

does not get always the fine and extreme edge of the personality that he describes. He is so politely careful to listen to what Mr. Abraham, Mr. Pierre Quint, Mr. Dandieu, Mr. Feuillerat have had to say about Proust, that he does not seem ever to have met Proust himself. I wish that a literary critic before talking of great authors might always read enough of their commentators to be fed up with them and spare us mention of them. Such observance ought to be the dividing line between literary criticism and teaching.

If Mr. Havelock Ellis had been himself a little more individualistic, and a little less kindly inclined towards the *gens de lettres* who have lived between him and Rousseau and Proust, he might have realized more clearly the heights of mysticism which Rousseau reached, which, as it is, he seems to neglect; he might also have felt the value and creative quality of vice in Proust's life. It cannot be doubted or denied, I believe, that Proust would never have written his great novel, and would never have sacrificed his life to his art, if he had not been driven by a violent and dominant sense of his own degradation.

Many things may still be said on Rousseau,* but nothing really new or valuable will be said as long as people speak of him without going to the bottom of his religious instinct. Endless and very picturesque books can be composed on Proust, but they are irrelevant, as long as one does not state and analyze very clearly and positively the place taken in his life by vice. Generally speaking such is the quality and the value of French freaks; on one hand they are quite extreme, their personalities are deeply abnormal, there are no fake and no tepid restrictions in their behavior. On the other hand, owing to the strict mental discipline that since the eighteenth century and more clearly since the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries the French mind has imposed on French personality, these freaks have been quite efficiently made normal by the work of their rationalizing will-power. Thus French prose has worked more than any other (with the single exception of the Greek) to broaden the field of psychological experience.

The great genius of English prose, on the contrary, has been to explore and to explain beautifully the field of normal life; English novels have made of normal life and normal personality, of social conformity, and of Victorian virtue the most brilliant and complete frescoes.

It is a nice world where such a small channel makes such a big difference, and where a really distinguished English writer and a fine European mind like Mr. Havelock Ellis wonders about the "schizoid" tendency of Marcel Proust.

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* Why is it that Mr. Ellis, who has read so many unnecessary books on Rousseau, seems not to know P. M. Masson's work on "La Religion de J. J. Rousseau"?

Mainly about Moore

ENGLISH YEARS. By James Whitall. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1935. \$2.75.

EPITAPH ON GEORGE MOORE. By Charles Morgan. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1935. \$1.25.

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

IN the Spring of 1914, Mr. Whitall, like Henry James before him, decided that the kind of life he wanted "could be more easily lived in England than in America." He wanted, in other words, to get away from a country where the overpowering pressure of commercialism in all its forms made life very difficult for a young man with vague literary aspirations. As he was possessed of a small competence, he was able to realize in pre-war London the dream of every man of letters, to associate with congenial people, and to live very comfortably, if modestly, without acute financial worry or the necessity of cheapening one's labor. Mr. Whitall arrived just in time to get a glimpse of a London which has disappeared for ever. He remained long enough to witness its transformation into the semi-Broadwayized city which it now is.

Mr. Whitall writes in a naturally graceful and entertaining style of his first ecstatic delight in English people and English ways, a delight which so many Americans genuinely feel, and which so many more Americans equally genuinely resent as unpatriotic. He is impenitent to the very end, and returns reluctantly to his own country, rightly feeling that the life he left behind him can never be duplicated here. The really charming and characteristic illustrations by George Plank, recording some of those scenes, must fill him with nostalgia. Nevertheless, he looks back with a certain humor at his initial naïveté, his essentially Transatlantic hero-worship of London's literary personalities, of whom he encountered a great many of the more interesting and typical specimens: Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, J. C. Squire, T. S. Eliot. As Assistant Editor of the *London Mercury*, and later as a publisher's reader, he soon established professional as well as personal relationships with the objects of his admiration.

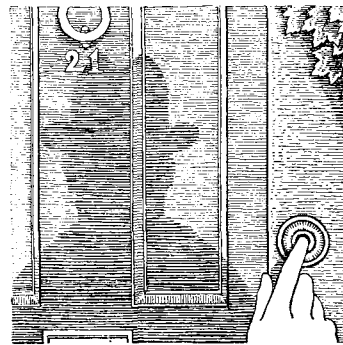
With George Moore he went even further, for he became his collaborator on a book which, though written and contracted for, was never published because

of Moore's veto. "How Literature Came to Texas" was the title of this work, which was a sequel to "Euphorion in Texas," which appeared in the *English Review* in July, 1914. I remember the date, because Moore sent me the magazine, and I was at once fired with the idea of writing the woman's side of that adventure. I did so; Moore criticized it not too harshly, but convinced me that my story did not sound like the writing of a woman. A fact I can well believe! Mr. Whitall was less fortunate, for Moore led him on into the arduous enterprise of writing a whole book, only to refuse his consent to its publication when it was ready for the press.

This typical example of Moore's petulance caused Mr. Whitall to scrutinize this one of his literary lions with a more critical eye, with the result that he has presented a picture of Moore which no other critic, save Susan Mitchell, has dared to give. Here is George Moore as he was at that period, irritable, irritating, rude, hospitable, delightful, and exasperating, full of phobias and manias,

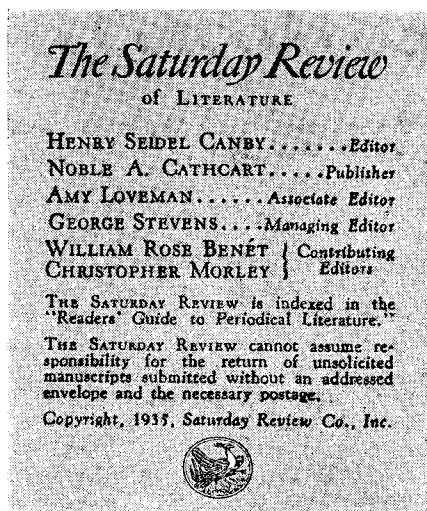
secure and serene in one thing only, his devotion to the art of writing.

In contrast to Mr. Whitall's veracious picture is Mr. Morgan's epitaph. It is not clear to me when exactly Mr. Morgan first made Moore's acquaintance—presumably after the war. He was nominated in Moore's will as his biographer, but had to abandon the task, because he could not have access to a certain batch of important correspondence. Reading this epitaph, I cannot but feel that Mr. Morgan's life might well have been what Moore was always trying to get somebody to write—John Freeman was the first to fall into the trap—but it would not have been the definitive biography which George Moore deserves. In his recently published "Irish Literary Portraits," John Englington relates how he refused Moore's request that he should write his life, yet he would have been the ideal biographer. So long as he was alive, Moore would allow nobody to approach the subject without dictating the manner in which it should be done, and threatening dire consequences, if one refused. I myself, some years ago, was thwarted in such an enterprise by the very methods so well described by Mr. Whitall. Mr. Morgan was evidently prepared to be more docile, but in the end we must await the Life and Letters which J. M. Hone, an Irish friend of long standing, has in preparation.



MOORE'S DOORWAY AT
21 EBURY ST.

Drawing by George Plank, from
"English Years."



Classics are Made, not Born

THE Limited Editions Club brought together recently a hundred kindred spirits for breakfast (in itself an achievement), and to witness the award of their first medal. It was given in due ceremony across a table on which lay Dr. Rosenbach's copies of the First Folio of Shakespeare, the first editions of "Don Quixote," the *editio princeps* of the "Odyssey," and the first Florentine Dante—given to a modest and engaging gentleman, Mr. Donald Culross Peattie, for his "An Almanac for Moderns," which in the opinion of the committee "most nearly attains the stature of a classic" among American books published in the last three years.

Phew! A classic! No wonder Mr. Peattie looked down at Cotton Mather's copy of Shakespeare in blushful confusion. But surely that excellent organization, The Limited Editions Club, which has given so many classics an adequate format, should have done the blushing. There were many attempts to define a classic at that breakfast party, but only one held water. A classic is made, not born. A classic is a book made classical by the steady devotion of generations of readers. It is not the same, as Mr. Frederic Melcher has acutely remarked, as a masterpiece. There are dozens of masterpieces which have never become classics. There are classics which are surely not one hundred percent masterpieces, among them "Romeo and Juliet" with its bad first act, and "Robinson Crusoe," which is quite unreadable after the first books. There is no law against guessing at what will become classic, though the odds against a right guess are very high. But if medals are to be given by guessing, let the awards go for merits which can be determined in our own time.

Since, however, the ice has been broken, let us try a little guessing ourselves. We guess that what makes a classic, which means what makes people continue to read and reread a book, is either what it says, or the way it is written, or both. It is too much to say that a classic must have a distinguished style, for while that is true of most classics, it is not true of all. The

style of "Robinson Crusoe" is not distinguished, nor is the style (so we are told) of the original of the four gospels. But if not style, there must be some fresh originality, some extraordinary grip of the subject matter upon the imagination which does not relax with change in fashions or shifts in mood.

Mr. Peattie's "Almanac" is an honest book, sympathetic to any lover of nature, informative to any reader curious as to what the modern science of natural history can contribute to our knowledge of our environment of weather, plants, animals, and the microbes that work beyond human sense. Day by day from April to March he records his observations, his thoughts, and his reflections in the presence of nature—sometimes by straight description, sometimes by reminiscence of earlier scientist-observers, sometimes by little lectures on the fruit fly or bacteriophage. This of course was Thoreau's method, though he never heard of bacteriophage, and John Burroughs's also, though that worthy in the style of his time, moralized his information whenever possible, whereas Mr. Peattie when he is not mildly philosophical annotates his descriptions by comments on what modern science has taught us. It is interesting material: the descriptions, though leaning too much on sentiment, often charming, the information guaranteed by the author's scientific training. But will such subject matter make a classic? It seems most doubtful. Someone at the breakfast remarked that the book could not have been written ten years ago. He meant presumably that the science it contains, being new, could not have been used ten years ago; since surely the wildness of crows, the cold amorosness of frogs, the habit of birds to sing in the after dawning, the colors of the gentian could have been recorded, and have been described, in excellent words any time these past one hundred and fifty years, ever since Crèvecoeur began such rewriting in America, and on through the extensive school of American nature literature of which Thoreau is still indisputably chief. But will that science stand or seem complete, be original or even novel, ten years from now, a hundred years, when classics are being made? It seems most improbable.

Nor is there distinction of style in this book, although except under stress of medal giving it would be ungenerous to criticize writing which is better than most of our current nature writers display. "There are few of us [this of the Indian] that at some time have not had a great longing to know our country as he knew it, and to have led his free and open life. And this nostalgia for the thing that we have killed is abroad in the wistful days we call Indian Summer." That is not Thoreau by a long shot, who said the same thing a great deal better nearly a century ago. It is not up to Burroughs, at his average, though in twenty odd volumes of remarks and descriptions very much like

Mr. Peattie's (minus the new science) the old hermit of Slabsides was often tiresome and frequently obvious.

But it is not Mr. Peattie we are attacking here, who is a sensitive spirit, well equipped with science, and if not a distinguished writer certainly not a bad one. It is the unhappy idea of calling his book a classic in advance of the returns, which cannot come in for twenty years yet. Nor can we escape an uncomfortable feeling that in thus choosing an agreeable nature book for medalling some of the judges may have themselves for the first time discovered American nature writing, and thus be a little wobbly in their standards. What a wallop upon the intelligence would have been made by, let us say, "Richard Carvel," if the critic had never read Thackeray or Sir Walter Scott!

Christmas Books For those who wish to give books for Christmas, and for those who hope to receive books at Christmas, one bit of advice may be given without impertinence. We have often insisted in these columns on the distinction between books to read and pass on and books to read and keep. Each may be equally important, equally interesting in the month they appear, but it is the book to keep that seems to us a particularly happy choice for Christmas giving. Library shelf room is limited for most of us nowadays. There should be in every well appointed home a rack for the current books, some of which may be intensely interesting even though with the passing of the Abyssinian crisis or the crash or success of the New Deal, their timeliness departs forever. But the library is meant for books to keep in 1936 as in 1935. And of these there have been more than usual published this year. See, for example, the list on page 9.

Ten Years Ago

The 1925 Christmas Number of The Saturday Review coincided with the publication of several well-remembered books. Sinclair Lewis, who reviewed "Manhattan Transfer" by John Dos Passos in that issue, wrote: "I regard 'Manhattan Transfer' as more important in every way than anything by Gertrude Stein or Marcel Proust or even the great white boar, Mr. Joyce's 'Ulysses.'" Mr. Lewis concluded that the book might possibly be "the foundation of a whole new school of novel-writing." A review of Christopher Morley's "Thunder on the Left" by Leonard Bacon is also to be found in that issue along with Katharine Anthony's "Catherine the Great," reviewed by Wilbur Cortez Abbott. The leading article, "Time, Tides and Taste," by John Galsworthy, surveyed the literary fashions of the 1920s.