

The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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Summer Reading

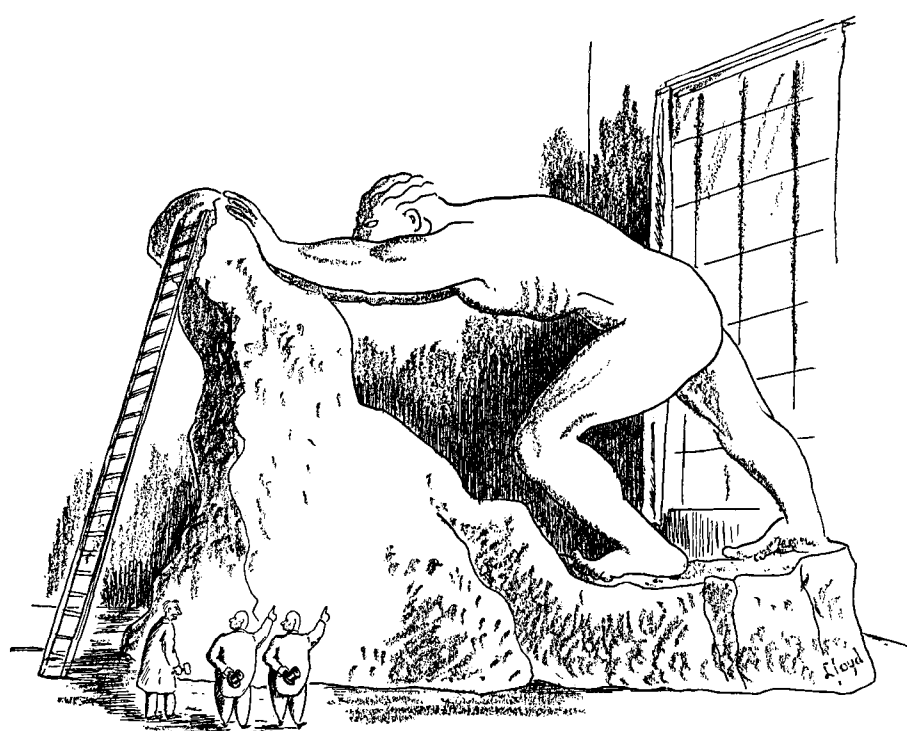
The tradition that summer is the time for light reading seems to have worn somewhat thin. Possibly arising from academic sources—the long vacation offering the opportunity to call off all intellectual activity—the tradition has got into the book business and influenced publishers' list-making. But less this summer, it seems, than in years past. Light reading still flourishes, of course, but it does not appear to have taken a seasonal spurt. Observing the lists of new books and of best-sellers, one concludes that the all-year-round light reading public is no longer being reinforced during the summer by serious readers on holiday: that the serious readers are reading the serious books which are being provided for them. Has the summer reading tradition succumbed to the law of supply and demand, or does the demand exist only to be ignored by the supply?

Whatever hesitation a publisher may once have had in issuing a serious summer list has evidently disappeared. One reason may be that some of the most widely successful books of recent years were summer publications. "All Quiet on the Western Front," "The Story of Philosophy," "Anthony Adverse," none of them "summer reading," none of them by authors previously popular, quickly come to mind. Certainly these are examples enough to encourage the publication of serious books in summer. And the summer lists this year, as any one can see from the majority of the reviews featured in this and other journals, are predominantly serious.

The reason for this, however, can probably not be entirely ascribed to changes in publishing practice; for publishing practice must ultimately depend on the available material, quite as much as on the public taste. Evidence is abundant for the hypothesis that the available material offers very little in the way of intelligent frivolity. This is not a period which may reasonably be expected to produce another Max Beerbohm or another Saki. If one wants light reading, one must either go to the library shelves or, if it has to be something new, compromise with the machine-made romance of the magazine writers. The times influence the author's output, and those among the younger authors who write not only for money have gone serious. A generation that has discarded art for art's sake will hardly go in for entertainment.

Yet this is a point which has been over-

looked in all the recent controversy of art vs. propaganda. No one seems to have pointed out to the propaganda faction that their current output is suffering from arrested development: that aside from the question whether the propaganda is good art, what does matter to the public for whom the propaganda is intended, is whether it is good entertainment. The greatest propagandists have invariably realized this, from Swift to Dickens to Shaw. Readers of "Nicholas Nickleby" boiled over about English schools because it was exciting to read about Dotheboys Hall. Similarly, Shaw undermined the moral pretensions of capitalism not by his own moral indignation, but by laughing at them. These considerations are as obvious as platitudes can be; but our propagandist novelists and playwrights have not taken advantage of them. Perhaps the times are too serious; even Shaw has lost his sense of humor. But the first really funny story written in favor of the proletarian revolution, or the communist or fascist state, will introduce a valuable innovation into our propagandist literature. And it will make ideal summer reading.



"SWELL IDEA FOR A BOOK-END!"

Letters to the Editor: Our Correspondents Burst into Poetry

The Mystery

Yo, ho, ho, Hitler is a vermin:
Why did Mr. Bogumil Dawison speak in German?

That is one thing I simply cannot determine:

Why did Mr. Bogumil Dawison speak in German?

And then, what was it he spoke? Was it a song or a sermon?

Why, I ask you, did Mr. Bogumil Dawison speak in German?

There was Edwin Booth as Iago all dressed in ermine,

But, meanwhile, as Othello, Mr. Bogumil Dawison was speaking in German.

He may have been some sort of a Cossack firman,

But in that case, surely, he wouldn't have been speaking in German.

"Othello" is no play in which to costume one's self as a merman,

But neither is it precisely the time and the place to go around speaking in German.

My lack of information upon this point makes me feel like a worm an'

I completely fail to understand why Mr. Bogumil Dawison was speaking in German.

There were famous last words by Generals Jackson, Sheridan, and Sherman,

But it seems that some of the last words that Mr. Bogumil Dawison ever seems to have spoken were spoken in German.

I think this is one of the mysteries that will remain permanent—that Mr. Bogumil Dawison, at the Winter Garden, before that vast assemblage, in a performance which must find "an abiding home in dramatic story," where tier on tier the noble and the fair, with cheer on cheer, must certainly have been there, and ear on ear palpitated with expectancy in the dazzle of the lights and that electric air—was

gutturally

SPEAKING IN GERMAN!

ENDYMION PORTER.

Ballade of the Favorite Book

SIR:—I was agreeably titillated, as a Dickens enthusiast, to read Mr. Morley's whimsical bit of verse on "Nana and the New York Times."

Your mention of "Pickwick," incidentally, stirred me to a realization that it is nearly time for me to begin my seventh reading of that gorgeous book—or will it be the eighth?

In any event, I have celebrated your

verse with another which, in spite of its probable technical defects, at least appears somewhat apropos in view of your comment.

When fancy fails, and friends deny

The answer to my spirit's need,

I still possess a staunch ally

To whom my mood is always keyed.

The book of honest British breed,

A book aglow with myriad tapers—

I take it down, and once more read

My old, beloved "Pickwick Papers."

It banishes my boredom's sigh,

And wafts me scents of English mead;

It sends me leaping, quick and spry,

To Dingley Dell, and Jingle's deed.

(Purses and hearts were made to bleed!)

So Jingle thought, whose jolly capers

From just one book—this one, proceed!

My old, beloved "Pickwick Papers."

And who'll forget Sam Veller? Aye!

The Sam whose impish spirit freed

The fable of the old "weal pie"

In which the "weal" was cats, indeed!

(Let all poor pussies here take heed).

Yet Pickwick's packed with such bright

vapors,

A marvel, we must be agreed,

My old, beloved "Pickwick Papers."

ENVOY

Thus do you see a book succeed

That never needed censor's scrapers—

Come, do I have to bid you read

My old, beloved "Pickwick Papers"?

KENNETH ABRAM FOWLER.

Yonkers, N. Y.

Genius in the Woodpile

SIR:—I am impelled to write you briefly commenting upon the tragedy of undiscovered genius. Occasionally we hear this cry in the present day. I want to know, with thousands of book-sellers scanning the prospectus of every new book offered them; with hundreds of reviewers and critics keeping a weather eye open; with tens of thousands of diversified readers prying into every volume off the presses, how can it happen?

I am inclined to believe that when a supposedly deserving book "doesn't go" there is a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. It lacks the good old "u. a." (universal appeal.) Like a tire that suddenly goes flat—there's a reason.

WALTER HETFIELD BOCK.

Plainfield, N. J.

An Answer to "One Question"

SIR:—It can't have occurred to E. P., who asked The Bowling Green "one question" last week, that she is just as smug as the books she turns to for consolation. I say this in all sympathy and understanding, believing that the period of despair described by her is one through which everyone who thinks must pass.

The term "patient" should not be applied to E. P. alone, but to hundreds of other thinking people who are so sure they are on the inside that they are really on the outside, and rather wistful, too. Why should one shut oneself away from life with a wall of books? Literature is dependent on life and not the reverse. There is no chicken and egg dispute here. Suppose Bunny in "Little Man, What

Now?" bought carrots and gossipped. She would have all the intelligentsia buying carrots and gossiping vicariously. Separate her from her context and what more have we than someone for them to deride? Let's not reserve all our powers of analysis for reading hours.

E. P. has something to learn from the most naive carrot-buyer, and a little to envy—if unadulterated happiness is what she wants. Of course it all depends on whether she prefers the viewpoint of an adolescent Cabell who must create a world to suit himself, or a Thomas Mann, content with interpreting the world as it is.

Let us not waste time deploring "nit-wits" and "evils." Once analyzed they cease to be satanic phenomena.

Book-lovers are of the human species and the planet called Earth is their natural habitat. We are all lucky to have got a look-in on this exciting, breath-taking adventure. The "mundane," the "dull," and the "horrible" mentioned by the plaintiff are as the Little Fears that beset the Emperor Jones in the forest. Outside the forest there is sunlight and possible death and though death is more tangible than a Little Fear, it is what it is.

J. C.

Binghamton, N. Y.

Ralph Earl

SIR:—I am gathering material for a biographical and critical study of the art of Ralph Earl, the eighteenth-century New England portrait painter, and would very much appreciate any biographical data, letters, personal reminiscences, photographs and/or descriptions of portraits, miniatures, or landscapes from his hand.

FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN.

44 State Street,
Westport, Conn.

The Eighth President

SIR:—I am preparing a life of Martin Van Buren, Eighth President, and would be grateful for any unpublished material on that subject. I am especially interested in personal anecdotes or in something concerning his wife, Hannah Holt Van Buren.

H. M. ALEXANDER.

25 E. 10th St.,
New York City.

Stella Benson Letters

SIR:—I have been asked by Mr. O'Gorman Anderson to write the life of Stella Benson (Mrs. Anderson). I would be grateful if any who have letters of hers which they are willing to have published, in whole or in part, would send them to me. They will be copied as soon as possible, and then returned.

R. ELLIS ROBERTS.

11, New Square, Lincoln's Inn,
London, W.C. 2.

Material on Major André

SIR:—I am preparing a life of Major John André from fresh material gathered in this country and abroad, and shall greatly appreciate the courtesy if any of your readers will extend the privilege of viewing mementoes or having photostats made of documents in their possession, which relate in any way to the days of André in America.

IDA M. MELLEN.

523 Sixth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

YEARS ARE SO LONG. By JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE. Stokes.
A tale centered about the family tragedy of dependent old age.

AMERICAN SONG. By PAUL ENGLE. Doubleday, Doran.
A volume of poems by one of the most promising of the younger writers.

STARS FELL ON ALABAMA. By CARL CARMER. Farrar & Rinehart. The soul of a southern state as it appeared to a Yankee.

This Less Recent Book:

HATTER'S CASTLE. By A. J. CRONIN. Little, Brown. A melodramatic, but powerful, story of Scottish life.

Human Figures of Hitler's Germany

TO THE VANQUISHED. By I. A. R. Wylie. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM HARLAN HALE

TO write a novel on a background so topical as that of Hitlerite Germany offers all the pitfalls of sensation and prejudice. Miss Wylie has used that background to such extent that it becomes the whole burden of her story; she has even let Hitler and Goebbels themselves appear as characters; but almost miraculously she avoids all rhetoric of accusation.

Not that there is any doubt as to which side Miss Wylie is on. But she has undoubtedly felt that any further presentation of horror material from the Hitler regime should be done in tracts and not in fiction. Her object has been, not to expose the human conditions now prevailing in the Germany that she knows so well, but to search their background and to reveal how they came about.

With this broad plan in mind she does not, however, go deeply into political or social history. A few individual characters



I. A. R. WYLIE

Drawing by Julie Brown

are her only tools: these voice, from their separate hearts, the aspirations and the defeats of modern Germany. They are symbols of post-war states of mind; but it is to Miss Wylie's credit as a creator that they come alive as credible human beings.

Orphaned, ignored, and starving, a gang of young Germans make camp in a deserted garrison church in a small southwestern city, going out from there on forays for food and bare essentials of living. In this *Bund der Wilden* the most desperate member is a youth who calls himself merely "The Wolf." Son of an officer killed in action, weaned in the terrible foodless days of war, and brought up on little else than neuroticism and frustration, he belongs to the disinherited. Miss Wylie draws him with sympathy, and lets us see his profound isolation from the Germany of the republic, and his sudden hysterical discovery of a savior—Hitler.

In the course of his house-breaking for things to eat, he comes upon a young girl and suffers the anguish of first love. He does not know that Franzle is the daughter of Dr. Roth, a staunch German liberal who has done his town great medical service. He does not know that this Dr. Roth is the center of a little group of liberal intellectuals and Jews—people who, as they hear the tramp of Hitler's storm-troops outside the door, huddle closer together in a final despairing hope for freedom.

The whole narrative—which is confined in time to the few months preceding and following Hitler's actual accession to power—revolves around these two young people, Wolf, whose dark, solitary brooding has now burst forth in a flaming passion against an "enemy" he cannot even identify, and Franzle, the embodiment of Gretchen, the *Ewig weibliche*, who gives Wolf the humanizing experience of love which in the end awakens him to faith in himself and relieves him of the bitter need of asserting himself through uniforms, commands, and persecutions.

Naturally a story built around such pol-

itical opposites in a time of revolution would have physical violence and melodrama in it; but Miss Wylie handles her prison scenes, her mass meetings, her raids, her deaths, with a sure feeling for the human values involved, rather than merely for the mob spectacle. Her Dr. Roth, a pillar of humanitarian wisdom and authority even as a prisoner in a concentration camp, is a compelling figure. Her S. A. men and boys, now exerting their unbridled revenge for a youth lived under the stigma of Versailles, are rough-hewn tragic portraits. And if the story runs perhaps at almost too quick a pace, with a tendency to over-briefness and glibness of dialogue, it is still an authentic contribution to the social novel of our time. It may appear to have a passing journalistic quality, but its inner tones are human and enduring.

Lardner at His Best

FIRST AND LAST. By Ring Lardner. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is a collection of humorous writings of Ring Lardner, projected before his death, and put into its present form by Mr. Gilbert Seldes. The pieces in this book, reprinted from various newspapers and other periodicals, include "The Young Immigrants," his rambling write-ups of the Dempsey-Firpo fight and the America Cup Race, some of his radio criticisms, his blasting parodies of certain columnists, and a number of hilarious short pieces. The book is all non-fiction, and is all humor, as only Lardner could write humor.

Having thus given the necessary information, perhaps the truly wise reviewer would stop at once, for to write of Ring Lardner, even in appreciation, is like trying to find a few fresh remarks about Niagara Falls. But there are one or two things which strike one afresh in rereading a quantity of his humor, much of it intended to be ephemeral. One is struck by the solidity of his work, enabling such a parody as "The Young Immigrants" to stand alone, like "Joseph Andrews," for the delight of those who know nothing of the original. And one is struck by the clarity and honesty of his mind which never allowed him, in his most popular work, to descend below his own level. It is a constant temptation for humorists like him to make a virtue of vulgarity and ignorance, even to flatter the mob by assuming prejudices they do not possess. Some of the very greatest have done so; Mark Twain himself did so; but Lardner never did. His gawkinsness is always merely external; it sets off the brilliance of his mind like the rags of the acrobat's assistant who dazzled Huck Finn when he slipped out of them.

Similarly his misspellings are different in kind from those of all the depressing procession from Orpheus C. Kerr and Petroleum V. Nasby down to Mr. Will Rogers, who display illiteracy, as medieval jesters displayed idiocy, for the entertainment of a stupid court. Lardner's misspelling goes straight to the first book to use it for humorous effect, and very nearly the last to achieve any humorous effect with it, the great "Humphrey Clinker," where the spelling suggests insane and ridiculous puns. When Lardner speaks of the *Resolute* and the *Shamrock* as "the two slops," or when he speaks of "my father," in a traffic jam, "reciteing the 4 Horses of the Apoplex in a under tone," he is reviving the noble tradition of Tabitha Bramble and Winifred Jenkins.

But all comments on the ludicrous are apt to be ridiculous. This book contains none of the hate and pity for the human race on which the critics have so insisted in Lardner's other work; but it is one of the funniest books of our time. And one wonders if that is not the highest praise one can after all give to Lardner. There are plenty of authors to demand scorn or sympathy for mankind; there are very few who can write books that one cannot read aloud for overwhelming laughter, and Lardner was one of that small company. One of the first things one will ask for in heaven will be the books Lardner has written there.

Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth

YEARS ARE SO LONG. By Josephine Lawrence. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

MISS LAWRENCE'S tale of an aged couple who have fallen upon evil days strikes consternation to the soul. Can this be true? Can this tragedy of indigent old age arise among people who are neither monstrous nor wantonly cruel? So much Miss Lawrence makes us believe, though every filial instinct rises in revolt against the situation she presents. The heart faints away from the spectacle of parents in their declining years separated from each other, shunted about from child to child, unwelcome wherever for the time they are, and with nothing for the one that remains when death takes off the other but the alien hospitality of a home for the aged. Incredible? Yes, but a horrible uneasiness fills our mind lest here, there, and everywhere throughout America this tragedy is being enacted.

Not that the children of Barkley and Lucy Cooper were determined to sidestep their obligations. On the contrary, they were ready to fulfill them according to their lights, but their lights were those of a generation different from their parents', and there began the pathos of the old people's situation. For when old Mr. Cooper announced to his sons and daughters that he had lost his position and henceforth would have to depend upon them for the support of his wife and himself, it was with no sense of either humiliation or doubt. He had cared for them in their youth, and now in his time of trial it was both their duty and their privilege to provide for him and their mother as he in his turn had done for his own parents. Other times, other manners. The generation of his children no longer believed that they owed their elders a sacred debt for having brought them into the world. "Bunk! Not many of us are grateful for the privilege of living," said the mild Richard, and "No, Father," went on the more calculating George. "I can't see that we should be grateful. You apparently assume that we wished to be born, in order to be the subjects of this love and care you talk about. No child has ever asked to be born." "My good Lord, Dad," said Richard further, "you're a hundred years behind the times. Did you and Mother have five children for the sole purpose of providing yourselves with old-age insurance? Is that why you've never saved a cent—because you relied on us? One generation's duty isn't to the past; it's to the future. We're in debt to our children, not to you."

It is the measure of Miss Lawrence's success that she has been able to hold the balance true between the generations—that while she makes so poignant the logic of the parents she yet is able to rationalize the attitude of the children, and by that rationalization to make them plausible. Her book is stripped of all sentimentality,

but full of an unspoken compassion. It is remarkably deft in the unfolding of its narrative, conveying the unquestioning reliance of the parents upon their children, their first incredulous reception of the unwillingness of the latter to provide for them as they had anticipated, and the situations precipitated in the different homes by their presence in convincing and skilful fashion. There is profound feeling in the book, but no hysteria. These sons and daughters, repellent as their attitude is, are not wholly vicious. Anita, for instance, honestly strives to treat her mother-in-law with consideration; Nellie lavishes real affection upon her; the sons are not without affection and sympathy for both parents. Because they are not all black, they are infinitely more convincing than if they had been portrayed as ruthless. True, feeling balks at believing that of five children none would have had profound enough love to have given shelter to their parents at whatsoever cost of inconvenience. And separating wife and husband seems an ultimate cruelty. Yet, despite these reservations, Miss Lawrence has had art enough to make her story in the main credible; and earnestness enough to make it heartrending. Whatever else this book is likely to do it is apt to stir up controversy. It is certain to move whoever reads it. We wish we could forget it, but we know we can't. Miss Lawrence has done too clean-cut and sincere a job, and written too effective a novel, for that.

Don Cossacks

(Continued from first page)

epic, music which clutches at the heart-strings like a Rimsky-Korsakoff symphony.

The story is not complicated. Drinking, fighting, mating. Men and women living close to nature surrounded by endless steppes, depending upon the soil for a living, the Don humming its endless melody in accompaniment to their existence, an ageless existence which for centuries remained the same. A sun-drenched landscape, a vigorous and vital people whose problems are of the simplest kind. And the narrative flows on like the Don, describing the Cossack life and customs, its interests and psychology, its joys and vicissitudes.

The author's manner and style denote a careful and experienced worker, a man familiar with writing. Yet, before reading his "Quiet Flows the Don" a few years ago (in Russian), I had not heard of him. It was pleasant reading, as unlike other Soviet books it contained no propaganda and was written in good Russian, and for the same reasons Sholokhov cannot be considered as a typical Soviet writer. The book is long and perhaps a trifle monotonous for those unacquainted with Russian life in general and Cossack existence in particular. The descriptions, however, are vivid and well balanced and do not slow down the narrative.

"And Quiet Flows the Don" is one of the best translations from Russian that I have ever come across. In its English version it keeps all the atmosphere, spontaneity, and color of the original.



DRAWING OF COSSACKS BY WILLIAM SIEGEL

From "Our Lenin" (International Publishers).