



## The Pulse of the Machine

THE standardizing of the modern world is much more superficial than it seems. Auto-busses rattle down the passes where the Spaniards drove the Moor, but the peasants who ride in them are not changed by speed, and an hour later will be swaying donkey-back on the last lap homeward with the same Spanish thoughts, the rhythm of their lives no more speeded than the steps of the ass whose ancestors bore the Phoenician over the same road at the same pace. Black-haired, blue-eyed girls on the quay of Split, and white-robed Arab women from the Atlas in the garden park of Tetuan, listen to the same jazz blared from a loud-speaker in a café, and are so little likened thereby that the vast differences between them reveal their importance. The scientific mind, classifying, identifying, defining, has missed subtler distinctions in temperament, and in the pressure of emotions, which are prepotent in life—as the uncontrollable illogicalities of nationalism show.

From a point of neutrality, let us say in mid-ocean, where the waves beat a thousand monotonous miles with only a shift from gray to green to blue, the intricate influences of regions of land seem to be imagination distinct and are perhaps over-simplified, like mountain ranges on some continental horizon. It was a sound instinct which led some literary critic to substitute the word "regional" for the old nineteenth-century term "local color." It is much more than color which a region imposes on a race, indeed the "color" of regional writing is too often no more than quaint details of speech or dress which the incapable author describes because he cannot grasp the real characteristics beneath, which are so different from his own.

The influences which mould temperament, and therefore social relationships, religion, and art, and especially the art of literature, are still chiefly natural. Wind, rain, sun, plain, valley, mountain, in their combinations and permutations, are assuredly the sculptors of habit now as in the past, even in cities. This cannot be proved, but it can be felt, and has been

felt by everyone who knows sensitively Chicago, New York, London, Paris, and Madrid. But it is easy to prove the potency of climate and physical environment beyond the boulevards. No race stays the same in Andalusia, Indiana, and Ireland.

The importance of these regional distinctions in literature has been often discussed but seldom carried beyond an analysis of local peculiarity or a dubious statement of facts of resemblance between torrid heat and torrid expression, or drab horizons and drabness of thought. The real importance of environment does not lie in what of stimulus or depression, or of color or its lack, or even in the beauty or the ugliness, it contributes, but in a fortunate balance between that which is shaped and the shaper which does not come often and when it comes is decisive. It is not length of days in a land, though that helps, or (in this argument) the innate capacities of peoples, about which we really know very little, but rather some fortunate moment of time and place when with the synchronizing beat of a perfect machine the race becomes at home in its country and the country in its race. For such a statement the tritest example is best, which is Greece, since everyone knows Greek architecture and Greek sculpture, and yet no one knows either who has not seen them at home. It is a tribute to the genius of the creators that the streaked and lightless Elgin Marbles in the British Museum should be powerful and the Iliad stir the imagination even in English and in the North. But it is no explanation of Grecian art, for that is inseparable from the gray, shimmering light in which, if not for which, it was created. An arch of the Parthenon was as truly built to enclose an arc of inward glowing Hymettus or a span of purple sea and violet mountain as to carry the roof which housed Athene. Somehow the balance came true for a century or so between the land and its people, and the art which expressed it derived its rhythm from this fortunate harmony. For it is not too much to say that the mountains and the seas and the valleys of Greece are composed as the sculptors of Greece if they had been at the making would have arranged them, so that one rubs the eyes to be sure whether one sees the background of peak, vale, and curving inlet through the powerful and transforming vision of the artists, or the art of Greece as a refinement of its background. Both visions are true.

**Books in England** The Spring book season in England has been bad, small sales, and a feeble interest that showed no signs of reviving until Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" was offered for advance subscription. For that a single London bookseller had taken in 1200 orders before the first of July, although publication will not be until August. The two reasons usually proffered for the unsatisfactory nature of the publishers' season are interesting because

they seem to have little relation one to the other. The questioner is told everywhere that the Jubilee, which is being hailed as the great reviver of English trade, killed the book market. As soon as the preparations for the Jubilee began, the sales of books fell off and have not since recovered. Book readers, apparently foreseeing endless expenses and urgent requests for contributions, decided to save on books. The other reason is a different story and is much more like a common complaint of writers upon books in America. There has been, so these others said, a scarcity of really good books that are also readable books. The younger generation of English writers (it is a shrewd bookseller who is speaking) are too academic in their training and their outlook. They cannot get upon that wave length which reaches the general reader. They write in a corner, for those in a corner. As for the older writers, they write extremely well, but they have nothing new to say. Their books repeat—they are full of highly competent staleness, of old patterns skilfully redrawn.

Of course there never is only one reason why books sell or do not sell. A Jubilee or a Presidential election is quite enough to divert the minds of the readers upon whom authors count for their living. And yet, and yet, books as well as times can be out of joint, can fail to be the right books for the real interests of the moment, or if right, not good enough. We forget that even the distracted war years had their crop of best sellers. The violent emotions running then were certainly subversive of quiet, and yet again and again in those four years some book like "Mr. Britling Sees It Through" caught the rhythm of the time and swept into edition after edition. It is not a sufficient alibi for writers that too much is happening in the world.

## Ten Years Ago

In the issue of July 18th, 1925, The Saturday Review recommended "The Mistress of Husaby," by Sigrid Undset. Allen W. Porterfield, who reviewed the book in that issue, wrote: "This is a very great novel, a really outstanding importation. . . a novel which depicts through its host of scenes and characters, the adolescence of a nation." "The Mistress of Husaby" is the second volume of the trilogy, "Kristin Lavransdatter," after the publication of which Sigrid Undset was awarded the Nobel Prize. Her latest book, "Long Memories," is to appear this fall.

## Today

The Saturday Review recommends these new books:

THE FURYS. By James Hanley. See review on page 5.

THE POST-WAR WORLD. By J. Hampden Jackson. See review on page 6.

## Letters to the Editor: *More Reports from Unknown Readers*

Herewith the second instalment of letters on current reading. We regret again that space does not permit printing all letters in full. A third selection of comments from *Unknown Readers* is planned for an early issue.—The Editors.

### Noble Experiment

SIR:—After reading the first batch of book review letters which you recently invited, pruned, and published, I feel inclined to vote this use of your columns a "noble experiment." It is the very unprofessional character of these comments, including their frankly personal, literary idiosyncrasies, that gives the column its delightful variety.

I have just read "John Brown's Body," that kaleidoscopic picture of a tragic epoch, written in every poetic form from light, amusing doggerel to moving blank verse of intelligence and dignity. Two slender volumes of verse with notable similarities have given me much pleasure, Millay's latest, "Wine from These Grapes," and Audrey Wurdemann's "Bright Ambush," which wears the bright band of distinctive award. Not only in their deft, crisp diction, but also in certain moods of disappointment or of detachment these two poets seem to me much akin.

I have been fascinated by the "Seven Gothic Tales," stories within stories, spun with ease and artistry, combinations of beauty and horror, ironic sanity and utter madness, unlike anything else I know. I have for the first time read an Edna Ferber novel with interest. It is "Come and Get It," narrative as melodramatic as the front page of a newspaper, which I began with distrust but ended breathless and capitulating. My list of fiction concludes with "The Fountain," by Charles Morgan, a philosophic romance, and "Jean-Christophe," by Rolland, which I consider a marvel of emotional detail.

Havelock Ellis's "The World of Dreams" and Adams's "The Epic of America" represent my ventures into non-fiction. Both succeed in being literature, even though instructive, one in the realm of the subconscious, the other in the scarcely less mystifying world of American thought and action.

ANNE WOODWARD KING.

Washington, D. C.

### Value of Irony

SIR:—Master Clifton Fadiman, the bright lad of the *New Yorker* (who needs to be told about "Children should be seen . . ."), kept refusing to like "Anthony Adverse." That's recommendation enough for me. So I read this one long after it had become a best seller. Another book that robbed me of sleep for two weeks hand-running was "Of Time and the River." When Tom Wolfe learns how to condense and revise, he'll be truly great. Or maybe he won't. Maybe he'll stop being Tom Wolfe. And that would be a crime. In detective fiction I've belatedly gulped down "Fer de Lance." Stout has something on the mystery-ball that no one else possesses. He's actually literate.



"I'M SORRY, BUT MR. MORTON IS WORKING ON HIS DREAM BOOK."

For non-fiction, Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" with the pious, hand-raising notes of Dean Milman. Also F. A. Spencer's "Beyond Damascus." This is the only civilized biography of St. Paul I've encountered. In tone it much and not unworthily reminds me of Gibbon. So does the third non-fiction work I've liked recently, Hans Zinsser's "Rats, Lice and History." I've always thought biologists were the most humane of scientists. Now I know it. Gibbon I came back to after an interval of some fifteen years. The other two books I found by means of, respectively, Elmer Davis's appreciation in the *New York Times* and Haldane's subdued British trumpeting in the *Saturday Review*. I'd admire to discover more writers who know the value of irony and don't get all het up about "this changing world of ours."

PETER RATHBUN.

New York City.

### Votes

SIR:—May I cast a few votes in your plebiscite of reader opinion?

Best Novel of the Winter: "Follow the Furies," by Eleanor Carroll Chilton.

Runners Up: "Roll River," and "February Hill."

Narrowest Miss of the Season: "National Velvet." (Tried just a shade too hard to be delightful—but nearly made it at that.)

Most Attractive Author (judging by publicity): James Boyd.

Least Attractive Publicity Photograph: Enid Bagnold's hat.

Biggest Bust of the Year: "Of Time and the River." (And what a pleasure it was to hear your Bernard De Voto say so!)

And finally, as one whose fortunes depend on the mystery fiction field, may I take this opportunity of bestowing my own particular palm on Joel Y. Dane (colleague personally unknown to me) for his "Murder Cum Laude"? For length, variety, excitement, humor, and sheer grizzle—you can't do better than this comparatively unappreciated volume. Truth compels me to warn that the solution of the mystery is poorly motivated, but by that time you've had so much more than your money's worth you don't care.

COLVER HARRIS.

Spuyten Duyvil, N. Y.

### Hall of Fame

SIR:—I submit to your Hall of Fame, magna cum laude, the following books: Douglas Freeman's "R. E. Lee," Thomas Wolfe's "Of Time and the River," and Edna Ferber's "Come and Get It." These books I'm sure would remain in a reader's memory forever.

ROBERT GORDON FAUDREE.

Springfield, Ohio.

### Five Books a Month

SIR:—Congratulations! You have been brave enough to print what the ordinary reader is enjoying. Reading at least five books each month I always look to the *Saturday Review of Literature* for recommendations.

The head of the English department of Albright College recently said that Paul Engle was a poet who will be heard from. "American Song" verified that criticism. Next among my favorites is Thomas Wolfe who in "Look Homeward, Angel" and "Of

(Continued on page 16)