

have been able to build a canal without any such unscrupulous policy. We have a right to be proud, on the other hand, of our patience in the face of disorder and jeopardized material interests in Mexico. Indeed, says Professor Bemis a bit lyrically, where else in the world is another such example?

Now these opinions are extremely interesting, and extremely suggestive. They happen almost exactly to fit the temper of the time, so far as they lay down policies for the future. There is much to be said, too, for non-involvement in the affairs of the Orient, for benevolent neutrality in League matters, for abstinence from intervention in Latin America. It is not at all to be regretted that, on the basis of solid scholarship, and after years of reflection, Professor Bemis should express his opinion frankly on such matters.

It is a more dangerous business, however, to deal in hypotheses. To the reviewer it seems by no means clear that American difficulties in the peace conference of 1919 would have been materially lightened by affixing conditions to our entrance into the war. It seems a bit naive to imagine that, when the Germans had been beaten, the condition would have been observed. After all, the Allies subscribed to the fourteen points (a fact hardly mentioned by Professor Bemis); how much were they hampered by this engagement?

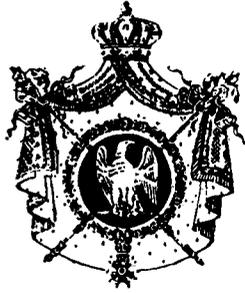
It would be possible to mention other instances in which the author of this book makes assumptions that are difficult to prove. But the fact remains that the work is one of solid scholarship; and although it is the vogue for historians to avoid all commitments, there is a good deal to be said for an historian who does not hesitate, on the basis of searching study, to give the reader the benefit of his considered judgment.

Dexter Perkins is professor of history at the University of Rochester, and author of two books on the Monroe Doctrine and a study of John Quincy Adams as Secretary of State.

Stockton's Fantasies

THE REFORMED PIRATE. By Frank R. Stockton. Illustrations by Reginald Birch. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1936. \$2.50.

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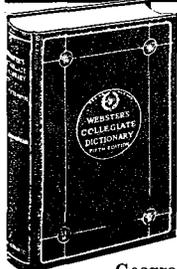
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A London Letter

BY R. ELLIS ROBERTS

THAT solemn, costive, and ill-tempered critic, F. R. Leavis, has just published a new book, "Revaluation," in which, with an anxious pedantry at odds with a genuine admiration for certain authors and a more fervent admiration for his own critical sense, he addresses, in the manner of a short-sighted professor, his admonitions to those English authors of whom he disapproves.

For T. S. Eliot's work, as exquisite as it is narrow, I have a great admiration; but when I read Mr. Leavis, I often find myself wishing that Eliot had never penned a word of criticism. There is something in Eliot's manner which compels the faithful to a certain liturgical routine of response. If Mr. Eliot says *Dominus vobiscum* he says it because he has found in that ancient greeting of promise and peace a vivid personal meaning; but when his disciples chant, in rather mangled plain-song, *Et cum spiritu tuo*, there is a mechanical quality in the response. Here, for instance, is the beginning of F. R. Leavis's essay on John Milton.

Milton's dislodgement, in the past decade, after his two centuries of predominance, was effected with remarkably little fuss. The irresistible argument was, of course, Mr. T. S. Eliot's creative achievement; it gave his few critical asides—potent, it is true, by context—their finality, and made it unnecessary to elaborate a case.

Now what does the man mean? From what has Milton been dislodged? From predominance? Over what? And what has Eliot's "creative achievement" to do with it? Does Mr. Leavis really know people who now neglect "Lycidas," "L'Allegro," "Comus," the "Hymn on the Nativity," and "Samson Agonistes" because they have their minds and hearts sufficiently filled by "The Waste Land" and "Ash Wednesday"? If so, it is surely evident that these gentlemen have but scant space for mental furniture; presumably the bulk of their attics is crowded by bats. Or again, why should it be unnecessary "to elaborate the case" against Milton, because T. S. Eliot has made some critical asides—asides, by the way, so personal as to seem puzzling to the ordinary lover of poetry? Recently Mr. Eliot has declared that he cannot always understand Milton.

Mr. Leavis is noteworthy only because he teaches English literature at Cambridge, and is one of the principal exemplars of a wry-mouthed Puritanism which is infecting our criticism. Throughout this book the word "poetic" is a word of contempt, and the word "literature" a term of abuse. He contrasts, with a flat naïveté, "literature" and "life": as if literature—as written by Milton or Pater or Swinburne, to name three of Mr. Leavis's chief abhorrences—were not just as much a part of life as the internal combustion engine or the prose of D. H. Lawrence. One might as well say that a bull-fight or a football match is life and a game

of chess is not. The rise of this school of criticism seems to me one of the biggest bluffs which the academics have made, and it has not been adequately called except by a few critics of the older school, such as F. L. Lucas and Desmond MacCarthy, and by John Sparrow, whose admirable "Sense and Poetry" has never met with any response from the pundits who make a virtue out of their weak digestions.

Well, while such men as Mr. Leavis are still building their temple of cards, Romance goes on. How heartily she goes on, I was aware as I assisted at the dinner, organized by the London P. E. N., to honor H. G. Wells on his seventieth birthday. The club made this an open dinner. We had the ballroom of the Savoy, which holds 600 people: and there were over 800 applications. Priestley was in the chair, and among the speakers were G. B. Shaw, André Maurois, G. B. Stern, and Julian Huxley. Shaw still thinks of Wells as the naughty boy who tried to reform the Fabian Society: and his speech, though dramatic (he began "Poor old Wells!") and domestic, was hardly suited to the occasion. No one paid adequate tribute to Wells, the great romantic novelist—the author of "The Wonderful Visit," of "Kipps," of "Mr. Polly," of "Tono-Bungay," and "Mr. Britling Sees It Through" and some two dozen wonderful short stories. It always surprises me when I find people accepting as final, authors' opinions of their own work. Years ago, impatient at Henry James's elaborate workmanship, Wells declared he was a journalist not an artist: and far too many people, ignoring the fact that the antithesis was false, promptly agreed that he was not an artist. The judgment is absurd. Wells at his best is an artist as surely as Dickens or Balzac: and in his short stories he is an artist as consummate as Kipling, of whom, by the way, in his admirable speech at the dinner, Wells made a spirited defence against a characteristically mischievous attack by Shaw.

An old friend of mine has just died—G. S. Street. I don't know whether his name means much to Americans. It does, I suppose, to those who study the period of *The Yellow Book*, those oddly named Naughty-Nineties, when, as we know from Hichens's "Green Carnation," flowers had to be unnatural to be loved, and, from Max's Lord George Hell, had to be unknown to be plucked. Street, who was a contemporary of Max's at Charterhouse and Oxford, achieved notoriety by his first book, "The Autobiography of a Boy," a delicate and witty satire on the ideas of the young esthete. That book came out as long ago as 1894. It seemed to me, who was in my early teens, a miracle of sophistication; and I remember my surprise and gratification to discover that the author, whom I asked some six years later for a contribution to an Oxford paper I edited, was one of the kindest and most modest of men. I think myself that a better book was "The Trials of the Ban-