

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

OUBLEDAY, DORAN has brought out in a particularly nice-looking volume "The Poems of Richard Aldington." Since the War Mr. Aldington has developed into one of our most valuable ironic novelists. His poetry has been more or less forgotten. A longer poem of such beauty as "A Dream in the Luxembourg," of 1930, reminds us, however, that his poetic faculties have not failed. I remember the author giving me a copy of this poem in Paris some three years ago, and my interest in the fact that, after all sorts of disaster and disillusionment connected with the War, this love poem seemed to speak with remarkable freshness and ardor. In fact, contrast it with one of Aldington's best earlier poems, "Childhood"—one of the longest of that pre-War period-and how almost unbearably bitter appears the earlier work. No, Aldington lost much during the War; the impress of those experiences cannot well be overemphasized; but after the War he found a new release of energy such as has come to few who have passed through the flame. And he found a person-perhaps that is part of the secret.

This is a large book. It is a complete collection of Mr. Aldington's poems, and many of these have not been published in America. A few have never before appeared in a book. Mr. Aldington furnishes an interesting brief introduction for the volume. It is twenty years since the first three poems in the book were published in Chicago, in Miss Monroe's Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.

Men and women are not distinguished from one another only by the quality of mind, but also by the quality of their feelings and the quality of their senses. And all these qualities must be present in poetry, though I don't for a moment believe there is any fixed or ideal ratio.

So Mr. Aldington in his introduction—a full-blooded definition of poetry with which I am very much in agreement. The extremely modern poetry seems to me to be too completely an intellectual affair. It was not so, just before the War. Poetry was then written by young men who felt intensely both the beauty of the world and its horror. And they expressed themselves explicitly and forcefully. It was perfectly easy to understand them. And with all their faults they possessed an exuberance that seemed the sign of a great age being renewed, of an Elizabethan second coming. Which was not to be.

EARLY AN IMAGIST

The imagism of that time certainly did not eschew vivid sense impressions and a considerable liveliness. Witness the late Miss Lowell, witness the exciting quality of John Gould Fletcher's first "Irradiations," witness Richard Aldington's wellknown, "The Faun Sees the Snow for the First Time":

Zeus,
Are the halls of heaven broken up
That you flake down upon me
Feather-strips of marble?

Dis and Styx!
When I stamp my hoof
The frozen-cloud-specks jam into the cleft
So that I reel upon two slippery points....

Fool, to stand here cursing When I might be running!

Much of Mr. Aldington's work is fluidly elusive. But again, as in "Rhapsody in a Third-Class Carriage," he can be as stricken by the ugliness of things as the most unsparing realist:

Deadness of English winter, dreariness, cold sky over provincial towns, mist.

Melancholy of undulating trams solitary jangling through muddy streets, narrowness, imperfection, dullness, black extinguisher over English towns; mediocre women in dull clothes—their nudity a disaster—heavy cunning men (guts and passbooks), relics of gentry, workmen on bicycles, puffy small whores, baby carriages, shops, newspapers, bets, cinemas, allotments....

So, he seems to say, it is better to muse upon the white fingers of Mænads, it is better to make a phantasmagoria like "A Fool i' the Forest," and transport a split personality to Greece, it is better even to

translate romance poems or the imaginary voyages of Cyrano de Bergerac and the letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great. Partly tough-minded modern, partly renaissance dreamer, Richard Aldington is both among the best poets of his time, and yet—somehow—more remote. It is possible indeed, that he may be remembered more for his novels than for his poetry. But the accent of his verse is that of the born artist, and will always delight lovers of the beauty of the word.

OLD BABYLONIA

Gilgamesh was a king in ancient Babylon; and now one of the world's oldest epics, which concerns him, has been translated by William Ellery Leonard into English verse. The book is called "Gilgamesh" and is published by the Viking Press. Mr. Leonard is, of course, famous for the novel in sonnets entitled "Two Lives" and for various volumes of shorter poems. He who originally wrote of Gilgamesh was an unknown poet who set forth his work in cuneiform script on twelve large clay tablets. A photograph of one of these is used as a frontispiece to the book. All the fragments of the tablets are now in the British Museum.

It is interesting that, in this poem, a thousand years before the writing of Genesis, the Semitic folk-tales of the flood and the tree of life and the evil serpent were set down. William Ellery Leonard's rendering of the original, in free rhythms, is based upon the German version of *Dr. Hermann Ranke*.

What the tablets yield is the story of a mighty ruler in Uruk, for contest with whom the great goddess, Aruru, fashioned another like him, one Engidu. Upon this man's being sent to earth, one of the sacred prostitutes of the temple of Astarte was made the instrument of his initiation into human life. He meets Gilgamesh and they become friends, and both go to destroy the monster Khumbaba in the sacred cedar-forest. Next, after Gilgamesh has excited the wrath of Astarte and she has sent against them a bull-ofheaven, they destroy the bull. Then sickness seizes Engidu. He dies; and Gilgamesh mourns him six days and six nights. Gilgamesh then goes to the mountain Mashu at the earth's end. He passes its guardians, the scorpion-men, and finally, after a dark journey, comes to a grove of the gods. There he finds Siduri, the divine cup-bearer. Her, and later Ur-Shanabi, Gilgamesh questions as to Life and Death. He and Ur-Shanabi sail to find Utnapishtim, the "far-one." The greater part of Utnapishtim's reply to Gilgamesh's questioning-like other sections of the narrative—is lost. From what remains we can only piece out a rather ambiguous answer to Gilgamesh's inquiries concerning death. But Utnapishtim's description of the Flood is very good. Finally Gilgamesh journeys back to "ramparted Uruk" with "Ur-Shanabi the shipman," and eventually talks with the spirit of his friend Engidu conjured from the depths of the earth.

This is a curious ancient legend—incomplete but well worth preserving, and Mr. Leonard has rendered it in a truly poetic fashion, with the scholarship for which he has always been notable.

DE RÉGNIER

Bruce Humphries, Inc., of Boston, publishes Flora Brent Hamilton's translations of poems from "La Sandale Ailée" of Henri de Régnier. When I was speaking of Mr. Aldington above, and incidentally mentioned Amy Lowell, it should have reminded me that Amy wrote one of the first articles on de Régnier that I ever read. It was included in her "Six French Poets." De Régnier is one of the greatest of the Symboliste poets. He has approved of Mrs. Hamilton's translations. With Gallic gallantry, he remarks: "Beneath the English verse, I find again the French verse in its sense and in its sonority, as though its splendor confronted me in a mirror.' Just the same, I hold it pretty impossible to transpose the delicacies of the French language into our more barbarous tongue, and certainly in poetry the task is an almost insuperable one. I should say that Mrs. Hamilton has succeeded in giving us a notion as to the content and form of M. De Régnier's "The Wingéd Sandal"; but that only.



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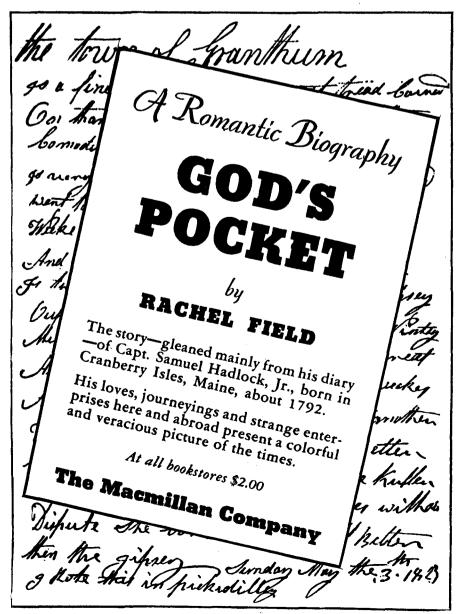
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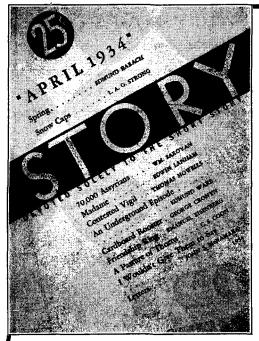
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A CLUB PROGRAM

NE of the requests for a club program which we have not yet answered stipulates that the suggestions for reading that we make be gathered from books off the press since September, 1933.

Our literary club wishes to study during the next club year [writes L. W. R. of Shreveport, La.] a few outstanding current books, to include some biography, some worthwhile fiction, and some books dealing with right-up-to-now problems of our fast changing times.

Keeping up with the Joneses of government is a difficult task in these days of rapidly developing crises and policies, and it would be a courageous soul who would hazard the statement that a book issued in one month on political or international affairs might not be outdated the next. Still there are several works which a club might read to advantage to get general orientation toward the problems of the day. Such, for instance, are THE UNITED STATES IN WORLD AFFAIRS (Harpers), by W. O. Scroggs and Charles Merz, edited by Walter Lippmann, and G. D. H. Cole's THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S REVIEW OF EUROPE TODAY (Knopf), both of which present a bird's-eve view of the international scene. President Roosevelt's on our way (Day), a collection of addresses and state papers, affords a report in the words of the Executive himself of his first year's policies. Perhaps the most striking thing about the volume is the vividness with which it makes evident how much of the effectiveness of the President's radio speeches has been due to the manner of their delivery. An interesting footnote to Mr. Roosevelt's discussion of his program is furnished by THE NEW DEALERS (Simon & Schuster), by Unofficial Observer, a portrait gallery of the men who are helping to carry it out. With these books might be read Mauritz Hallgren's SEEDS OF REVOLT (Knopf), which brings into focus the underlying social and economic trends of present-day American civilization, and MY BATTLE (Houghton Mifflin), by Adolf Hitler, a cloudy and confused book, but one in which are set forth the ideas directing the dictatorship that presents so great a menace to the entire world. Hot off the press are MERCHANTS OF DEATH (Dodd, Mead), by Engelbrecht and Hanighen, and George Seldes's IRON, BLOOD AND PROFITS (Harpers), both of them horrifying indictments of the international "racket" in the arms industry. The foregoing, with Hoffman Nickerson's can we limit war? (Stokes), should give the club members some "feel" for the problems confronting our society in these parlous times.

L. W. R. gives us no indication as to whether her club wishes to confine itself to American fiction or not, but as we shall publish next week a list covering English and continental novels as well as American we shall confine ourselves here to the latter. The Shreveport club will probably want to sample various types of work. To begin with it might take up novels of the soil, and by way of introduction to that group of tales, read Louis Bromfield's THE FARM (Harpers), a romanticized autobiography which personally we consider the best book Mr. Bromfield has written. Arthur Pound's ONCE A WILDERNESS (Reynal & Hitchcock) and Nola Henderson's this much is mine (Smith & Haas) give authentic portrayals of life on the farm which would interestingly supplement his book. From these stories the club might turn for contrast to examples of the fiction which is concerned with the proletarian struggle, such as Albert Halper's sprawling but effective UNION SQUARE (Viking) and Robert Cantwell's just issued THE LAND OF PLENTY (Farrar & Rinehart), interesting both as an example and a warning. Incidentally, it would be worth while to read together with these books Lauren Gilfillan's I WENT TO PIT COLLEGE (Viking), the account of a young girl's actual experiences in a Pennsylvania coal mining community. For regional fiction the club might turn to Thames Williamson's WOODS COLT (Harcourt, Brace), a tale of the Ozarks, and T. S. Stribling's UNFINISHED CATHE-DRAL (Doubleday, Doran), the last of a trilogy on the South. And finally, just to see what the author of the once revolu-

tionary this side of paradise is doing ten

years after, it might read Scott Fitzgerald's tender is the night (Scribners), a novel whose flashes of brilliance make the more evident the unsatisfactory nature of the whole. Stephen Vincent Benét's JAMES SHORE'S DAUGHTER (Doubleday, Doran), is a skilful, well-written tale, with some good character drawing and an interesting setting, and could well be added to the list.

As to biography the club should find extremely interesting Louis Adamic's THE NATIVE'S RETURN (Harpers), a delightful volume recounting an American immigrant's visit to Yugoslavia and discovery of his own country; Edith Wharton's A BACKWARD GLANCE (Appleton-Century), THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE B. TOKLAS (Harcourt, Brace), in reality the autobiography of that remarkable personality, Gertrude Stein, and Matthew Josephson's ROBBER BARONS (Harcourt, Brace), biographies of great American industrialists and railway men of the last century. Here, too, as with fiction, we have confined ourself to American writers.

STORIES OF COLLEGE LIFE

J. K. S. of Chicago, Ill., writes: "Aside from stover at yale and not to eat; not FOR LOVE, I don't know of any good college stories. I would appreciate your sending me some titles.'

One of the most delightful of all college stories, still as entertaining as when we first read it in our own undergraduate years, is Owen Wister's PHILOSOPHY 4 (Macmillan). It does all the things that the right-minded adult ought to deprecate-casts disfavor on the grind (though we don't know why anyone must approve the grind as opposed to the more intelligent scholar), invests the scapegraces with a halo, and makes the end and aim of the youthful student's college efforts nothing better than sliding neatly out of college restrictions, but it is an immensely diverting tale. It is placed at Harvard which years ago had another excellent chronicler in Charles M. Flandrau. We believe his book, harvard episodes (Copeland & Day), is out of print, but it is doubtless still to be found in libraries. Clever short stories, Mr. Flandrau's were, with rather a cynical slant as we remember them. Robert Nathan's first book, PETER KINDRED (Duffield), has a hero who goes to Phillips Andover and Harvard, and who ends by marrying a Radcliffe girl (there once was a Harvard song about "the only, only, only man who went to a Radcliffe tea"; we wonder who remembers it now). Yale is the background for Meade Minnigerode's THE BIG YEAR (Putnam), and Stephen Vincent Benét's THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM (Doubleday, Doran), has chapters laid at Yale. Scott Fitzgerald's THIS SIDE OF PARADISE (Scribners), over a decade ago now, placed Princeton squarely in the tide of the new freedom of the younger generation. An entertaining college tale, which has been extremely popular, is George Fitch's amusing AT GOOD OLD SIWASH (Little, Brown), a portrayal of life at a Middle Western coeducational college.

THE POST-BELLUM SOUTH

And now we come to the question of A. L. L. of Willoughby, O.:

Do you have a book relative to the existing conditions of the South which followed directly after the Civil War?

THE TRAGIC ERA (Houghton Mifflin), by Claude G. Bowers, now Ambassador to Spain, but still a newspaper man when his book won the Pulitzer Prize, would seem to be the very volume indicated if a short survey is desired. Mr. Bowers subtitles his book, which is sharply critical of the Northern policy of reconstruction, "the revolution after Lincoln." If A. L. L. wants to go into the period and its history further, he should read Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer's history of the united states SINCE THE CIVIL WAR (Macmillan), of which the first volume, covering the years 1865-1868, takes up conditions in the South in detail.

"CASTILIAN"

William Rose Benét whom we asked in behalf of J. H. E. of New Rochelle, N. Y. upon what Velasquez portrait Elinor Wylie's poem "Castilian," was based, tells us that the poem had no specific bearing.

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