The Saturday Review of Literature

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But What Is Liberalism?

Mr. Bernard Smith's essay in last week's *Review* entitled "The Liberals Grow Old" raises some very interesting questions. The liberals, he said, have ceased to lead, have grown, in fact, melancholy and distraught, or are resting upon their known consistencies, refusing to look ahead, refusing to mark out new paths, no longer trying to free the artist from his bondage to a bourgeois ruling class. They have instead given themselves over to bitterness or fury, to resignation, aloofness, or melancholy.

It is a sorry picture if the picture be a true one, the more so since Mr. Smith's list of names includes those among our critics and students of literature who have given the best part of their lives to an attempt to understand the complex development of American history. They should be leading now. But what does he mean by leadership? It is clearly not of politics, or industrial activity, or economics, that he is thinking. The men whom he names have chiefly been concerned with literature, and especially with that literature which is the articulate expression of the imagination of a race, which reflects the attempts of the American mind to know itself, which provides those eidolons, of which Whitman used to write, to serve as the images of what we think we are or hope to be.

But what is leadership in such an area of the activities of the human race? Mr. Smith, if one can read between as well as in his lines, is dissatisfied because the literary liberal has not formulated a social program as definite, as forward looking, as Marxism. He agrees with that multitude who just now believe that the eternal verities are identical with social planning, and that the poet, dramatist, novelist, who does not write of a new society is a mere nostalgic echo and by definition unworthy of enrolment among the captains of mankind who explore the trails to the future.

But what a curious interpretation of intellectual leadership, which would leave out of the reckoning a good half of the luminaries of the past. Are we then to be all Athenians, never content except in the pursuit of something new? Is there no leadership in interpretation and reminder, in the estimate of values and the assessing of the meaning for us of the present and the past?

Mr. Smith has discussed in the main critics and historians of the American scene. It was their job to place for us Whitman and Thoreau and Emerson, to explain the effect upon the American imagination and the American character of the great rush westward, of the era of unrestricted exploitation, of republican institutions under the control of economic forces, to study from every useful angle the environment of American literature. Incidentally it was their job, and they did it, to point out the bondage of the American artist to the ruling economic forces of the nation. But to suppose that this was all their task, and all their leadership, is to misunderstand the nature of criticism. If some of the liberals who took part in the battle are melancholy now, it is because in their view the war has become a riot in which objectives have been lost sight of. The young Marxist and the young socialist critics have completely forgotten that a man is more than a formula. Whitman for them is an exponent of democratic theory, Thoreau of individualism, Emerson of a particularly objectionable denial of the economic interpretation of history. The estimates, the histories, of these new men are always in terms of becoming. Does Poe fit into a program for a developing state? If not, throw him out. Is Miss Cather a factor in the coming of a classless society? If not, throw her out. Does Mr. Van Wyck Brooks concern himself with what is going to happen next in America? If not, cancel his leadership.

But what fallacies betray themselves here! A great literary artist is an item in his environment, and it was the failure to understand this, and his environment, which negated so much nineteenth century discussion of American literature. But he also remains a great literary artist, presenting problems of interpretation and appreciation to the critic which reach back into the past beyond his present, and involve an estimate of values of which his place in the social program is only an incident. Poe as a journalist, as a "depressed bourgeois," is a cog in the American machine, but as a poet he is a machine of which the cog is only a least part. The argument which leaves Emerson as a bourgeois made futile by an income and too much transcendentalism is unsatisfactory. For literature differs from potato growing in that its values must be assessed in terms of the whole needs of man.

It may be submitted therefore that the liberals of Mr. Smith's category, who for the moment are more interested in values than in programs, more concerned with truth than with prophecy, are perhaps leading as effectively as when their assault was upon conventions which had to be broken. They are skeptical, and have reason to be, of the attempt to identify literary leadership with a social program and to interpret our history in terms of what converts to this or that think is essential for the present. In relation to a leadership which makes a program for poetry they are conservative. In relation to a blissful ignorance of the tremendous impact of social forces upon literature they are radical. For effective leadership sometimes pulls from in front and sometimes from behind, as every military expert knows.

H. S. C.

H. W. Fowler Dr. Johnson forever established the fact that personality could lend flavor and liveliness even to a dictionary. Certainly the late Henry W. Fowler, whose death the other day deprived British scholarship of one of its brightest ornaments, and his brother, who predeceased him by some years, were evidence to the humor and charm that can reside in lexicography. "He had a nimbler wit, a better sense of proportion, and a more open mind than his twelve-year-older partner," said H. W. Fowler of Francis. Yet "A Dictionary of Modern English Usage," which in the writing at least was the work of the elder brother alone, had no less of sprightliness, of sly humor, and apt description than did "The Concise Oxford Dictionary" which was a collaboration of both men. "Entertaining" may seem a maladroit adjective to apply to such works, and yet few books of learning have more genuine entertainment lurking amid their facts than these volumes. To dip into them is to quaff not only knowledge but delight, and to feel the English language as a swift stream constantly swelling through fresh accessions of term and epithet.

"I'M NOT GOING TO SEE 'ALICE IN WONDERLAND.' I MAKE IT A PRACTICE NEVER TO SEE THE MOVIE OF A BOOK I'VE READ."

To the Editor: *Where Does the Middle West Begin?*

What Is Middlewestern?

Sir: What is the answer to Grant Wood's question, "What is Middlewestern?" What is the answer to the geographers' question, "Where is the Middle West?" As a human geographer, or more appropriately as a student of human geography, I have been interested in these two questions. I frankly admit that I do not know the answers, but for several years I have been trying to delineate the Middle West, not precisely but approximately.

Probably the southern boundary of the Middle West lies somewhere near where the pronunciation changes from "down" to "daown," or perhaps where the expression "damn Yankee" becomes "Damnyankee." The indefinite boundary between corn and cotton is a boundary which is no respecter of the political borders. While these three boundaries are not coincident we can be reasonably sure that a line representing the mean or average position is very close to the southern limit of the Middle West.

On the west the Middle West ends at the twenty-inch mean annual isohyet. Near here a railway company posted Indians at the stations so the tourists might observe where the West begins. Where the tall grass of the prairie is replaced by the bunch grass of the plains is an indefinite line which separates the cornhusker from the cowpuncher. This boundary lies near the center of the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas at the hundredth meridian, which is labeled by such a convenient whole number.

The northern boundary of the Middle West may be the Canadian border, but I believe it lies farther south near the center of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Here is the southern limit of the Laurentian Upland underlain by the crystalline rocks of pre-Cambrian age, and near here the northern forest of pine and spruce made contact with the hardwoods which made Grand Rapids and South Bend so famous for furniture and wagons.

The eastern boundary is uncertain, though I believe that at or near Columbus, Ohio, the Middle West begins. Near here corn begins to occupy more land than any other crop. Also the land is spread out in a terrain of low relief, as though there were not enough surface to permit the making of a rugged topography so characteristic of the Appalachian plateau.

The boundaries given above circumscribe my Middle West, and I call it the Middle West. In the *Chicago Tribune* for April 14, 1929, was published an editorial under the title "The Central States." The editor stated that thereafter the *Tribune* would substitute "Central States" for "Middle West." But the powerful *Chicago Tribune* cannot change a national habit of speech and a manner of thinking.

GUY-HAROLD SMITH.
Ohio State University,
Columbus, Ohio.

Another Opinion

Sir: Your note about the Cedar Rapids Community Players and the question of the true boundaries of the Middlewest have stirred me strangely. I still remember my thrill at the first sight of Ohio's broad, flat fields, the huge campus of O. S. U., its hordes of eager students. It was in and around Columbus on many trips with kindly native friends that the hitherto despised American history and geography became engrossing interests as they never had in the old East. I was charmed by the buoyant, youthful spirit and easy cordiality of the people, traits derived from a happy blend of Northern and Southern pioneers. I also learned that a lingering agricultural atmosphere, provincialism in the good sense of the word, can have a very attractive flavor. I write this in spite of Cleveland and the industrialized sections of the Buckeye State, for to me the center is the heart of the commonwealth. In my humble opinion Ohio is no more a border state than is Virginia.

LAMBERT A. SHEARS.
Duke University,
Durham, N. C.

The Hudson Valley

Sir: In a recent issue of the *Review* you gave a clean bill of health to Mr. Wilstach's "Hudson River Landings."

While the style of the book is good, there are many instances where the author has taken liberties with history. This in spite of the fact that with a little research many of the errors might have been avoided.

Two of the more glaring misstatements applicable to the region about Westchester County are those relative to the André-Arnold episode and the genealogy of the Philips family.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Wilstach in a later edition will revise his historical data and include a bibliography.

ERNEST H. GRIFFIN.
Westchester County Historical Society,
White Plains, N. Y.

Mexico in Evolution

PEACE BY REVOLUTION. By Frank Tannenbaum. Drawings by Miguel Covarrubias. New York: Columbia University Press. 1933. $3.50.

Reviewed by J. FRED RIPPY

THE subtitle of this volume informs the reader that it is "an interpretation of Mexico." Although its emphasis is on the epoch since 1910, a third of the volume deals with the four centuries that preceded. It is in some respects similar to the works of Carleton Beals, Stuart Chase, and Ernest Gruening, but one feels that Tannenbaum has a better grasp of the facts of the recent period than has Beals or Chase, perhaps even better than Gruening, who was quite industrious in the collection of his data.

The work includes a historical discussion of race, religion, and politics, as well as of the land, labor, and educational policies of the period since 1910, which is known in Mexico as "The Revolution." The church problem and the educational program of the Revolution are discussed without prejudice, especially the former. The whole book is written with deep sympathy for the Mexican masses and in beautiful style. It is a brilliant attempt at synthesis. Details are subordinated to the main theme and an effort is made to discover the meaning of Mexican history. Perhaps the story is too simple, but the author would probably be the first to admit this. He appears to have a full realization of the complexity of the subject.

Tannenbaum's viewpoint is probably correct, if not accepted too literally, for

Drawing by Covarrubias for "Peace by Revolution."

Mexican national history does display a general trend, and this general trend has been in the direction of "undoing" the Spanish Conquest, of ejecting the elements of Spanish culture imposed by the Conquest and three centuries of colonial subjection. It is unlikely, however, that every element of Spanish culture will be uprooted, or even that the most radical of Mexican reformers will desire to eradicate everything Hispanic. The Spanish language and Spanish place names will remain. Spanish churches and public buildings and patios will be retained. Spanish saints—endowed with some of the attributes of the native gods—will not be cast out of the temples. The Catholic religion—nationalized and somewhat mixed with the native cults—will probably endure and an effort will be made to restore the administrative unity of the Spanish period. The renunciation will therefore be eclectic. Only the ancient aristocracy and the ancient exploiters will be rejected, along with all of the former tendencies to repress the Indians and the mixed breeds.

A complete return to the pre-Conquest mode of living would mean a return to oppression, internecine war, and chaos. It would mean even more: it would signify the resumption of bloody human sacrifices and degrading superstitions and the total rejection of modern science and technology. *Indianismo* is the slogan, but its content is not full. It means only that the Indian will be respected, given an opportunity to develop his talents, and participate in the government. He will surely be indoctrinated with nationalism and taught some of the ways of a more complex civilization. Some of his burdens will be lifted by machinery, and his diseases will be

From "Peace by Revolution."

cured by modern medicine. But there will be a disposition not to impose foreign culture traits too rapidly and ruthlessly, to grant him the privilege of rejection and adaptation, to treat him as a human being with a mind and a spirit of his own.

The Indian will be dealt with patiently, gently, and respectfully, if the pressure of the external world does not prove too great and if the leaders of the Revolution do not abandon their ideals or lose their enthusiasm. Reformers, however, may change their attitude. Emotions and ideals are unstable. The future of Mexico will probably depend more on the Mexican leaders and the disposition of the United States and the strong nations of Europe than upon the Indians themselves. The world is still dominated by the capitalistic and industrial nations which have appropriated the discoveries of the scientists and the inventions of the technologists. Mexico will be subjected to the tremendous pressure of the bankers, the captains of industry, and the aggressive sales forces of both. The tendency will be to thrust machines upon machineless men, to substitute the commodities of the factory for the handicraft products of the Indian.

Tannenbaum writes with the idealism and the spirit of a French philosopher of the eighteenth century. The universal respect for personality which he envisions may require the overthrow of the capitalistic system, and it might not prevail even in a socialistic or communistic régime. Strong men tend ever to impose their purposes and ideals upon the weak. If deprived of the profit motive and the economic mechanism of the capitalistic age, they may be actuated by other ambitions and employ other instruments. Intolerance and the will to power are not easily eradicated.

James Fred Rippy, professor of history at Duke University, is the author, among a number of other books on Latin America, of "The United States and Mexico."

Sib to De Quincey

(*Continued from first page*)

London purlieus. All these adventures, and their philosophical overtones, are supposed to be seen through the unspoiled eyes of youth—but narrated in memory twenty-five years after. This has to account for the odd pantheist charm which will puzzle some readers, delight others.

For my own part, I surrender to this book without reserve. Some will find it artificed, consciously odd; but to me it effused an aura of extraordinary truth and value. Passages of rich vulgarity modulate into writing of superb liquid color and suggestion. There is no space here for quotation, but I commend you for instance to the description of the theft of the sovereign in Part I; the deathbed of Lily in Part III. At such moments Mr. Beaton is sib to De Quincey. The glamor and oddity of this strange book are such that every reader will hurry to pass it on to some trusted friend for corroborative opinion. It is a dream and a nightmare, and has the inward testimony of both. It has some of the secrets of what Mr. Beaton calls "that pure and unintermittent delight which was our original inheritance."

Bligh of the *Bounty* Becomes a Hero

MEN AGAINST THE SEA. By Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall. Boston: Little, Brown & Company (Atlantic Monthly Press). 1934. $2.

Reviewed by OLIVER LA FARGE

SOME men reach their full stature only in times of crisis and disaster; when things go normally, they may abuse power if they have it, be overbearing, exercise an excessive force and even cruelty, or, if they be of another type or in different circumstances, show themselves careless, incompetent, thoughtless until a situation arises which really calls upon them to show their mettle. Captain Bligh of H. M. Armed Transport *Bounty* was a man of the former class. Cold history, and the splendid reinterpretation of it by these same authors in "Mutiny on the *Bounty*," have amply set forth the man's violence and heartlessness when none but the relatively routine difficulties of his task confronted him. What happened to his character when his violent nature was counterbalanced by conditions of continuous and imminent, deadly danger, when daily and hourly his own life and those of eighteen men depended upon his firmness and self-control, forms the fascinating major theme of this sequel.

The story of the *Bounty* is well known. The strange phenomenon of Pitcairn Island, continuing to this day, has intrigued many writers, though perhaps none so felicitous as Messrs. Nordhoff and Hall. Much less attention has been given to the story of the loyal group which followed Captain Bligh overside into the *Bounty's* launch to sail more than three thousand miles in an open boat too small for the load, on starvation rations, in every kind of weather.

The sheer feat of seamanship and the plain endurance recorded are amazing; perhaps without parallel in the annals of the sea. To lovers of salt water, a mere log of the cruise would perhaps be sufficiently interesting reading, but this book offers more varied fare. True, one sails the whole distance as one reads; there is no sparing of storm, starvation, sickness, and narrowly averted disaster. But neither is this a "sea story" in the sense that the reader must know about, and care for, nautical matters to find interest in it. Without skimping or omitting, the writers have succeeded in giving full value to the performance of the launch and the men who sailed her, and yet there is scarcely a phrase in the whole book not comprehensible to any landsman. And better still, all of this serves as the means through which the characters of Captain Bligh and his eighteen men are revealed—the craven Lamb; Nelson, the sensitive, gallant scientist; the surgeon, Ledward, through whom the tale is told; men of all ranks and ratings, the character of each developing under successive trials, and over all the dominant figure of Bligh.

The story is the captain's. Nothing could cancel his behavior on the *Bounty*. His actions, let us say, had been inexcusable, but in his handling of the launch and her crew his existence is justified. In the face of death he acquired superb self-control; calm and perfectly in hand even at the threat of further mutiny, just, unflinching, thoughtful, considerate, wise — and yet to a remarkable way still himself. The portrayal of his character, its complexities and its consistency despite apparent inconsistencies is in itself enough to make the book worthwhile.

There must have been many temptations for the authors to overwrite their story. The dramatic dangers, the pathetic revelations of human nature, and such situations as the starving crew, weak and sick from lack of food, water, and rest, coasting along fertile, lovely islands on which they dared not land for fear of the savage inhabitants, would have lured many writers into purple passages. But the whole book is written with a steady, quiet factualness which does not grow stale, and which in the end creates cumulatively more dramatic effect than any amount of fervid writing could have done. Of course, it also serves excellently the purpose of the authors, which is to give the impression, not of a partly fictitious reconstruction, but of a true first-hand account.

A few of the characters, particularly the midshipmen, go unrealized. One is tempted, too, to think of Lamb as a lay figure. His greatest offense must have been invented by the authors, perhaps on some evidence, but no more, since the act was unknown to Captain Bligh, and it is from his log that they drew their story. Perhaps they felt the need of some wretched foil to their heroes; perhaps Lamb really was like that, it is quite possible. Lots of us who read the tale in comfort would probably have been the same.

Whatever the unevennesses may be, this is a story of a great feat upon salt water, told with unflagging interest; it is also a fine delineation of character, a thorough study of men under stress. That would seem to be a sufficiency of perfections in one book.

Oliver La Farge, archæologist and novelist, whose "Laughing Boy" won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1929, has recently published an excellent tale of American shipping in colonial days entitled, "The Long Pennant."

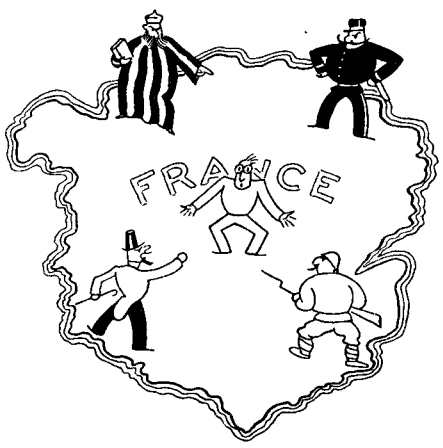
An Innocent Abroad

L'AFFAIRE JONES. By Hillel Bernstein. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1934. $2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

ONE of the immemorial and most successful forms of humor is the result of bringing opposites into direct contact. The great versus the small, the pompous versus the irreverent, the dowager versus the street urchin have inspired laughter from the era of Aristophanes to that of the *New Yorker*. Mr. Hillel Bernstein is thus following classic models in confronting the might and majesty of the French republic with the somewhat bewildered person of Henry Jones, cornpone-and-potlikker expert of Windfall, Georgia. "Les extrêmes se touchent," as the inhabitants of Mr. Bernstein's "purely imaginary" country put it. Sociological criticism of considerable subtlety is the better part of his book, achieved by simply putting American customs and Gallic ones side by side, while a tortuous plot, made up of scrambled happenings in the Dreyfus, Caillaux, and Léon Daudet cases, is less entertaining. Such humor is not necessarily malicious, and while there are few French institutions at which "L'Affaire Jones" does not aim a shaft, the list including everything from patriotism to the *crime passionel*, there is a distinct note of admiration sounded at the end.

Perhaps the principal reason why Mr. Bernstein's book is not as a whole very funny, in spite of being original in concep-



Drawing by Soglow for "L'Affaire Jones"

tion and often well arranged in detail, lies in his inability to make up his mind as to what kind of a book it is to be. It is not pure satire and it is not sheer nonsense, and also it is unfortunately not entirely free from stretches of dulness in which it becomes merely another novel about an American in France. In days when humor, particularly between the nations, is not exactly flourishing, one may at least be thankful for a book in which something of the French character (also "purely imaginary," of course) not found in the guide books emerges, free from ridicule or conventional platitudes. Soglow has done some illustrations which suggest that he has been doing a lot of work lately.