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The Two Catherines

FULL FLAVOUR. By Doris Leslie. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STANLEY WENT

WONDER how many novelists and budding novelists are working at the British Museum today, reading in old files of the newspapers, poring over long-forgotten advertisements, leafing the memoirs of past generations, studying the fashions of bygone days—all in order that have may reproduce faithfully, meticulously, in a coming masterpiece, the styles, the sentiments, the ipsissima verba of their ancestors unto the third and fourth generation.

This spect ation is called forth by the recent perusal of some half-dozen family novels from the pens of English authors, and in particular by a reading of Miss Leslie's volume. I make the speculation in no spirit of depreciation, for the astonishing thing is that almost all of these novels command respectful consideration. I do not remember to have read a really bad one, and I have read some, including Miss Leslie's, that seem to me to be exceedingly good.

But why this uncontrolled multiplication of the brood of Galsworthy? Is it merely that the "Forsyte Saga" and "Cavalcade" have set a fashion, or is that only part of the explanation? Do these writers of today see change whirling at such speed down the ringing grooves of time that they feel they must pin the past down before it has slipped for ever beyond their reach? Is the present scene changing so rapidly that they dare not take the time to write about it? Or is it simply that English men and women, having seen a mansion that appeared so secure come crashing about their ears, turn nostalgically to the days when it was still standing and seemed as if it would stand for ever?

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that nothing short of a saga satisfies the English novelist of today. Miss Leslie goes back to 1848, when the descendants of a French emigré were in possession of a prosperous cigar business called Hanson's, and ends in 1914, when the century-old building of Hanson's had just been demolished to make room for a mammoth hotel, and a crowd was gathered outside Buckingham Palace to cheer King George as the time limit of the ultimatum to Germany expired. I will hazard a guess that Miss Leslie is even now engaged on another volume that will bring the fourth generation of her Ducrox family through the war and up to date.

Even though Miss Leslie is travelling over familiar territory, she has beaten a new path through it, or if not an entirely new path, one that was only partially explored by G. B. Stern in her "Matriarch" trilogy. For Miss Leslie, in the present volume, deals almost entirely with the women of her chosen family-the males are mere foils to the females of the species; it is only when she comes to the fourth generation that a man, young Christopher, enjoys the spotlight, and even then his grandmother, Catherine, "steals the show" whenever she appears on the stage-much as did Ellen Terry in that rash production when she was invited to play the nurse to Miss Doris Keane's Juliet.

When lazy, good-natured Edward Ducrox died unexpectedly, he left an inconsolate widow, two young daughters, and a family cigar business that was pretty well on its last legs. Catherine, the elder daughter, who was eighteen, had already scan-(Continued on page 79)



The "immortal dinner" at Haydon's studio at which Keats joined Wordsworth, Lamb, and Landseer among others. Reproduced from "Autobiography of John Keats" (Stanford University Press).

A Poet Steadfast As His Star

BY LEONARD BACON

OHN KEATS, in the eyes of many and most excellent judges, second in gifts only to the greatest of all poets, was born on October 31 (probably), 1795, in Finsbury, then a suburb, now part of the heart of London. Much has been written about his origins and his family which may be profitably ignored. It is enough to say that he was the son of the employee of a livery stable proprietor who had the good fortune to marry his employer's daughter and ultimately to succeed to the business, together with a comfortable though by no means gigantic fortune. At the end of his schooling in 1809, Keats was, at the instance of his guardian, apprenticed to a surgeon, with whom he served for three years till, after a probation not unproductive of imperfect sympathies, he separated from him in 1812. However, he continued his medical and surgical studies in London to such purpose that he ultimately received the license to practise, though by this time the interest in poetry, which it seems was in him rather late in development, had begun to be an overwhelming obsession. From 1815 onward he was a dedicated poet. He had, we know, written verse as early as three years before, but after 1815 hardly a line came from his pen which has not a burning or a poignant interest.

Even today it is with something like physical pain that we read the lines from "Sleep and Poetry":

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm Myself in poesy—,

that is to say if we realize that that year was the first of the five allowed him by the fates.

In 1817 Keats's first volume of poetry was published and fell dead. But undiscouraged he began the composition of "Endymion," strangest and most misunderstood of poems, which only in our time after the lapse of a philistine century is beginning to be properly comprehended and admired. Into the year 1818 the unfortunate boy managed to crowd enough strangely varied experience to last most people a lifetime. What with family illnesses and death, the departure of his brother George for America, and the attacks on "Endymion," which was published in April, it was a terrible year for him.

Nevertheless in the face of varied anxiety and depression he had finished "Isabella" in the Spring, begun the great "Hyperion" as the autumn ended, and by February, 1074 had composed the "Eve of St. Agnes," one of the greatest of English love-poems.

Never in so brief time was such huge creativeness. The year begun with the "Eve of Saint Agnes," saw the conception and completion of the "Ode to Psyche," "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "The Ode to a Nightingale," "The Ode to Autumn," and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," every one of them a great peak of poetry. As if that were not enough we have also "The Eve of St. Mark," which unhappily was never finished, and the five act drama "Otho the Great" which unhappily was. At all times during this creative year he was struggling with money difficulties, and his health was declining, becoming definitely alarming in December.

Keats died after great suffering on the 23rd of February, 1821, in the yellow house at the foot of the Spanish Stairs in Rome, and was buried by the Pyramid of Cestius, a relic of Roman funeral pomp which now serves as the monument of two English poets.

I propose here to make a brief appraisal, uncontaminated by detailed research, of some aspects of this strange, young, great poet, whose work grows stronger and more beautiful as time lengthens. In doing so I shall consider first of all his limitations which are trifling and nugatory, before touching on virtues which defeat estimation. It seems to me proper to say at once that Keats was not highly cultivated in the sense that Wordsworth and Shelley were cultivated, and that his extraordinary congenital power to discriminate values literary and psychological was not always sufficient to save him from outrageous lapses into bathos and bad taste. It is true that he had managed to read deeply among the Elizabethans. But he had only a schoolboy's Latin and just enough French to translate a poem by Ronsard or to become jealous when Fanny Brawne conversed in that tongue. Of Italian he possessed a mere smattering. And we should perhaps thank God that he knew no Greek, for we should never have had "On First Looking Into Chapman's

(Continued on next page)

Thar's Still Gold in Them Thar Hills

THE COMING AMERICAN BOOM. By L. L. B. Angas. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1934. \$1.50.

Reviewed by John Chamberlain

NFLATION in America, says Major Angas, who has a fairly enviable record as a prophet, has just begun. And because the Roosevelt administration is bound, as he sees it, to keep on pouring more and more money into emergency expenditure, creating thereby a "redundancy" of cash in the pockets and the passbooks of the people, and enlarging the basis for credit as the government borrows at the banks, there should be, must be, a boom in common stocks.

"At a guess," says Major Angas, "I should say such a rise will begin before the end of the Summer of 1934." By projecting his graphs into the future, on a basis of plotting the coming behavior of short and long term market swings from what has happened in recent cyclical phenomena, Major Angas, who believes that history repeats itself on the Stock Exchange, concludes that common stocks may reach their 1929 levels around 1938. He is not yet "in person" forecasting such a rise, but he notes, apparently with satisfaction, that the credit facilities made available by devalution of the dollar, the silver purchase plan, and other inflationary measures, exist to support it.

Most persons who saw their margins melt away in 1929 will, upon reading such a statement, cry "God help us" and rush to buy subsistence farms. For if the Dow Jones share index (Major Angas's economic bible) rises to 1929 heights once more, it will most certainly fall again to 1931 depths. Major Angas, who thinks that Roosevelt will "stabilize" after reflation, loses a little of his broker's hard-headedness when he mentions the word "stabilization." As the phrase goes, he hasn't thought this stabilization matter through. Assuming that a stable price level might be achieved, it would most certainly lead to a new variety of social harm, as I think

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THE KEY

By LAURA BENÉT

THE HILLS STEP LIGHTLY
By ALBERTA PIERSON HANNUM
Reviewed by Louis Untermeyer

THE LAUGHING JOURNEY
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Reviewed by Robert B. Macdougall
BIG STEEL

By LESLIE SWABACKER
Reviewed by Alvah C. Bessie
REMINISCENCES OF AN AMERICAN

SCHOLAR
By JOHN W. BURGESS
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BLAMING THE SHREW
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PEGASUS PULLS A HACK
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Reviewed by William Rose Benét
THE ESSENCE OF PLATO'S

PHILOSOPHY
By CONSTANTIN RITTER
Reviewed by Paul Elmer More

By FRANK SCHOONMAKER

Next Week or Later
THE TWENTY-FIRST COMMANDMENT

A Steadfast Poet

(Continued from preceding page)

Homer" from a man who could drink from the genuine spring. A perfect familiarity with ancient literature might, indeed, have prevented his novel and lovely development of the myths that enchanted him.

In that sense his lack of high training was not a disadvantage. But it was a handicap and it might have been increasingly so. Nor would he have been the worse for a sort of culture that the school at Enfield, which he attended in his youth, for

all its encouragement of him did not or could not give. Whatever is exuberantly and unnecessarily tasteless in his verse may be confidently attributed to a sort of ignorance which was caned out of Byron and Shelley, an ignorance by no means an essential concomitant of genius, an ignorance which Shakespeare himself felt and complained of in the sad moment when we find him desiring this man's art and that man's scope. When Endymion utters the exc

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men of talent and training too often feel for errors which their good fortune has prevented them from committing. This was uncharitable and unintelligent. But it became practically imbecile in this instance when, hatefully preoccupied with the mole on her thigh, they succeeded in ignoring naked Aphrodite.

The sort of ignorance to which I allude is a small matter perhaps, a mere mote between us and starshine. But it seems worth mentioning, if only for the reason that, in five brief years, the discipline of fate and the subtle influence of a great and beautiful mind upon itself had enabled him to transcend the limitation. The loftiest sense of what his calling demanded, careful reading, and meditation more careful still, had unshackled him from the cheap, sentimental, and diluted Rousseauism that passed for liberality, had made him free of nature, had in short brought him into contact with superb inner realities. His brief probation was enough to teach him to see through the artificialities of Leigh Hunt, who published Keats's first verses in his paper, The Examiner, to sharpen his sight, to purge his style, and finally to find his way to immortal inevitabilities, not attained as the result of any discipline that men of culture can impose.

When Matthew Arnold wrote the gentlest, most penetrating, and least patronizing of his essays, he felt it necessary to emphasize the manliness, the vigor, the energy of Keats. His essay was clear wind that for ever dissipated the miasma of the Quarterly and Blackwood's. But I wish he had dwelt more on a point which has been made before (by Colvin, for instance) and will be made again. Keats is the most inward of poets, more like Blake than he is like Shelley, more like Vaughan than he is like Tennyson. They are dangerous men, those inward poets, and in their verses there is stranger fire than we are always prepared for. Nature comes into them and they participate mystically with her, but her images are only the colors with which they paint inner landscapes. More than

any modern poet, more than they who most profess to pursue the same objects, Keats takes us into the bride-chambers and birth-chambers of the spirit, and has by magic we cannot pretend to anatomize, brought outward to our sight the inmost glory of the interior passion. His real life was there, beautiful, liberated life. And of this he appears to have been perfectly conscious. In a letter to his brother and sister-in-law he writes: "You speak of Lord Byron to me. There is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees—I describe what I imagine. Mine

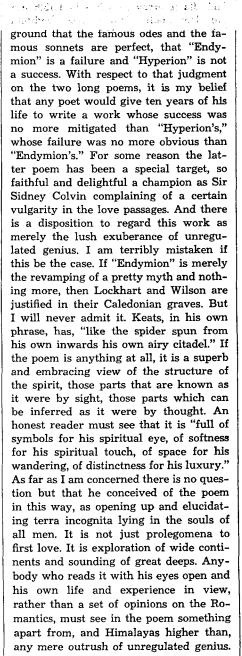
is the hardest task." Beyond all doubt it was. And also, beyond all doubt he was the man of all mensince Shakespeare, not excluding Donne, not excluding Crashaw, best qualified to perform it.

This point made, or rather stated, a little space may be devoted to what seems to me the proper way of looking at Keats's performance. Three slender volumes published in his lifetime include the greater part of his great work.

Opinions with respect to poetry differ not only between man and man but between time and time. Both these differences have been explored competently by the scholars after whom we are gleaning. But it is interesting to note or to combat some of the views which different men have expressed at different times. Charles Lamb thought the pathetic tale of "Isabella" the very top of poetry when any school are also proved.

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SEVERN'S PORTRAIT OF KEATS



All times have their limitations. It would be interesting to know ours, but that is a privilege reserved for those who for purposes we cannot imagine shall ex-

plore our not too glorious dust. Even with this in mind it is hard for us to understand the manœuvres of better men than ourselves before the splendor of "Endymion." Poetry, naked and superb, was before them, but the mote of anti-revolutionary prejudice and the beam of a middle-class, semi-respectable, and definitely second-rate moral system were too much for eyes that otherwise would have perceived more than our own limited vision. It taxes the mind to comprehend why in poetry so beautiful and intuitively penetrating, the gross, obvious, and unimportant imperfections did not almost become a grace in the sight of the critics who after all were intelligent men.

The "Lamia" volume, last of the works published in Keats's lifetime, can only be paragoned for brevity and magnitude with the Sonnets of Shakespeare, Milton's volume of 1645, and the "Lyrical Ballads." The mere title-page is a bede-roll of beauty, "Lamia," "Isabella," "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode to Psyche," "Fancy," "Bards of Passion and of Mirth," "Souls of Poets dead and gone," "Robin Hood," "To Autumn," "Ode on Melancholy," and—"Hyperion." Just to read that list is breath-taking. To borrow an old figure, if the volume, after some historic cataclysm were the sole survivor of all our poetry the archeologist who should preside over its resurrection, could imagine, and might perhaps exaggerate, the beauty of the lost literature, as our scholars shadow forth the greatness of the Tenth Muse from the fragment of a love song. Everything men desire and demand of poetry is in the book, poignant feeling, incredible felicity of expression, penetration of thought. There is mystery and clearness, the development of the high and beautiful, of the simple and the touching, the line exquisite for naked grace or delicious adornment. Everywhere there is the implication and suggestion of what no mere word can carry, the drawing up from the reader's own interior depth of those vast images that lie like sea-mon-ระหาริเม็น เรียก ว่า เรียก เหมืองการกับ

the elements of desire and the shadows of ancient thought renew their beauty as the nuthon renews his gleaning armor

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and all in the clother that we are

the python renews his gleaming armor. A word should be said on the letters of Keats. They tell the brief and troubling story of his life better than any of his biographers. There is perhaps no body of correspondence of equal magnitude of such strange interest. They alone would have secured him a permanent place in the history of the literature. Certainly no man of his years has spoken with greater charm or greater wisdom. Fragments of the letters have become part of the language precisely as the shining phrases from his poems have done. They admit you, they welcome you, into the innermost intimacies of a beautiful mind. In them the dream of a boy is expressed by a full and powerful intellect, which operates swiftly and exactly. There is hardly a subject of interest to man that is not elucidated by a clear and piercing light which reveals facets of things unknown or ignored, so that a topic thrashed to jejune threadbareness comes to us with a shock of novelty. You are captivated by the sheer delightfulness of the man, by humor, by a kind of divine sharpness of the mind, by a virtue at once jovial and mercurial. There is seriousness and good sense. There is gentleness and kindness and friendliness and a complete independence of intellect. He sees things at once with a child's interest and a man's judgment. Whether he is talking of a gay party at Haydon's, a conversation with Coleridge, a scene behind stage at a burlesque, of what Shellev ought to do in his new venture, or of the stage of poetic development of the mind of Wordsworth when he was writing "Tintern Abbey," the fascination never fails. Nor can I agree with two of the great Victorians that those terrible letters to and about Fanny Brawne exhibit a falling off and that they ought never to have been published. Doubtless they did violate in some way the Platonic ideal of Keats, which had been produced as a result of the passionate sympathies

risen up against the brutality of Blackwood's. But I for one will never deprecate the very essence of humanness. Those letters make dreadful reading, but a man's soul must be stiff with preternatural pomp, who feels that they reveal a loss of spiritual dignity. Unconventional things have a way of getting said in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. It seems to me that he put down nothing to which exception can be taken. Nor do I feel that the strictures passed on these final and tragic documents by the pet cat of Watts-Dunton, No. 2, The Pines, Putney, do much to entertain or anything to edify. They must be forgiven as the eccentricities of a great man, prematurely coddled into his dotage, who retained his volubility after the natural force, that in three blazing sonnets had repelled the cheap blasphemy of Carlyle, was sadly and permanently abated.

It is satisfactory in closing to take refuge in the comfortable thought that it is impossible to say anything adequate, new or old, about Keats, that is not banal. Pyramid and Parthenon are not subject to the indignity of praise or to the ineptitude of blame. Though the superlatives rush to the nib of the pen, the immense and beautiful fact remains untouched, undefined. This man was poetry, and we cannot and do not pretend to fathom the mystery of the incarnation. In his brief apogee a power was disclosed, an evanescent beauty in some way became eternal. Thankful we may be, but the fact remains inexplicable as the pulsations in the substance of a sun or the rhythms that are parcel of an atom. Something sidereal came into life with that poetry, something that after more than a hundred years, full, it is true, of not ignoble thought but full also of crass and terrible collective agony, we have been unable to lose, for all our contemporary declensions into the unhousebroke and the coarse. To paraphrase the verdict of a better judge, it is not necessary to think with too much bitterness on the tragedy of an unhappy and defeated young man. He has proved

By Laura Benét

KEY!" said she in surprise—
There, dangling from his wrist
Was a delicate thing, the size
Of a fairy's fist.

"May it show me the heart of my child, Aloof and wild."

She had waited until he slept, Wan, wistful-eyed. On slippered feet she had crept Through darkening rooms to his side. Yes, over the heart's pulsing clock Was a tiny lock.

It swung open, the heart of her son. What saw she? High, wilding grass; A colt tossing its head to run Through a rocky pass. Voices cried, "Mother, come no more To this secret door!" Voices said, "Have no fear—it is free From aught save liberty."

Though the mother, closing it fast Withdrew, strange fires in her brain, She tried the key at long last Again and again, When she thought her son short-spoken Or brooded on promises broken.

The little key, rusting in air, Fitted ill the lock, Every time she forced it there Gave a shuddering shock. A fragile instrument bent By prying intent.

There came a night when the key Would not fit at all.
When her son in an ecstasy,
Turned his face to the wall.
As his heart, quickening its pace,
Withdrew to a safer place.

Oh the distance stretched between His vision, beauteous As Vega or Sirius, And her in the known valley With its sweet encloséd dream Now transcended wholly!