends rise before you. What's happening to them? Tell me, tell me everything (you'd like to say); I'll never hold it against you. I'll match each grief

that plagues you with grievance of my own. Ring, telephone; come, letter; I need you.

I don't like people who are Sure of Themselves, he said.

He tried earnestly to put himself in Roe's place. "I am Richard Roe, stationery novelties. I have a wife Lucille, a daughter Gladys, a dog Peke, an apartment on 81st Street, an office in the Flatiron Building. I have a secretary Miss Hutzler, I mean Minnie, with dark eyebrows; a brother Shad who owes me money and hopes to owe me more. I have a bunch of keys in the left trouser-leg of a gray suit, and in the right trouser some bills fastened together with a paper-clip. I have three cigars wrapped in cellophane in my vest. My overcoat is dark blue, and I am on my way to talk discounts with a jobber. What am I thinking about?"

It didn't seem to work. Apparently he wasn't thinking anything except that a cocktail would be in order. Was that what Richard would have had in mind? This sort of brooding is a bewildering affair, and he hankered for companionship. He remembered that on Saturday afternoons the boys usually gathered at Jules's place.

When there was time for a good long session they sat not in the kitchen but in a tiny inside room that opened off it. There, through the doorway, they could see Jules and Madame side by side at the store, tending various operations in perfect harmony. There was something fundamental and close to reality about that scene. Madame never guessed how these clients, not inexperienced students of women, admired her. She was too intent on the browning veal cutlet or the colander of tender haricots. There was a natural benignity about her. Presently she would come to the doorway. Her face and voice were beautiful with simple friendliness when she said, "What will the gentlemen have?" It was a lesson in grace just to watch her move about. Jules was more volatile: when he had a specially fine ham or a haunch of venison he carried it in to show them. When he shook up cocktails he usually found a small dividend for himself, so that by midafternoon he was ripe to play the accordion. It was a noble instrument, inlaid with oyster-shell and sparklers and an American flag outlined in colored gems. The tunes Jules enjoyed had no terminus: they went on and on, endless *da capos* with surprising blasts of power and a secret humorous effect of which the virtuoso himself is unaware. "Do you remember," said George Work, "how pleased Dick Roe was with that line of Gene Vogelsang's? Gene said, life seems so simple when you hear the accordion."

Life did seem simple in that unassuming place. Here, Hubbard remembered, he had actually seen Richard Roe, with these same men. Had Richard divined here some of that easy relish of being we all bitterly need? Don Quixotes of the revenue service go tilting at gin-mills, but at their best these places are, true civilization and a lesson in economics. At Jules's, product and consumer were immediate, there was no waste, not even a waiter or a hat-check. Close behind his little back-yard towered an enormous new office building that had already gone through four bankruptcies. Beneath that monument of over-production Jules lived in plentiful content. His notice posted on the kitchen wall was an added touch of honest realism:—

On account of the Management of this place having to get up early, In order to market and prepare for service. We regret to notify our customers we will close at 10 P. M.

With sinewy bare arms Jules stood over an omelet at the stove, intent as a painter at the canvas. When the crusted soot of the flue caught fire and roared, as

it often did, he calmly threw a handful of salt up the chimney and continued his cooking. To see his family group around the kitchen table, sitting hours together in unappeasable talk after customers had gone, was to know the meaning of a home. The clients in the middle room could sometimes hear fragments of animated conversation about American institutions. Jules himself highly approved of America, and with reason; and you could see his boys, dark lads in their teens, growing by some magical chemistry more American every day.

To such hideaways come occasional fugitives from oppressive doctrine: fugitives from rectangular streets and rectangular ideas, from Noise and Nerves, from Efficiency and Haste. They meet clandestinely, like primitive Christians in the catacombs. They exchange grotesque confidences. Wine opens the heart; roof and fire, food and drink, a barred door and a wet winter afternoon outside, put almost any group of men in a candid mood, especially if they can sit and watch a woman doing the work. Few women have ever heard, or ever will hear, the naive speculations their jaded hoplites venture in these hours of armistice. Though the wives of Messrs. Work, Vogel-sang, Schaefer, Furness and Von Ulm perhaps imagined that their husbands were engaged in illicit gayety, the fact is that these plodding creatures were far happier in the exercise of argument almost as idealistic as Plato's. The Decline and Fall of the American Woman was one of their themes. Sitting very much at their ease, they suggested that she would really be much happier if she were in the kitchen all day like Madame. This led to Bill Schaefer's reminiscence of his friend who, at a charitable garden party, took up an impromptu collection from emotional patriots. When they asked for what he was collecting he murmured reverently, "For the women who fell in the War."

Ed Furness remarked that women were insincere drinkers. "A fellow took me to lunch in one of those swell East Side speakeasies that are mostly frequented by dames," he said. "The place was packed with 'em, we were the only men in the room. Even the bar was full of women at tables, with just half a dozen goofs crowded down at one end of the counter. It was queer to hear that babble—a treble yell. If you stopped to listen, they sounded like a river going over a dam. Except for a couple of old battleships with old-fashioned, every one of those frails was drinking water. It didn't seem like fair play."

"Women don't enjoy drinks they have to pay for themselves," said Von Ulm. But Von Ulm was bitter in those days because he was out of a job and hunting for work. "Hard times are supposed to build character," he said. "But what are you going to do with all that character when you get it built?"

"The funny thing is," said George Work, "they let women into those places without a card, but a man has to be identified. Why is that?"

These eavesdroppings, if misunderstood, would be treason. But woman, the ruler of our scene, is an enlightened tyrant. She is wise enough to allow her subjects opportunity to blow off vapors, and pays no attention. Every government must learn when not to listen.

Hubbard, however, had no grievance against women except that the only one he had ever really wanted wouldn't have him. He waited for a chance to turn the talk in more profitable channels. Several of these men had worked for Erskine Brothers when Roe was there. "What was Roe's job at Erskine's?" he asked.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

(To be continued)

In the Roxburghe Club of San Francisco, a group of men who are interested in books, either as printers, booksellers, book selectors or librarians, recently issued as the souvenir of their meeting on Washington's Birthday, a book the paper of which was made in Holland and France during Washington's lifetime, and was used in mounting botanical specimens for a collection known as the Harvey Herbarium.

Ask Me Again!

THE following literary test is compiled from the forthcoming "Ask Me Again!" edited by Jonathan Leonard, to be published by the Viking Press on April first. The *Saturday Review* plans to follow this first series of questions with other instalments precedent to the publication of the book in the belief that they will prove of interest to its readers. The answers to the questions appear below them.

1. What long Latin poem features a descent into the Underworld?
2. What well-known modern author wrote an eleven-volume novel in bed?
3. What fictitious Englishman of ordinary size was called the "man mountain"?
4. What is the most famous English poem to describe a pilgrimage to a shrine?
5. What English writer began under the pseudonym of "Boz"?
6. Who is the publisher of the magazines: *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *House and Garden*, and *The American Golfer*?
7. What is the metaphorical or literary meaning of "Aes Triplex" as used in the title of Stevenson's Essay?
8. What was the name of Sherlock Holmes's brother, who was said to be even more clever than Sherlock himself?
9. What phrase did Ali Baba use to open the door of the cave?
10. Who sat on the bust of Pallas?
11. Where is the "Lake Country" of poetic significance?
12. What two modern dramatists have produced plays which require more than one sitting?
13. In what story by Poe do rats eat away the rope that bound the prisoner?
14. Give the author of the following: "The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece, Where burning Sappho loved and sung."
15. Why did the walrus weep for the oysters in the verse "The Walrus and the Carpenter"?
16. What did Maeterlinck symbolize by the bluebird?
17. Who wrote "A Message to Garcia"?
18. What was the first work printed in Europe?
19. What nineteenth century novelist wrote almost entirely about rural ecclesiastics?
20. Who wrote "Three Soldiers"?
21. In what river did much of the action in Browning's "Pied Piper of Hamelin" take place?
22. Who is Selma Lagerlöf?
23. Who wrote "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."
24. What two well-known British authors died within a few days of each other in August, 1931?
25. Who was responsible for the phrase "sweetness and light"?

ANSWERS

- 1—Virgil's "Æneid."
- 2—Marcel Proust.
- 3—Gulliver, by the Lilliputians.
- 4—Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales."
- 5—Charles Dickens.
- 6—Condé Nast.
- 7—Courage—literally "triple bronze."
- 8—Mycroft Holmes.
- 9—"Open Sesame."
- 10—Poe's raven.
- 11—In the northwest of England.
- 12—Bernard Shaw and Eugene O'Neill.
- 13—"The Pit and the Pendulum."
- 14—Lord Byron.
- 15—Because he was eating them.
- 16—Happiness.
- 17—Elbert Hubbard.
- 18—The Gutenberg Bible.
- 19—Anthony Trollope.
- 20—John Dos Passos.
- 21—The Weser River.
- 22—A Swedish novelist.
- 23—Alfred Tennyson.
- 24—Frank Harris and Hall Caine.
- 25—Matthew Arnold.

EXCURSIONS IN LITERATURE

"The Shell of Shelley"

THOMAS HOLLEY CHIVERS: FRIEND OF POE. By S. FOSTER DAMON. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931. \$5.
Reviewed by HARRY HAYDEN CLARK

The University of Wisconsin

READER of anthologies would gain the impression that the Romantic Movement in America, as compared with that in Germany, France, and England, was strikingly tame. A little book of romantic "poems" could be collected, however, from the work of such men as Jones Very, Christopher Cranch, Bronson Alcott, and Chivers which would help to supply our supposed lack of a lunatic fringe. Mr. S. Foster Damon has begun the good work in his interesting book, "Thomas Holley Chivers, Friend of Poe." This "wild Mazzeppa of letters" (as Simms called him) was a native of Georgia, a well-to-do dabbler in medicine, and of persuasions Baptist, Swedenborgian, Transcendental, spiritualist, and pseudo-scientific. Like Blake, "he actually developed the power of seeing visions." According to one of his contemporary fellow-townsmen, "he was a strange man, and here, where he was born and reared, he was considered crazy."

One wishes Mr. Damon had devoted more study to the Southern society which bred this strange man; Poe and Brown, and even Emerson, were interested in mesmerism, hypnotism, and phrenology, but it seems to me that Chivers was far too extreme to have much value as an index to his times. The causes of his separation from his youthful bride bore fruit in his first book, "The Path of Sorrow," characteristically melancholy. He lived for many years in New England, breathing the transcendental atmosphere but always leagues away from the Emersonian serenity and practical idealism. In all he published some eight books of poetry, two poetic dramas, and a curious prose work entitled "The Search after Truth; or, A New Revelation of the Psycho-Philosophical Nature." This was a statement of his philosophic outlook, parallel to Poe's "Eureka," and like that work inspired by Andrew Jackson Davis's "The Principles of Nature" (1847), or the gospel according to Swedenborg and Fourier. To Mr. Damon this "New Revelation" is "a cool-headed bit of work," dealing, in "well-platted argument," with "the perfect clarity of pure logic." At least it is pure.

If some of Mr. Damon's critical judgments seem a bit extraordinary, if he tends to over-rate the value of symbolist and hypnotic poetry, his painstaking historical scholarship has illuminated some dark corners of American literary history, and his book contains many passages of general interest. In these days, when "liberals" signalize their liberal comprehensiveness by refusing to recognize in literary history factors and determinisms other than economic, it is encouraging to find Mr. Damon devoting his first chapter to the thesis that "one of the dominant impulses of American literature" has been "an awareness of psychological fact, inherited from the seventeenth century, and given fresh life by several tendencies of later times. A net work of causes has led to a single result: exploration of the mental frontier." He is confidently convinced that "Chivers must stand on his own merits," and no doubt a few of his poems are worth salvaging for their own sake. At his best, Chivers wrote elegies like "Avalon," which Mr. Damon exults over as "the most Chiversian," "the most original, the most poignant, and the most melodious of them all"; the reader deserves a sample, as Mr. Damon says, to "show to what heights he was capable of rising":

For thou didst tread with fire-ensandled feet,
Star-crowned, forgiven,
The burning diapason of the stars so sweet,
To God in Heaven!
And walking on the sapphire-paven street,
Didst take up the highest sill they seat—

Waiting in glory there my soul to meet,
When I am lying
Beside the beautiful undying
In the valley of the pausing of the Moon,
Oh, Avalon! my son! my son! . . ."

No doubt Lowell was unduly unsympathetic in calling Chivers "a rather droll illustration of the shell of Shelley," yet readers of romantic poetry will hardly be startled by the originality of lines even as beautiful as these. Chivers himself, however, rested his "claims" on such sublime flights as the following:

As an egg, when broken, never
Can be mended, but must ever
Be the same crushed egg forever—
So shall this dark heart of mine!
Which, though broken, is still breaking,
And shall never more cease aching
For the sleep which has no waking—
For the sleep which now is thine!

What chiefly concerns Mr. Damon is the analysis in Chivers's work of "two tendencies, both of remarkable value as experiments:

On the one hand, he endeavored to express subtle states of mind by a series of words (often of his own invention) and of images, the surface meanings of which are subordinate to the general hypnotic effect. Thus Chivers is kin to Coleridge and Poe; but he so far surpassed them in audacity that he anticipated for himself the fundamental theory of Symbolist poetry. . . . Chivers also tried to build poems out of pure sound, with results that are surprisingly modern. He would elaborate railroad rhythms or bell tones or negro cadences or Chinese music into a long poem intended for recitation; these poems remind one today of the parallel experiments of our modern troubadours, especially Vachel Lindsay.

It seems a pity to have to admit that the latest eccentricities are stale, even in America.

Of course there are degenerate critics who might hint that it was no infallible claim to literary immortality to have "anticipated the great discovery of Symbolism" that "the immediate meaning is comparatively unimportant." Sursum corda! Before Verlaine, before Mallarmé, America gave the world the "lost poet" of Georgia.

Mr. Damon's book will no doubt interest scholars chiefly for the new light his evidence, some of it hitherto unpublished, throws on the question of Poe-Chivers plagiarism. It now appears that Poe's indebtedness was considerable, since Mr. Damon shows that, although Poe's poems in question were published before Chivers, Poe first had access as editor to Chivers's work. Mr. Damon is prone to defend Poe from the charge of utter plagiarism on the grounds of his rare esthetic improvements. He seems, however, to avoid the resultant question of the validity of the assumptions underlying much of our Poe scholarship. It has been customary for many critics to read most of Poe's poems as truthful autobiography, as authentic clinical reports of Poe's own mental states. Thus, for example, a reputable critic concludes an ingenious study of "Ulalume" with the conviction that it "throws light upon the poet's inner life, . . . it is an honest lyric that leads us to a man's heart; it is a cry of utter despair from a man's inmost soul. . . . 'Ulalume' is the epitome of Poe's last years." If, as Mr. Damon shows, "the idea of 'Nacchee' (1837) is taken over bodily into 'Ulalume' (1847) and developed through a long series of parallel details, it would seem at least possible to raise the question whether one is justified in reading the poem as a chapter of an autobiography. Again, if, as Mr. Damon shows with regard to "The Raven," "Chivers's priority in these things—idea, meter, refrain, and something of the atmosphere—is unquestionable," what are we to say of another critic's interpretation of "The Raven" as a completely autobiographical confession of faith in immortality wrung from his soul in a spiritual crisis? The difficulty in question has long been acknowledged by students of Shakespeare and his sources,

and it is not the least important merit of Mr. Damon's book that it may furnish material for a modified approach to Poe.

Essays in Criticism

COUNTRIES OF THE MIND. By J. MIDDLETON MURRY. New York: Oxford University Press. 1931. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY TRACY

THE name, John Middleton Murry, so written, has stood for a high order of literary criticism ever since the days of the *Athenaeum* and the years immediately following the Armistice. More familiarly, as Middleton Murry, the name has been the target of criticism, more or less acrid, from clericals who resent what they regard as his free-thinking, and intellectuals who dislike what they call his "conversion," or his mysticism. By venturing boldly into fields controversial and metaphysical, he has got himself somewhat extensively misunderstood. The appearance of these two sheaves of purely critical papers, at this time, may augur a return to what the public regards as his proper vocational field. As a matter of fact, he has never left it, but has merely adventured boldly, sometimes perhaps wildly, where the mood took him, at a time when moods were many, and the hard impacts of the world's brain-cracking experiments drove men to do or to think things unthinkable in other years. Such titles as "To the Unknown God" and "Jesus, the Man of Genius," are interspersed with others such as "Keats and Shakespeare," "Pencilings," and the subject of the present review. Needless to say, "Countries of the Mind" is a book of pure criticism, in the scholarly manner, and (save for the title) with no bid for popular favor. We venture to say that its chief appeal will be to those who wish to know what is Murry's distinctive approach to problems in criticism, at a time when critical controversies are rife. It might, it is quite true, be difficult for a reader to deduce from one explicit paper, like that in "A Critical Credo," of the first volume, precisely what that approach is. A sentence here and there may set up, in the mind of a modern, that controversial fever to which so few of us seem to be immune. One gets Murry's viewpoint better by reading the critical studies rather than the "Credo"; for in them a principle is practised, not merely talked about.

It is, I submit, this search for a guiding principle in criticism that will attract students of literature to "Countries of the Mind," quite as much as the matter of the essays on poets and poetry, or on certain writers of very exceptional prose. In any case the appeal is not what could be called "popular." It takes for granted an interest in those sensibilities that lie back of all great creative work. On the basis of such sensibility as groundwork for expression (creative writing) and for criticism (judgments of value) Mr. Murry builds an authentic technique, and one that will not break down under the somewhat arbitrary verbalisms of naturalist-humanist controversy. Those who are the subjective victims of such verbalisms are perhaps beginning to be atrophied in regard to sensibility. Murry's contribution is the more pertinent because of his intimate relations with the hypersensitive D. H. Lawrence, with Katherine Mansfield's poignant spirit, and with the tortured soul of Keats (which he came to know, through interpretive sympathy, almost as if the poet were a living friend). Knowledge of such backgrounds of the creative human spirit serve to make him conversant with an aspect of literature which is likely to remain obscure to traditionalists and to all who apply preconceived standards of form. The standard, or principle or "law" even, used in criticism, Murry believes, is the outcome of personal impressions. It is the sum of such impressions, stabilized into rules of judgment. This view does two things. It permits growth and change of viewpoint in the critic; it insures that criticism shall be individual, and not mere conformation to academic standards.

As to content, the seemingly popular

title of these two series of essays is not altogether justified. It is so in respect to a certain haunting desire on the part of the human spirit to inhabit a place where beauty shall be permanent and some value, spiritual, intellectual, or mystical, shall endure. This desire is a perennial source of poetic expression; sometimes a motivation of prose. We seek to eternalize experience, if only in the immortality of words. This theme is implicit in the paper on "The Poetry of Walter de la Mare." It is explicit in that portion of the essay on "Arabia Deserta" where the land of Doughty's wanderings is envisaged as "a world of thought and living remote from our own . . . a world part parable, part fairy tale: simpler yet sterner, more beautiful yet more oppressive, than our own; austere intoxicating." In his own comments on this incomparable piece of prose, Murry's language rises to the needs of its occasion and attains the level of a sublimated medium. Here a critic is responsive to the magic of a great evocation. Chill "evaluations" drop into the discard in the presence of such writing as that of Charles Doughty, and one cares little with what school of criticism a critic aligns himself, if only he can rise to the rhythms and under-meanings of a great book. It is a hard test.

The range of subject in the two volumes is broad. It is not systematic. Shakespeare, Burton, William Collins, John Clarr, and Doughty are treated in the first series; but also Baudelaire, Amiel, Flaubert, and Stendhal. In the second series we have five essays on poetry and criticism followed by papers on Plutarch, Shakespeare, Bossuet, Lessing, Thomas Flatman, William Godwin, and others. They are worth reading in themselves, as literature. "Countries of the Mind" appears now as a new and enlarged edition of these essays, published in England in 1922.

Platonic Philosophy

PLATO AND HIS DIALOGUES. By G. LOWES. Dickinson Morton & Co. 1932. \$2.

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON

M. R. DICKINSON'S interest is, naturally, in Plato as a social and political thinker, and hence his selections are largely from "The Republic" and "The Laws." "The Republic" seems to most men excessively doctrinaire, and it was of course more of a speculation than a proposal. But Mr. Dickinson argues successfully that it was not altogether in the air. Government by a class would probably be the best if that class could be made and kept high-minded, public-spirited, disinterested, and disciplined. "The Republic" is concerned mainly with its disinterestedness and discipline. The logic of the structure grows upon one with study of it, but its still seems an algebraic logic. The elements that it eliminates are inherent in the real problem.

"In 'The Laws,' a work of his old age" he condescends to consider human nature. He "has not changed his views as to what is important and true, but he makes concessions—He is much discouraged by the course of events in the Greek world, and a strain of pessimism intrudes. 'Human Affairs,' he says, 'are and yet we must be in earnest about them, a sad necessity constrains us.' Government by philosophers is abandoned, and instead there is a constant appeal to the authority of religion." The peculiar circumstance behind "The Republic" was that Athenian democracy degenerated while the speculative thought of its intelligentsia rose clearer and higher. The algebraic determinization (so to speak) of "The Republic" does not prevent its having a bearing, if taken in its own setting, on the political thought of any age.

"Our fathers and grandfathers," says the *Manchester Guardian*, "confess their inability to fathom the exact significance of 'The Hunting of the Snark.' What if it should turn out to be the guest of Reparations, or the sell Boojum that will ultimately engulf us all?"