

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."

The Liberal Philosophy of Life

CREATIVE SCEPTICS: In Defense of the Liberal Temper. By T. V. Smith. Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co. 1934. \$2.

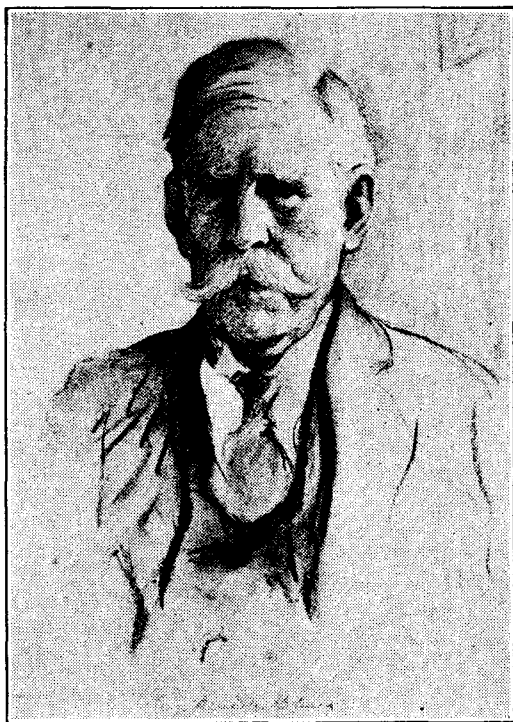
Reviewed by ZECHARIAH CHAFEE, JR.

FUN and philosophy do not often go together. We ordinarily think of philosophers as concentrated on knowing the unknowable or unscrewing the inscrutable, and, if ever concerned with earthly matters, as falling into wells while gazing at the stars, or as bearing the toothache impatiently. No such gloomy intensity pervades Professor Smith's book. The fun of writing it, he says, was great, and there is plenty of amusement in reading it.

Since each mind is bottled up in itself, how do they ever communicate with each other? Why are they not, like scattered planets, hopelessly separated by a space which is surely impassable and perhaps completely empty? For instance, Mr. Smith tells us that he has now reduced the very book we are reading to a bundle of mental qualities. Are these qualities in his mind, or my mind, or in both? If the ideas in the book are the same to him and to me, then there seems to be something outside us after all which we can know, namely, the minds of others. Or must we assume that there is no assured probability of similarity between what goes on in his head and what goes on in mine? At least he and I would agree in calling the same trolley car yellow, but is there a big chance that the color he sees is what I would call blue?

Having started this doubting about the true nature of things, the author does not stop with metaphysics but insists here and throughout his book on the importance of the sceptical attitude in human relations. "Much of the misery that men inflict upon one another is in the name of and because of their feeling so certain that they know things and that the other fellow does not." The time has definitely passed when we could assume that philosophy was something apart from practical affairs. The most unpopular of metaphysicians, Hegel, is the forerunner of both Marx and Mussolini.

The author considers six heroes of scepticism, of whom four are dead, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, and Schopenhauer, and two, Professor William Pepperell Montague of Columbia and Justice Holmes, are very much alive. Instead of the technical analysis of the systematic thought of each philosopher, Mr. Smith tells us what he was like as a human being and presents his doubts and his answers to them as this thinker's method of adjusting himself satisfactorily to the life he had to live. With Descartes we hear something about his famous proposition, "I think, therefore I am," but more about the resolutions which he adopted for his methods of thinking and for his practical life while



JUSTICE HOLMES

Drawing by S. J. Woolf, from "Drawn from Life."

he was conducting his revolutionary investigations. After discussing Spinoza's theory of God and nature, the author takes up Spinoza's other book, the "Treatise on Theology and Politics," which is often ignored. He shows how Spinoza's political philosophy of the supremacy of the state was due to his desire to lessen the power of the clergy, and contrasts with this absolutism his insistence on free thought and speech. "The state has no suppressive right in abridging

such freedom, because it has no power to practise freedom save through free individuals."

Himself indeed Spinoza saved, but us he could not and cannot save. . . . A man may or may not live with other men, every man must live with himself. Spinoza discovered how to live uncomplainingly with himself.

Of the two living thinkers chosen Montague is much the less familiar, and this book will send many to read him. An age which votes heavy majorities in favor of more horse racing, with the novelty of dog racing thrown in, ought to welcome a man who is willing to take a sporting chance on God and immortality. At the same time, the reviewer regrets that a chapter on William James was not included, because the materials for recording his personality are so much more abundant. In comparison with Descartes, Spinoza, and Hume, although they are long dead, the living Professor Montague seems rather shadowy.

There is, however, nothing ghost-like about Justice Holmes in the full-length portrait which Mr. Smith gives us. Especially interesting is his view of Holmes's early character, and his opinion that Holmes might have ended in either intellectual frivolity or in complete and paralyzing doubt if it had not been for the hardening experience of the Civil War. Possibly so, yet it seems true of war as of most else, that to bring back the wealth of the Indies you must take the wealth of the Indies with you. Holmes got more good out of war than most soldiers, because he went into it more of a man. After all, the same strength of character has been displayed by some of his generation who never saw a battle, for example, by Grover Cleveland, who hired a substitute. Perhaps this strength of those brought up in the eighteen-forties and eighteen-fifties was tested by the discomforts and responsibilities of everyday life, and not just by campaigns. Some of Holmes's statements about war were very fitting in his funeral orations on his old comrades in the Twentieth Massachusetts, but when Mr. Smith tears them out of their context and gives them to us en masse, they take on a false tone. "This also is part of the soldier's faith; having known great things, to be content with silence." "In the great democracy of self-devotion private and general stand side by side." Compare the memories of another soldier—

If I were fierce,
and bald,
and short of
breath
I'd live with
scarlet Major
at the Base,
And speed
glum heroes
up the line
to death.

Language about the "divine message" of war and "man's destiny is battle" recalls Theodore Roosevelt's complacent assurances that war eliminates the unfit and lets only the strong survive. Suppose some Confederate youngster at Ball's Bluff had held his rifle a fraction of an

inch lower—courage and poetry had nothing to do with that—but if he had, all the previous character development of Captain Holmes would not have compensated the country for the loss of "The Common Law" and Noble State Bank vs. Haskell and the dissenting opinion in Abrams vs. United States.

In another way this portrait is unsatisfactory. Holmes, unlike the five other thinkers whom the author describes, is not primarily a philosopher. The main

business of his life has been law, and the thoughts expressed by him under the grave responsibility of judicial decision are as important to the understanding of his mind as the essays and speeches of his more leisurely hours. The consequence of this partial use of the materials is that Justice Holmes stands before us in the book a bit bumptious and over-enthusiastic, which is a pity. His great contribution to freedom of speech in the Abrams dissent is rightly emphasized. For that we can never be over-grateful. At the same time, one may question whether the author has not exaggerated the confidence of Justice Holmes in democracy. His judicial tolerance of legislation rests less on the belief that legislatures are usually right than on the doubt whether courts might not be equally foolish. Mr. Smith is right in holding forth Justice Holmes as a great teacher of tolerance, but is on less solid ground when he praises him as "preeminently a democrat" and calls him one of the immortals of the democratic form of government. Holmes has more in common with Hume than with Lincoln or John Bright.

The concluding chapter, "The Upshot of Scepticism," argues that death is the only escape from doubt, and cautions us against certain easy but false escapes which are popularly urged today. First, the Illusion of the Blood conceives the particular nation to which individuals happen to belong as a chosen people and calls upon these individuals to think with their blood and to act in the name of blood "against somebody, anybody; whoever happens to be at hand will do." This illusion is not restricted to Germany and Italy. The recent attempts to revive the Ku Klux Klan under various names show how this country may also succumb. "Modern Paul Revere, grown pudgy with time and prosperity, may hear the Call of the Blood and ride to the death, rather than to the rebirth, of a nation. Blood is no substitute for brains." Second, the Illusion of Simplicity holds forth the hope that the baffling complexity of the present may somehow be avoided by flight to the supposedly simple past, for instance, to authoritative religion or to the classics as the main source of education. Third, the Illusion of Certainty seeks self-evident truths, whereas for the author nothing of the kind exists. "No disputant has ever been convinced of a point by another's declaration of its self-evidence." None of these illusions can rescue us from bewilderment. But doubt can create compensations for uncertainty. For some, such compensation may be found in the patient investigation of the scientist, ever sensitive to the danger of prematurity in the pursuit of knowledge, and, like Pasteur, "only permitting himself to proclaim his discovery when all the adverse hypotheses have been exhausted." For other and less gifted men, compensation must be found in the supreme virtue of tolerance, less safely established today than it seemed fifteen years ago. "Scepticism is not only the great antiseptic for the wounds of the spirit; it is the only known guarantor of modesty enough to make society possible without constant suppression."

Enough has been said to show Professor Smith's success in bringing philosophy down from the clouds to earth. Any reader who is looking for some book that will introduce him to philosophical problems cannot do better than begin with this.

Zechariah Chafee, Jr., is professor of law at Harvard University.

Mr. Pound and the Broken Tradition

A B C OF READING. By Ezra Pound. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1934. \$2.

ELEVEN NEW CANTOS. By Ezra Pound. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1934. \$1.50.

Reviewed by JOHN CROWE RANSOM

THE new Cantos of Mr. Pound's, XXXI to XLI, are very much like the others. If there is a difference, it is that the new ones have gone a little further still from any accepted tradition

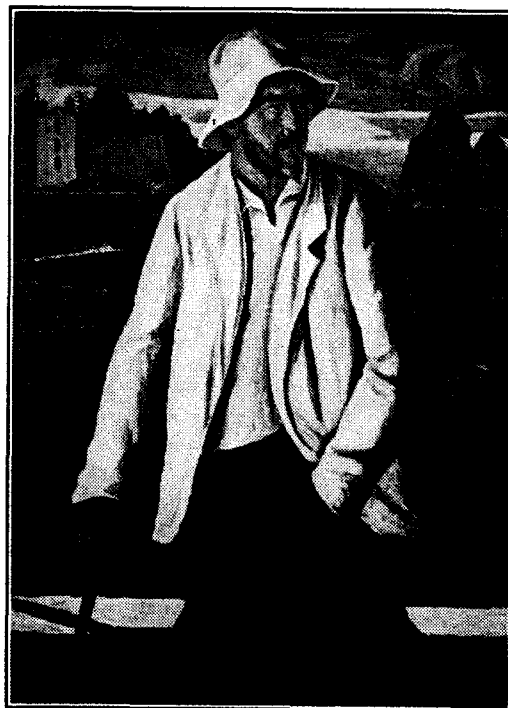
of what poetry is; direr, as if a little wearier, yet more resolute than the old ones. Evidently it is hard to sustain the role of poet nowadays, even of modernist poet. But the father of modernism is still, substantially, himself. Perhaps it should be added quickly, for the benefit of unbelievers, that he is not exactly a mountebank.

As for the tradition, it may look as if modernist poets cared nothing about that, but so far as Mr. Pound is concerned this

is not so; and to prove it here is his "A B C of Reading." Few scholars know so well the many collateral forms of European poetry, and the parent tree from which they have stemmed. For what purpose then does he exhibit this literature to possible readers? Not for mockery. His writing about poetry is smart and journalistic, rather in the manner of an Elbert Hubbard, but his readers should guard against error by repeating to themselves: His receptivity is acute, and his attitude toward the tradition is piety.

As a reader, orthodox; as a poet, revolutionary. It is a great paradox. Why should Mr. Pound divide himself like this? Is it not painful? I should think it is painful, but I should think also that it is not peculiar to Mr. Pound but is, after Mr. Pound, characteristic of our generation. I have in mind the same sort of ambivalence in certain other living poet-critics, such as Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. Allen Tate. Few poets define their critical position so accurately as these, and fewer novelists; but I imagine it is a common thing in our time for the creative artist, steeped in the past, to feel wretchedly obliged to turn his back upon it; and I judge that this occurs as a general phenomenon for the first time in history. The explanation would be difficult and long, and it would not make a pretty story, for it would show the Eumenides visiting our generation with a new sort of vengeance. The generation does not quite understand it, just as it only half realizes the obscure crime it has committed; but at any rate it begins now to observe with alarming repetition that its most sensitive spirits seem doomed to love one thing and to perform another.

Mr. Pound may attempt, though I think unsuccessfully, to derive his modernism from the tradition. His list of recommended readings from English poets is supposed to present a continuous history, and it is very interesting. Here are the chief items: Chaucer; Gavin Douglas's translation of Virgil, and Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid, the latter twice described as the most beautiful book in English; a little of Marlowe; Shakespeare's Histories and songs; a little of Donne; the Stuart song writers; Butler, Pope, and Crabbe as authors of the satiric couplet; Landor; Browning's "Sordello"; and finally, as if borrowing from another literature where



EZRA POUND

Portrait by Rolando Monti