

# The Saturday Review

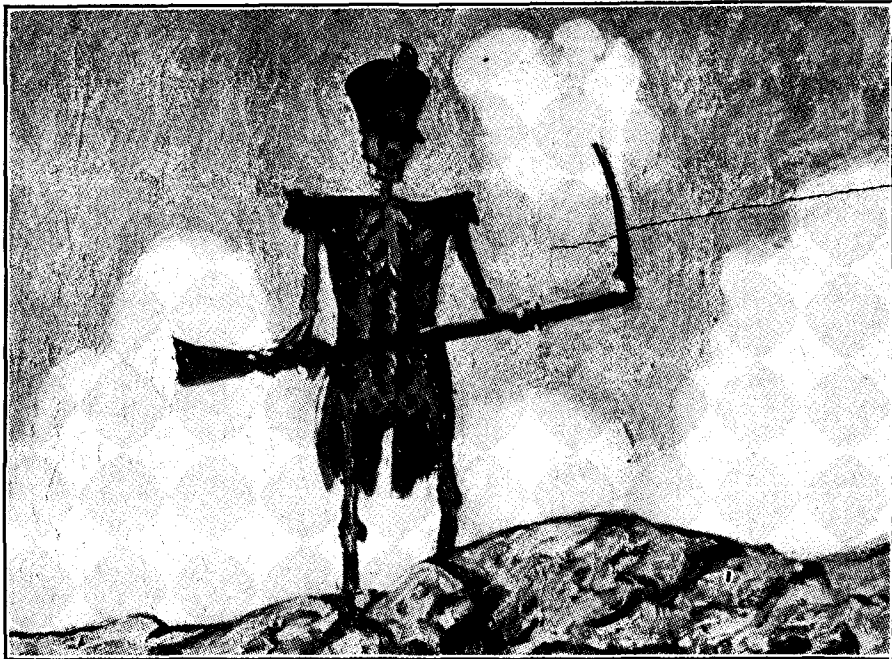
## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

VOLUME IX

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1933

NUMBER 35



THE REVIEW. BY ALLEN TUCKER.  
(Whitney Museum of American Art.)

### The Will of a Liberal

THE WAY OF ESCAPE. By SIR PHILIP GIBBS. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1933. \$3.

Reviewed by FRANK H. SIMONDS

IT is now almost twenty years since "Phil" Gibbs, as Fleet Street then knew him, waiting on the chalk downs of Picardy for the start of the Somme "Push," heard a thrush sing far out in "No-man's land" and reported that fact to his newspaper. His "story," so far as a journalist's later dazzling success can be ascribed to a single performance, made Gibbs. It made him because it permitted the millions of newspaper readers starving for a chance to "feel" what war was like, to penetrate the dense fog of censorship and get beyond the arid unreality of professional propaganda. Actually, however, the story was the man and it opened a new field in war correspondence.

In the traditional sense, Gibbs was never a real war correspondent. Perry Robinson of the London *Times* and our own "Fred" Palmer, his colleagues at Rollin Court, which was a branch of G. H. Q., were of the school of Archibald Forbes. They could be trusted to set down official interpretations of the strategic aspects of the rather primitive butchery which for four years proceeded about Ypres, Arras, and Amiens. Gibbs, by contrast was rather the artist, who had stumbled upon massacre and not only felt it. But feeling it, he was able to make millions feel with him.

After the war was over, Gibbs flashed forth with a book almost savage in its concentrated sadness. In his "Now It Can Be Told" he set down memorably the blindness and folly of the soldier and statesman, as he had seen them measured in casualties and frustration. Aside from Montague's "Disenchantment," this book remains perhaps the severest indictment of the officialdom of the World War ever framed. It was not as great a book as Montague's, because there never was but one "C. E.," but it was in the same mood, the passionate protest of a keen, sensitive spirit against mechanized mediocrity of the military mind.

Because he was a Gibbs and all members of that distinguished family unto the third remove are born, if not with silver spoons in their mouths, at least with fountain pens between their fingers, Sir Philip, as he had presently become, continued to

write: novels which were now and then "best sellers," and reports of current events which were always competent. He wandered from Dublin to Moscow, wherever and whenever the stupidity of man repeated in some new form the old insanities of the war.

All through the post-war period Gibbs has been writing, lecturing, talking, passionately searching for some way of escape from the tragic destiny which seemed to have overtaken mankind in 1914. But he has never again heard the thrush sing. The sound of that original song, too, has grown fainter in his own ears, as time has passed. On that morning, now so long ago, he hailed it as a promise. From the immediate horror of war he turned to a hope for the future, which the spectacle of human courage and devotion all about him seemed to justify. Then he believed in England. Soon after the war he was in the United States and his faith in America was impregnable. Russia, in turn, inspired his confidence. But now, at the end he comes to us with a new book in a different note. My townsman, Henry D. Thoreau, once wrote that man sets out to construct a palace and ends by throwing together a woodshed. Sir Philip, twenty years after, has at last come to his woodshed.

No small part of Gibbs's new book is devoted to the diagnosis of the world we are living in. But Sir Philip is not a political economist, he is equally impervious to the tricks of politics and the rules of economics. He has something of the romantic idealism which slips out in the most professional of the dissertations of Sir Arthur Salter, but he has nothing of Sir Arthur's impeccable mastery of the revised version of the gospel according to John Stuart Mill. Like everyone who was either born a citizen of Brooklyn or a liberal, like Walter Lippmann, for example, Sir Philip remains loyal to his spiritual home. But he has neither Lippmann's philosophic background nor his technical mastery of contemporary problems.

One of Gibbs's fondest illusions is that he understands the younger generation which he does genuinely love and admire. But if you think he understands that generation, compare his latest book with the recent volume of John Strachey. Before the advance in serried ranks of Strachey's economic arguments Gibbs would be compelled to surrender or take to his heels. When the columns began to manœuvre

(Continued on page 487)

### Galsworthy: An Estimate\*

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THE British Empire, said Philip Guedalla at a recent dinner, is held together by the Encyclopædia Britannica. It holds together (I suppose that he meant) because the British have imposed their own outline of history upon the English-speaking world, so that the Irish Free State will have to get out an Encyclopædia Celtica before it becomes really free! And it may truly be said that England, the essential England, exists chiefly through, and in, men like John Galsworthy and their works.

I have heard Galsworthy called an idealist. I have heard him called a romanticist, and even a sentimentalist. None of these terms exactly fits. Like all great novelists he was a man in search of reality, and reality is not a simple term, like money, or fame, or craftsmanship. Someone said recently that perhaps the current loose talk of hard reality was misleading. It was not the hardships, the material failures, the envies and remorses of this time of trouble which were essential reality. They were only clouds passing over the moon. Reality was deeper. It was not intermittent trouble but human nature's daily food of love, friendship, felt happiness, or felt grief. The speaker cited Robert Frost as a man who had never swerved from the pursuit of such reality, regardless of external circumstance. I say the same of John Galsworthy. His novels and his plays have always dealt with what really mattered to an Englishman in the closing years of a great English period. In this sense John Galsworthy was a realist, a great realist.

I knew him well, not intimately, not from long association, but in circumstances far enough from the casual to let me write of him here with his personality rich and living in my memory. He was a gentleman—one thought of that first, always, with Galsworthy—sensitive, a little hesitant, but with rushes of strong feeling. He had the unshakable dignity of a man sure of his breeding who respects the rights of others and gets respect himself. I never saw him lose his temper but once,—when, in an international meeting, a Prussian who knew English perfectly heckled him in rapid German, with an evident purpose to take unfair advantage. Then he blazed out once, and gave up the chair as one gives way to an unmannerly child.

But this was but the surface of the man. More deeply considered, I find in him an English type, as distinctive as a manor house or an English garden. It is not the aggressive type of Englishman, arrogant, energetic, cool, which we call John Bull, but it is a type equally true to race and traceable in English history from long before the immigrations to America. He was the liberal, intellectual aristocrat, spiritual, sensitive, humanitarian, proud. England has always had such men, and they have been of her best. Spenser, I think, was one of them, and that poet-priest George Herbert, who said that his friends had all gone into the world of light, and (with a dose of snobbishness) Joseph Addison. Matthew Arnold was the school-

\* This essay was presented in slightly different form at the Convocation of George Washington University in Commemoration of John Galsworthy on February 22, 1933.

master phase of the type, Edward Fitzgerald its esthete, Horace Walpole its gossip. Nor have we lacked its strong racial manifestations here. Jonathan Edwards, in spite of the hysteria of his sermons, was the scholar-aristocrat who loves the human race, Jefferson had many of the attributes, and Emerson was perhaps the supreme example among English-speaking peoples of this liberal and aristocratic intellectualism. Nor do I except Woodrow Wilson, whom Galsworthy himself trusted and admired. These were men conscious of a code of behavior to which as gentlemen they conformed, and this is their weakness in a hard-boiled world, so that in politics it is only the shrewd manœuvrers like Jefferson who succeed. They are responsible, humane, and passionately in love with the possibilities of human nature. In literature, they are the great reformers, for they are not moved by jealousy, having been bred inside a tradition; they are our best critics, for they wish to change not to destroy; and their minds are set on those traits of good will and spiritual satisfaction which they see still living beneath the frustrations and warpings of the struggle for success.

Fine natures are finely moved. John Galsworthy came toward the end of an age of possessiveness, when, in the words of Tennyson, "property, property, property," thudded all over the English-speaking world. Wealth was on the move from the earliest 1800s onward. Land had been static in the eighteenth century, and property had been felt as a right even more than as an opportunity. With the opening of the colonies and the beginning of industrialism, property became mobile. A continent was exploited, goods were multiplied. To the class that merely owned, succeeded a class that acquired and possessed. A middle class arose in England, conditioned in mind and emotions by the pursuit of property; it was the same class that made America.

In England, the experiment was what the scientists call controlled and pure. The new bourgeois aristocracy took over the

### This Week

BAVARIAN GENTIAN.

By D. H. LAWRENCE.

"PRESIDENT LINCOLN."

Reviewed by CARL SANDBURG.

"WHAT THE AUTHOR MEANT."

Reviewed by ARTHUR COLTON.

"THE ENCHANTED WINTER."

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

"THE MASK OF SILENUS."

Reviewed by HETTY GOLDMAN.

"ORIENT EXPRESS."

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN.

"SUNSET SONG."

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT.

"SOUTH AMERICAN MEDITATIONS."

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES.

THE FINDING OF THE SNARK.

By ARTHUR RUHL.

### Next Week, or Later

RECENT STUDIES OF UNEMPLOYMENT. Reviewed by BEULAH AMIDON.



code of the aristocrats who had owned by right, and subtly modified it. They assumed responsibility, developed to a high degree the character indispensable to a governing class in a self-governing community, but began to invite the fatal karma which pursues all men and women whose god is material success. England produced old James Forsyte, and the son of his heart and will, Soames, in whose delineation Galsworthy's powers reached their height; and the rebels Jolyon and Irene; the conformist Annette; the by-products, Timothy and the aunts; the wrecks and the frustrations, Val and Fleur.

But something was left behind by this new possessive class and lost, something crumbled, something rose like a heady fume dulling men and women, puzzling their hearts, and frustrating their desires, while their wills remained more powerful than ever. Responsibility to state and class they kept, and chivalry, and a sense of duty better than chivalry. Nevertheless this possessiveness, this submission to Things, the solid houses, the stocks and bonds, the responsibilities to property of the Forsytes, dimmed the sense of other gods whose altars grow cold only with peril to mankind. They neglected the Cyprian Venus, whose frustration and revenge Ashurst deplored in that exquisite story, "The Apple-Tree"—

For mad is the heart of love,  
And gold the gleam of his wing;  
And all to the spell thereof  
Bend when he makes his spring.  
All life that is wild and young  
In mountain and wave and stream,  
All that of earth is sprung,  
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;  
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne

Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!  
They turned their backs upon the gods  
whose duty it is to see that the human heart stays human. Beauty, spirituality, love, even justice which the new possessive class had once demanded, were the victims of Things. Property had achieved a dulling of sensibility, a warping away from pleasure and the healthy satisfaction of the mind, which the greed of the Forsytes, even the necessities of the world, had accomplished. Property made the Forsytes, and property chilled them. And yet these Forsytes in their own way were great. Beside them other racial types seemed lesser breeds without the law. They had the gift of character, the power of strength.

This was the puzzle of the nineteenth century, its challenge to an interpreter, which was like the challenge to the imagination of the young Shakespeare of the brilliant, full-blooded aristocrats of the Renaissance, with their gusto, their beauty, and their defiance of morality. A poet, a dramatist, a novelist was needed to attack this nineteenth century paradox, most of all a novelist, since the Forsytes were prose and their background all of England. An Englishman in England was at the heart of property; a liberal, a humanitarian, a "tender-minded" artist could sympathize and yet attack; an aristocrat could appreciate code and character; an idealist could discriminate where

a satirist might only destroy. John Galsworthy was the man.

And indeed the story of Soames Forsyte is the story of man's spirit in the English nineteenth century, wrestling with property and thrown by it at the moment of apparent victory. It is the story of a defeated spirit (for Soames lost Irene and with Irene the possibility of love and a completed life)—of a defeated spirit rising wiser, stronger, more indomitable in character, making property his servant though he could not make it his friend, until at the conclusion of that extraordinary narrative Soames's very shortcomings have been turned into the steel and fibre of a man who knows what he wants and gets it, and what he cannot have and gives it up—a stoic, not to be envied, not to be loved, but certainly to be respected and approved.

This grasp upon the moral theme of England under industrialism is the key to John Galsworthy's superiority as a novelist of character to far cleverer men, such as Arnold Bennett and G. B. Shaw, to more worldly men and more widely experienced, such as H. G. Wells and Sinclair Lewis. Undeviatingly he pursues through this elaborate process of character building the rich results of tradition until Soames, eccentric and individualist that he is, becomes the symbol of whole shadowy generations of the English middle class. Unwaveringly he searches for the effect upon man of beauty neglected, and spirituality scorned by the religion of property. And yet, though the criticism in his novels is always against the tyranny of Things, his liberal mind admits, his aristocratic nature recognizes, a great character emerging, perhaps unexpectedly, from the havoc that accompanies a too material success. No propagandist could have done this. His Forsyte Saga is a tragi-comedy with a stoic ending, as was "The Tempest," as was "Candide," as was "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."

Only in England I think could such books have been written. Proust's great study of an aristocracy decaying in the refinements of ultra-cerebration, belongs in a very different category. It is intensely French, and yet has no relationship with France at large in the century, not much indeed with Paris except as a background. The "Forsyte Saga" is intensely English, and quite as intensely upper and middle class, since to Galsworthy, humanitarian though he was, the lower classes were only shadows throwing into relief the responsible reality of his Forsyte world. And yet there is the character of a nation and of a race in the Saga. Narrow as its cross-section, the type is there. It is a national study or it is nothing, whereas Proust has only the universal validity of a Racine—the actual existence of his cerebral Paris is of little importance; the psychology is all. Not so with the Forsytes. They are geological, and have in them the secrets of racial evolution. They are not all England, yet as they go, so goes England. Like Hardy's peasants and Shakespeare's Mercutio, Hotspurs, and Falstaffs, they are so racial that they can afford to be individualists.

All this explains, I think, Galsworthy's great reputation on the continent of Europe, where he was thought to be England's foremost novelist because in him and his were to be found the living explanations of what England was in the period of her dominating greatness. This explains the award to him of the Nobel prize, which never came to Hardy. His foreign readers also saw, as some of his compatriots have failed to see, that whatever were their faults of sentiment, diffuseness, and a reach beyond the author's grasp, the novels of Galsworthy were epic in their scope and had that broad stretch of significance which, since Balzac and the Russians, we have expected of fiction that deals with mores rather than manners. This explains also, I believe, his great vogue in America, but with a difference. For here unquestionably we, whose culture and training more than our blood, have owed so much to the English tradition—we read Galsworthy for news on a grand scale of the English character, so subtly like our own while so obviously different from it. The Forsytes are potentially Americans of the age of property who stayed at home, who never sailed for Plymouth and the Hudson and the Delaware and the capes of Virginia, to break up the sense of class in the forests while the struggle for property went on.

He wrote too much. He should have let the Americans alone, for he could understand only the English aspect of them, and his fastidious ear made a jargon of their speech. He should have lived in a world where there were no magazines, with their constant urging of the established writer to write more than he wills, and their subtle moulding of his work to the stock emotions of vast audiences. He should have seen his Saga early in its length and breadth,—and gone to some Walden Pond to write it—and stopped when he had finished. I do not know whether he was a great artist, although there are passages in "The Indian Summer of a Forsyte" and in "The Apple Tree," and "In Chancery" and elsewhere, which only a consummate artist could write. Yet certainly he had that insight which is given to someone in every generation, and which, if used, explains us to ourselves. He had a message. I use that word with reluctance, for a message means usually a dogmatism, a moral, and designates that part of a book or a lecture which sticks in the memory like a lump of undigested dough. None of this in Galsworthy. Rather he is the moving finger that writes. You see in him, often through clouds of words, what the Greeks saw in Sophocles, the moral meaning of a generation. Sophocles dealt in heroes and in a superb style of heaven-sent rhetoric. Galsworthy treats of stiff old men, hiding, beneath Anglo-Saxon phlegm or a dry humor inappropriate to tragedy, the powerful prejudices, the passions, of a people heart-wrecked by their devotion to property, but become great because they identified property with the welfare of a state. Yet both Sophocles and Galsworthy are concerned with fundamental morality. And this is what gives dramatists and novelists magnitude, precisely as the power to realize, to make their problems live as a Soames, as an Irene, as a Hamlet, is what makes them novelists and dramatists.

I have said little of Galsworthy's plays because this essay is not concerned primarily with literary criticism, and for Galsworthy the stage (so I think) was only an escape for the emotions aroused by those unavoidable contradictions in a society supposedly founded on justice which stirred his humanitarian spirit to a pitch that only drama would assuage. The theatre never gave him room. It exaggerated the lesson at the expense of the

background in which the true moral lay. He saw best pageant-wise, not drama-wise. His strength, like so much English strength, was in the slow tenacity of descriptive narrative, not in quick symbols or isolated event.

Galsworthy is just dead, and America, in which he was as much honored as at home, and perhaps more widely read, may well take stock of what his insight may mean for us. For ours is a country bred in the English tradition, though intensely changed by circumstance, a country not devoid of character as the English and as Galsworthy understood character, not unaware of the code of duty, for of the Puritans who gave fibre to that code the

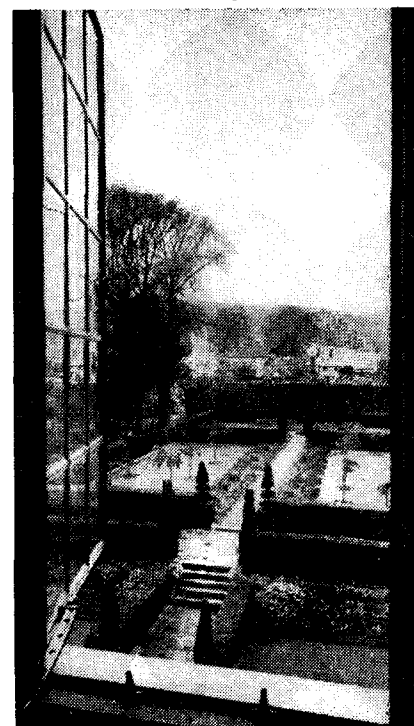
best came here, not without the desire for order which was so strong in all the Forsytes, nor the sense of fairness, nor the instinct to be humane.

Our problem has been different. We have had to contend with less rigidity of ownership, we have been able to escape many responsibilities in the easy recourse of our oppressed and our turbulent to the spaces of the West, we have been far more fertile in experiment. But to suppose that the karma which pursues all greed for Things, all obsessions with property, is to be spared us, would be unrealistic. Our karma is different. We threw out our Soames

Forsytes a generation ago—the selfish individuals, the so-called builders of American prosperity, men not too scrupulous, who believed that in making themselves they were making America, and attained a certain bad eminence of character from their loyalties so energetically if so selfishly pursued. Yet those pirate captains of the last generation of American industrialism in their way were patriots, as Soames Forsyte was a patriot.

Are there any patriots left? In our sectional blocs? Among our tariff mongers? In our local interests? Among the veterans? In Congress? Undoubtedly, but it has been months since we have heard from them. One grows skeptical. Is there any character in our new society to take the place of the old character of individualism? Is the humanitarianism which the last generation suppressed in business and exuded upon foundations and universities, more vital now that the strong men who took with the right hand and gave with the left are gone? Is the beauty which they, like Soames, forced out of their lives, and then sought, like fugitives, in pictures, and bronzes, and opera, and Tudor Gothic, where it took the form of property—is it dealt with more intelligently today? Is religion? Is love? This is what an American thinks, what he must ask, as he reads Galsworthy, seeing in the special English problem a reflection of his own. And we understand the grim sadness of Soames Forsyte at his life's end, self-critical, skeptical of the future; and we realize, as Galsworthy the idealist was forced by his own imagination to realize, that life is a series of defeats and compensations, of values frustrated to the peril of the race, of character that may emerge as a result of frustration—or may not.

The nineteenth century, liberal, progressive, hopeful, intensely possessive, was a laboratory of human nature. The books of John Galsworthy are a report of what happened in the English section, which was so much then the center of the modern world. If the reader reflects upon the story of how Soames Forsyte bought, and how he lost, Irene, who was the symbol of the "life that is wild and young" which belongs to the Cyprian alone, he may sum up the whole matter by saying that love and Irene fell victims to property, yet from their loss stoicism shaped that character which gives to society a backbone if not a heart. Where are our



VIEW FROM GALSWORTHY'S STUDY.

## Bavarian Gentians\*

By D. H. LAWRENCE

NOT every man has gentians in his house  
in Soft September, at slow, sad Michaelmas.

Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark  
darkening the day-time torch-like with the smoking blueness of Pluto's gloom,  
ribbed and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue  
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day  
torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze.  
black lamps from the halls of Dio, burning dark blue.  
giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off light,  
lead me then, lead me the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!  
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower  
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness  
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September  
to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark  
and Persephone herself is but a voice  
or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark  
of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,  
among the splendour of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the lost bride and  
her groom.

\* The following poem is to be included in "Last Poems," by D. H. Lawrence, to be issued next week by the Viking Press.