

The Saturday Review of Literature

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Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., 25 W. 45th St., New York, N. Y.
Noble A. Cathcart, President and Treasurer;
Henry Seidel Canby, Vice-President and Chairman; Amy Loveman, Secretary.

Subscription rates per year, postpaid in the U. S. and Pan-American Postal Union, \$3.50; in Canada, \$5; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere \$4.50. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 1, 1879. Vol. 10. No. 22.

THE SATURDAY REVIEW is indexed in the "Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature."

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Mark Twain's New Deal

The Cynical Observer, so often quoted in the press, must have had some rude surprises in the last six months. It must, for example, have shaken his philosophy to discover that in his campaign speeches and his inaugural address, President Roosevelt seems to have meant exactly what he said, and intends, so far as he is able, to carry out what he there in general terms proposed.

The terms were general, even though to many advocates of laissez-faire some of them may have proved uncomfortably specific; therefore every new light on the new deal and what it means is interesting and may be important.

In a recent interview the President stated that the phrase "new deal" itself is taken from Mark Twain's "Yankee in King Arthur's Court." Now men take suggestions where they find their own beliefs expressed, and the source of an idea is often a clue to the borrower's thoughts.

Mark Twain's book was a passionate document, a fact carefully concealed in the moving picture made from it. The Yankee found the economic and social conditions of King Arthur's realm atrocious—that was why Twain set time whirling back to land him there, with a cargo of ideas for reforming an unbalanced civilization. The general corrective for the ills of that age was to upset the ideas of class privilege as a vested right which were planted in every knightly mind. The particular method was to overthrow the old order by inventions popular in Connecticut. The Yankee introduced firearms, the telephone, high-charged electric wires, and would certainly have used the automobile and radio, if he had known about them, in his attempt to give new powers to the unprivileged man.

Here was the naive confidence of Mark Twain's century in the benefits of individual initiative unloosed, and its faith that every new machine was a nail in the coffin of poverty, a rung on the ladder to success for the poorest. But Mark himself had his doubts. In his book the old order got both Yankee and revolution before his Arthurian machine era had passed the defensive stage, and readers were allowed to think of the mechanized King Arthur's Court as a Yankee boast translated into fantasy. It is quite obvious that Mr. Roosevelt's New Deal was not inspired by Mark Twain's celebration of the machine let loose.

But no reader of that famous book can forget the bitter and passionate attack upon special privilege. The common man had no economic justice. He had few human rights that stood in the way of prejudice and property. Suffering, starvation, and hard labor without gain was his lot. Merely to belong to his class was to forfeit protections and opportunities which the law gave to his betters. The state was constructed to keep him down, and neither churchman, ruler, nor scholar saw anything wrong in such an arrangement. It was all a very unfair and largely unhistorical picture of the Middle Ages in whose imagination the romance of King Arthur's Court was formed.

Mark was not aiming at the Middle Ages which were too dead, like Arthur, to be

worth satirizing. He was shooting in his accustomed manner, with paradox, satire, and exaggeration, at his own times, and particularly at privilege as he had seen it. His very terms in his reference to the "new deal" are modern:—

So to speak [he says of Arthur's realm], I was become a stockholder in a corporation where nine hundred and ninety-four of the members furnished all the money and did all the work, and the other six elected themselves a permanent board of direction and took all the dividends. It seemed to me that what the nine hundred and ninety-four dupes needed was a new deal.

His passion was that thwarted and unphilosophic desire for a square deal for everybody, but especially the underdog, that one finds in the slavery scenes of "Huckleberry Finn." It angered him to see the powerful exploiter walk off with other people's money; it infuriated him that the virtues which made a man human were not recognized in courts of law or the conduct of business. His New Deal took no account of categorical philosophies, Marxian or otherwise, but was based on the thesis that most economic problems could be solved if greed could be checked, and if the idea that one man had a right to exploit another because of his superior force, skill, or culture could be extirpated from the human race.

And note that his method of reform was to work with, and not against the powers that be, on the theory that there were as many honest and idealistic men in power as out of it, perhaps more, and that once their minds were straightened they would become allies in revolution. He put, in his story, the king himself, by a trick of plot, in the place of the forgotten man, and let him see how it felt to be unprivileged, unsafe, exploited by a code which seemed good sense and justice to those on top.

One begins to see resemblances between Mark Twain's New Deal and Roosevelt's. Neither has any novel economic or political doctrine behind it. Both believe that a better ethics will result in a better economics. Both expect to find leaders and support in the privileged class as well as in the unprivileged. Both back up moral suasion by a compulsory change of circumstance. Arthur, once he is straightened in mind, is worth ten serfs; one guesses that Mr. Roosevelt believes that a reformed industrialist is ten times as valuable in his New Deal as the very best day laborer. And implicit in the ideas of both these Americans, two generations apart, is a mixture of common sense, shrewdness, and passionate humanitarianism—a blend violently unpopular in communist and fascist countries, but certainly a racial trait if we have one.

Mark Twain's symbolic story contains no cure-all for our problems. The terms are too different. Yet reading it again, one sees why so many Americans have rallied, with the first enthusiasm for years, in support of another New Deal, evidently experimental, quite impossible of achievement in anything like the atmosphere of America, say between 1920 and 1932, but entirely in the American tradition.

Ulysses Judge Woolsey's decision in the "Ulysses" case was so excellent in its definition of obscenity and its principles laid down as to when a work admittedly indecent in places was justified by its purpose and its art, that little can be added by way of comment. One item of his admirable argument printed elsewhere in this issue should, however, be emphasized. He notes that many familiar and important types of human nature cannot be made to live in literature unless the background of their lives, tawdry, distressing, or indecent though it may be, accompanies them. Now most readers would agree that the soliloquy with which "Ulysses" ends is the most indecent passage in the book, and also its nearest approach to a great representation of character. But this famous soliloquy is very like to the still more famous self-revelations of the Wife of Bath, in the Prologue to her Canterbury Tale. Her wit, her effrontery, her lewdness, her speech in all its coarseness, make her one of the great personalities of world literature. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.



"THAT'S A COPY OF 'ULYSSES,' THE SAP DOESN'T KNOW IT'S LEGAL NOW."

To the Editor: Crane and "The O'Ruddy," Keats Letters in America

Stephen Crane and Robert Barr

SIR: Mr. John H. Birss in a recent issue of the *Saturday Review* quotes at length a letter concerning Stephen Crane, written by Robert Barr a few days after Crane's death.

I hope Mr. Birss will forgive me for exploding his belief that this letter is a "find." It is reproduced in full in Vincent Starrett's sketch of Crane in "Buried Caesars." From certain lines in the life of Crane by Thomas Beer, it is easy to perceive that Mr. Beer knew of the letter also.

One notation might be of interest. In spite of his loyal and staunch friendship, Barr was only one of nearly a half-dozen friends who were asked to finish "The O'Ruddy." All the others refused, believing rightly that such a task was futile and practically useless.

CARL BOHNENBERGER.

Jacksonville Public Library
Jacksonville, Florida.

Letters of John Keats

SIR: As I am preparing for a new edition of the "Letters of John Keats" I am anxious to trace certain of the poet's letters which I have reason to believe are in America, and I shall be much obliged if you can find space in your journal for this appeal for any information about them your readers may be able to afford me. Unpublished letters, of course, I should wish to hear of, but the known letters I am seeking to trace to their present owners I will enumerate.

In the William Harris Arnold sale catalogue of November, 1924, the following letters occur:

1. To John Taylor, dated Friday 23rd (i. e. 23 January 1818), 1 page quarto.
2. To George and Georgiana Keats, dated February 14, 1819, 4 pages quarto.
3. To John Hamilton Reynolds, dated August 25, 1819, 3 pages quarto.

Among the Rowfant Library Autographs, disposed by Messrs. Dodd, Mead & Company, was a letter from Keats to Joseph Severn, 128 Goswell Street, dated "Friday afternoon," 1 page quarto, beginning, "I am really sorry that I have an engagement on Saturday."

Keats's letter to Haydon of March 8, 1819, was sold at Sotheby's in July, 1892. I have it in mind that this letter went to America, but I cannot be sure.

Keats's letter to Shelley, of August, 1820, I can only trace up to 1907, when it

was exhibited at Stafford House in the Keats-Shelley Memorial Exhibition.

Of the thirty-nine letters to Fanny Brawne, which for a few years were in my father's keeping in the room from which I now write, I have managed to trace only ten, of which number nine are in good homes in America. I feel sure that others of this important series have found their way across the Atlantic.

I have already received so much kindly help from owners of Keats letters in the States that I do not hesitate to ask for more. If owners with whom I have not come into touch will communicate with me at this address, I shall be very grateful, and should they be able to furnish me with photostats of their letters, I will gladly bear the cost.

M. BUXTON FORMAN.

46 Marlborough Hill, St. John's Wood
London, N.W. 8

Rhode Island Jonny-Cake

SIR:—I know you are a dependable caller of attention to books that can't or won't shout very loud for themselves, and I have before me a book that I think ought to have a little refined shouting done for it.

Did you ever hear of "The Jonny-Cake Papers of 'Shepherd Tom,'" by Thomas Robinson Hazard (Boston, 1915)? I doubt if you did, for, as Bloomingdale's advertisement said of the NRA the other day, "to know it is to like it," and you'd have liked it enough to praise it in print.

It must be fairly rare; it was "Printed for Subscribers," most of whom were probably Rhode Island people, for the whole book is an extravagant, humorous boast of the glories of Rhode Island and its folk and natural products. Rudolph Ruzicka (to my mind the most delightful of illustrators) did the illustrations, and collectors of his work no doubt have the book, but I have never seen it in a catalogue.

A copy fell into my hands by chance. Some years ago, when I was working hard at a collection of cook books, a Boston friend sent me a box of odds and ends from a library she had inherited, and "The Jonny-Cake Papers" was among them. Strictly speaking, it isn't a book that would fit into a gastronomic collection; the baking of jonny-cakes—the proper way, the Rhode Island way—is the thread on which the whole book of reminiscences is strung, but my Boston friend didn't know that.

WILLIAM BRIDGES.

New York City.

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

WHAT ME BEFELL. By JULES JUSSERAND. Houghton Mifflin. Reminiscences, by the late French Ambassador to America, of life in three countries.

PLAY PARADE. By NOEL COWARD. Doubleday, Doran. An omnibus containing plays, sketches, and lyrics.

VINCENT VAN GOGH. By JULIUS MEIER-GRAEFE. Harcourt, Brace. A biography of the Dutch Impressionist painter.

This Less Recent Book:

THE OLD DARK HOUSE. By J. B. PRIESTLEY. Harpers. A mystery story.

The Stubborn Virgin

ENGLAND'S ELIZABETH. By Milton Waldman. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1933. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM HUSE DUNHAM, JR.

"ELIZABETH'S England" might better describe this story of the last Tudor's public career, for Mr. Waldman has been able to make interesting that political history recently so unfashionable. Adhering closely to Tudor political theory, that the prince is the brain of the body politic, the author presents in an intelligible pattern English and foreign politics as they were designed by the "Stubborn Virgin." The political and diplomatic intrigues of her reign, which once provoked Froude's melodramatic chapters, have again led an enthusiastic writer to contribute a lucid presentation of a complicated narrative. Mr. Waldman has reconstructed from the printed records of the period a readable study of *la haute politique*. But he has done still more, he has added a refreshingly modern point of view to his discussions of Elizabeth's professional life.

While avoiding psychological language, this biographer has none the less attempted to explain the motives of his characters. After a straightforward explanation of the factors involved in a given situation, he then demonstrates how they were appraised by Elizabeth and determined her consequent action, or how she modified the to-be-expected course of their influence. The problem of the "Unwelcome Guest" (Mary Stuart) created one of the two most tense of the situations confronting the Queen of England. Here Mr. Waldman has written a chapter marked by vitality and a restrained, hence effective, use of the dramatic. His subtle elucidation of Elizabeth's neat politics in her dealings with the parliament of 1566-1567 is typical. She forsook an untenable position created by her wrongful interference with parliament's freedom of speech in return for the Commons' withdrawal of their less just, but more dangerous, demand that she marry. Such situations afford Mr. Waldman opportunities to philosophize upon history and the human nature of his characters.

And yet his philosophizing does not draw Mr. Waldman beyond those limits of prudence into the personal whimsies which have produced that school of unsubstantial biography already on the decline. His serious efforts have provided us with the background of continental affairs and personalities necessary to understand the tortuous maneuvers of Elizabethan statecraft. Such a logical and clear narrative of the major personality of an age when politics were plots and plots politics is not likely to fade.

This appraisal of Elizabeth as a ruling queen may make her personality less vivid, but it preserves the author from the banalities of the intimate biographer. He properly despatches as unsolvable guesswork the rumors by "tavern pathologists" of his heroine's "physical abnormality." He fears not to call spades spades, nor does his admiration for the queen deter him from criticism of her mistakes and shortcomings. But might he not have been more cautious in endorsing the view that her "Lord Robert" Dudley enjoyed English majesty as "his mistress"? To establish the perfectly valid point that Eliza-

beth supplied the *élan vital* to English government, Mr. Waldman has, perhaps, tended to minimize the capacities and effectiveness of her foremost ministers. Perhaps, too, he has overestimated Elizabeth's prescience when he attributes to her Machiavellian subtlety the successful turn for English affairs of the Darnley marriage. But the emphasis he places upon character and his theme that Elizabeth's success was the fulfilment of a destiny determined by character provide a refreshing contrast to the recent psychopathic interpretations of heroic careers. To accentuate this point he deflates the sentimental romances woven about Mary Stuart and lays her misfortunes to her lack of moral principle and purpose. Elizabeth's steadfastness to the welfare of the common weal and to England's national cause, often at personal cost, carried her (according to this view) through the dreary days and devious politics immediately preceding the Armada crisis of 1588.

But why does Mr. Waldman conclude the great queen's national services with the thirtieth anniversary of her accession? He would hardly contend that her destiny had been fulfilled when she still had fifteen years to govern. And these were not years dull or negligible. The Spanish menace

had not wholly disappeared with Drake's volleys and God's breeze. Puritanism was giving a revolutionary tone to domestic affairs which demanded as complete an application of her political talents as the events of the first two-thirds of her reign.

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For the Defense

NOT GUILTY! The Story of Samuel S. Leibowitz. By Fred D. Pasley. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM JAY HOFF

MR. PASLEY has written a book that is more than the story of Samuel Leibowitz. In a colorful and dramatic manner he has put our jury system itself on trial. Leibowitz, it appears, obtained a verdict of "Not Guilty" in eighty-five consecutive first degree murder trials. The author, largely through reporting excerpts from the testimony in various cases, gives us a glimpse of the technique that aided in establishing this astounding record.

Sketches of the attorney's life are interwoven with the account of his career. We are led in some detail through several trials, including those of Harry Hoffman, Vivian Gordon, the Scottsboro case, and other famous murder trials. Interspersed with these more important cases are many short anecdotes, all filling in the general picture of the Leibowitz technique.

Often the facts and the verdict would seem irreconcilable unless we were piloted through the presentation of some of the salient testimony. Mr. Pasley gives us some insight into the methods that Leibowitz uses, the manner in which he attracts the attention and sympathy of the jury, the way in which he leads up to and then brings out a damaging piece of evidence. It is not the individual incidents that are important, but they leave us with a picture of Leibowitz's genius for dramatiza-

tion and his unerring instinct for psychological effects.

Although the author does not fully analyze the technique of Leibowitz, he does give us some idea of the method by which he tries a case. Moreover, this is done in a dramatic and intensely interesting manner. Mr. Pasley conveys the impression that perhaps trial by jury is largely a skirmish between lawyers. Conscious of the effect created by the skill and technique of counsel we cannot help but have some misgivings as to a procedure under which it is possible to obtain eighty-five consecutive verdicts of "Not Guilty." This becomes the more poignant when we are led through the second Scottsboro trial at Decatur, Alabama. There, emotions and prejudices, far more fundamental than any the attorney can instill in the jurors, appear to play their parts in the resultant verdict of "Guilty." It is pointed out that this verdict was set aside by the trial judge because, "The testimony of the prosecutrix in the case is not only uncorroborated, but it also bears on its face indications of improbability and is contradicted by other evidence, and in addition thereto the evidence greatly preponderates in favor of the defendant." Without questioning the verdict in any of Leibowitz's cases, it cannot be overlooked that in many instances where a verdict of "Not Guilty" was returned the evidence against the defendant appeared very much more damaging than in the Scottsboro case.

This book is neither an indictment nor an endorsement. It is a brief reportorial account of our criminal courts in action. It should be of interest not only to those concerned with criminal law procedure, but to all who are interested in drama and justice.

Epic of the Railroads

STEEL TRAILS. By Martin D. Stevers. New York: Minton, Balch & Co. 1933. \$3.75.

WE have had excellent histories of individual railroads such as those of the New York Central, the Baltimore and Ohio, the Delaware and Hudson, etc. "Trains, Tracks, and Travel," written by an engineer for his son, is nevertheless the best book for adults, from this standpoint, which has appeared. The Baltimore and Ohio has issued a large folder which gives in considerable detail various mechanical operations, accounting and auditing. Yet it has remained for the author of "Steel Trails," after evidently extensive research and collation, to present the best general résumé of the early history of the locomotive, the political and economic considerations which led to the inception, development, and operation of the railroads in this country.

The style of writing suffers somewhat from obvious lightening of the material with colloquialism, for the broad conception and nicely worked out scheme of the entire book is of ample worth to have carried along without such aid. However this need not cause one to digress and surely high praise must be accorded a most complete and conclusive work.

A Magic Book

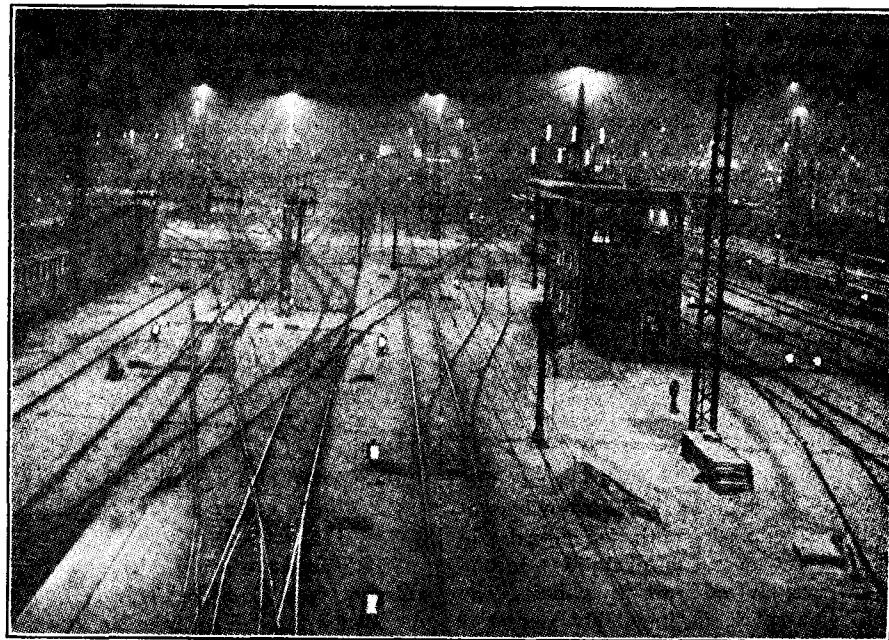
THE CURSE OF THE WISE WOMAN. By Lord Dunsany. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1933. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

AT the beginning of one of his books of fantastic romance, Lord Dunsany once promised his readers that if they were weary of London, he had new worlds for them there, and in fulfilment of his promise, took them to lands east of the sun and west of the moon. But London, whatever Dr. Johnson may have thought, is not all there is even of this world; and though Lord Dunsany still offers new worlds to those tired of cities, he does not, in the first part of this new book, have to go farther than the Irish country. His hero is the son of an Anglo-Irish squire who at the beginning of the book is forced, by his interference between some of the peasants and their murdered man, to fly the country, and his son grows up in the manor-house, alone, able to escape from more schooling, and spending all his time with the country folk, hunting, shooting, fishing, and ranging the marshes. The Irish appear even more than the English to perpetuate the paradox of primitive peoples, that wild animals are both killed and adored by them, so that Æschylus can invoke the huntress Artemis as "she that delights in the lion's cubs and every suckling thing in the woods." The boy's days are passed in killing woodland creatures, and in feeling a deep kinship with them. There are many pages, but not too many, devoted to his lessons in sport, pages that are worthy to stand by Mr. Siegfried Sassoon's "Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man" for conveying the intoxicating joy of the neophyte, which is so rarely expressed.

But though Ireland is itself far enough from London, it is shot through with a world farther and stranger still, the Land of the Young, that you can see from the marshes sometimes when the light is right. One of the country boys knows that he will never go to heaven, because he does not desire it so much as he desires visions of Tir-Nan-Og, and he tells his hero about them. Halfway through, this magic Ireland that lies in Ireland is threatened with civilization and progress; a company comes to drain the marsh. But the old "wise woman"—witch, that is—calls down a curse upon them, and the unearthly marsh and the Land of the Young are left.

This story shows Lord Dunsany at his best. His imagination, and his mellifluous prose, are to be found in it; but more than most of his books it keeps its feet upon earth, in the humors of Ireland where a Fenian may tell a boy how to shoot a wild goose while he is seeking the life of the boy's father, and in the excitement of a hunt where one may come a cropper on real hard earth; and it is none the worse for that. And this tale of a vanishing gentility and an unattainable paradise is told by an old man looking back, with tender *desiderium*, upon his youth; it is far away and long ago; it has the singular, melancholy charm of something solid and yet hazy, like the woods in autumn.



THE MAIN RAILROAD STATION AT MUNICH
A night view, from "Das Deutsche Lichtbild."