



Is Youth Defeatist?

WILL teachers, editors, publishers, or whoever has an opportunity to see the yet unpublished work of the young, tell us whether the oncoming generation is defeatist in its psychology? The question is not whether they should be, or might be, or may be defeatist, but whether they are. And the best evidence, even though partial and preliminary, should be found in what they write. They have published too little yet—their spokesmen are still too casual or exceptional (young, fluent talent rushing into print)—to depend upon the testimony of printed books, or even upon college magazines, where not the most authentic but the most facile and articulate imagination usually gets the right of way.

The term defeatist should be defined. It does not mean a fear of personal defeat so much as an expectation of social defeat—defeat for the best hopes and most approved ideals of the present social structure, defeat for any constructive plans for the future based upon the status quo, defeat most of all, for what the defeatist, given his wish, free of the pressure of circumstances, would choose for the future. Like the defeatist of 1917 and 1918, when the term first came into the news, no definite negative solution, no expected social philosophy, no one feared result unites the defeatists, but only the fatalism of anticipated change for the worse.

It can be said without much likelihood of contradiction that the middle generation of American writers have defeatist written on their foreheads. There are notable exceptions, even outside the sanguine army of those who write success stories for the magazines. Stephen Benét is not defeatist. Nor is Thornton Wilder. Nor the authors of "The Green Pastures." Nor the satirists of "Of Thee I Sing." Nor Vincent Millay. But among the novelists defeatism is strong. Hemingway is a defeatist. So is Caldwell. So is Faulkner. So is John O'Hara. Thomas Wolfe is saved from defeatism only by his abounding

energy, so great that life itself seems invaluable to him even in defeat. Among the older novelists, Theodore Dreiser is the epitome, or rather the encyclopedia, of defeatism. Sinclair Lewis, in spite of his vitriol, is not a defeatist. Nor is H. L. Mencken. Robinson Jeffers is defeatism made epic. Willa Cather, a realist if there ever was one, is definitely anti-defeatist. So, of course, is the humorist, Booth Tarkington. So, one might say, are all humorists, among whom Mark Twain, who bore a tragic heart, was chief, and as surely anti-defeatist as he was against the optimists and the sentimentals.

But what of the young? The question is important, since they have, presumably, defeat to encounter, and certainly problems of an extraordinary complexity impending. Not their thinking, certainly not their present opinions, not even the upward or downward direction of the economic cycle, the political curve, the social barometer which will register their maturity, is of more importance, is of as much importance, as the morale of their emotions. One of the less hackneyed and particularly meaty lines of Shakespeare is Hamlet's "the readiness is all." We wish that someone would report upon the writings of the young.

Banned Books

Anyone interested in literary censorship will find food for meditation in the collection of banned books now on exhibition in the club house of the Junior League of New York City. Here truly are strange bedfellows: the Bible and "Look Homeward, Angel," Roger Bacon's "Opus Maius" and "The Mikado," Marx's "Manifesto of the Communist Party" and Julia Peterkin's "Black April." Somewhere, at some time, each of these and hundreds of other books have been banned. Caligula forbade the Odyssey currency in ancient Rome on the ground that the ideals of freedom it embodied held a threat for his absolutism; Queen Elizabeth suppressed the deposition scene from "Richard II"; in imperial Russia Andersen's fairy tales fell under the ban and in the province of Hunan, China, "Alice in Wonderland"; Spinoza's "Ethics," "Don Quixote," and "Robinson Crusoe" all appear on the Index Expurgatorius of the Catholic Church; Boston banned Aldous Huxley's "Point Counter Point," and Kipling's "A Fleet in Being" ran afoul of the censorship in England on the suspicion that its author (oh, ye gods!) was revealing naval secrets. When Hitler last year was holding a holocaust of books in Germany he was following in the footsteps of Savonarola who had consigned "The Divine Comedy" to the flames lest it corrode the public mind of Renaissance Florence. So it goes.

Three major causes seem to urge the censors on—one the desire to maintain moral standards, a second the offense to religious taboos, and the third the fear of political complications. Both in Europe and America the Catholic Church has put

a long list of books without the pale. Aside from this, in America, with few exceptions, it has been squeamishness as to the decency of a work that has brought it under the axe; in European countries, on the other hand, it has very frequently been doctrine which seemed to hold a menace to entrenched power. An autocratic monarch of Russia, like Nicholas I, could not brook an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" whose influence might be hostile to the institution of serfdom; Milton's England frowned on "The Areopagitica" and eighteenth century England on Thomas Paine's "The Rights of Man." Nazi Germany today denies circulation to Lenin's "The State and the Revolution," Italy and Czechoslovakia forbid Hitler's "Mein Kampf," and Soviet Russia outlaws Taine's "Philosophy."

In the unending battle between freedom of thought and political fear it is heartening to discover how futile censorship has been to restrain the progress of ideas. The teeth of the books which the censors feared have been drawn not by those who would have prevented their bite but by the mere fact that the ideas that seemed so menacing in one fashion or another became part of the public knowledge and eventually of public faith. The tenets these books set forth and the policies they advocated found their way into tolerance or observance. In proportion as a nation is free it has dared to allow any theory to be aired. Only as to morals, free countries like England and America are still constantly censorious. At least we can hope that before long even our Comstocks and Sumners will have had their day.

Ten Years Ago

The Saturday Review of May 16, 1925, listed the Pulitzer Prize awards in literature as follows:

Fiction

SO BIG

By Edna Ferber

Drama

THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WANTED

By Sidney Howard

History

A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

By Frederick L. Paxson

Biography

BARRETT WENDELL AND HIS LETTERS

By M. A. De Wolfe Howe

Poetry

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Today

The Saturday Review has held the presses for the story and photographs of the current Pulitzer Prize winners. See pages 6 and 7.

Letters to the Editor: *Tracing the Origin of a Plot; Reading in a National Park*

Who Started It?

SIR:—I am anxious to trace the origin of a (to me) recently recurrent plot. I first came across it a couple of years ago as a short story by a very eminent contemporary English novelist, whose name I refrain from giving, not wishing to appear to be accusing him of plagiarism.

Very briefly, the plot is as follows:

An elderly, aristocratic lady living in a decayed house in Ireland decides to come out of her retirement, and give an elaborate and exclusive party, to spite some parvenus recently arrived in the district. The preparations are highly extravagant; a band is hired from London, and the catering provided from Dublin. On the night of the party the hostess, specially gowned for the occasion, waits for her guests in vain. No one appears except the parvenus who have not been invited. The old lady takes to her bed and dies of a broken heart. After her death there are found in her bureau all the invitations, stamped, addressed, and never mailed.

Having been considerably impressed by the story, I recounted the plot to an acquaintance. I have forgotten now who he was, but I remember his telling me that he had encountered it before, but in a French setting. He believed, but was not sure, that it was by Maupassant, and in the version he knew the non-appearance of the guests was due to the agency of a malicious child who destroyed the invitations out of spite.

Today, I have read the plot again. It recurs in its Irish setting, reprinted in the *Golden Book* for April, as an anecdote invented by Oscar Wilde, retold by W. Graham Robertson.

I am greatly puzzled by this recurrence and should be grateful if you or any of your readers could help me to trace the story to its origin.

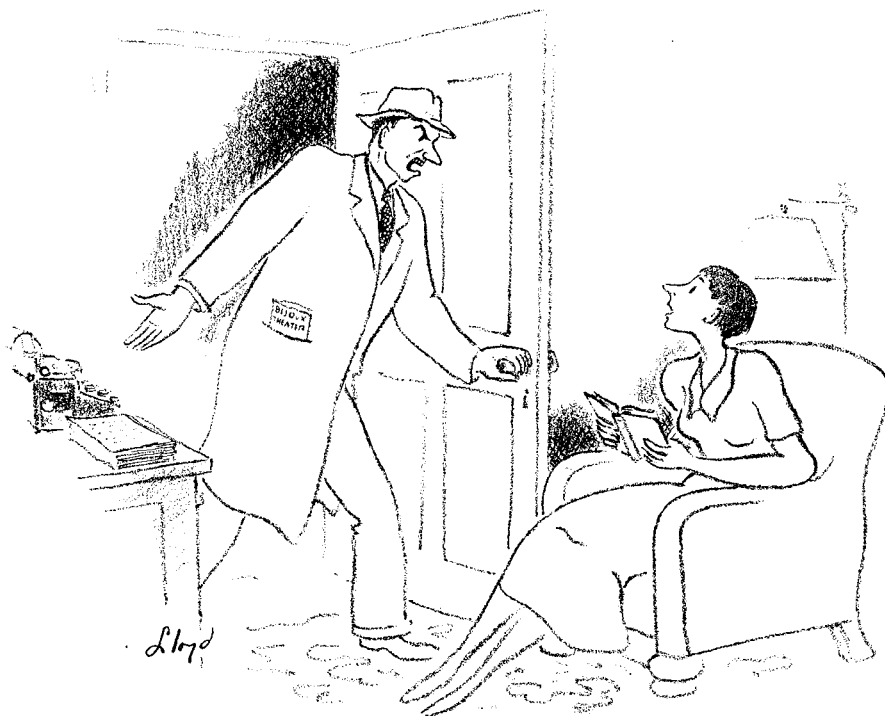
JOHN VAN DRUTEN.

New York City.

Yosemite Readers

SIR:—Few people know that there are such things as year round residents in National Parks. They see these places in their summer glory and think that from October until June they belong only to the wild life. Frequently to surprised Easterners we have to answer that we have families living here, that we send our children to a first class mountain school, that we have a PTA, a Hippodrome, yes, even a library.

We have a public library which contains 1,200 volumes. And through the California State Library at Sacramento, one can request any book not on its shelves. A small but good rental library is also maintained, and its assortment of new fiction and non-fiction is excellent. The owner says it is a losing proposition financially but doesn't mind. Yes, we have that kind of folks out West! Our newsstand stock is quite the largest and best I have ever seen anywhere. In addition to all the quality magazines we have about thirty of the monthly pulps. Cowboys are



"THE MOVIE THEY MADE OUT OF MY LAST BOOK IS JUST LIKE
THE STORY I'M WRITING NOW!"

the most consistent readers of these "Western" thrillers.

And practically everyone subscribes to several magazines and when finished turns them over to the librarian. She puts them in circulation for awhile and then turns them over to the CCC Camp where they are thoroughly thumbed. Circulation managers could gather some interesting facts here. One copy of *Fortune* is read by at least twenty persons. My own *Saturday Review of Literature* has a regular route of six awaiting it eagerly. So it is with *Harper's*, *Scribners*, *The Atlantic Monthly*.

If you think that there isn't a place left where reading is still a pleasure, where everything in print is anxiously awaited, where people still loll in the warmth of an Indian summer sun and read leisurely, peek in and view us sometime. This is America's land of *poco tiempo*.

F. R. CONNETT.

Yosemite National Park.

Robinson and Hardy

SIR:—In your issue of April 27th you published a letter which quotes a sonnet "For a Book by Thomas Hardy" as a poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson which had appeared only in a magazine and then, as your correspondent said, apparently had been forgotten.

This sonnet may be found in Mr. Robinson's privately printed first book, "The Torrent and the Night Before," which was printed for the author in 1896. In Mr. Robinson's first published book, "The Children of the Night," the Hardy sonnet appears again, this time on page 56. Your correspondent is correct in saying that it

was not included in any of the volumes of collected poems published later, the probable reason for its omission being that the author had ceased to think well of it.

The privately printed pamphlet, "The Torrent and the Night Before," is a very rare little book, and I am under the impression that a copy which Mr. Robinson had presented to Thomas Hardy was sold at the American Art Galleries this winter and brought over \$500. The copies presented to Charles Eliot Norton, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and President Eliot now are included in the Robinson Memorial Exhibition in the Widener Library, Cambridge.

LOUIS V. LEDOUX.

New York City.

Justice Holmes's Letters

SIR:—The late Mr. Justice Holmes has entrusted to Professor Felix Frankfurter, of the Harvard Law School, and to me the task of arranging for authoritative publications concerning his life and work, and by his will he appointed me Executor and left to me the use and disposal of his letters, papers, and memoranda, including his rights in letters written by him. Professor Frankfurter and I shall be grateful if any who possess letters of his which may be fitly made available for publication would communicate with me or send to me such letters as they are willing to allow us to examine. All such material will be copied and the originals returned to those who are kind enough to entrust them to me.

JOHN G. PALFREY.

84 State Street,
Boston, Mass.