

The Clearing House

Conducted by AMY LOVEMAN

Inquiries in regard to the choice of books should be addressed to MISS LOVEMAN, c/o *The Saturday Review*. A stamped and addressed envelope should be enclosed for reply.

FOR A SEATTLE CLUB

A. S. H. of Seattle, Wash., is planning a special program for a university women's book review class to which she belongs, and wishes in this instance instead of following their usual procedure to make the program one to which several members contribute instead of a single one. She wishes therefore suggestions for a topic which can be subdivided among some half-dozen members who will thus conduct a symposium. Since all the members of her organization are amateurs and all are busy they cannot undertake elaborate research.

IN these days when so many from all over the United States are making the trip to Mexico it seems to me that a program centered about a possible prospective tour to that country might be of general interest. What the intelligent traveller would want as intellectual equipment for such a journey would, I should think, be some outline of the history, ancient and modern, of Mexico, some authoritative and suggestive discussion of its present relations, problems, and policies, description of the land and its people, and something that would convey a little of the romance of its past. Books may come and books may go, but Prescott's *THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO* still remains the great classic on the early history of Mexico, and though later research has brought to light much which emends and adds to it, it is a work which every visitor to that land should read. It is long, perhaps too long in its entirety for the time at the disposal of A. S. H.'s group, but some member of it ought to read it at least in part. Some one could dip, too, into Bernal Diaz del Castillo's *DISCOVERY AND CONQUEST OF MEXICO* (London: Routledge), that chronicle of one of Cortez's soldiers to which Prescott went as one of his sources and which Archibald MacLeish in *CONQUISTADOR* (Houghton Mifflin) follows with great closeness, putting his tale into the mouth of the old adventurer. Mr. MacLeish's poem, which won a Pulitzer Prize, might well have excerpts read aloud by the member to whom it is allotted. It is a stirring narrative which swells along in vigorous fashion and quite apart from its bearing on the Mexican program should furnish excellent reading for the club. With these three works, and if something more specifically from the archaeological angle is desired, with H. J. Spinden's *ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS OF MEXICO AND AMERICA* (American Museum of Natural History) added for good measure, the distant past should be well taken care of, and the reports could then proceed to a study of the evolution of the Mexico of today. There is no better book for this purpose than Ernest H. Gruening's *MEXICO AND ITS HERITAGE* (Appleton-Century), a study of social conditions, politics, and government, with a survey of church history, and illuminating characterization of Mexican civilization. Mr. Gruening's book, I am told, is regarded in Mexico much as Bryce's *AMERICAN COMMONWEALTH* is in our country, as a study by a foreigner which is as authoritative as anything in its field. It is dispassionate and analytical, at once critical and understanding, in every way an excellent work. One of A. S. H.'s fellow club members ought without fail to report on it. Another, then, might present a synopsis of Stuart Chase's views as set forth in his *MEXICO: A STUDY OF TWO AMERICAS* (Macmillan), a roseate portrayal of the Mexican country and its civilization, designed to show the blessedness of a machineless community as over against the defects of a highly industrialized society like that of the United States. One other aspect still remains which should furnish an interesting paper, and that is the Maximilian episode on which two good recent books have appeared—*MAXIMILIAN, EMPEROR OF MEXICO* (Yale University Press), by J. L. Blasio, and Bertita Harding's *PHANTOM CROWN* (Bobbs-Merrill). And, lest after the club has had its Mexico day, all the members decide to take their next vacations in that land of beauty, confusion, and interest, some one of the speakers should take occasion to inform them that the best manual for their travels is Terry's *GUIDE TO MEXICO* (Houghton Mifflin), a revised edition of which is just off the press.

Since there's a possibility that A. S. H.'s club may prefer to conduct a symposium of a different sort I am offering an alternative program centered about the short

story. This is one which, of course, offers opportunity for wide reading, but which can be held within bounds by severe selection. I suggest that as background for the study of some of the outstanding short story writers of the day, one of the members report on Henry Seidel Canby's *STUDY OF THE SHORT STORY* (Holt), which will give them a survey of what had been accomplished up to 1900. Another might spend her time on *CREATIVE WRITING: THE STORY FORM* (American Book Company), by Mabel Louise Robinson and Helen Hull, an analytical study directed toward the intending writer, and the others could then present papers on a few of the outstanding practitioners of the short story form at various periods of American literary history. Thus one paper would cover Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe, another such writers as Bret Harte, Aldrich, Cable, and Sarah Orne Jewett, a third might include such disparate authors as Jack London, Edith Wharton, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and H. C. Bunner, and the last could embrace authors of the immediate present like Sherwood Anderson, Struthers Burt, Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, Joseph Hergesheimer, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Ruth Suckow, Dorothy Parker, George Milburn, Ernest Hemingway, and William Saroyan.

ANTIQUE AMERICAN FURNITURE

A. W. D., of Rock Hall, Md., who says that for some time he has been interested in antique furniture, American periods, from the collector's point of view, has hitherto been depending for information in regard to it on the articles in standard histories of art, and on the Metropolitan Museum of Art handbook on the American wing. He now wants something more definite and comprehensive.

Charles Over Cornelius, assistant curator of American art in the Metropolitan Museum, one of the authors of the handbook on the American wing mentioned by A. W. D., has published a volume entitled *EARLY AMERICAN FURNITURE* (Appleton-Century), which covers the ground from the earliest days to the present, is well-written, extremely readable, and lavishly illustrated. There is a comprehensive, but expensive, reference work to be had in Wallace Nutting's *FURNITURE TREASURY* (Old American Company), which contains descriptions of large numbers of pieces of furniture and utensils, principally of American origin, with accompanying photographs, and, of course, *THE PRACTICAL BOOK OF PERIOD FURNITURE* (Lippincott), by Harold D. Eberlein and Abbot McClure, is a standard work on the subject. Lurella Van Arsdale Guild's *GEOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN ANTIQUES* (Doubleday, Doran), takes up the objects it describes by states and devotes the first half of the book to furniture. Finally there is Henry Hammond Taylor's *KNOWING, COLLECTING, AND RESTORING EARLY AMERICAN FURNITURE* (Lippincott).



ILLUSTRATION BY FREDA BONE, FROM "HIGHLAND NIGHT"

The New Books

Fiction

HIGHLAND NIGHT. By Neil M. Gunn. Harcourt, Brace. 1935. \$2.50.

In the early years of the sixteenth century it began to be said in England that the sheep were eating up the men, that where a hundred families had lately tilled the soil, now a single shepherd watched his flocks. Three hundred years later the last stages of the same process were carried out in the highlands of Scotland. To make room for southern sheep and southern shepherds, the dwellers of the glens were driven from the lands of their ancestors to starve on a barren coast or to survive if they could the pest-laden emigrant ships and the perils of the new world.

Mr. Neil Gunn in this novel writes of the "Highland clearances" in which under the pressure of the Napoleonic wars the last step was taken in the application of capitalist technique to British land from the point of view of a Gael and a Scottish patriot. The betrayal of an ancient people by their natural leaders, the destruction of an ancient culture so that the rents of an absentee landlord in London might be trebled, awakens in him an emotion, a bitterness, which the perspective of a century has dulled but little. But if Mr. Gunn tends to idealize the old life of the glens, to exaggerate the ancient wisdom of the common people, and to find an idyllic poetry in what was always a hard, bare existence, anyone who has seen the Glasgow slums and reflected on the gifts of the industrial system to Scotland will be inclined to forgive him.

One could wish indeed that the main theme had been more firmly grasped. It was Mr. Gunn's purpose to show the effects of the clearance on the lives of a single group of villagers, but at times the details of these individual lives obscure the central story. The tragedies of his villagers are a little remote, not always clearly related to the tragedy of the whole people. Or so it seems. Perhaps to some

the deliberate cadences of Mr. Gunn's fine prose with their reminiscences of the rich melancholy rhetoric of the ancient highlands may convey a more vivid sense of reality. The fresh and beautifully imagined picture of the daily life of the clansmen is alone enough to repay the reader. But face to face with his main theme, Mr. Gunn seems to have achieved only something in the vein of the "Deserted Village"—a pathetic idyl rather than the high tragedy for which the material cries out. G. M.

THE OLD MAN'S BIRTHDAY. By Richard Crompton. Little, Brown. 1935. \$2.50.

This is a readable and mildly entertaining novel that falls short of being anything more, largely because of the author's insistence upon working out a neat and artificial pattern that is alien to life, and therefore unconvincing. Old Matthew Royston is to celebrate his ninety-fifth birthday, with the numerous members of his family gathered around him. Along with the others he has invited his grandson, Stephen, and Beatrice to his board; and this is scandalous in the eyes of almost all the Roystons, because the domestic happiness of Stephen and Beatrice has been blessed by neither church nor state. But, in satisfaction of a gentle auctorial irony, it is this sinful couple who incarnate true love, and it is Beatrice who resolves the problems perplexing a number of Royston lives, setting wandering feet on the right path, and aiding youth toward the satisfaction of its dreams. Once she has passed by, all is well. Because of her, Helen does not elope with Philip, Enid determines to remain a genuine spinster despite the substantial masculine lure of Max Collin, Pippa is assured of a college education, Richard is provided with a meaning for his hitherto meaningless life, Daphne is encouraged in her sudden adoration of Adam, Adam himself is recommended for a job, and Lilian (indirectly) is moved to battle against the demon jealousy. It is all very neat; too neat for serious consideration. The author dots every i, crosses every t, and conscientiously composes her characters from stock ingredients. Gaston, the valet, at first promises to be an original, but Gaston does not develop. Among other things the reader enjoys a little English-rectory-afternoon-tennis-on-the-lawn. And, yes, there is a curate. B. R. R.

THE IRON MOTHER. By Charles Braibant. Harpers. 1935. \$2.50.

The ancient but always vexing problem of what happens to the good qualities of so many excellent French novels when they are translated, is again raised by this English version of M. Braibant's "Le Roi Dort," a book which has enjoyed considerable critical success in France. Let it be said at once that Vyvyan Holland's rendering is always adequate, possessing as it does the two primary requisites of being intelligible throughout, and reasonably faithful to the sense of the original. Yet "The Iron Mother" is somehow quite a different book from "Le Roi Dort,"—as different, in fact, as the two titles themselves.

M. Braibant's novel is his first published work of fiction, but it is in the best sense of the word an amateur's book, and has been prepared for by many years of study and sympathetic observation. It gives a sincere and well drawn picture of the obstinate and hardy folk who lived

(Continued on page 509)

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
MOSS ROSE Joseph Shearing (Smith & Haas: \$2)	Lost Lady, holding secret of murder, blackmails killer, falls in love with him, and then . . .	Tale of icy viciousness and ever growing horror told against background of London and Germany of 1860's.	Brilliant
THE CORPSE IN THE GREEN PAJAMAS R. A. J. Walling (Morrow: \$2.)	Vanishing stiff in verdant night-rail perturbs machicolated family and puts Mr. Tolefree on mettle.	For clever talk, keen conflict of wits, rich background and all round subtlety, this takes a prize.	Grand!
THE POSTAGE STAMP MURDER Clinton Bestor (Dial: \$2.)	Tahiti is scene of almost endless sequence of murders finally curbed by bearded beachcomber "detective."	They die so thick and fast that plot involving rare stamps loses itself in gore. Plenty of action.	Unbelievable
BIG BUSINESS MURDER G. D. H. and Margaret Cole (Crime Club: \$2.)	Supt. Henry Wilson, entering on p. 213, solves murder of London financier who would bare huge swindle.	Background of crooked finance is best part of well-knit, ironically amusing, and puzzling yarn.	Good
THE MAN FROM MANHATTAN Leo Grex (Crime Club: \$2.)	Two guests at questionable British house party are killed; Jerry Downs, ex-Yard, uncovers pretty k. of f.	Mixed identities of leading characters and villainies of lovely ladies set the Jedge's head reeling.	Below par

An Important Literary Event!
A NEW NOVEL BY
THOMAS BOYD
Author of "THROUGH THE WHEAT"
**IN TIME OF
PEACE**

A story of immense power and scope—of Hicks, a young American who comes to grips with life in the mad decade of the 1920's. Hicks, ambitious, impulsive, an idealist tinged with cynicism, is a vital provocative character. His story, as told in "Time of Peace" will arouse discussion everywhere it is read. *A Minton, Balch Book.* \$2.50

AS MUCH AS TWICE

By DANE YORKE. This novel of a hard-bitten, homespun Yankee who ruled an entire village is superb as a faithful picture of contemporary life. *A Minton, Balch Book.* At All Booksellers. \$2.00



**Books Especially Recommended to
Readers of THE SATURDAY REVIEW**

Science and Social Needs

By JULIAN HUXLEY. "He has given us an admirable and fascinating survey, with many a fine human touch, of the part that science plays in dominating nearly all human activities concerned with the business of living in an industrial society."—*N. Y. Times.* \$2.75

The Iron Mother

By CHARLES BRAIBANT. "The Iron Mother' is a French 'Main Street' in which one's interest is held not by the portrayal of barriers to life—though these there are, neither minimized nor prettified—but by the sense of life's victories."—*N. Y. Herald Tribune.* \$2.50

A Young Man in a Hurry

By T. O. BEACHCROFT. "I agree that he is a discovery. He makes much of the best story writing of the day seem insignificant in the true sense of the word. He is a realist, a successful poetic observer of Nature."—*macabre and an intensely poetic observer of Nature.*—*William Rose Benét in the Saturday Review.* \$2.50

Sounding Harbors

By ELEANOR MERCEIN KELLY, author of *Basquerie*. "A thoroughly charming book. The scenes are as picturesque, as unusual, as those of the Basque stories. She writes of Yugoslavia and Corfu, and the characters are salty and vigorous. It is certainly highly enjoyable."—*N. Y. Herald Tribune.* \$2.50

HARPER & BROTHERS

NEW YORK

The  PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

BEFORE examining what recent books of verse are upon my desk, I should like to tender the whole-hearted concern and sympathy of this department to Edwin Arlington Robinson, our greatest living American poet, who is now ill in hospital. I hope his recovery may be speedy. I have a particular admiration for his latest book, "Amaranth," and such reviews as I have seen of it did not seem to me at all to do it justice. People tire so quickly nowadays, apparently, of hearing Aristides called the Just—in other words, when a writer has built up a considerable reputation the time inevitably comes when smaller men wish to tear it down. This is the most general of statements, but I have thought it peculiar that the bright minds on our best journals couldn't seem to perceive the remarkable vigor and originality in "Amaranth." At a time when most poets would be practically through writing, or else repeating themselves, Mr. Robinson accomplished something peculiarly his own yet peculiarly different from much of his work. There had been several of his later books that did not hold or move me as much as the work of his strongest period, but "Amaranth" seems to me an extraordinary poem. In spite of its presentation of the miscast, it is anything but a "tired" poem. It has energy, remarkable imagination, and a subtle humor—deeply ironic though its implications are—that in a man of less achievement would have confounded the critics. As it was it seemed to confound them in a different way. When a man has finally come into his own and received the highest praise, it would appear to be an accepted fact that there is nothing further to say about him. He may continue writing extremely well, but his style is known, all his best qualities have been intensively analyzed, his contribution to literature has become so familiar that the reviewers are inclined to tire of further evidences of it. They are looking around for what is happening in new pastures and they miss what is right under their eyes.

This, at least, is the opinion of one reader of poetry who has been following the current output for some time. "Amaranth" is one of the few volumes I can read with pleasure and profit. I do not find this study of the miscast in life a pessimistic book, I find it a most wise one. It is the mithridate that inoculates against the poisons of life and should strengthen the spirit. And the creatures of this significant fantasy, even to the pythian cat, Amersand, are types we can all recognize, drawn with sure skill and yet not at all without sympathy. My admiration is second to no one's for Robinson's great narrative, "Tristram," just as I think that in certain of his shorter poems he created some of the most subtle and beautiful verse of our time; but he has written with wide range, and "Amaranth" is unique in narrative poetry. It is like nothing he has done before. It shows his fullest powers of insight, his ripest intelligence.

One should be grateful to the Overbrook Press for bringing out a new edition of George Meredith's famous sonnet sequence, "Modern Love," in a most attractive format and binding, with slip-cover. One hundred and fifty copies of this little book were printed last October, with composition by Margaret Evans and presswork by John F. MacNamara. The address of the Overbrook Press is Riverbank Road, Stamford, Connecticut.

Joseph Auslander has made a distinguished translation from the Norwegian of the poems of Herman Wildenvey, the leading poet of Norway today. His first book of lyrics was published in 1907, and at the age of twenty he was praised by Georg Brandes. He has won the famous Gyldendal Prize, which corresponds in Scandinavian countries to our Pulitzer Prize. Knut Hamsun furnishes an introductory note to this book, highly laudatory, and Mr. Auslander, in a preface, tells us of Wildenvey's life of adventure. His volumes of verse, it seems, number eleven, and he has also written a novel, several collections of short stories, a book of essays, a book of biographical sketches, and done various translations. The present volume is entitled "Owls to Athens" (Dodd, Mead), and this is Mr. Wildenvey's explanation of his title:

By "Owls to Athens," as the old Greeks phrased it,
They meant the adding to what brimmed abundant—
Like gilding the lily or like bread that's wasted
On baker's brats—redundance twice redundant!

To you, America, these songs I bring—
Though all your resonant young forests ring;
Though you, America, my new-found land,
Grasp fistfuls of new beauty with each hand.

Incidentally, Mr. Auslander's lyrical (though prose) descriptions of Norway in his preface are beautiful. It was Wildenvey who introduced him to the country. The translator also speaks eloquently of the difficulties of translation, of how the translator is "continually torn between the scrupulous tyrannies of the text and the nimble latitudes of the spirit." In closing he pays a most graceful tribute to the poet, in laying before him his translation.

The book opens with tributes to Norway and Knut Hamsun. Then come lyrics, two satires, and a long ballad on Mary Magdalene. This poetry is immediately seen to be robust, offhand, even jaunty. Also it is often colloquial with a foreign tang. Sometimes the translator has encountered considerable difficulties with the movement of the rhythm and the falling of the rhyme. Nevertheless, on the whole, Mr. Auslander has managed to convey the fresh, exuberant qualities of the original poetry. The book is different from any you are likely to have seen for some time.

Over the Counter

The Saturday Review's Guide to Current Attractions

Trade Mark	Label	Contents	Flavor
MODERN LADY <i>Grace Perkins</i> (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.)	Novel	Success story in which Jane, having won a dominant position among New York's realtors, finds triumph hollow without a man.	Adequate Time-killer
DEVIL KINSMERE <i>Roger Fairbairn</i> (Harpers: \$2.)	Costume Romance	Scion of good provincial family heads for London, steps smack into intrigue at Charles II's court. Beaucoup action against authentic-seeming backdrop.	Good
SO BRIEF THE YEARS <i>Natalie Sokoloff</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.50.)	Novel	The horrors of Russian post-revolution days as they hit our heroine. Urged by shrewish grandma, she sells herself to OGPU's head man in return for invalid mama's comfort. Comes the White Prince.	Not So Good
THE GUESTS ARRIVE <i>Cecil Roberts</i> (Appleton-Century: \$2.50.)	Romance	Inheriting the Venetian island palace of her father, Cleo is forced to open it as a hotel. Proprietor and guests provide the tale.	Enter- taining
FORGET IF YOU CAN <i>John Erskine</i> (Bobbs, Merrill: \$2.50.)	Novel	Using a wealthy attorney, widower, and a svelte mysterious Fifth Avenue modiste, Mr. Erskine demonstrates that a man can't forget his wife's past.	New York