

A Man of Action and Intellect

DREAM AND ACTION. By Leonard Bacon. New York: Harper & Bros. 1934.

Reviewed by ARNOLD WHITRIDGE

In his latest poem, a narrative based on the life of Rimbaud, Leonard Bacon has added another cubit to his intellectual stature. We have seen him as a rollicking satirist, treading deliberately in the footsteps of Byron, we have watched him in the "Furioso" pummeling the unfortunate d'Annunzio with such vigor that we felt almost ashamed of ourselves for enjoying the terrific punishment of this once-popular hero. Nor is it merely as a robust satirist that Mr. Bacon has distinguished himself. He can walk as delicately as Agag. A volume of lyric poetry, "Animula Vagula," reminds us that this arch satirist has a deep inner life of his own. He is as merciless with himself as with d'Annunzio:

The siege is over. And the walls are down
In the dismantled city of the soul.
Here fire and there the sword have taken toll.
And the inhabitants have fled the town.
Courage ran first and with him good renown.
As for the famous captain's self-control,
He's in the mountains hiding in a hole.
And not one passion trembles at his frown.

Despair's a silly word. It seems to me
Something by implication almost gay
Beside the thing that I perceive today,
The liquid of the Phlegethonian stream,
The parching water in whose glass I see
My own face like an idiot's in a dream.

The man who wrote that sonnet has certainly won the right to castigate the world for its love of pedantry and cheap romanticism.

"Dream and Action" is in many ways Mr. Bacon's most interesting poem. Here for the first time he has discovered a hero who is profoundly sympathetic to him. Rimbaud was an intellectual gifted with a savage energy. He appeared on the literary horizon when he was only sixteen years old. His best-known poem, the "Bateau Ivre" of which Mr. Bacon includes a translation, was written before he was seventeen. By the time he was twenty-one he had changed the course of French poetry, and then suddenly wearying of the Muses he embarked on a new life as a soldier, explorer, and merchant adventurer in Java and Abyssinia. It is not always easy to remember that the poet who wrote that extraordinary sonnet on the colors of vowels, and the explorer so respectfully mentioned in the reports of the Société de Géographie, are one and the same person. He might still be living at his trading post at Harrar in Somaliland if he had not been struck down by cancer and compelled to return to France. The doctors amputated a leg, after which he expected to recover quickly and go back to the desert, but the disease had gone too far to be arrested. He died in the hospital at Marseilles in November, 1891, at the age of thirty-seven.

No two Frenchmen have ever seen eye to eye about Rimbaud. To Claudel he was a mystic and a saint, an illuminator of all the highways of art, religion, and life. To Remy de Gourmont he was an unclean animal. Leonard Bacon sees him as a Titan, a mystic and a realist in one, a great poet in whom action and dream had coalesced for the first time. The poem opens with the sordid incident in Brussels. Verlaine, tortured by the growing contempt of his young protégé, fires a pistol shot which is heard around the literary world. The wound in Rimbaud's arm amounts to nothing, but it marks his farewell to poetry. We see him next on a Dutch

transport headed for Java. The lure of the Orient had induced him to enlist in the Dutch army from which he deserted as soon as Java was reached. Mr. Bacon would have it that he was in a detachment of infantry ambushed by savages, and that he was wounded and left for dead on the battlefield. As long as he has expressly denied any intention of writing a biography of Rimbaud the accuracy of Mr. Bacon's facts is of no great importance. The poem is founded upon Rimbaud's career in the East, large blocks of which are still untouched by his biographers. Where they have failed to penetrate the poet is at liberty to wander at will.

That Rimbaud soon tired of poetry, that it became associated in his mind with the wretched intimacy with Verlaine, is obvious and it is equally obvious that Leonard Bacon is inclined to share Rimbaud's opinion of himself. He is not so much excited by Rimbaud the intellectual, as by the Rimbaud who rebelled against fate, the indefatigable traveler who without any assistance from the French government organized and led expeditions into the desert regions of Abyssinia. There is nothing unusual in all this. Rimbaud is merely an outstanding example of the great masters of literature—Stevenson is another of them—who have been half-ashamed of their trade. He grew up in the darkest hour of French history when Bismarck was crushing France under his heel. Without being in any sense a patriot, or even an unwilling admirer of Prussian efficiency, he felt the imperious call of action. And yet Rimbaud's career is perfectly consistent. In the Anglo-Saxon world the men of action and the men of intellect glare at each other with mutual distrust, but in France the two types are more often merged. Never have they been more effectively merged than in Rimbaud, and Leonard Bacon as the title of his poem indicates has caught the essential attribute of Rimbaud's wayward genius.

He was of the great who triumph over time,
Space, misery, language, they who are made free
By force of burning thought and burning rhyme,
Given up to man's original liberty,
Wandering at will into unknown, sublime
Empires, where they imagine or foresee
Beauty to come, vast pictures, vaster psalms.
Dante foreheard so thunderblasts of Brahms'.

In "Dream and Action" Mr. Bacon has escaped temporarily at least from the thralldom of satire. If T. S. Eliot had read any one of Mr. Bacon's books, preferably "Ulug Beg," he would not have said, as he did in a recent lecture at the University of Virginia, that "you cannot write satire in the stanza of Byron." On the contrary, Mr. Bacon's favorite stanza is "ottava rima," the stanza of "Don Juan," and he uses it with extraordinary felicity. He can duplicate romance and cynical realism, his occasional tiresome trick of buttonholing the reader, and his flashing phrases which repeatedly

lift the easy slipshod narrative to the dizzy heights of poetry. Even Byron's preposterous rhymes, "intellectual" and "hen-pecked you all" are matched by Mr. Bacon's "American" and "wherry can." But it is good to escape from satire sometimes, out of a world of negation into one of assertion. The constant shifting from passion to burlesque and vice versa, which Byron made so popular, is wearisome in the long run and only a poet of Leonard Bacon's amazing gusto could prevent a thousand

stanzas of ottava rima from degenerating into a display of verbal dexterity.

Mere gusto is not enough. Leonard Bacon could hardly have written, certainly he could not have had published, eight volumes of poetry unless he had something more solid to rely on than his amazing fund of vitality. His range of subject is prodigious. He writes with equal ease and authority of Rimbaud and d'Annunzio, of the pedantry of graduate schools and of frontier life in the primitive Southwest. Whatever he has read or experienced seems to find its natural expression in verse. Sometimes, like John Donne, he deserves hanging for not keeping accent but there is a rush of inevitability about his poetry that more than compensates for the roughness of its texture. There are a few poets, such as Heredia and A. E. Housman, who give to the world nothing but their best. Theoretically they are right, and yet when we run through the great names of literature we do not find many flawless artists among them. If Leonard Bacon is sometimes guilty of writing less well than he knows how, he errs in the excellent company of Shakespeare, Shelley, and Wordsworth.

Edgar Allan Poe once maintained that there was no such thing as a good long poem. A long poem might contain a number of excellent short passages but human nature was incapable of living on the heights for more than a few pages at a time. In one sense Poe was right. Emotional intensity cannot be sustained indefinitely, but why should poetry perpetually be aiming at emotional intensity? Leonard Bacon's poetry makes the same impression on us as a rushing river, and the quiet pools of beauty are all the more magical because we come upon them unawares. The exquisite description of d'Annunzio's first meeting with Duse is embedded in a fiercely satiric poem of some six hundred stanzas:

In the gas-lit green-room, back of the Roman stage,
He met her first. The Foscarina stood
Pale as the anemone when March's rage
Has spent itself in the New England wood,
And the white petals softly disengage
From the sheath, and there's a motion
In our blood
Premonitory, and leaves are shooting forth,
And the air sounds of wildfowl sailing North.

There is still another aspect of Mr. Bacon's genius to be considered. Like all good poets he is a moralist at heart. However much the modern intellectual may dislike Matthew Arnold's dictum that poetry is a "criticism of life," no man can sally forth and tilt at the world's shams without cherishing some citadel of his own into which he retires periodically for rest and refreshment. A satirist without a private bureau of standards is a cynic in whose eyes the world is a vast meaningless joke. No man can accuse Mr. Bacon of being a cynic. His vitality and his curiosity about life are not only splendid things in themselves but they preserve him from cynicism and didacticism, the twin dangers of the intellectual and the moralist. For a long time critics have been insisting that those who concern themselves with the future of American poetry should watch Mr. Bacon. He has won his place in the very front rank of contemporary poets not merely because he happens to possess a happy knack of verse satire, but because like all true humorists he writes from the heart and from the brain at the same time.

Arnold Whitridge, whose review analyzes the work of one of the most valued contributors to The Saturday Review, is a member of the English department of Yale University.

A Story of Invalidism

CORPORAL TUNE. By L. A. G. Strong. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

ALL is grist that comes to a fiction writer's mill, even an operation for gastric ulcers; but what Mr. Strong gets out of his operation is very different from the memorable report of Irvin S. Cobb. For this is a story of invalidism and not (despite the title) of army life. "Corporal tunes," said Burton the anatomist of melancholy, "pacify our incorporeal soul." Ignatius Farrelly's incorporeal soul had been much upset by the death of his beloved wife in childbirth, and by the subsequent discovery that the child was not his; but his stomach presently pacified him by making it impossible to think of anything uncolored by the effects of its ailments.

This reviewer could not get up much interest in Ignatius Farrelly, but was immensely interested in Mr. Strong's reproduction of the psychology of an invalid. For this is simply a report of what Ignatius Farrelly saw and felt and thought from the time he left a holiday resort in Scotland to go to London and get ready for his operation, until he came out of the ether; and it has in a supreme degree that essential quality of good fiction

which Gilman Hall used to call "vivacity of visualization." You see, you feel, everything with Ignatius Farrelly; for you as for him, everything is qualified by his illness; you not only appreciate, as you read, that an invalid is of a different species from healthy men, but you become a member of that different species. As a purely technical achievement it is magnificent, no less in the resolute fortitude which the author must have needed to observe and note and remember every one of his reactions to illness than in the vividness with which he has reproduced them; but beyond that this simple report of the life of a sick man is, incredibly enough, interesting reading.

Delightful Malice

HEIRS OF MRS. WILLINGDON. By Matilde Eiker. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.

MISS EIKER, having proved in "The Senator's Lady" that she could write hot romance if she chose, chooses to return to the malicious vivisection of character; and shows her contempt for popularity by the bold gesture of enlisting the reader's sympathy for a banker. Old Mrs. Willingdon, who had been her chauffeur's mistress for ten years, dies and leaves her money to him instead of to her stepchildren; one of whom, Lydia, is probably the most vicious female that even Miss Eiker has drawn.

The action revolves chiefly around the romance between Lydia's stepson and the chauffeur's daughter, but the point of the story gradually becomes the breaking down of the neurotic frigidity of Mrs. Willingdon's other stepdaughter, Avis Pettigrew; and only as it unfolds do you realize how truly every one who came into contact with her became, in one way or another, an heir of Mrs. Willingdon. Avis had to approach emotion through her intellect, which makes her an ideal subject for a writer who usually does the same. Can such things be? Don't ask; this is a fiction story, and if you hope the heroine will get what she wants, the author's purpose is accomplished. Not for the general public; but a book to be read with immense relish by those who appreciate Miss Eiker's uniquely ironic talent.



A PORTRAIT BUST OF
LEONARD BACON

Geneva's Great Citizen Rousseau

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, MORALIST. By Charles William Hendel. New York: Oxford University Press. 1934. Two vols. \$7.50.

Reviewed by MATTHEW JOSEPHSON

THERE has actually been no full-length, comprehensive study of Rousseau's writing and thought published in English, though there have been biographies and incomplete commentaries aplenty. Professor Hendel's monumental interpretation thus fills a considerable need; it is written, moreover, with reverence and enthusiasm for the subject and is the fruit of some ten years of reading and searching over the whole field of Rousseau-ana.

The author has chosen to picture the interior (rather than the external) life of the Citizen of Geneva by following the thread of his thought throughout his private and public writings. Taking the period of self-education at the "Hermitage" as his point of departure, he pictures the growth of Rousseau's system of ideas as it shaped itself year by year, and relates this both to the sages who preceded him and the men who were his contemporaries. The decisive influence in Rousseau's moral philosophy, Professor Hendel rightly judges and illustrates with overwhelming evidence, was Plato. His life became, as it is portrayed here, on the one hand an "imitation" of the Socratic quest for truth, and on the other of the role of Lycurgus, the lawgiver, whom Plato so extolled. Hendel shows thereafter Rousseau's affinity with the eighteenth century currents of ideas and his opposition to the Encyclopedists and philosophes who surrounded him. The author of "Emile" drew his democratic and anti-monarchic spirit from the times; the ideas of natural right and popular sovereignty were in the air, ever since Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu; but these conceptions were "assimilated to his own mind and background," and he developed them—especially the notion of popular sovereignty—with his own originality and boldness. Jean-Jacques was both more revolutionary and more atavistic—as in his pantheism—than his contemporaries, and it is owing to these qualities probably that his works became the *vade-mecum* of the French Revolution.

Rousseau's abstract doctrines for a new state, as voiced in the "Social Contract," were based upon the laws of the ancient Greek cities and his own Geneva. Yet, when late in life he saw himself persecuted by Geneva, which was itself torn by the conflicts of special interests and privileged groups, he sensed that his "Social Contract" would have to be rewritten. It was not enough to have tried "to put the Law above man." And Professor Hendel, citing his last political writings, especially the projected constitution for Corsica, shows that he would have ruled out money and established there an economic communism. In the end Rousseau himself seemed to realize that the promulgation of human rights and popular sovereignty was insufficient to preserve human values such as he championed in "Emile" and the "New Heloise."

The chief value of Professor Hendel's study consists in its elaborate and precise examination of Rousseau's writings, both in their fragmentary and complete stage. This painstaking method reveals to us just what materials, new or old, Rousseau's moral philosophy was compounded of. If one would cavil with the author it would be only because he follows his subject too rigorously, and fails to convey to it a critical perspective based upon the history of the time and of succeeding times.

Matthew Josephson is himself the author of a much praised life of Rousseau.

The Bennett Book Studios have finally located and acquired a copy of the real first issue of Kate Douglas Wiggin's famous first book, "The Birds' Christmas Carol"—the "ghost book" of all American late nineteenth century juveniles. The copy is in good condition in the original paper wrappers.



E. Nesbit

By EARL WALBRIDGE

NINE years ago, on the fourth of May, 1924, there died at Jesson St. Mary's, England, after months of suffering gallantly endured, one of the most remarkable women of all those that English life and letters have produced. She was known to thousands of English children and to a smaller but equally devoted band of young readers in America as E. Nesbit. She was born in 1858 as Edith Nesbit, was married to Hubert Bland, a socialist writer, for thirty-seven years, and was Mrs. T. T. Tucker at the time of her death.

Her name bore an unfortunate resemblance to that of the chief protagonist in a



E. NESBIT

notorious murder trial, and there is probably no American E. Nesbit fan who has not had the trying experience of mentioning her name and meeting with either a blank stare or the question, "You mean Evelyn Nesbit Thaw?" All the more reason, these fans believe, why an American edition of Doris Langley Moore's marvelously felicitous and understanding "E. Nesbit: a Biography," should appear on this side of the Atlantic. It is published in London by Ernest Benn, Ltd., who deserves eternal gratitude for keeping fifteen of her children's books in print. In uniform blue binding, with the inimitable H. R. Millar and Spencer Pryse illustrations intact, they cost only a dollar apiece to import. Two omnibus volumes (containing "Five Children and It," "The Phoenix and the Carpet," and "The Story of the Amulet") and "The Bastable Children" (which puts between covers "The Treasure Seekers," "The Wouldbegoods," and "The New Treasure Seekers") are available in this country, but, melancholy to say, appear not to be as welcome to little children here as in England. Christopher Morley voiced some such apprehension in his entertaining and sympathetic preface to "The Bastable Children."

Faute de mieux, I have obtained from England "Nine Unlikely Tales," "The Enchanted Garden," "The Magic World," and "Wet Magic," and "The Magic City." The little blue volumes are gay and attractive, and contain treasures that never came my way in the old Strand Magazine. However, I look with particular pride on that shelf in my bookcase which contains original American editions of E. Nesbit's books, found in unexpected corners of Manhattan. "The House of Arden" I found one evening when I was walking down Sixth Avenue, with the thunders of Toscanini's conducting of the Overture to "The Flying Dutchman" still in my ears. In the same sidewalk bookstall outside the same furniture store where I once found a copy of Grant Allen's "Hilda Wade" I espied this copy of "The House of Arden." The price was a quarter of a dollar, and for

good measure the book contained Donald Douglas's bookplate. Mr. Douglas is an abject admirer of E. Nesbit, and once introduced a reference to the Ugly-Wuglies (those bloodcurdling creations in "The Enchanted Castle") into his first novel "The Grand Inquisitor." "The Railway Children" I found at Weltman's on 125th Street; "The Book of Dragons" (a particularly attractively made volume) at Friedman's; and "Harding's Luck" somewhere on Fourth Avenue. Cuthbert Wright, the Anglo-Catholic historian and critic, gave me my "Wouldbegoods," with the Reginald Birch pictures.

Who was E. Nesbit? Well, she was a born Bohemian, a Fabian Socialist, a hack writer, a novelist, a poet (she considered herself a very fine one), a Bacon-Shakespeare infatuate, the dispenser of gay hospitality to Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Berta Ruck, Noel Coward, and hosts of others, and the author of a long series of children's books which have never been equalled for gayety, freshness, unflagging invention, and infectious humor. Here is Miss Moore's masterly summing up of their importance in the history of children's literature:

The Psammead stories must not be dismissed without some attempt to estimate their significance. With their successors, the tales of the Phoenix and of the Amulet, and later on the Arden books, they represented something entirely new in the realm of children's fiction: no such curious and unheard-of fairies had ever been portrayed before in contact with a family of English children. Each of the supernatural characters has its own vivid, convincing personality. The traditional fairy queen, gracefully waving her wand and uttering noble sentiments in a silvery voice, is a pale, meaningless cipher to those who have known the cantankerous Psammead, the lovable but outrageously conceited Phoenix, and the Mouldiwarp who talks in dialect. They are neither "good fairies" who moralize, nor fiendish ones, who, without motive, work evil spells; they belong to the rarer and much more engaging species of fairies who, while lacking nothing of magical power, are yet made credible and familiar by human weaknesses and vanities. In ordinary fairy-tales, it is the magic and its consequences alone that excite interest; here we have not only magic most wonderful and *dénouements* queerer than have often been conceived, but subtle distinction of character in mortals and immortals alike, and a humor so lively that eagerness to unravel the plot is repeatedly forgotten in laughter, even when the reader is a child.

"Five Children and It" was the first of a series of books in which the waking dreams of children are realized and crystallized as their sleeping dreams are crystallized in "Alice in Wonderland." No one has ever been able to imitate them, and—perhaps regrettably,—it is unlikely that anyone ever will. They were the production of a mind capable of throwing off in an instant all the shackles of adulthood while yet retaining all the skill of experience. In their own sphere they were without parallel, and no parallel in any other sphere suggests itself—unless it be in the works of F. Anstey, to whom it is possible that she owed one of those indirect debts which are at the same time payments of tribute.

Humor, as Miss Moore says, permeates every story, and the reader, even when he is not a child, will often dissolve in helpless laughter over some passage which he passed over in wondering silence twenty-five years before.

E. Nesbit was quite as unequalled in her short flights as in her longer. Lewis Carroll himself could not surpass the sustained nonsense of "The Cockatoucan; or, Great-Aunt Willoughby," in "Nine Unlikely Tales." Taking a wrong bus, Matilda and her terrible governess, Pridmore, find themselves in a fantastic land where the landscape and personnel are subject to violent and humiliating changes. The

King of the country (who before coming to greet them "changed his sceptre and put on a clean crown") met things with patience and resignation. As Matilda later discovered, all the trouble was caused by his daughter, the much too slim Princess, who from sheer vindictiveness would creep out at night and tickle the Cockatoucan until he laughed. And with what results!

It laughed, and the general holiday was turned into a new income tax; the magnificent reception changed itself to a royal reprimand, and the Army itself suddenly became a discontented Sunday school treat, and had to be fed with buns and brought home in brakes, crying.

However, Matilda fed the Princess her favorite food, bread and milk, sprinkled with rose leaves, and with pear-drops in it. Furthermore, she appealed to her better nature.

"But how can any one be happy?" asked Matilda, severely, "when every one is turned into something they weren't meant to be? There's your dear father—he's a desirable villa—the Prime Minister was a little boy, and he got back again, and now he's turned into a Comic Opera. Half the Palace housemaids are breakers, dashing themselves against the Palace crockery; the Navy, to a man, are changed to French poodles, and the Army to German sausages. Your favorite nurse is now a flourishing steam laundry, and I, alas! am too clever by half. Can't that horrible bird do anything to put us all right again?"

It seemed that the remedy was to make him laugh on the wrong side of his mouth, and Pridmore, changed back into her original shape from that of an Automatic Nagging Machine, was perfectly capable of accomplishing that.

Then the awful fate of Tony, in "The Blue Mountain" (another Unlikely Tale). "Take him to the Parliament House," said the King, beside himself with rage. "Give him a taste of the mace," and Tony tasted the mace and was stamped on by the Great Seal, who was very fierce and lived in a cage at the Parliament House (but is wearing a rather smug smile in the accompanying illustration).

E. Nesbit's imperiousness, her frequent fits of temper, and her sensitivity to slights made life difficult enough for her family and friends on occasion, as Miss Moore shows (although Heaven knows Hubert Bland's philandering gave her ample provocation more than once), but her wonderful generosity, her high spirits, and at the end, her marvellous courage, more than atoned for these. Her last gesture, as Miss Moore puts it, was a typically graceful and gallant one.

When she was dying she had longed to have a fair view of the Kentish hills whose aspect had always rejoiced her. Hearing this, her friend, Mrs. Thorndike, had sent her some contrivance by which she could raise her four-post bed to a level with the window. She replied with the poem that follows, the last she ever completed, and one of the most charming:

On bed of state long
since a Queen
Would wake to
morning's starry
beams
Silvering the arras
blue and green
That hung her walls
with cloth-of
dreams;
And, where the
fluted valance
drooped
Above the curtains'
brodered posies,
The pretty carven
cupids trooped
Festooning all her
bed with roses.

Mother of Stars! enthroned I lie
On the high bed
your kindness sent,

And see between the marsh and sky
The little lovely hills of Kent;
And, 'mid the memories old and new
That bless me as the curtain closes,
Come troops of pretty thoughts of
you . . .
And mine, too, is a bed of roses.

The University of Pennsylvania Press has recently completed arrangements to act as publishers for the American Philological Society, oldest learned society in America, founded by Benjamin Franklin.



While Christopher Morley smokes a cigarette from the case given him by Joseph Conrad, en route to Peru, we take the opportunity to print Mr. Walbridge's article on one of the great enthusiasts of the Conductor of the Bowling Green (Grace Line Photo).