

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

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JOHN GALSWORTHY.

### John Galsworthy

JOHN GALSWORTHY was more than an English novelist. In Continental Europe, and among the German-speaking countries particularly, he was not only the best known English novelist of his generation, he was also a world writer whom they took to their hearts. When he went to Vienna in 1929 the foremost Viennese actor delivered a eulogy, and a thousand men and women listened in rapt attention while he read in English from his works. The recent award of the Nobel prize was an inevitable crowning of a European reputation.

It is said that his popularity and prestige were greater abroad than at home. It is said that the English speak of him as English Henry spoke of Percy of Northumberland, dead on Chevy Chase—

"Now God be with him," said our King,  
"Since 'twill no better be;  
I trust I have within my realm,  
Five hundred as good as he."

If there is a certain insularity in such an attitude (supposing that it actually exists) an American can only remind his British contemporaries that Whitman had his earliest praisers abroad, and endeavor to account for the deep interest and real affection which the works of John Galsworthy have always aroused in the United States.

It was assuredly not his American characters that won us. They are neither numerous nor particularly successful, and indeed if they had been as distinguished as the English Forsytes, we should have been put off by the strange jargon they spoke, a muddle of American dialects which not even *Punch* has ever equalled. But this is unimportant, for they were unimportant in his scheme.

What won us first in those now almost forgotten years of the 'sixties, the 'sevens, and the 'nines, was that strange and thrilling social conscience, which was more articulate and more persuasive in his novels than in the raucous shoutings of our own muckrakers, or the ironical disintegrations of Bernard Shaw. "The Island Pharisees," "The Man of Property," most of all "Fraternity," where each character had his shadow in the slums, were disturbing and inspiring because they were so fair-minded and so kind. To an American society that had just ranged itself, they spoke of the responsibilities that come

with culture achieved, they carried a warning from a stable society to one just stabilizing. All this is far away and long ago, and now we talk more of revolution than of responsibility, yet the influence of that aristocratic liberalism which in this country certainly was often born of a reading of Galsworthy is still potent, if no longer regarded as the answer to our problems. It was a first stage in the transition from the arrogant confidence of the nineteenth century to the radical reconstructions of society under way in the twentieth. Those whose imaginations were first touched by the early novels of Galsworthy were fortunate, for ideas of change came to them in the guise of an inspiring duty, and not as stark necessities driven upon them by war and economic chaos.

These early enthusiasms were momentary, and one doubts whether "Fraternity" could stir us now except by its virtues—not transcendent—as sheer story. But there is another and subtler and more lasting debt which American readers owe to Galsworthy. The monumental work by which Galsworthy will unquestionably be best remembered is "The Forsyte Saga," of which the first volume remains the most impressive. Its admirers claim, and rightly, that as a pageant of capitalistic England in the Victorian age, it is worthy of comparison with Thackeray, and comparable in sincerity and scope, if not in variety, with Balzac. Yet for Americans it has a closer claim upon attention. Our abundant British inheritances of blood and culture have always aroused our interest to the point of fascination in any strong study of racial character and personality among the English. And especially is this true when the English author depicts with power the slow moulding, into distinctive and intensely individual traits, of those qualities, those instincts, those tendencies from which, under different skies and different circumstances, our own characteristic mental behavior has been made. To the American well read in his own literature and history, English types, when felt as such and projected with the realizing imagination of genius, have the fascination of might-have-been, either for better or for worse. When English fiction is written with a sense of racial history, we read in it of a life that is paral-

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### Saintsbury, the Connoisseur

By BEN RAY REDMAN

I KNEW, of course, that it was bound to happen sooner or later, and the probabilities were that I would live to see and lament the day. For a good many years now, at least several more than a decade, I have been looking at a certain fairly long shelf in my library, wondering just when the inevitable event would be announced. The author of the many books on that shelf had left the Biblical span well behind him—he was never one for minimum allowances for anything, and the final reckoning could not long be postponed. But postponed it was with singular fortitude and persistence, year after year, until one was nearly persuaded that it would never come at all. So it was with a shock, almost of the completely unexpected, that I read on the morning of Sunday, January 29th, that on the previous day, at his home in Bath, England, George Edward Bateman Saintsbury, "literary critic and connoisseur of wines," had died at the age of eighty-seven.

Born at Southampton, on October 23rd, 1845—died at Bath, on January 28th, 1933. That in itself is a far from usual record. But S. J. C. (among others), has pointed out that years provide no fit measurement for the life of man. *Longa est vita, si plena est.* And the life of George Saintsbury was not merely long, but long in the sense that it was full. Those thirty-odd volumes on the previously mentioned shelf are standing proof of the fullness. A "History of Criticism," in three stout volumes; a "History of English Prosody," in three volumes almost equally stout; a "History of English Prose Rhythm"; a "History of the French Novel," in two volumes; a "Short History of English Literature" (short meaning some eight hundred pages); four volumes of "Collected Essays and Papers"; one volume on the English novel, another on Elizabethan literature, another on nineteenth century literature, another entitled "The Earlier Renaissance," and still another called "The Flourishing of Romance"—these are some of the thirty-odd, and they (the thirty and more) represent only a fraction, perhaps a third, perhaps less, of their author's almost sixty years of writing life.

What he attempted, what he did, was prodigious. There are dry and dusty pedants, breathing the stuffy air of the infinitesimal cubby-holes of specialization, who will tell you that he attempted too much. Some of my most unpleasant minutes have been spent in argument with mole-scholars of that sort. But he did not attempt too much, because his attempt and his accomplishment were identical; and he has himself described the pedants who condemn him. Here we have them, pinned on a small cork as they deserve: "the acrid pedant who will allow no one whom he dislikes to write well, and no one at all to write on any subject that he himself has written on, or would like to write on, who dwells on dates and commas, who garbles out and foists in, whose learning may be easily exaggerated but whose taste and judgment cannot be, because they do not exist. . . ." We meet the same pedant, or the plural of the kind, in a letter that the late Walter Raleigh (not then Sir) wrote to D. Nichol Smith almost thirty years ago. Raleigh, taking up his professorship at Oxford, was a little wor-

ried by the secretive and defensive attitude of his learned colleagues; but his friend Firth reassured him.

Firth talked to me like a godmother; and said that I mustn't be frightened of them, as most newcomers are. He's quite right—they frighten each other to death, and any moderately impudent man can dupe them all. They regard knowledge as a kind of capital—not revenue. They sit on the bag. It's the credit of knowing they care for, and the discredit of not knowing, they fear.

These people, according to their lights, had a legitimate complaint against Saintsbury (as they had against Gosse, who attempted less), but their lights were not his. He *did* make mistakes in dates; he *did* err in quotation, when he was separated from books that he knew much better than the gentlemen who had to have the same books at their elbow in order to prove any knowledge of them; but I refuse to believe that he ever "faked" as his accusers say. I remember the moment of potential disillusionment through which I passed, years ago, when a certain allusion to Fronto, in a footnote of Saintsbury's "History of Criticism," convinced me that Saintsbury had never read Fronto. But a little reflection led me to the conclusion that undoubtedly he had read the most excellent dicta of Marcus Aurelius's tutor, that he had made an abstract of Fronto's writings, and (again separated from the original) had misinterpreted his notes. Such accidents happen, and they are seldom important. Certainly they were not important in the case of a man who took all literature as his province, and made that province his own by right of indisputable conquest.

There is overwhelming evidence to prove that Saintsbury exaggerated not at all, or

### This Week

JOHN GALSWORTHY: A Personal Reminiscence.

By J. W. CUNLIFFE.

RELIGIO POETÆ.

By ALASTAIR W. R. MILLER.

"LIBERALISM IN THE SOUTH."

Reviewed by DONALD DAVIDSON.

"GERMANY PUTS THE CLOCK BACK."

Reviewed by OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD.

"PAGEANT."

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS.

"THE BULPINGTON OF BLUP."

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT.

"CHEERFUL WEATHER FOR THE WEDDING."

Reviewed by DAVID GARNETT.

"A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE."

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

"THE BRIDE OF QUIETNESS."

Reviewed by ROBERT WARNOCK.

"THE NEW VISION."

Reviewed by CLAUDE BRAGDON.

SARA TEASDALE.

By LOUIS UNTERMEYER.

THE FOLDER.

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

### Next Week, or Later

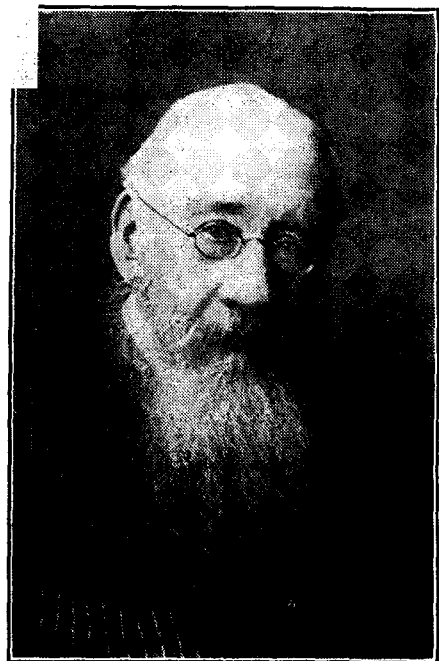
NOEL COWARD.

By JOHN CORBIN.



very slightly, when, in his preface to "Notes on A Cellar-Book," he declared: "I have never yet given a second-hand opinion on any thing, or any book, or person." His ideal critic was one who had, to begin with, read everything, and, if possible, forgotten nothing for purposes of comparison. The first condition, so far as printed records show, he fulfilled as nearly as has anyone who has lived since the multiplication of books became an unbearable white man's burden; and the second condition he fulfilled within the limits which divinity has imposed upon humanity. Seldom did he ever have to say, as he once said regarding the origin of the word Communism, "I suppose I once knew; but I have forgotten." It may be stated quite simply and without exaggeration, I believe, that Saintsbury experienced a vaster body of literature, with full appreciation, and knew more about more literature, than any other Englishman who has yet lived. (The national limitation obviates a certain amount of the argument which in any case is inevitable.) Other scholars have carried flashlights into holes and corners of literature where they have studied objects, in full light and at leisure, which Saintsbury may have glimpsed briefly and in shadow; but their work has been on the minute scale, while his has been on the grand. He did not belong to the small, closed world of the academicians, but to what he would call "the general congregation of decently educated and intelligent people." And he would certainly prefer their everlasting gratitude, which he boundlessly deserves, to the somewhat prickly wreath which sits uneasily upon the pedant's brow only so long as another pedant (for lack of accumulated minutiae) is incapable of knocking it off.

Few lives of so long duration have been consistently and amorously devoted to the cause of literature. When I reviewed "The Collected Essays and Papers" of George Saintsbury, in the year of his eightieth birthday, I quoted a passage



GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

from his preface to his first "Scrap Book," published in 1922; and I shall quote it again for the benefit of those who know little or nothing of his career. Then he described that career as follows:

Twenty years of passive education and eight of active schoolmastering . . . twenty more of London journalism of a rather varied type; twenty more yet of that professorial life in a Scotch university, which, especially for persons not to the country born, gave an almost ideal combination of vocational employment, with varied residence and opportunities for avocational work and play; yet another seven of "shelf," with the opportunities that shelf gives of looking without falling "down and out," and certain circumstances not favorable to mere going to sleep on it. . . .

That was the record up to 1922. And ten more years of "shelf," during which the confirmed man of letters persisted in being the man of letters, never slipping below his established level of excellence, and you have the record complete up to his final day in the first month of 1933.

It was a life devoted to letters, but it

was a career in which the fullest possible appreciation of literature was made possible by a full and sensuous appreciation of life. Those of us who did not know the man can arrive at a certain intimacy with him through his "Scrap Books" and his "Cellar-Book," and between, or in, the lines of everything he ever wrote there is further knowledge to be gained. He was a great walker and a shrewd whist player; he liked dancing, in his younger years, and pretty girls (the wife whom he married in 1869 died in 1924); he couldn't get very far at cricket because of near-sightedness and a native clumsiness, but he liked and played billiards as well his eyesight would permit. Tea, with milk, not cream, was his preferred drink at breakfast; of a certain amount of strong beer, immediately after, he approved; a bottle of wine at dinner, and a bottle afterward, he thought a decent allowance for an Englishman in good health, but there is no space here to deal with, or recapitulate, his observations on the art of drinking; they are numerous, and all set down in their proper places where they should be read. (But, let it be added for the benefit of an unregenerate nation, he detested, abominated, and "in the extremest Rabelaisian variety and floridity" condemned the cocktail habit.)

But now, for the sake of those who are still unacquainted with Saintsbury, and for his own sake, it is probably time—in the course of this rambling and affectionate article—to come to grips with his critical credo, and to state in plain English the method of his critical practice. His method was so simple, his practice was so consistent, that one hesitates to set them forth in the presence of our younger, and semi-articulate, estheticians. He was never mystical, metaphysical, or pseudo-scientific; the isolated esthetic emotions of a T. S. Eliot and the psychological reactions of an I. A. Richards were so much jargon to him. He actually and confidently relied upon his own taste and judgment, which had been conditioned by long contact with what, according to general agreement, is the best literature mankind has produced. He was supremely sure of himself (and he had reason), and he was utterly blunt. What, he asked, had an author attempted? How far had he succeeded? Where did it fit in with his (Saintsbury's) literary scheme of things? The last question might seem limiting and fatal to one who is aware of the limitations of even Aristotle (limitations discovered, let it be said, after many centuries), but no one need worry, immediately, about Saintsbury's limitations, when one remembers his greeting of Norman Douglas's "South Wind." There, if you like, was a book new enough and strange enough to puzzle the critic of twenty; but the critic of almost eighty knew exactly where it belonged.

His style, of course, has bothered a good many respectable people. He liked odd words, but only when the odd word

happened to be precise. As he explained in a footnote which put Hallam in his place: "A sovereign of just weight, fineness, and stamp is none the worse for having been little circulated; nor is a word." When the precise word was not available, he minted it himself from the Greek or Latin, and this was annoying until readers got used to it. And then, of course, there were his clauses within clauses, and his italics. These, too, were troublesome until readers discovered they were doing their job, and doing it perfectly. After which experienced readers could confidently state of Saintsbury's style, as he said of Sainte-Beuve's: "It can say anything that the author wishes to say, and does not try to say what he cannot."

What he tried to say and did say throughout sixty years is that literature is one of life's greatest blessings, that it offers ecstasy, rest, refreshment, and amusement without end; and it was his constant care to share with others his knowledge of where the blessing might be found concentrated and in abundance. He was singularly stout-minded, never admitting that a person or author (excepting Carlyle, with whom he often disagreed) had influenced his opinions in the slightest degree; and his criticism was of the most practical variety. He could discuss the theory of equitation with the best of the experts, but he preferred to go into the ring and judge actual horses. Full of prejudices in his private life, he was amazingly unprejudiced when he sat down to judge a book. He was the staunchest of Tories, but a non-Tory author—as author—was safe in his hands. He did not relish a certain kind of Gallic dirt, but as an editor of the *Caroline* poets he did not balk at the freedom of "Leoline and Sydanis." Not only could he recognize, appreciate, and do just honor to the "earth-born fire" of literature at its greatest, but he had a shrewd eye for the gradations of second, third, and even fifth-rate talent; an eye that was continuously useful to the historian of literature. And he wore astonishingly well. It is too easy for a man to make up his mind, as did Jeffrey—with genius blossoming all around him—that "the age of original genius is over." This Saintsbury never did. The "comprehensive and catholic possession of literature—all literature and all that is good in all" was what he believed the ideal criticism should make possible. Never was an ideal better served or followed. Covering many centuries and several languages, he demonstrated again and again that the supreme function of literary criticism, whether it be art or history, is to "help the ear to listen when the horns of Elfland blow." The ears he helped are numberless, and the gratitude of their possessors is beyond measurement.

It is reported from London that the autograph manuscript of Mozart's "Coronation Concert" has been sold in Berlin for £1,560.

## Galsworthy the Man

By J. W. CUNLIFFE.

WHEN I was in England as Director of the London Branch of the American University Union in 1918-19, I came frequently into contact with Galsworthy, as we were both serving on an international committee for the rehabilitation of the wounded and mutilated of the Great War. One could not help but be struck by



GALSWORTHY, THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

the combined considerateness and reserve, the quietness and dignity of manner, which made him an ideal type of English gentleman. It was characteristic of him that while H. G. Wells was arguing energetically for the League of Nations and Arnold Bennett was no less busily engaged in the National Publicity Office under Lord Northcliffe, Galsworthy had been working quietly in a French military hospital. So, at any rate, nobody ever heard Galsworthy himself make the slightest reference to his war services.

It was my privilege to submit to him on behalf of President Butler the invitation to deliver the address at the celebration to be given in New York in honor of James Russell Lowell in 1919 by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. I had some difficulty in persuading him on account of his diffidence and dislike of appearing in public, and only the argument that he could help to cement the bonds between the United States and Great Britain ultimately induced him to accept. I had returned to New York by the time the celebration took place, and was listening with pleasure to his beautifully phrased and sympathetic address (evidently recited from memory) when to the consternation of his distinguished audience the orator's voice faltered and ceased. "I am very sorry," he said, "but I have lost the thread. I must look at my manuscript." He produced a typewritten sheaf from his pocket, and for a few painful minutes sought the place at which his memory had failed him. Then he resumed the address, which was a finished literary production entirely worthy of the occasion. In the tumult of applause that followed one felt a note of personal affection and sympathy for the speaker as well as of admiration for a magnificent effort.

Galsworthy's visits to this country were frequent and prolonged after the welcome he received from the American public at that time, and he became more habituated to the popular platform; but he retained something of the modest charm, the gentle, appealing, and yet dignified, shyness that made that New York speech memorable. I remember an address on "The Herd Spirit" spoken from the chancel steps of the Columbia University Chapel with an obvious hesitancy and embarrassment caused by the unfamiliar ecclesiastical surroundings. Yet there was always something very endearing about Galsworthy's timidity, for such modesty is a rare phenomenon on the platform.

## Religio Poetae

By ALASTAIR W. R. MILLER

FACT killed Beauty.  
(Mourn ai ai, O mourn.)  
Fact took an arrow  
With hand unhesitating,

Correctly and precisely  
She put it to the bowstring,  
Lifted it self-assuredly  
To the glance of her eye  
And let it fly  
Neither low nor high  
But straight straight and unswerving  
To the heart of Beauty.  
(Wherefore mourn ai ai.)  
But also rejoice loud loud and loud  
And also rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice  
And the glad noise  
Of girls and boys  
Loving on the fields  
And knowledgeable of happiness.  
For Truth will come  
By divers unnecessary wandering

Through nowhere-leading glades  
That lead from nowhere,  
And she will stop to comb out  
The symmetry from her hair,  
And will have to run home  
To fetch her comb,  
And, forgetting for what she went  
back,  
Will come again  
Plying in most admired disorder her  
direction,  
For Truth knows little of such things  
But Truth will come  
By divers unnecessary wanderings  
And she will breathe on Beauty  
lying dead  
(Mourn ai ai, O mourn.)  
And Beauty will lift up her head  
(Wherefore mourn ai ai no longer.)  
And hand in hand with Truth  
New-breathing Beauty will go,  
And that is all ye need to know.