

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

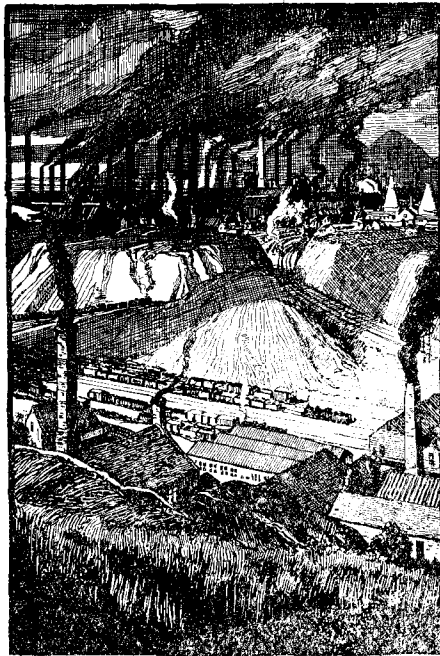
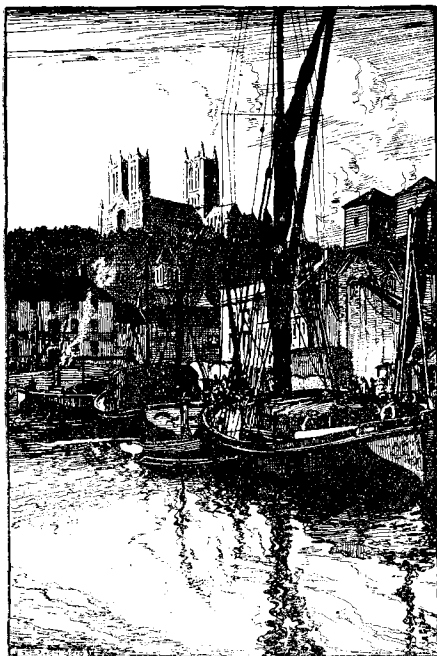
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ENGLAND HAS ITS CATHEDRALS AS WELL AS ITS FACTORIES  
Illustrations by Stephen Reid for "English Journey."

### The England of Mr. Priestley's Time

ENGLISH JOURNEY. By J. B. Priestley.  
New York: Harper & Bros. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

IN the autumn of 1933, Mr. Priestley set out to make a tour of England. He traveled westward from London to Bristol, and then northward through all sorts of regions, dialects, and industries, until he reached East Durham and the Tees; and came home in cold and dirty weather. The result of this thorough tour is "English Journey," which Mr. Priestley's compatriots have called, with that unanimity we have come to expect from them, the best book he has ever written. This is one of the rare occasions on which we can agree with them.

There is a piece of dialogue in Somerset Maugham's "The Alien Corn" which I will take leave to borrow as a preface to this review. "Do you feel at home in England?" "No," I said, "but then I don't feel at home anywhere else." In his last chapter Mr. Priestley remarks that he does not feel at home anywhere else; the rest of the book is taken up with showing how very difficult it is to feel at home there. Other writers have said the same thing, of course, but their reasons have been esthetic ones. Mr. Priestley's reasons are economic.

Not that he is an economist; far from it. But he could not help observing, during his travels, that the English working classes were engaged in "an obstacle race, with the most monstrous and gigantic obstacles, but you may see them straining and panting, still in the race." And his whole book is filled with a kind of horrified resignation at such a state of affairs. It is not a passionate book. It is not passionate, I imagine, because Mr. Priestley has a Liberal mind, and the Liberal mind ceased being passionate some years before the late war. But this kind of mind is apt to be better at observing than any other, and the importance of "English Journey" lies in its observation.

When he is not writing fiction, Mr. Priestley is very much the Yorkshireman, he has a natural inclination towards the grim side of things. He did not set forth from London in an impartial spirit. He

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### The Turn of the Wheel

THE BALLIOLS. By Alec Waugh. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

I HAVE felt quite encouraged by reading this book—not so much as to the state of English literature (though the contemplation of so brilliant a brotherhood as the Waughes cannot fail to give encouragement on that ground), but as to my own status. For there are indications in this volume that in the long process of time I may again be a hero. I was a hero once, as was everybody who could answer the question, "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" with the ringing asseveration, "I fought for King and Country." But recent literature has more than suggested that one's part in the war, if any, should be decently glossed over, for Daddy's admission that he joined the army has been more than likely to draw from the younger generation the contemptuous retort, "What a boob you must have been!"

Mr. Waugh gives some hope to the ex-heroes that perhaps the cycle of cynicism as to their exploits and motives has run its full course, and that a more charitable view of both may be coming into vogue. Kitchener's army, he thinks, "was for the most part recruited from men who believed that an honorable obligation had been laid upon them not to desert their friends." He goes even farther and asserts that those who fought did so to preserve "the tradition and dignity of English life"—a sentiment somewhat reminiscent of the final curtain of "Cavalcade." That is to say that Mr. Waugh, in this war novel (for though it begins before the war and closes long after it, that is what it is) steers a pretty sensible midway course between the heroics of the earlier war novelists and the cynicism of the later ones.

It all started, he tells us, as a sort of essay in belles lettres, determined upon on his thirty-fifth birthday when he was impressed, and perhaps depressed, by the solemn reflection that he had reached the halfway house of man's terrestrial journey. He had intended to make a sort of "survey" of life as it used to be and life as it now is. But the moment he began he found himself thinking in terms of in-

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## Howells: The Genteel Radical

BY BERNARD SMITH

HOWELLS'S surviving friends are reconciled to the thought that he is little honored among the critics of the generation that has grown up since his death. We may wonder, then, how they feel on finding in a book by one of the younger Marxists—Granville Hicks's "The Great Tradition"—a warm and appreciative study of his novels. They are, no doubt, shocked. Howells would not be, if he were alive.

That is perhaps as good an indication as any of what small service his friends have been to his reputation. They have praised him for the wrong things; they have defended the indefensible; and they have ignored or misrepresented those of his qualities that truly entitle him to sympathy and esteem. For a while—indeed, for many years after Gertrude Atherton's energetic attack upon him, early in the century—it looked as though his stature would decline to the point of invisibility. The animosity of the anti-puritans during the campaign against gentility before and after the war destroyed his hold upon American belles-lettrestic taste and thought, and thus helped to blot his name from the confinement of the notebook. If today we are beginning to evaluate him more intelligently, thanks are not due to his friends and companions, the respectable people who surrounded him during his lifetime, but to Parrington's third volume, to Lewisohn's "Expression in America," and to Mr. Hicks. This is hardly the kind of men whom tradition has accustomed us to think of in connection with the "dean."

There can be no question of the justice of the criticisms made by the anti-puritans. Howells was ultra-genteel in all matters pertaining to sexual morality; he was squeamish when faced with dirt, pain, crime, bestiality—all the ingredients in the life of a large part of both the rural and the urban masses. He, the exponent of realism and polemicist for truth, shrank from such realities and such truths. To that extent his fiction was weak and a false expression of this, or any other, country. He thus belied his own critical doctrines, sapped their strength with absurd qualifications, and made it difficult for the realists who came after him to win the acceptance of the reading public. The anti-puritan critics of ten, fifteen, and twenty years ago were not merely irreproachable in their charges against him on these grounds, but actually advanced the cause of literary honesty and freedom by disabusing the general mind of the notion that he represented the last word in fidelity to nature and in esthetic purpose.

Unfortunately, they went too far. They portrayed that side of him as the total man, minimized some of his other and more important sides, and overlooked completely what may in the future be considered most significant in him—his criticism of the social base of the American community. They were guilty of this because they themselves were uncritical of, often content with, the drift of society—and therefore they could not understand him, could not understand even the relation of his gentility to his other characteristics. As a result there was popularized a distorted conception of his contributions to the nation's letters, and this was nothing less than a crime against the finest tradition in our literary history.

What did those who were regarded as his friends do about it? (It is best to speak in the past tense, for there are not enough of them left to matter much.) They replied by praising the genteel in him, or at least defending it, and by sneering at Mencken, Dreiser, Lewis, Anderson, Dos Passos, and the others who stand for twentieth century realism! They attempted to perpetuate his moral viewpoint as the ideal *par excellence* of the novelist and they shuddered vehemently at the works of his critics and successors! That was stupid, you say? It was more than that. It was the logical reaction of men who were really Howells's worst traducers. They were the conventional pedagogues and ministers who had in the first place secured his appeal and power solely on the fact of his gentility and had kept silent about precisely those elements in his writings that will make him live. They above all were respectable middle-class gentlemen who were well satisfied with the social order and had, to put it mildly, no interest in Howells's criticism of it. On them, consequently, rests most of the responsibility for the oblivion that for so long threatened him. They collaborated beautifully with his enemies to bury him.

The three critics who have recently studied Howells with some sense of proportion have dealt mainly with his novels. Parrington found in them the liberalism, the sympathy with the "little man" and hatred of plutocracy, he sought in all writing, and he applauded, while at the same time pointing to their "Victorian squeamishness." It is a thoroughly decent, sane essay. Lewisohn looked rather for esthetic virtues and found them in abundance together with the familiar sexual timidity, and he did not forget to analyzing the latter in pay his respects to the former. It is a pleasing instance of one good craftsman honoring another—honoring, moreover, the other's intelligence and insight into the manners of his neighbors. Hicks discovered in them the critique of indus-

## This Week

FOR TO BEHOLD AT DUSK  
By KIMBALL FLACCUS

MODERN AMERICAN PROSE  
Edited by CARL VAN DOREN

Reviewed by William Rose Benét

BOY AND GIRL TRAMPS OF AMERICA  
By THOMAS MINEHAN

Reviewed by Wallace I. Goldsmith

AN ENQUIRY INTO CERTAIN NINETEENTH CENTURY PAMPHLETS  
By JOHN CARTER and GRAHAM POLLARD

Reviewed by Chauncey B. Tinker

TALE WITHOUT END  
By LILO LINKE

Reviewed by Arthur Ruhl

THE EXPLORATION OF WESTERN AMERICA  
By E. W. GILBERT

Reviewed by Allan Nevins

BEALE STREET  
By GEORGE W. LEE

Reviewed by Jonathan Daniels

## Next Week or Later

JOHN KEATS  
By LEONARD BACON



trial capitalism by which we are coming to test Howells's mental calibre. He discusses, of course, the problem of moral bias, but goes beyond Parrington in his perception of the naïveté of Howells's social critique. In his final estimate of the man we are given one of the most interesting of all attempts to do Howells justice.

Yet each of the three essays is imperfect, simply because they concentrate upon the novels. With all their virtues—skilful construction, ease of style, urbanity, irony, humanity, sharp dissent from the ideals and practices of our commercial world—they are not good novels. They are dull. Howells's evasion of the unpleasant realities took the blood, bone, and muscle out of them. Their people are unnatural in their moments of strong passion; their greatest dramas, their fiercest conflicts, are dissipated in feeble, unconvincing solutions, imposed according to the amenities of Boston. Even Howells's style did not lend itself readily to the novel: it was too urbane and too finely ironical and reflective.

He was at his best in his criticism. His novels may soon seem unreadable, but there are articles and essays of his that might have been written yesterday by one of the "advance-guard." He was by training and temperament a critic and commentator. Most of his little sketches, such as those which padded out his "Literature and Life," are trivial and rightly forgotten, but there are residues in that and other volumes that compose a solid, lasting, and valuable part of America's poor critical library. We find there that at the same time that he set down his baleful strictures on offending the sensibilities of the maiden reader, and at the same time that he wrote guilelessly of the "smiling aspects" of American life, he created a body of theory on realism and social democracy that had a beneficent influence on this country's literary philosophy during a crucial formative period. No trace remains of the irrational moral inhibitions he upheld, but there is a wealth of evidence that the ideas he enunciated on the duty of the novelist to scrutinize his native material and to surrender himself to the commonality are flourishing and are stimulating the best of our younger talents. Is it reasonable to harp on dead faults and neglect living excellences? And is it reasonable to dismiss a man who—irrespective of theory and simply as a person of repute and persuasive style—helped educate the public to an appreciation of the moderns and the giants of realism? One may recall only what is after all very well known—that he encouraged Stephen Crane and championed, against provincialism and prejudice, Tolstoy. How many of the contemporary critics whom we so solemnly read and discuss can claim as much for immortality?

At the heart of his critical writing was his opposition to the development of industrial capitalism. It is impossible to understand him or his work without recognizing that life-long disgust with the spread of mass poverty concurrently with the growth of the privileges of a minority. In his youth and early manhood it took the form of a somewhat dim humanitarianism; later it was inoculated with single-tax doctrines and populism; but in his maturity it became outspoken socialism. There is no secret about it; everyone who knows Howells knows this. Then why has it been befogged and disregarded? D. G. Cooke, in his treatise on Howells's work, spoke vaguely of a "doctrine of equality of experience" and an "American tradition of social equality." Why gloss over the obvious with such nice-Nellie ambiguities?

They create difficulties where there should be none. Howells's criticism is clear and consistent once his socialism is acknowledged.

For there was no division between his criticism of life and his criticism of literature. There should never be one in the great critic. Howells said:

I have never been able to see much difference between what seemed to me Literature and what seemed to me Life. If I did not find life in what professed to be literature, I disabled its profession, and possibly from this habit, now inveterate with me, I am never quite sure of life unless I find literature in it. . . . I do not wish to part them.

He seldom did part them, and surely we cannot do so. What he had to say about the "Chicago anarchists" is as much a part of his literary criticism as his remarks on the prose of Oliver Wendell Holmes are of his conception of good and evil.

Gentility is in his criticism as well as in his novels—in a sense more so, for it is stated more blatantly. It is well to see it and exorcise it, but our doing so must not permit us to obscure what exists beside

it. What was the source of his gentility? He came from Ohio, a pioneer settlement that was not the savage, lawless, unmoral place that Lewis Mumford pictured as the typical frontier in "The Golden Day." It was a piece of New England, sober, industrious, and puritanic. Add to this influence the influence of his home, permeated with the mood of mystical "Swedenborgian fleshlessness," and Howells's prudery becomes entirely comprehensible. He was a fit subject for Boston when he arrived there in his early twenties, and when he found there the culture, the temper, the manners he admired, he gave himself to it unreservedly and was stamped genteel for life.

Gentility became an ingredient of his idealism. The civilization of Boston-Cambridge-Concord seemed to him the highest, the best, the most desirable yet attained by mankind. Nothing in it jarred, nothing was inharmonious. How could he abstract from the whole one of its inherent qualities? Because he couldn't and didn't want to, Victorian morals accompanied learning, goodness, peace, neighborliness, and comfort in his dream of a social goal. He carried it over into his socialism. Since he believed the Massachusetts civilization to be the ultimate, he wanted everyone to participate in it, everywhere in the United States to be like it. He wanted the masses to be freed from wage slavery and get the opportunity to struggle up to a comparable culture. It was a childish, a ridiculous dream, no doubt. It was also, in a way, noble, and on account of it we can forgive him his gentility.

In the light of this we can penetrate better the meaning of such a book as his "Literary Friends and Acquaintances." That rhapsody on Boston, that silly paean of adoration of every writer in Boston, whether genius or scribbler, was essentially a picture of a society he thought adorable. We today may laugh; we know that in reality it was grossly different from the way Howells saw it. But he saw it myopically, in its loveliest aspects, and his picture of it makes it certainly a more livable place, for men of his environment and aspiration, than any other in the country. And we must remember again that he wanted the most vulgar business population to emulate it and the meanest mill town to be converted into it. In this "preposterous" book, apropos of "Walden," he wrote profoundly:

If it were newly written it could not fail of a far wider acceptance than it had then, when to those who thought and felt seriously it seemed that if sla-

very could only be controlled, all things else would come right of themselves with us. Slavery has not only been controlled, but it has been destroyed, and yet things have not begun to come right with us; but it was in the order of Providence that chattel slavery should cease before industrial slavery, and the infinitely crueler and stupider vanity and luxury bred of it, should be attacked.

And of Whittier:

In the quiet of his country home at Danvers he apparently read all the magazines, and kept himself fully abreast of the literary movement, but I doubt if he so fully appreciated the importance of the social movement. Like some others of the great anti-slavery men, he seemed to imagine that mankind had won itself a clear field by destroying chattel slavery, and he had no sympathy with those who think that the man who may any moment be out of work is industrially a slave.

That was the whole point of Newton Arvin's review in the *New Republic*, some months ago, of Mordell's "Whittier."

A man with those political opinions could not be anything but a democrat in his criticism of literature. Howells pleaded always for simplicity, for an insight into the lowly and the common. He hailed the future of the novel as a glorious one principally because he was convinced that the novelist would tend more and more to detach himself from the "smart set" and the professional bohemians (he felt at home with neither, naturally) and ally himself with the "people," the broad and humble levels of the population. He was aware of the dangers of didacticism: the habit of drawing a "moral," he said, marred the poetry of New England—"they felt their vocation as prophets too much for their good as poets." Nevertheless, he believed that the novelist, just by revealing the truth about human beings and the world they have built, awakens and guides. That implies realism to the roots. Realism is the product of an age of democratic ideals and of science. Howells was almost as much affected by the advances in the latter sphere as in the former. Both were at the bottom of his critical principles. There is no need here to offer details; his principles are known; they are present in all his books (especially, perhaps, in "Criticism and Fiction"). But it is worth repeating that he was the first outstanding critic in the United States to define them and fight for them. Before him criticism had tended toward the aristocratic and the romantic. After him came the twentieth century. The influence of such democratic-realistic manifestos as Frank Norris's "The Responsibilities of the Novelist" and Hamlin Garland's "Crumbling Idols" pales to nothing when compared with Howells's work.

He even anticipated later iconoclasts: he argued for contemporaneity before Michael Gold was born; he lashed the pedants for their legislative habits before Spingarn stirred up the academic pot; he recommended the scientific method in criticism long before Max Eastman rose to fame. We may still read and quote Howells with profit. Gentility ruined his novels, but the Boston-spinner sentences in his essays may be shrugged away while we pause over the courageous free-thinking passages.

Courage was one of his splendid traits. We have just seen that he had it in issues pertaining to literature, and we know—from his condemnation of the Spanish War and the annexation of the Philippines, and from his letter to the *New York Tribune* in behalf of the "Chicago anarchists"—that he had it also in issues pertaining to politics and society. It was courageous of him, moreover, to unite the two. It was no "trimmer" that wrote the last paragraphs of "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business." Those paragraphs are among the most memorable in American criticism. It is sad that they are not widely familiar, for they state once and forever, in beautifully sincere and poignant lines the dilemma of the artist who realizes that he cannot consort with the ruling classes, since he is himself a worker and a man of the earth, yet finds it difficult to consort with the masses, since they do not understand or care for him. Some of us today think we see a way out that did not occur to Howells, but we cannot deny the gravity of his problem or deny him the dignity with which he faced it.

It does not matter that Howells was a visionary, that he was sentimental and often confused, that his socialism had a little of Henry George, much of William Morris, and more of Tolstoy in it. His intentions, his "instincts," were in the direction of the truest democracy. In the tradition of rebellion and dissent that runs through American literature—from Sam Adams and Tom Paine through Thoreau and Walt Whitman to Theodore Dreiser—the name of Howells is not written small.

H. W. Garrod, writing in the *London Observer* apropos of the Coleridge centenary, says: "It is true that the best of Coleridge's poetry was written always when he was with, or near, Wordsworth. Some of his poems are Wordsworthian in manner; but he used this Wordsworthian manner before he knew Wordsworth. A less poet than Wordsworth, yet he somehow answers more fully to the idea of a poet. He has more of free creative magic, a more quivering sensibility. He has a mind of richer color and tone."

## For to Behold at Dusk

By KIMBALL FLACCUS

VENUS, star of the west, in early April  
Burns calm and low where suns have just gone down,  
And it is spring, and I am young enough  
To waive the established fact that this bright planet  
Revolves and eddies in such and such a way,  
Through æons mad with stars, and will continue  
Year after year to emerge on such a day;  
Venus suggests to me no mathematics  
Is no phenomenon to take for granted.  
Whenever I find myself alone with the hour  
That divides light from night, when it is spring,  
When birds sing in the pines,—the lively veery  
Descending rapidly on a scale of bells,  
The hermit thrush whose slow experiment  
Calls forth an answering voice from the deep shadows,  
Thin as a golden wire that up and up  
Revolves beyond all reach of sight and hearing,—  
I search the west and find my planet there  
And I am glad, and peace flows over me,  
Such calm repose as never invades the cities;  
Dwellers in city streets would become joyful  
Could they look up out of the noisy canyons,  
Above hot battlements that bleed at sunset  
To the white manifestation of desire,  
Symbol of faith that embraces the roots of earth;  
For to behold at dusk the beautiful bird-wing  
Flash of a planet amid desolation  
Is to be washed in fire and purified,  
To think of fields new-turned beneath the plough-share,  
How cool they are, how sweet the smell of hay,  
How firm and white the breasts of one beloved,  
How mute the lips, how eloquent the hands;  
The hair how lovely stroked back from the temples,  
The nacreous shells of ears, the body swaying  
In motion as long grass sways to the wind.