

First Impressions

HASTA LA VISTA. By Christopher Morley. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1935. \$2.

Reviewed by HENRY WELLES DURHAM

"ONLY two kinds of people write books about Latin America," said my room-mate, another veteran tropical tramp, "those who have spent a day or two ashore, and those who were never there. If you've lived there, you know too much to write it."

Santa Elena bringing me back from a winter job in the tropics, was moving up from Quarantine in a chilly fog last week. Astern was *Santa Maria* just in from Valparaiso, sending me no warning that she was the heroine of the next story I was to read. Liberty and the skyscrapers, seen through the mist from a wet deck, seemed a poor exchange for the tropical warmth, and we were a bit fed up with some of the Grace tourists. "Did you see the old girl who worked me for a cocktail last night?" he continued, "she's going to write a book about Guatemala. She studied the country for several weeks."

My own sentiments were about the same, although I had three classes, to include the very serious writers who study second-hand archæology and politics. All of which is by way of introducing to others the very pleasant surprise that greeted me and forced me to expand my collection to four classes, the last containing just one book, admittedly written by a tourist who does not attempt the role of guide or prophet, but merely tells most entertainingly and in his own wittily philosophic style, of a trip to Lima and back.

"Hasta la Vista" is remarkable at first reading for what it does not attempt. The author had seen and learned enough on his journey to have produced another of those books which the earnest lady tourists study so diligently in their deck chairs; the latest studies of the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas; the true stories of the wicked dictators and adventurers, the evil foreign capitalists, and oppressive Uncle Sam with his grasping policy. He could have elaborated tales of perilous exploration ashore, based on smoking room yarns and hasty trips by automobile and railroad, and he could have talked knowingly of politics and the future. Finally, he could have filled his book with photographs, on sale at each point visited to those who have not the time or the opportunity to make their own, as was done by one author who learned enough on a trip by air to produce a fat book about most of South and all Central America. Instead of lending the prestige of his name and style to such an obvious work, Mr. Morley has produced something infinitely better, a record of first impressions, and an account of a trip which will give the reader

who has not made it, a much clearer picture of the countries visited than any amount of guide book description, padded with sophomoric theorizing and pseudo-history and science. To one reader who has passed much of his life in, or travelling through, the region described, the author has given pleasure, both in the revival of memories of familiar scenes, and by the unassuming comments from a fresh viewpoint.

To have been able to do as Christopher Morley has done, in describing so entertainingly and lucidly what he has seen, and his impressions thereon, during a forty day trip from New York, through the Canal to Peru and back, as to give to the reader who has never been there, a desire to take the same journey, and an idea of what it will be, and to interest one to whom it is an old story without awakening the least desire to correct, makes his work outstanding among current travel literature and books which proclaim to the reader how much more the author knows of the countries described than he can possibly impart. To abstract it in outline is impossible and would be useless. It must be read to be appreciated. It is not a travel guide, although a delightful narrative of travel, interspersed with a running comment, sometimes serious, sometimes whimsical.

Mr. Morley's remarks on so-called luxury ships and sea travel should be read and pondered by all who call ships boats, and rate them by their built-in pools and tennis courts. So, too, he earns several good marks in his review of Panama. He should be assured, however, that one oddity he noticed seems to have been rectified. There are now no right-angle turns in Culebra cut. As to Colon and Panama

he notes much that never gets into the guide books and going down the West Coast past the Equator to Peru, continues with always entertaining and original comment on the ports and incidents aboard.

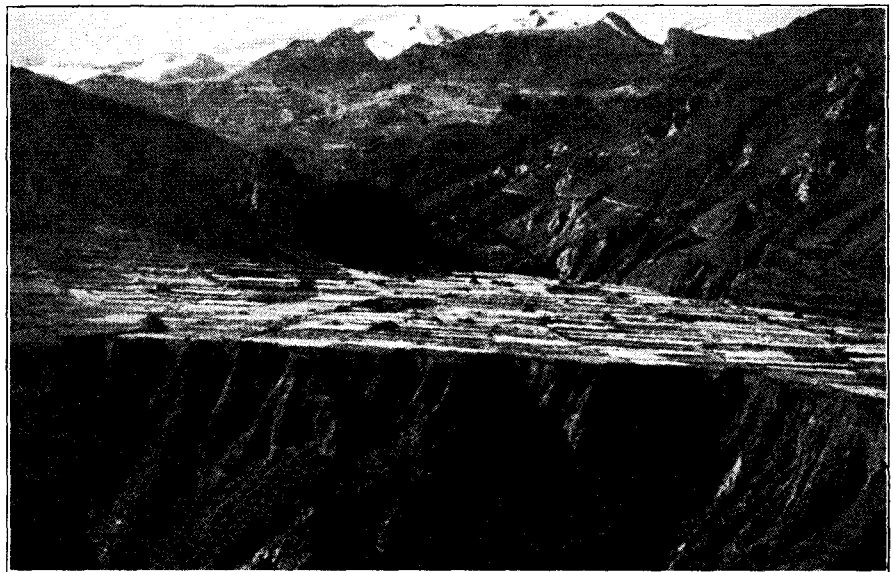
Some of his remarks, of course, he might modify after intensive research, probably to the detriment of the book. It isn't meant to educate, which is what makes it of value. Still, in defense of Prescott, we must tell him that there are fertile green valleys in Peru, even though they are not seen from the coast. And Mr. Morley missed seeing one fertile oasis and the scene of some of Palma's best tales by not going ashore at Huacho.

Quite the best of "Hasta la Vista" is in the last hundred pages covering a fortnight in Lima. Much more of less value has been written about shorter stays by less keen observers, which brings to mind the old definition of research, "more and more about less and less," but few travel comments about the place are so informing or less didactic. If for no other reason the book would be notable for its generally correct use of Spanish. We incline to the belief that Mr. Morley knows much more of the language than he pretends, in cheerful contrast to authors like the writer of the Hollywood romance of San Luis Rey who could not even spell the name of his leading character correctly as Mr. Morley has done.

Finally, for good measure, the book contains an index and glossary in which but one serious error appears, and that surely was overlooked in reading proof. Such a connoisseur of beverages must know that Pisco is a brandy made from Peruvian wine.

"Hasta la Vista" is a title well chosen, for any reader will wish to meet the author again.

Henry Welles Durham has spent a large part of an engineering career of note in South and Central America.



AGRICULTURE ON A PERUVIAN PLATEAU
The inhabitants have cultivated every foot of flat soil.



Poetry and Modern Life

In a recent book by Geoffrey Bullough, entitled "The Trend of Modern Poetry," he quotes in his last chapter these lines from a modern, Mr. John Davenport:

Eliot, Rabelais, Dryden, Donne,
Bless the bed that I lie on,
Blake, Rimbaud, Marvell, Voltaire,
Swift, Joyce, Proust, and Baudelaire. . .

This, as he says, suggests amusingly some allegiances of the modern "cerebral" poets. But he points out how the most recent English writers in verse—you know the triumvirate before we name it (Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis) "have broken through the cramping fashion of recondite verse, the ever-narrowing circle of 'Pure Poetry,'" and have been striving to bring back "spontaneity, energy, flowing lines." Eliot and Pound, the two chief influencers of a horde of disciples, filed a "common plea for a literature of scholarly intelligence." But the effect upon their disciples was a stampede in the general direction of the esoteric, the pedantic, the almost impenetrably obscure. The "cerebral school" became an incubus and a succubus in this department of literature. It seemed to be draining the very life-blood out of poetry; until today in America we have the astonishing spectacle, among our most recent writers, of a novelist evincing more vigor, more élan, more true poetic gusto than nine-tenths of our latest poets. We refer to Mr. Thomas Wolfe. Whatever his faults as a novelist, the Elizabethans would certainly have recognized him as blood-kin; and while our world of today is not the Elizabethan world, our discoveries not those of the merchant-adventurers in the youth of the world, surely it is an exciting enough epoch in which to live. In fact the gestation of this first half of the twentieth century seems too great a throe for modern poets to grasp, just as the advance of modern science and all its concomitants is as yet with difficulty being absorbed into modern poetic expression.

The writer of this editorial does believe, however, that a start has been made at interpretation by the English poets above

named, tortuous and confused though their efforts may be as yet in that direction. The age is too full of conflicting sensations for any Wordsworthian tranquillity, in which to recollect emotion. In fact, it is difficult enough to collect one's thoughts in the face of the multiplex nature of modern life! As for Matthew Arnold's injunction to "see life steadily and see it whole," the possibility of that has gone glimmering, if, indeed, it was ever possible. All of which being taken into consideration, a headlong enthusiasm for life does seem to be returning, in place of the "frivolously decorative or elaborately erudite" in poetry, or the aloofly esoteric. It does not matter what political affiliations the poets affect, so long as such affiliation serves as a means to produce verse that will no longer turn inward upon itself, becoming so involved in self-analysis as to be so much gibberish to the average intelligence. If poetry is to establish no immediate—yes, and emotional—contact with the people, but simply to bombinate *in vacuo*, one can see no reason for its being; no reason except that it be placed in the category of riddles.

The material of the modern world, with which the modern poet has to deal, is, as has been noted, of so multifold a character as constantly to frustrate expression. Consequently we are witnessing considerable flounderings—about as to means of expression, the endeavor to assimilate into poetry all modern phenomena, the endeavor to evolve new forms adapted to the expression of sensations alien to other periods. To take a crude and obvious instance, we are as familiar today with traffic through the air as were the Elizabethans with traffic by sea. And though this, together with such phenomena as radio communication (which would have seemed no less than sorcery to other times!), rapidly becomes a commonplace to the ordinary man, the poet's function has always been to show us the miraculous nature of such things, to open our eyes to wonders, to increase our range of vision. That also is his function in regard to changes in the social order; to quicken and expand the intelligence of man. Today his prophetic robes have dropped from him, he is no longer regarded as the seer, the priest of a vision. That may be just as well. Poets are but human beings practising to the best of their ability a certain art. But they should certainly have more heart for the practice of that art than many have had of late; withdrawing as they have into the purely intellectual, contenting themselves with wit and erudition.

We are not decrying "a literature of scholarly intelligence." We are merely glad of certain signs that larger poetic energies are being again released. Just before the Great War we experienced here in the United States a sudden—one might almost call it an "explosion" of poetic energy. It came at a time when certain dicta were to the effect that poetry as a means of

artistic expression was "dead," that prose was to be the medium of the future. In the general apathy and disillusionment following the war, the same murmurings recurred—until a few new names of great brightness established themselves. Latterly the murmurings have recurred again, chiefly because so many poets seemed to have traversed the Wasteland into an arid intellectualism. (He who indicated its existence having found it necessary to retreat into the round-tower of a Faith.) But history repeats itself; and though poetry may go down into the desert for awhile, it returns eventually to the life of men, with strong singing.

T. E. Lawrence It is one of the curiosities of national temperament that the English who so habitually take a common sense attitude toward life should ever and again fall under the spell of romance. The latest instance of this duality of nature is in the hero worship which during the past few years has been focussed upon T. E. Lawrence whose tragic death, as we go to press, has just been announced. An archaeologist known only to a small group of fellow students when the war broke out, his feat in leading the Arabs to victory against the Turkish enemy raised him to the position of a popular idol after the declaration of peace. Immediately he became a legend, and no avoidance of publicity, no effort at anonymity, was potent to still the interest which his career had aroused. Soldier and scholar both, he caught the fancy of the man in the street as well as of the man of books. The personality of the man cannot be compressed into a note. The editors of *The Saturday Review* wish here merely to record the passing of a glamorous figure and hope in the near future to present a portrayal of the man by one who knew him other than through report.

Ten Years Ago

In the issue of May 23rd, 1925, *The Saturday Review* recommended "Der Zauberberg," by Thomas Mann, in an article by A. W. G. Randall on "Literature Abroad." Readers who enjoyed "The Magic Mountain" when it was published in English in 1927, will agree with this early opinion: "Far superior to any transcription of life. . . a lesson in the technique of fiction. . . He [Thomas Mann] is hardly likely to be deposed from the position he held . . . of being the most considerable of living German novelists."

Today

The *Saturday Review* recommends these new books:

TIME: THE PRESENT. By Tess Slesinger. See review on page 5.

THE CAMBERWELL BEAUTY. By Louis Golding. See review on page 5.