

that there was no dawn and no sunset—no gradual rise to eminence, no peak, and no decline. Of all the leading British novelists he is the only one who had a great reputation before he was thirty; at the age of twenty-four he was writing "Pickwick Papers" which many believe to be his greatest work and which all would include among the first four; while "Our Mutual Friend," the last of the finished novels, is the favorite book of thousands of his readers.

Dickens cannot be explained by any heredity or environment theory; everything was against him. Apart from his creative genius, where did he get that overwhelming vitality? To open any one of his novels is like coming from the bitter cold of a winter wind-swept street into a well-warmed and well-lighted house, filled with delightful people.

Nor does he resemble any other writer. It used to be a commonplace to say that Thackeray was like Fielding and Dickens like Smollett. Dickens is as much like Smollett as Wordsworth is like Swinburne. Think what the history of the English novel would be with Dickens left out!

Mr. Santayana has well pointed out the fact that Dickens knew the difference between right and wrong—a difference unperceived I think by many of our contemporary authors. Dickens's bad persons are really bad; they would be bad under any mores, under any social conditions; because his bad characters are always dangerous to the welfare and happiness and security of all with whom they come in contact. His good characters are really good because they are a blessing to others, even if in their meditations and conversations they are somewhat over-sentimentalized.

The robust heartiness of Dickens is too much for frugal folk; his characters never heard of reducing or dieting. They fall to with valor, and consume mountains of roast beef, vegetables, puddings, and they swallow gallons of beer and ale. Dickens describes these materials with detail. He describes gravy as our contemporary novelists describe what they call love.

In that blessed year of 1812 there were lusty English babies—Charles Dickens born in February, Robert Browning born in May. As men they resembled each other in their love of life, in their love of city streets, in their abounding vigor and zest.

It has always seemed to me unfortunate that they were not more intimate. There



DICKENS IN 1837

Drawing by Phiz (Hablot Knight Brown)

For some inexplicable reason, Forster never showed this letter to Browning, and the first time the poet saw it was after the death of Dickens, while he was reading Forster's "Life." He read it with amazement.

No doubt Dickens wondered why Browning never mentioned the letter, and perhaps Browning wondered why Dickens, etc. They would have been a marvellous pair, resembling one another in so many striking ways.

No writer except Shakespeare stands the test of rereading so well as Dickens. No matter how thoroughly you may think you know him, there is in every chapter what Henry James said there should be in every work of art—the double delight of surprise and recognition.

I think one reason for his greater eminence in our day is that we love the truth, we love reality, and no one except Shakespeare has given us persons who are so wholly and completely alive.

Suicides are usually inopportune; but was there ever a more striking instance than that of the original artist chosen to illustrate "Pickwick Papers"? The opening numbers attracted no attention from the public and, though probably not for that reason, he killed himself. Immediately after his death, Sam Weller was born, and all England went wild over his birth. His uniqueness was instantly recognized and with him began the fame of Dickens—never to decay.

Of all the novels of Dickens, I like least "A Tale of Two Cities" because I miss his chief characteristics; and I have not very much enthusiasm for "Little Dorrit," for it is the only work of its author I find monotonous.

In the front rank of the masterpieces I place "Great Expectations," once more not in agreement with Mr. Leacock. What a magnificent first chapter!

I believe the two most fortunate events in the nineteenth century came in the same year.

Stephen Leacock's "Life of Dickens," to which Mr. Phelps refers, is shortly to be issued by Doubleday, Doran & Co.

Evening

By JOHN HALL WHELOCK

NOTHING has altered the slow ritual

Of evening in this country, her clear stars

Come quietly forever and the sea Has the same sound along the breathing shore.

The wind that sighed among the hemlock branches

Grows vaguer with the dusk, and in the house

The lamps are lit and there are faces there That Time has made familiar, though one face

Is missing now, Time will not bring again, And one is newly welcomed. Earth sends up

Her voice of dreamy love out of the dark— One voice in many voices. Gradual night. Silence. The sorrowful mystery of things Flows on forever. A little hoot-owl comes Crying about the house his timorous cry, His tender cry, that once you loved so well.



DICKENS AND FORSTER
From a caricature by Doyle

was a time in their youth when with Forster and others they haunted the theatre-dressing-room of the great Macready; but Browning quarrelled with the actor over "A Blot" and never came into long close contact with Dickens again, though the two men were on cordial terms. It is my belief that if Forster had shown to Browning the letter that Dickens wrote to him on November 5, 1842, after the novelist had read the MS. of Browning's play, the two men would have become lifelong close friends. Dickens wrote:

Browning's play has thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrow. . . . It is full of genius. . . . And if you tell Browning that I have seen it, tell him that I believe from my soul there is no man living (and not many dead) who could produce such a work.

The Lady and the Dandy

THE STRANGE LIFE OF LADY BLESSINGTON. By Michael Sadleir. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1933. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MR. SADLEIR, after furnishing us a satisfactory panorama of Bulwer, is more than ordinarily fitted to give us a full-length portrait of the fascinating Lady Blessington. To me the important thing he does at the outset is to explain satisfactorily what he says has never before been suggested, that "the capacity to relate emotion and physical sensation was terrified out of existence before the girl reached the age of sixteen." Indeed, the history of Sally Power, Margaret Farmer, Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, might have been cited in Stekel's "Frigidity in Women," where many examples with far more dire consequences are made case-histories. The father of Lady Blessington was both a ruffian and a fool. The first man she married was a thoroughgoing sensualist and materialist. Then comes the period when Captain Jenkins was kind to her, and the negligible, though always amiable Lord Mountjoy, to be created Earl of Blessington "for reasons so little obvious that they must have been financial," secured "an effective option on his future Countess." After their marriage, enter Alfred d'Orsay, "the Earl's fancy boy and protégé." Between a spendthrift and an exquisite was the beautiful Lady Blessington self-created, with as much sexual warmth as a marble statue, with marvelous charm and aplomb, with developed literary talent, with scandal hissing all about her in scandal's absurd and utterly ignorant fashion. She faced the music, won her own battles, and would permanently have triumphed, had not d'Orsay failed her. Then came her second facer, deadening the remainder of her life. As Mr. Sadleir puts it:

In childhood half of her nature had been paralyzed by a man's brutal lust; the other half, late in the year 1831, was killed by the baseness and ingratitude of a mere trousered exquisite.

Lord Blessington's infatuation with d'Orsay had reached a point on the Continent where he put into his hands either of Blessington's daughters the other might elect, and insured to any issue of theirs the Mountjoy fortune. Both girls were children at the time but either was to be considered marriageable at the age of sixteen. Thus ensued "the disagreeable farce of marriage" that "turned Harriet Gardiner into the Countess d'Orsay." The extraordinary codicil to Blessington's will was "done at Genoa" in 1823, at the time when Lady Blessington had met Lord Byron and the Blessington entourage were idling in Italy. Six years later Lord Blessington died of an apoplexy in Paris, and scandal accompanied the return of Lady Blessington from long absence abroad to London.

When she established herself at Seamore Place and at first succeeded with her salon, enemies began intimating that (owing to the fact that Lady Blessington had insisted that the new Countess d'Orsay be a wife in name only for four years) Lady Blessington was d'Orsay's mistress, his young wife the dupe, and that her dead husband had long been cuckolded. Mr. Sadleir destroys this fabric of insinuation entirely through his deep understanding of all the principals in the case and his intensely reasonable argument. Then the relatives of Harriet d'Orsay moved to have her marriage annulled; she precipitously left her husband (thereby embarrassing their plans); d'Orsay stands open to a most unpleasant charge, and the upshot was that he completely forfeited Lady Blessington's former trust in him. As Mr. Sadleir shows, she had been blameless of any of the vile motives or actions imputed to her.

Lady Blessington fought for survival, and we enter into her period as authoress. We read N. P. Willis's description of her, note her friendship with Bulwer, her Books of Beauty, her "Conversations with Lord Byron," and follow her from Seamore Place to Gore House. She becomes a novelist and queen of Gore House, of

which circle Louis Napoleon finally became an habitué. Aged and fatigued, Lady Blessington still sparkled. Then came d'Orsay's insolvency and the crash of Lady Blessington's credit. The sheriffs took the citadel. The sale realized more than enough to pay the creditors, and Lady Blessington departed for Paris where she died in her fifty-ninth year. "In losing her," said d'Orsay, "I lost everything in this world. She was to me a mother, a dear, dear mother, a true, loving mother."

So passed Sally Power. Mr. Sadleir's book is to be valued as much for his understanding treatment of d'Orsay, the last of the dandies, as for his unusually sensitive portrayal of Lady Blessington. He has written his book with a clarity, wisdom, and constant vivid interest that make it an unusual biography. Fascinating in its arrangement of characters as the true story is, the writer has never sacrificed truth to dramatic effect. In fact, he has taken that phase of the story hitherto most clothed in mystery, the happenings of the autumn of 1831, and through accurate research and luminous conjecture made a logical reconstruction plain. To me, for its matter, its manner of presentation, its lucid style, and combination of detached appraisal and saturation in the atmosphere of the time, this is one of the most interesting biographies of the season.

Rebellious Titans

(Continued from first page)

sometimes devoting whole pages to a summary of the plots of stories which they wrote. Nietzsche, concerning whom there is plenty of material available, is discussed in less than nine pages—a thoroughly unsatisfactory performance from a critic of Mr. Rascoe's reputation. D. H. Lawrence receives twice as much space, and, whereas Mr. Rascoe has hitherto in the book been mainly interested in literary production, his interest here is mainly in gossipy personal detail. The Dreiser chapter is better, but the essay on Cabell is again superficial. The most ambiguous essay in the book is, however, that in which Mr. Rascoe has assembled, but not fused, information about the ancient Jews, Roman rule, false messiahs, a *souppçon* of "higher criticism," and an interpretation of Jesus which oscillates between admiration for the personality of Jesus and a restless desire to be rationalistic and "free."

One does not look for scholarship in a popular book of this sort, but when in the field with which Mr. Rascoe is presumably familiar, one finds him writing that "Dreiser was the first American novelist to show men, boys, girls, and women in the process of earning a living under industrialism . . . [the first who] has given us novels showing not only men and women at work but also the interrelation of these various activities"; or, of "The Financier," that "it was the first picture . . . of an energetic, powerful, acquisitive, and sinister product of an era of greed and opportunity created by the rapid industrializing of the country," suspicion as to the thoroughness of his preparation will not down. Has Mr. Rascoe never read Frank Norris, Robert Herrick, "The Portion of Labor" or "Life in the Iron Mills"?

Mr. Rascoe's essays may get people to reading Lucian, his enthusiasm for whom I share, but it is difficult to think that they contribute importantly to our understanding of any of the figures discussed. Perhaps the best way to keep one's sense of proportion in this case is to speculate on what a writer like Havelock Ellis might have done with this title and this theme.

Apropos of the seventy-fifth birthday of Selma Lagerlöf, a correspondent to the London Observer writes of her first book "Gösta Berling's Saga":

At the outset the book was received without enthusiasm in Sweden, because at that period, 1891, naturalism was predominant. In 1892, however, the book appeared in Denmark, and was warmly welcomed by the great Danish author and critic George Brandes; and when it was re-published in Sweden it soon acquired admirers.

A Conjured Spirit

THE LIFE AND FRIENDSHIPS OF DEAN SWIFT. By Stephen Gwynn. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1933. \$3.75.

Reviewed by TEMPLE SCOTT

MR. STEPHEN GWYNN is to be complimented on his painstaking and pictorial presentation of Swift's life and friendships. It makes a readable story and will serve to take the place of the biographies by Sir Walter Scott and Sir Henry Craik which are no longer on general sale to the public. It is written with a fuller knowledge of the facts than was possessed by either of these earlier biographers, mainly owing to the material so ably marshalled by Mr. Elrington Ball in his splendid edition of Swift's Correspondence. It is written also with a kind of sympathy: "Those of us," says Mr. Gwynn, "who have lived much in Swift's company, receiving such communication as is possible through the stored-up utterance of the dead, hold him, I think, in veneration rather than affection." And this veneration Mr. Gwynn has for the consummate master of English prose and the strenuous vindicator of human liberty. The story is amply documented with lengthy extracts from Swift's letters and from his various writings both in verse and prose. These with Mr. Gwynn's running comments serve to compose a colorful panorama of Swift's public and private life which is reeled off as a cinema picture on a white screen.

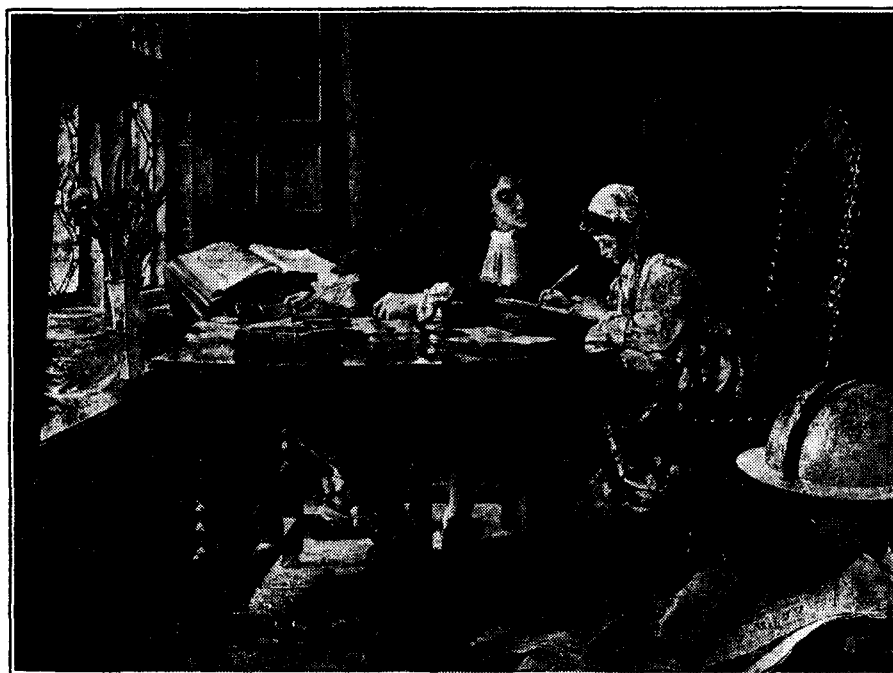
We see the young man Swift, a dependent, living at Farnham as secretary to Sir William Temple and as tutor to the child Esther Johnson. We see him as the Laracor parson pruning willows and hedges and planting his garden. We see him again in England where he is now on a clerical mission, moving in the best literary and political circles, forming friendships with Addison, Steele, Prior, Arbuthnot, Harley, and Bolingbroke. He is deeply engaged as the pamphleteer-journalist for the Harley Administration. We find him dined and wined by the Lord Treasurer and Mr. Secretary and courted by dignitaries high and low both in the State and the Church. He is welcomed in the coffee houses of the wits as well as at the court circles of Windsor and London. The young man who scarce had stirred the bulrushes by his masterly satire of "A Tale of a Tub" has emerged from obscurity and is now a state counsellor wielding a pen of such consummately driving power that the life of the government of England is nourished and sustained by his hands. Apparently he asks for no recompense commensurate with his services, he but suggests that he would accept a clerical position which should assure him *otium cum dignitate* on English soil; if not a bishopric, then a deanery of Wells or Windsor. But though promises are made all are unfulfilled.

In intervals of leisure snatched from amid these political and social activities he writes to Esther Johnson in Ireland of what is happening to him and through him and of what he feels for her. These are the letters which have come down to us as "The Journal to Stella." In other intervals he meets another Esther—Hester Vanhomrigh, the tragic Vanessa of later days, and the occasions of their meetings are fraught with passion and pathos. Then comes the cataclysm of the fall of the Harley Administration and Swift, fobbed off with the Deanery of St. Patrick's, slips away to Ireland and exile to spend the rest of his life among a people he heartily despises. But we do not lose him in Ireland. He rises there in fresh might as The Drapier, the strenuous vindicator of liberty, and is acclaimed by the Irish people as their champion. Then for a time we catch only glimpses of him as he amuses himself with the new friends he has gathered about him in Dublin. Then is flashed before us a lurid picture of him in the company of Vanessa, who has followed him to Ireland, which fades out in a tragic dénouement. Then with the publication of "Gulliver's Travels" we see a universal fame beating, as Mr. Gwynn puts it, "at the doors of a deaf, diseased, and failing man . . . a man by his own choice lonely, and homeless." The last scene that ends this strange, eventful tale is too painful to

witness and Swift passes on to where rage and resentment can no longer eat out his heart, giving the

... little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad;
And show, by one satiric touch,
No nation needed it so much.

All this is a twice-told tale and as Mr. Gwynn retells it, it loses none of its peculiarly fascinating interest. Yet his narrative, even with the sidelights of his comments, leaves his hero still unguessed at. The character of Swift, the man, remains what it has always been, a problem in human psychology, a problem which none of his biographers, with the exception of Mr. Carl Van Doren (whose suggestive study of Swift Mr. Gwynn does not even mention), has attempted to tackle. Neither veneration nor affection will help the psychiatrist in this particular analysis. Such attitudes will rather distract and mislead him. Nor do we explain Swift by labelling him selfish, egotist, misanthrope. He made many and lasting friendships with the most notable men and women of his time and he was ready to help when it was in his power. "You are the man without flattery," Pope wrote to him, "who serve your friends with the least ostentation." What was it then in this supremely gifted man that impelled him to expressions of such searing contempt of his fellow men? How are we to understand his relations with Harley and Bolingbroke when, though acquitting



SWIFT AND STELLA
From the painting by Herbert Dicksee

himself as their able and devoted champion, he is yet denied a fitting reward for his services and is left to pass out from the scenes in which he shone, a defeated man? How are we to explain his relations with the two women he undoubtedly loved, after his own fashion, but whom he involved in situations that brought suffering and agony to both? Was it, as Mr. Carl Van Doren argues, that Swift's fleshly body housed what a person of great honor in Ireland had early seen in him—"a conjured spirit"?

In future editions of this book, which surely must follow, Mr. Gwynn should correct a few bibliographical errors which have crept in. Swift's "Genteel and Ingenious Conversation" was published while Swift was yet alive, in 1738, not after his death. The "Miscellanies" were issued in 1732. The numerous corrections and additions Swift made to "Gulliver" which Mr. Gwynn assumes were included in the second edition, appeared for the first time with the prefatory letter in the collected edition of Swift's works begun by Faulkner, the Dublin publisher, in 1735. Motte, the English publisher of "Gulliver," may have had these corrections submitted to him by Swift's friend Charles Ford, but he did not use them until the printing of the fourth edition and, even then, only in part. Mr. Gwynn is not quite correct in stating that all Swift's writings were published anonymously, for his "Proposal for Correcting . . . the English Tongue," published in 1712, of which he was rather proud, bore his full name.

The Gospel Story in Mary Borden's Novel

MARY OF NAZARETH. By Mary Borden. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

OF all possible themes for the novelist, the story of Jesus is probably the most intractable. The general difficulties inherent in historical fiction are here enhanced a hundredfold. Whereas in dealing with contemporary material, the novelist may "look in his own heart and write" or trust to his own observation, in either case easily achieving a measure of spontaneity, this is not possible in treating of the past where he is embarrassed at every step by problems of fact, interpretation, and style. When to these limiting factors are added those imposed by religious reverence or reticence, with the crucial question of the supernatural fronting one at every turn, the task becomes almost insuperable.

It is evident that any novelist who takes the life of Jesus as his subject must at the outset make up his mind as to the meaning of that life. There are two clearly differentiated lines of approach, each compelling a distinct technique: the rationalistic, as used for example in George Moore's "Brook Kerith," which regards the New Testament figures as human beings subject to the same physiological and psycho-

Beecher and Canon Farrar that once delighted our parents or grandparents.

Mary, on the other hand, is a wholly human figure in Mrs. Borden's book, becoming, at least at times, a deeply moving and pathetic character. She is presented as an essentially timid, conventional person trapped in a revolutionary period. Proud of her eldest son in his youth, later horrified by his violations of the Mosaic Law and sufficiently under the coercion of her other children to be unable to accept his prophetic claims, she remains a mother to the end, failing to understand her son and often fearing him but never wavering in her love and tenderness. The strongest portion of the book is that which describes her long journey to Jerusalem in a last effort to save him, and her arrival only in time to hear his condemnation and behold his crucifixion. Had Mary dominated the entire volume, as its title would lead one to expect, it would be a much more satisfactory work. As it is, there are long stretches wherein she sinks into the background and the reader forgets about her in his perplexity over other matters.

There is a similar uncertainty in style. A generally successful attempt is made by the author to preserve the dignified manner of the King James version sufficiently modernized to avoid the appearance of artificiality, but there are not a few passages that remind one of the decadent romanticism of John Ruskin:

For she became known in time as the Mother of God, and shrines were built to her all over the world, and many candles, millions and millions of candles, still burn day and night in her many shrines.

Mary Borden's attempt to rescue the mortal woman hidden by the Mother of God is meritorious and interesting, showing at times subtle imagination, but it demanded a unity of design and a humanizing of the entire Gospel narrative which the author has been unable or unwilling to present.

A Sailor's Dream

THE BIRD OF DAWN. By Masefield. New York: The Company. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CAPTAIN DAVID W. BONE

THERE is perhaps no British newspaper more widely quoted by the press of the United States than *The Manchester Guardian*. I wonder if American readers have ever noted the character of the "nor'west" column in the back page of that journal. It has been aptly termed a "literary births" column by reason of the number of eminent English authors who were born into good black newsprint there. I can recall a very marked day in my casual reading when I noted J. M. as signature below a short article, "A Raines Law Arrest." I was sufficiently interested to search some back files in the *Guardian* office and found an article about "able whackers" and "Ambitious Jimmy Hicks." (Readers may look these up in "A Tarpaulin Muster," Masefield, about 1905.) I was a young sailor then, just out of square rig, and it seemed to me that the writer put the sailorman down in his habit as he lived and used the right terms of sailor speech; the truth of the pattern to real sea life delighted me. Shipshape. Sailor fashion. Ambitious Jimmy Hicks who sunk his shipmates by being fussy over the turn of a half-hitch!

And now, in this year of grace, comes "The Bird of Dawn" that might have been written about the same time as the twenty or more articles in "A Tarpaulin Muster." It is the kind of story that a young sailing ship officer might conjure up in day-dream, its theme that of seamanship resulting in substantial award for the salvaging of a gallant ship. It has a "Swiss Family Robinson" atmosphere and a misunderstanding seaman might call it a chronicle of ocean miracles. I can hazard a guess that Mr. Masefield projected it as a book for boys, and he will indeed be a fortunate youngster who can call a copy his at Christmas time, but there are passages in it that show the source from whence came such magnificent prose as his Introduction to the Dent edition of "Marco Polo."