

The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., 25 W. 43rd St., New York, N. Y.
Noble A. Cathart, President and Treasurer;
Henry Seidel Canby, Vice-President and Chairman; Amy Loveman, Secretary.

Subscription rates per year, postpaid in the U. S. and Pan-American Postal Union, \$3.50; in Canada, \$5; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere \$4.50. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 1, 1879. Vol. 10. No. 28.

THE SATURDAY REVIEW is indexed in the "Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature."

THE SATURDAY REVIEW cannot assume responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts submitted without an addressed envelope and the necessary postage.

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Literary Politics

The stalwart Mencken, one of the few conservatives left in America who still dares to speak his piece, believes that when American politics turn to the left American literature will turn to the right—for American writers have always refused to follow the politicians.

He is right historically, or, at least, eighty percent right. The notable American writers have been in nothing more notable than in their consistent stand with the opposition. Washington Irving was a conformist and occasionally a time server, and Hawthorne's deep-lying pessimism made it easy for his conscience to exchange political biography for political preferment; but Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Howells, Mark Twain, Melville have all written their protests against the politicians and the financiers behind them deep in American literature. Whitman, though he held a government job, was no model of a placeman, and Cooper broke his heart in the attempt to reconcile his native respect for property and authority with the knaveries and injustices of those in power. There is perhaps no literature more definitely protestant in the lay sense of that word than the American.

Nevertheless, if there is a tradition in American literature that still has force (and the burden of proof is upon those who uphold the contrary opinion), that tradition is not conservative in the political or economic sense, but radical, humanitarian, against dominance by property, against exploitation, for the relatively poor, against the merely rich.

"Conservative" and "radical" are only words. Creative writers are nearly always conservative in the sense that they wish at all costs to conserve those human values which greed, ignorance, stupidity, sadism, and vanity destroy, and this has been notably true of the American literary tradition. Mr. Mencken is unquestionably right if he thinks that any effort to substitute force for persuasion in the attempt to bring about a new economic and political order in the United States will send even those intellectuals who are now toying with the forthright methods of communism and fascism scurrying into the opposition. Their predecessors—the Thoreaus, the Emersons, the Mark Twains, the Whitmans—were intense individualists, yet with a very little stretch of the imagination it is possible to conceive of them, even Thoreau, as in deep sympathy with the current attempts to hold back the profit-making motive from its excesses; it is quite possible to believe that they would be supporters of such a democratic-socialistic state as the liberals of the present Administration seem to have in mind. But they were more deeply concerned with the integrity of the mind, with good values in living, with spiritual freedom, than with economic equality. A Thoreau today would be more troubled by the threat of an authoritarian state, whether communist or fascist, than by the maldistribution of wealth. He would oppose the latter with all the force of his philosophy, yet scorn the man who made a fuss about his body while giving over his mind without a struggle to the state.

But it is most improbable that the new

generation of American writers, hatched in the sun of the New Deal, will be conservative, if conservative means to favor the continuance of the exploiting of the "boobs" for the benefit of the plutocracy that has been in power since the Civil War. And yet, if there is anything in tradition (and there most certainly is), it is equally improbable that they will be radical, if radical means to surrender to the politicians freedom of thought for a doubtful guarantee of distributed prosperity. It will prove to be easier to push American business toward fascism or communism (as the case may be) than to pull American literature in the direction of either.

The Booksellers' Code, now on file in Washington, is scheduled for hearings before the end of January. *The Saturday Review* urges all who are interested in the preservation of bookstores to support the proposed code by writing to Administrator Alexander Whiteside, NRA Headquarters, Washington. Letters from readers who can testify to the importance of maintaining smaller bookstores will be of great value to the booksellers' cause.



"NOW YOU SEE WHY WE CAN'T LET THIS BOOK GO FOR LESS THAN THIRTY DOLLARS."

Letters to the Editor: *In Search of a Publisher; How to Pronounce Names*

Problems of the Young Novelist

SIR: I have finished four novels. None have been published. The last took a year to write and rewrite. Eight active publishers were queried with a letter giving short synopsis, description of my material, and frank confession of my status as a novelist.

All but one of the eight publishers admitted willingness to take a look. The four most representative were selected, and I drew from these letters of rejection that meant nothing except that my manuscript was being returned by express. The Macmillan Company was the most courteous, writing, "We have had it [my novel] read carefully by our most competent advisers, and discussed at considerable length in editorial conference. It is undoubtedly an unusual piece of work, but the consensus of opinion seems to be that despite its merits, there is no place where it will fit in with our future publishing plans."

My novel seemed slanted to the *Saturday Evening Post*, but nothing doing there.

A good agent was the thing! Sheldon Dick was selected. His readers examined my manuscript. "... unfortunately we do not feel that we would be successful in handling it for you."

Where from here? Four general book publishers, one national periodical, and one reputable literary agent had said no. Rewrite? I had done this. Abandon it and start number five? Learn to write by writing? What had I learned to write by writing these four novels? Nothing from publishers and the public. Polite silence from the publishers and the public had no chance to say. Professional critics? On my third novel I had employed three of the best available. (I was selling many minor articles and a short story to one of the big national magazines at the time and had extra money for criticism.) But what one critic condemned, the others praised. Comparing the three criticisms, I despaired of any real help from paid critics, and decided that a writer's help must come from within himself.

And my conclusion is that although a young novelist's problems are many, the one that leads the field by a mile is finding a publisher. Here is one reason why I believe this:

When I finished my third novel and could not find a publisher, I was determined to in some way get the public's reaction to my writing. I went to one of

our local newspapers and arranged to run a Saturday column in their daily. I cut most of my third novel up in bits and published it in this Saturday Column. This paper's circulation amounts to 3,200 subscribers. I am positive that 3,199 kept up with my column. Almost that many have either written or spoken to me about it. And I found they not only liked the subject matter but the way it was written.

With this knowledge and experience behind me, I wrote my fourth novel about farm life and the daily events and problems of contemporary American life that my column fans love to read about. And I can't find a publisher to try it on a larger audience.

A newspaper editorial today under the heading, "Subsistence Farming Wins Wide Favor," tells of the overwhelming flood of demands to the government for subsistence farms. These demands are rolling in at the rate of 1,000 a day. And this was the theme of my fourth novel; a young couple forced to a small farm in order that they might eat and keep warm—and the publishers think there are not a sufficient number of people interested in such subject matter to warrant putting it into a book.

Should the author pay to have his novel published? What young novelist has available the facilities for marketing copies of a novel? But it is my opinion that authors—even young novelists—do know something of what the public likes to read about, but they do not know how to find a publisher without many trials, errors, and acres of wasted energy and heartache.

HERMAN LOWE.

Bowling Green, Ky.

More About Names

SIR: After the appreciative review given to my "International Book of Names" and the helpful suggestions made by Professor Holt, I trust it will not seem ungracious if I challenge his criticism of two or three items.

The reviewer questions my pronunciation of Pinero, Suckow, and Ambassador Morgenthau. If I am in error, the owners of the names are equally at fault. My role was merely that of a recorder.

Sir Arthur Pinero wrote me on July 10, 1933: "The correct pronunciation of the name is Pin-e'-ro (e as in me)."

Miss Ruth Suckow wrote on June 26, 1933: "Both the vowels in my name are long, as you wrote it—Su-kō (u as in

music)—with the accent on the first syllable. Thanks for writing to ask me, for it is almost invariably mispronounced."

Henry Morgenthau, Jr., instructed his secretary to write me as follows: "Although Mr. Morgenthau's father follows the German pronunciation, Mr. Morgenthau himself Anglicizes the name, pronouncing the last syllable *thaw*." This distinction between father and son has been duly incorporated in the second printing of my book.

Wodehouse is another name that has puzzled the eye-minded, and your readers may be interested in having the correct pronunciation determined by the author himself. "The name is pronounced Woodhouse," he wrote on June 19, 1933. The creator of Jeeves is entitled to the last word.

C. O. SYLVESTER MAWSON.

Wellesley, Mass.

Irish Names

SIR: Mr. Ernest Boyd's note on the pronunciation of Irish names caught my eye, and it occurs to me that some readers may be interested in the fact that the character Mahony in H. H. Richardson's "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony" accented his name in the approved Irish fashion and was always pained when his Australian associates mispronounced it. . . .

Incidentally, my own name, which Mr. Boyd uses as an example, is very frequently mispronounced in this country, and persons who have heard me pronounce it properly seem perversely determined to continue in error. I have always called myself Grat'n.

C. HARTLEY GRATTAN.

New York City.

Children and Literature

SIR:—I am preparing a book on the subject of "Children and Literature," in which I hope to include a section on "American Children and Literature," and I should be deeply grateful if you would permit me the use of your valuable columns to ask any of your readers who possess interesting, curious, or amusing literary efforts by children to be kind enough to give me an opportunity of reading and, possibly, using them.

I should, of course, return all MSS. sent to me and refund the cost of postage.

GEORGE GREER.

21 Little Russell St.
London, W.C.1

Van Nest Place

SIR: A curious lapse of accuracy occurs in Mr. Benet's interesting reminiscences of Sinclair Lewis, in your issue of January 20. What is called "Van Ness" Place, where Messrs. Lewis and Benet lived, is correctly spelled Van Nest Place, as any resident of Greenwich Village, past or present, ought to know. Don't tell me it was a typographical error: it occurs twice.

EDWARD CORNELIUS.

New York City.

(Mr. Cornelius saw an advance copy of the Review, as the correction was made for the regular edition. In any case, the error was not Mr. Benet's; his copy read "Van Nest," and was changed as the result of a proof-reader's brainstorm.—The Editors.)

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

ULYSSES. By JAMES JOYCE. Random House. The long proscribed work which many regard as one of the great novels of our time.

WORK OF ART. By SINCLAIR LEWIS. Doubleday, Doran. The story of a hotel man.

MORE FUN IN BED. Edited by FRANK SCULLY. Simon & Schuster. The convalescent's handbook.

This Less Recent Book:

ONLY YESTERDAY. By FREDERICK L. ALLEN. A history of the recent past.

A Little Man Who Touches Greatness

OUT OF LIFE. By Myron Brinig. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

THE list of Myron Brinig's novels lengthens. In each of them a wide interest in human beings as they are and as they are moulded by the conditions under which they live has been apparent. And, since a man no more than a city, is made in a day, Mr. Brinig's books have for the most part been long and his characters and places have reappeared from time to time in different novels. This full-length, carefully detailed style of portraiture is what we have inevitably come to expect from the author. His latest book breaks entirely away from his tradition. It gives as completely and with even greater emotional verity the whole being of a man but it does so simply, quickly, in a single flash with no long succession of days and nights, no careful leading up to and away from. Here is a man on his day of days. We are concerned with his past only as it manifests itself on this day, a day that will lead into no future.

Sam Baggot closes his delicatessen store in downtown New York and starts for his home in Brooklyn. Dulness and routine. Business bad as usual; the evening paper; the faces in the subway; the smell of food in the house; the silent supper with a tired wife, then bed and blessed forgetfulness. Morning and the great news. Stella tells him they are to have a child. After all these years,—a child, a son. Sam Baggot walks out of the house into a new world.

Sam tells everyone he meets on the way to the store. He loves every one and everything. And everyone and everything love him. The delicatessen counter cannot hold him, he will take a holiday to explore this brave new world that Stella's words have builded. He starts out.

His day is what his day would have to be. He wants to embrace joy, he wants to be one with the very heart of life. But he is Sam Baggot, delicatessen dealer, and so outwardly he can only meet and join forces with a young sailor, drink, brawl, gamble, and end his day in a disreputable house. But for Sam all these things are very different. For him the sailor represents beauty and strength and freedom. Sam feels himself father to the beauty of the young man, son to his strength. Drinking is a release to the spirit, gives to Sam a self worthy of his great news, brave enough to challenge any man he happens to find annoying. And in gambling Sam senses his new power. He can take money from the world as well as everything else. And for him the girl in the house symbolizes a force in living which is essential and exquisite. Through the embrace of this girl and the sailor, Sam feels himself at one with all merging and union throughout life.

So one follows Sam on his brief pilgrimage through ecstatic intensification. He wants to give out all that is within him and to take into himself all that lies outside. In his attempt to show the extent of his character's desire and the narrow

limits imposed upon its expression, Mr. Brinig has feared neither the sublime nor the ridiculous. The result amply justifies his courage. Sam Baggot is a little man who touches greatness for a moment. His saga is pitiful and ludicrous. As a potential father he looms gigantic in his own eyes; after such a hope and such a vision any lesser fate is impossible for him; to be out of life is better than dull continuing.

Kim of Bolivia

THE BLACK MOUNTAIN. By Alan Hillgarth. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LUCIA ALZAMORA

ALAN HILLGARTH'S scene is present-day Bolivia, his subject the Bolivian Indian. Taken together, they form an ancient plot, however fresh to the reader of fiction, and of them he has made an unusual and engrossing novel. It is, on the face of it, a romance, an invented, adventurous story, but it is written so sympathetically, with a discernment so rare in a North American writing about South America that it lifts itself out of that class into a place of real importance.

The chief character of the book, Patricio, is a Quichua Indian with an infinitesimal amount of white blood in his veins—what in South America is called a cholo. When he is eleven years old, and in serious trouble, he falls in with a Callaguaya, an itinerant native healer, endowed with great wisdom and sweetness, who recognizes the latent possibilities in the boy and arranges to have him educated by an important family of Spanish descent. Through the years that he is acquiring the education of a gentleman he almost persuades himself that he is neither Indian nor cholo, but white, that his percentage of Indian blood is so slight as to be negligible. A concerted and horrible Indian uprising serves both to make him even more definitely wish to forget that he has ever been an Indian, and to awaken him to the situation of the people among whom he was born. But he finds it impossible. He follows the Callaguaya out of La Paz, destined to succeed his mentor as another link in that legendary chain of native leaders which alone binds the Indian of today to the old civilized nation of the Incas.

Bolivia is a strange country, and perhaps this story could have been set convincingly in no other. Mr. Hillgarth knows its mountains, its mines, its Incas, its men, and its legends. He writes vigorously and well. The slow development of soul and intelligence, and later the racial conflict in the boy's mind, are touchingly and skilfully done. Perhaps the first chapters wherein the child wanders alone in the mountain are the most appealing, but the book reaches its peak almost at the last, when Patricio, holding the revolutionary mob in his hand, speaks unconsciously in his native Quichua. The visionary ending, though foreseen, is not entirely convincing, not quite satisfactory, and the love-affair with the American girl not at all so.

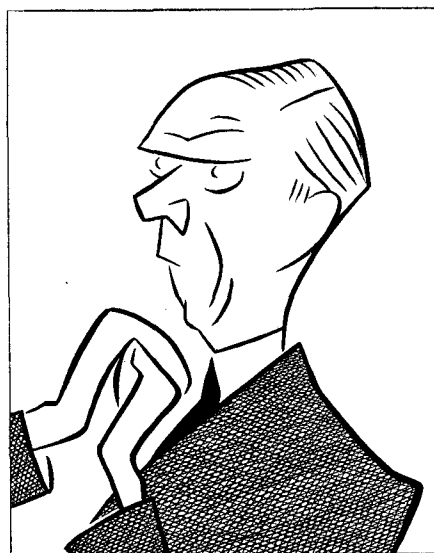
For the rest this is an exciting and thoughtful book, a rounded picture of a strange civilization, written by a man of delicate perceptions and great knowledge of his subject.

Lewis's Hick of Genius

(Continued from first page)

calling. Thereafter Myron learned to scorn delights and live laborious days, and to toughen himself against the misunderstanding that besets the artist. Striving to bring order and efficiency into the slackness of average American hotel-keeping of a generation ago, he found that "his easy-going employees resented him as supercilious and fussy, his old friends felt that he was a hard money-grubber and climber," while "the 'intellectuals' were certain that he was a vulgar Philistine because he provided excellent bathrooms and ice cream (which people wanted) instead of atrocious paintings or novels (which they didn't want)."

And as Myron Weagle gradually rose in his field there shaped itself before him the vision of the Perfect Inn, the work of art which should be the crown of his life's



SINCLAIR LEWIS
Drawn for The Saturday Review
by Irma Selz

work. Possibly he was a little touched by cultural colonialism, for his vision was of a modernized version of the old English country inn; not till long afterward, from his son, did he catch the revolutionary idea that perhaps the modern analogue of that celebrated institution could be found in the humble tourist camp. The perfect work of art was at last completed, only to be wrecked by incalculable and adventitious disaster; but even without disaster Myron realized eventually that the resort-hotel business was changing under the pressure of the motoring and golfing manias, that by building his country inn in 1927 he had in effect "set up shop as epic poet just when the prose novel was ousting the hexameter." It is a disaster that has happened to many artists and to many works of art; a century from now, literary detectives may be running through Lewis's published and unpublished output, trying to determine which of his books suggested the fate of the Black Thread Center Inn.

In these later chapters of Myron Weagle's decline one begins to feel that this is less a story of a hotel man than of a man, frustrated in great ambitions by stupidity and greed and sheer bad luck; there is in them a depth and an intensity missing in the earlier part of the book. But a man in Lewis's position can dare give his story a fairly happy ending, even though he ranks as an art artist; Myron Weagle went grimly back to work, did what he could as well as he could, and in the end attained the supreme distinction of a country hotel keeper; "the traveling men told him that his was the best hotel in their territory, and they planned their routes so that they could spend Sunday there."

A book on such a theme inevitably suggests comparison with "Arrowsmith." By contrast, "Work of Art" is a long way inferior, both in profundity and in variety. Such variety as it has comes chiefly from the recurrent intrusions of Brother Ora (usually to borrow money); and the contrast of this novelist-playwright-scenario-writer-swindler with Myron, pattern of the Idle and Industrious Apprentices brought up to date, is one of Lewis's unhappier inspirations. Ora's history contains some shrewd touches, but most of it is broad caricature in the early manner

of "Hobohemia." Myron Weagle is a less complex person than Martin Arrowsmith and his wife is very far from a Leora; though their relation, casually sketched in a few parenthetical pages, builds up into a picture that possibly comes nearer being the typical American marriage than most of those that get into current fiction.

But the comparison is irrelevant, however inescapable. A man who has written two books as good as "Babbitt" and "Arrowsmith" need never write anything else; and if the gadfly drives him to keep on writing he still has the right to be judged only by his best. If "Work of Art" is considerably below Lewis's best, it is immeasurably above his worst. It may not be what the trade (usually with unintended irony) terms an Important Book, but it is a good two dollars and fifty cents' worth; it may be Lewis's country commercial hotel, but this reviewer spent a highly agreeable Sunday there.

Double Exposure

FIRST LOVE AND LAST. By Howard Coxe. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

IT is difficult, in a big city, to know the beginnings and endings of people, difficult, indeed, to see them in the round. Perhaps it is only in small communities that observation of character can be really profound and all-knowing. And in a community where families have lived in an established way for generations, what hoarded knowledge of character is stored in their long memories!

It is precisely this accumulated shrewdness and knowledge that Mr. Coxe, in "First Love and Last," has brought to his study of Miss Sara Cloud. He shows her to us, against the slowly changing background of her small town in northeastern New York, as a type, an individual, and a force,—that gravitational force which holds a family to a solid place in the world. We do not so much see, as know, her, as we know an intimate old friend, whose outward appearance has no longer any particular significance for us.

Mr. Coxe tells her story in a tone that is colloquial, American, and altogether natural, and with a liveliness that flags only in the middle section of the book, a section that is slower and less interesting than the first and last. He has devised a form of story-telling that is novel and successful. He first reveals Miss Sara to us on Christmas Eve, 1931, in the searing moment when she courageously meets the family doctor's grim diagnosis of her illness. The succeeding chapters trace the events of her life back from that moment of 1931, to her girlhood in 1894, in a chronological regression that continually deepens our understanding of her final strength. At the same time we are led forward by a curiosity to know just what her "story" was, to find out about the blighted romance that shadowed her early life.

It is a method peculiarly suited to Mr. Coxe's corrosive portrayal of character. In the first section of the book we meet most of the principal figures of Miss Sara's life. They are there in their final state of moral disintegration. They have already toppled from their niches in her inner temple. When she comes across her old love, Lucius Kent, at Rome in 1929, he is a grave Silenus in spats, with years of unscrupulously bought success behind him. It is consequently with a particular irony that we watch Lucius Kent, the young lover of 1894. We are enabled to take just such a double view of the others; of Miss Sara's father, the great Senator Cloud, with his lofty forehead, his rhetoric, and his high-flown hypocrisy; of weak, charming Roddy, her brother, who goes to Paris to become a painter.

Mr. Coxe knows all about these people, all about the rise and fall of the Cloud family in their town of Sparta. He can even put his finger on the exact moment when their decline began—a little while before Mrs. Cloud's death, and shortly after one of those Christmas family gatherings in the damask-walled drawing-room that had come to resemble nothing so much as a "reception at one of the minor German courts."



DRAWING BY RICHARD FLOETHE FOR "OUT OF LIFE"