

# The New Books

## Biography

**WANDERER FROM SEA TO SEA: A True Narrative of Modern Man in Search of His Soul.** By Maarten Matisse. Harcourt, Brace. 1936. \$2.50.

There are two ways of reviewing this very interesting book which has been translated and well translated from the Dutch. It is an autobiography of a spiritual trend. A young Dutchman with the soul of a seeker, the eye of a painter, and the mind of a poet, in a flowing narrative vividly descriptive and full of charm, tells the story of a life which, regardless of its object, is crammed full of the most extraordinary contacts with people of all kinds but particularly the poor, the barbaric, and those hungry either for life

or for spirituality. Beginning with the tough adventures of a sailor-boy, he drifts off through the south of France, falling in love with a gypsy, and on among the Arabs and Jews of North Africa, whom he sees not as a tourist sees them but as a vagrant depending upon their hospitality. From there in search of his main objective he crosses Persia, mostly on foot, and so on into India where that variegated life again provides human contacts, many of them extraordinary. Thus the narrative from this point of view is a kind of picaresque romance excellently written and never dropping in interest. But the Matisse book is not a picaresque novel. It is a closely knit story of a modern, a Westerner, an artistic temperament who seeks to satisfy his spiritual craving by first-hand experi-

ence of the wisdom of the East. His quest finally takes him to Gurukula, a school of the Arya Samaja, a liberal sect which trains its pupils in the "pure spirit of the precepts of the Vedas and at the same time . . . in the sciences of the West." Here in this sylvan retreat at the foot of the Himalayas he knows pure happiness and a cessation of desire, but the Westerner dies hard in him and at the end he returns to Europe as a missionary of the truth he has found; he discovers in the chaos of contemporary Europe no place for his teaching, yet the struggle between spirit and matter is taking place there also; and it is with deep satisfaction that he finds that the serenity he had learned in the East can keep his spirit whole in the West.

There is much interesting pure information in this book as to the practice of Yoga, as to teachers in India true and false, and as to the Westerner's reaction to an Eastern ideal. But I think it will be read chiefly as highly original and highly picturesque biography of originality and some distinction.

H. S. C.

## Fiction

**JOHN DAWN.** By Robert P. Tristram Coffin. Macmillan. 1936. \$2.50.

This novel opens at quarter before midnight, December 31, 1799, in the kitchen of Captain James Dawn of Merrymeeting in Maine. His wife is in labor upstairs, and James Dawn is determined that his son should not be born until after midnight—which the captain, who no doubt knew more of navigation than of mathematical paradoxes, erroneously regarded as the beginning of the new century. The assembled neighbors protest that he cannot be sure of such a thing, and he cries,

"I have a wager on it." He stood there, head and shoulders over them all in the tobacco smoke, holding his huge watch in his great fist. He was the only one whose hair was not white. He wore it natural. It shone golden in the firelight, drawn back and tied with a black silk ribbon.

The clock strikes twelve and the child appears, not altogether to the reader's surprise.

There could not be a more appropriate opening for the book, in spite of the fact that it necessitates a rather awkward flashback to get in the Revolutionary War; for the Dawns are all like this more fortunate King Canute, and if you like this incident you will like the book. They are all handsome and virile and lucky and picturesque. They win their fights and their women; Jacob Dawn, the founder of the family, licked the Tory squire before the Revolution. John Dawn, the boy born on New Year's Day, attained command of a ship at fourteen, in the War of 1812; and while foraging ashore in Devon was helped by a squire's daughter, a girl of twelve, promised to marry her, and four years later came back to keep his promise.

To include four generations of so adventurous a family in three hundred pages something has to be left out, and what is left out is characterization and plausibility. One cannot altogether escape

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the feeling that after so many other novels of Maine, Mr. Coffin felt that to outdo them he must include everything in Maine's history, and the book produces much the impression of a local pageant: a picturesque incident to illustrate Colonial days, another for the Revolutionary War, another for the War of 1812, and so on, with plenty of vivid color and costuming, but a certain thinness and artificiality.

B. D.

**MABEL TARNER.** By Harry Kemp. Furman, 1936. \$2.50.

One sympathizes with Harry Kemp's desire to write of undegenerate American farm life. His characters are all robust and natural. The self-sufficient farmers lost out when they began to limit and intensify their crops for profit and to buck the money-interests of the cities. This Mr. Kemp tells us in talking about his book, and if his novel had set out to show this course of events it might have possessed considerably more significance. As it is, it is merely the story of a healthy, happy farm girl, without much brains, who learns disagreeably of sex but escapes soilure, and eventually marries happily. Her father; the farm-hand, Jed Hoskins; Jimmy Tyrrell (whom Mabel marries); the lewd and thieving Ozzie Treffer, and other characters are given full-bodied portrayal. Treffer's violent end is one of the high spots of the story. It must be said that, good poet as is Harry Kemp, in this novel his prose often seems most amateurish. There is much too much of the "Land sakes!" "By Cracky!" sort of writing, a persistent use of the bastard word "tendance," and there are other blemishes that should have been avoided. With the hearty, earthy quality of the dialogue none can quarrel—but the writing is often hasty and clumsy. A sincere, plunging, stumbling book! Mother Williams, the religious Madam of the house of prostitution, is more or less a creation. Mabel Tarnar, herself, is winning in her ingenueness. And that is about all that can be said for a farm novel that might have assumed larger proportions.

W. R. B.

**THE RETURN OF THE WEED.** By Paul Horgan. Harpers, 1936. \$2.

There are six short stories in this almost preciously thin little book by a Harper prize novelist. All of them are about New Mexico, all of them ingratiating portraits of persons.

An early mission padre goes out in his fields on an autumn morning, wondering about the conversions he has made and the worth of his life work, and is slain with arrows in the great revolt of 1680. A cow town mob lynches a young rancher for a cattle rustler, not because he has stolen cattle but because he makes money, has a satirical conquering way with women, and a visiting Texan, with a killer's inferiority sense, has worked on their unconscious jealousies. A widow lives on in a vast desert mansion after her husband has wrecked his fortune on baronial land development schemes and dies with the regional reputation as a romantic cow country chatelaine, all the

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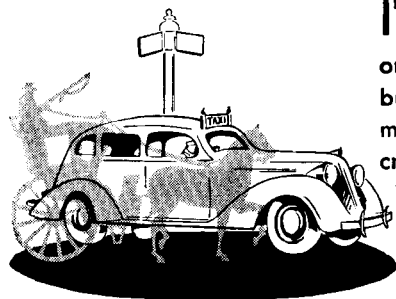
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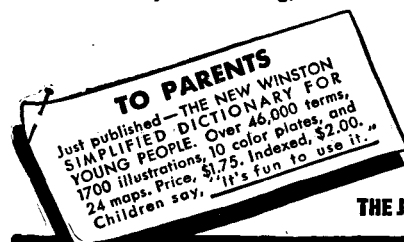


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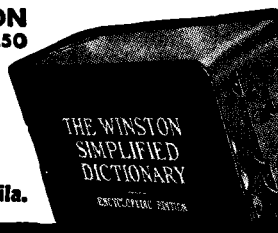


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time inwardly hating it. The last exponent of an aristocratic Spanish family's hacienda traditions gets drunk bemoaning the grandeur of the old times to kidding small town realtors. A high school athlete catches "aviation fever" watching the sky from a lonely desert service station. A modern young girl, after a romantic secret marriage, lets her young rancher husband down because life holds no other values for her than the shoddy stuff of social position in El Paso.

By the standards of psychological portraiture, the persons are types and the situations are types. Mr. Horgan takes no deep bite into life, betraying new talent, fresh outlooks. What he does most effectively is to project the physical quality of the desert land with a spell of consciously charming prose. "The sun always seemed to go lower earlier in the valley than in the great wild-cat colored plain beyond the hills" . . . "the mountains, rising and falling in the various tempers of daylight like part of the sky itself." . . . Now and then a phrase like this is richer than a journey to the land itself, while Peter Hurd's lithographs are an impressive libretto to Mr. Horgan's music.

D. A.

ANGELS' MIRTH. By Ethel Cook Eliot. Sheed & Ward. 1936. \$2.

Mrs. Eliot's second novel has for heroine a girl of sixteen who has been rendered unusually sensitive by the divorce of her parents and the death of an adored sister. Sent by her father to spend the summer with the family of the woman whom he expects to make his second wife, she finds herself involved in a tragic crisis of the most distressing sort. Authentic drama is pointed by the contrast between the almost unconscious agnosticism of Mary Stevens and the firm Catholic faith of the Sands children. Poignant as the situation is, the author makes the despair and death of Mrs. Sands secondary to the conversion of Mary. Under the circumstances this may be foreseen and accepted by any unprejudiced reader, though the author has perhaps loaded the dice a trifle in making Mary something of an affected prig, reared to know Chekhov by heart, yet entirely ignorant of the Bible. Whatever one's opinion of Mrs. Eliot as propagandist, much of her story is of high quality. Her success with the difficult figure of Irina Sands, the would-be Carmelite nun, is further proof of her ability as a writer of fiction.

T. P., Jr.

MAIDEN CASTLE. By John. Cowper Powys. Simon & Schuster. 1936. \$2.75.

To read this book is to feel one has several degrees of temperature. Everything is Queer. The author seems to have had some sort of plan in mind, something to do with Midsummer Eve and All Souls and Candlemas, old Welsh gods and a neolithic earth work called Maiden Dun or Maiden Castle; but just what the plan was remains baffling. The hero is called D. No-man, which is not much help. (D. stands for Dud, a name he gave himself as a child; No-man was an adult inspiration after he found he was illegitimate.) The heroine is Wizzie Ravelston, who has an alluring figure and stringy

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hair, who has been a circus rider and has had a child, at a tender age, by a character known as Old Funky. There is an artist, Thuella Wye, who supports her father (whose name is Teucer) by painting pictures of clouds, and Enoch Quirm, whose first name is shortly changed to Uryen. Further, these folk rejoice in nicknames such as Horse Head and Venetian Post. Of course an author is at perfect liberty to call his characters any names he chooses; but a reader, by the same token, is free to carp if these names give him bad dreams, set him fretfully hunting a thermometer, and are so eccentric as actually to interfere with what the author is saying.

The general atmosphere of undulant fever is further heightened by unreasonable italics and exclamation points which come like thuds. The author seems in a constant state of interest and surprise at what his characters do, and the reader shares his surprise. There doesn't seem to be any reason for any of these people or for what happens to them. There are bits about fascism, communism, and archeology. Mr. No-man, who is historically minded, calls his garbage pail Henry VIII. The sexual habits of the characters, notably of the hero, are what the author rather politely refers to as "perverse."

The publishers say "John Cowper Powys's new novel will in all probability be of greater interest to those over thirty years of age than any of his previous works." This is called leading with the chin.

C. H. M.

*SAND CASTLE.* By Janet Beith. Stokes. 1936. \$2.50.

David and Alan Stewart, two young Western Highlanders, came to the Manchester (England) of 1889 to be employed by Charles Appleby of the Balaclava Mill who has been in the Lancashire cotton trade almost since its inception. Such is the foundation laid for this new novel by the talented niece of Ian Hay, she who won a \$20,000 world prize for her first book, "No Second Spring."

Alan adapts himself to machine-driven Manchester, but David is unadapted to industrialism. The several fortunes of the devoted brothers are traced, and of those with whom they come in contact. Both, in their different ways, fall in love with Annis, the daughter of their employer. David meets his destiny at the end of the first part of the novel. Alan and Annis, and Charles her father, carry on through the book, and a younger generation, Colin and Barbara, grow up, with their own problems.

The lives of these people have nothing startlingly dramatic about them, but they are altogether human. Miss Beith has a rather rich feeling for character. Back of the story of stumbling lives is the story of the rise to great proportions and boom times of the Lancashire cotton industry and its decline after the Great War. It is a sand castle that Charles Appleby has built after all, with his spinning mill. The book ends with Colin quoting a famous passage from Gerard Manly Hopkins, to the effect that toil-smeared generations

(Continued on page 57)

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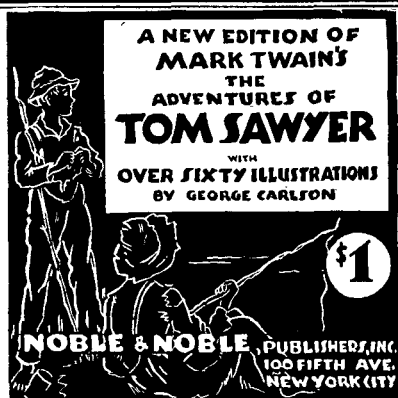
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FRANCOIS RABELAIS: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Translated by Jacques Le Clercq. With decorations by W. A. Dwiggins. New York: Limited Editions Club. 1936.

THE present printing of Rabelais is as handsome as Mr. Dwiggins's famous "Droll Stories" of some years ago. It is probably the handsomest dress in which the French classic has ever appeared, designed with exquisite skill. And therein lies its one serious defect. It is far too exquisite for Rabelais, who by his gusto was not delicate, humorous, subtle. Typographically the books are far from Rabelasian.

But, also speaking typographically, the books are grand. The work has been cast into five easily handled volumes which as they stand on the shelf have five whimsical labels in color which make up a picture in themselves. One turns the pages with delight—the paper is a soft, mellow sheet now seldom seen in books since the offset printer has bedevilled paper making; the type is Mr. Dwiggins's own fine *Electra* font, a very lively roman, and the size is large enough for easiest reading; the margins are ample; and the numerous pictorial decorations are in the nicest taste, with the quality of cameos. There is a vigor and a verve about the volumes which is not unusual in many modern books: but few modern books have in addition the clarity and simplicity which these have.

One should by all means read the clever facsimile letter from Mr. Dwiggins to Mr. Macy which accompanies the set, in which Mr. Dwiggins explains his ideas of how the books should be printed. I don't wholly agree with his plan, but, given the plan, he has succeeded brilliantly.

### Recent Books on Typography

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF TYPOGRAPHY. By Stanley Morison. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1936. \$1.

AN ESSAY ON TYPOGRAPHY. By Eric Gill. New York: Sheed & Ward. 2nd edition. 1936. \$2.

The attempt to reduce the principles of typography to the dimensions of a short essay or small book runs great risk of failure, owing to the complexity of the subject. One of the best of such essays was that contributed by Emery Walker and William Morris to "Arts and Crafts Essays" in 1893. There is another excellent little chapter by Mr. Updike in *Handicraft* for May, 1902. Little can be added to what has been said by these writers except in the way of expansion; nevertheless, each generation needs to have the fundamentals restated in terms of its own time, and there are perhaps no men better fitted to do so for the pres-

ent generation than Mr. Morison and Mr. Gill—one a foremost writer about printing, the other an active and superior practitioner.

Mr. Morison's small book, printed in a fine roman type, is a reprint of the article which first appeared in the last volume of *The Fleuron*. In general it is a plea for sanity and unobtrusiveness in the printed page and book: one may take some exception to his advice regarding title-pages, but in general there is good sense in his remarks.

If Mr. Morison's book is soporific, Mr. Gill's is exciting. The author is sometimes a bit difficult to follow in his other writings on art and beauty, but he is not dull, and he is usually stimulating. In this volume he again emphasizes the change from craftsmanship to industrialism. His first chapter is given over to the situation in modern England in which the craftsman finds himself. The major portion of the book is a consideration of letters and lettering, both ideally and as related to printing. And then in the final chapter he makes a brilliant suggestion—that lettering be abandoned and superseded by shorthand. He would have all persons taught shorthand, and have phonographic symbols replace letters in printing. The proposal is fantastic, but so are modern science and commercialism.

While Mr. Morison's book is printed in a fine traditional renaissance type, in a normal manner, Mr. Gill's is printed in one of his own types, set with "ragged" composition—that is, unjustified lines. It is a stimulating book which all printers and handlers of words should read.

### Best Seller

A recent cartoon in the *New Yorker* represents a bookstore clerk who has been asked by a customer for the Bible, as scratching his head and saying, "Let me see, that is a Simon & Schuster publication." Equally amusing was the nice old lady who spent fruitless time at the late Book Fair in trying to find what she knew was there—the original manuscript of the Bible. Ridicule would hardly kill the sale of the Bible, but the way in which it has been usually printed ought to kill it. For many years the typographic format was frozen into a harsh and unlovely form from which it has only in same degree emerged. This new Bible of Simon & Schuster's is a distinguished addition to the shelf of well-printed editions. Enough has been written about its textual arrangement: I am interested in the format. It is a heavy book, but that could not easily be avoided. It has a type page which could hardly be bettered for the easy reading it is meant for: the only exception to this is the possible excessive use of italic, but I do not object to this. The title-page and binding are pleasing and appropriate. If this edition of the Holy Scriptures will not tempt the reader, I don't know what can be done to make them more attractive.