

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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### Feeding Knowledge to the Public

It is one of the ironies of present-day society that information never was so cheap and wisdom so much at a premium. Facts in a profusion never before known to history are the property of the man in the street. The modern applications of science, the radio, the movie, the linotype machine, the telegraph, and telephone have today put knowledge that formerly took long years to seep down to the multitude into the possession of everyone almost as soon as the specialists have been apprised of it. The fact of its rapid dissemination has added enormously to the problems of government and industry, for society is awake to conditions as never before and rushes in with variant opinions on every matter under the stars. For the moment, to be sure, the public has consented to abrogate its individualism and to allow the authorities to dictate policy, but this suspension of the right to personal judgment is in itself only evidence to the amount of information—as well as the lack of sufficient information—at the command of the average person. He has been so lavishly furnished with data on the affairs of the day as to recognize his utter unpreparedness to deal with them. Truly, he is as sick that surfeits with too much as he that starves on nothing. Your man in the street has had facts hurled at him with such velocity and in such numbers as to be, when not benumbed, frankly bemused as to how to resolve the problems which throng in upon him.

There can be small doubt that for some years to come the questions of highest significance before the country will lie in the field of politics—in its broadest sense—and economics. Publishers' lists and library patronage, those subtle indexes to the popular interest, forecast the rising concern with these subjects. There is an increasing demand for books dealing with international affairs, with matters of domestic policy, for studies of industrial and social nature, for factual works that may be supposed to cast light upon the perplexities of the instant. The depression, of course, has something to do with this demand, not only because it has inclined a large number of persons to seek the means to vocational education but also because it has conferred a troublesome idleness on many who seek in reading a resource against all ills and seize the opportunity to gratify an eager interest in public affairs. But it is fair to assume that the ha-

bitually more or less casual reader is feeling the impact of the enormous problems of the day to a degree where he wants enlightenment in regard to them and is seeking for it not only in newspapers but in books.

It is, then, the hour of the writers on what have hitherto been regarded as rather special and scientific subjects. But if these writers are to realize to the full their opportunities two things are essential. The one that they spare no pains to make their studies readable, and the other that their academic colleagues cease from looking with suspicion upon their works merely because they are written with a liveliness that disguises their learning. It should go without saying that the first prerequisite of any informative treatise is clarity. But clarity is all the better for having style to give it verve, and the more intrinsically difficult the subject matter of literary productions the more necessary it is to maintain the interest in their facts by the animation of their presentation. Scholars have been wont to look askance upon the popularizer, and with good reason, it must frequently be admitted. But the trouble has been, not with popularizing, but with those who have done it. Nothing can be more important than their task. The accurate student who can and will popularize his knowledge is in a position today to bestow an inestimable boon upon the community. Power to his elbow.

### Hands Across the Seas

American scholars have always labored under a disadvantage as against foreign in that so large an amount of source material is contained in European libraries and private collections and is available for their research only at a great expenditure of time and money. As a result American writing has suffered doubly, first because the temptation to include in minutest detail what is so difficult of access tends to over-meticulousness in documentation and summary, and again because lack of frequent opportunity to make use of the material and the necessity of culling its riches at high speed leads to superficiality. The difficulties of the scholars are now in fair way of improvement, for there is in existence and increasing use a camera which at a nominal price per page reproduces in miniature the material hitherto only to be consulted where it is housed. As many as 8,000 exposures can be made a day, and the photofilm can be filed and projected at will.

The Library of Congress, quick to see the importance of such an instrument, has had its agents at work throughout Europe, and is amassing treasures for the scholar. Manuscripts relating to the United States have been photographed literally by the hundreds of thousands in the various countries of Europe and placed for reference in Washington, whence they have on occasions been circulated to other libraries. Individual research workers, too, have transported to this country documents necessary for their studies, which if not thus available, would have required prolonged residence abroad. It is only a matter of time, in all probability, before the American scholar will find it possible to pursue his investigations in his own home, or at least in his university library, with as complete access to documentary material as though he were in the British Museum or the Vatican Library. The cabin steamship lines ought to look with respect on the camera as a rival.



A CELEBRATED VENTRILOQUIST WITH TWO OF HIS MOST POPULAR DUMMIES—  
P. G. Wodehouse, the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, and the Empress of Blandings

## To the Editor: Concerning a Debtor Class

### Not Nonsense

Sir: In his review of "The Internal Debts of the United States" in your issue of June 24, Lawrence Dennis says: "Evans Clark in his introductory chapter on the Nation's Total Internal Debts makes an artful but unsuccessful attempt to dispose of the debt difficulty by saying that 'There is no debtor class any more than there is a creditor class in the United States. Most of us are both at the same time.' Such a statement is nonsense. One is a creditor or a debtor according to one's net position on balance."

What Mr. Dennis says in his last sentence is just what Mr. Clark says in the remarks immediately following the words Mr. Dennis quotes. In order to exhibit the injustice here committed I must ask you to permit me to quote in full the passage concerned: "There is no 'debtor class' any more than there is a 'creditor class' in the United States. Most of us are both at the same time. We are creditors in relation to our bank which owes us the money we deposited, to the corporation whose bonds we hold, and to our insurance company which owes us the paid-up value of our policies. We are debtors to the holder of the mortgage on our home, to the company that finances the purchase of our car or piano, and to the bank from which we have borrowed to tide over some personal or business emergency."

"The nation's chief debtors are not individuals at all but insurance companies, banks, railroads, and industrial corporations. If one were to buttonhole the first thousand people one met on a New York street corner and to ask each one whether he was more of a debtor than a creditor one might well find creditorship to predominate. Even the farmer, who is looked upon as the nation's most militant debtor, is also often a creditor as well—especially to the insurance company and bank. Farmers themselves also hold 14 per cent of the mortgages of, and are creditors to, other farmers."

This may be all wrong, but it is not nonsense, and particularly not the imbecile nonsense which your reviewer charges. To point out other extravagant dicta in Mr. Dennis's article would require more space than you can afford. Moreover, I am afraid that I am disqualified for the rôle of critic, since I was for a time a university professor and therefore one of the "scholarly pensioners of usury." Mr. Dennis is within his rights in regarding professors as humble servants of the money power; for does not everybody know that in the Victorian days our academic teachers of free trade were the salaried hirelings of British gold?

FABIAN FRANKLIN.

Ridgefield, Conn.

### Hence These Tears

Sir: I am still struggling along, trying to make sense out of some of the most peculiar writing it ever has been my fortune to read in a literary journal, without more

than a limited degree of success. For instance, the following from a review of "The Odyssey" of Lawrence: "Wherever choice offered between a poor and a rich word richness had it; to raise the color I have transposed: the order of metrical Greek being unlike plain English. Not that my English is plain enough." Sometimes I think I understand, rather by intuition than by any knowledge of English that may be mine; but, because I read for entertainment, and to break the monotony of a prosaic life, it does seem that peculiar construction, unusual words and phrases should be the exception rather than the rule. Such as "burked," "the seed of pathos," I have conceded "tenter-hooks." It is my own limitations with which I must live, and move and have my being, of course; hence, "these tears!"

G. E. HARTER.

Los Angeles, Calif.

### The Devil Was In It

Sir: In my review of Mr. Francis Stuart's "Try the Sky" I wrote that his earlier novels had shown "a mystic self-abasement that called to mind Dostoevsky." By some really remarkable operation of Freudianism in the composing-room, this appeared as "a masochistic self-abasement." I am asking the favor of space for this correction, for I should be sorry indeed to give the impression that I had tried to explain the deeply religious feeling apparent in Mr. Stuart's novels in terms of popularized pathology.

BASIL DAVENPORT.

Pemaquid Point, Maine.

### German Errors Too

Sir: In his rather devastating criticism of "Everyman's Encyclopædia," published in your journal some time ago, Mr. H. L. Pangborn says he has noticed a few slips in the German encyclopædias—chiefly typographical. We are all ashamed of the too numerous errors in our American works of reference, and are ready to concede high rating to the careful, painstaking labors of foreign scholars.

Let me quote, however, from Meyer's *Konversations-Lexikon*, Vol. 9, page 465, article on Kansas:—"grenzt westlich an Idaho." Farther on: "Den Südwesten des Staates bildet der obere Arkansas mit seinem Nebenfluss, dem Neosho." And other hazards, concerning relative fertility of soil, heat, cold, snowfall, and so forth. All of which are for the native a loud raucous laugh. For the writer of this article does not even check his geography by the map, although he does refer the reader to a map in vol. 16. Even this map shows gross inaccuracies. Personal experience, together with local and State records, disclose the invalidity of his other "facts."

These patent misstatements can hardly be called "slips," in Mr. Pangborn's meaning. Errors there are, even in Meyer, and omissions, even in Brockhaus.

FREDERICK WILLIAMS PIERCE.

The Pennsylvania State College.

## The Saturday Review recommends

### This Group of Current Books:

THE SNOWS OF HELICON. By H. M. TOMLINSON. Harpers. Nothing as a novel but distinguished in writing and thought.

RIO GRANDE. By HARVEY FERGUSON. Knopf. A description of the Southwest in the early days.

LETTERS OF SUSAN HALE. Houghton Mifflin. A new edition of those vivacious letter picturing American celebrities of half a century ago.

### This Less Recent Book:

REVOLT IN THE DESERT. By T. E. LAWRENCE. Doubleday, Doran. An epic of the war in the East.



## Our Collective Destinies

(Continued from first page)

ject of environment and health, one is discouraged over the possibility of valid deductions considering the myriads of environmental influences, both physical and social, to which *homo sapiens* is exposed. The paucity of reliable data, and the practically insurmountable difficulties of applying the experimental method, do not invite the amateur investigator.

Mr. Sydenstricker nevertheless makes a tremendously important contribution in selecting the significant data, and one feels that here is a statistician who is fully aware of the misleading possibilities which statistics have for proving that the moon is made of green cheese. This critical ability qualifies the author most highly to work with the President's Research Committee on Social Trends.

"Health and Environment" is one of several monographs growing out of the studies of this Committee. Because of the character of the general study it is appropriate that emphasis in this monograph is on social environment rather than on physical environment. This in itself identifies a new milepost in public health consciousness.

The first phase of public health control—the engineer's phase—dealt with the physical environment—water supply and purification, sewage disposal, and a general policing up of the refuse of the Middle Ages. The second phase—the doctor's phase—dealt with personal hygiene and prophylaxis—toxin-antitoxin, diet, tonsils, and physical examination. The high priests of the third phase, which will deal with the social environment, have not yet been identified. They will probably be recruited from the ranks of the politicians who put their trust in brains.

"Health and Environment" should be a valuable guide book for a planned economy. It is a book which has needed writing for a long time, if only to show the wide open spaces in our knowledge of a subject which has long engaged the speculations of professional and amateur philosophers. It is a sound scientific survey of a popular mental playland.

Goiter is prevalent in the Great Lakes District because the water supply is deficient in iodine; hookworm is, or was, rampant in the South because of primitive sanitary arrangements and a warm, moist climate which kept the infant hookworm on the surface of the ground and made shoes of little importance; pellegra occurs in certain communities under certain conditions. Such snatches here and there of negative relationships between environment and health are about all we can count on in evaluating the effect of geographical environment.

It seems that it is healthier for some people to live in the country than in the city. But why is not certain. Indeed the author with scientific caniness does not explain the "whys." He weighs the evidence and presents that which seems to him sound. Segregation of social environmental factors presents untold difficulties and no one has yet solved the problem of whether the illness which is associated with low income and a consequent low standard of living is due to the low income, or whether the low income is due to a low degree of vitality.

However groping a treatise on the subject must be at this stage of our knowledge, Mr. Sydenstricker clearly and definitely establishes the position of a few fixed stars to guide future explorers.

For sociologists, social workers, sanitarians, statisticians, statesmen, and all others whose role it is to guide our collective destinies, "Health and Environment" is an indispensable text book which cannot in good judgment be omitted from their libraries. The casual reader will find the relationship between human beings and environment treated more poetically by Mr. Sydenstricker's distinguished sister, Pearl Buck.

Homer N. Calver is a sanitarian who has had extensive experience as director of the American Red Cross Health Service, as a professor of hygiene, as editor of journals on public health, and as an officer of the American sanitary corps in France during the war years.

## In His Habit As He Lived

THE LETTERS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

By H. J. C. Grierson. Vols. I and II. London: Constable & Co. 1932.

Reviewed by E. PRESTON DARGAN  
University of Chicago

OF all the publications surrounding the centenary of Scott's death, Professor Grierson's monumental edition of the "Letters" is the most imposing and the most promising. There has been no undertaking comparable to the ten projected volumes of this correspondence, over half of which is freshly drawn from manuscript sources. Professor Grierson's care and resourcefulness as an editor have been well supplemented by his strategic position at Edinburgh, by several lucky "finds," and by the wide circle of collectors and connoisseurs who have furnished new material. The results are already visible. As Scotchman and as writer, Sir Walter's figure takes on a reality and a variety that even Lockhart had not given him.

Were it not for Scott's abounding energy, the number of his correspondents and the growing volume of his letters would, as in the case of Voltaire, be matter for amazement. For these first two volumes alone, over two-score manuscript collections have been laid under contribution, while printed sources are reckoned at about half that number. The latter have often misdated, truncated, or garbled the originals; and Lockhart himself, with his ideas of correct English and gentility, was guilty of some surprising "manipulations." Part of Professor Grierson's heavy task has been to restore, wherever available, the true text, with all of Scott's care-free quaintness in spelling and punctuation. The editor has also labored, in numerous footnotes, to explain allusions and to amplify background. Fortunately, he was aided in this by the great Walpole Collection (of letters to Scott), which should also be published in its entirety.

Although there are tokens that some of this letter-writing, to blue-stockings or favor-seekers, became a burden, Scott declares in one place that not a few of his "most valuable literary connections and private friendships" were formed through correspondence. Among the names that figure largely in the Grierson edition are Lady Abercorn, patroness and *confidante* on many occasions; "John Morritt, to whom he writes more constantly and more openly than to any one, except it be Lady Louisa Stuart"; Joanna Baillie, the dramatist, and Anna Seward, although his admiration for the latter lady was somewhat tempered by her incessancy. We should add to the list antiquarian discussions with Surtees and missives on legal matters to Charles Erskine, the Sheriff-substitute.

The letters to most of these and to many lesser folk are marked by a constant helpfulness, loyalty, and generosity both in will and deed. As for hospitality, Scott frequently urges his correspondents to visit him; thirty-two people were once crowded into the cottage at Ashetiel.

Probably in the interest of the gentle reader, the editor has printed "only a fraction" of Scott's letters on business matters, while Lockhart had made a still greater suppression. This seems a questionable policy, in view of the important trends discernible in Professor Grierson's

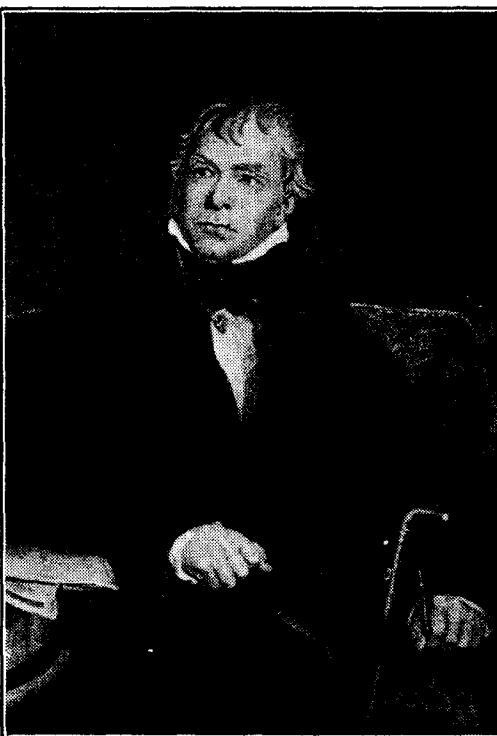
new material. Space is lacking to do more than suggest the multifarious activities represented. These include not only "the purchase of land, the planting and building, the electioneering . . ." but also the management of his farm, his duties as sheriff of Roxburghshire and as Clerk of Session, and particularly the gradual displacement of law by literature as a business venture. It is revealed that whether in setting forth his prospects to his brother-in-law or in soliciting the patronage of Lady Abercorn and others, Scott had usually a sharp eye to the main chance. In none of these matters does he show a mean or haggling spirit. He wanted the lucre to acquire an estate; but he wanted the estate for the benefit of his children and his guests, as well as to project the aura of the "Laird" beyond the humble figure of the Writer to the Signet.

Hence arose what Professor Grierson esteems "the tragic error of Scott's life"—a perfect example of Aristotelian "frailty." Weary of the law, finding that his poems brought him in "fairy-gold," believing himself an expert in the book trade, was it not natural that Scott should set up as publisher under the rose and link himself with the Ballantynes? Was it not inevitable that he and his partners, equally amateurs in the business, should skirt the edges of bankruptcy and finally dissolve to save their skins?

This first crisis of 1813-14 is less famous than the real bankruptcy of 1826, but it was almost as dangerous. The association with the two brothers is clarified by the luckiest of the editor's finds—a mass of letters addressed mostly to John Ballantyne and "lost" since Lockhart partly used and partly garbled them. Marked by the recipient "Open not, read not," this correspondence (running through 1818) has been haled forth from the National Library of Scotland and published as an Appendix to Vol. I. It reveals a tangled story, and one that cannot be retold here. Suffice it to say that a lack of systematic accounting, the over-use of "accommodation" bills and renewals, John Ballantyne's failure to keep Scott posted

on the business, coupled with the latter's craving to plunge into fresh publishing ventures, put the partners through most of the agonies of bankruptcy and actually brought them several times almost to the brink of destitution. Scott's long patience with the brothers is beyond question; so is his honorable attitude toward his obligations. Yet no sooner is he out of the woods than he plans and borrows to acquire an extensive estate!

The fact is that this man of letters was primarily a man of action. The correspondence proves over and over again how he was fascinated by the "pomp and circumstance of war" and how he would have loved a military career, partly for its aristocratic connections. The evidence accumulates to show that his approach to the Muse (the novels are not yet in question) decidedly mingled the useful with the sweet. Literature has become his "chief business." Art for art's sake was not his *forte*. If he is fond of collecting old ballads and romances, that is mainly because of the antiquarian trend, so pronounced in these pages. If he busies himself with the founding of the *London Quarterly*, that is in good part because the Whigs need an organ "to counterbalance the *Edinburgh Review*." The "Border Minstrelsy," the "Lay," and the "Lady" were, with regard to their traditional content, labors of love; but the production of the longer poems is often associated by their author with the



SIR WALTER SCOTT  
From a portrait by Lawrence

jingling of the guinea. Scott was neither a Milton nor a Flaubert: he lacked, as Bagehot said, the "consecrating power."

Since his devotion to literature was not absolute, he could escape what he thought the besetting sins of the craft—vanity and jealousy. He was rarely ruffled by an adverse opinion; he admitted that he composed too rapidly. He was so aware of his own limitations, e.g., in the depiction of lovers, that his modesty led him unduly to belittle his poetic efforts, while he overpraises a Southey, a Campbell, and many another. Yet he knew that he had the gift of lilting verse and he recognized, casually, the appeal of his stirring passages.

Altogether, a very rounded personality emerges from these two volumes, which carry Scott to his fortieth year. On the horizon are the beginnings of *Abbotsford* at what Buchan calls the "astonishing" purchase price of £4,000. The "Waverley Novels" are around the corner. We look forward to the eight volumes that remain to be published with the conviction that when all the correspondence has appeared, a new full biography of Scott will have to be written. There can never be another Lockhart; but there is still Professor Grierson.

## The Old Southwest

RIO GRANDE. By Harvey Fergusson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1933. \$3.

Reviewed by EDWIN L. SABIN

HARVEY FERGUSON is a native of the Valley of the Rio Grande, New Mexico. His mother's father came there with freighter's wagon and mule spans in the fifties, his own father followed the railroad there in the early eighties, and he himself arrived in the opening of the nineties when there still was plenty of time for pacing a slowly developing land. New Mexico reached statehood, and Mr. Fergusson, manhood, in the same year, 1911.

In all his writings upon the Southwest as typified by New Mexico he is, by heritage and by experience, what they call, down there, *simpatico*; he has the feel of and for the land and the people. In this story, "Rio Grande," there are chapters upon "Country," the Valley and its bordering mesas and mountains, its natural and its cultivated aspects; "The Dancing Builders," the Pueblo Indians; "The Men of the Soil," the common class, the changeless laborers; the first American invasion by "The Mountain Men" trappers and the "Prairie Man" of the Santa Fe trade. And so on, through "The Man of God," the influential conspirator and schismatic, Padre Antonio Martinez of Taos, inciter of the only rebellion against the American rule; through "Longhorns and Six Shooters," of time when the buffalo butchers had cleared the Indian ranges for the ranges of the cowman and in the resultant feuds with the wild Texans one Ellego Baca maintained the honor of militant New Mexico; to "Old Town and New," which deals with the cultural process of the railroad.

Now all this is in chronological order by the arrangement of thought as well as that of facts. It is a review of Southwestern life as instanced nowhere more reliably than in the productive Valley of the Rio Grande where, as in Santa Fe the Spanish capital and frontier Taos of the Pueblos and the early resident Americans, there originated many of those impulses which reacted upon the surface of an ancient land. That which has made New Mexico of itself in tradition and living interest, and not merely a marshaling of progressive events is the story scheme—sketched with high lights of incidents less instructive than demonstrative, by one who has witnessed the rites of the Penitentes, has climbed the lovely Taos Mountain to the sacred lake, has voyaged down a Rio Grande of environments still primitive, and has tried to reason out the changes rung upon this country where, more so than in any other domain, there is place for both body and soul—"where many kinds of men live and work, where one may dig or dream, make poems, bricks, or love," and find companionship.