

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.....Editor  
NOBLE A. CATHCART.....Publisher  
AMY LOVEMAN.....Associate Editor  
GEORGE STEVENS.....Managing Editor  
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT } Contributing  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY } Editors

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; Amy Loveman, Secretary.

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. 37.

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.

Copyright, 1935, Saturday Review Co., Inc.

### Influential Books

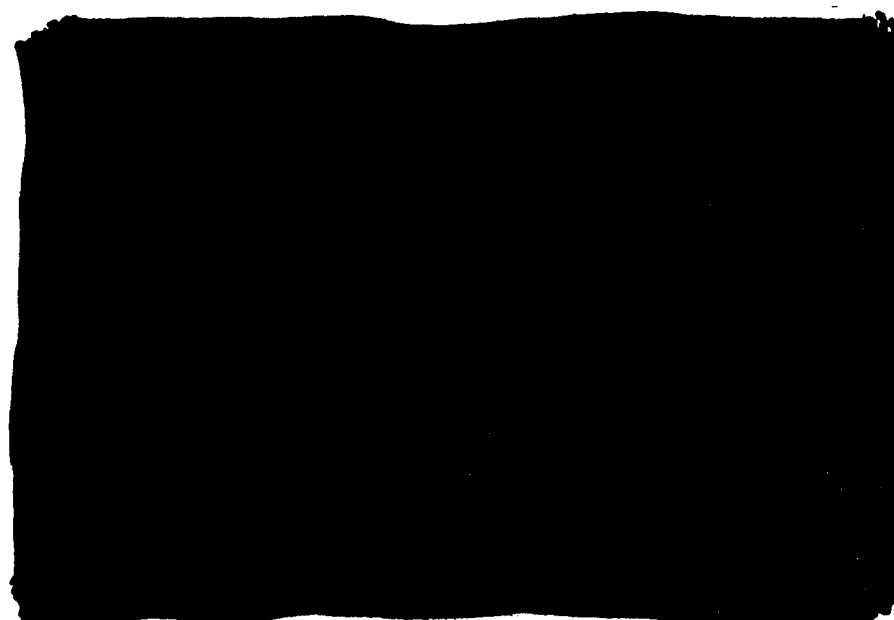
Any list of "the best books" inevitably starts a controversy. Let one list be printed—the hundred best books of all time, or ten books for a desert island—and correspondents will rush in with their own alternative selections. Such, however, has not been the case with the three lists of "The Twenty-Five Most Influential Books Published Since 1885," compiled by John Dewey, Charles A. Beard, and Edward Weeks, and printed in the April issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. For these lists, "including books which have influenced both thought and action," have been assembled by eminent specialists, without the criterion of personal preference which would invite a democratic society of readers to enter into a choosing game. Nor is it our intention to try to go Messrs. Dewey, Beard, and Weeks one better. These lists raise a question even more interesting than any involved in the specific titles chosen; they start a whole train of thought about the kind of influence books can have on life.

The *Atlantic* lists include, on the whole, books of unquestioned importance: books which have opened up new fields of thought, like Marx's "Das Kapital," which heads all three of the lists; books which have presented new discoveries in science and research, like "The Golden Bough," Niels Bohr's "Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature," Turner's "Frontier in American History." Books of purely literary importance are not neglected: Proust and Joyce are present, and even Henry James. What is most striking about these lists is that all the books mentioned, with one exception, are books which have had a good influence: at least an influence for which, from the intellectual or the literary point of view, there is much to be said. (The exception is Adolf Hitler's "My Battle," which appears twenty-fifth on Professor Beard's list.)

We wonder whether this may possibly be taken to indicate an over-optimistic attitude as to the influence of books. Is it altogether realistic to include, as two of the lists do, "All Quiet on the Western Front," which has certainly not yet stopped any armament races, and to omit "Over the Top," which signally assisted in selling the last war to America? Does "The Golden Bowl"—the literary influence of which is unquestionable—belong on a list that fails to mention "Pollyanna,"

"Freckles," "The Shepherd of the Hills," and the scores of other popular novels which have supported the rationalizations and the wish-fulfillments of millions? The fact that these books did not outlive their periods makes no difference—as Mr. De Voto points out on another page of this issue, a Harold Bell Wright can come back, with all essentials unaltered, in a Lloyd C. Douglas. And what shall we say of D. H. Lawrence, whose influence has been intense if not objectively perceptible, who has contributed an original richness and confusion to the inner life of his generation?

The point seems to be that books can exert all sorts of influences, and not all of them are socially desirable. Once upon a time "The Sorrows of Werther" contributed to the suicide statistics. And for every book which, in our own day, opens up a new field of thought, there is at least one other which will keep its hundred thousand readers anesthetized, a little longer, against reality.



"WELL, PROUST WORKED IN THE DARK, DIDN'T HE?"

Cartoon by Lloyd.

## Letters to the Editor: *Timely Books and Rental Libraries*

### A Plan for Book Borrowing

SIR:—I thought I had shaken the dust of the so-called "circulating libraries" off of my feet permanently after the "Smart Set Anthology" rescued me from the puerile purlieus of retail bookselling; and "How to Run a Rental Library" had rid my shoulders of an accumulated mass of knowledge. But your editorial in the issue of March 9th has aroused old ghosts, and I have to write you about it.

In the first place (and a silly quibble it is, too,) by all laws of technicality, common sense, truthfulness, and systematization, circulating libraries are rental libraries. The reason for this is that dozens of public libraries are circulating libraries; in fact I expect all of them are save a few exclusive and dull reference collections. Rental libraries is the shorter, more truthful, and more accepted name. After which I shall make my plea, which is the body of this message.

The cruel part of your editorial resides in the little phrase toward its end: "Why not . . . let them get the timely book in the month of its publication . . . ?" If you only knew the heartaches and misery that most rental libraries suffer just because of that misguided notion of a rental library's function, you would, I hope, have avoided the statement! Because it is utterly misguided.

An active rental library membership of five hundred people will require, during the first two weeks after publication of a book by, say, Sinclair Lewis, or some equal light in the literary firmament, two hundred fifty to three hundred fifty separate readings of this book. The average reading period will be about five days. In two weeks a copy can be read (at an extremely bold estimate) three times—a bold estimate because of the fact that sometimes three days are wasted while a library member is being notified of the fact that the book she reserved is being held for her. Averaging the requests for such a book at three hundred, and the number of readings in two weeks at three, the obvious result is a call for one hundred copies of the book in that period. If everybody in the library reads the book (and at least two hundred will not) it means five rentals per copy. The average income per rental is less than 25 cents—about twenty-one and one half cents, except for those institutions which still cling to the twenty-five cents a week rate. The net income on a copy of the novel will then be about \$1.15. The book costs the library in actual cash between \$1.50 and \$1.75.

And people wonder why the rental library is such a poorly run and inefficient business! It cannot afford to be otherwise. The above outline of events for a Sinclair Lewis book is typical though at the same time exaggerated. It is not so much the fact that Americans all want to read the best seller at the same time that bothers the rental trade, however, as the fact that they refuse to pay fairly for the privilege.

The solution to the problem is one which I am afraid will never be adopted in this supposedly democratic nation: and that is the use of two classes of library membership, preferred and regular. England is the country from which this plan comes; but after having spent six precious months out of my life trying to interest people in the establishing of an English type library in this country, I fear the system will never become a part of America's book business.

By paying, on a yearly basis, twice the amount (sometimes still more) of the regular membership, eager readers in England can have the book they want the day they want it. That never happens in this country; and I think it is not a necessary feature of such a plan. But for such extra fee, the subscriber should get the book he wants within three days. The yearly rates in England amount to about \$15.00, or a little more than 4 cents a day, for which the reader can have out one book at a time, exchangeable as often as he wishes—three times a day, if he can read that fast.

But the regular membership—about \$8.00 a year, 2 cents a day—permits the subscriber to take out books on exactly the same basis with the exception that he cannot reserve or request special books. A small point it may seem—but as it works out, it means that never, in the larger libraries, does the reader of the second class get a book of any popularity till it has been out four to six weeks. And this is to the present writer a necessary and excellent plan. Make the impatient, rather blatant, and sheep-like reader of best-sellers—according-to-reviews-and-to-the-fashion, pay for the privilege. Let the good reader, the serious reader, the reader who really doesn't care about fashions in reading, but who wants something good to read, pay much less, and stand the delay.

Unless libraries can be organized in this country with memberships of over five thousand active participants, there will never be the attainment of your expressed ideal of everyone's reading the good books within the month of publication. It cannot happen. With such memberships, it is probable that under either the English system, or the American (so long as the rates do not decrease the average income per rental below the basic minimum of twenty cents) good service can be given the customer, and a tiny little bit of profit may be made by the proprietor.

Now that I have that off my chest, I hope the subject of rental libraries never comes up again!

GROFF CONKLIN.

University of Chicago Press,  
Chicago, Ill.

### Catch Your Reader

SIR:—I have just read your editorial on circulating libraries in last week's issue. And I quite agree with you that it would be fine, if the lending libraries could supply their readers with the kind of books

you mention. Perhaps you remember the old recipe for cooking a hare, which began—"First catch your hare."

My experience has been that in order to circulate good non-fiction books, or even distinguished fiction, you must first catch your reader. And, believe me, they are hard to catch with anything except detective stories, light novels, and sexy things. Of course, when some book appears, which "everybody is talking about" ("Anthony Adverse," for instance), even the quality of it will not prevent rental library patrons from asking for it. Whether they read it or not is another question. But as a general rule, you simply cannot rent anything except light fiction, detective and mystery stories leading.

When I came back to — after an absence of a good many years, and opened the small rental library that I am struggling to operate, I had "Vision," with a tolerably large V. Not that I expected to teach people what to read—far from it! But I did want to make my library different from most rental libraries. To begin with, I like good books myself, and I thought how nice it would be to read things I wanted to read, and then rent them out to other intelligent people. And again, I was sure that my plan would attract the very best people in town, as I am close enough to the center of things to be handy for everybody. And I am here all day (open from 9:30 A. M. to 9 P. M., and will exchange books on Sunday, if necessary). And I wanted to send books into the rural communities, too, after they had served their turn on the library shelves in town. They are needed in the country districts, I assure you. Oh, yes, I had plans! I immediately subscribed for *The Saturday Review* (used to be a charter subscriber, but had to drop it for some years), also the *New York Sunday Times*, *Publishers' Weekly*, *Retail Bookseller*, and other magazines and periodicals, bought a small set of reference books, and took other steps to start an out-of-the-ordinary rental library. I advertised (newspaper and direct by mail), and started with about 100 volumes, fiction, non-fiction, some classics, a few books that I had owned for a long time, and held on to because of their real worth. Well—let's see what has happened.

I've been open nearly six months. I have, in that length of time, sent out three or four non-fiction books, and these were wished on to people who took my word for it. Not one reader has asked for a non-fiction book. They all say "I want a new book." And regardless of what it is, just so it is new, light, and fiction they take it. My last order to McClurg was "for some NEW, light, very light, love stories, a couple of NEW Westerns," and so on. Must be NEW and must be LIGHT!

No, kind sir! We, the librarians of the rental libraries, are not to blame for the kind of trash our trade reads. Personally, I am getting fed up, because I can't buy the things I want to read. I have to read the things my customers make me buy! So what? . . .

So, if you know of anybody who would like to start the kind of rental library you speak of (which is the same kind I "visualized" in my innocence), let me know, please, and I'll apply for a job helping to run it!

A CIRCULATING LIBRARIAN.

### The Saturday Review recommends

**This Group of Current Books:**  
**PROVENCE: FROM MINSTRELS TO THE MACHINE.**  
 By FORD MADDOX FORD. Lippincott. Glimpses of French life and countryside by an adopted son.  
**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN HAYS HAMMOND.**  
 Farrar & Rinehart. The chronicle of a varied and colorful career.  
**DEATH IN THE AIR.** By AGATHA CHRISTIE. Dodd, Mead. A Hercule Poirot detective story.

**This Less Recent Book:**  
**THE POEMS OF ROBERT FROST.** Holt. Some of the most distinguished contemporary American poetry.



## Flights of Fancy

(Continued from first page)

verne than by anything else. He had another explanation of course: it was just some quality in them, and the life they led, that attracted him. He tried to explain to his editor.

Because they aint human like us; they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn't want to or dare to if they just had human brains: Burn them like this one tonight and they dont even holler in the fire; crash one and it aint even blood when you haul him out: it's cylinder oil the same as in the crankcase. . . . They aint human, you see. No ties; no place where you were born and have to go back to it now and then even if it's just only to hate the damn place good and comfortable for a day or two. From coast to coast and Canada in summer and Mexico in winter, with one suitcase and the same canopener because three can live on one canopener as easy as one or twelve.

Anyway, the reporter attaches himself to these people, and fusses around them, and gives them a place to sleep, and then helps Shumann get that ship that he kills himself in on the last day of the races. And the reporter's pretty queer himself, if it comes to that. As another newspaperman says about him: "He dont have to move very far to go nuts in the first place and so he dont have so far to come back." And the whole story is about these flying people and the reporter. But it's more about the way this reporter sees them than anything else.

So much for the synopsis, as it might be presented by an ingenuous reader. The reader may take the novel, or leave it, as he pleases; but the less fortunate reviewer must face certain questions. Is Mr. Faulkner, in such books as this one, writing powerful, or merely sensational, fiction? Is he truly representing and interpreting life, or distorting it through the medium of a temperament so warped and peculiar that the distortions are not simply valueless, but also repellent, to those temperaments that we are generally agreed in designating, roughly, as normal? Are his characters genuinely observed, understood, felt, and re-created; or are they fantastic fabrications, the originals of which are to be found neither on land nor sea? Are not Mr. Faulkner's devices—his oblique approach, his ellipses, his scrambled time sequences, his pretentious descriptions, his tricky use of light and shadow, illuminating this part of the narrative and darkening that—designed to make the reader believe that his material is more complex and more important, subtler in nature and harder to get at, than it really is? Does he not purposely make things a little difficult for the reader, so that the reader will value excessively whatever rewards he may gather after surmounting the difficulty?

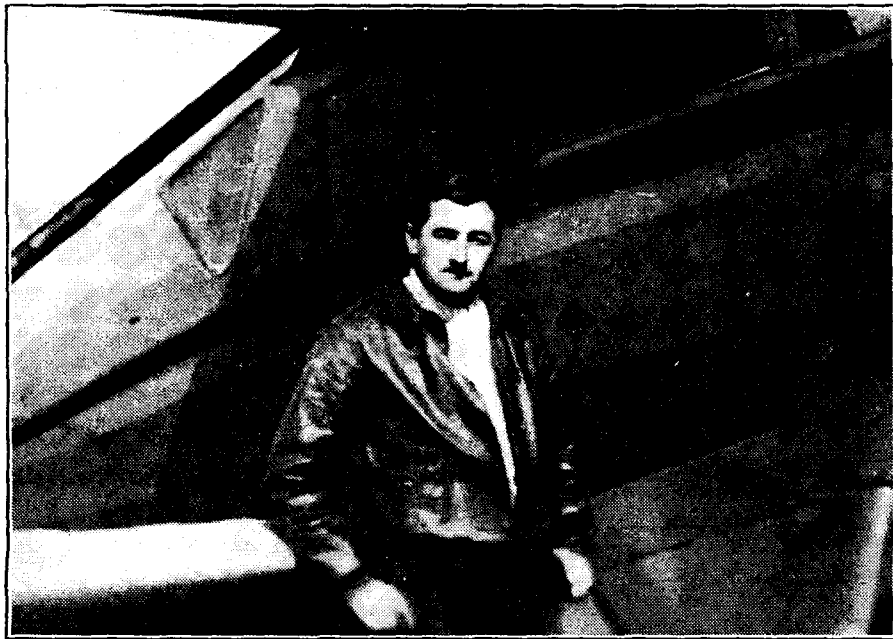
Perhaps the form in which I have cast these questions has already indicated what my own answers are. Briefly, they are all unfavorable to Mr. Faulkner. And the sum of them is that Mr. Faulkner is a mannered, tricky, extremely clever, and talented sensationalist. But I am perfectly willing to believe that he is entirely sincere, and that he could be nothing else. In

any case, it is only his performance that comes to judgment.

The characters of "Pylon" are typical of the specimens that Mr. Faulkner makes up out of his admittedly unusual head. Clothing them in what might be called a cloak of romance worn inside out, the author tells us through the reporter that "they aint human." Which is quite true. They are not. But what are they, then? Symbols of the will to live, to continue, to reproduce—of the life urge, reduced to its lowest terms? Symbols of mankind lashed to the machine, in unholy wedlock? I shall not presume to say. But if they are meant to be either the one or the other, or anything else symbolical, it is a mistake to make them the focal points of a factual narrative otherwise designed to carry a conviction of reality. And what do we actually get to know of these characters? The author at least promises us knowledge, for, from the moment of the reporter's first excitement, it is the promise that lures us on; and in the art of come-on Mr. Faulkner need yield the palm to no detective story writer. But when we reach out our hand for these people there is almost nothing there. Shumann is simply a pilot; Laverne is a woman; the parachute jumper is a jumper and nothing more; and Jiggs is a little "horse of a man," obsessed by a new pair of boots. As for the relationship between the two men and the woman, of which so much is made, that promised a genuinely interesting psychological and emotional study, it is never penetrated, never explained, never developed. We reach out our hand—and what we touch is only an immensely clever and pretentious auctorial hocus-pocus calculated to conceal the emptiness at the heart of the narrative.

Mr. Faulkner is bothered neither by improbability nor impossibility in the conduct of his story. The scheme by which the reporter and Shumann obtain the new racing plane flouts probability outrageously. But connoisseurs of the impossible—and particularly those who have themselves piloted two-seater, open cockpit planes, with the joystick between their legs and their feet on the rudder-bar—should cast their eyes on the incident so Faulkneresquely described on pages 194-196. Not only does it rank as the neatest trick of the year, or any year, but it is good for as much laughter as your ribs will stand. Perhaps this is symbolism again; if so, it is so mucked up with detailed realism that it fails to come off—and it fails with a large, ridiculous bang.

In passing, and parting, Mr. Faulkner's passion for compounding words should be noted. Whatever the influence that has moved him to this activity, whether it be Joyce or the Germans, he goes in for it in a big way. Almost every page is sprinkled with such typographical beauties as "tying-in," "martialcolored," "alreadyparked," "distancesoftened," "newspaperwrapped," "machinesymmetry," and with such eye-stopping phrases as "regalcolored cattle-chute." A street sign, announcing that the street is closed to traffic, is felicitously described as an "outwardfacing cheese-clothlettered interdiction." Here is one more annoying and meaningless affectation that must be borne upon the shoulders of Mr. Faulkner's manifest talent.



WILLIAM FAULKNER BESIDE HIS PLANE AT THE MEMPHIS AIRPORT

## Streamline Version of Harold Bell Wright

GREEN LIGHT. By Lloyd C. Douglas. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BERNARD DE VOTO

**A** SUMMARY of the Reverend Dr. Douglas's new novel will indicate its classification. In a city never quite identified as Chicago a crippled clergyman named Dean Harcourt mends shattered lives by discovering to their possessors their own Personal Adequacy and bringing them into knowledge of the Irresistible Onward Drive of God's purpose. (Hence the symbolic title: the road is clear before you—Go Forward.) The dean is a mighty preacher and so sways multitudes, but also he is a mystical psychoanalyst, a priest in the consulting room, and thus exercises his inspiration on individuals. Persons who come in contact with him are never again quite the same. Once a patient of his has heard the



LLOYD C. DOUGLAS  
Photo by Blank & Stoller.

message, he has thereafter a harmonious personality, makes a success in his career, and achieves a happy marriage—except Sonia Duquesne, who has committed adultery and has to be content with becoming the dean's secretary. Several minor couples are conducted to God-consciousness and the marriage bed, but both the dean and his message are focussed on Newell Paige and Phyllis Dexter. Paige is the most brilliant young surgeon anywhere. He is about to succeed to the place of the most brilliant older surgeon, whom he loves and idolizes, Dr. Bruce Endicott. (Note the influence of Mrs. Southworth in the characters' names.) A patient whom Dr. Paige is treating has received Dean Harcourt's message and seems to the doctor the most inspiring woman he has ever known. But alas, on the day when Dr. Endicott is to operate on her, the bottom falls out of the stock market and so he botches the job. The patient dies, Dr. Paige accepts the responsibility for his chief's mistake, Dr. Endicott permits him to, and he begins to wander over the earth, disenchanted, very bitter, his life a ruin. Being a great soul, he can't help doing good here and there, but he is still Hamlet when he drops in on Dean Harcourt. In the dean's office he meets the daughter of the dead woman, and though they love greatly they misunderstand. Paige therefore wanders some more and the dean has to locate him in a laboratory where deckle-edge scientists are risking their lives with Rocky Mountain spotted fever before he can make his message clear. Even so a setter bitch is killed and she has carried some of the most touching scenes in the book. Dr. Endicott repents and everyone, including the adulteress, is saved.

It would be absurd to call this sort of thing bilge. It belongs to one of the oldest traditions of literature, the mystically therapeutic. Its equivalent is always with us and always serves an important end. Dr. Douglas is, briefly, a Harold Bell Wright—a streamlined Wright with kneecap wheels and chased silver dials on the cowl, to be sure, but with the identifiable engine under the hood. His milieu has changed from the desert to the metropolis, he deals with the maladjusted

rather than the impure of heart, fear and frustration rather than lust and dishonesty are his monsters, but he tells us exactly what Mr. Wright used to tell us and he employs exactly the same technique. He tells us: one increasing purpose runs. He tells us: let not your hearts be troubled. He tells us no more—but do not be disdainful. He tells us what Mary Baker Eddy and Ralph Waldo Trine told us—or, if you like, what Emerson and Whitman told us. Or Woodrow Wilson. Or Karl Marx.

Millions want to be told just that. This audience combines wish-fulfilment with its spiritual sustenance, and it is Dr. Douglas's audience. He gives them what they need and desperately desire: assurance. In a time of economic chaos, it is comforting to be told that the Long Parade is moving onward in God's plan. In a time of disaster, it is comforting to be told that one is being Dragged Up. It is always comforting to frightened, weary, and discouraged men, to be told that they are the masters of their fate, that they have a spiritual power which will bring them through, that they have the Kingdom of Heaven with them, that the God-spirit of which they are a part has given them unused and even unguessed capacities for heroism and eventual success. It is comforting and, when told in terms of metrical and crepuscular vagueness, it is convincing. Thoughts so noble, so impalpable, so incapable of precise statement, must be true.

Comfort is what his readers ask of Dr. Douglas and comfort is what they get. His books would not sell by the carload—as at least "The Magnificent Obsession" did, which had the same message—unless his public found what they were looking for. It is a legitimate literary quest. He works with the humbler symbols of art, but they are eternal symbols. Their success on the lower levels of literature, in the sub-basements where yearning and exhortation and incantation dictate their form, requires no explanation. Does "Molly-Make-Believe" need to be explained? Or "St. Elmo"? Or "Tempest and Sunshine"? Or "If Winter Comes"?

## Convulsing Idiocy

MASTER SANGUINE. By Ivor Brown. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

**T**HIS book can be recommended as diverting, rather obviously in the manner of "Candide." The story of the education—not of a Henry Adams—but of a young Englishman who believed everything he was told successively explodes a good many hypocrisies and kicks the pants of modern thought in a wholly pleasing manner. Master Sanguine is first educated in freedom, which he finds beset with pitfalls, and in the hearty tradition of English sport which also brings him to grief. He proceeds through Chastity College at Oxford, and after graduation moves in the higher realms of speculation, an excellent apprenticeship for which he has already served at school. He encounters the plague of vari-colored shirts that now oppresses Europe. In a nudist colony he runs into his old master, Dr. Junck-Vorwärts, again, who tells him that the price of nuts has risen sharply of late.

Meanwhile in the innocent following of what has been preached to him about sex in modern novels, our hero has encountered certain bewildering incidents. In the Kingdom of Cerulea, he is captured by the Green Shirts along with other nudists. He is finally won over to the splendid and sacred cause of Viridia, the country of the famous Stincka song. Other adventures ensue, until, in the chapter upon the Feast of Love the book reaches its hilarious height. It is all stuff and nonsense on the surface, and packed with delicious flings against most modern tendencies. The book is dedicated to that other highly humorous Scot, A. G. MacDonell. The style of it should be highly commended for its suavity, readability, and occasional convulsing idiocy. Mr. Brown commands an innocent urbanity that packs a considerable satirical wallop. In England he adorns the staff of the London Observer, and is known here for his "I Commit to the Flames."