

# Twenty-Six Estimates of Our First Ten Years

Letters from Prominent Literary Figures, Here and Abroad,  
on the Occasion of The Saturday Review's Tenth Anniversary

**T**HE tenth birthday of a magazine may (in America today) be regarded as indicating an age old enough for retrospection, young enough to take advice. On the occasion of our tenth anniversary, the Editors of The Saturday Review asked those who cared to write letters to be free in their criticism, while not allowing undue reticence to interfere with any expression of approval of the policy and achievement of The Saturday Review. We wish to express our thanks, not only for the kind words, but also for the suggestions and for the criticism in general. We have a policy, a program, and a past, but also a future in which constructive criticism as well as friendly support will be valued and valuable.

## "Character, Tact, and Acuteness"

**SIR:**—It was with lively interest that I learned that *The Saturday Review* was about to celebrate its tenth anniversary, and I hasten to send my most heartfelt congratulations on the event and best wishes for the future. Each time that I have had occasion to read this noted weekly, I have come away with the impression that, thanks to an editorial direction of exceptional ability and breadth of view, it takes rank not only with the outstanding literary organs of America, but with the leading reviews of the world. At this time of intellectual perplexities and confusion it is America itself which one must congratulate on a periodical which follows and interprets literary events with so much character, tact, and acuteness. From the bottom of my heart I hope that the decade on which it is now entering will see its task, never more difficult than today, as well fulfilled as the last, and that it will meet then as now with the acclaim and success it deserves.

THOMAS MANN.

Küssnacht-Zürich.

## "Material for Literary History"

**SIR:**—My feeling is that a future historian who might wish to review the literary life of the decade just past would find virtually all the needed material in the files of *The Saturday Review* for this period. That is to say, these files constitute a most important historical document; the historian would find in them, not only the literary feeling and opinion of their time, but also the very life itself of their day.

This life, moreover, would not be a local one, but, on the contrary, cosmopolitan; for the field covered would be of universal extent. In other words, the historian just imagined would here find considered virtually all that has been considered in the books of this period and would thus have before him, condensed, the decade's essential human thought so far as it is in the power of print to express it.

BOOTH TARKINGTON.

Kennebunkport, Maine.

## "No Labor-Saving Mental Devices"

**SIR:**—I have read, I think, every issue of *The Saturday Review* since it began with Dr. Canby as editor. At the end of each week I have looked for my copy with pleasure, and turning immediately to the editorials, I have been seldom disappointed. Dr. Canby's commentary on the age has been filled with sound sense and sharply pointed with insight.

The general tone of *The Review* is tolerant, judicious, and hospitable to a diversity of opinion. Among the more important contributions, I put first the essays by Santayana, one of the great philosophers of all time, and the most distinguished living master of English prose. Other articles I enjoyed were by Harold Nicolson, James Truslow Adams, Archibald MacLeish, H. M. Tomlinson, J.

Donald Adams, John Chamberlain, Allan Nevins, Horace Gregory, and of course Christopher Morley.

But what I like best in *The Saturday Review* is its loyalty to the republic of letters through a period of riot without revolution, when everything except writing is supposed to be literature. For it appears that every branch of art nowadays has become, as Virginia Woolf once remarked of the art of fiction, "infinitely accommodating." So accommodating, indeed, that to hold any standards at all about anything in the world is the quickest way to attract disaster in criticism. That *The Review* should have held standards and still survived proves both its vitality and its usefulness. As long as we continue to live in an age of the amateur, and mediocrity, if only it does not modulate its voice, is assured of an audience, it will be adequate praise of any literary journal to say that it has never offered its readers the cheap modern substitutes for the effort of thinking, or employed a single one of the various labor-saving mental devices.

ELLEN GLASGOW.

Richmond, Va.

## Would Like Unsigned Reviews

**SIR:**—The best weekly journal of literary criticism in English that I ever saw was the *Athenæum*, as it existed in England before the war. (In its later form after the war, it was a caricature of its former self.)

The *Athenæum* which lasted through most of the nineteenth century, was authoritative, dignified, yet never dull.

The Literary (Weekly) Supplement of the *London Times* at present is better than anything we have in America; though it leaves much to be desired.

I am forced to the conclusion that a literary journal consisting largely of book reviews, gains in influence and in value if all the reviews are unsigned. The reviewer himself is free to give a frank opinion and is also not so eager to show off his own brilliant wit; for perhaps a majority of book reviews in America are attempts on the part of the reviewer to ape Jack Horner.

Furthermore, the journal itself gains in influence because it is quoted for itself and not because of a particular reviewer. *The Saturday Review of Literature* says, etc.

I congratulate you on what you have accomplished with *The Saturday Review*; in every issue there are things not only worth reading but worth preserving. I think, however, it should be literary and not colloquial in tone. No one loves slang in intimate talk more than I do; but I think it is quite possible for literary articles to be both vigorous and interesting even when written in good English.

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.

New Haven, Conn.

## "The American View We Desire"

**SIR:**—Your *Review of Literature* has one fault, there is not enough of it. It is very welcome on this side, as far as it goes. What I enjoy most in it are its editorials, its special articles, its correspondence, and its advertisements. They give the American view we desire. In its broad survey of literature and the tendencies of modern opinion, it measures by reference to the established bearings those traditional values which have survived ages of earthquakes and revolutions. I have no confidence in those who can tell us by happy guesswork where we are, without resource to those obsolete data, the meridian and the horizon.

As to reviewing, on your side as on this it has fallen to a level where nobody who knows the tradition would expect to find good work. There is plenty of knowledge,

and confidence which is near to bump-tiousness, but little understanding. We never listen for the sound of Apollo's bowstring today. Usually a modern review makes a noise more like a dropped tea-tray; no need to look to see whether a shaft has hit the gold. Anarchy is doing its worst with literature as it is with politics. Still, the reviewing in the *S R* of *L* compares easily with the best on this side. It has good humor and sobriety, virtues growing as out-of-date as reason itself. The revolt against civilization is growing more and more violent, so, my dear Canby, you have got your work cut out. Hold on!

H. M. TOMLINSON.

Croydon, England.

## "Sincerity Never Questioned"

**SIR:**—I congratulate you warmly on the tenth anniversary of *The Saturday Review*. In it you have made a fine contribution to our journalism. An independent literary weekly in America was certainly greatly needed; and you have created it and demonstrated its ability to survive these most difficult times without currying favor of the publishers by, for example, suppressing unfavorable reviews. *The Saturday Review* is both liberal and catholic in its taste; nor is it doctrinaire. It is a good deal to create nowadays in this field a journal whose honesty and sincerity have never been questioned, and you and your associates may well take pride in the achievement. I wish for it another equally successful ten years,—with a sharpening of its editorial pencil as the years lapse.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD.

Thomaston, Conn.

## "Vacillates Between Gossip and Controversies"

**SIR:**—I can't pass judgment on the way *The Saturday Review* has reflected the literary life of the past decade in the sense of being able to refer back to specific controversies and deciding how *The Review* has met them. It has not had that value for me. I have read it for its occasional pieces, longer, more exact, and more scholarly than those of the book sections of the newspapers—reviews which sometimes, as in the case of Hook's piece on modern socialism, Josephson's on Dos Passos, several of Chamberlain's, gave you a feeling that a specific literary question was being examined as a whole, and being really clarified as a result. Reviews of this character, actually critical essays, have been the most distinguished contribution of *The Review*, and in presenting them it has performed a service no other American publication could offer.

But I have been increasingly conscious of a sense of impatience and disappointment at a kind of editorial extravagance in the magazine, at the waste of so much precious space on wearily-whimsical columns, photographs, bookstore gossip, at a

time when so many critical problems are knocking at our doors. *The Review* has seemed to vacillate between being a forum for critical controversies and a vehicle for literary gossip—and not sharp, provocative gossip, of the sort that's really tied to the dominant cultural movements of the present and in which the New York literary world abounds, but incidental, irrelevant, and generally gentle stuff. When I think that *The Saturday Review* is the only specifically critical weekly in the country, it seems to me that it falls far short of its opportunities, no matter what point of view it expresses. It has little prestige with the writers of my generation, I think because they draw back from its blank spots rather than because they consider it too conservative or too liberal—a strong and consistent and well-integrated opposition would stimulate them to reply, would force them constantly to examine the bases of their convictions.

ROBERT CANTWELL.

Carmel, Cal.

## "Chronicle of the Literary Scene"

**SIR:**—It would be quite impossible for me to visualize the literary scenery of the past decade without *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Other American reviews have devoted themselves to sheer reviewing with no general comment or they have carried book reviews only as news. With still others, reviews have frequently been merely a sideline department in small print, a sop to readers, who, supposedly interested in the various social phenomena of their own times, might also be expected to take a cursory glance at contemporary literature. American reviewing has suffered by consequence from a too journalistic and newsy appeal, from a confusing eclecticism or, in the opposite direction, from a too stringent professional or propagandist approach. The general shuffling about of reviewers from one organ of opinion to another has also by no means tended to clarify, although it has sometimes helped to enliven the scene. To most of this *The Saturday Review of Literature* has been a valuable exception.

As far as I know it has been the only publication in the United States which provided a justly moulded "matrix" into which the current comment on contemporary literature in the form of reviews, articles, letters from readers, and other brief topical matter could be freely poured and yet still remain contained in surroundings that have always been—at least—an intelligent reminder and assertion of literature as a living continuum.

This "matrix," provided by the editorials, the reviews, the articles, and the comments of the permanent staff, has to a surprising degree successfully graphed the tide of thought of the past decade. Not always brilliant, the content of the magazine has seldom been dull and there have

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"HAVE YOU SOMETHING NICE IN TIN FOR A MAGAZINE?"



## From Cotton Fields to the Cotton Club

CANDY. By L. M. Alexander. Illustrated by Rockwell Kent. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHARLES MCD. PUCKETTE

IN his remarks at the Pulitzer Prize dinner last year Mr. T. S. Stribling said that the South was so rich in story material and color that it was easy to write interestingly about such a region. Now comes another prize winner from the deep South, for Mrs. Alexander won the Dodd, Mead \$10,000 competition with this novel about the people and the places which recently have provided the theme of such a wealth of creative literature. The mine apparently is inexhaustible.

Mrs. Alexander's story of Mimosa Hill plantation, on the South Carolina bank of the Savannah River, is dramatic in that it places in contrast the negroes who re-



main in the cabins and the life of the South, and the expatriates who have moved to New York's Harlem. The return visits to their folk of the colored people who have been North have been a not inconsiderable influence among the negroes in recent years, along with other sophisticated experiences. And Mimosa Hill is one of those decaying plantations, the scene of a hopeless fight of "Little King," the owner, to hold his own in the planting of cotton (apparently the time of which Mrs. Alexander writes was before the A. A. A.) It is all too easy for the flashily if dubiously prosperous agents of the Harlem night clubs and policy games to dazzle the eyes of the plantation folk no matter how strong their loyalty to the plantation and its owner.

The story of this book is essentially, however, that of Candy whose virtue was that she loved only one man at a time. A vivid, passionate personality with strong loves and hates, she stood out among the cabin people. Betrayed by her latest shiftless lover, to whom she was faithful, Candy, in her loves and in her bitter griefs, is a figure drawn with sincerity and power.

Mrs. Alexander paints in the white folk of Mimosa Hill sparingly, and only as they are seen through the eyes of her colored people. Her story is that of the negroes and she finds ample material in their simple tragedies. The juxtaposition of the Northern sophisticates and the plantation colored folk is dramatic, even if in some details it is unconvincing.

Nor has Mrs. Alexander relied greatly for her interest upon the superstitions, the customs, and ways of her characters as they differ from ours. Likewise she spares the reader the difficulties of low country dialect, perhaps too much so.

It is hazardous to challenge only from one's own belief the report of an eye-witness like Mrs. Alexander, but an occasional detail of her canvas leaves one incredulous. For example, the thought of a plantation negro woman and man, before Harlem had come into their lives, doing an interpretive costume dance styled "Temptation" is difficult to believe. The

simple rural negro is decidedly prudish with respect to such a display, especially when in good standing in the church.

This, however, is but a minor point to raise against a study which is essentially sincere and sustained. Mrs. Alexander's novel, because of the manner in which she has contrasted the deep South and Harlem, brings a fresh interest to the literature of the negro. And she is genuinely successful in the clarity with which she has portrayed and made alive many of the characters of her story besides the colorful Candy.

## Tight Little Island

THIS LITTLE WORLD. By Francis Brett Young. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

THE theme of Mr. Young's latest book is contained in its title. "This Little World" is the Worcestershire village of Chaddesbourne D'Abitot, a microcosm of the English country life that to so many lovers of it is England itself, the only England that exists for a writer like, for example, Archibald Marshall. When it comes to sentiment the Englishman is likely to forget that with the industrial revolution he changed, in the mass, from a rural to an urban dweller. When he thinks—this average Englishman—of England, it is of the broad acres of plough or grassland, the rolling woodland, a picturesque village nestled on its slopes, all complete with church steeple, hall, and rectory and, above all, the ubiquitous and convenient "pub." This was what, subconsciously, they thought they were fighting to save in the war—not the bleak-looking, smoke-ridden cities from which most of them drew their livelihood, not even the Empire which for many of them was a matter of theoretic pride but practical indifference, but the peaceful, smiling English countryside.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the microcosm of England is for thousands of his fellow-countrymen a true microcosm of England itself. It is true that the life that he describes is passing; but in the imaginations of Englishmen it still has definite reality, and in actual fact it still retains more reality than many suppose. There are still hundreds of Miles Ombersleys, small squires making a brave struggle for continued existence on ancestral acres. It is almost certainly a losing struggle, and the Hacketts—the *nouveaux riches* of Mr. Young's story—must take their place if the old houses are to be maintained at all. In the main it is the story of this struggle that Mr. Young tells, in a leisurely, slow-moving tale that has constant interest and at times an almost poignant beauty.

## Home-Folks in Iowa

THE FOLKS. By Ruth Suckow. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by ALVAH C. BESSIE

RECENTLY there has apparently been a feeling among novelists—and it has obviously extended to critics and publishers as well—that any novel under five hundred pages in length does not stand a chance of survival; and conversely, that any story that runs over five hundred pages is destined for immortality, as though sheer bulk were a guarantee of intrinsic worth, as well as of sincerity and hard work. That this is a misconception is so obvious as to need no illustration, but it has not deterred the continued production of novels of "epic" scope and "monumental" virtues.

Miss Suckow's novel is physically enormous, running to over seven hundred pages of compact composition; it employs a host of characters and it covers an ample space of time and distance. Unlike many others, however, it does not lack the design that may be found even in such mammoth achievements as "War and Peace," "The Brothers Karamazov," and "Ulysses," but the design is considerably less than perfect. There is economy too—the economy of one family, the Fergusons of Belmond, Iowa, and their immediate relations. But despite the two indispensable virtues of economy and design, the novel lacks a structure that would have required even more work of Miss Suckow than she has obviously performed. For the method she has employed, of considering the various members of the family separately—the story of Carl and his repressed wife; of Margaret, who followed romance to the bitter end; of Bunny, the youngest, who more than any other escaped the family traditions into the arms of a young communist bride—this method makes it inevitable that by the time the reader has finished one of her long sections dealing with Carl or Margaret or Bunny, the other two have completely disappeared from the story. When, the children having effectually disappeared from the story over two hundred pages before, the narrative closes with the return of the old folks from the first vacation they have ever had.

It is not impossible that this novel might have been written in considerably shorter space (and it is difficult to believe that Miss Suckow deliberately padded it), and the case for this contention is strengthened by consideration of another of her virtues which, paradoxically enough, works to her detriment as an artist. She has been so thoroughly successful with her home-folks—Iowans, descendants of early settlers—she has so meticulously explored their little activities, their small

minds and smaller imaginations, their conversation, their clothes and food, their petty aspirations and concerns, that for long stretches at a time she bores her readers most insufferably. She has made herself one of the home-folks, and it may be that she found richness and enduring beauty where the normally intelligent reader finds platitudes and boredom.

But where the reader's interest flags for chapters at a time, it rises again when Miss Suckow considers, with a talent for retrospective analysis as keen as her talent for factual reporting, the inner conflicts of Carl and Margaret, who were both permanently maimed by the "wholesome" folksy life of their town, and the bewilderment of Bunny, faced by the choice of two loyalties—one of which appealed to his mind and heart as truth, the other of which was bred into his bone and could not be escaped. These chapters are the most vital and moving of a book that, more than most others of our time, is deeply bedded in the American scene, that could only have been written by an American, and in our time.

## Maine Coast Village

MARY PETERS. By Mary Ellen Chase. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS quiet, sympathetic story of Maine and the sea has qualities of its own, and other qualities which remind the reader of Sarah Orne Jewett. Beautifully written in a minor key, it is notable for two elements: its effective rendition of the atmosphere of time and place—particularly of shipboard life and of the coast where pine and rock meet the salt marshes; and its delicate analysis of psychological states of a quite normal type. The author of "A Goodly Heritage" has given us another book in the best tradition of New England fiction. Its vivid but unforced evocation of land and water, village and farmstead, is ably done; the greater ability. It is an unpretentious but distinguished novel, by no means lacking in color and drama, but most striking for fine brushwork and careful detail.

As the title indicates, it is above all the story of one character. "Mary Peters first saw Cadiz in 1880," it begins. "That shining whiteness she was never in all her life to forget." Born in the harbor of Singapore on her father's ship *Nautilus* in 1871, for many years she shared her father's life on the sea. It was not a tempestuous stepmother to her; its discipline gave her not adventurousness, but rather endurance, steadfastness, and love of order. Even Cadiz, which made such an impression upon her childish mind, was not a place of glamour and exotic challenge; it remained, the author writes, "through many and varying years as the imperishable symbol of security, stability, and quiet order—a place both unassailable and unafraid." In these respects it was symbolic of Mary Peters's mind. The childhood and youth of the heroine, delineated at great length but never tiresomely, are presented as the key to the later development of her character.

The study of Petersport is as charming as it is obviously faithful. In these pages we see again, as probably nowhere since Miss Jewett ceased writing, a typical Maine-coast village of the eighties and nineties. With loving touch the author presents the beauty of sea and field and the quaintness of a decaying community as the background of Mary Peters's later life. To most people it would seem an uneventful life. But its hidden drama and romance are well brought out. Mary's career becomes entangled with that of a man whose character is largely antithetical to her own. When we take leave of her, widowed and in some degree disillusioned, eking out an existence by weaving rugs in a village now given over to summer residents and their dependents, we feel that she had after all lived a full and satisfactory life. We feel, too, that this dignified and delicate chronicle is a genuine addition to the New England shelf.

## The Sophisticate

By CLARENCE DAY



JUDGING by the things we buy  
Or the rulers we elect,  
We're more child-like, you and I,  
Than you and I suspect.

Even the sophisticate  
Has a self that's simple-minded.  
See it, ready for the bait,  
Waiting to be blinded.