

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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SALISBURY: "HULLO! AREN'T YOU FELLOWS GOING FURTHER WITH ME?"  
From a cartoon by Sir John Tenniel in *Punch*, July 31, 1886. Joseph Chamberlain is seen at the rear deserting the trap driving towards Conservatism.

### Joe Chamberlain

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN:  
Vol. II: 1885-1895. By J. L. Garvin. New  
York: The Macmillan Co. 1933. \$5.

Reviewed by C. H. DRIVER

PERHAPS no biographer could undertake a harder task than the one Mr. Garvin discharges in this second volume of his life of Joseph Chamberlain. Those ten years following the resignation of Gladstone's second ministry constitute one of the most complex phases of English party history in the nineteenth century. They saw the great split in the Liberal party which resulted in the Unionist wing seceding from, and defeating, the main body of the party on Gladstone's proposed Home Rule scheme for Ireland. They saw even the seceding Unionists rifted in their own ranks and maintaining a precarious unanimity between the radical Unionist faction under Chamberlain and the Whig Unionist group under Lord Hartington. They witnessed a growing cleavage among the orthodox Liberals in the contrasting attitudes of "Little Englanders" and Liberal-Imperialists; and an equally marked cleavage in the Conservative party on the subject of Social reform. Finally, they saw the splitting of the Irish Nationalist party, after the Parnell divorce case, into Parnellites and anti-Parnellites. The simple antitheses of the earlier period gave way to a new balance of forces, and between the "yellows" and the "blues" appeared a complete range of spectroscopic variations.

Yet in spite of his complexity, Mr. Garvin tells his story in the grand manner which grips attention from first to last. He has an extraordinarily vivid sense of the inner stresses of the age and with perfect art induces the completest imaginative apprehension of the reader. Never has his story been told more convincingly, for Garvin has as delicate a sense of justice as of historical perspective. A passing remark at the outset strikes the keynote of the whole book: "Nor are the motives low and petty on the part of any of the principles . . . malign misunderstandings were spread as though imps wove the plot." Moreover, without a single false touch, he vividly traces the personal factors in the political

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### Family Life in an Oxfordshire Village

HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE. By Elizabeth Cambridge. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1933. \$2

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

THIS, we are told, is a first novel, and was the June choice of the English Book Society. We accept the first statement on the word of the publisher, and the second is easily verifiable; and we can only conclude that "Elizabeth Cambridge" (we have no idea if this is a *nom de plume*, but somehow it has the sound of one) has for long been practising her art in secret. For her book has the artlessness that conceals art; it is like a cartoon from which every redundant line has been carefully eliminated, so that the elements of the design stand out bold and clear, telling a complex story in terms of utter simplicity. If Elizabeth Cambridge is really a young and inexperienced writer, then her future career ought to be extraordinarily interesting to watch.

That there be no misunderstanding, let me say at once that I do not believe that sun-bathers and sea-shore nymphs will in any considerable number select this book as a beach companion. It is something to be read and relished in an armchair at home. Its taste and intelligence call for corresponding qualities in the reader. For this author has successfully attempted an extremely difficult literary feat: she has essayed simply to describe the day-by-day life of a middle-class English family, living in narrow circumstances in an Oxfordshire village; and in doing it she has drawn an all but faultless picture of what has sometimes been described (rather foolishly) as the "lost generation"—that is, the generation in England that became adult during the war. The story opens with the birth of a child to the young wife of a war-marriage, the husband, a medical officer, being at the front. Before the war is over, he is invalided out of the army and takes up a scattered country practice in Oxfordshire. From then on the story is that of the adjustment of the wife, Catherine, to all the circumstances of her life—to the difficulties (and in retrospect they seem almost incredible) of living in the

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## Henley and His Henchmen

BY HORACE GREGORY

WHERE is William Ernest Henley and where are the Henley evenings at the house near Richmond, an hour's walk for young men who strolled through spring twilight from Bedford Park?" "The Oxford Book of English Verse" has embalmed "Invictus," whose every line is now a sentimental platitude, whose fire is ashes and is a warning of how heroic English verse should not be written. Many of the young men are gone, are resting with their chief in the files of *The Observer* and *The New Review*; and today, even Henley's luminaries, the H. G. Wellses, the Kiplings, the J. M. Barries, yes, even the Bernard Shaws are receiving ante mortem obituaries. But something more powerful than mere physical death is obscuring Henley's name and those who wrote unsigned reviews in his periodicals, for today's obscurity of his reputation is a special act of forgetting—subconscious desire to punish him for the sins of absolute yet transitory power exerted too wilfully, too openly—the iron invective resounding in still air. Silence was then (now forty years ago) the best reply and that silence has covered him until this day.

It would be well to revive him a moment before the final curtain falls, before the last Princeton senior to write in the name of Kipling as his favorite poet joins the alumni and stores his sheepskin in the family vault. See Henley once more alive—not the sensitive realistic poet who wrote distinguished vers libre years before its time—but the careerist, the hero, the Tory critic, instructor to his sub-lieutenants in the art of virulent prose. The time is any afternoon or evening between 1889 and 1898; Henley is in the room for everyone to see. His great physique, the golden, wiry beard and hair, shoulders and upper torso thrust forward across a desk or leaning full weight upon the back of a chair, would always impress his audience with the integrity of his purpose; the nervous hands and fingers stained with nicotine, and the deep, rapid inhalation of innumerable cigarettes stressed the speed of his enthusiasm, the laughter following clean-edged wit, and the flash of electric anger. It was then that one remembered the complaint of Robert Louis Stevenson's wife: that Henley's energy endangered poor Robert's health and that his friendship drove her husband to the verge of physical exhaustion.

Behind this massive figure sprang the iridescent mist of an attractive legend, and behind the legend were a few necessary facts. William Ernest Henley was born in 1849, son of an unprosperous Gloucester printer and second-hand bookdealer. In early adolescence tuberculosis of the bone had maimed one foot, and subsequently destroyed it. As he neared maturity the other foot was threatened, and to stave off the immediate danger of its amputation, Henley, penniless, friendless, made a pilgrimage to Edinburgh from Gloucester. There he appealed directly to the great surgeon, Lister, who became interested in his case and installed him for treatment in a hospital. It was from this hospital that Henley wrote to London editors, and Leslie Stephen, in particular, was stirred by the forthright personality revealed in a short letter. In February, 1875, when Ste-

phen had occasion to visit Edinburgh, he remembered Henley and, bringing Robert Louis Stevenson with him, called at Lister's Hospital in search of the young man whose correspondence had awakened his interest. The interview with Henley was something more than a casual event; within an hour Stephen's curiosity had been transfigured into admiration for the man who so cheerfully and vigorously surmounted physical pain and economic hardship; and R. L. S. had discovered a new friend, a friend whose ruddy laughter was contagious and whose masculinity was the very complement of his own fragility and lassitude. And when at last, two years later, Henley arrived in London, he came as the reincarnation of some Northern myth, as a descendant of a Danish Anglo-Saxon ancestor, a young Thor, whose ready, short-clipped phrases struck the ground like so many thunderbolts. His first venture, *London*, a satirical weekly, chose the aging Gladstone as its foil, Gladstone, who was then a great white whale swimming to rest in Liberal waters. *London's* harpoons effected little damage to the whale, but each well-aimed thrust drew witness to a new personality in English journalism, and Henley emerged to receive the awards of an initial victory.

It was during the following ten years that Henley developed his aptitude for making important literary discoveries, and with these names: Alice Meynell, Andrew Archer, Austin Dobson, he found himself rising in the estimation of his fellows; he became an active literary agent for his friend, Stevenson, and when *London* perished (an untimely death) under him he sought out commissions for freelance criticism and in a series of reviews ignited the smoldering reputation of George Meredith. In assuming the editorship of *The Magazine of Art* he converted that periodical into a testing field for his esthetic convictions, and there he won the credit of introducing Rodin to the English public. By the time he accepted his position as editor of *The Scots Observer*, his

## This Week

PAINTING BY MA-YUAN

A poem by HUGH WESTERN

THE BOOK OF THE TIGER

By R. G. BURTON

Reviewed by William T. Hornaday

HISTORY OF THE JEWS

By JOSEF KASTEIN

Reviewed by Albert C. Wyckoff

INDIA MARCHES PAST

By R. J. MINNEY

Reviewed by Charles Roland

OVERLAND TO THE PACIFIC

Edited by ARCHER BUTLER HULBERT

Reviewed by Allan Nevins

THE BOWLING GREEN

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

GAMBLER'S WIFE

By MALINDA JENKINS

Reviewed by Edwin L. Sabin

WHITE ARMIES OF RUSSIA

By GEORGE STEWART

Reviewed by Arthur Ruhl

## Next Week or Later

THE SPORTSMAN'S LEXICON

An essay by JOHN KIERAN

policies for a literary dictatorship had attained full growth; the paper was founded for the express purpose of becoming his personal vehicle; it was his medium and his alone for exerting absolute power.

Surely no editor had ever received his commission on better terms than those of Henley's when he stepped into the office of *The Scots Observer*. Its owner was Fitz-Roy Bell, a well-to-do Scotch lawyer who felt it his duty to restore Edinburgh's intellectual glory that had diminished sadly since the days when Wilson and Lockhart roused controversy in the pages of *The Quarterly*. He had read Henley and recognized in his prose an individual, unique vigor that carried with it those qualities of leadership which might conceivably reproduce the critical success of Christopher North. He was prepared to be generous with such a man; the weekly was fully subsidized, and before long the wide pages of clean-cut, beautifully balanced type that set *The Scots Observer* well apart from all other papers appeared upon the library tables of the British reading public.

*The Observer* was Henley's opportunity to leave the impress of his heel upon the body of English literature. Self-educated and endowed with those strong prejudices that have their sources in pragmatic experience of every man who has dragged himself upward out of poverty into the drawingrooms of middle-class society, Henley's articles of faith were those of trenchant individualism. It was characteristic of him to choose Disraeli as his political model, and in this choice lay the source of his strength and weakness. Subconsciously it must have been Disraeli's drive toward imperial power that attracted Henley most, for the results that this bediamonded, golden-hued statesman obtained were tangible; Christmas tree tinsel and brass were always an effective disguise for the intervention of Lewis guns in Disraeli's proposals, and the value of his flowery waistcoats was measured in terms of the Suez Canal and the crown of India. Henley's defense of Disraeli shows clearly enough his uneasy relationship to the subject of his admiration.

His success awakened his esthetic appreciation of a system that worked with the fluid noiselessness and precise dynamics of a well-oiled piston.

It is, therefore, scarcely surprising that a number of his contemporaries adopted the habit of describing him as a literary pirate, and that Stevenson, half-affectionately, modeled "Long John Silver" in his image. Even the least discerning of his fellows saw in his worship of physical strength a compensatory impulse toward balancing his own physical disabilities—and that impulse soon translated itself into editorial tyranny. From the very start, he utilized *The Observer* as a training school for his young men, young men who, under his quick eye, displayed either personal loyalty to himself or an intelligence well above the average set for promise of a literary career. From these he chose an assistant editor, Charles Whibley, who filled both requirements, and combined with them an original flair for high-class journalism. Having first proved their usefulness, the young men were forced to submit to Henley's explicit orders: "Never again use that detestable word, 'stylist,' if you would be an officier of mine," he wrote to Vernon Blackburn. Note Henley's "officier"; he was like a general commanding an army of lieutenants; and because of their number, his enemies saw danger in exciting disapproval from the chief, for he would set his pack upon them, one by one, and the assault of Henley, multiplied by twenty vitriolic little Henleys, might well demolish a flourishing literary reputation.

Henley's successful leadership, however, built castles of sand against the eventual, inevitable storm. His quarrels were frequent, and, at times, quite unnecessary. He was among the first to champion and publish W. B. Yeats, and yet could not refrain from rewriting the poetry that Yeats submitted to him. I doubt whether this prerogative ever deeply stirred Yeats's enmity, but in after years, when he is writing of the time that he, too,

followed closely in the footsteps of the master, one finds his early enthusiasm considerably cooled. He remarks calmly that he was comforted by the fact that Henley also rewrote Kipling, and it is significant that he recalls on the very same page an encounter with a former member of Henley's formidable reviewing staff: "I met him in Paris very sad and, I think, very poor. 'Nobody will employ me now,' he said. 'Your master is gone,' I answered, 'and you are like the spear in an old Irish story that had to be kept dipped in poppy-juice that it might not go about killing people on its own account.'"

Henley's quarrel with Shaw was a serious matter, and in the circumstances which surrounded it, it is easy to prophesy the years of slowly approaching doom, the gradual obscurity of Henley's reputation. As in the case of Yeats, he was among the first to recognize Shaw's promise (some few years before Frank Harris shouted aloud his grand discovery of the young Irishman); and with his characteristic gesture of approval, demanded that Shaw

write for the *Observer*. Shaw immediately agreed to do a series of musical commentaries for him, and all went well until the question of Richard Wagner arose. In London much of Wagner's popularity had been nursed to fever pitch by the group of pre-Raphaelites, all of whom were (and not without reason) marked targets for Henley's bitterest scorn. It is entirely possible that Henley had no objection to Wagner (Vernon Blackburn reported that Wagner's music, after Mozart's, was among his favorable prejudices), but the very thought of the Rossettis' enjoying it at all drove him blindly into the anti-Wagner camp. What followed illustrates how far his moral and esthetic judgments were deflected in a battle for supremacy, a drive toward influence as transitory and as mercurial as any debate won by Disraeli in the House of Commons. Shaw spoke well of Wagner in his essay for the *Observer*, and Henley accepted it. But on publication Shaw found whatever praise he had given Wagner changed to Henleyesque censure—and with the force of moral dignity behind his motive, he cut short his brief friendship with the *Observer's* editor; the break was final, and from that time onward Shaw chose to forget Henley or to dismiss him (not without kindly patronage) as unimportant, a poet to whom matter meant little and manner everything.

Throughout Henley's long extended

warfare against the Rossettis he reveals the character of a man whose literary tastes were excellent, but whose judgment was irrevocably bad. His own esthetic standards were often as not sloughed in miry, stagnant swamps of petty controversy. In his attacks upon the Pre-Raphaelites, one could readily sympathize with a man who said: "An artist is he who knows how to select and to inspire the results of his selection," a standard by which the Rossettis and their followers would be damned to this hour. But one is less impressed by Henley's more direct onslaught against *The Germ*, for personal venom

turns upon itself and in the act of excreting poison often annihilates its author: "Dante Rossetti imagined the *Germ*, made the *Germ* possible, floated the *Germ* and in the long run died of the *Germ*. The engineer 'hoist with his own petard' was never better exemplified than in Dante Rossetti and the magazine which excused his lapses and made him an amateur for the term of his natural life."

And one finds it difficult to forgive a careless and savage un-

signed review of Charles Eliot Norton's "Dante" in the *Observer*. The obvious excuse for the review lies in its deliberately planned objective—a shot at the Rossetti group from an ambushed quarter—yet the book itself and Norton are rather clumsily ignored, and one feels that the reviewer has done no more than cover his ignorance of Italian by launching into full-throated abuse of all translators.

Even to this day one feels that the very nature of Henley's attack upon the Rossettis actually promoted their growing popularity and stimulated what has since become a tawdry influence upon English lyric poetry. A far more effective method of diminishing this influence was set in motion by John Churton Collins, and in illustrating this point I hope I may be pardoned for a slight digression from the subject of this essay. Collins was a friend and an exact contemporary of Henley, being born in Gloucestershire in the same year, 1849. Quite undeservedly his reputation has fallen into darkness, and but for T. S. Eliot's essay on Cyril Tournier, his name is completely unknown in modern criticism. All one remembers of Collins are shreds of gossip circulated in horrified whispers by late Victorians who have recently taken up the art of writing memoirs. From these one learns that Collins had committed the unpardonable sin of exposing Edmund Gosse's ignorance and

shoddy critical standards, of refusing to sign a petition for Oscar Wilde's release from prison on esthetic grounds, since Oscar's florid prose had offended him, and, lastly, of his reviewing a textbook issued by the Oxford University Press and disclosing its eight hundred errors. Though he received recognition in academic circles, Gosse's enmity brought Collins's career to an abrupt decline. By the use of subtle slander Gosse saw to it that doors were slammed to wherever Collins showed his genial, unrepentant smile.

Yet in rereading Collins's books of criticism, particularly the "Ephemera Critica," which contains his plea for an organized study of English literature at the universities, one finds him a just, gentlemanly, impersonalized critic of the academic standards then in vogue. Unlike Henley, the object of his attack was at a point far beyond a mere personal evaluation and time has already proved that his chastisement of Gosse as well as Saintsbury and William Rossetti was (to say the very least) a well-deserved arraignment of those who had sacrificed literary discernment for the pleasure of making friends at publisher's tea parties. His essay on William Rossetti's edition of Shelley's "Adonais" is the most serious indictment of Pre-Raphaelite criticism that has yet been published, and Collins skillfully balances his dispraise by his own acute analysis of Shelley's poetry. I offer this essay as a worthy contrast to Francis Thompson's much overrated study of the same subject, and even Matthew Arnold's well-known Shelley essay lacks Collins's penetration into the methods by which Shelley produced a memorable poem. In short, Collins fully realized and put into practice Henley's dictum that art is treatment, and his own prose, light and flexible in quality, seems to foreshadow the excellence now revealed in T. S. Eliot's occasional ventures into critical writing.

On returning from Collins to Henley it seems all the more regrettable that so much of Henley's strength was vitiated in mere double-barreled literary journalism. He was not as Stevenson once hinted (a hint, by the way, that touched off a series of erratic estrangements between the two friends) a man bent upon filling his purse at the cost of literature. None of the magazines he edited ever circulated beyond a thousand copies an issue. Even the later *Observer*, which had changed its prefix from *Scots* to *National*, and the more impressive *New Review*, which contained a large body of creative work, made no compromise with cheap or merely popular taste. At the close of his editorial career in 1898, following upon the heels of a tragic bereavement, the loss of an only child, a five-year-old daughter, he had to his credit a list of contributors whose notoriety in letters has linked his age to ours.

It was perhaps inevitable that the climax of his brief career should have been the ill-advised essay on Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson had been dead seven years and Henley had been given Balfour's biography of "R. L. S." for review. His death had done nothing toward resolving the emotional conflict of a severed friendship in Henley's blood. At first, Henley rejected the assignment—some premonition of disaster must have warned him—and then accepted a generous offer from the editor of *Pall Mall*. By the time he came to write the piece, his characteristic recklessness was fully roused; rambling, choked with personal reference, heavy with irrelevant bile, the essay slowly took on form, form by the way that was so shapeless that even Oscar Wilde's sneering commentary: "He has always thought too much about himself which is wise; and written too much about others which is foolish" seemed particularly apt. After a violent storm in the literary journals of the time, the episode was dropped into the earth; and when Henley died two years later in 1903, many felt as Wilde did, that he had survived all his disciples; he was left to moulder in his grave, forever chanting the poem he loved best, the poem that had become a parody of his hollow victories:

I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

Horace Gregory, author of two books of poetry, has written extensively on late Victorian literary figures.



WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY  
From "The Portrait Drawings of William Rothenstein"  
Viking Press

## Painting by Ma-Yuan

By HUGH WESTERN

CRYSTAL the stream that hesitates and spills  
Its legend from the calligraphic hills,  
Purls and incontinently lunges  
Through groves amorphous as so many sponges:  
Straight as the strictest arrow from the quiver  
Darts then this way, a swift and narrow river.  
Upon its bank a figure small and droll  
Crouches above his bending bamboo pole  
Waiting the most improbable of fishes  
He nods and, if awake, I think he wishes  
For that peculiar and fresh-water cod  
Whose scales may bear the hieroglyph of god.  
Don't think I mock this old  
Philosopher in speck and gold.  
Not I!  
I only wonder why  
We all don't fish for such queer creatures too  
Who find, alas, much duller things to do.