

The AMEN CORNER

The two-volume biography has come back into its own. The "monumental" *Life of Washington Irving*,¹ by Stanley T. Williams of Yale, which the Oxford University Press published just in time for the Christmas season "is likely," says the *New York Herald Tribune*, "to remain for years the model of what a definitive biography should be. Nor will it easily be equaled . . . No detail is scanted, but all are ordered and composed on a vast and glowing canvas. In sheer skill of performance Professor Williams's writing will stand comparison with Irving at his best."

With a kind of pleased surprise reviewer after reviewer has discovered that although it is long,—and, as John Cour-nos says, "scholarly thoroughness could go no farther"—Professor Williams's book actually, to quote Mr. Cour-nos, "makes a fascinating story for any lover of literary biography."

The *New York Times* remarks that "it possesses stylistic grace, distinction of diction and forceful expression. It should appeal to the casual reader who finds biography diverting. Attractive illustrations [there are 53 of them] add to the interest of the book."

Professor Robert E. Spiller (editor of James Fenimore Cooper's *Gleanings in Europe*)² writing in these very pages a week or two ago, hailed it as "entertaining reading," and declared that "in a subtle and unobtrusive way, we are made to feel . . . that here we have found the key" to Irving's rather complex and elusive character.

Few American men of letters have been so many other things as the first, during his long life of almost seventy-seven years. He took part in the trial of Aaron Burr; was active as a Colonel in the War of 1812; was Secretary of the American Legation in London under President Jackson; had his experience of the exploration of the West in 1832; and from 1842 to 1848 was Minister of the United States at the court of Isabella II, at Madrid. He was the friend of Henry Brevoort, Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, "Fernán Caballero," and scores of eminent persons in England and America.

Using many hitherto unknown manuscripts, Professor Williams throws new light on many interesting aspects of Irving's career, and has made his book "at once a portrait of a man," says Mr. Cour-nos, "and a picture of a period."

Among the unusual (and beautifully reproduced) illustrations is a facsimile of a page from the little *Washington Irving Journal 1803* which Professor Williams edited for the Oxford Press last year in a limited edition³ (and which was one of the Fifty Books of the Year of the American Institute of Graphic Arts).

The Oxonian had intended to touch lightly on several subjects, but he has been carried away by his enthusiasm for *The Life of Washington Irving*. You will be too, if you take our advice and add it to the really permanent shelf of your library.

THE OXONIAN.

(¹) \$15.00. (²) Vol. I France; Vol. II England. Each \$3.50. (³) \$3.00.

Trade Winds

BY P. E. G. QUERCUS

MANY thanks to Mrs. H. R. Boynton (Claremont, Calif.) for sending us the good news that Mr. C. C. Parker, dean of booksellers in Los Angeles, is back in his shop after a serious illness. Mrs. Boynton encloses a clipping from Lee Shippey's excellent column in the *L. A. Times* wherein Mr. Shippey pays fine tribute to Mr. Parker's service to his community through 41 years. We quote:—

Who can estimate the thousands of Angelenos who have profited by Parker's advice in those forty-one years? Hundreds of men and women now prominent in Southern California have been influenced by that advice ever since they were youngsters. And the right book at the right time may mean more in a person's life than anything else.

Quercus began the New Year, out in his frostbitten hutch, *The Fantods*, busily fomenting himself. He had not known before that both ink and paste can freeze solid, and scissors get so cold that they burn the hand. So he is practically helpless. Celebrated Mr. Kipling's birthday by rereading *The Rhyme of the Three Captains* which was originally a sprightly grenade dropped down the hatchway of Harper & Bros. The description of a venerable ancient, once head of that firm, always gives irreverent Q. a roar: "I had stripped his hide for my hammock-side, and tasselled his beard in the mesh." Those curious to recall this spirited old controversy will find a good essay about it in James Westfall Thompson's *Byways in Bookland*, just published by the Book Arts Club of the University of California (Berkeley, Calif.) Among other most interesting papers in Mr. Thompson's book is one on *Napoleon as a Booklover*, and a description of his travelling library (of 1000 volumes). When Napoleon did not like a book he threw it out of the window of his carriage. This explains (says Mr. Thompson) why so many volumes stamped with his insignia have found their way to the booksellers. Quercus has found himself bursting into verse lately:—

*The Emperor with bloody heart
Tore Europe's flesh and bone apart
But days of carnivores are through:
Napoleons are now napoo.
The Ethiop will change his skin
Ere Mussolini muscles in.*

We print the above lines three in Italic and three in blackface, to be impartial.

Old Quercus, busy trying to keep warm in his snowbound cabin, heard from Mr. George Seiffert of Doubleday's of his similar difficulty while travelling in Australia last summer—which was the Australian winter. Mr. Seiffert was enormously impressed by the fine stock and efficiency of the Australian bookstores; particularly of course the world-famous Angus & Robertson's of Sydney. When Mr. Seiffert discovered the hot-bottle in his berth in an Austral sleeper he thought at first the train was on fire and anxiously summoned the attendant. When black

ink has once been well frozen it turns a horrid gray: there is some philosophical analogy here, but what? Old Q. rarely receives telegrams, so when they come he is excited. A Day Letter from Boston says: Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowships just announced for nineteen thirty-six. Two Fellowships each carrying award one thousand dollars apart from royalties offered for most meritorious projects fiction or non-fiction. Last year's Fellowships awarded Terence O'Donnell and Jenny Ballou for novels now in progress. April first dead line for applications. Blanks and information on request. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Thomas Wolfe's three articles, *The Story of a Novel*, which appeared in the last three issues of this Review, will be published in book form by Scribners early in 1936. Meanwhile the subscription department reminds Quercus that copies of the three issues—December 14, 21, and 28—will remain on sale at 10 cents each while they last.

J. Ray Peck (first editions, fine bindings, etc.) has moved to the General Electric Bldg., 126 East 51. To Old Quercus in his Tarragonian mood *The Bedroom Companion*, a book of supposed bawdy hilarity for the beaver-chested male, seemed a bit sophomoric. In spite of our warning women against reading Esther Forbes's *Miss Marvel* (there are highly specialized reasons why they will find it beautifully painful) several of them have, and have written to tell us that we could not possibly understand it.

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