

A Southern Boy's Life in a Dramatic Novel

COME IN AT THE DOOR. By William March. New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WELBOURN KELLEY

NOT since Thomas Wolfe wrote "Look Homeward, Angel" has there been such a book as this novel by William March. But whereas I, for one, have marvelled from afar and have never been quite able to make up my mind about Mr. Wolfe's book, I feel certain that "Come in at the Door" is deliberate writing, that it is not due principally to a searingly-alive memory and an accident of environment, as "Look Homeward, Angel" just possibly could have been.

Mr. March has given us a brilliant addition to the list of brilliant novels that have come out of the South in the last few years. But he has added one distinguishing mark which so many other of the best Southern novels have lacked: he has written in good taste without any sacrifice of truth and realism. This statement is made with full knowledge that the term "good taste" is dangerous in this day of literary liberty. But I insist that Mr. March has lost no effect, has shaded no value, and that none of the shorter and more pungent Anglo-Saxon descriptives is used in the accomplishment.

The author has grouped ten full-length characters about one central figure, a sensitive, introverted boy growing into manhood. That is the only comparison between this book and any other I have ever read, and there is no comparison. A novel



FROM THE JACKET DESIGN OF "COME IN AT THE DOOR."

could have been written about any of these ten characters, yet the reader never forgets that they are secondary to Chester Hurry, who is eight years old when the story opens in Mississippi soon after the turn of the present century.

Chester's father, Robert Hurry, is a harshly ineffectual man grown strained and silent, a type so often seen in the South at the end of several generations of unproductive gentility. Chester's nurse is Mitty, statuesque and jet black, who also is his father's mistress.

Mitty's jealousy of Chester's affection for Baptiste, his mulatto tutor, brings about the climax of the first part of the book. Mitty indirectly causes Baptiste's death, by hanging—a scene which Mr. March wisely underlines with lack of emphasis and thereby makes doubly effective and almost unbearable for the reader.

The boy, the horror of the swinging Negro burned into his memory, is sent to another part of Mississippi to live with the family of his grandfather, Frank Tarleton. I believed in this family from the first—in supernormal Grand-aunt Sarah, in tattooed Uncle Bushrod and his painted wife, Ruby (Uncle Bushrod knew she was a harlot), and in brusque, kindly, slightly masculine Aunt Bessie—but I said "These people are mad." Then I realized that they were people I had known only slightly until William March let me see under their surfaces: people I had known no better than I have known some of my closest friends.

But even a recitation of characters and events in this packed novel would take up more space than is possible in a review. For instance, there is still bright-haired, baby-faced Addie, whom Chester marries, and with whom I was in love as long as Chester and Mr. March loved her. And

Addie's ex-sailor father, Jim. And Aunt Lillian. And more.

The denouement of the book is startling, unbelievable, and just what one would have expected if one had been thinking ahead with the writer. It occurs when Chester returns to the home of his childhood upon the death of his father, and but for a miracle of writing it would be sensational and shocking. But here again a lack of emphasis proves a test of ability.

Mr. March first showed this ability in "Company K." "Come in at the Door" is therefore not a fulfillment of promise but a continuation of accomplishment.

There are a few conclusions by induction which one can dispute, such as that happiness is possessed only by those who are not fully awake. And there are a few deplorable instances of proofreading in an otherwise capably designed book. But these criticisms are quibbling. There is no doubt that persons who pretend to keep abreast of the finest in the contemporary novel will have to read this book sooner or later.

And, finally, I should like to suggest a close reading of the book to the selection and award committees who give prizes to American novels. The Pulitzer Prize has gone to lesser novels than "Come in at the Door."

Case History

COVERING TWO YEARS. By I. V. Morris. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

IN this novel a sincere attempt has been made to study the state of mind of a young woman who, in the language of the day, is an introvert afflicted by an inferiority complex. Because of her heritage, because of her feverish love for another young woman, because of her "unfaithfulness" to that love and its consequences, Judith Mahon, when we first meet her at the age of thirty-three, is an apathetic and morbid person who despises her ineffectual, dowdy self and longs only for death.

That any man should again come into her life seems impossible to her—and to us. Yet Morton Haliday is drawn to her, more perhaps by his own curiosity than by any attraction of the woman herself. He expresses his feeling by saying that "her appeal was psychic rather than physical or mental." His efforts to overcome the effects of the past and her responses to the normal ways of living that he would provide for her occupy the latter part of the book. In the end, however, she slips back to the unrealities of a hermitlike existence, and we leave her, as we found her, uniquely occupied by her misery, her memories, and her games of solitaire.

Judith's case is undoubtedly one for an expert pathologist (it seems strange, by the way, that neither her Beacon Street uncle nor her Beekman Place husband consulted one), and whether or not Mr. Morris has correctly interpreted it must be left to professional counsel. One suspects that a thyroid deficiency might offer a better explanation than the cant terminology of psychoanalysis. At any event, the author has presented a recognizable case of a woman enmeshed in recognizable tangles.

Unfortunately, his presentation lacks the subtlety and sophistication that so ambitious a theme demanded. Abrupt transitions of plot, leaning heavily on dreams and premonitions, parenthetical flashes of jejune philosophy, and ineptitudes of language that range from banalities of phrase to serious grammatical slips, all reveal the tyro. One is occasionally reminded of a little girl decked out in grown-up finery who unexpectedly sticks out her tongue. Immaturities of technique, thought, and language would matter less in this instance if the theme itself did not demand expertness, penetration, and distinction. Julian Green at his best might have given us a credible and significant Judith Mahon; most of our younger writers would have failed. In the circumstances, this first novel upon a difficult subject has accomplished more than might have been expected. There are pages that raise hopes of completely satisfying work in the future.

The Celluloid Athens

FALLING STAR. By Vicki Baum. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by JOHN C. MOSHER

SINCE curiosity about Hollywood and the doings of its inmates seems to be a prevailing concern in our American life, this novel, by Vicki Baum of "Grand Hotel" fame, should have a bannered army of readers. The substantial fan magazine public, for instance, those unnumbered hordes, should certainly include "Falling Star" in the course of their research for this winter. It is possible that Frau Baum has devised a *roman à clef*, that these persons she writes about have their originals in the secret stories, (if one can imagine a screen star with anything secret), of those living beings whose faces grace the screens day after day everywhere. As I have no special knowledge myself of what the performers are up to in their off hours I cannot give a hint actually as to who or what is meant beyond the surface of the lines.

"Falling Star" is a story of studio life, of the very great and royal of that world, with some attention given the very obscure, whose extremity too provides of course a lurid note. Little time is spent, I rather regret, on those middling successes, those adequate performers, directors, and the like, who must make up the bulk of the population in this film capital, this celluloid Athens. I think a little more consideration of these worthies might lend any book on the scene there a greater reality. Reality, though, is something one seldom feels in any account of Hollywood. The town is always unreal. It is always puzzling, the more puzzling of course as every report or opinion on it differs from all the others. The most publicized town on earth, it remains fantastic, unimaginable, to all outsiders. Perhaps that is to its advantage.

It is not to be said that Vicki Baum suggests a lack of familiarity with her subject matter. As a reporter she is excellent. But "Falling Star" is a love story, very much a love story, far too much perhaps. And it is in her leading man, her hero, her star that falls, that Vicki Baum is probably most unfortunate. At the beginning of the book, "Oliver" is at the height of his greatness. As Frau Baum writes about him he is unlike any star of the moment. No one, I should say, has such a position in the films now, although something of the Valentino grandeur haunts his career as well as the very Valentino tragedy of his end. This is my only contribution, I must say hurriedly, to the *roman à clef* theory. Unlike Valentino this "Oliver" is an Englishman, an Oxford graduate, of the great name of Drake, which he has however abandoned for his film career out of pride and delicacy, this being only one of the rather bizarre attributes and unique characteristics for an actor given him by the author. He is "the handsomest man in the world," blond, wears brilliantine, and a small chip diamond ring, and has an ailment of the stomach which eventually proves fatal. He seems to me the most un-English young man in fiction, and his temperaments, manners, everything, as given here, are decidedly on the South European model.

The lady of the story, a film star, too, but on the edge of disaster, is from Southern Europe, from Bucharest, and Frau Baum's technique handles her better. She seems alive, like no special star perhaps, but like many we have read about, and her story is clearer because the romantic interest is subordinate in her to the ambitious objective, a point of view which often makes the picture of an actor more convincing somehow. Around her and her career and her romance, intrigue seethes in the grand manner. Rivals are ousted, producers cajoled, and all with such violence and melodrama that at last one doesn't envy any victory the poor woman achieves. That she is not allowed much triumph at the end seems part of the Vicki Baum point of view, though the author may feel the unhappy ending to be the vogue now.

There isn't much humor in this book of Hollywood grandeur. There is even less humor than there is tranquillity. Perhaps that is true of the town itself. Perhaps that town where the comics of the world congregate is a pretty grim affair after all. Yet I think that some humor might help a bit to give the picture of Hollywood a reality. We might feel then that we had really read about the place itself at last. Our curiosity about it might be satisfied. Then we wouldn't have to think about Hollywood any more, which would be quite wonderful.

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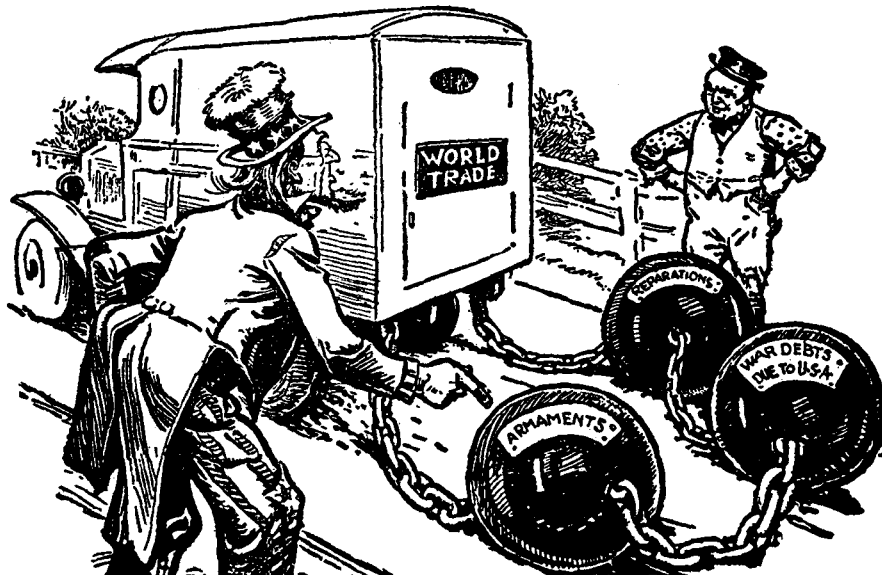
America in Foreign Affairs

(Continued from first page)

as concerned with the regulation of the various interests, often conflicting, which society presented, while with Hamilton the idea of national interest took the "positive and definite" form of "a consolidation of commercial, manufacturing, financial, and agricultural interests at home," diplomatic promotion of foreign trade and its defense by a navy, "the supremacy of the United States in the Western hemisphere, and the use of military and naval strength in the rivalry of nations to secure economic advantages for citizens of the United States."

The two fields of American foreign policy in which Professor Beard undertakes to trace the historical development of national interest are those of territorial expansion and foreign trade. Reviewing the long history of territorial acquisition on the continent and overseas, the former for land and the latter for trade, Professor Beard notes that while national interest was the standpoint from which the expansion policy was followed, "at no time was there anything approaching a united front, except after the country had become involved in war," that each type of expansion had its favoring and opposing groups, that each was "connected with the maintenance of partisan supremacy in domestic politics," and that each "associated with itself a certain philosophy of civilization carrying with it international implications," all the way from the narrow nationalism of Jefferson to the Republican assumption of "international responsibilities."

American interest in foreign relations and foreign trade, Professor Beard finds, is not at all the recent thing that is often



AN ENGLISH VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

A cartoon from News of the World (London), reproduced from "The March of Democracy," by James Truslow Adams.

supposed. On the contrary, both foreign relations and foreign trade, "with all their implications of world power," appear as a continuous national interest from the earliest days of the Republic until 1913. Jefferson and his Democratic disciples, to be sure, were most concerned to obtain markets for agricultural products, while Federalists, Whigs, and Republicans encouraged domestic manufactures, aided shipping, developed the navy, and even resorted to force "in aid of private enterprise," but in each case there was more or less systematic action on the part of government in behalf of foreign trade. When President Taft, in 1912, laid down the dictum that "modern diplomacy is commercial" he believed that he saw "the dawn of a 'new age' in American diplomacy, although what he beheld seemed very much like the fires of Federalist *Macht-politik* kept glowing through the years, especially by the navy, and fanned into flame by the economic intensities of the twentieth century." The eight years of the Wilson régime were marked by pronounced opposition to "dollar diplomacy" and the commercial expansion which it represented, but expansion was resumed with new vigor as the country returned to "normalcy" and the Commerce and State departments enlarged their activities in promoting, regulating, and protecting foreign trade, and continued at a still more rapid tempo as there was added to trade "the quest for privileges, investment opportunities . . . and special rights."

As illustrations of national interest in action, Professor Beard examines at length the relations between the United States and Nicaragua, where "the foundations for the security of American interests . . . were firmly laid by diplomatic and naval action on the part of the United States government," and between the United States and China, in which latter country American policy appears as "primarily economic in object." To these Mr. Smith adds two minutely detailed chapters on the American financial and commercial stake abroad. Many readers will be surprised to learn that the volume of American exports "has remained relatively constant over a long period of years," and has not been materially affected by the change from agriculture to the factory system or from the latter to mass production, or by the abandonment of "isolation" with its accompaniment of a small navy and the turn to imperialism, a large navy, and vigorous trade promotion. "An increase in the export of machines, methods, and services connected with the newer operations of mass production," however, "has been a marked element, indicating that continuous technological advances have been prominent features in sustaining the export level."

"All foreign policies," Professor Beard reminds us, "are internally as well as externally conditioned," and an attempt to draw a hard and fast distinction between domestic and foreign affairs may result in "misleading conceptions concerning the processes of national life and their actual ramifications throughout the texture of world societies." His pursuit of the idea of national interest, accordingly, leads to consideration of American tariff policy, with its side-issue of reciprocity, national defense, "the supreme consideration of every government," the development of a merchant marine, and the control of immigration—all of them "outward thrusts of power which produce repercussions in various parts of the world." Toward the end of the nineteenth century a new element appeared in expressions by directors of American foreign policy of a "moral obligation to embark upon projects for uplifting, civilizing, or Christianizing other peoples beyond the confines of the country." The former principle of abstention was first broken, apparently, in the case of Samoa, was further repudiated in the war with Spain, frequently challenged by Theodore Roosevelt, and sweepingly set aside by Woodrow Wilson. The morality of the obligation, however, is properly characterized by Professor Beard as "earthly."

Although accompanied by great enthusiasm, conviction, and sense of rectitude, it cannot be called a sacrificial morality without self-regardant aspects, . . . nor do efforts to spread it under

government auspices extend beyond places where it can be realized in conjunction with economic advantages to American citizens and with a reasonable degree of safety and expedition.

The term moral obligation is "effective for domestic purposes mainly."

Such, in briefest outline, is national interest as exhibited in American foreign policy. How is it interpreted, advanced, and applied? Something of interpretation emerges vaguely from the business world, but the chief and obvious agencies are the President, the departments of State and Commerce, Congress, the administrative bureaucracy, and the practice of diplomacy. Professor Beard criticizes the Department of State as "still lacking in the centralization and equipment necessary for dealing organically and effectively with economic matters involved in diplomacy," and the Department of Commerce for basing its reports in general "on the assumptions of current and popular business philosophy" and for having made "on its own motion . . . no broad inquiry into the total effect of export practices on American economy, viewed in the light of permanent national interest." For the ultimate enforcement of national interest there remains the resort to war, and Professor Beard is unable to see that, in spite of the Paris peace pact, any state is debarred from going to war in its discretion if it regards war as necessary to enforce its own conception of its national interest.

Professor Beard concludes his study by pointing out that the two great historical views of national interest which, for convenience, may be labeled with the names of Jefferson and Hamilton, are "in process of fusion and dissolution," and that "a new conception, with a positive core and nebulous implications, is arising out of the past and is awaiting formulation." He finds "fragments" of the new conception in the policies and measures of President Roosevelt, but he does not permit himself more than a bare allusion to the possible trend. Until his second volume appears, we must await not only his larger deductions from the history which he has examined and his indication of the policy of national interest which a changed time demands, but also the extension of his definition beyond the views of statesmen and publicists and the policies of government with which, thus far, he is primarily concerned. Meantime the present volume stands as far and away the most mature and thoughtful piece of work that Professor Beard has done. Weighty in substance, serious in tone, and restrained though keen in its criticism, its outstanding quality is its intellectual and social comprehension of the particular national interests which have affected the foreign policy of the United States. If the philosophy which is to come fits the analysis which we now have, Professor Beard will have made a notable contribution to the understanding of American history.

An Archivist's Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON HIMSELF. A Common-Sense Biography. Written from His Manuscripts. By John C. Fitzpatrick. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1933. \$3.50.

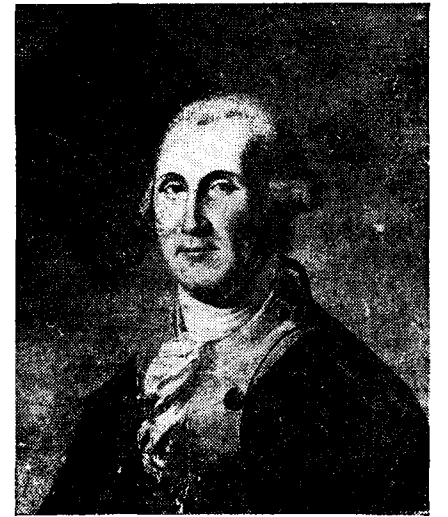
Reviewed by JOHN CORBIN

IN a previous number of this Review I enjoyed the privilege of praising Dr. Fitzpatrick's bicentennial edition of the Writings of Washington. It is the one outstanding achievement of the recent celebration, destined to keep its memory green when all the trumpery parades and empty oratory are forgotten, and to crown Dr. Fitzpatrick's most honorable career as searcher of the archives. Even in that great work, however, certain curiosities of critical procedure were to be noted; and now, in the biography which is based on it, they become of primary importance. The discussion is rendered especially difficult by the fact that Dr. Fitzpatrick has in the main a sound understanding of Washington's greatness and is everywhere moved by a passionately pious desire to defend it against sensation mongers. It were easier to dance the tight-rope than preserve the balance of due respect while debunking the debunker of debunkers.

Dr. Fitzpatrick is doubtless well within the truth in saying that the twelve volumes of Jared Sparks plus the fourteen volumes of Worthington Ford "contain less than half of Washington's letters." To anyone who has ranged the manuscript department of the Library of Congress, not to mention half a dozen other repositories, this will seem a conservative understatement. Credulity balks, however, when he declares that "the unpublished material contains as heavy a percentage of important letters as the published," and denounces preceding biographers as having "cheerily rushed into print with so-called complete lives" while "less than half the facts were at their command." Whatever else may be said of the embattled debunkers, their works give evidence of very considerable servitude both in the Library of Congress and elsewhere. Nor is it possible that Messrs. Sparks and Ford, impeachable though they are on many grounds, were so lacking in critical sense that a merely chance selection would be likely to yield as high a "percentage" of important letters as their laborious winnowing. Dr. Fitzpatrick's own biography affords the means of judging the truth of his stupendous claim. He covers the most varied and momentous career in American history in five hundred pages of large type. In that brief compass he purports to rewrite several

episodes which are not without importance; but it may be questioned whether scrutiny of the evidence he adduces will allay more of doubt than it provokes.

He is especially severe upon "amateur soldiers" and "self-appointed military critics" for questioning Washington's genius in generalship. What military qualification his own lifelong service as an archivist has given him he does not specify. For myself I can only say that, out of an utter and abysmal ignorance in such matters, I am inclined to agree heartily with his main conclusions—and had already arrived at something very like them from an incidental reading of Sparks and Ford. In the absence of over-



GEORGE WASHINGTON

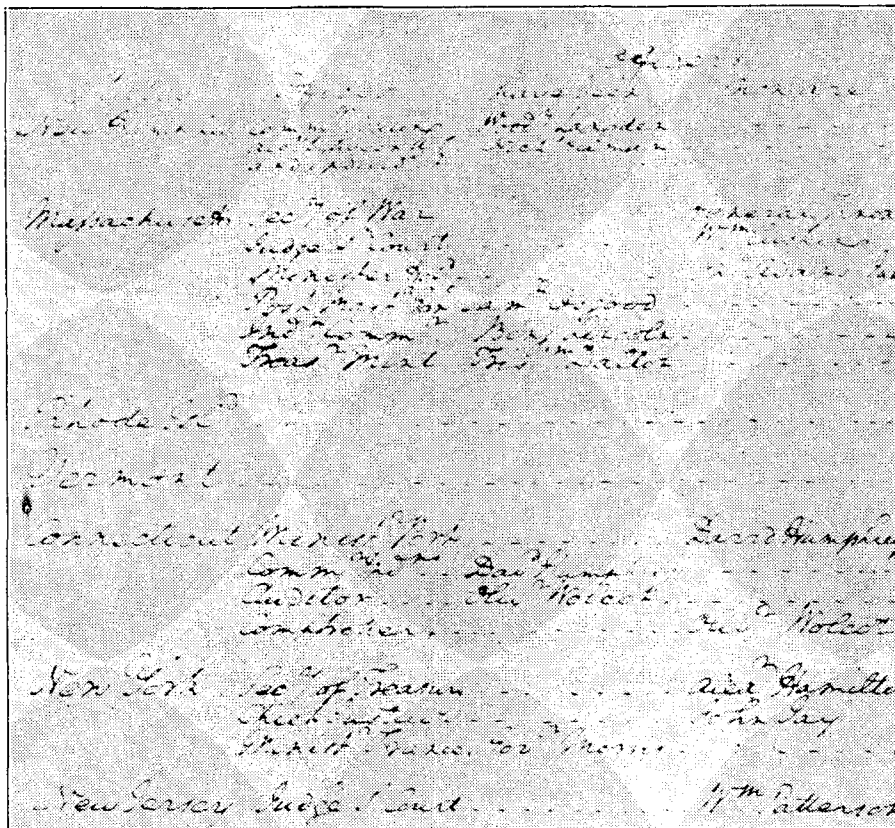
A portrait by Charles Wilson Peale, from the Rupert Hughes biography (Morrow).

whelming and indubitable evidence to the contrary, it is probable that Washington knew what he was about.

The boy Washington has been denounced, alike by amateur soldiers and experienced military men, for taking up his stand against the French and Indians at Fort Mifflin in Great Meadows—in the open and exposed to fire from the cover of woods and from surrounding high ground. Mr. Fitzpatrick is perhaps correct in saying that the high ground is out of musket range, though he adduces no measurements. But he speaks of the French attack as having taken place "from the edge of the forest," and sharpshooters have been known to climb trees.

So also with the defense of New York and the battle of Long Island. No one has questioned that military strategy alone required the destruction of the city and the devastation of Westchester County entire. John Jay was no soldier, but he urged this, though his own beloved Bedford House would have been sacrificed. But Congress balked at a measure so drastic, fearing the effect on the popular mind; and Washington obeyed without a murmur, doing his utmost to defend an indefensible position against a greatly superior army and a vast fleet. Mr. Fitzpatrick explains this as the result of his firm resolve to respect always, as a staunch "republican," the paramount authority of the civil government over the army, and indeed that is one of the perennially amazing heroisms of this most amazing man. Congress never quite succeeded in being more stupid and vacillating than he was wisely humble and majestically heroic. But the fact remains that even after the defeat he wrote to Congress: "Till of late I had no doubt in my own mind of defending this place, nor should I have yet, if the men would do their duty." The things that Virginia farmer was capable of may not always have been "war," but they were certainly magnificent; and the hope persists that some even more military archivist may yet clear up the question of his judgment in hoping to hold New York.

The "hitherto insoluble mystery of the Conway Cabal" Dr. Fitzpatrick attempts to solve by picturing the opposition in Congress to Washington and ferreting out



A PAGE OF WASHINGTON'S TENTATIVE LIST OF APPOINTMENTS
From "Facsimiles of Famous American Documents and Letters" (Blue Ribbon Books).