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LUIGI PIRANDELLO. Photo by Keystone View Co.

Brilliant Bankruptcy

THE GEORGIAN SCENE. By Frank Swinnerton. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

READERS with a general curiosity about the last twenty-five years of English literature need look no further than this immense book. There are, no doubt, more brilliant writers and better critics in England than Mr. Swinnerton, but I doubt if any writer is better informed. It is precisely its information which gives this book its melancholy value—this, and its author's extraordinarily pleasant manners.

"Melancholy" because so few of the writers it mentions can one remember any more; and more melancholy still because one realizes how precious few of them were worth remembering. "The Georgian Scene" is not merely a record of English writers from 1910 until today, it is also the record of thousands of tons of forgotten printed paper; and it says much for Mr. Swinnerton that he can make this literary mausoleum a pleasant place to linger in, instead of simply a place which gives you the creeps.

I have only one real criticism of Mr. Swinnerton's comprehensive and dutiful book. Its title is misleading. Surely the real Georgian scene was the scene which was never played out, which young pre-war England never had time to finish, which ended abruptly with the death of Rupert Brooke in 1915; a scene which was mostly written in terms of a sentimentalism too mild to be poisonous, and prompted only by the magnificent, unfulfilled voices of Shaw and Wells. For if the Georgian scene actually continued beyond the war and into our year 1934, then it isn't finished yet—not so long as King George the Fifth lives to preside over the uncertain destinies of such as Spender and Auden. And it is something more than unfinished—it is practically meaningless unless you discuss politics and economics along with your literature.

Mr. Swinnerton, however, is purely a shrewd literary gossip. As such, it is difficult to praise him too highly. He knows his facts; and there never was such an array of facts, dates, and information as you will find here. Nor can you disagree with any of the judgments which he passes upon the hundreds of writers who throng

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Luigi Pirandello, Nobel Prize Winner

By G. A. BORGESE

IN the beginning there was a Sicilian Pirandello, born sixty-seven years ago on the extreme shore of that island, where passionate intelligence and vitality, under the pressure of poverty and superstition, often steam with melancholy and quarrelsome moodiness, or sometimes flare in unexpected violence. Naturally he was a reader and admirer of the Sicilian narrative school, and of its greatest master, Giovanni Verga, a realist indeed, more than that, a pessimist.

Still very young, Pirandello wandered to some university in Germany, where no doubt he made the acquaintance of certain Romanticists: say, Chamisso and his Schlemihl who had lost his shadow, or E. A. T. Hoffmann with his nightmare tales. It is more doubtful whether he ever came directly under the spell of E. A. Poe or Jekyll and Hyde or Wendell Holmes.

Then he settled in Rome, a teacher, a husband, a father. He taught Italian literature to generations of girls from the middle and lower middle classes. That was now his world, with the background of Sicilian reminiscence and a blackish hue of Northern philosophy over the sheen and rags of Mediterranean folk-lore.

His family was ravaged by insanity and discord: an element of his experience now openly recorded in official biographies.

His spontaneity was in short story writing. Far from the sculptural style of a Verga, far also from the mellowness of certain minor masters, he had a weird sarcasm of his own, with a ghastly, almost soundless laugh, and an obsessive idea of life and man, which drew every fragment of inspiration into a whirl, always the same.

Life is just a trick, a farce of the gods (who, in their turn, do not exist at all). It may display masks and attitudes, some of them fine; tear them off, you'll see naked truth. An ugly nakedness, and miserable; even worse than that, life and truth are nothing. An escape might be left, perhaps compassion; no social brotherhood supposing a plan and a hope; only occasional, impulsive benevolence in the narrow surrounding of family and neighborhood; a smile, a help to child or woman or pariah. But even that must not be taken too seri-

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"God's Little Acre": an Analysis

BY LAWRENCE S. KUBIE, M. D.

[Some readers may not have seen the editor's Introduction to Dr. Kubie's series of articles applying the principles of psychoanalysis to the modern literature of neuroticism. For them it may be well to repeat that these essays are not literary criticisms but scientific analyses of the perplexing phantasies which have caused so much discussion of widely read books in this characteristically modern variety of fiction. These essays will supply a basis for a later literary estimate—Editor.]

MEN have always known that the romantic picture of love and marriage is false. They have known that the eager yearnings of adolescence meet with strangely bitter disappointments in the effort to translate themselves into the realities of adult experience. Only recently, however, has any understanding come of why this is true, through the realization that, from childhood on, each step in Everyman's psychosexual evolution is taken in the face of opposing forces which threaten to drive him from the path of normal development. If then the impulse to write and to read bears any relation to human needs, it would seem to be inevitable that a struggle which begins in earliest years and continues throughout life must find insistent expression in literature. It is not strange, therefore, that novelists and readers have always been concerned with sex.

To meet the needs of different temperaments, however, literature assumes varied forms. The simplest and most childlike response to disappointment is to retreat into phantasies in which the frustrated yearnings are gratified. In this way simple people can console themselves with the adolescent and sentimental prevarications of the movies and the cheap magazines. Even the better forms of the romantic novel serve essentially the same simple need. Such writings might therefore be called the romantic and consolatory literature of sex.

More complicated temperaments cannot make use of this elementary device of phantasy and romance; but instead react to disappointment with bitterness and irony, which expresses itself in an effort to belittle that which is unobtainable. Much of the so-called "classical" erotic literature satisfied the needs of such readers; Rabelais and Casanova, Boccaccio and Cellini. But whether it be naive or sophisticated, romantic or ironical and bitter, all of this literature constitutes merely varying forms of literary escape. In neither group is sex recognized as a serious, perplexing, and vital human problem.

Out of the modern temper, however, there has arisen a third group of books: one in which sex is treated frankly and seriously, and yet with a confused pattern of tension and distortion. These books form the great bulk of the so-called morbid modern literature, a literature which attempts not merely a safe and literary escapade in sex, but rather a mirror of the moving realities of sexual problems in all their intricacy.

Certainly a compelling drive to portray and solve the problems of sexual unrest and dissatisfaction is not an obscene or morbid purpose. Yet just as the problem play will be violently attacked while the naked revue passes unmolested, so, too, the cheap and "sexy" magazine, or the

subtler waggery of classical erotica, will be accepted unprotestingly by the very people who raise the cry that these modern books are deliberately capitalizing the morbid and perverse in human nature. In other words, an honest and vivid literature, which is struggling to express the confused problems of sex, arouses such hostile, uncomfortable, and suspicious feelings, that it is attacked as dirty, obscene, sick, useless, ugly, etc. This is a strange and paradoxical social phenomenon, the explanation of which may lead to a deeper understanding of the psychological and artistic significance of these books.

The most obvious point is that the protesting reader has been made uncomfortable in a special and peculiar way. Furthermore, not only is he uncomfortable, but he is resentfully aroused as well; and it is out of this constellation of feelings that he throws up the epithet "obscene."

To define what is meant by obscenity is impossible, because the word does not carry quite the same implications to any two people. Nor is there any one type of scene or phrase which will make all people squirm. Yet the experience is almost universal, a feeling which everyone has encountered and can recognize, even if its effective stimulus varies from one human being to another. And since it is universal, it must have some common underlying quality.

This experience might well be called the "sense of the obscene," and with regard to it we will take as our premise: (1) that a reader's phantasies, be they conscious or unconscious, arise from his personal needs; (2) that this angry, resentful sense of the obscene arises when confused and troubling unconscious phantasies are stirred into activity; (3) that this happens when such phantasies have been awakened in the reader by the vigor of the author's art.

From what has been said already it should be clear that our search leads directly into the problem of psychosexual illness. The difficult lifelong struggle to-

This Week

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By JOHN COWPER POWYS
Reviewed by Arthur Colton

SOUTH TO CADIZ

By H. M. TOMLINSON
Reviewed by Herschel Brickell

SUNDOWN

By JOHN JOSEPH MATHEWS
Reviewed by Oliver La Farge

LITTLE ORVIE

By BOOTH TARKINGTON
Reviewed by William Rose Benét

THE DARK ISLAND

By V. SACKVILLE WEST
Reviewed by Basil Davenport

METROPOLIS

By AGNES ROGERS and
FREDERICK L. ALLEN
Reviewed by Robert Disraeli

THE BOWLING GREEN

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Next Week or Later

ONE WAY OF WRITING NOVELS
By ELLEN GLASGOW

wards adult normality is pursued through a maze of infantile and childish impulses, which, though normal enough at their own levels, become disturbing if they persist with dominating force into adult life. It is inevitable, therefore, that in a literature which deals with a blind groping towards normal sexuality one should find much of the psychopathology of sex dramatized in literary expression. This will appear chiefly in descriptions of adult distortions of infantile impulses; and it is just here that the reader, either for lack of technical knowledge, or because of inner problems, is most likely to mistake the portrayal of distorted sexual development for the manifestations of a supernormal lustiness and release. Often enough the picture of sickness is taken for an example of a greater freedom. It becomes therefore a most difficult problem to estimate the esthetic significance of this confused borderland between sickness and health.

Since no problem in science or in art can be solved by generalizations alone, our first step must be to subject a typical example of this literature to a frankly psychoanalytic scrutiny. To do this one must use the tale and the people and their words as dreamlike products of imagination, dissecting the story for the conscious and unconscious content of the characters' minds or acts to see how much of sickness or of health lies within its pages.

For this purpose we have chosen the novel, "God's Little Acre," by Erskine Caldwell, first published in the spring of 1933 by the Viking Press. It is an earthy and vivid story of Southern whites, who struggle in the land, and in town, and in their bodies to reach some kind of peace. And because here and there this struggle is infused with activity which is technically known as "perverted," the book drew upon itself the curiosity of all and the wrath of many.

In the tale, as in a dream, there are confused and kaleidoscopic shifts forwards and backwards between desolate farm land and a turbulent strike-weary mill town; from deep pit holes in the red and yellow clay to hilly eminences, from swamp land to solid earth. Unlike an actual dream, however, the movement from scene to scene is carried along on a thread of story; whereas in a dream which has not been artificially elaborated the episodes would follow one another without even this pretence of conscious reason. To the analyst, therefore, the story serves as a rationalization, an effort to give an appearance of logical order to the sequence of free phantasies. This conscious elaboration of spontaneous phantasy succeeds in making the tale appear simple and realistic; but it also interjects elements which are extraneous to the fundamental dreamlike structure. It is necessary, therefore, to confine the analytic interpretation to the main outlines of the story, considering only the characters and their outstanding acts.

As in many dreams, one may recognize two groups of characters, those that are clear and those that are vague. There are some shrouded and ominous figures who hover dimly in the background, like those unseen persons in a dream whose presence one senses but never sees. There are others who stand out with all the hallucinatory vividness of the lions and tigers of a child's nightmare. Their clarity is a tribute to the author's skill, particularly because, despite their sharp outlines, they retain their fantastic and unreal quality; and when closely examined these figures fuse until they

seem to become different aspects of a single human spirit, split up by a legitimate and effective literary artifice into the semblances of separate beings.

Among all the characters one finds no living mother in the book. Yet everywhere throughout the tale brood the spirits of unhappy, frustrated, and forgotten mothers, dimly seen, yet constituting the essential but unrecognized object of all the conflict which the story contains. The figures of women can be arrayed in order from the most dim to the clearest; and then one sees that the shadowy figures are the frank mother-images, and that as the figures of women become clearer the maternal role is distorted more and more towards perversion and prostitution. It is as if the book were saying that the only good woman is a dead and legendary mother—and that even there danger and sin may lurk.

First there is old Mrs. Walden, who, before the tale is begun, has died of heart-break because her oldest son was ashamed of her. She is a dim phantasy of a good mother, dead and therefore forever unattainable. Then there is the witch-like figure of Gussie, supposedly diseased and hoarding gold, whom this oldest son had married and with whom he hid himself away. This is the "bad woman," the "sterile mother," no mother at all and yet more mother than wife, who is heard wandering eerily off-stage and who never appears directly in the action of the book.

The first woman to emerge even dimly from these shadows is Rosamond, Ty Ty Walden's oldest daughter, and the wife of Will Thompson. She remains vague in outline, but at least she is alive. She weeps in the background of the story, taking humbly and gratefully what Will has left over to give her, mothering him, feeding him, spanking him with her hair-brush when she catches him *flagrante delicto* with her younger sister, Darling Jill. Then she tries in a sudden rage to shoot him; but in the end she mourns his death in a paroxysm of grief.

And finally come the only two clear and vivid women in the tale, standing as the direct objects and instruments of primitive lusts. One is Griselda, the wife of Buck Walden, the daughter-in-law in the Walden family, no mother in spirit or in fact, but whose body stands to all the men as a perverse symbol for nursing. The other is Darling Jill, the youngest Walden daughter, who devotes her life to conquering men with her body, insatiable and destructive, tantalizing men, using them, throwing them aside, demanding pain as her only physical joy, and turning for peace at the last to the fat, infantile, and eunuchoid figure of "Pluto."

This much, then, can be safely concluded: (that in this tale are found only certain limited conceptions of women. There are good mothers who are dead, good mothers who suffer, bad mothers who hoard their sustenance and will not share, mothers who breed and transmit disease, erotic mothers whose bodies exist to nurse men, and women who exist only to destroy. There is no image of a woman whose body is to be loved as an adult,—genitally, confidently, happily, tenderly, reproductively. By some undefined magic of the moon, as Ty Ty Walden says, no act of intercourse in the book results in the conception of a child. In the confused and childlike phantasy, babies would seem to be conceived and born in some other

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As Wild Mohawk

By FLORENCE WILKINSON

IN glimmering starlight on my journey forth,
noting faint current of betrayer wind,
or leeward loping, crouched and moccasined,
I whiffed the caribou, crushing the tree's north.
the mossy northern rib; but, storm misled,
now like the prairie hen I plead and squawk,
crying unto my Lord, a wild Mohawk;
"I have been snared; if I had lain in bed
through pounding rain and forked lightning I
might then have welcomed, climbing down the sky
on lightning's ladder, branch by branch of gleam,
the spirit-Hunter with his belt of dream.
Impute it not my fault (whom hunger drove)
to forfeit thus the supper of Thy love."

Show Business

ZIEGFELD THE GREAT GLORIFIER.

By Eddie Cantor and David Freedman.

New York: Alfred H. King. 1934. \$2.

MY OWN STORY. By Marie Dressler as

Told to Mildred Harrington. Boston:

Little, Brown & Company. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by L. CABOT HEARN

THIS short biography and this slightly longer autobiography of two famous characters in the American theatre may not be literature, but they are valuable Americana; an actor and an actress have told the stories, assisted by two most capable writers. In fact, the witty Eddie Cantor's collaborator is one who helped Cantor with his own life story, one who has written some good short stories, some good revues, and at least one successful play. David Freedman is a man of unusual talent. I don't know who Mildred Harrington is, though perhaps I should, but she assisted the late Marie Dressler in making her autobiography vivid and moving. The Ziegfeld biography ran serially as "Ziegfeld and His Follies," and an abbreviated ver-

of genius about Ziegfeld, and surely as a human being in a supposedly normal world he was one of the most eccentric of characters and beloved of the gods. He had no idea, as Cantor and Freedman say, of time, space, or the value of money. He had enormous personal magnetism. He engaged Anna Held in London at a time when he was flat broke, had run through large resources, and apparently had no direction in which to turn. That was early in his career. But

The rest was simple. He cabled Diamond Jim Brady and there was the money! Flo always had men of finance who helped him readily and lavishly.

He possessed a "mysterious magic" that even Abraham L. Erlanger, that one-time Czar of Broadway, and human adding-machine, could appreciate. Ziegfeld could create bonanzas out of nothing.

The prime fact about Marie Dressler's life is, of course, her remarkable "come-back." Subsequent to her valiant work in the war and in the Actors' Equity strike of 1919, the managers ceased to have work for her. She travelled, she busied herself, she fought a losing fight. But eight years



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, MARIE DRESSLER, CHARLIE CHAPLIN, DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, AND MARY PICKFORD AT A LIBERTY LOAN DRIVE IN 1918.

From "My Own Story."

sion of the Dressler narrative appeared in the magazine called *Redbook* as "Life Begins at Sixty."

Florenz Ziegfeld created a form of entertainment that became an institution on the American stage and started a swarm of other revues, incidentally showing the way to George White and Earl Carroll. Over and above that Ziegfeld was one of the most remarkable characters in the American theatre. The book about him begins:

The beginning of the twentieth century developed three great inventions—the telephone, the telegraph, and the American Beauty—and Florenz Ziegfeld was the leading exponent of all three. He was the Knight Errant of American Womanhood. The telegram was his sword and the telephone his coat-of-arms.

One can scarcely quarrel with that statement, if by knight-errant is to be understood one who sincerely and profoundly admired feminine beauty and wished to see it made as spectacular as was humanly possible. We are apt somewhat cynically to smile at the "glorification" process; but there is no doubt that Ziegfeld loved form, design, and color, and had the eye of an artist for the spectacle of beauty, expressing itself even in the most meticulous study of fabrics wherewith to enhance it, scenic arrangements before which to present it, and an intricate system of lighting to play upon it. He was absorbed in spectacle. He hardly ever laughed. He seemed to care little for brilliant comedy achievements in his revues, though he well knew the value of his comedians and treated Eddie Cantor with a mixture of jocularity and sentiment, as though he had been his own son.

In his peculiar field there was a touch

later, when almost at the end of her rope, she got the chance to go to Hollywood and act the role of Ma Callahan in "The Callahans and the Murphys." She made good in it, but the picture offended the Irish, and another disheartening interlude ensued. Again she got her chance in the screen version of O'Neill's "Anna Christie," with Garbo. She triumphed superbly.

Hers is the story of a fighter, an optimist, a grand old trouper, with an extraordinary personality that made her hosts of friends. It is a moving narrative because of the utter genuineness and valor of the woman. One can see, without ever having known her, why Marie Dressler is still so greatly beloved. Having climbed to stardom on the stage, she became a star again at the age of sixty in a new medium. Her generous acknowledgments go to all her many friends who stood by her, and she misses no irony in the twists of fortune, witness the movingly dramatic account of what she read in the paper about another actress of sixty the morning after the banquet in her honor when she received the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences award for the best portrayal of a feminine role of the year.

The anecdotal side of the book is rich and vivid. There is not a dull page. The glimpses one gets of Lillian Russell, Chaplin in his beginnings, Mabel Normand, Greta Garbo, are mere details in a close-packed story. And it is a life worth reading about, the enheartening account of a fine type of woman.

It should perhaps be added that both books are well illustrated, and that the Ziegfeld book contains a supplement of photographs by Alfred Cheney Johnston of some of the most noted show-girls that Ziegfeld "glorified."