

**BERNARD DeVOTO said**

In His Last Week's Editorial  
On Reference  
Books:

"Roget's Thesaurus." This darling of the manuals usually does what you want it to but almost never in the way you expect it to. After sixteen years of writing you should be able to think of the word you want. When you can't Roget does not find it for you but does start off the chains of association that make you remember it. This copy is in the orthodox edition copyrighted by Crowell in 1911. Three or four alleged improvements on that arrangement have had a brief existence on the reference shelf but have been thrown away as delusions. No dictionary of synonyms has survived.

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## A BALANCED RATION FOR A WEEK'S READING

PEKING PICNIC. By Ann Bridge. *Little, Brown.*  
DARLING OF MISFORTUNE. By Richard Lockridge. *Century.*  
EDUCATION AND THE MODERN WORLD. By Bertrand Russell. *Norton.*

## Reference Material on a Group

A. M. G. of *Stillwater, Okla.*, wants to know where she can find critical comment on the work and biographies of Edith Wharton, Emerson Hough, Edna Ferber, Sinclair Lewis, Margaret Deland, Willa Cather, Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield, Ellen Glasgow, and Joseph Hergesheimer. She wants also to know where she can get suitable material for a paper on modern drama.

FOR the biography of all of the authors she mentions, with the exception of Emerson Hough who is not contained in it, A. M. G. should consult that strong reed to lean on when in need of life sketches of contemporary writers, *LIVING AUTHORS* (Wilson). Here she will find brief but adequate sketches of the authors she names, embodying the main facts in their careers, some description of their personality, a few lines of discussion of their art, and a list of their works. *WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA*, which contains a biography of Emerson Hough, has entries of course for all the others. As to critical comment upon them she will find discussion of the work of Hough in Charles C. Baldwin's *THE MEN WHO MAKE OUR NOVELS* (Dodd, Mead), which also contains pages on Hergesheimer. Hergesheimer is given place also in Percy H. Boynton's *MORE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVELISTS* (Dodd, Mead) and in Blanche Colton Williams's *OUR SHORT STORY WRITERS* (Dodd, Mead). This last-named volume presents studies of Edith Wharton, Edna Ferber, Margaret Deland, and Dorothy Canfield. Carl Van Doren's *CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVELISTS* (Macmillan) contains sketches of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, who also figure in Boynton's *SOME CONTEMPORARY AMERICANS* (Dodd, Mead) and Grant Overton's *THE WOMEN WHO MAKE OUR NOVELS* (Dodd, Mead). This last has material also on Edna Ferber, Margaret Deland, Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield, and Ellen Glasgow. Stuart P. Sherman's *CRITICAL WOOD-CUTS* (Scribners) includes Miss Cather, Miss Glasgow, and Sinclair Lewis. Lewis is the subject of study likewise in Stuart Sherman's *POINTS OF VIEW* (Scribners), Walter Lippmann's *MEN OF DESTINY* (Macmillan), and Boynton's *MORE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVELISTS*. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, in her *FIRE UNDER THE ANDES* (Knopf), includes a portrait of Willa Cather.

As to the reference material for a study of the modern drama which A. M. A. wants she might try James W. Marriott's *MODERN DRAMA* (Nelson), a popular survey of the drama of the last half century, which should be useful as a means of orientation. *THE BEST PLAYS OF 1934-1935* (Dodd, Mead), by Burns Mantle, will give her a bird's-eye view of the plays of that year and excerpts from some of them. If she wants entertaining and informing reading, not directed to specific plays but enlightening discussion of dramatists, she should read John Mason Brown's *LETTERS FROM GREENROOM GHOSTS* (Viking) in which in a succession of letters cleverly adapted to the style of their supposed authors some of the dramatists of the past write to others of the present who might be supposed to have special points of likeness to or divergence from their predecessors.

## Editions of Marco Polo

E. B. of *Saginaw, Mich.*, asks concerning the best editions of Marco Polo's *TRAVELS* and wishes to know whether it is possible to obtain a map of his journeyings which is separate from the book. She wishes one which has been "treated to look like a very old one."

The most comprehensive edition of *THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO (THE VENETIAN)* is that by Sir Henry Yule, which was revised and augmented by Henri Cordier. These two volumes, which are carried on the Scribner list, embody the results of the research of the best students in the field, and are the most extensive study of the subject available. They, of course, contain the maps, which also decorate the lining papers of a more recent, and good, if less definitive edition of the *TRAVELS* (Liveright), revised from Marsden's translation and edited by Manuel Komroff. This edition costs only two dollars where the Yule is \$22.50. There are, of course, numerous inexpensive editions.

## The Development of Communication

F. S. and M. I. G. of *New York City*, who are high school students whose history course covers the development of communication, ask for information on that subject.

Labert St. Clair's *TRANSPORTATION: LAND, AIR, WATER* (Dodd, Mead) ought to give them an interesting survey of the history of travel, for it follows methods of locomotion through various phases. *MODERN COMMUNICATION* (Houghton Mifflin), by A. W. Page and others, in addition to its chapters on traffic takes up communication in the form of the telephone, the telegraph, the radio, the moving and talking picture, and television. Some of its studies are fairly technical and probably would present difficulty to a high school student. He might do better with George O. Squier's *TELLING THE WORLD* (Appleton-Century).

# The New Books

## Fiction

*SUN DIAL TIME.* By Don Marquis.  
Doubleday, Doran. 1936. \$2.

The famous ex-columnist and creator of archy and mehitabel is, of course, an American humorist in the great tradition. He created *The Old Soak* and he wrote the story of Danny. Here are ten new stories by him, written of late years. He is at his best in the kind of yarn told by old pitch men and around the general store—that is, a sort of super-version of such yarns. He can tell a marvelous "drunk" story. And when you get into an account like that of Bud Peevy's great race across country to carry by his deciding vote the "electoral" district that gave McKinley the state of Kentucky "which no Republican had ever carried Kentucky for President afore" you are in the presence of great American myth. Not only that, but you are in the midst of the highly complicated and highly diverting story of "The Saddest Man," which is one of the best in this book.

We won't say that any of these stories top certain classics by Don Marquis—and several of them are not as funny as they might be. But the book has his own original tang. It opens with Captain Samuel Billing's extraordinary Hollywood scenario, and continues with tall tales of a relishable kind. An unusual and wholly indigenous brand of humor. You'll miss much solid winter-evening entertainment if you overlook "Sun Dial Time."

W. R. B.

*A HOUSE OF WOMEN.* By H. E. Bates.  
Holt. 1936. \$2.

This is the story of Rosie Perkins, a barmaid in an English country town, who married into a family of prosperous farmers. For more than a quarter of a century the Jeffrey family hated Rosie and, at last, her husband, Tom, came to hate her. But Rosie survived the last Jeffrey and sold the once well kept farm for what it would bring.

"A House of Women" is the farm novel in an English setting. Rosie Perkins is a real person, and she manages to give some force and conviction to the insane atmosphere of the Jeffrey house. The book doesn't carry the impact it is meant to, but it's not dull reading.

M. S.

*TWO YEARS.* By Alberto Albertini.  
Translated from the Italian by Arthur Livingston. Viking. 1936. \$2.75.

If you had three wishes? If you had several million dollars to be spent in one year? If you had your life to live over again? If Faust sells his soul to the devil? If, dying, you were by miracle given two years more to live?

These are all the same question. And probably no question in the world is surer of provoking answers from every human being it is put to; nor would the answers to any other question be more signally revealing of each man in his part. To the tracing of one such answer, in

one human being, Alberto Albertini has set his very considerable powers as a novelist. And "Two Years" is a memorably readable book.

The novel is founded on legend, set in fourth century Rome. The boy Maximus lies dying, and Mutius, the monk, by strong prayer achieves for him the grant from God of two more years of life. Adolescence is adolescence in any century. And Maximus is no more sure of what he wants to do with life than any talented, half-mystic, half-hedonist in any American college today. He only knows he wants to live. It may well be that only the old, snatched back from a death they might not dread, could lay instant plans

for life. The old would have retrospect, nostalgia, disappointment, as guide posts. Maximus had only youth, and the problem of solving the whole mystery of living, dying, and eternity in twenty-four months. He had no better talisman than his admiration for the monk, and his too sensitive desire to embrace life by withdrawing from all chance of hurt.

Before the story opens Maximus has tried to be a poet, and failed; tried to be a monk, and left the monastery; tried to be a recluse, and succeeded only in christening himself Miserere. Life had been shadows of beauty and of pain, which time might confidently be expected to resolve gently into gentle answers. Now life was two years, and every day a day which must be used.

The character of the boy is beautifully,  
(Continued on page 26)

## Do You Know . . . ?

- WHAT famous English philosopher's skeleton, dressed in his own clothes, is preserved in a London university?
- WHO first called Ireland "the Emerald Isle"?
- WHAT celebrated essayist joined the audience in hissing the sole performance of his only play?
- WHO snatched Shelley's unconsumed heart from the funeral pyre?
- WHAT noted Irish novelist was the grandfather of the composer Victor Herbert?
- WHAT absent-minded poet, being invited to dine at an inn called "The Green Man" in Dulwich, proceeded to Greenwich and made inquiries for the sign of "The Dull Man"?
- WHAT novelist sent 4,000 people to call on a lady of his acquaintance in one day?
- WHO was made Poet Laureate "because of the sins he had *not* committed"?
- WHAT popular Scottish novelist of the "kailyard school" died in Iowa?
- WHAT poet's *nom de plume* was the anagram of his real name?
- WHAT famous philosopher carried ear-stoppers which he put on whenever anyone opposed his opinions?
- WHAT eminent Victorian novelist pretended to be illegitimate in order to conceal his true origin as the son of a tailor?

READ

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