

A Force, Not a Formula

ROOSEVELT AND HIS AMERICA. By Bernard Fay. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 1933. \$2.75.

Reviewed by FRANK ERNEST HILL

IN a time of national emergency the American scene can at best be viewed with difficulty, and one looking at it from the outside has obvious advantages. Mr. Fay has perhaps the best credentials of any foreigner who might report upon it. His "American Experiment," done four years ago, showed a comprehensive knowledge of American institutions and history, and the clear objectivity of the best French mind. His studies of Benjamin Franklin and the early nineteenth century have confirmed Maurois's opinion that he knows more about America than most American citizens, and the present volume on Roosevelt must rank at once with such American interpretations of the "revolution" as Mr. Lindley's and Mr. Looker's.

This will be the more true because Mr. Fay has drawn a picture that has both depth and entertainment. He states in his preface that his chief desire in writing the book has been "to remind Europeans that America is a force, not a formula." Consequently, he attempts to see present-day America as a culmination of past American experience, to build a frame in which his picture may appear at its clearest.

The spirit in which Mr. Fay builds his frame, or background, is one of robust insistence on America's individual character. In an amusing preliminary scene he gives the querulous complaints of imaginary Englishmen, Italians, French, and Germans upon this strange land which each feels his nation has had a part in making. He then turns to what he considers the realities of the Americans' struggle in their America. More than half of the book is devoted to this—to the forces represented by Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and particularly to the modern product of their ideas after fermentation and contact with the world outside in the administrations of the first Roosevelt, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. Against this he sets the work of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The effort to interpret a nation with a few phrases, however judiciously chosen, is almost bound to breed suspicion and dissent. Mr. Fay lays himself open to both. His assertion that America represents the working out of eighteenth century European ideas is doubtless true to an extent, but dangerous. So is the importance he lays upon the American's implicit trust in the Anglo-Saxon tradition and personality (he cites a Chinese's comment in support of this!). His bold characterizations of Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover are only saved by the playful fantasy with which he invests them. Yet if not taken too seriously his friendly and half-humorous caricatures give at least one aspect of truth, and stimulate the reader enjoyably.

His portrait of Roosevelt is in contrast given with little caricature, and with shrewd practicality. He is by implication an admirer of the man who is now steering the country through strange waters. He believes that by ancestry, experience (including the attack of infantile paralysis, on which he lays considerable emphasis as a psychological element in the President's makeup), and character Roosevelt is peculiarly fitted to guide the Americans today. Mr. Fay sees in him another of the many leaders who have responded to American instinct in time of crisis, and have known how to use crisis.

Here one feels an instinctive rightness and a clear perceptivity in his opinion. He contrasts dramatically the American's acceptance of "Anglo-Saxon logic and customs" in daily life, and his abandonment of these for "more profound and personal resources" in national emergencies. "The American . . . is attracted toward a crisis, whilst the Englishman is fascinated by passivity." In stress, "the Englishman tries to leave time and the course of events to solve this problem. The American, on the contrary, instinctively inclines toward a violent reaction and enjoys an explosion."

Roosevelt fits into this conception as a president-elect refusing to assist Hoover to moderate the approaching difficulties which culminated around election day. He let them materialize. As a result he had a tangible emergency to deal with, and dealt with it in the best American tradition of dramatic power.

The interpretation of Roosevelt which is made with this point of view gives a clear sense of the President's apparent resources as a ruler. Mr. Fay has suffered the natural disadvantage of one dealing in a book with a scene that really requires the facilities of newspaper publication. The work of the administration is barely sketched. The N. R. A. in the pages of this volume is little more than launched, the farm program receives only the vaguest attention, the public works and monetary experiments are sketchy and far from up-to-date. The study, in other words, is essentially one of last June.

Yet its vitality and shrewdness and boldness are refreshing. One could wish for a clearer definition of what are peculiarly American forces in history and in Mr. Roosevelt. Mr. Fay, so open-minded to the idea that America works in her own way, does not find convincing explanations for our national tendencies. (His discussion of our industrial experience is an example—he actually sees a partial return to the handicraft stage, in imitation of France!) Yet one finds throughout a sympathy and large understanding, and an attitude sufficiently objective and non-American, to provoke endless discussion.

Aristocratic Spirit

(Continued from first page)

rise, that sets one trying to find words for it; but it is hard to criticize her. In one of the prefaces of this volume, Mr. Van Vechten has described the difficulty he felt in writing of "Jennifer Lorn" for the first time. The difficulty is that she is one of those writers whose work is so wholly of a piece that even what by certain standards are its defects are integral parts of it, and to wish them altered is like wishing that Gothic architecture were less exuberant; it is simply wishing that the art did not exist. One can wish for many alterations in Shakespeare, and feel that if they could be made, the more Shakespeare he; but to wish, as some critic once wished, that Sir Thomas Browne had written "hanging gardens" instead of "pensile gardens" is wishing that he were less himself. So the work of Elinor Wylie, who once wrote with a proud right

. . . I'll lay me down
In silver coverlid and clothing
Beside my brother, Thomas Browne,

is always what it was meant to be, and is itself.

Her style has been called mannered, and so in a sense it is. But it is not on that account affected, for it is the style of a mind to whom manners are no affectation, but a second nature. It is the expression of the aristocratic spirit in literature. Her first hero, Poynter, was a type of the aristocrat, exaggerated and caricatured, but with all his faults a figure whom one cannot read about without carrying one's chin a little higher for a few days afterward. Set him beside Mr. Hodge, and there is no doubt where the sympathy lies. This spirit in writing has no desire to appeal to a universal audience; it knows its own value; it regards beauty of style as being self-evidently a good; it esteems learning if it can be gracefully carried; and it has no doubt that the aristocrat Goethe was right when he said, "Art is called art because it is not nature." These are its principles; and in following them, its nobility obliges it never for half a line to do less than its best. That is the spirit that has written the sentences of which this book is made.

The aristocratic spirit can say some things as well as they can possibly be said, and it will take any pains to do so; there are, however, other things which it cannot say at all (in prose; but it must not be forgotten that Elinor Wylie was first of all a

poet). Elinor Wylie, who saw the absurdities of her admirations (as in her tender mockery of Shelley), and the dangers of her positions better than any one else, expressed this perfectly in the person of the Venetian Glass Nephew. Virginia is exquisite, lovely, all that can be desired—but he cannot embrace his bride without breaking. The aristocratic spirit finds a difficulty in the expression of personal feeling. It will not cry out when it is hurt; but a good deal of literature is crying out when one is hurt. It will not wear its heart upon its sleeve; but it must find a round-about way to show that it has a heart at all. It is for this reason that one sometimes feels that one might address to Elinor Wylie the quotation supposed to be addressed to Shelley, which she has taken for a motto for her essay upon his habits of speech, "I prithee deliver thyself like a man of this world." She does not consider it altogether well-bred, like Pepita in "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," she does not think it *brave*, to say too clearly what

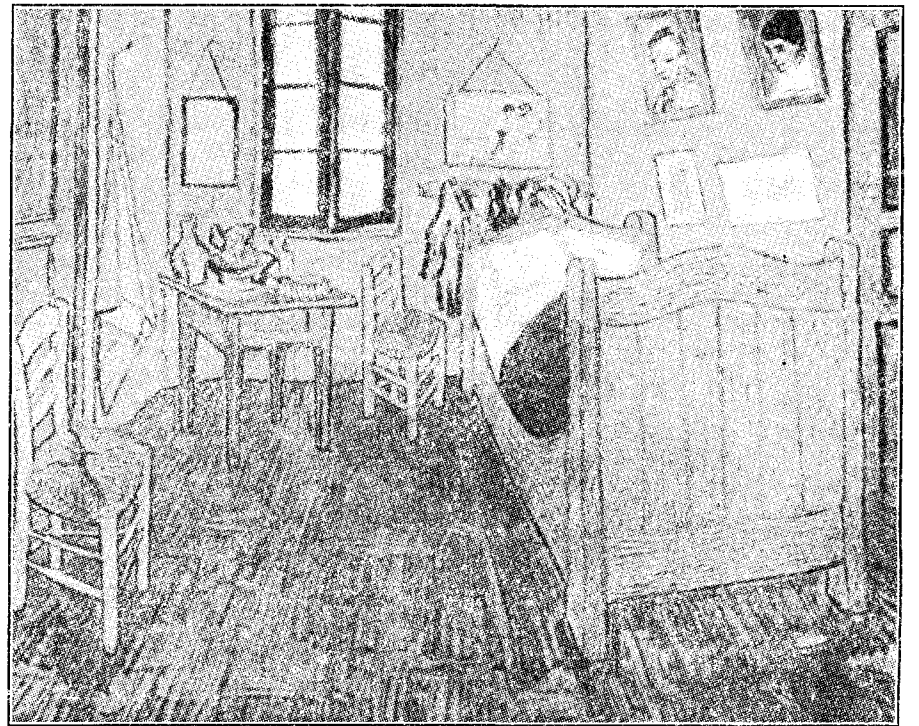
A Distracted Genius

VINCENT VAN GOGH. By Julius Meier-Graefe. Translated by John Holroyd-Reece. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1933. \$3.

Reviewed by MARGARET SCOLARI

SIX months after his suicide Vincent van Gogh was followed to the grave by his brother Theo to whom he had been tied by bonds which death could not loose. The inheritance of tragedy and art which they bequeathed fell upon Theo's widow, Johanna van Gogh-Bonger. To have Vincent's meteoric pictures recognized by a public which still hesitated to accept the pleasant landscapes of the impressionists and to have his letters published so that their hidden drama should not disappear with her but illumine the paintings she knew to be immortal became her unremitting task.

Since his earliest youth Vincent had communed with his brother through a



VAN GOGH'S PAINTING OF HIS BEDROOM

she feels when she feels intensely. The feeling may be conveyed, and the intensity; but it must be conveyed by all sorts of indirections, ironic understatement, allegory, deliberate exaggeration. And there must always be a cool, high-bred vein of satire ready to check the romantic excesses of feeling. This conviction in Elinor Wylie is clearly expressed in one of the pieces here reprinted in the section "Fugitive Prose," under the title of "Symbols in Literature," in which she adopts with pleasure Mr. Christopher Morley's statement that "the recourse of those who . . . desire to avoid the bitterness of being understood," is the fable of fantasy. But even without this, it would be plain to any one who read her prose, in which the emotion is so plainly held in leash, and compared it with her poetry, in which is shown her real intensity.

It is true that even in her poetry sometimes the habit of restraint persists, and she will end one of her lesser poems with a deliberate, mocking anticlimax. But in her greatest work there is nothing of this. There, in the "Hymn to Earth" and the love sonnet for instance, there is none of the reluctance of the aristocratic spirit to obtrude its personal affairs, for the emotion is no longer personal, it has become a universal expression. The poems show what is no doubt the greater side of her; but to see that only increases our thankful admiration for the other side as well.

I have said nothing of many of Elinor Wylie's greatest talents, her wit, for example, or her positively uncanny power of creating an atmosphere, or the marvellous technical dexterity with which she simultaneously sustains half a dozen different kinds of appeal. Those have been often spoken of, in criticism of her various works. It seems to me that her prose as a whole is informed by a spirit for which I can find no name but aristocratic; one which, like the romantic spirit, is alien to our time, but never at any time wholly absent from the world.

constant stream of letters into which he distilled the very essence of his spirit.

This extraordinary correspondence, which fills no less than three large volumes, together with van Gogh's letters to Emile Bernard and to Paul Gauguin, forms the chief material of Meier-Graefe's biography. To have gathered from this ample but confused documentation every essential detail so that neither the man nor the artist is obscured, to have dramatized, vivified, clarified van Gogh's distracted genius is the achievement of a man who is not only a sensitive critic and psychologist but a creative artist.

While Meier-Graefe's interpretation of the Gauguin episode in Arles, his exaggerated antipathy for Dr. Gachet, his description of van Gogh's death are questionable, it is nevertheless the definitely subjective treatment which makes the book ring true. Because the author feels so personally about his subject he can make van Gogh's spirit live before us as vividly as do his pictures.

The exceptionally fine English translation by John Holroyd-Reece appears for the third time in the Harcourt, Brace edition. The two large volumes published by the Medici Society in 1922 were followed by the inexpensive Payson & Clarke edition of 1928, in which the number of plates was reduced from one hundred and two to sixteen clear, well chosen halftones. The Harcourt, Brace book offers sixty-one plates, uneven in quality, often ruthlessly cut down and carelessly selected so that no less than six of the key pictures emphasized in the text are omitted.

Furthermore the German edition contained a succinct critical essay in which Meier-Graefe defined the painter's style, analyzed his development, and placed him in a correct relation to his antecedents and contemporaries. That this excellent study should never have been translated is perhaps the most serious fault in the successive English vulgarizations of the German original.

The Real Sherlock Holmes

BY ELMER DAVIS

WHO was Sherlock Holmes? Essentially an ectoplasmic emanation of two men, Conan Doyle and William Gillette. Gillette set the canonical standard of Holmes's outward appearance for all time (with the powerful assistance of Frederic Dorr Steele whose illustrations were portraits of Gillette); one of the most successful of stage burlesques, Fred Stone's in "The Red Mill," was (if memory is accurate over a space of twenty-five years) Gillette exactly, save for his height. As for the personality, Mr. Vincent Starrett in his recent book, "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes,"* rightly insists that even if some of the mannerisms came from Dr. Joseph Bell of Edinburgh, "the real Holmes was Conan Doyle himself." It was remarked some years ago, one forgets by whom, that the reason the Sherlock Holmes history lives when the average detective story is like the grass that today is, and tomorrow is cast into the furnace, is that Conan Doyle had more brains than most writers, of detective stories or of any other stories; and an extraordinary variety of interest. "To the end," Mr. Starrett observes, "he was a remarkable example of the scientific investigator touched with the curiosity and credulity of the child—an admirable blend, it would seem, for the perfect sleuth." The author of "The White Company" and the Gerard stories had good ground for thinking of himself first of all as a historical novelist; yet nobody can doubt that when Samkin Alyward and Sir Nigel and Gerard are forgotten, Sherlock Holmes will still be one of the treasures of Occidental culture. (This, of course, on the optimistic assumption that despite Nazis and communists and chemists and aviators, there will continue to be an Occidental culture.)

For Holmes, Mr. Starrett observes, is "an illusion unique in profane letters—a figure of incredible popularity, who exists in history more surely than the warriors and statesmen of his time." The various bibliographies, all incomplete, indicate that more has already been written about him than about Salisbury or Wolseley or Rosebery or Hicks-Beach—probably more than about Roberts or Chamberlain; and the disproportion in Holmes's favor will increase as time goes on. There can be few languages if any that do not know him; if you want to brush up on your Arabic, or your Swedish, or your Polish, or your Croatian, with the aid of a pony, you need go no farther than the New York Public Library to read the history of Sherlock Holmes in any of those tongues.

More significant of his stature than the translations are the parodies, the burlesques, the apocryphal additions to his history. The best of the burlesques were by Bret Harte and John Kendrick Bangs, the indubitable worst by Mark Twain; Mr. Starrett lists many others, unfortunately omitting O. Henry's amusing tale of the success of Shamrock Jolnes in finding the missing scrubwoman. Of the foreign imitations some, such as Leblanc's "Arsène Lupin vs. Herlock Sholmes," were apparently authorized, or at least condoned; Spain was a particularly fertile soil for the piracies, of which the most successful seems to have been "La captura de Raffles, o el triunfo de Holmes"; and this reviewer purchased in 1912, at a Constantinople bookstall chiefly devoted to histories, in the language of Æschylus and Thucydides, of *Mpouphalo Mpil* and *Nik Karter*, a yellow-backed volume entitled "Abdoul Chamit Kai Serlock Cholms," whose subsequent loss is an enduring regret.

Obviously research into the history of a figure of such universal interest is considerably more worth while than the dreary trivialities of the average Ph.D. thesis; and there has been a great deal of it, conducted by men of more mature insight than the ordinary graduate student. Mr. Starrett, as the most recent of these critical historians, has some illuminating

comments; yet it is to be regretted that he did not dig deeper into the private life itself. His book is a miscellany of valuable and entertaining essays most of which, inevitably, deal with Holmes's public life and the public appreciation of his services. To what Mr. Starrett has to say, and what he omits, about the private life of Holmes (and the more obscure and fascinating private life of Watson) we shall return presently; meanwhile for the other chapters. They include, along with a detailed history of Holmes's work, a list (admittedly incomplete) of the cases mentioned at various times by Dr. Watson and never recounted in detail; the Holmes examination papers set by Desmond McCarthy and E. V. Knox; an account of the various representations of Holmes in illustration, on the stage, and on the screen; and a valuable study of the various parodies, burlesques, piracies, and imitations of his work.

Holmes had less private life than most men—virtually none at all, after he met Watson, except for the two years of travel in Tibet; but much remains to be done in the elucidation of the early years which formed his character. Practically all the information we have on this subject is contained in "The Gloria Scott," "The Musgrave Ritual," and "The Greek Interpreter." Mr. Starrett suggests that Holmes's mother was a Miss Mycroft, for whose family the elder brother was named; the name Sherlock was perhaps bestowed by Holmes's father (a country squire, and inferentially a sportsman) in honor of a famous cricketer of the time, against whose bowling a certain young Dr. Doyle of Southsea was once proud to make thirty runs.

Where was Holmes educated, and for how long? In "The Gloria Scott" he speaks of "my two years at college"; in "The Musgrave Ritual" of "my last years at the university." Mr. Starrett chooses to take this latter as a figure of speech, but it seems open to a different interpretation. In the two years, when Holmes became a friend of Victor Trevor, "my line of study was quite distinct," but it had been "the merest hobby" until the uneasy admiration of Trevor's father led to the suggestion that it might become a profession. Is it not conceivable that Holmes, with his ambition thus aroused, may have returned to the university (or matriculated at a different university) in order to perfect himself in chemistry, botany, and pharmacology? This latter university was almost certainly Cambridge; one might have inferred London or Edinburgh but for the explicit statement that Reginald Musgrave was in Holmes's college. This limits the choice to Oxford and Cambridge; and of the two a scientist at almost any epoch must have preferred Cambridge. The "col-

lege" (curious locution for the Englishman Holmes, or even for Conan Doyle the Iro-Scot) at which Holmes knew Trevor cannot at present be identified; but it is at least possible that Holmes may have been one of that small but distinguished company, including King Edward VII and Charles Stuart Calverley, who were both Oxford and Cambridge men.

Much has been written about the contrast between Holmes's colossal ignorance of literature, history, and philosophy when Doyle first met him, and the breadth of learning which he later displayed; but the apparent inconsistency may easily be reconciled. One of the most brilliant and most variously learned men ever known to this reviewer had been a notorious idler at college; not till he went to work for a living did his ambition and curiosity become aroused. Holmes may have paid little attention to studies of any sort in the putative Oxford years; when he went to Cambridge he was already specializing and concentrating for his life work. As he grew older and his experiences broadened he doubtless realized that many subjects, earlier ignored, might be useful as well as interesting; very possibly the time came when he no longer chose to forget that the earth goes around the sun.

Holmes's indifference to women, however, would repay a more thorough analysis. Granted his peculiar temperament, the man was human; it is hardly conceivable that he never, in his youth, was transfixed by Cupid's dart. Such an experience may be posited on grounds of general plausibility and its nature may be inferred from Holmes's tremendous and unique admiration for Irene Adler. Her intelligence, her coolness, her resource, her sportsmanship and good humor—all these captivated him; the fact that her reputation was "dubious and questionable," by the standards of the eighties, disturbed him not at all. Dr. Watson was less tolerant; Holmes's attitude is explicable only on the hypothesis of some emotional experience which had disgusted him with mere chastity, and had burned into him the truth that desire is no guarantee of intellectual compatibility, or indeed of any intellect at all. Must we not suppose that in youth he was strongly attracted to some blameless nitwit, perhaps the daughter of a neighboring county family; and that the discovery, happily not too belated, of her stupidity or lack of spirit sickened him not only of her, but of an emotion which such a woman—even such a woman—could inspire? "He never spoke of the softer passions," Dr. Watson records, "save with a gibe and a sneer." Such bitterness is not the fruit of mere indifference or inexperience.

There remains the more perplexing, perhaps the more sinister problem of the love life of Dr. Watson.

S. C. Roberts's "Dr. Watson," published in London in 1931, is the fullest and best, but not yet the definitive, biography of this enigmatic figure—perhaps the most typical of late-Victorian middle-class Englishmen, behind whose commonplace



Photograph by Pirie MacDonald
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

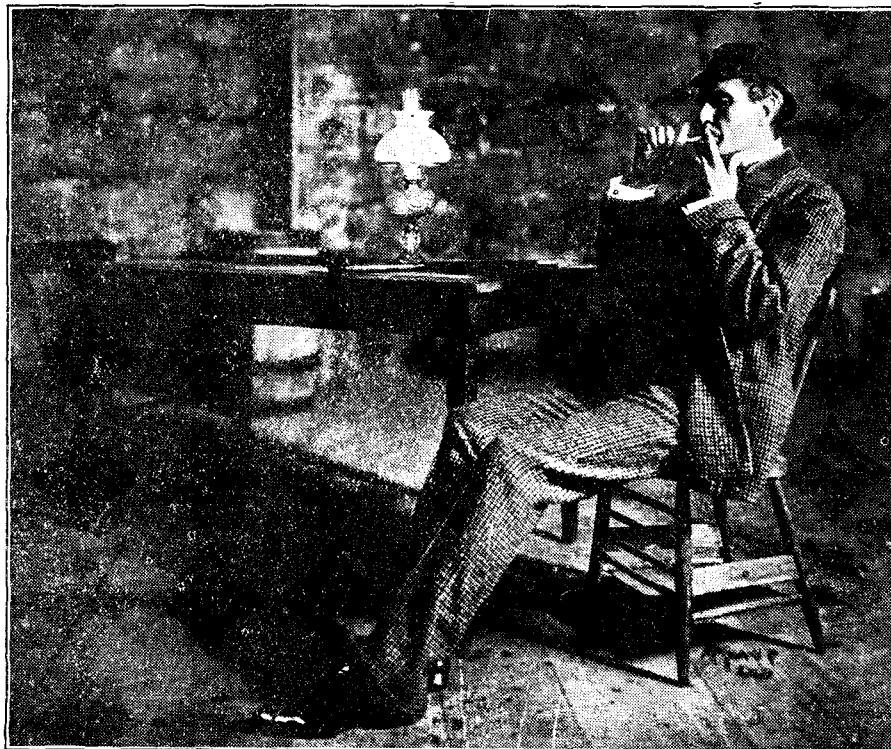
and stodgy front research reveals depths of psychological complexity still unplumbed. Watson's memory, Starrett points out, is "notoriously faulty," but that does not explain all the discrepancies in the autobiographical data which he has furnished; the man seems to have been capable of deception, and no doubt of self-deception as well. What was too uncomfortable he could forget. A really thorough analysis might prove him as untrustworthy in many details, as unpredictably correct in others, as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*.

Roberts's reconstruction of the chronology of Dr. Watson's first marriage, a matter on which some of the sources are demonstrably in error, is a feat of which British scholarship may well be proud; but it is impossible to follow his comfortable conviction that the marriage was unusually happy. For the first year or so it may well have been; but thereafter enters the problem of what Roberts calls Watson's "intermittent resumption of partnership with Holmes," whose treatment has been such that one can only suppose that it has been considered by none but bachelors. Mrs. Watson, says Roberts (and virtually all commentators agree with him) "maintained a continuous sympathy" with this friendship and collaboration; which if true would prove her more inhuman than the misogynist Holmes. What woman who loves her husband would willingly acquiesce in his repeated absences from home, of indefinite length and on the shortest notice? The conclusion is inescapable that the romance engendered by the pursuit of the Agra treasure soon palled under the strain of domesticity; that either Mary Morstan Watson was always glad enough to see her husband leave home, or that he was deliberately blind to her dissatisfaction, and was careful to leave no hint of it in the record.

The evidence is indeed susceptible of a darker interpretation; Mrs. Watson's increasingly frequent absences from home after the second or third year of her marriage may suggest that home life had become intolerable—possibly, even, that either she or her husband had been attracted elsewhere; of which irregularity, had it befallen his wife or a *fortiori* himself, we may be sure that Dr. Watson would have said not a word, as becomes the strong silent Englishman. But this is no more than a possibility; the logic of the case points to increasing boredom rather than active estrangement, and if Watson showed the "ravages of grief and worry" after his wife's death, as Roberts suggests, his dominant emotion may have been remorse rather than bereaved desolation.

Some years after Mary Morstan Watson's death—at the end of 1902—her husband remarried. Starrett doubts this, but to sustain his doubt he must question the authenticity of the entire "Case Book of Sherlock Holmes," on no sounder grounds than its inferiority to the earlier reports. Such a sweeping dismissal of documents whose genuineness is strongly corroborated by internal evidence is worthy of German scholarship at its worst; they must be accepted as authentic, if of an inferior vintage; and one of them—"The Blended Soldier"—is direct and primary

(Continued on following page)



WILLIAM GILLETTE AS SHERLOCK HOLMES
Courtesy of Doubleday, Doran & Co.

* THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES. By Vincent Starrett. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933. \$2.