

Trade Winds

By P. E. G. QUERCUS

Old Quercus began New Year drinking sherry, having his skates sharpened. Pinguid as he is, still hopes to cut a few Figure 8's on the frozen pond. Isn't an 8 laid sideways mathematical symbol for Infinity? Space meagre these days, cultivate brevity. Unlike radio announcer Rose Bowl Game who never said *The ball did not touch the ground* but always *The ball did not effect contact with the greensward*. Why do the movies, trying to be tony, always pronounce cognac *cone-yack*? Best wine tasted this year a demi of Chassagne-Montrachet, 1926, at the Harvard Club where Old Q. was a guest. Given his choice, he voted for the Chassagne (near Beaune) because that's where Jo Davidson the sculptor gets very fine stone for busts. Very pleased to see *Via Mala* by John Knittel (Stokes), Swiss novel of solid power and worth, well received by shrewd critics. Don Gordon of the American News Co. remarks "Its publishers will be safe in throwing many thousands into the advertising pot." Q's thought throughout this melodramatic tale was, what a movie. C. P. Everitt of Dauber & Pine's bookstore was so steamed up by reading the *MS of Heaven High-Hell Deep* by Norman Archibald (a book about aviation in the War, coming Jan. 15) that he de-hatted himself publicly in the new D. & P. catalogue.

With all the rumbleumble about Montaigne old pettifogging Quercus often wonders how many people actually read him. The *Crimson Tide* (not a Football Team) would mount high on many a damask cheek if that should happen. His calm and prodigious candor always seems to have made almost all other books unnecessary. Marvin Lowenthal had the ingenious idea of picking out and rearranging (in the form of an autobiography) the liveliest and most first-person-singular stuff from the immortal but overstuffed *Essais*. So we have, from Houghton Mifflin, *The Autobiography of Michel de Montaigne* (\$3.50) a book that nestles as dangerously close to human fact as the asp in Cleopatra's sinus.

A very pleasant little volume of book lore comes to us from a new publisher, William H. Smith, Jr., 9 East 57 Street. It gathers together the ten prefaces written by distinguished hands for the great ten-volume catalogue of the Ashley Library (the collection of T. J. Wise in London). We note with interest that in one of these prefaces Mr. Augustine Birrell thinks the 1681 title-page of *Absalom and Achitophel* is "the most majestic in its proud simplicity" of any title-page ever printed in England. The town of Bronxville has been talking about changing its name to something more romantic-sounding; Old Q. heartily approves Harry Snyder's suggestion that it be renamed Dreamthorp. Q. remembers the late Will H. Low remarking that when he and other artists first settled in Bronxville it was so secluded they could paint nudes in the woods without causing

scandal. We liked the title of Philip Duschnes's latest catalogue (507 Fifth Ave.)—*Profit Takes a Holiday*.

Friswell is found! (See Q's inquiry last week.) Our colleague Mr. Clip Boutell discovered him in a delicious little encheiridion which he (C. B.) keeps in his desk drawer for reference. There he is listed as James Hain Friswell, 1827-78, author of *The Gentle Life*. The sentence quoted by Jordan Marsh reads in full: *Ink stains are difficult to get out: there is nothing so imperishable as a book.* But we are still wondering about the *Boston Transcript* editorial which called the author of *Dodsworth* "Lewis Sinclair." Meanwhile we turn over the balance of the column to our split-second exposurist:—

Alexander Woollcott and Kathleen Norris doing the Hauptmann trial for the NANA. . . . Adela Rogers St. Johns is smearing it on the front pages for the Hearst rags. . . . Six grand bought 33 Dickens letters from the late Ogden Goelet collection at auction . . . and the original manuscript journal of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775 clipped a cool \$4,500 at the same joint. . . . Edna St. Vincent Millay and her husband cottage-domiciled in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. . . . The newly rebuilt zoo in Central Park, N. Y., is becoming famous as the "Story Book" zoo . . . weather vanes of metal are cut in silhouette shapes of animals and birds. . . . Thomas Craven goes drama critic and blasts hell out of all current Broadway offerings. . . . Hitler's "My Battle" is now a compulsory text book in all elementary and secondary schools in Germany. . . . The new Congressional Directory gives Wm. G. McAdoo, California senator, the longest biography with 400 words and the Pa. Democrat, Senator Guffey, the shortest biography with 7 words. . . . Zowie! Harry H. Griswold, New York City, a librarian, left a net estate of \$130,746. . . . The square-rigger *Joseph Conrad*, owned and captained by Alan Villiers, is still in the hard-luck class, going in for repairs after she struck rocky bottom in the New York harbor. . . . Fernando Salcedo, big-time Andorra poet, flung his chapeau in the ring for King of this little Pyrenesian country. . . . Four of the ten "best" films of 1934 were taken from books: *The Thin Man*, *Little Women*, *Viva Villa*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. . . . Frederic F. Van De Water went after General Hugh S. Johnson's review in a potent letter to the editor of the *New York Times* concerning the General's ignorance about some history and about *Glory Hunter* in particular. . . . The controversy wages torrid with the *Detroit News* editorially backing Van De Water. . . . The hitherto unpublished letters of Napoleon to his second wife, Marie Louise, will be syndicated in the U. S. by the United Features shortly. . . . The same outfit peddled *The Life of Our Lord* via the same route. . . . Nine books and magazines dealing with birth control were barred from entry into the U. S. by commissioner of customs for obscenity. . . .

The PHENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

I CAN recommend to my readers, a book to be published before long, "The Poet as Citizen and Other Papers," by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (Macmillan); and I should also like to recommend to them "The Trend of Modern Poetry," by Geoffrey Bullough, Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffield, England, save that it comes to me from Oliver & Boyd, the Edinburgh publishers, and I do not believe it is as yet issued in this country. Still, if you are sufficiently interested, you can procure it through their London office, 33 Paternoster Row, E. C. The published price is five shillings net. I do not mean that either of these books is enormously important, but both, in their several ways, are interesting to the student of verse—even the lay student. Sir Arthur treats of such matters as "Ancient and Modern Notions," "Tradition and Orthodoxy," "The Handicap of Poetry," and even harks back to Tennyson in 1833 and William Barnes; while Professor Bullough talks of "The Inheritance of the Twentieth Century," "Georgian Poetry," "War Poetry," "The Sitwell Group," and so on to a discussion of Herbert Read, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and "New Signatures." He brings us up—or down—to date. Between the two books you will gain a pretty clear idea of what has been going on in English poetry, before, during, and since the late Great War. You will not get a complete panorama or perspective, but will acquire a good deal of information by the way.

The book, of those books of poems before me, that seems of most immediate interest is "A Winter Diary," by Mark Van Doren (Macmillan), but mine is an advance copy and the book is not yet released for review. I shall treat of it shortly. It is important work by a man with a considerable number of books of poems already to his credit. The same firm in London has just put out Wilfrid Gibson's "Fuel," arranged under the section headings "Fuel," "Balmoral Buildings," "Landfalls," "Ernsshaw," and "The Schooner." I notice that this writer, who started as one of the Georgian poets, has now dropped his middle name of Wilson for literary purposes. Mr. Gibson is the author of a surprising number of volumes containing many lyrics and narratives. His poems of the twenty years from 1905 to 1925 have been collected. I think it notable that he still writes so interestingly. He has always been the verse-reporter of the lives of ordinary human beings. In this respect he has followed in the Wordsworthian tradition, though his style has little in common with Wordsworth's. I remember hearing one of his first books, many years ago, highly praised by George Middleton, the American playwright. Gibson's reputation has been long established and "Fuel" cannot be said to enhance it in any way, though it is—as I say—an interesting book, and workmanlike. It has not the keen bite and originality of some of the poems in his "Borderlands and Thoroughfares," which is the book of his I like best. But it seems amazing to me when I learn that he now is having a difficult enough time making a living and, along with most of the Georgians, fairly well forgotten in England. That this should come to pass in the case of a man of his attainments is certainly not as it should be. If the poets of the proletariat and their admirers but knew it, Gibson has sung the proletariat for years with deep sympathy and impressive sincerity. He has also tried his hand at plays. He has written of the life of his time with unsentimental realism. His apothegms also are pungent. Here is one from this most recent book:

Fools of the jest which God
Plays ever and again,
We, who thought old men odd,
Are now the odd old men.

Within the last several years your humble servant has felt that sometimes quite keenly. For he is nearing fifty and Gibson may be slightly older. We say to ourselves, "That isn't really old," but we know in our hearts that a certain wild-fire has vanished from existence. I shouldn't say that it makes us exactly

down-hearted, but perhaps it teaches us to know our place!

But nothing is truer than that poetry, like virtue, is its own reward. So is painting, of course, and even more so, music. Those who practise these arts do not look forward to a revolution which may give them the reins of government or put them into any position of power. There will never come a time when the general-ity of them will be able to command large emolument from editors and the like. Whatever happens to civilization or the economic system, they will find themselves in much the same position in regard to society as that in which they always have found themselves. And people will continue to think that it is—for instance—a good thing for poets to starve in garrets; no myth, in certain instances in America—yet most certainly a myth when we cast a glance at the great English poets of the past. I happened to be discussing this matter with an American poet, Frank Ernest Hill, the other evening. We named off Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Browning, and Tennyson, immediately, as poets of private means who never had to worry about money or, indeed, about earning their livings in any way. They could afford to devote themselves solely to poetry—and, certainly, their attainments were not feeble! In twentieth century America, however, the poets scramble along as best they can; keeping body and soul together through all sorts of avocations. Perhaps that's better and perhaps it isn't. I should be loth to say that the masterpieces of John Keats could have been better written, or that he would have written more of them, or anything like that, if he had had to figure ways and means and dollars and cents all the time! There's a great deal of bosh talked by laymen about the conditions under which the artist does his best work. They really know very little about it. They can't, in the first place, conceive of anyone electing a calling that is practically a philanthropy. It is perhaps natural that a good many poets should side with the down-trodden proletariat; except that they know in their own secret souls that—so long as they keep on being poets—any social change is going to benefit them very little. All it will do, in general, will be to upset the conditions that make their work in any way possible. The poet is actually anti-social. I think that the communists, for instance, really have very little use for him; and I don't blame them. Logically he is a bad person to have around your camp. He can't be counted on to sing your praises or to fall in with any kind of marching order. These casual and idle reflections are somewhat the kind of reflections poets indulge in. And then you take "The House of Titans and Other Poems," (Macmillan), the latest work of that certainly socially-conscious and great-spirited humanitarian Irishman, "A. E." (George Russell). His mystic feeling about the earth, his nostalgic reveries, his talk of Karma, Eros, and enchantments; what in Heaven's name are these, to be understood of Dialectical Materialism; or seem to it aught but woozy silliness? I wrote some rather bitter light-verse the other day, which I can't sell, so I think I'll quote the last section of it (in sonnet-form) here:

Poets, you are a ragged rabble lot,
Your individualism does not charm me;
But you'll be drafted in the industrial
army,

Oh yes, you will be put upon the spot,
Or, like young Keats, unto his gallipot
Returned—with all men telling you you're
barmy!

They'll be around to feather and to tar me
Along with you, what time it matters not.

Or maybe they will stoop with conde-
scension

To our poor wits, and say, "These need
not perish!"

Nay, even put us on a little pension
So long as we don't sing what things we
cherish,

So long as we admit our world is sold
And busted Apollo's bow of burning gold.

Always social justice will have its best spokesmen among the poets, but it won't be because they are members of a party; but because when a burning human wrong strikes home to them they can rouse the world.

THE FIRST REVIEW OF VARDIS FISHER'S NEW NOVEL:

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Vardis Fisher

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