

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., 25 W. 45th St., New York, N. Y.  
Noble A. Cathcart, President and Treasurer;  
Henry Seidel Canby, Vice-President and Chairman;  
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Subscription rates per year, postpaid in the U. S. and Pan-American Postal Union, \$3.50; in Canada, \$5; in Great Britain, 18 shillings; elsewhere \$4.50. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 1, 1879. Vol. 11, No. 27.

THE SATURDAY REVIEW is indexed in the "Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature."

THE SATURDAY REVIEW cannot assume responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts submitted without an addressed envelope and the necessary postage.

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### The Morgan Library

The Morgan Library is accessible to scholars and notable works of scholarship are already being drawn from its treasures. It has exhibitions, one of which is now current. The general public may obtain entrance by asking for the privilege; and it is not necessary to be an accredited scholar in order to get a card. With such a wealth of reference material, it is of course understandable that precautions should be taken, and that this great collection should be reserved first of all for students. However, the interest of these priceless manuscripts and memorabilia extends far beyond the specialist, and the present restrictions, however perfunctory, raise barriers for the visiting stranger or even the book lover resident in New York, who may hesitate to ask for, or be unaware of, his privileges. We believe that the new building, which contains the reading and exhibition rooms, should be open to the public without card or other restriction at least one day a week.

And our reason for urging a procedure that would involve expense and perhaps inconvenience to custodians and scholars at work, is not merely that so many treasures of literature should be regarded as a public trust, and made part of the privileges of a great city. All this is true, but there is a more cogent reason. Literature, especially the literature of the past, inevitably becomes more and more dehumanized. Keats, Byron, Dickens, Scott, Hawthorne, to say nothing of Shakespeare, the medievalists, and the great Romans and Greeks, become names merely, shadows, more or less august, of another world than ours.

And did you once see Shelley plain? was a cry from the reality of experience. To think of a Wordsworth, a Pope, a Ben Jonson as a man in the flesh, who wrote, as this editorial is being written, scratching out false starts, revising, interrupted, excited as the handwriting may show, is to think of a man as well as of a book. Letters, memorabilia, most of all the manuscripts of masterpieces which show the quality of labor, give a sense of the continuity of the imagination, of the human relationship throughout the ages between writer and reader, which no edition, first or last, no literary essay, no portrait even, can equal.

And it is in such material that the Morgan Library is infinitely rich. Already the American Academy exhibits at their gal-

lery at 155th Street and Broadway the human background of manuscripts, utensils, memorabilia of their members who have contributed to American literature. But where they can thus humanize a Mark Twain or a Howells, the Morgan Library with its treasures from every great age could put flesh on the bones of the history of all literature.

This great library is not primarily for exhibit, and yet at small cost and with some trouble, in our opinion richly justified, one day a week could surely be given to the public, with exhibits changing from time to time, but always with the idea of showing to those who know them only in cold type, great writers in their habits, as they lived.

A clear photograph has recently been made of a famous papyrus in the Zagreb Museum, which contains the longest Etruscan text so far discovered. The photograph makes the complete text of twelve hundred words available for Etruscan scholars, and its final translation will undoubtedly elucidate many obscurities. Hitherto only a hundred and fifty words of the text have been legible.



"STATIC, NOTHING! THAT'S ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT GOING QUIETLY MAD."

## Letters to the Editor: Major Thomas Replies to Colonel Palmer; The Grand Manner and Modern Poetry

### Bliss's Diaries

SIR:—Colonel Palmer transposes an unfavorable review of his book into an attack on General Bliss, but his letter replies to criticisms not made in my review. My estimate of General Bliss is rather higher, I should say, than his; and my review praised Bliss but found the biography disappointing and inadequate. The author demands for his book the admiration due General Bliss's character: whoever ventures to make a distinction becomes "an enthusiastic proselyte of a medieval militarism."

1. A mass of letters, reports, and memoranda do not constitute a diary or journal; but my comment on the absence of one could not possibly be taken as a criticism of the author. In his preface he makes no mention of a diary and none is referred to in his index. From the beginning of the book until after the Armistice I can find in the text or footnotes no allusion to a diary or journal of any sort; none of the documents quoted up to this point are noted as taken from such a source. Toward the end of the volume I missed a footnote explaining that Bliss began a diary when appointed to the Peace Commission. The author does not appear to have found this a very important source: entries from it appear on about 15 pages in a 465-page volume. My error seems rather less misleading than the author's vehement correction. He notes that for the period of the Peace Conference "Few memoranda to the President appear in Bliss's papers. . . . Bliss saw the President only five times in a personal interview during the whole Conference." The analogy to Madison's Journal seems not quite perfect.

2. The review did not throw out suspicion of Bliss's having yielded to "the wiles of the French and the British," but on the contrary blamed the author for refusing so lamely a charge made long ago in print. This "suspicion" did not arise from back-stairs staff gossip but from the published war memoirs of General Dawes and General Harbord. Col. Palmer quotes Bliss's own comment on Dawes's "unwarranted assertions" but avoids any reference to the well-known passage in which Harbord disclosed the attitude of G.H.Q. to Bliss,—soon after his arrival in France.

The future is pregnant with possibilities with General Bliss participating

in the Supreme Council. Confined to that alone he would be comparatively harmless, for its deliberations seem a little wild, and it is generally referred to over here as the Soviet. . . . The situation is extremely interesting but it offers possibilities that have caused me more worry than the anticipated German offensive.

General Bliss apparently was so moved by the *entente* with our English friends that he completely embraced their view on the matter of the American troops to be brought over. . . . Bliss reached Paris with his mind made up and prepared to line up with the British chorus, leaving Pershing to sing a solo.

These pages in a widely read book were the basis of a generally accepted idea, which, as far as I know, was never corrected publicly. Later on I heard General Bliss state the case in his own words, and gradually came to the opinion that, while made in perfect good faith, General Harbord's statement was nevertheless unfair and misleading. As I understand the matter Bliss's action was in every way creditable and straightforward. I think that by tackling squarely Harbord's comments and stating the essential facts of the case, Col. Palmer would have effectively cleared Bliss's record of the only charge made against it.

This point illustrates fairly well the general issue. The clashes and disagreements between various war-time figures are not scandals to be suppressed—or to be exploited. They arose from the general jangle of the business of war, and it is the biographer's duty to set forth and explain, rather than to pass gracefully over, such difficulties. The English war biographies to which Col. Palmer appeals do not flinch from entering into facts even at the risk of controversy; and as a result they receive "broad and deep attention." Surfeited with meaningless eulogies, our own public tends to lose interest in the subject.

T. H. THOMAS.

Cambridge, Mass.

### Mr. Benét and the Grand Manner

SIR:—I call upon the justice of your public forum to claim a clear technical foul from your Mr. Benét in his notice of my poetry anthology, "Modern Things," Dec. 29th.

Mr. Benét may know what he likes but the matter ends there. He feels that his reaction to the poets included (among whom are Pound, Eliot, Cummings, Williams, and Marianne Moore) justifies his dismissing most of them without so much as giving a single concrete objection which has the remotest resemblance to a technique of criticism. He wails: "Life, guts, and gusto; color, music, fire. . . . Don't expect them any more, my friends."

These mono- and duosyllabic nouns imply, according to their categoric intonation, a hierarchic majesty which relates to nothing real in the present domain of art or emotion. They prevail, I hazard, through the official courtesy of the dictionary towards a one-time user, Mr. Benét.

What lies in Mr. Benét's heart seems to be a thwarted love for the Grand Manner in literature. There is no Grand Manner operating in literature today save in Mr.

Pound's work, which Mr. Benét finds boring. Mr. Benét's chauvinism is therefore dishonorable and stupid. Marx can teach us that it is the most trivial of romantic fallacies to believe, as it seems most likely Mr. Benét believes, that poetry exists *in vacuo*; that it is an immutable wealth, like ore or diamonds lying in the air rather than in the earth and waiting patiently as time passes to be mined by the next surprise genius. . . . Hart Crane's "The Bridge" is an actual proof that it is impossible, as yet, to apply the grand manner to the surface patterns of American culture, a fact which was competently demonstrated by some half-a-dozen reviewers. Yet "The Bridge" ostensibly has "gusto, fire, music, etc." Mr. Benét knows these qualities not as of poetic objects but as abstracted romantic entities. Thus, if they only exist, legitimately, in Mr. Benét's head and in the dictionary, what good are they, whom do they afford consolation, and were they worth the ink spent on them by *The Saturday Review*? . . . It is possible, of course, to wonder if Mr. Benét, although he invites his friends not to look for the said qualities in poetry, is personally satisfied with the repetitious feminine music of Miss Millay and the snug regional color of Mr. Frost.

New York City. PARKER TYLER.

### Sam Ward

SIR:—May I ask through your columns the following courtesy:

I am preparing material for a memoir of my uncle Sam Ward (1814-1884), oldest brother of my mother, Julia Ward Howe. I should welcome the opportunity to see any letters of his, or documents bearing on his life; would take great care of such documents, returning them safely when I have finished with them, by the copying of serviceable passages.

Samuel Ward was born in New York, lived there for the greater part of his life, some of which however was spent in Paris and Heidelberg; England and Rome; South America and California. He is the Sam Ward who was known as The King of the Lobby, famous for his dinners and his wit.

His younger brother Marion, "Manny," spent much time in New Orleans and in St. Louis in the 1840's.

Any data will be deeply appreciated.

MAUD HOWE (MRS. JOHN ELLIOTT).  
150 Rhode Island Avenue,  
Newport, Rhode Island.

### George Francis Train

SIR:—I am working on the biography of George Francis Train, and I shall appreciate hearing from any of your readers.

JAMES E. MYERS.

Amity Court,  
133 West 3rd Street,  
New York City.

### A Correction

SIR:—On the editorial page of a recent issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature* is a letter from Professor Carl J. Weber of this College. The address of the college is misprinted. It is not Waterville, but Waterville. J. S. IBBOTSON, Librarian.

Waterville, Maine.

### The Saturday Review recommends

**This List of Current Books:**

THE AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC GAME. By DREW PEARSON and CONSTANTINE BROWN. Doubleday, Doran. Recent episodes of international history.

A HOUSE DIVIDED. By PEARL S. BUCK. Day. The concluding volume of "The Good Earth" trilogy.

EXPRESSIONISM IN ART. By SHELDON CHENEY. Live-right. An interpretation of twentieth century expressionism.

**This Less Recent Book:**

THE STRICKEN DEER. By LORD DAVID CECIL. Bobbs-Merrill. A biography of Cowper.



## Where Credit Is Due

JOHN BROWN: Terrible "Saint." By David Karsner. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by A. HOWARD MENEELY

JOHN BROWN'S body has lain a-mouldering in the grave for seventy-five years. The first serious attempt at objectivity in a biography of the old warrior was made by Oswald Garrison Villard, whose study appeared in 1911. Prodigal of time, energy, and expense, he sought to collect every scrap of evidence which might contribute to a history and understanding of his subject, and his biography became the standard life of John Brown. While his pages betray a decided sympathy for Brown, they also bear witness to his painstaking scholarship and a conscientious effort to present the whole story. He made every student of the pre-Civil War field his debtor, and no biographer of Brown can avoid drawing upon his storehouse of information. While Mr. Karsner's book is



JOHN BROWN, ALIAS ISAAC SMITH  
He grew a beard as a disguise when he led his raiders on Harpers Ferry.

undocumented, except for occasional references to his sources in the text, it is apparent that he is very heavily obligated.

The publishers of his book assert that there has been no biography of Brown "in a quarter of a century," that "Mr. Karsner's book comes now in view of certain letters of his that have recently come to light," that "the research which Mr. Karsner has given to the mass of true and false testimony in regard to him is enormous," and that "the book can safely be called definitive."

Since 1911 at least two other biographies of John Brown have come from the press: one by Hill Peebles Wilson in 1918, which was in the nature of a reply to Villard's sympathetic interpretation; another by Robert Penn Warren in 1929. That Mr. Karsner spent considerable time in the preparation of his book is not questioned, but that there is new material of any consequence in his volume is not borne out by a study of his pages. There is exceedingly little data that is not to be found in Villard's biography or in other books on Brown and his time. At least three-fourths of all his quotations, from letters, documents, books, magazines, and newspapers, are printed, and in more reliable form, in Villard's book. Almost every quotation in his last four chapters is to be found in Villard's concluding chapters, and his narrative of the last months of Brown's life so closely parallels that of the earlier book as to amount, in the judgment of this reviewer, to little more than a summarizing of Villard's detailed account.

The book is in no sense definitive. It is not even dependable for the serious student, for in seeking color and dramatic effect, the author appears at times to have given rein to his imagination. More serious in such a volume is the mutilation of documentary evidence. Villard assures us that wherever sources have been quoted in his book, "they have been cited *verbatim et literatim*, the effort being to reproduce exactly spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. . . ." A comparison of Mr. Karsner's extracts with Villard's

painstaking reproductions discloses that he has taken undue liberties in transcription. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and italics have been changed at will, and frequently portions of the quotations have been omitted without any indication of the fact being given.

Those who are not disturbed by such defects as have been mentioned will no doubt find this new biography of old John Brown very good entertainment. For friends and foes alike the story of this strange man must ever be a fascinating one: it is so full of drama, pathos, purpose, and tragedy. To the retelling of it Mr. Karsner has brought a facile pen and an engaging style.

A. Howard Meneely is a member of the department of history of Dartmouth College.

## Grandchildren of the Good Earth

(Continued from first page)

but it focuses the dreaming mind and anchors it to some ledge in the sea of memory. This latest book has to do with articulate, sterile people; the dreaming flow is stopped. One sees no longer the magic formula, "Well, and if. . ."

For there are wastrels in the third generation. That exquisite flower sprung from her grandfather's wealth, Ai-lan, to whom motherhood is a tiresome interruption to her gaieties, who refuses to nurse even her first-born son lest her lovely body lose its virginal contours—Ai-lan is a long way from her heavy, fruitful grandmother O-lan, whose milk was so abundant that her greedy sons could not take it all, and it soaked back into the good earth of the fields where she labored with her husband. That fine dilettante, the poet Sheng, seems hardly kin to his earth-stained grandfather Wang Lung, who established in his fields the fortune on which Sheng lives far from the land, in cities of whose existence Wang Lung was unaware. These are flowers on the far tip of that tree the good earth nourished. They will wither and drop off in their time. But pushing up, dogged and unnoticed, from the same earth, comes that shelf-toothed peasant who bought the land, married a cast-off slave woman of the great family Wang, and, like the old Wang Lung, took his family south to beg in a year of famine rather than let his sons' inheritance of good earth get into the hands of Wang the Merchant.

There is hope from Yuan, the sensitive lad, who hankers for the soil against his war-lord father's military training. But book-learning and protected living have confused Yuan; he shrinks from ugly smells and sights; he cannot sink into the earth in animal content as could his grandfather. As Mei-ling says:

It is better for such people as we are to live in the new city. . . . I want to work there—perhaps I'll make a hospital there some day—add my life to its new life. We belong there, we new ones.

There is hope from Mei-ling, too, a foundling girl whom Ai-lan's mother had adopted to give the education that Ai-lan's shallow nature could not take. Mei-ling is to be a doctor. For the war-lord's First Wife, the Learned One, has understood what neither her husband nor his father, brooding over the revolt of their sons, could learn—that even the child of its parent's body has its own dissimilar life and cannot be forced into its parent's mold. The First Wife had purposed learning and service for her only child; the child preferred to be ornamental, only. So her mother brings up twenty foundling girl babies, and among them finds one, Mei-ling, who can accept eagerly and use the education her own child has rejected. It is a thought a long time coming: that not through our own nation alone, not through our blood children alone, can our good purpose for future generations be served.

Maude Meagher is the author of "White Jade," a charming tale with China for background.

The forthcoming "History of The Times" will be, according to the *London Observer*, "A great event in journalism, for its story since Number 1 of the *Daily Universal Register* covers six generations of modern life."

## Dogged Hammering at Human Emotions

WE ARE BETRAYED. By Vardis Fisher. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

THE principal characteristics of Mr. Fisher's work are by now fairly well known. The two books which form a trilogy with this one were certainly not distinguished for their subtlety, but they gained attention by a sheer dogged hammering at the emotions. "We Are Betrayed" finds Mr. Fisher still inexorably determined to move the reader at all costs with his painstaking account of Vridar Hunter's blundering attempts to learn how to live. The author's high blood-pressured prose, in fact, seems even more apt in this book to fall into complete apoplexy at any moment than it did in the earlier stages of Vridar's lugubrious saga. In addition, while "In Tragic Life" and its successor contained occasional descriptive interludes which might almost be called pleasant in tone, the new novel boasts no such breathing spaces between Mr. Fisher's innumerable powerful scenes of tragedy. At least, he cannot be accused of undue partiality for his characters, since Vridar and his wife Neola are throughout treated unbelievably badly by fate and the author.

"We Are Betrayed," then, is like its predecessors, only more so. The narrative is somewhat less convincing, possibly because Vridar as a grown man does very much the same sort of things which he did as a child, and what was credible and interesting in the child becomes grotesque and unlikely in the man. There are two main themes in the book: Vridar's superstitious desire to gain more "book learning" as a kind of charm against the difficulties of life, and his jealousy of his wife. There is a vast amount of space devoted to his rather dull reactions to his college courses, and similarly until the book ends with Neola's suicide, there are endless repetitions of his quarrels with her, each of course being followed by the inevitable reconciliation. All this tends to make Mr. Fisher's new book less exciting than the rest of his trilogy, though it is equally packed with passionate feeling and violent hatred, both directed indiscriminately at any convenient objective.

While there is much of the familiar power in "We Are Betrayed," therefore, there is also even more of the intellectual disorder and uncouth heaviness of manner which disfigured Mr. Fisher's earlier attempts to apply the methods of Zola and Dostoevsky to the American scene. Yet these things do not seem to be fatal weaknesses, nor does the abundance of often unnecessarily sordid and petty detail, which at this late date may be dismissed as merely a part of the realistic novelist's ritual.

More serious, and more difficult to overcome, is the author's tendency to write about peculiarly maladjusted and backward personalities, not always characteristic of their environment. If this trilogy fails to attain the high tragic quality at which it so notably aims, it is largely because it is concerned with persons of seriously limited social significance. Vridar, brought up under heartbreaking conditions, is endowed only with a great desire for the "finer things of life" but has no vaguest conception of what they are, nor

of how to attain them. He remains, at the end of the trilogy, more Caliban than representative American—a freak whose mental age is stationary. Finally, the author's obvious striving for effect in his climaxes is absurdly exaggerated. Anyone gifted with such natural vigor and force as Mr. Fisher undoubtedly possesses, should in time be able to mold American life into far more genuine and moving fictional shapes. Eventually, with discipline and the avoidance of emotional tricks, a very considerable novelist may result.

## Gauchos of the Pampa

DON SEGUNDO SOMBRA. Translated from the Spanish of Ricardo Güiraldes by Harriet De Onís. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1935. \$2.50.

IN Argentina, everything, so to say, goes back to the pampa. It is this vast, level, fertile, easily accessible plain, all in the temperate zone, the only thing of the sort between our own prairies and Cape Horn, which has determined the character of the nation's life. Beef and wheat and a rising export market—which now, perhaps, has passed its peak—built the great cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires, and the link between its sophisticated and showy life and the latter's economic source is felt as in perhaps no other nation's capital.

There is neither coal nor iron in the Argentine. Manufactures are comparatively trifling. The great fortunes, the outstanding families, are the pampa's flowering, if not even now directly connected with it. The gaucho, the Argentine cowboy, not unnaturally, therefore, plays a symbolic as well as factual role in Argentine thought and life similar to that played, until very recently at least, in our own life and thought by the pioneer. Elegant Porteños are still flattered to be told that beneath their elegance they still retain the gaucho's independence, his toughness, humor, love of wide spaces and free air, and unwillingness to be shut up within four walls.

Don Segundo Sombra, the real hero of Ricardo Güiraldes's novel, although its actual protagonist and narrator is the young gaucho who worships the older man, is an embodiment of the gaucho virtues—tough as rawhide, calm, poised, wise, equal to any emergency, knowing everything about horses and cattle, and

though giving everything that's in him to the job in hand, whatever he may have engaged to do, always cutting loose from routine once the job is finished and going back to the pampa again as an old salt returns to the open sea.

Mr. Waldo Frank, who writes an introduction, suggests that the novel holds a place in Argentine letters similar to that of "Huckleberry Finn" in ours, a suggestion with which the reader may or may not agree. The narrator, in any case, is a boy who runs away from home to be a

gaucho, and attaching himself to Don Segundo Sombra, goes through a series of adventures which give the reader a pretty complete notion of bronco-busting and cattle-driving in the Argentine.

Ricardo Güiraldes himself came of a ranch-owning family. This novel, published the year before his death, is a picture, simply and eloquently painted, of the gaucho's life and characteristics, with Don Segundo Sombra's heroic outlines rising in the background, a sort of mystical shadow thrown on the pampa sky.



Drawing by Howard Willard, from "Don Segundo Sombra."