

The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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The Mechanical Mouse

In Germany this summer, a newspaper announced that Mickey Mouse was about to steal the old German fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, and called upon the Nazi government to chase the vermin out of the Reich.

Whether or not Mickey Mouse has been *verboten* in Germany, the attack was in keeping with the Nazi program of a return to the old simplicities. For the adventures of Mickey Mouse are clearly the fairy tales of a machine age. Superpenetration and excessive movement are Mickey's attributes. He goes through solids like an X ray, and transports himself in air, water, or earth by pseudo-mechanical means which an earlier age of fairy tales could scarcely have imagined. Speed is his life, and the jerky rhythm of his movements, the constant collisions, explosions, and projections, are symbolic of nervous modern man living in a whirl of mechanical forces that multiply every physical action by ten to a thousand. Naturally in such a symbolic world the body is subject to humiliating experiences—squashed, tossed up, hurled, twisted, stretched, until monsters become comic and heroes (like Mickey) mere squeaking mice. It is not the world of the Niebelungenlied to which the Nazis think they are returning.

If one compares these mechanical fairy tales with our classic examples of folk lore, the contrast is striking. There is no moral quality in Mickey except courage, though plenty of that. "Keep going" is his motto. The beauty and the wisdom of the old fairy tales are utterly absent. Nothing parallels the sleeping beauty or the glass slippers of Cinderella, there is none of the wisdom which makes Brer Rabbit and his briar patch a commentary on human nature. Furthermore, these modern folk tales are told for adults, as much as, probably more than, for children. Their composer has learned the modern lesson that most of humanity keeps some childishness through life, and the majority of mankind never grow up mentally at all. This has always been true, but now that everyone can read and spend, it is commercially important.

But though modern in this sense, these fairy tales of Mickey Mouse are really folk lore in its first stages. For all their whimsy, they are faithful, if symbolic, representations of the harsh mechanisms of the machine age. They are not beautiful because the machine age has not yet trapped

beauty. They are not wise because wisdom has not yet been put into them.

Grimm's fairy tales were in their origin, of course, no more "Aryan" or "Teutonic" than other robings of man's spirit which the Germans are claiming as their own. As the folklorists have long since proved, in their primitive beginnings they were realistic narratives of folk custom, told for adults by the symbolists of the tribe, each one an imaginative interpretation of life as it seemed to the teller. There is, for example, a whole literature of scholarship dealing with the original significance of the story of Bluebeard. The folk tales were not beautiful then, nor were they wise—no more than Mickey is beautiful and wise. These attributes came later when meaning was lost and only the story remained, mistily significant of lost beliefs, a tale for children who still possessed the primitive mind, but enriched by layer after layer of perceptions of wisdom and beauty.

The Germans are right when they resent a threatened invasion of this treasury by mechanical mice seeking new adventures. And they may be right in believing that the modern mind craves simpler humors. The wild success of "The Three Little Pigs" is evidence on their side; but would a big, bad Nazi like "The Three Little Pigs?" However they can no more suppress Mickey Mouse than they can stop the machine age. It is the most characteristic folk lore of which we are capable, and if it is good enough to last will have beauty and wisdom added to it when we make mechanism beautiful and are wise enough to control it. The clear shift of emphasis in the U. S. A., from making a living regardless of the life lived, to the values of living as an end in themselves, which is as much a part of the N. R. A. program as the recovery of profits, may be a first step toward more than the enriching of fairy tales. In the meantime, if you wish to see the folk tale of its age in the cradle, go to the nearest movie theatre.

The Ullstein "More than a Newspaper: a National Institution" could with truth Verlag

have been said of some of the publications of the great house of Ullstein which has now been *gleichgestaltet* by the Nazi régime. Indeed few publishing houses throughout the world have attained to the importance which the Ullstein Verlag has long since held, or have exerted so powerful an influence on opinions in different directions as did it. Publishers of four large circulation daily newspapers in Berlin alone, of four weeklies, and of ten monthly magazines, the Ullsteins issued journals which held sway over upper classes and workmen alike. Through them they carried on social welfare campaigns, programs for popular instruction, a travel bureau, a foreign news service, crusades of all sorts. The plant which houses them represents the last word in equipment and in comforts for the workers. No less preëminent as publishers of books than in the journalistic field, the Ullstein presses have issued some of the most important works of recent times; such books, for instance, as "All Quiet on the Western Front" and the novels of Lion Feuchtwanger. And now, in the attempt at Aryanization, the Ullsteins have been ousted from control of the organization which the energies and abilities of two generations built up. Herr Hitler has added another to the many tragedies for which he must bear the blame.



"PLEASE FORGIVE THIS MESS—GILBERT IS WRITING A SONNET."

To the Editor:

A Farmer on "The Farm,"
Notes from a Linguist

Back to the Soil

Sir: For two months I was away this summer and am only now gathering up the tag ends of what I missed. Among other things I find a review by Henry Steele Commager of "The Farm" by Louis Bromfield.

I don't know whether Mr. Bromfield's book is better than the review or not. I'm going to buy it to find out. If it is any better than the review it will have to be rather superlative.

However, there is one criticism I'd like to make. Both Mr. Bromfield and Mr. Commager seem to assume that the old American farm life has vanished and in its place is a very dreary existence lived by a lot of impoverished paupers who are of little consequence to anyone.

Now, as a matter of fact, American farm life of a pretty high character still exists. I am in a position to know something about this because I am a part of it. For more than twenty years I have lived in the country. Much of that time I have spent traveling over the Eastern half of the United States talking to other farmers and writing down what they have to say about my particular branch of farming, which is fruit growing.

I want to assure you that American farmers still enjoy quite a large measure of what has been called "gracious living" and I believe that today they are getting more out of life than any other group in the country. I believe, too, that farmers are realizing as they never did before, the fact that theirs is a peculiarly desirable type of living.

The old, independent life that my grandfather lived in Northern Ohio, is, of course, gone. (They say he drove a herd of cattle to town to buy the hall clock which is now in my brother's home.) Farmers, today, are perhaps less independent than was my grandfather but on the other hand they have a great deal more in the way of pleasures and conveniences than my grandfather had. The possession of one or more cars, a radio, an electric ice box, and other modern contraptions naturally take away part of a man's independence. Also, they add a good deal to the joy of living—with possible reservations on my part when it comes to the radio.

B. W. DOUGLASS.

Trevlac, Ind.

Languages in "Anthony Adverse"

Sir: To scatter odds and ends of other languages through his book is any writer's privilege. It often enhances the local color; it tends to cast an aura of erudition about the author; finally, it is subtly flattering to the reader.

But I rise in protest against the slapdash manner in which these foreign-language phrases are far too commonly injected. Often only one of the results is attained, and the reader is merely irritated.

America is a big country, with varying accent and idiom, yet most of us would agree in the conviction that the language put by Mr. Galsworthy into the mouths of his American characters is something never heard on land or sea, and that the artistic effect of an episode can be definitely marred thereby. One thinks too of the French and German locutions in such

beautifully written books as "The Constant Nymph" or "Dusty Answer."

Again, how easy it is to pick up a modern French novel and find sentences comparable to these: "Henri trouva Sir Jones, déjà vêtu en smoking, assis dans un rocking. Ils se donnèrent un shake-hand cordial."

What makes such blunders all the more irritating is the fact that they might so easily have been checked up. I can well believe the assertion of the publishers that "Anthony Adverse" was "four years in preparation." But why not four years and then four hours, one each with a literate native of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain? The robust tale was well worth the little extra effort.

Instances? Below are a few, taken at random. (I am not qualified to pass on the phrases in Italian or Spanish.)

"Bon chance," "quelle dommage," "taisez vous," and "pas de tout" each occurs at least twice.

"La parapluie du frère de l'empereur se presente à l'adjudant du staff." (At least three errors.)

"Anna has a young Düsseldorf, ein knabe." (Why not *einen Knaben*, or better still, *einen Jungen*?)

"Je suis sur que ce large monsieur la vous fera la grande justice." (At least four slips. Bonaparte, the "consul premier," is speaking, but of course he was a Corsican and French was not his native tongue.)

"Voilà la vraie France que persiste toujours."

Could authority be found for "Monsieur le majeur"? And just what is an "Almagne commercial avec bijouterie de Bingen"?

"Elle souffres." (Me, too.)
Mr. Allen might well have taken a leaf from the book of his hero (page 203): "He had learned when in doubt how to resort to a grammar or a dictionary."

ALFRED LOWRY.

Moorestown, N. J.

Hamilton's Romance

Sir: When an author prepares the bibliography of a biographical work he has completed, he may naturally make some slip and omit an important item. But when one writer after another commits the same error, it is about time that attention should be called to the omission. Lives of Alexander Hamilton have appeared at least at the rate of one a year recently. The latest is "An American Colossus: The Singular Career of Alexander Hamilton" by Ralph Edward Bailey. Last year Johan J. Smertenko's biography was published. The year prior Robert Irving Warshaw's "Alexander Hamilton: First American Business Man" appeared. All these volumes have bibliographies, and while they list Gertrude Atherton's novel "The Conqueror," none of them indicates that their authors know of George Alfred Townsend's ("Gath") novel "Mrs. Reynolds and Hamilton, a Romance" published in 1890 in New York from the press of E. F. Bonaventure, 31st St. and Broadway. The copy I have, which is at the disposal of the next biographer of Hamilton, is a paper backed novel of 273 pages. In it appear Jefferson, Burr, Priestley and others.

Townsend who died in 1914 was a poet, novelist and Civil War correspondent.

ALBERT MORDELL.

Philadelphia, Pa.

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

THE STRANGE LIFE OF LADY BLESSINGTON. By MICHAEL SADLER. Little, Brown. The biography of a lady of fashion and wit of the eighteenth century.

THE CHILD MANUELA. By CHRISTA WINSLOE. Farrar & Rinehart. The novel from which the picture "Mädchen in Uniform" was taken.

THE SIXTH NEW YORKER ALBUM. Harpers. The cream of this year's cartoons from the New Yorker.

This Less Recent Book:

THE ROMANTIC COMEDIANS. By ELLEN GLASGOW. Doubleday, Doran. A novel of the changing South.

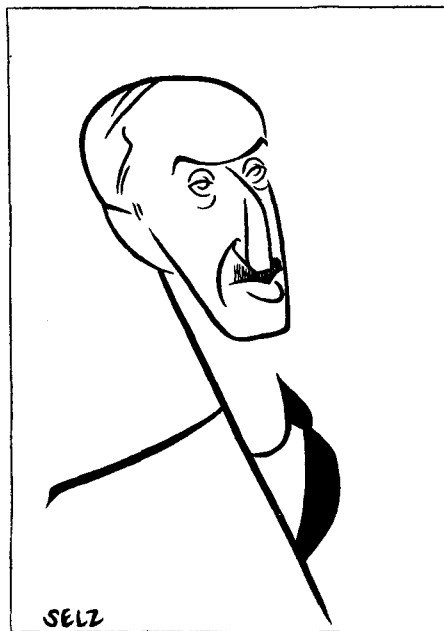
A Conducted Tour

(Continued from first page)

Guedalla has brought into fashion, and, it must be admitted, are the kind for which there is the most active demand among the reading public. It is, in fact, faithfully after the example of Mr. Guedalla's "Wellington" that M. Maurois concludes with a long list of high-sounding titles recited "in solemn tones" at a funeral.

We must admit that M. Maurois does not follow out the pageant idea with the intransigent logic of Mr. Guedalla. He does, for instance, insert one rather perfunctory section on literature, in which the things we should expect are said about the people we should expect, and one on the theatre, in which a really good point is made about the dramatic renaissance being cut short by the failure to end the scandal of the censorship by parliamentary action.

Diplomacy is the field in which M. Maurois seems most at home, and from the historian's point of view, the book would have considerably gained had he cut out everything else but the diplomatic part, and continued that down to the crisis of 1914. He is too much the pageant master



ANDRÉ MAUROIS

to penetrate very far below the surface—he fails, for instance, to bring out the decisive importance of the abortive Bjorkoe treaty between Germany and Russia, and he is blind to the significance of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in enabling Japan to fall on Russia and to prepare for the collapse of that Western civilization that Peter the Great had imposed on the half of two continents.

But M. Maurois has read his authorities, and though he is inclined to quote at a length that becomes a little tedious, at times, he provides his readers with an agreeable spectacle of the diplomatic puppets performing their tragi-comedy, though hardly of the wires by which they were pulled. Still, he who wants to know what was done, without greatly bothering why, can hardly do better than follow him as a guide.

We wish we could say the same about the parts of the book that deal with British domestic and imperial history. It is perhaps too much to expect a gentleman of France to take much interest in these matters, but in that case it is surely better to refrain from writing about them, or at least to check every statement by authorities, so that if not the whole truth, at least nothing but the truth is set down.

There was a saying during the Boer War, that South Africa was the grave of reputations. It would be unfortunate were M. Maurois to be judged by this text. For instance, we come across the astounding statement that the great Boer trek of 1836 was "headed by an old farmer named Kruger," the father of Oom Paul. Where M. Maurois got this piece of information about the most epochal event in South African history baffles conjecture. It would certainly have surprised that obscure burgher, Caspar Kruger, to know that he, and not Pretories, Potgieter, or Piet Retief, was the Moses of that Exodus.

Again, the first Boer War is recorded in the sentence, "the Boers repulsed the

British at Majuba Hill and Gladstone weakly yielded." One would hardly gather from this that Gladstone concluded peace with the Boers on precisely the terms that had been proposed to them, and that they had not had time to answer, when Colley forced their hands by the insensate folly of his Majuba offensive.

Next we have the bare and groundless assertion that Kruger "wisely refused to concede the franchise to the Uitlanders because it was the British plan to swamp the Boer electorate and make the two republics" vote for annexation to the Empire. In what way the Uitlander franchise could have turned a single vote in the Orange Free State, M. Maurois does not explain, while as for the Transvaal, it is a matter of simple fact that the British proposals could not possibly have had the effect of giving a Uitlander majority, or anything like it, in the Raadzaal.

We now pass on to the second Boer War, about which we find the following statement:

Within two months [apparently from May 1901, though any other two months might conceivably be pressed into the service] 4,000 prisoners were captured, and as there remained hardly 16,000 Boers under arms, the end of operations was within sight.

On this it is perhaps sufficient comment to say that the number of burghers who actually laid down their arms at the end of operations was exactly 21,256, and that this did not include a number of Cape Dutchmen who managed to get back to their farms without surrendering at all.

In dealing with English domestic politics it is easy to cite instances of the same slipshod recklessness of statement. Lord Haldane, who is more often referred to by the irritating nickname of Schopenhauer, is made into a Balliol man, for the purpose, apparently, of accounting for his sympathy with Milner; the Lords are made to reject Mr. Birrell's Education Bill, which they did not—it was the Commons who rejected the Lords' amendment; reference is made to the "hundred suffrages" of the Irish Home Rule group, whereas its numbers never exceeded 86.

A disproportionate amount of space is devoted to the petty intrigues that accompanied the formation of the Liberal Cabinet in 1905, but practically the whole of what that Cabinet did, or failed to do, in the all-important task of Social Reform, is allowed to go by the board. Old age pensions receive a casual mention, *en passant*; the great struggle over the Licensing Bill of 1908, which the Lords really did reject, does not even get that; the election of 1910 is supposed to be on a straight question of the Lords' right to reject a Budget, and the at least equal dominance of the fiscal issue is ignored; finally, M. Maurois appears to be quite unconscious of the fact that the real crux of the Liberal Irish bargaining after that election was not Home Rule, but the right to coerce Ulster.

M. Maurois would surely have been well advised if he had either avoided the thorny subject of British politics altogether, or had devoted more care and reading to it than he has seen fit to do. This part of his work, in addition to its incompleteness and unreliability, has not even the zest and easy flow that we expect from him. It would seem as if he had tried to write about this particular camel without even the formality of a visit to his enclosure.

To sum up: our advice to the reader is to select and take the gossip, the character sketches, and the diplomatic chronicles of M. Maurois thankfully for what they can give him, which is a pleasant conducted tour over the surface of an epoch whose most attractive characteristics did, after all, lie on the surface. And that, no doubt, is what most readers want. To lay bare the forces that were driving that generation to destruction, may recall a little too vividly the epitaph;

Ye passers by, behold & see!
Such as I was, so now are ye;
Such as I am, so shall ye be;
Then in good time be warned by me!

Esmé Wingfield-Stratford is the author of "Those Earnest Victorians."

A Chicago Family Saga

WITHIN THIS PRESENT. By Margaret Ayer Barnes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

MARGARET AYER BARNES'S literary career has been startlingly successful. Her first novel, "Years of Grace," published in 1930, became a best-seller immediately on publication and remained one throughout that year. In 1931 the book was selected as the Pulitzer Prize novel and went steadily on its best-selling way. With this one novel the author's name blazed across the country, and she became as well known in a few months as the normal successful novelist does after many years. Following "Years of Grace," "Westward Passage" duplicated, to only a slightly lesser degree, the popularity of its widely read predecessor.

It is not far to seek for the qualities in Mrs. Barnes's work that account for its vogue. The fundamental one is what might be called a positive attitude toward life. There is no negativism, no defeatism, in these records of American experience. Mrs. Barnes may be writing about people lost for the time being in the contemporary sea, but she stands outside their confusions and their doubts and seems to sense some scheme beyond the moment. Behind the chaos through which her men and women plunge, a pattern clearly shows. We have had in recent years plenty of novelized pictures of the beautiful and damned, the dissipated and depressed, the lost generations; we have had, too, the happy-happy novels and eyes turned away from things not good to see; but it is the outstanding mark of Mrs. Barnes's work that while she avoids no necessary facing of the tawdry temporal *mise-en-scène* she retains a sturdy faith in the ultimate rightness of human nature, which, flattered to weakness by success, nevertheless knows strength in the pinch of ill fortune.

The American in Mrs. Barnes's novels is more than mere background. In each of her works she is concerned with the careful geographic and historical setting, but, beyond this, and more importantly, she seeks in each character to find the essential qualities bred, out of the time and place that mark him as that distinctive, if mixed, character, an American. Where she succeeds best in characterization there could be no transplanting; her Chicagoans could never be found in Berlin or London; they have been fed on their own environs. Lastly in generalization, there is the story element which this author handles in the pleasingly old-fashioned way that takes account of the reader's interest. Her books, which are long, move slowly in their narrative and invite to leisured evenings outside the hurry of the day.

Mrs. Barnes's latest work deals with Chicago during the years 1914-1933. In a brief foreword she acknowledges indebtedness to the daily papers of the period, to Frederick Lewis Allen's "Only

Yesterday," and to the many friends whose recollections "confirmed my incredulous memory of how foolish and how tragic we had all been 'within this present.'" The novel is full-peopled, carrying three generations, attenuated in the third remove, of a large family, from the sure, safe days before the war to the disaster that still swirls about our feet. The success and the pride of the Sewalls is based upon their banking business. For some of them this is a passion, for some a mission, for others it merely provides the way of living, and for still others it is a day-taking nuisance. While the plot centers primarily about Sally Sewall, her love, her marriage, separation, and other love, the business background is felt, powerful and ominous, behind the individual personalities engrossed in their own givings and takings. With so many people in such eventful years there are naturally stories within stories, too complex for a retelling. Within a circle as large as this, there are enough different types to show the variety of responses to the pressure, from every conceivable angle, of the vicissitudes of these momentous years.

"Within this Present" sheds about its story that faint, nostalgic glow which comes from the close past, near enough still to be amusing, far-away enough already to be sad. The narrative is not as sure as in "Years of Grace," being interrupted by not-too-well integrated historical comments and disquisitions on the theory and practice of banking. In the end as in the beginning, however, the story is the thing. Margaret Ayer Barnes tells us tales about ourselves and who has ever been able to withstand the lure of his inimitable past?

To the Ladies

IT'S UP TO THE WOMEN.

Franklin D. Roosevelt. New York: Erick A. Stokes Company. 1933. \$1.25.

Reviewed by SUZANNE LA FOLLETTE

MRS. ROOSEVELT is the American Daisy Ashford. Not since "The Young Visitors" has there appeared a book as naively confident about life and as distantly related to it as "It's Up to the Women." The First Lady, by her own testimony, has "had opportunities for mixing with a great many people in a great many parts of the world," and as inevitably happens, she has brought back just what she took with her: an eager and singularly incurious mind; a mind which interprets the "what" of things in terms of the comforting catchwords which every well bred lady should know and thus avoids any tiresome misgivings about the "why."

"I have touched," she says, "on the things which to me are the most important in the necessary adjustments which we must all make to life today." And these things are precisely the things which have



THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE
A Currier and Ives Print (1871) illustrating the description in the opening scene of "Within This Present."