

# BREAD LOAF

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## BREAD LOAF, VERMONT AUGUST 20 - SEPTEMBER 3

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### PERSONAL INTERVIEWS for MANUSCRIPT CRITICISM

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ALL INQUIRIES:

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Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

# The Modern Quest for God

**AMERICAN PHILOSOPHIES OF RELIGION.** By Henry Nelson Wieman and Bernard Eugene Meland. Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company. 1936. \$3.

**GOD IS MY ADVENTURE.** By Rom Landau. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$3.50.

**THE FOOL HATH SAID.** By Beverley Nichols. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1936. \$3.

Reviewed by A. C. WYCKOFF

THAT a modern search for God is on, no one who has been interested in observing what is taking place in literature and life will deny. One could fill a page with titles of recent books phrased around this search or quest for God. The three books to be reviewed, give a glimpse of it in America, Germany, England, and the British Dominions. Wieman and Meland, in "American Philosophies Of Religion," give fifty-seven varieties of religious experience. Rom Landau adds ten more most unusual varieties, and Beverley Nichols describes his book as "The Story of a Modern Search for God."

The amount of preparatory work which has gone into "American Philosophies Of Religion" will be realized when it is recognized that it contains a study of fifty-seven American philosophers and theologians who in their way are seeking God. It covers only the modern period, beginning with Josiah Royce, William James,

Francis L. Patton, and continues down to the Niebuhrs of the younger generation. As evidence of the liberal spirit controlling the authors, such names are included as George Santayana, Baker Brownell, William P. Montague, Alfred N. Whitehead, F. S. C. Northrop, Harry A. Overstreet, Walter Lippmann, and John Dewey. It would be difficult to find any living American philosopher who could more clearly and fairly present the thinking of such widely varying religious thinkers, than Professor Wieman.

One of the features of this presentation is that it shows each seeker finds God. Of this he is sure, so sure that he feels impelled to convert others to his God. But, while the experiential areas of each religious thinker are psychologically similar, they are so different philosophically, that no one of the fifty-seven is quite satisfied with another's God. Their thinking is "rooted" in the wrong philosophical soil. For example, Professor Wieman himself finds it most difficult to extend his sympathetic philosophical understanding to the Neo-Supernaturalists, as he styles them. He classifies himself among the Empirical Theists, with John Dewey and Edward Scribner Ames, and others who are "Rooted in the Tradition of Naturalism." We suspect that John Dewey again will object to being classed with him, as he has on other occasions. But Wieman still feels that Dewey does not fully appreciate his real religious position.

An interesting feature of the American philosophers of religion appears in their major preoccupation with the problems raised by the advancement in modern science. Living as they do in colleges, universities, and theological seminaries, and teaching students who are graduates of these institutions, they feel their whole reputation as successful teachers depends upon their ability to meet this new challenge to theism which is made by the natural and social sciences. One cannot but admire the courageous and determined way in which they have held their ground against great odds. Yet, they betray too much nervousness in the presence of this department of human knowledge to be at their best in presenting constructively the spiritual values of religion. They are too university-conscious, too science-minded for the free functioning of their full personality resources in this important field. To be sure they have extended the boundaries of their monism to include the whole domain of the cosmos now known to science, but neither natural science, biology, social science, nor psychology provides them with sufficient data to support their religious theories. Even John Dewey has to call his Humanism "A Common Faith." A "Faith" it is, though not yet adopted as "common." These criticisms should not be allowed seriously to interfere with the exceptional value which this book furnishes to teachers, students, and preachers.

Rom Landau, in "God Is My Adventure," presents ten modern mystics and masters, who represent that great group

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by Archibald MacLeish

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of religious personalities who refuse to be stampeded by modern science and philosophy into capitulating to their methods in seeking for God and spiritual realities. They, too, find God. And, if possible, they are even more certain of this reality than their science-minded colleagues. Landau is primarily interested in the personalities of these people. And in so many instances, he brings out the fact that the personality is more important than the teaching, in establishing the following that is gained. How our author could place himself for fifteen years under the direct influence of the strange personalities he describes, and yet come through it all without becoming a devotee to any one of them, is one of the marvels of the book. For he knew intimately these men—Count Keyserling, Krishnamurti, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Shri Meher Baba, and others. The first two divisions of the book describe his experiences as he joined the groups of these various leaders, and explains the teachings they gave concerning spiritual truth. The last division, entitled "Fulfilments," tells how, after fifteen years, he goes back to check up on what has been the outcome of their movements and teachings.

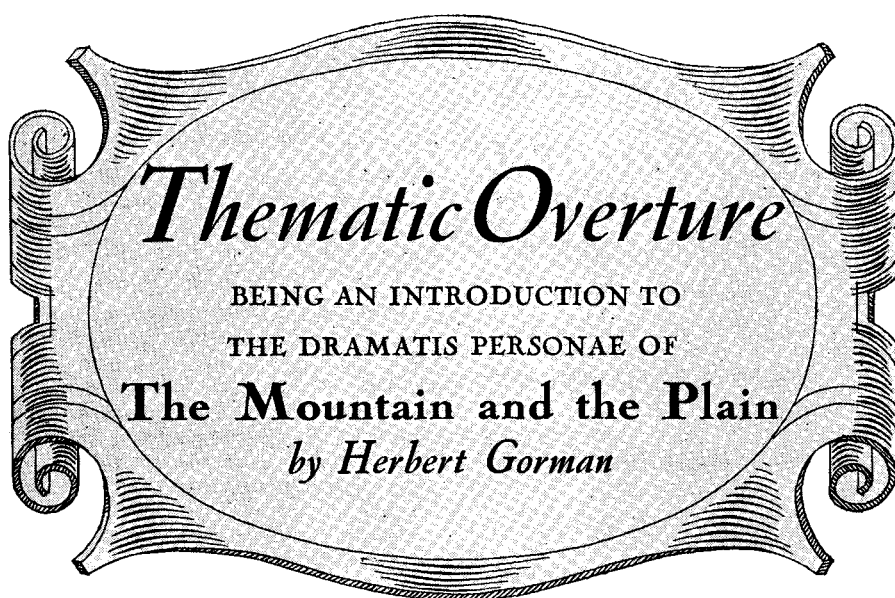
"The Fool Hath Said," by Beverley Nichols, introduces us to a third method of finding God. It is much more available for the average person than either of the other two. It functions through an act of the will by which one surrenders wholly to God, and then, from the vantage point of faith in God, turns to solve all of life's other problems. Beverley Nichols is a charming young English writer, whose books on Old English thatched cottages, English gardens and villages, have won for him a warm place in the hearts of many Americans. He was persuaded to attend one of the Oxford Group meetings and, as a result, was "changed." After this "change" all life looks different. The intellectual problems of religion, which up to this moment had been rather insuperable, now almost vanish. He, too, has found God, and is sure of it, as he repeatedly affirms. So we read in another place: "It is the one true thing I know, that rather than lose my faith in Christ, I would give up every material thing." Of all the books on the Oxford Group Movement I have reviewed, this is by far the most appealing. One wonders what there is in this Movement that enables it to get such a mighty grip upon this highly educated, rarely gifted, socially prominent, young Englishman. As an antidote, one should read Rom Landau's study of "The Man Whose God Was a Millionaire."

A. C. Wyckoff is minister of the Reformed Church of Spring Valley, N. Y.

#### SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 119)

WM. HAZLITT—  
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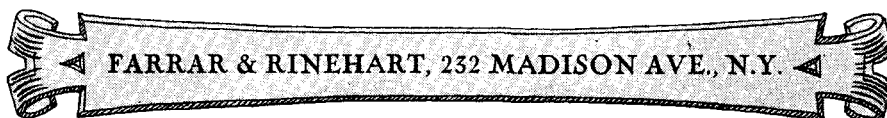
In it, you will meet a host of familiar characters, many of them cast in a new light; all of them portrayed with a dramatic artistry whose effect is cumulative and unforgettable. Danton, Marat, Robespierre, Dr. Guillotin, Tom Paine—the friend of the Common Man who was sickened and disillusioned by the happenings of the Revolution—Louis, Gouverneur Morris and many more, are here . . . the threads of many personal ambitions woven into the pattern of a larger story, seen through the eyes of a young American who becomes involved—both romantically and politically—in the great upheaval . . .

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# The New Books

### Belles Lettres

**THE LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS.**  
*Edited by Maurice Buxton Forman.*  
Second edition, with revisions and additional letters. New York: Oxford University Press. \$5.

Scholars and general readers who were too poor to buy Mr. Forman's edition of 1931 may rejoice that this new edition is not out of reach. It is not merely a reprint. The editor has spared no pains to make the present edition definitive; the useful apparatus is revised and enlarged, and nine letters and two fragments are added to the text. The new material includes items of some interest, if not of great importance. The canonical text no longer begins with, "Although the Borough is a beastly place . . ." for we now have the earlier part of this letter to Clarke of October, 1815; Keats is looking forward to meeting Hunt—"t will be an Era in my existence"—and has chosen one poem for the great man to see. The most remarkable letter is that of March 31, 1819, written—not many weeks before the Odes—in answer to a series of questions on the catechism from his sister, who is preparing for confirmation. The sympathetic interest of "Your affectionate Parson" might be explained as more fraternal than religious, but the tone of the letter and the numerous Biblical citations suggest that Keats himself has recently been studying the evidences of Christianity; the inference is supported, as an English reviewer (perhaps Mr. Murry) has observed, by the fact that Keats's only other explicit reference to Christ occurs in the section of a journal-

letter written on March 19. Finally, on November 19 we have a gloomy letter to George Keats, who needs money; Mr. Abbey wants John "to turn Bookseller"; he has tried to write lately but cannot get on while George is in such low water. Looking back over his *annus mirabilis*, he can say: "Nothing could have in all its circumstances fallen out worse for me than the last year has done, or could be more damping to my poetical talent—I comfort myself in the idea that you are a consolation to each other."

During the last twenty years Keats's letters have probably been more read and more quoted than those of any other English author; as the intimate record of the growth of a poet's mind and as a golden book of criticism they make Shelley's letters seem strangely remote and immature. This Bible for poets and readers of poetry can now be everyone's personal possession.

D. B.

### Fiction

**FRIGHTENED ANGELS.** By Joanna Cannan. Harpers. 1936. \$2.

Joanna Cannan has told her story well, bringing out all its bitterness and tragic irony. It is about John Marlow, a master in a minor English public school, a failure in life, a sensitive, kindly man who becomes an inadvertent murderer. It is a rather painful book, and Miss Cannan does not shrink from any touch of realism that will help her picture; John Marlow's bleak life-history,—illuminated by one moment of stolen happiness that proves his undoing,—his poverty, his disillusion, his despairing sense of inadequacy, are shown us in sharp-bitten detail. He is weak, he is eaten up with an inferiority complex, he makes a mess of his life, but we share the half-contemptuous liking with which Miss Cannan regards him. The fate that overtakes him is reminiscent in its cruel irony of certain stories of Maupassant.

C. C.

**BLESSED ABOVE WOMEN.** Pamela Hansford Johnson. Harcourt, Brace. 1936. \$2.

Yeats once observed that a particular writer's work lacked depth, because it contained no "vision of evil." Certainly Miss Johnson's work takes on depth and even a certain fascination precisely because of her perception of evil, of those dark, abnormal forces of the soul that can accent and shadow apparently simple lives. She has observed as a psychologist and written with a story-teller's sense of the value of light and shade, and she has surrounded her characters with an indefinable atmosphere of danger that is not dispelled until the last page of the book.

"Blessed Above Women" is woven out of the life of Miss Hobchick, a pathetic, a very painfully real, old maid, but it is not the quiet story that might be imagined. Within the meagre circle of Miss Hobchick's experience move people in-

*Lovely Journey*  
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of the success,  
"Rain Before Seven"

Miss Fox again shows her mastery of technique. Here is a story no less human—of a young woman seeking the "lovely journey" of life. **\$2.00**

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