

The New Books

Fiction

THE PRODIGAL FATHER. By Richard Church. Day. 1934. \$2.50

Richard Church, it seems, has a staunch little following in England—headed by the ubiquitous Gerald Gould. Evidently the English must relish his treatment of semi-pathological situations and must be ready to forgive him for his rather distressing lack of humor. That his books have a queer intensity is undeniable, but his themes and characters scarcely seem to justify the almost agonized pains he spends upon them. This is even more true of "The Prodigal Father" than it was of "High Summer." Despite occasional arresting flashes of insight it is the kind of novel which exhausts one by its excessive solemnity.

The prodigal of the story is an irresponsible middle-aged musician named George Cromwell who is egregiously ill mated to a pious invalid wife. Mrs. Cromwell—as dreary and uninteresting a martyr as fiction can offer—has infected her son, Robert, with her own religious emotionalism and has likewise inspired in him a mother-complex unhealthy enough to satisfy Dr. Freud himself. As he perfectly realizes, mother and son are subtly leagued against George, and neither makes any effort to share or understand his passion for music. Robert, moreover, hates and resents his father for being somewhat callous to his mother's suffering.

Poor George has a thin time of it—as who wouldn't with so gloomy a home—and it is with fervor that he turns for comfort to a certain beautiful, enigmatic Mrs. Marsh whom he meets by chance in a restaurant. Although mother and son remain ignorant of her relationship with George, Mary Marsh becomes the ministering angel of the Cromwell household and is with Mrs. Cromwell at the time of her sudden death. Ignorant of what has happened, George returns truculent and drunken from a party following a successful concert. When he learns the truth he is overcome with shame and remorse. He departs for Germany, leaving Mary to deal with the distracted and bewildered Robert, to check the flowering of the boy's passion for herself, and to reconcile him spiritually to his father—whom she still loves.

Up to a certain point the psychology of the book is true and just. There is much in the story, however, that is baldly unconvincing. One's final reaction is that Mr. Church meant to write of emotion on a grand scale—dark, passionate, and intricate—but that he lacked the power to carry his idea through. Too often his climaxes are absurd rather than moving, his book dull instead of dramatic.

E. H. W.

Music

TWENTIETH CENTURY MUSIC. By Marion Bauer. Putnams. 1933. \$3.

The author of this book has undertaken to show that modern music is not an arbitrary creation out of the void, but that its materials and idioms are derived from the familiar characteristics of eighteenth and nineteenth century compositions. The book is addressed to laymen, and the layman who is prepared to use the numerous musical illustrations will find information in it which will considerably increase his enjoyment and understanding of modern music. The author is successful because she has not been afraid to be technical; and it is only by means of the musical illustrations that she has been able to show the real relationships of the new music to the old. For instance, the genesis of a modern composer's idiom in that of an earlier—as Stravinsky's in Moussorgsky's; the relation of dissonant counterpoint to plain song; the origins of the whole-tone and twelve-tone scales; the demonstration that atonality is not a fetish, but a logical development—these are propositions which must be understood by the concert-goer, even by the radio listener, and it is here that the real value of the book lies. Otherwise it is a collection of program notes and historical data, all of which have their place in relation to the technical information, but will give a superficial impression to the reader who takes them alone. Like many books on music, this one is not very well written; we mention this not in any sense of disparagement, but only to emphasize that it is a book not merely to read, but to use.

G.S.

Religion

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD. By Harry Emerson Fosdick. Harpers. 1933. \$1.50.

The pastor of the Riverside Church, New York City, with the possible exception of Father Coughlin of the Shrine of the Little Flower in Michigan, is probably the most powerful and popular preacher, in his pulpit and over the radio, that America possesses. Consequently, a book by him interests far more people than one written by a more ordinary expounder of religion. Dr. Fosdick has written a number of volumes; but here is his first collection of sermons as such. May it not be the last!

Very interesting discourses they are. They show a shrewd understanding of the practical problems of the man in the street and his wife. They are written in a most attractive style, colloquial but not vulgar; with snap and go to them, but never marred by antics designed to attract the groundlings. The preacher believes in God. There can be no doubt of

that. He believes in man, too. Perhaps he believes in him a little too much, in the usual fashion of a determined "liberal." It is significant that Dr. Fosdick does not like the word "sin." He prefers to talk, instead, of "unhealthiness of mind and spirit," and as though sin were only a functional disorder. With many people, it is an organic trouble. Such persons will not, perhaps, greatly appreciate these discourses. They will say that Dr. Fosdick's world seems to them a wee bit too simple, somehow. They will miss the note of the mystic, the sense of dependence upon God's power. They will say, possibly, that Paul's "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death, wretched man that I am?" sounds a note the lack of which marks a certain defect in Dr. Fosdick's perceptiveness. They will be wrong too gravely to fault the preacher for this. For those who are of Dr. Fosdick's temperament, the sermons are admirable. Only, it is a temperament which the saints have hardly been fortunate enough to share, and which multitudes of people, many of them intelligent, can not claim to possess today.

B. I. B.

Latest Books Received

ART

Art in America from 1600-1865. Univ. of Chicago Pr. \$1. *Art-History as an Academic Study.* R. Fry. Cambridge Univ. Pr. 75 cents.

BELLES LETTRES

An American Bookshelf, 1755. L. C. Wroth. Univ. of Pennsylvania Pr. \$2.50.

BIOGRAPHY

Virgil the Necromancer. J. W. Spargo. Harvard Univ. Pr. \$5. *Mozart on the Way to Prague.* E. Moerike. Oxford: Blackwell. *Riding the High Country.* P. T. Tucker. E. G. S. Coates. Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton. \$2.50.

FICTION

Mr. Zouch: Superman. A. Powell. Vanguard. \$2.

FOREIGN

Rhythmus und Metrum. A. Verwey. Halle, Germany: Niemeyer. *Das Amerikanische Kurzschauspiel zwischen 1910 und 1930.* G. L. Plessow. Halle, Germany: Niemeyer.

HISTORY

Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee. J. W. Patton. Univ. of North Carolina Pr. \$3.50. *The Struggle for South Africa.* R. I. Lovell. Macmillan.

MISCELLANEOUS

Men Are Clumsy Lovers. E. M. Stern. Vanguard. \$1.

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Over the Counter

The Saturday Review's Guide to Romance and Adventure

Trade Mark	Label	Contents	Flavor
SHE WAS A LADY <i>Elisabeth Cobb</i> (Bobbs-Merrill: \$2.)	Romance	Moir's father's folks didn't like his marriage and exile landed him in a Western livery stable. He left her an appreciation of horses and poetry with which she snared a circus job and the attention of a Social Name.	Good
MOTHER AND DAUGHTER <i>Ann Lawrence</i> (Godwin: \$2.)	Rental Tripe	Her step-mother, sober, was a lady; two snorts and the ice-man had to lock himself in the box. It was all very distressing to daughter until mother reformed.	Sour
DRAGONS DRIVE YOU <i>Edwin Balmer</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Novel	Jeb Bredon, Chicago broker, pursues cash and lovely Agnes with equal ardor during the hectic days of Insull finance. Then came the crash. Balmer's pace is furious—as it should be in a time-killer.	Good
THE WHIP HAND <i>Helen R. Martin</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Love Story	When her tough grandpappy folded, Dagmar set herself for a whirl, but the old boy had appointed a thirty-five year old D.D. who absorbed her attentions.	Ladies' Special
BORDER TOWN <i>Carroll Graham</i> (Vanguard: \$2.)	Novel	Our hero slips over the border to Mexicali ahead of the sheriff, becomes a power in the town through a shrewd double-cross of dope-runners. Enter the thrill-chasing heiress and trouble.	Oke

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Trade Winds

By P. E. G. QUERCUS

THE BOOKSELLERS AND THE NRA

Washington, February 3. It was a surprise to hear that the Commerce Building contains more office space than any other building in the world. Its inception in the activities of the Department of Commerce under Hoover might convey the ironical suggestion of a monument to the prosperity era; instead, the Commerce Building is more active than ever, since it conveniently provides a setting for much of the work of the NRA. It was here that the proposed booksellers' code came up last Saturday for hearing before the Administrators. And if the outcome was evident almost from the first, that did not deprive the occasion of its dramatic quality.

This was, in a way, the first major crisis of bookselling in some thirty years. It was the first time that the booksellers had an opportunity to approach the government to ask for a solution of their principal besetting difficulty. They were represented by Cedric Crowell of the Doubleday shops, Frank Magel of Putnams, the Arthur Brentanos Sr. and Jr., Richard Fuller of Boston, E. S. McCawley of Haverford, Lewis Travers of Trenton, and Alice Steinlein of Wilmington; with corollary reports from Frederic G. Melcher, Cass Canfield, and Virginia Kirkus, and from Arthur H. Stevens of the Methodist Book Concern for the religious bookstores and Jeff Coleman of the University of Alabama for the college bookstores.

No brief report could possibly undertake to discuss the merits of the case of the booksellers against price-cutting. The hearing made it abundantly clear that the matter is one of considerable intricacy, although the booksellers' case was simple. And from the opening speech, by Mr. Brentano Sr., it was forceful; he, and those who followed, unequivocally announced that the price-cutting tactics of department stores have brought the trade to a serious emergency. Cedric Crowell, whose paper was the best we have heard on the subject of price-cutting, developed the major part of the argument, which can be summarized as follows. Few manufactured articles bear a fixed price, established by the manufacturer and printed on the label. Books do. Therefore a department store, wishing to emphasize low prices, cuts the prices of books, particularly best-sellers. (E. g., four New York department stores sold *Anthony Adverse*, wholesale price \$1.77 to \$2, at \$1.77 or less. These four stores sold 70,000 copies of the book.) Books at cut prices are known as "loss leaders"—i. e., articles on which the store loses money, which is charged to advertising; the impression being given that other articles in the store are correspondingly cheap, whereas in reality the loss on books must actually be made up by the profits on other articles. Bookstores, unlike department stores, cannot cut prices on books, as they have no other merchandise on which they can make up the losses. The situation, said Mr. Crowell, has become particularly acute in New York since the adoption of the general retail code (which allows cut prices, but not prices lower than the wholesale price) and it is also spreading throughout the country. The result is that booksellers, faced with this competition which they are unable to meet, are living on their own capital and publishers' credit; this cannot continue much longer, and many of them will go out of business unless price-cutting is stopped. Mr. Crowell cited an opinion of Justice Brandeis to support the contention that price-cutting may create, rather than prevent, monopolies.

Other speakers strongly emphasized the argument that bookstores are not only business establishments, but cultural and social assets. In this connection it was pointed out that many customers now go to bookstores, where they can look at books and get information which helps them to make an intelligent selection, and then go to department stores to buy the books at cut prices.

In short, the booksellers were out to prove that bookstores are sufficiently different from other retail stores to deserve a special code. It was plain from the first that the burden of proof would be heavy. Dr. Kenneth Dameron, the chairman of the hearing committee, opened with the statement that the hearing was to consider three problems: the necessity of the booksellers' separate code; the special clause for hours of employment (this was a minor feature in the discussion), and the advisability of price maintenance, admittedly contrary to the policy of the administration. (Incidentally, we caught the Administrators' names by ear, and apologize for any misspellings.) After Mr. Crowell had read his paper, the chairman stated that the approval of price maintenance would necessarily mean a great increase of governmental supervision over the industry, to an extent which business is not ready to accept. He added that those in favor of price-fixing were apt to oversimplify the issues involved.

The hearing committee, while pursuing an administrative rather than a judicial inquiry, and avoiding technical cross-examination, nevertheless did ask questions and did make comments. In spite of the fact that only one witness in opposition to the proposed code was called during the morning, one felt that the case for the opposition had been fairly well aired before lunch time. Dr. H. H. Maynard, retail adviser to the committee, spoke of the particularly local aspect of the book-price problem, and also remarked that the problem is not peculiar to the book trade. He did, however, recognize that one of the issues is that of which type of service is better for consumers in the long run: the special service of the regular bookseller, or the opportunity to shop for bargains. The representative of the Consumers' Advisory Board admitted no alternatives: he stated that he was opposed to price maintenance unequivocally, and did not take into consideration the argument that what consumers save on cut-price books they lose on the store's other merchandise.

If the hearing served to emphasize the complexity of the price-maintenance problem, it also helped to clarify the issues involved. Those principally discussed were the consumer's best interest; the legal aspects of monopolies; the possibility that price-fixing might be a boomerang, there being nothing to stop the publishers from raising prices, cutting discounts, and thus squeezing out the retailer entirely; and the certainty that price-fixing must lead in the direction of government control. But the underlying issue between the booksellers and the hearing committee seemed to rest in their different conceptions of the bookseller's function. Again and again the booksellers reiterated the cultural and social importance of books, as a claim to consideration for their special code; each time the committee led the discussion back to dollars and cents. Mr. Barr, the legal adviser of the committee, who took the chairman's place during the afternoon, made an ironic apology for "superimposing legal technicalities on this

(Continued on next page)



THE BOOKSELLERS' CODE HEARING, PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE REAR

PERSONALS

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