

# The New Books

## Biography

**THE ANGEL OF THE ASSASSINATION.**  
By Joseph Shearing. Smith & Haas.  
1935. \$2.75.

Of the many individuals thrown up into that brief and violent notoriety so often produced by the events of the French Revolution, none is more spectacular and more likely to be misunderstood than Charlotte Corday. The deed which she committed was melodramatic, grotesque, horrible, and useless. Disease could have spared Marat for only a few weeks more when she entered his offensive rooms and slew him as he sat huddled repulsively in his bath. The murder accomplished nothing, except, perhaps, the more relentless pursuit of the escaping Girondists who were thought to have inspired it. Designed to prevent, it merely precipitated, the reign of terror. And yet no act of violence was ever more nobly conceived, ever found for its perpetrator an instrument more pure, exalted, and selfless.

Charlotte Corday concealed under the maidenly exterior, which was all her few friends and relations saw of her, just such a spirit of patriotic fervor and loyalty as had formerly animated Joan of Arc. It was a patriotism nourished not on mystical visions but on their eighteenth century equivalents: the romantic and illusive doctrines of Rousseau, and the ancient, stoical virtues as exemplified in the Plutarchian heroes. On these she had meditated in her loneliness until they were a part of her nature. At first she had gloried in the turns of the revolution. This was the beginning of that millennium which was to bring peace and happiness to the France that she loved. But with the rise to power of the ungovernable mob and its leaders, she saw only terror and evil ahead. Marat assumed in her eyes the proportions of a tyrant such as not even Judith had had to face, and there seemed no end to his atrocities. She came to believe that his death alone could save her country and purify it of the stains which gave her such anguish, and with terrible, guileless despatch she stabbed to the heart the man whom she had sworn to kill. To her it was no crime, but the necessary deed of a noble Roman.

Mr. Shearing has told her story in this book with an austere simplicity that is properly in keeping with his subject. He wastes no space upon argument, defense, or condemnation, but simply gives us a straightforward narrative that, in the end, has pictured Charlotte Corday with an

honesty that is wholly admirable. It is naturally a very melodramatic tale, but his rigorous, deft handling of it has eliminated those hysterical notes that are so likely to vitiate the best melodrama, and has given it the quality of high tragedy. It is unfortunate that hasty or careless proofreading has left so many inaccuracies of fact and grammar, but even this fault cannot seriously mar a book which is so patently a sincere and penetrating study of a most difficult personality.

C. D. A.

## Drama

**HOKUSAI. Play in Fourteen Scenes.** By Gustav Eckstein. Harpers. 1935. \$2.50.

In Hokusai's long activity Dr. Eckstein discerns fourteen crises which he has defined and expressed in dramatic form in as many short scenes. The dialogue is terse, intentionally brittle, and quite unornamented. As a sort of title page for each scene is reproduced one of Hokusai's drawings. We have to do with a *tour de force* of simplicity, with an attempt to effect much with the sparsest means. As one reads an initial impression of thinness and even of dilettantism yields to a cumulative effect of intimate understanding. The austere and apparently fragile method is after all strong enough to bear the weight the author has imposed upon it. A full appreciation of this distinguished little book probably requires a certain knowledge of Japanese ideals, for there is a good deal between the lines.

F. J. M.

## Fiction

**DUST OVER THE RUINS.** By Helen Ashton. Macmillan. 1936. \$2.50.

This author first came into prominence with her novel, "Dr. Serocold," which she has since never bettered or, indeed, approached in fiction. Her father's life as a

country doctor furnished her with the material for the best of her books; and while a novel like the present one contains interesting material—in the descriptions of an archeological expedition—the cast of characters is stereotyped, the psychological issues obvious at all times. We have the dominating, surly husband of a flighty young wife, a fine scientist whose career has been ruined by his ungovernable temper. We have the young romantic boy, out on his first "dig," and falling in love with the young wife. We have the elderly, pottering head of the expedition, and the faithful old maid assistant who is really in love with her cousin, the irritable husband. These people all act in easily-foreseen ways, and aside from excellent descriptions of northern Arabia, where the site of the "dig" is placed, the story drags. Of course the young woman finally causes a good deal of trouble, the young man makes an unpremeditated attempt to kill the older one, and finally the whole party breaks up and their time of stress is over. One does not care a great deal. Miss Ashton does not write badly but such a novel as this seems merely run of the mill.

W. R. B.

## Medicine

**MODERN HOME MEDICAL ADVISER.**  
Edited by Morris Fishbein, M.D.  
Doubleday, Doran. 1935. \$7.50.

If you are able to buy but one book this winter for family consumption this is unquestionably the one you should have. For here in one volume Dr. Fishbein and his distinguished collaborators offer you in comprehensible terms practically everything that an intelligent family should know—and almost never does—of their own bodies, of emergency first aid measures, of the diseases common and uncommon which may beset any or all of them. Here you will find the answers to your questions as to what is actually meant by such terms as "basal metabolism," "glandular inefficiency,"

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## THE MYSTERY OF THE SMOKING GUN

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

"Stirs the blood and holds the attention as few crime stories do."

—N. Y. Times  
\$2 STOKES



## Over the Counter

The Saturday Review's Guide to Current Attractions

Trade Mark	Label	Contents	Flavor
THE GOLDEN HEIGHT <i>Marguerite Mooers Marshall</i> (Doubleday, Doran: \$2.)	Love Story	Social Service Iris, offspring of divorce, fears insecurity and gives up newspaperman for handsome country boy with white teeth and lots of acres.	Corn mush
IT BEGAN IN EDEN <i>Frances Shelley Wees</i> (Macrae-Smith: \$2.)	Novel	Meredith, a Ph.D. honey, almost goes the altar route with a Prof. The gal's sister and a crack reporter pull the double-cross—but smoothly.	Caviar
BLACK FEATHER <i>Harold Titus</i> (Macrae-Smith: \$2.)	Romantic Adventure	Intrepid young trader baulks John Jacob Astor and his fur-bearing varlets in 1818 N.W. There's a girl around too.	Beaver
HAPPY JACK <i>Max Brand</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Western	They all laughed when Happy Jack sat down to play—the guitar. But when the smiling cow-hand plugged Charlie Lake in the belly—well, the West ain't seen anything like him.	B. B. shots

# The Compleat Collector

RARE BOOKS: CONDUCTED BY JOHN T. WINTERICH

*In alternate weeks this Department is devoted to Fine Printing  
and is conducted by Carl Purington Rollins*

## All Sorts of Primers

**THE NEW-ENGLAND PRIMER ISSUED PRIOR TO 1830.** A Bibliographical Check-List. Compiled by Charles F. Heartman. New York: R. R. Bowker Co. 300 copies. \$10.

**AMERICAN PRIMERS, INDIAN PRIMERS, ROYAL PRIMERS, AND THIRTY-SEVEN OTHER TYPES OF NON-NEW-ENGLAND PRIMERS ISSUED PRIOR TO 1930.** Compiled by Charles F. Heartman. Printed for Harry B. Weiss, Highland Park, N. J. 1935. 500 copies. \$10.

IT is as certain as that the mastodon once shook the earth that a New-England Primer was issued at least as early as 1690, but no copy is today of record in advance of 1727. The New York Public Library is the proud custodian of this single tattered exemplar, and there is doubtless gnashing of teeth thereat in San Marino, for the next oldest—1735, also unique—is in the Huntington Library (here is one of the few instances of bibliographical orchestration where the Huntington has to play second fiddle). Of the 1737 edition two copies are known, of the 1738 one, of the 1744 one (conjectural), of the 1746 one, of the 1749 one, of two 1750 issues one each. All of these are Boston imprints—the first extra-Boston Primer discoverable is a New York edition of 1750, and the one copy known is housed, not in the New York Public Library, but in the Huntington.

Mr. Heartman's check-list, therefore, is, in addition, a complete census in its earlier entries—a fact which definitely heightens its interest. For here, proclaimed as loudly in the inevitable gaps as in the citations, is the story of America's first best-seller. It is a subject concerning which Mr. Heartman can assert a special competence. It is also a subject, perforce, concerning which the last word can never be written. Fresh primers—fresh at least to twentieth-century eyes—will forever be popping up, to the delight and discomfiture of collector, librarian, and bibliographer.

The non-New-England Primer is an even more confusing phenomenon than

its famous prototype. Generally it attempted some slight degree, often a considerable degree, of secularization. Its importance, however, may be measured from the supposition that of every three primers that issued from colonial presses, at least one was other than a New England—and the ratio may have been as high as two in five. Mr. Heartman does pioneer work in this compilation.

## As Issued

The final 1935 number of P. H. Muir's "Bibliographical Notes and Queries," completing Volume I, contains an index to the volume. David A. Randall of Scribner's is American editor and subscription-taker (\$2.50 a year). B.N.Q. will be converted into a monthly at a guinea a year if a plebiscite now being conducted so favors. Watch this department for late election bulletins.

"Dard Hunter, the Mountain House, and Chillicothe," by Lloyd Emerson Siberell, has been issued by the Ailanthus Press, Box 83, Cincinnati, in an edition of 100 copies signed by Mr. Siberell (\$1). A check-list of Mr. Hunter's books is appended.

"Notes on the Causes and Prevention of Foxing in Books," by Thomas M. Iiams of the Huntington Library and T. D. Beckwith of the University of California at Los Angeles, has been reprinted in pamphlet form from the *Library Quarterly* for October, 1935, for private circulation. Conclusions: Iron is the villain, but science will outfox it.

Allen T. Hazen and Edward L. McAdam, Jr., have compiled a catalogue (35 cents) of the recent exhibition of first editions of Samuel Johnson in the Yale Uni-

versity Library. The final page considerably and courageously lists important Johnson units which were not available for the exhibition.

The latest catalogue issued by House of Books, Ltd., 19 East 55th Street, offers a complete set (17 volumes) of the Pulitzer prize novels in first edition. Informative bibliographical notes are cited. Price, catalogue, free; complete set of the novels, \$125.

The University of Texas Library has prepared a useful "Account of an Exhibition of Books and Manuscripts of Percy Bysshe Shelley, With Something of Their Literary History, Their Present Condition and Their Provenance" of which copies are available at fifty cents each from Donald Coney, Librarian. . . . A nearly-4000-years-old Babylonian contract that has never been unsealed is among the recent additions to the Yale Babylonian Collection, now on exhibition in Sterling Memorial Library. . . . When opened (as it will be, and by an expert) it will probably prove to be voided by the statute of limitations. . . . Or it will have a P.S.: "Burn this letter." . . . Proof that prosperity is taking the corner on two wheels: Gifts to Baker Memorial Library at Dartmouth during the last college year were 2005 volumes, an increase of 517 over 1933-34. . . . The Rosenbach Company's new "Catalogue of Rare Books of Six Centuries" lists 519 lots, among which, cheek by jowl, are A. Edward Newton's "A Tourist in Spite of Himself" at \$3.50 and the Bradford 1694 "Laws of the Province of New-York" at \$18,650. . . . And from Macy's Rare Book Shop comes Catalogue No. 1, with firsts of "The Good Earth" at \$5.97, "Jude the Obscure" at \$8.44, and "The Eighth Sin" with contemporary presentation inscription at \$124 straight. . . . Members of the newly-organized Friends of the Lockwood Memorial Library in the University of Buffalo, whether alumni, associate, full or life, will enjoy among other privileges the right to withdraw new and old books and to secure reading lists on any subject.

## THE MAN WITH THE BATON

By DAVID EWEN

Author of

"From Bach to Stravinsky"

The story of conductors and their orchestras with special chapters on Toscanini, Stokowski, Koussevitsky and others.

374 Pages, 26 Illustrations, \$3.50

THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY  
393 Fourth Avenue New York



374 Pages  
26 Illustrations  
\$3.50

## The Clearing House

Conducted by AMY LOVEMAN

Miss Loveman's department is omitted from this week's issue of *The Saturday Review*, but will appear next week and in alternate weeks thereafter. Inquiries not answered in these columns will continue to be answered promptly by mail.