#### 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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y blisses, Those lips or pleads f breath-one gentle One si

stupid injustice of Lockthe fe becomes almost explicahart hle servers from their political hatred Work in the developing a fact in Inc. Lie thunder and know a. Na waato pri v Concentration of Strates they all Contractor 1 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 men since 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 માં પ્રદેશના ને તેની સ્ટુલ્ટ સંપાર્થના છે. આ ગાઉફ જાન manual preferences for "Hyperion" Preers states of a science of all lar . godra ground that the famous odes and the famous sonnets are perfect, that "Endymion" is a failure and "Hyperion" is not a success. With respect to that judgment on the two long poems, it is my belief that any poet would give ten years of his life to write a work whose success was no more mitigated than "Hyperion's," whose failure was no more obvious than "Endymion's." For some reason the latter poem has been a special target, so faithful and delightful a champion as Sir Sidney Colvin complaining of a certain vulgarity in the love passages. And there is a disposition to regard this work as merely the lush exuberance of unregulated genius. I am terribly mistaken if this be the case. If "Endymion" is merely the revamping of a pretty myth and nothing more, then Lockhart and Wilson are justified in their Caledonian graves. But I will never admit it. Keats, in his own phrase, has, "like the spider spun from his own inwards his own airy citadel." If the poem is anything at all, it is a superb and embracing view of the structure of the spirit, those parts that are known as it were by sight, those parts which can

be inferred as it were by thought. An "full of honest reader must see that it i symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury." As far as I am concerned there is no question but that he conceived of the poem in this way, as opening up and elucidating terra incognita lying in the souls of all men. It is not just prolegomena to first love. It is exploration of wide continents and sounding of great deeps. Anybody who reads it with his eyes open and his own life and experience in view, rather than a set of opinions on the Romantics, must see in the poem something apart from, and Himalayas higher than, any mere outrush of unregulated genius. 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 explore 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-ฐมารไป ซึ่งเป็นชาติเธย เหตุ่มชาตา a deservitor we she we as has actually and have not all an discission for restaurant tare

ω απ πωπ, ων πιέτουν άπα ππαχειν; ελίτ the elements of desire and the shadows of ancient thought renew their beauty as 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 Shelley 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

# a p to coinger.

### 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.

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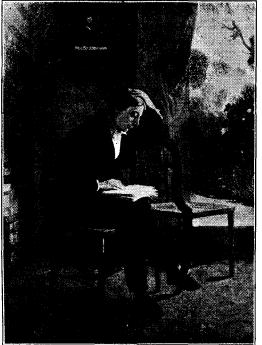
On slippered feet she had crept Through darkening rooms to his side. Yes, over the heart's pulsing clock Was a tiny lock.

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.



SEVERN'S PORTRAIT OF KEATS

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 enclosed dream Now transcended wholly!

## Rude Folk in a Mountain World

THE HILLS STEP LIGHTLY. By Alberta Pierson Hannum. New York: William Morrow & Company. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

**HERE** are certain books which we read with pleasure but with no great excitement, and there are others which we read with excitement but with dubious pleasure. Yet many of those which quickened momentary pulses have died in the memory, while a few of the less precipitate ones have so mellowed in memory that they have taken on a quiet but determined life of their own. Mrs. Hannum's first novel, "Thursday April." is one of those whose vitality seems greater today than when it was printed two years ago. Its curious combination of ordinariness and fantasy, of ease and intensity, is emphasized by her new story.

In some ways "The Hills Step Lightly" recalls one of the finest first novels ever printed in America, Elizabeth Madox Roberts's "The Time of Man." If Mrs. Hannum's work is less suggestive and symbolic than Miss Roberts's, it is more direct; though it is neither as rich nor as dramatic, it has something of the same conviction. It, too, moves in a world of poor mountain-folk whose labors are as drab as their locutions are rich, a world of gnarled realities set to rude poetry.

The story could not be simpler. It centers about Deborah Deane and never leaves the acres in western North Carolina which she tends. At the beginning of the tale she is a girl of ten; in the last chapter she is an old woman of seventy-five. Two men govern her life: the man for whom she bears a child at the request of his childless wife and whom she subsequently marries, an upright, hard-working, and happy-hearted farmer; and an unquiet fiddler and shoemaker who, puckishly, walks in and out of her life, and whom she buries in the end. The sixty-five years covered in the story might have been spread upon a panoramic canvas; instead, Mrs. Hunnum has chosen to paint her heroine in a series of selective panels. Without stressing the native backgrounds she has brought out local color with extraordinary skill and subtlety. The hunting episodes, the tall tales, the legends of witchcraft, are so intricately woven that it is hard to separate the central story from its clustering episodes. The reader moves among these people with immediate intimacy. He is at home, incongruously enough, in the primitive interiors; every stick of farmhouse furniture has a meanDeborah, for example, justifies the coming of love to her lover.

"Thar's nothin' wrong about hit, Jilson. We couldn't he'p hit, and hit's beau-tiful."

Jilson smiled ruefully. "Mebbe we couldn't he'p hits comin' to us, Deborah, but we don't need to set hit a chair."

This is a book about which too little may be written or too much may be said. It is not a sentimental nor a novel story. But it is a warm and moving one.

# In the Byrne Vein

THE LAUGHING JOURNEY. By Thomas Lennon. New York: The John Day Company. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by ROBERT B. MACDOUGALL

HE rhythms and cadences of Anglo-Irish prose are unmistakable. Whether they have been forced in a literary hothouse is beside the point. Donn Byrne had them, and now Thomas Lennon puts them into his first novel, a gay, tragic fantasy of Ireland and the Irish. Readers who are gratified and enlivened by the Celtic temperament as represented in the Byrne tradition will find this story of Shane Erskine's rebellion a thing of joy. Others may not like it so well, feeling that this tradition is hardly nearer the truth than was the oldstyle "begorra" stage Irishman. But truth or no, this journey of laughter is seductive; it has sentiment, warmth, bravery. It will have no traffic with the small or the mean, and its philosophy can take a firing

squad in its stride. Shane Erskine's rebellion, which came to nothing though it caused the death of many well intentioned Irishmen, might

have taken place in almost any decade of the late nineteenth century. The question of actuality is unimportant. At any rate, Shane Erskine's father was Shane Conor, a fireman in San Francisco, who had never seen the lad until the rebellion had failed and the son was near the end of his days. The girl, Rosaleen Fair, had met Shane Erskine twice, however, before she sailed for the United States, and neither one of them had ever forgotten the other. She, too, returned to Dublin only when the mischief was almost completed and Shane Erskine was running from the English soldiers. But Shane Conor, and Rosaleen Fair, and the Lord Abbot, head of the monastery where Shane Erskine had once gained sanctuary, were with him at the end, as was fitting. The conclusion of the story is genuine tragedy.

It must not be thought that "The Laughing Journey" is a sad or doleful book. It



### The Two Catherines (Continued from first page)

dalized her mother and her matriarchal grandmother by insisting on going to her father's office to help him in the business, and on his deathbed he called her his son and told her to take his place. So Catherine, in the third quarter of the last century, when marriage was the only career for a nice girl, took hold of Hanson's tottering cigar business. Thereafter, for twenty years, Hanson's was one-half-and a perfectly distinct half-of her life. The other half was

given, in the early years, to a fascinating young artist husband, Richard Temple, for sake of whose beaux yeux Catherine had declined a faithful adorer and most desirable match. It was this clean-cut division of her life into halves --- by day the keen, alert woman of business, by night the ardent wife of a passionate loverthat made tragedy for Cathe-

rine, and that forms the main theme and the essential merit of Miss Leslie's story. The very gualities that made Catherine successful in business-her possessiveness, her instinct to bend people to her will, her reservation of one-half of herself-made her unsuccessful first as wife and later as mother. Sensual Maria, for whom Richard left Catherine, told her many years later: "He wanted you as wife, and you made yourself his mistress. He could have had them two-a-penny. Richard was half-woman. And you-half-man, for all the little lady that you were!"

This almost Freudian motif Miss Leslie handles with consistent skill and delicacy. It is at once the foundation on which her principal character is built and the thread that binds the diverse persons and incidents of her story into a unity. As a result, through all its long course the book holds together and commands interest. In addition, one must admire the author's skilful characterization, especially of the women of her story (the men are not always so distinct), and the careful workmanship with which she has built her successive scenes and reproduced the atmosphere of the period.

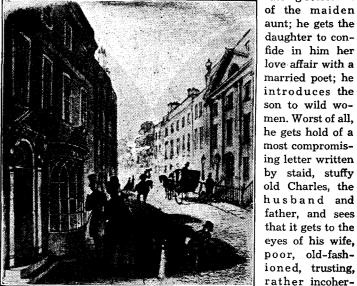
I believe this is only the second book of Miss Leslie's to be published in America, the first having appeared some years ago. It is an auspicious introduction, a distinctive achievement in the over-crowded field of the family novel.

### **Robust Romance**

CAPTAIN NICHOLAS. By Hugh Walpole. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1934. \$2.50.

R. WALPOLE is exercised about the morals of the younger generation, and still more about the cynical attitude it takes towards its own failings and those of the world in general. So he has written a romantic novel to show that right is still right and wrong is still wrong, that God's in His heaven and all's right with the world, that virtue will still triumph, if it is given half a chance, in spite of all that the cynics may say. As the vehicle with which to convey this robust optimism, Mr. Walpole selects a middle-class English family in which a miscellaneous assortment of relativeshusband, wife, and mother-in-law, uncle and aunt and three children-like little birds in their nest agree. The ménage is more than Victorian; it is patriarchal. Into this pleasant Utopia stalks the sinister figure of the wicked uncle, Captain Nicholas, holding by the hand his female offspring, a pathetic but most sophisticated little girl called Lizzie, and announcing that he has come to stay.

What Captain Nicholas does to that happy family is limited only by Mr. Walpole's imagination, which is fertile. For the gallant captain is a rogue, if ever there was one, the charmingly genial and handsome black sheep of the family well and favorably known to generations of novel readers. It is not only that Captain Nicholas is a first-class crook, a thief, and a card-sharp; he is also a malignant, Mephistophelian person who hates to see his family so smug and happy and cannot rest content till he has set them all by the ears. He worms an innocent but embarrassing secret out



#### FROM THE JACKET DESIGN OF "FULL FLAVOUR'

fide in him her love affair with a married poet; he introduces the son to wild women. Worst of all, he gets hold of a most compromising letter written by staid, stuffy old Charles, the husband and father, and sees that it gets to the eyes of his wife, poor. old-fashioned, trusting, rather incoherent Fanny. Nevertheless, as has been hinted.

virtue triumphs in the end, and the reader will be mildly entertained in discovering how that desirable consummation is brought about

# An Amazing Puppet BIG STEEL. By Leslie Swabacker. New York: The Macaulay Co. 1934, \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALVAH C. BESSIE

R. SWABACKER'S story of the rise of one of the polities **compounde** of the garbled history, and 'users vides excellent entertair

much technical information nere, for those seeking it, on the various processes of steel manufacture, many tantalizing glimpses into the private lives of halfa-dozen semi-fictional personages of the past century. "Big Steel" himself, magnate who rises from bug-infested boarding-houses to a mansion on Riverside Drive that was "a perfect reproduction of a famous French chatoo," has a half dozen more or less recognizable ancestors, a handful of genuinely human traits, and a surplusage of the superman. Beginning life as butcher boy and steel puddler, he rose through the sheer force of his superhuman energy and fanatical devotion to steel, to a position of power that rivalled only that of the redoubtable finance capitalist, "G. Z. Barton," whose loans to the Allied Powers brought America into the World War. He is an amusing marionette, and what he has lost in humanity, in his passage through the considerably flawed crucible of Mr. Swabacker's fictional talents, he has made up in sensational activity.

A physical giant, his appetites were commensurate with his size, and they nearly brought him to ruin. Though he started life as a workman, he lost sympathy with his fellows when fate, in the form of a strike, left him captive in the hot sun, with bullets whizzing on all sides. He never forgave labor this insult, and thereafter he was as ruthless as "Henry Schlesinger," who founded the steel industry in America; but, Mr. Swabacker would have us believe, his ruthlessness was not compounded of the lusts for power and wealth, but of the practically religious emotions involved in his passion for steel as an abstraction, as a deity. Steel must be manufactured, no matter how many slaves perished in the process. The machinations of the magnate are traced in simplified detail that makes them understandable, if not quite human; but neither "Big Steel"-Daniel Kelly Cainenor his associates, wife and daughter, his mistresses, ever come to life.



#### THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS From a painting by Homer Martin

ing for him; every casual sight and sound is characterized without being theatricalized. Everything is authentic, even the lesser smells of herbs dangling from wooden pegs in the rafters, "dried catnip and boneset, pennyroyal and masterroot. smoke that crept up the back wall of the hearth and escaped out into the room from the freshly poked supper fire."

The story itself is so calmly told that its quality is likely to be overlooked. The prose is poetic throughout without straining for poeticisms; a quaint humor often slips into the midst of moments of tension. is far from that. All the way through, there is humor, some of it broad and quick, some of it-like the two discussions between Shane Erskine and the Lord Abbot, or the expedition along the road to Belfast-in sustained passages where the comic spirit deepens and becomes memorable.

The story is not a masterpiece; no critical microscope is needed to find flaws. But in Mr. Lennon's writing there is so much zest and buoyancy, so much mad courage and sober wisdom, that we have only affection and admiration for what he has done.