

cally than the English phrases. An American of Mr. Vulliamy's shrewdness would hardly take as seriously as this author does the Shackamaxon elm, treaty, and blue sash, and those other romantic and mythical embroideries of Penn's American visits which have either been disproved or laid open to question by competent authority.

Arthur Pound, who is a journalist and novelist as well as historian, is the author of "The Penns of Pennsylvania."

## A Turbulent Day

THE WIFE. By Helen Grace Carlisle. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

TO those who ask that a novel be exciting and emotionally appealing rather than intellectually convincing, "The Wife" can be recommended. It offers heady liquor, some of it mellow and heart-warming, some of it raw and acrid. Indeed, in its transitions from sensitive understanding to melodrama, from the real to the tawdry, the book is not unlike those post-prohibition advertisements that proffer the vintage wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux cheek by jowl with the bastard distillates of day before yesterday.

Perhaps the framework of the tale, admirable in its way, is partly responsible, though the ultimate cause lies deeper. The framework in any case favors the juxtaposition of violently contrasting scenes. The story itself is told entirely from the point of view of Nina, the happily married wife of Robert Cameron, and it covers the period that elapses between her awakening at eight in the morning, through the crisis which takes place at four that afternoon, to the solution of her problem next morning at ten. As we follow Nina from hour to hour in an existence seemingly compounded of love, luxurious well-being, a few duties, a little work and many pleasures, we soon become aware that under the clean, smooth surface of her present life flow the muddy waters of an unusually grimy past. Into her consciousness stream the hatreds and misery of a childhood spent in the tenements of New York, the shame and physical hunger of her first marriage to an incorrigible thief, the poisonous degradation of her relations with the drunken rotter, Nelson Crane, who is the father of her illegitimate child. Lacking family, religion, traditions, Nina in her youth had succumbed to a peculiarly ugly variety of experiences, and it is these experiences that, in a series of flash-backs, are placed for us beside the unfolding picture of her present well-being. They shadow her happiness and, in a moment of crisis, threaten its annihilation.

The pattern of the story, with past and present so tightly interwoven, successfully combines unity, color, and tension, and the plot, moving as it does on several levels, all interrelated, has excellent dramatic possibilities. The author accurately observes many of the subtler emotions of her heroine and the thumb-nail sketches along the way—of a cocktail party, emerging from warmth and hilarity, confronted by a beggar; of an evicted musician playing her piano on the sidewalk and cajoling reluctant pennies from Italian fruit-vendors—show both feeling and perception. But too often scenes that are potentially dramatic lapse into theatricality, and too often the figures concerned in them are stage-props instead of human beings. Neither Nelson nor Robert is entirely credible in himself or in the life of the heroine. Nina's debauchery by the first and marriage to the second are insufficiently premised and almost equally unpalatable. Nor is the motivation of the denouement psychologically satisfying.

In short, the tale moves swiftly and much of it is emotionally persuasive, but one cannot help wishing that the incidents jostling their way through the heroine's thoughts had been fewer, more firmly realized, more resonant. Nina's turbulent life, like music heard over the radio, lacks overtones, and, for all its turbulence, tinkles but feebly when compared with the great orchestral crash of Clarissa Dallo-way's much quieter day in fiction.

# The Career of a Dancer

NIJINSKY. By Ramola Nijinsky. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1934. \$3.75.

Reviewed by EMILY GARDINER

NIJINSKY'S life written by his wife is a book that will be read with interest by many people only moderately interested in dancing. It is intended as an honest and frank account of his life although actually it is the biased and personal version of an excessively emotional though charming woman. But it is much more as well: it is a study in abnormal psychology, a collection of spicy anecdotes of artistic and social life, an authentic though personal history of the famous Diaghileff ballet, a sometimes embarrassingly intimate picture of a great



THE SPECTRE OF THE ROSE  
Karsavina and Nijinsky

artist who was also the humblest and gentlest of men.

After an opening chapter recounting how Mme. Nijinsky first saw and became infatuated with her future husband in 1912 in Budapest when he was already at the height of his career, the book goes back to Nijinsky's childhood. He was born in 1890, the fourth generation of dancers, was carried all over Russia by his itinerant parents; in 1900 he was admitted to the Imperial Ballet School, from then on leading the same secluded life completely dedicated to dancing of which we already have an astonishing account in Karsavina's "Theatre Street." In 1908 his course was finished, he was automatically taken into the company of the Mariinsky Theatre, and in the same year he first met Serge Diaghileff. An immediate friendship sprang up between them which soon grew into a more intimate relation and produced a fruitful artistic collaboration. In 1909 Diaghileff arranged for a season of the Russian Imperial Ballet in Paris. The furor which their appearance caused there, with Nijinsky as the brightest of half a dozen stars, is now history, and a second season, equally successful, was organized in the following year. So far Mme. Nijinsky's book is a comparatively objective account of the first part of Nijinsky's life of which she had no first-hand knowledge and with which she must have received much help from Nijinsky's various friends whom she thanks in her foreword as well as from Mr. Lincoln Kirstein. But from here on the book is her personal story.

Mme. Nijinsky was a Hungarian aristocrat, in her own words just another adoring society girl, who was immediately infatuated with Nijinsky. She is quite shameless in recounting the extremes to which she went in order to meet, to know, and to possess Nijinsky. She had to use all her not inconsiderable influence in Budapest, had to cultivate other members of the troupe, even to take up dancing herself, had to grapple with Diaghileff who guarded Nijinsky jealously, had finally to join the troupe on a tour to South America, and had to persist through

Nijinsky's indifference and shyness, before she could make him say in his broken French (as they spoke no language in common) on the moonlit deck of a steamer, "Mademoiselle, voulez-vous vous et moi?" They were married in Buenos Aires in September 1913.

Notwithstanding this unpropitious start Mme. Nijinsky has been a deeply devoted wife through all Nijinsky's triumphs and subsequent tragedies. She fought Diaghileff's unrelenting hatred, shared Nijinsky's hardships during the war, and has always looked out for his support during the horrible mental illness from which he has suffered since 1919.

The book gives in detail the history of each tour, even of each ballet, and follows the development of Nijinsky as a dancer and as a choreographer; but it always remains a personal interpretation. For instance, her opinion of Diaghileff's work is colored by her bitterness. The impression of Diaghileff that has so far prevailed is of a great impresario, combining in one man a connoisseur of music, choreography, painting, theatre, with a diplomat of unlimited tact in dealing with temperamental artists, and a sufficiently business-like organizer to find the backing for his expensive productions. Mme. Nijinsky sees this Renaissance hero as a man whose greed for fame came before any other consideration, so jealous that he would crush any individual whose popularity threatened to overshadow his own. Nijinsky's friends were divided into two parties, those who hated Mme. Nijinsky and those who hated Diaghileff.

The book is crowded with amusing extravagances. Nijinsky could leap the depth of a stage at one bound; his feet were not constructed normally but somewhat resembled those of a bird; the heat of his feet split his shoes so rapidly that he used up several pairs during each performance; his muscles were so hard that his masseur was completely exhausted after rubbing him for an hour. Once during a benefit performance in New York some adoring society women stole his underwear to treasure as mementos; his valet in Paris built a house with the money he got by surreptitiously cutting off and selling the artificial rose-petals of his costume in "Spectre de la Rose." And so on.

Only three or four dancers in history rank with Nijinsky. We should be thankful that his wife has put on record her account of his life; it is an important addition to the literature of dancing because of its authenticity rather than its accuracy.

## Peasant Life in a Balkan Village

EASTER SUN. By Peter Neagoe. New York: Coward-McCann. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS ADAMIC

WHISPERING, say old Balkan peasants, is like a lighted match dropped upon dry stubble. They know whereof they speak. In the little village in Rumanian Transylvania, which is typical of a hundred thousand villages and hamlets in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and where Peter Neagoe sets his story "Easter Sun," everyone whispered about Ileana, the daughter of John, a hard-toiling, superstition-wracked peasant, and his stupid and kind wife, Chiva. Ileana was too beautiful, intelligent, and gifted: she embroidered like no one else in the village, making her own designs and color patterns; she sang like a bird; she was strange, elusive, aloof, desirable. Her own father desired her. The village, including members of her own family, believed she was a tool in the hands of the Unclean One, the devil, who "uses her beauty to trap souls." Ignorant, burdened by ancient superstitions, folk beliefs, and a mixture of Christianity and paganism, it shunned Ileana except for the teacher and choir master, Tedescu, a young hunchback. He loved her, encouraged her to cultivate her voice, and wanted to marry her.

But Ileana had her own dreams. She

had fallen in love on her weekly visits to the city with the wheat merchant, Serafim, and yearned for the day when she should marry him. When, crazed by her beauty though sharing the village's resentment of it, her father pursued her with the idea of purging her of evil, it was to Serafim she fled, only, however, to learn that he was about to marry another girl.

When Easter dawned, her father, seemingly recovered from his madness, required Ileana to come with him to a hill-top to watch the sunrise. There his madness asserted itself again and he tried to offer her in the Biblical manner as a sacrifice to God. She escaped from him, but when the sun rose blood-red, the peasants, construing this as an evil omen, turned upon her. She must expiate. The village was cursed by her. She must go.

This a good, exciting story, if oft-told and with definite shortcomings. Ileana, who is portrayed in extravagant terms, is never quite real. One can think of her only as a symbol, which in an essentially realistic novel, is not enough. Her love scenes with Serafim, who does come to life, do not convince. The story as Mr. Neagoe worked it out, although it gathers force in every page and culminates in an exciting finale, has other technical faults. The incestuous lust of Ileana's father, for instance, strikes a heavy melodramatic note, which overemphasizes the major theme of the plot.

Mr. Neagoe, who is a Rumanian by birth, reveals, however, an authentic knowledge of and feeling for his peasants. He knows their everyday life, their legends, customs, folklore, their fantastic religion and its hold upon them, their picturesque, often poetical speech. But, to judge by "Easter Sun," he has not looked deep into the life of his people. He appears to consider superstition in its various forms as the beginning and end of all evil in the village. He betrays no awareness of the community's socio-economic organization and its relation to the world at large. He nowhere implies realization of the fact that the fantastic pagan-Christian religion, with which superstition and ignorance are tied up, is part and parcel of the socio-economic system which holds



A RUMANIAN PEASANT

Drawing by I. Steriadi, from "Modern Drawings" (Studio Publications)

sway in the country of which the village is a microscopic part.

Nevertheless I hope Mr. Neagoe continues to use the rich materials of his native Rumania. He knows two things about peasants that make him singularly fit to write about them. He knows that the "simple peasant" is anything but simple; that, in fact, he is one of the most complicated creatures under the sun. And he knows, or at least seems to know, that the peasant in countless villages, not only in the Balkans but everywhere, is essentially obscurantist, unfriendly to progress, and that he will not and cannot break through the complicated system of his shortcomings and traditions on his own initiative and with his own mental energy. Mr. Neagoe will become, I think, an important writer on peasant life when he realizes that the peasant is a world problem which can be solved but one way—the way they are solving it in the Soviet Union.

Louis Adamic, in "The Native's Return," a recent book club selection, proves his own understanding of peasant life in Southeastern Europe.



## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.....Editor  
NOBLE A. CATHCART.....Publisher  
AMY LOVEMAN.....Associate Editor  
GEORGE STEVENS.....Managing Editor  
WILLIAM ROSE BENET } Contributing  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY } Editors

Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., 25 W. 45th St., New York, N. Y.  
Noble A. Cathcart, 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. 36.

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.

Copyright, 1934, Saturday Review Co., Inc.

### Dressmakers for Art

This distressed generation is groaning and travailing in the attempt to express itself. It seemed, for a while this year, that the explosion of economic and political writing would cure its pain, but the burden on the heart is not sensibly relieved. It is apparent that something is wrong that even a redistribution of wealth will not cure. There is a moral lesion.

The élite of New York have been seeing Gertrude Stein's "Four Saints in Three Acts," and what have they seen? They entered a lobby lined with posters announcing the literary, dramatic, and musical triumph of the season, and sat them down before an exquisitely beautiful décor, to watch a drama freed from those shackles of coherence, unity, and sense, which have made playwriting so difficult in the past. The lines, often excellently

the beauty of good prose or poetry without the handicap of having to mean something. For this drama meant nothing, means nothing, and could mean nothing in itself of interest to anyone but a practising psychologist. Not even the rules that govern nonsense stand in the way of a complete anarchy of suggestive but unintelligible sound.

But even Gertrude Stein exercises one restraint. She misuses words, but she does not invent them. Hence there were sounds that were recognizable, even if unintelligible in their context, with known human equivalents upon which producer and composer could take hold. "Mountains" means mountains; "grass," grass; a "saint," a saint, no matter how absurd the context. And thus upon a fortunate collection of syllables, many of them beautiful, and a discontinuity beside which the mad scenes of Elizabethan drama seem natural, the characteristic showmanship of our time builds up a structure of music, action, and scene which fascinates the audience as would a movie run backwards or a charade in an asylum for actors out of their minds. But unlike movie and charade this dementia is beautiful. The slow funeral march of the last act or wedding of corpses, or the translation of an African saint, or ballet of the martyrdom of the 11,000 virgins, or whatever it was, might have been imagined by the disintegrating ghost of Shakespeare, vaguely remembering the march out of

the legion with the dead bodies of Antony and Cleopatra, having forgot who they were and what it was all about, except that there was a beauty in marching to music which once had reason, though its meaning is lost.

Here is an epitome (if one wishes to take this sort of thing philosophically) of the breakdown of every system from capitalism backward that has ever existed in the memory of civilization. Here is a noble language reduced to its sound and suggestions, like the utterances of barbarous Northumbrians muttering delightedly *arum, orum, nobis, saecula* after their priest, but with an exotic sophistication of meaninglessness which they could never attain. And here is a producer of exquisite talent and a skilful composer creating a visible body and an intelligible music for this anarchy of words, by recalling to the puzzled but fascinated audience memories of more comprehensible art—or near art; the drama of Racine, the minstrel show and "Porgy," Italian opera, and anything else that could be made to cohere long enough for music and setting to hold together. A *tour de force*! No earlier age could have equalled it. No earlier age would have wished to.

And last irony, this *jeu d'esprit* of sophisticated incoherence is sung and acted by a race supposedly less rational, more naive than ours, with heavenly voices and agile bodies, who, with a dignity impossible to Europeans, play through this farrago of no-sense, getting out every ounce of wit and beauty the producer and composer have given it, and rejoicing in the rhythm of the meaningless words. It is surely ironical that the chief instrument of the naive in our civilization, the moving picture, should have been used for Jean Cocteau's sophisticated incoherence (so closely related to Gertrude Stein's); and for Gertrude Stein's last word in the sophisticated non-representational

absurdity into action! With what passionate intensity does the chorus search for maggots in the grass! And why not take it all at the face value of scene and sound, except that here is a cardinal instance of how far in our artistic anarchy the talent of the producers (those dressmakers of art) whether in the movies or on the stage, excels the creative power of the workers in words. Either we overstuff the upholstery of some trivial or psychopathic furniture of the imagination; or at the other extreme—in the novel of current life, for example—let it all go in naked ugliness, where case histories of vicious little girls, depressed laborers, or depraved poor whites, are strung together as if the faculty that makes substance out of accident had retreated somewhere to wait for better times.

But as Theresa, Ignace, and another said so melodiously in the opera—

They never knew about it green and they never knew about it she never knew about it they never knew about it they never knew about it she never knew about it.

And as Saint Chavez concluded—

Who may be what it is when it is instead.

And that's that.

A number of hitherto unpublished letters of George Eliot are about to appear in London auction rooms. They are said to throw light on her association with G. H. Lewes.



"GOOD LORD, IS THIS A CROSS-SECTION OF MY READING PUBLIC?"

## To the Editor: Finding a New Basis for Individualism

### The Golden Mean—1934

SIR:—As world tensions grow, exponents of various "ways of life" redouble their clamor. Many of the literary sort are alarmed, with reason, because modern political and economic movements tend to submerge in a flood of mass-men or race-men the independent human personality and related cultural values. Prominent among these values is a "sound individualism," defined variously as moral or intellectual integrity, as a capacity for critical choice, or as plain common sense.

Despite their eagerness to preserve a way of life, despite their plea for "democracy" and a courageous leadership, the apostles of culture shrink consistently from attempting a positive description of the political and economic arrangements which can support a sound individualism in the modern world. Such a course would

moral or artistic individualism bound up with a competitive economy? Is fascism, as the whisper goes, merely the last stand of capitalism, equally powerless for all its martial glitter to remove that physical distress which keeps the world in a ferment? Finally, can the incessant internecine strife between major groups of collectivists (socialists and communists) be honestly dismissed with gibes about radicals who do not agree, when the issues involved seem to be the following: (1) a socialist faith in democratic methods, in the educational and political approach, versus a communist trust in violence; (2) a socialist belief that the new order must inherit the moral and cultural riches of the past (including personal liberty), versus a communist plan for wholesale liquidation of "leisure-class" values and the building of a proletarian culture.

Democracy must rest finally on free consent of the governed, not on consent at the bayonet-point, not on mob-response to the violent emotional appeals of fascism or communism. A wise choice of the governed is not furthered by those content to long for a golden past, to hymn an individualism absolute, unclothed in specific beliefs and deeds. High integrity may be the same in any age, as searchers for "constants" tell us. But its manifestations are various; it no longer abides in that individual who neglects the social implications of his thought and action. That which yesterday was the wise choice, the golden mean, is far off center today. Is it not time for the defenders of culture, who sneer with facility at the unreasoning crowd, to consider seriously their failure to discuss the most vital aspects of a question which they themselves raise? While a Spengler proclaims democracy's doom, will they sit futilely among their books and wonder if he is right?

ALBERT L. WALKER.

The University of Iowa,  
Iowa City, Iowa.

### Nolte's "Memoirs"

SIR:—In my review of Vincent Nolte's "Memoirs" (*Saturday Review*, March 17), I quoted at some length from Mr. Rascoe's enthusiastic introduction to the book. I prefaced my quotation by writing: "Let me quote a few of Mr. Rascoe's seductive words." And I followed the quotation by

writing: "I quote Mr. Rascoe, in fairness to Nolte. . . ." But when the review appeared in print the quotation had been so cut down, and had been so garbled in the cutting, that it was meaningless in the context. The words spared by the editorial pencil were not "seductive," and their quotation gave no evidence of a desire for "fairness" to Nolte. I should appreciate your printing this letter as an explanation to Mr. Rascoe, and to any readers who may have been puzzled by a reviewer's apparent flight from sanity.

BEN RAY REDMAN.

New York City.

We reproduce the omitted quotation in full: "In his memoirs a panorama of the history of Europe and of North America passes before our eyes. We see him watch the rise and fall of Napoleon, arranging for some banking matters for the Pope, in audience with the young Queen Victoria

meeting Audubon at the Falls of Juniata before Audubon had become famous as an ornithologist, baring his head at the grave of Potemkin, watching the defense of New Orleans by Andrew Jackson, calling upon Henry Clay in Kentucky, recounting anecdotes of such personalities in art and literature as Ingres, Delacroix, Landseer, Byron, Lamartine, Goethe, and James Fenimore Cooper, telling about the foundation of the Biddle family in Philadelphia and of the Astor fortune in New York, giving his version of the Aaron Burr matter and of the reason why the United States Bank suspended specie payments, and combining within himself an apprehension of, and an identification with, all that was going on in the two hemispheres about which he writes."

### Marginal Notes

SIR:—May I point out what is, to me, a common fault in book making? The application of the formula that the width of the outer margins shall be twice the width of the inner margins gives me much inconvenience and discomfort in reading. This formula is based on the assumption that every two successive pages form a plane or flat surface. Since this is rarely true in actual reading, the result is that the middle margin, measured when in reading position, is only one-half the width of the outer margin.

The greatest discomfort comes in rhythmic succession, as I come to the end of every line of the left page. Because the page begins to have a spherical surface my eyes strain to follow the words around the curve. The left page throws a half-inch shadow-ribbon vertically on the inner edge of the right page which increases my reading difficulties. Certain technical improvements in binding may help to overcome the difficulty but the fundamental remedy is to increase the width of the inner margins.

HENRY HARAP.

School of Education,  
Cleveland, Ohio.

### Mary Rotch

SIR:—I am attempting to collect all information possible concerning Mary Rotch (1777-1848) of New Bedford, Massachusetts. I shall be grateful if any persons who have knowledge of any letters or journals of hers would write to me.

MURRAY G. HILL.

20 Oak Knoll Gardens  
Pasadena, California.

## The Saturday Review recommends

### This Group of Current Books:

THE OPPERMANNS. By LION FEUCHTWANGER. Viking.  
The story of a Jewish family in Nazi Germany.

ART AS EXPERIENCE. By JOHN DEWEY. Minton, Balch.  
A volume on esthetics for the layman.

HOXSIE SELLS HIS ACRES. By CHRISTOPHER LA FARGE.  
Coward-McCann. A novel in verse.

### This Less Recent Book:

COMPANY K. By WILLIAM MARCH. Smith & Haas. Fictionized sketches presenting a cross-section of the A. E. F.