

a challenge by the editor to his readers. If he wished it, he could not escape stirring, now here, now there, some to debate his system of discrimination among individual writers. He has prepared in advance an altogether reasonable defence, and it stands solid and impregnable. Yet, why no mention of Lessing or Schiller among the Germans? Or of Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, Daudet, for example, among the French, or to name them at random, of Diderot, Rivarol, Mirabeau, Chateaubriand, Cuvier, Fabre? Why a very dull life of the poet Gray by Samuel Johnson, and not a word of Hobbes, Burton, Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, Macaulay, Kipling, Conrad? Why no Polish, no Portuguese writer? Why nothing of Prescott, Motley, Parkman, to go no further? Having accomplished so much, must Mr. Van Doren be drafted for the preparation of a second volume to match his first in learning and quality?

L. R. E. Paulin was one of the editors of the New York World until its extinction in 1932.

Our Pacific Policy

THE FUTURE OF SEA POWER IN THE PACIFIC. By Walter Millis. World Peace Foundation. 1935. 50 cents.

THIS brief discussion of sea power in the Pacific comprises an illuminating analysis of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of the role of sea power, which was predicated upon command of the sea not only in time of war but in time of peace, and a discussion of the alternatives now facing the United States in determining its Pacific policy. No attempt is made to give a final answer to the question of what our future course should be. Mr. Millis is apparently of the opinion that a series of temporary expedients and adjustments, rather than the adoption of any definite policy, will be the outcome of present uncertainties, and he does not hesitate to point out that actual war may be among these expedients. This possibility is not, however, given the unwarranted emphasis so popular among writers on the Pacific.

It is easy to criticize this little book on certain obvious grounds: little attention is given to background of American policy in the Pacific—and that of Japanese policy—which is responsible for the existing naval rivalry between the United States and Japan; the importance of Captain Mahan's theories seems unduly stressed; the treatment of the alternatives now before us disregards various important factors in the situation. In the opinion of the reviewer, navalism is more an instrument of political policy than Mr. Millis suggests.

These are complicated and debatable questions, however, and limitations of space quite naturally forestalled the fuller discussion the author would undoubtedly have otherwise given them.

Mr. Lewis and the Primitive American

SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF SINCLAIR LEWIS. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

WHILE the Marxist critics seek whom they may devour and the proletarian novelists compass us about with gall and travail, Mr. Sinclair Lewis continues to stalk what may be called the Primitive American of the Pre-Alphabet Era. He is not at ease in the Roosevelt Zion. "I wonder," he says apologetically in the introduction, "if this American optimism, this hope and courage, so submerged now in 1935, are not authentic parts of American life." Somewhere in Elysium the shade of William Dean Howells is hopefully cutting an extra branch of laurel and picking out a comfortable stretch of grass for Mr. Lewis to repose on. Mr. Howells, it will be remembered, thought that the more smiling aspects of life are the more American.

The twelve stories in this collection were originally published between 1917 and 1931. Mr. Lewis now thinks that the earlier ones "belong to an era distant now and strange as the days of Queen Victoria." The earlier ones may be described as O. Henry with trimmings. In "The Kidnapped Memorial" a Confederate veteran kidnaps a G. A. R. Memorial Day parade for the benefit of a forgotten Unionist widow, and, being offered a Northerner's sword, buckles it on, crying: "This isn't a Northerner's sword any more, nor a Southerner's, ma'am. It's an American's! Forward! March!"

"The Cat of the Stars" is devoted to the proposition, beloved of O. Henry, that mighty contests rise from trivial things. "Go East, Young Man" proves that honest go-getter business activities are preferable to sham estheticism. "Things" develops an analogous theme. Mr. Lewis is right. These stories date.

The author himself prefers three later tales: "Let's Play Kings," "The Willow Walk," and "A Letter from the Queen." They are more mature; yet the first is a variant of the boy story, this time with a

Hollywood aura, the second is the sort of thing Irvin Cobb has often turned out, and the third, though able, is not striking. "The Willow Walk" is memorable because of a kind of grim precision in its structure. "A Letter from the Queen" might be more nearly memorable if it were not stuffed with various typical Lewis excrescences.

Even in his better work, it appears that Mr. Lewis is content with a simple and conventional technique. In what, then, does the interest of the volume lie? I should say that here, as in the novels, there is an infectious zest which carries the author triumphantly through rudimentary plots and facile characterization. Mr. Lewis is always amazingly alive. And this liveliness is coupled with a kind of queer jollity. Even when travesty seems to be verging on bitterness, the effect is as if he stuck his head around the side of the Punch-and-Judy box to remark: "Look here! Don't be frightened. It's all a part of the show, you know!" Like Thackeray, Mr. Lewis is incapable of hate.

He shyly reveals from time to time a healthy longing for romance. Describing the researches of Dr. Selig in "A Letter from the Queen," Mr. Lewis writes:

"He had touched a world romantic and little known. Hidden in old documents . . . he found the story of Franklin, who in his mousy fur cap was the Don Juan of Paris, of Adams fighting the British Government to prevent their recognizing the Confederacy, of Benjamin Thompson, the Massachusetts



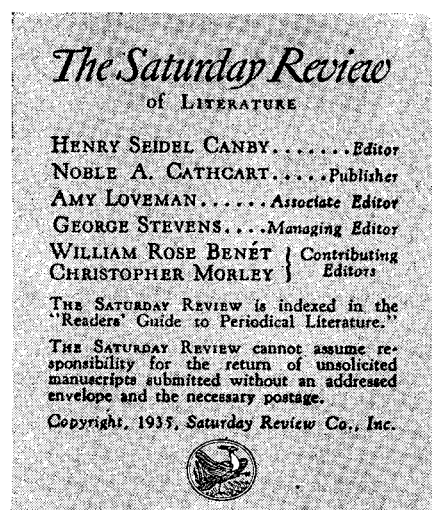
Robert H. Davis

SINCLAIR LEWIS

Yankee who in 1791 was chief counselor of Bavaria, with the title of Count Rumford."

This is the E. Phillips Oppenheim interpretation of history, likable and boyish. As Mr. Lewis remarks, optimism, hope, and courage, "so submerged . . . in 1935" are, for him, authentic parts of American life. I should add to these, sentiment. Mr. Lewis satirizes sentimentality, but there is in him this honest vein of sentiment, a possession which puts him apart from most contemporary fiction. Amid the tortured souls who frequent our fiction just now, it is refreshing to have this belated but healthy objectivity, this telling of stories for the fun of it. In the long run it is just possible that Mr. Lewis may be wiser than the sophisticated.

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Vocational Training

THE growth in number of summer writers' conferences, many of them attached to colleges and universities, emphasizes the demand for some kind of vocational training on the part of people who want to write. And there are various methods by which partial attempts can be made to meet the demand. But there is no general method of training creative writers, as there is in other vocations, even in other arts. There is no royal road to literature.

A young composer, if he has the means, the motive, and the opportunity (those three indispensables of the Scotland Yard suspect) has a few years' work cut out for him. So has a young painter, sculptor, or architect. In their fields there is a definite technique to be learned. Serious musical composition is impossible to any one, however gifted, who has not gone through the experience of learning something about harmony, counterpoint, and theory. There are probably more painters than musicians who accomplish something without formal technical training, but even these are exceptional.

Technique in music and art is not only a matter of rules. Rules exist, and even obsolescent rules—like that which proscribes consecutive fifths in harmony—are useful to learn if only to know why they were once universally accepted. But the point of learning a technique is to provide the composer or artist with a means of developing his ideas. The grammar of music and art is less elementary than that of writing; the process of attaining form is much more esoteric than the unity, coherence, and emphasis of the English composition classroom.

The reason is that form is both more abstract and more complex in music and art than in literature. More so even than in those areas of literature, poetry and the drama, where technique is best defined. No one would maintain that the sonnet form is as complex as that of the fugue. Form in a work of art becomes more important as the intellectual content becomes less. The only things in absolute

music that can be defined in musical terms are its abstractions, its technicalities, its form. Comparatively little writing, even in poetry, is entirely abstract.

Now if the purpose of mastering a technique is to acquire a capacity for form, it is natural that the more indefinite the form, the less technique there is to teach. And form becomes most indefinite in the most popular department of literature, that of prose fiction. Not that it does not exist; not that novelists have not always been interested in it; not that formal excellence in fiction has not in certain cases approached perfection—in "Madame Bovary," in "The Wings of the Dove," in "Ulysses." But these are all different forms, arrived at by different novelists in their own ways.

A good critic, or better still a good editor, can often take hold of a promising manuscript and make valuable suggestions. And a promising novelist can learn, in time, all he needs to know about technique for his own purposes. But there is no body of doctrine, constituting the technique of the novel, that can be taught, corresponding to harmony, counterpoint, drawing, or modeling. There is no royal road to literature.

There is compensation, however, for the novelists. The Topic-writer of the *New York Times* commented the other day upon the peculiar difficulties of the modern composer, who is a drug on the market because audiences would rather hear Beethoven and Brahms than any modern, unknown composition. The young artist is in a similar predicament. The situation of the promising novelist is, in comparison with these, much easier. Not only critics, but publishers and readers are on the lookout for him.

A Komsomol The announcement that for America Soviet Russia has ordered a reorganization of the Komsomol—The League of Communist Youth—and that henceforth the five million young persons whose energies until now have been bent to the industrialization of their country are to become "the ideological carrier of the proletarian revolution" means that Russian youth is to concentrate on education but not, of course, that it is to be free to choose its own way of thinking. The great experiment is still going on and the most plastic material in the world being shaped in the workshop of communism. What is more, it has proved so successful that Germany and Italy have taken a lesson from Russia's example, and are regimenting youth in the way the State would have it develop. Even here in America the Federal Administration only last week took cognizance of youth as an entity in the provision it made for the relief of unemployment,—a first step perhaps toward the growth of a youth group which in this country has so far made only a weak attempt to band together.

Americans with their eyes upon Europe

will look with uneasiness on any organization of youth by itself or by others that can make it the tool of individuals or factions. But surely, Americans with their eyes upon Europe, ought to realize that if ever the world is to attain its hope that war will vanish from the earth, it must be through training the sentiment of the young to that end. It is a good many years now since we began to rewrite our history books in an effort to take the emphasis off battle, and the youth that has grown up in the shadow of destruction has steadily heard resort to arms decried as a failure. But we have never yet tried to make youth itself fight the battle for peace. There, it seems to us, is a real goal for budding manhood and womanhood—the prevention of war, and in the Russian idea that the cohorts of youth are directly responsible for the ideology of its own maturing generation and that of younger children a noble challenge to militant pacific sentiment. Why, if the Komsomol can educate the adolescent mind to the purposes of the communist state, cannot our own youth which is just arriving at manhood, help to further the cause of international harmony by concerted effort? There is literature to its hand, both in the way of history to cast light on the problems to be attacked and of discussions of world conditions and the existent machinery for peace familiarity with which could well be considered a first step to action. If all our youth at the impressionable age could read a Tolstoy or a Norman Angell it might feel itself stirred to the mightiest crusade the world can offer. Traditionally youth must be served. And traditionally again, he is best served who serves himself.

Ten Years Ago

In the issue of July 4th, 1925, The Saturday Review recommended "My Diary 1915-1917" by Benito Mussolini as "interesting and important because of its realism," and because it showed the Fascist leader as "a sort of Italian Roosevelt."

In the same issue The Saturday Review recommended "Beyond the Utmost Purple Rim," a book on Abyssinia by Alexander E. Powell, and pointed out that "Abyssinia is a pivotal point of strategy for all northeastern Africa and is coveted by every nation in Europe, yet . . . not only remains undisturbed, but actually destroyed an Italian army of 15,000 men in 1896."

Today

The Saturday Review recommends these new books:

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD PROSE. Edited by Carl Van Doren. See review on page 6.

FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES. By George Cronyn. See review on page 13.