

The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

Sonnet in a Knothole

WE idled at our doings, heart and I.
We watched the puddle lose its glaze of frost,
Measured the April in a pale March sky
And saw the birch-tree root all newly mossed.
Filling our fingernails with spring, we raked
And burned and swept, and breathed, and chopped some wood;
And even in that easiness, heart ached
To keep this noon forever, if we could.

But no one guessed (we made no outward stopping)
The sudden woodsman stroke that we incurred
When down through fibre, grain, and knotted wit
The oak of language shivered, cleanly split
By the flashed axe-blade of the perfect word.
We tightened steel to helve, and went on chopping.

Small Wares

(AND AN IRON RESIDUE)

I've been looking at some photographs (in that always exciting quarterly *The Colophon*) of the sanctums of eminent book collectors. And I'm amused again at their museum look, their housemaid neatness. Damn it, those fellows aren't collectors, they're interior decorators. Clean-swept desks, deep rugs, a few choice bric-a-bracs each in the exact spot . . . one even has some empty space on his shelves. (Incredible!) What do they do with all the precious and heavenly oddities, minutiae, small wares (excellent department-store term) that flock around the humbler collector? And each of these as delightful in its way as a perfect First. Is it possible that these lads only cherish the things that have been collated, certified, appraised, by some one else? What do they do with association treasures of their own?

Damn it all, I've been wanting for a long time to say something about this room (whose picture will not get into print). I dare say you'd think it ugly, but dogs and cats love it (every new animal makes straight for it; Blythe says it's the "masculine smell") and as for the rats: you should hear them antic-hay in the wall behind the shelves. I thought when I built the Knothole that this older room would settle down into austere decorum; but the habits of years are too strong for it.

A genuine collector *never* has any space, no matter how he contrive.

But I really want to know: I appeal for information: what do these well-bred aesthetes do with all the adorable trivia of life that are so dear to numbskulls like me? I'll take one shelf at random: here is a précis of o's d'a that have collected along it, in front of the books.

(1.) A complicated little gadget, in a leather folder, for reaming, coring and probing a pipe. I never use things of that sort, they make life more difficult still, but this was given me by that polished man-about-books Mr. Eddie Ziegler and I cherish it as a symbol of his goodness.

(2.) A horse's head, carved in Ivory soap by a daughter.

(3.) The last of half a dozen silver teaspoons which (with a corkscrew) were the first things I bought at Oxford, at the beginning of Michaelmas term 1910. If you were here and we were talking things over, that would send me down the shelf to R. W. Chapman's *The Portrait of a Scholar* (Oxford Press, 1920) in which there is a delicious essay on Silver Spoons.

Good idea, I'll move the spoon to another shelf, where it can stay right in front of Chapman's book.

(4.) A terracotta egg-cup, with Indian designs, from Valparaiso. Too precious to eat eggs from (this household has had bad luck with many favorite egg-cups), it is useful to hold paper-clips.

—Among the few things I've ever thought seriously of collecting are egg-cups. I've had them of china, and wood, and even pewter, but they always disappear. What became of that little beauty from Mt. Saint Michel, with a picture of the abbey? Then the family brought me a charming one from a convent in Quebec, with a pewter ornament, which washed off. But when I am very old, and life settles down, I shall go in for egg-cups, range them delicately in a cabinet, and have them photographed for *The Colophon*.

(5.) Tait McKenzie's fine medallion of Walt Whitman, done for the Franklin Inn Club (of Philly) at Walt's centennial in 1919.—This fronts a thick rich collection of miscellaneous postal cards, which deserve the bibliographic study for which

literature is too brief. I shuffle through them and put foremost the picture of one of America's most beautiful fireplaces, which is at "Charlesgift," Maryland, the seat of Hulbert Footner, Esq., and birth-place of Mme. Storey, my favorite female detective.—As it is late, and dusting this shelf has made me thirsty, I shall do the unusual: open the new bottle of Cutty Sark and drink a solitary toast to Mme. Storey, whose new book is about to appear. Is it possible to fall in love with a person merely imagined by a friend? How well Mme. Storey and I would have understood each other. And how grimly curious I am about the (perhaps mythical?) M. Storey, who is never mentioned or explained.

(May I remark what a handsome gloss and color these plain cypress shelves have taken in seventeen years; like old violins. It was a bright spring day of 1920 when I first took possession of this room. As a

matter of fact an even earlier occupant was L., then small wares of sixteen months, who spent her first night in this house in a baby carriage right where these shelves now stand. The furniture van broke down on the way from Philadelphia, so that night we slept as best we could. I lay on the dining room floor with the light burning (so the van would find the house if it arrived in middle darkness) and read Conrad's *The Rescue*, then about

to be published. I still remember how pleased I was by one line—*There is no rest for a messenger till the message is delivered.*

(6.) Beyond the postcards is something whose purpose you'd scarcely guess. It's an egg-cosy; but a modernistic egg-cosy (looks like a conical carnival-hat) which I regard as symbolic of much. To change the Supreme Court is trivial compared to altering the traditional idea of a Suffolk egg-cosy.

(7.) Tortoise-shell spectacles; a spare, in case of emergency; specially esteemed for scratches on the lens, which came from the bottom of the swimming pool of M.S. *Santa Maria en voyage* to South America. Do not, no matter what stimu-

(Continued on page 20)



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The Bowling Green

(Continued from page 17)

lus, dive into a swimming tank wearing your glasses.

(8.) A card, on which is written a quotation from Virgil's *Eclogues* (VIII, 75): *Numero deus impare gaudet* (God rejoices in the odd number) to remind me that there may be something in numerology after all.

(9.) A tobacco pouch, very handsome, in blue and gold silk. I don't use tobacco pouches either, but I can't forget this one. It was given to me by some still unidentified friend at a performance of *The Black Crook* in Hoboken. Inside was a note which said *To Mr. M., now producing the first Leg Show I ever saw*. This amuses me, and pleasantly recalls the great saying of Messrs. Jarrett and Palmer, the *Crook's* first management, in 1866:—"Legs are staple articles and will never go out of fashion."

(10.) Small water-color drawing brought me one snowy day by one of the Capitol policemen in Washington, who was on holiday.

(11.) Pot of vaseline, used (though not often enough) to mollify old leather bindings.

(12.) Another batch of postcards and small pictures. The high spots here are a reproduction of C. R. Patterson's painting of the *Cutty Sark*, and a drawing of the *Torrens* done by Captain Armitage McCann—who, if I remember, came to that ship as cabin-boy shortly after Joseph Conrad left her. Speaking of *Cutty Sark*, I hope it is always borne in mind that the name is a quotation from Burns (*Tam o' Shanter*). It means, of course, an abbreviated shift, which was the garment of souple Nannie in the poem. Why the great ship was so called I don't know. My copy of Lubbock's book on the clippers might tell, but is out on loan. My own idea is that (like Nannie) the name was boastful; to imply that even under shortened sail she could keep up with the best. The association with Scotch whiskey obviously came from Burns's closing lines—

Whene'er to drink you are inclined
Or cutty sarks run in your mind—

If we're not careful we'll find ourselves down in the nautical corner of the shelves with David Bone, Tomlinson, McFee, and many others. I hope all sea-minded readers keep in touch with James Brown & Son, the nautical publishers of Glasgow. (52 Darnley Street). The list of their books is always good for cheerful meditation. For fifteen years I've been meaning to write for old sea-dog Whall's *Shakespeare's Sea Terms Explained* ("Readers will be astonished to find that the plays are so rich in professionally used terms.") Their inexpensive reproductions of famous marine paintings are also tempting: if I had a bar-room I would certainly want *Wet Work in the Waist*; and I'm always fascinated by the idea of Captain

Peterson's *Nautical Whist*, a card game that teaches you semaphore, flag and Morse signalling. Captain Maxwell's *Bright Star Atlas I* should be tempted to put alongside Keats's *Sonnets*.

How often I have dreamed of a leisurely loiter along these shelves with some special friend, attempting orderly to describe the things I have dear; but it seems almost impossible. The variety of their claims abashes me to silence. But *they* understand, my midnight darlings. For me, and I suppose irreparably for me only, they hold their secrets. I liked the idea of Harry Korner, bookseller in Cleveland, to take a piece of manuscript that he esteems and mount it, properly glazed and shielded, as a library lamp-shade. Thus your reading light would shine through the actual words that first said something you enjoyed. It reminds me of something Dr. Leonard Keeler and his associate Edwin O'Neill showed me at the Crime Detection Laboratory at Northwestern University. There they have invented a way of reviving the most faded or perished ink-script. Unless the actual fabric of the paper has been destroyed, the ink leaves iron residues; and by blowing a gas upon an apparently blank sheet these particles of iron can be corroded so that the former writing leaps to sight, now rusted brilliant red. It struck me that here was a shiny parable for teachers of literature. Their topic is often ancient books and papers, from which the childish pupil might suppose all life had withered. But if the teacher has the right kind of gas on spout, handwriting as old as Chaucer can burn again more vivid than tonight's tabloid. Presuming that it had, to begin with, the authentic mettle.

In this room, or any other of its kind, time is merely relative anyhow. In that same number of *The Colophon* I noticed a remark that its readers had chosen Sinclair Lewis as the American author now living "who has the best chance of being considered a classic in the year 2000." I suddenly realized that that year, which we used to take as a symbol of things wildly remote, really isn't far away. There are plenty of children now living, perhaps even my own, who will have the thrill of writing that date on paper.—Let's hope for a tinge of iron residue in the ink, so that 2000 (or even 1938) won't make a monkey of us.

I was looking through some books and catalogues about tobacco: I had it in mind to find something that would amuse Mr. W. H. of Chicago who has just taken up pipe-smoking. But I ran into another W. H., and found one of the grandest iron residues in literature, Hazlitt's glorious letter to Gifford, the *Quarterly* reviewer. Just the opening and closing lines, for a nightcap—

"Sir: You have an ugly trick of saying what is not true of any one you do not like; and it will be the object of this letter to cure you of it. . . . You are a nuisance, and should be abated."

Outward Bound

THE good old Houseboat on the Styx (dipping her colors to John Kendrick Bangs) was out for the first cruise of spring. Among her various immortals there are always a few squabbles: Mark Twain had to take the wheel while Joseph Conrad and Captain Marryat argued a point of seamanship. Chaplain Weems was sulky because George Washington had called him a greater inventor than Edison. Some one wishing advice on an ecclesiastical detail called out, "Hey, Trollope!" and to every one's embarrassment Nell Gwynne responded. But now they all seemed to have settled down. In the bows Herman Melville and Izaak Walton exchanged yarns about fish. In the messroom Kipling was telling the Other Story; at the bar General Grant and Bret Harte were trying to keep Edgar Poe quiet while Conan Doyle imparted some of those unpublished adventures of Sherlock Holmes with which Dr. Watson tantalized us.

But they're at their best on controversial topics. Some of the phantoms had revisited mortal scenes, and Dickens complained about the condition in which he found his books. "Absolutely in rags," he said. "Worn to pieces. The library copies are a disgrace."

Henry James remarked that he hadn't found it so. "That is to say, of course, even with due consideration of the, shall we call them, relativities involved, I had not, myself, in respect of my own writings, been struck by any abnormal celerity of obsolescence."

There was a pause of politeness, which only Dr. Johnson could break.

"Sir," he said, "the caducity of covers is the premium of the bibliopole. It is mortality of stuff, sir, not merit of style, that causes scarcity; in any human æconomy, scarcity augments price. On the moribundity of matter *we* are surely authoritative."

"Would you say, Doctor," began Boswell hoping to delay him until he could find the notebook, but others broke in.

"Yea verily," said the shade of old Eliot, he of the first Indian Bible. "Why are the earliest Americana so rare? Because they were so weakly bound. Their physical disintegrality doomed them to perish—"

"And why not?" cried Sydney Smith (the Reverend). "Who reads an American book?"

"Sir," said the Doctor, "the plantations have ejected some fresh literary sprouts. A root will sporadicate even in a dungeon."

"I ask not equal length of life for all," interposed Will Shakespeare. "Some books are to be tasted, others swallowed; only a few to chew on and digest—Have I said that before?" he inquired. "It sounds familiar."

"You haven't," said John Bartlett whose encyclopedic spook is always aboard the boat to settle such matters. "Bacon has, the essay *Of Studies*."

"I don't want my books to be rare," exclaimed Dickens, who had been listening impatiently. "I want 'em to be read, and kept. I want them honestly and attractively bound, so they'll live and give pleasure, and even beauty on the shelves. We were proud of what we wrote, gentlemen, let us be proud of their mortal dress—"

At this moment the stowaway, a much alive salesman (probably called Pete) couldn't contain himself any longer. He burst into the discussion, eager to win friends and influence ghosts. "You are dead right, I mean definitely right: a book oughtn't to be just Outward Bound for show, it's got to be inward bound for use. Bound clear through to the spine, strong and openable and appropriate. If your Indian Bible (he bowed to old Puritan Eliot) had been put together the way we did *The Flowering of New England* it wouldn't be so scarce today. Listen, did you ever hear of a book that had harder handling than *Gone With the Wind*? We did that, and boy, how it stands up. We bound about 75 of this spring's leading titles, roll your eye over these samples: *The Nile*, *Angels in Undress*, *Jordanstown*, *Suns Go Down*, *Not So Deep as a Well*, *Today Is Forever*—"

The old houseboat was also gone with the wind, down winding reaches of the dusky stream. But there would be less ghostly bickering between decks, maybe, and fewer, shabby, broken and foundered volumes, if her immortals and their publishers, had known the latest efficiencies of the American Book Bindery-Stratford Press, Inc.

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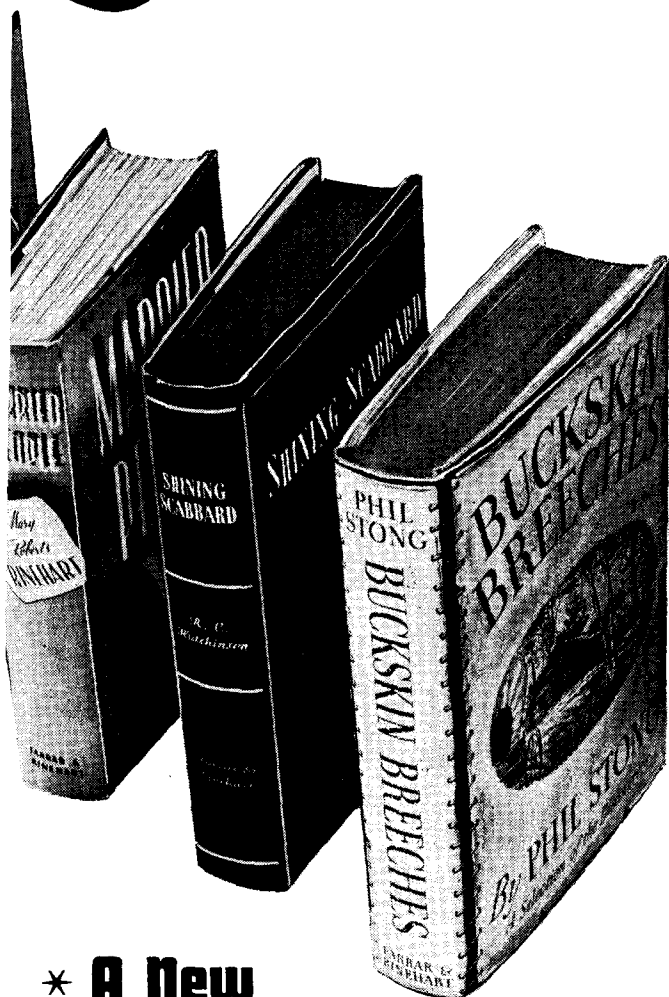
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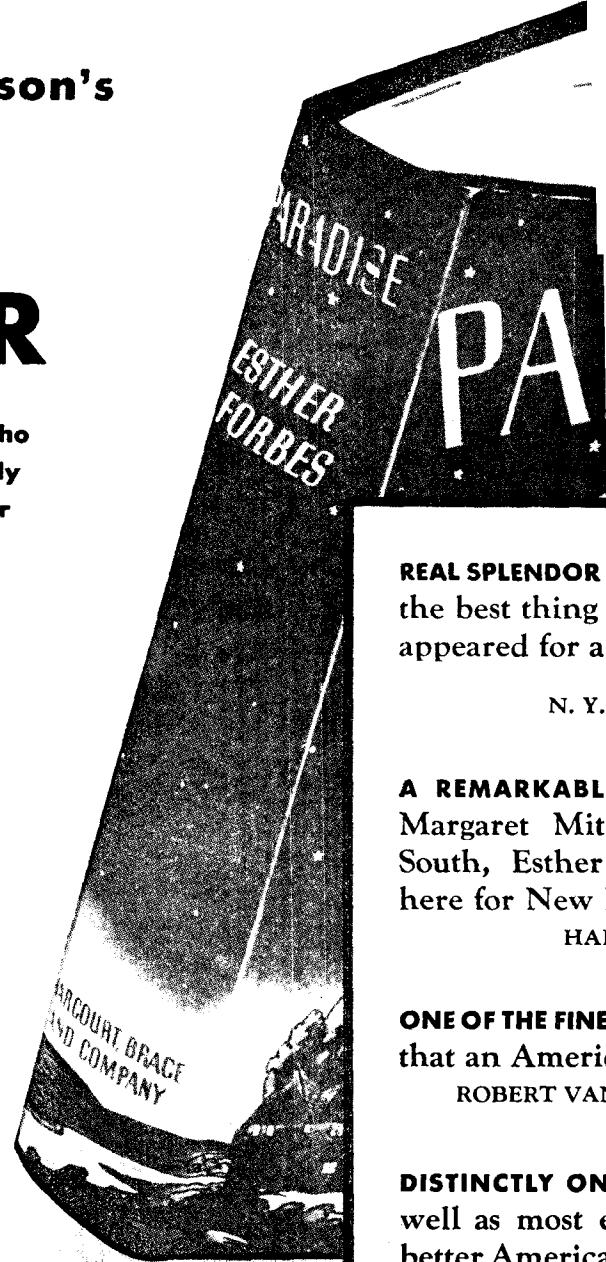
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English Ebb, American Flow

(Continued from page 4)

novel grew up with industrial democracy. It grew up unhurriedly with the railroads and the factory chimneys, thrived on their expansion, and in the complicated society which grew up between them, thriving on them too, found the material for its great spiritual conflicts and revelations.

But the American novel, as a body of writing, came in with a shout in the nineties or thereabouts, found its democracy already established, and began fighting at once. One of its enemies was the middle class conscience, which insisted that facts were improper when truthful, so that Stephen Crane had to publish his "Maggie" privately. The battle for the right to tell the truth is only just over; it was part

of a larger battle in which the novel advanced against a whole way of life, not cautiously, but with astonishment, beligerence, impatience. Whatever other qualities it may have possessed or developed, these three are part of its life stream; and though they had nothing whatsoever to do with great literature like "Death Comes for the Archbishop," they have been responsible for great literature like "An American Tragedy."

Of course, there are libel laws, and people's feelings might be hurt, and there is always the esthetic conscience, a necessary arbiter. None the less, if the American novelist wants to speak out, he generally does so: he feels no shadowy censorship inside. Is this because American democracy regards its future with excitement rather than foreboding? Partly; and it is partly due to the fact that

the American novelist never seems to have felt himself in debt to democracy, an ungrateful attitude, but helpful. Here is Daniel Fuchs's "Low Company" which, published in 1937, is a fairly recent example. Its scene is laid in Neptune Beach, which is near Manhattan, and might be Coney Island. It is summer, but no holiday spirit prevails: all is disorder and despair. Mr. Shubunka's brothel business and Mr. Spitzbergen's ice cream machine are wrecked by an organized racket, with police assistance; while Karty is to be beaten up for debt, *à la* Drukman; and Shorty is in trouble with sex and the platonic Madame Pavlovna.

The book is savagely outspoken, but the characters seem to lack an interior. Something stands between them and us, an impalpable barrier, which, on examination, proves to be Neptune Beach. There is a side of American life, something represented by Neptune Beach, and Mr. Fuchs wants to get at it. To get at it, but not inside it, or through it: had he done that, he would have written an extraordinary novel.

Well, there were certain aspects of pre-Rooseveltian unemployment which compelled Mr. Robert Nathan to write a fantasy called "One More Spring." If you compare American fantasy with English fantasy, you begin to understand something quite remote from either, such as the work of Mr. Daniel Fuchs. English fantasy is often abstract, unconcerned with right or wrong; but American fantasists prefer to anchor their work to the concrete, and the preference is characteristic. Indeed, so little does America care for abstractions that, if an interesting problem arises, the tendency has been to incarnate it in a novel. The function of the novel is to create human beings; its condition is that it should criticize society. But if you incarnate the problem—as, for example, Josephine Lawrence incarnated the family budget in "If I Have Four Apples"—then you substitute the condition for the function, and your publishers say that you have thrown "a really important light on the problems that assail every American family today," and the public rushes to buy you, and perhaps you have. But your novel may not survive.

Was Mr. Fuchs incarnating a problem? Not explicitly, but he never gets through the problematic barrier of Neptune Beach, behind which there wait, in unexplored darkness, the souls of Mr. Spitzbergen, Karty, Madame Pavlovna, and the rest. Was Mr. Farrell incarnating a problem in "Studs Lonigan?" Certainly. But Mr. Farrell, with an industrious and detailed passion, pulled the problem to bits in order to see what lay behind; in the course of which he created a human being.

If this tendency were not strong and persistent, the American novel could never have bent to its will a materialistic

(Continued on page 28)

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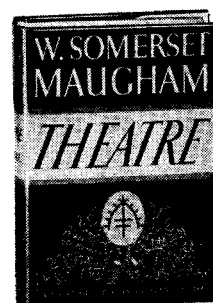
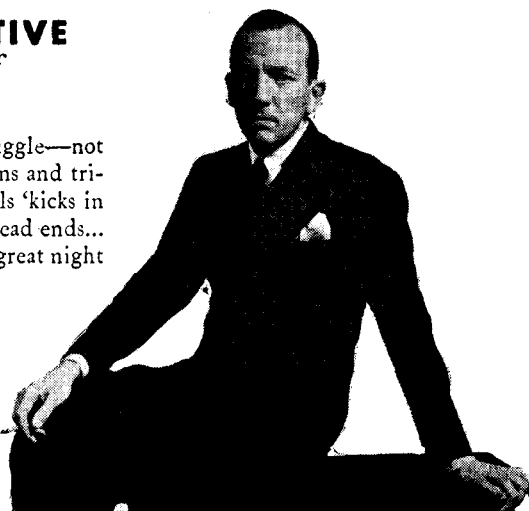
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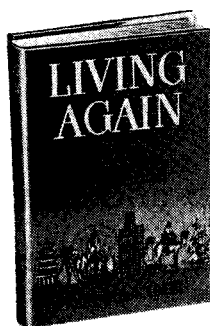
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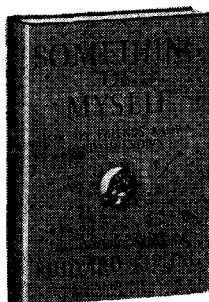
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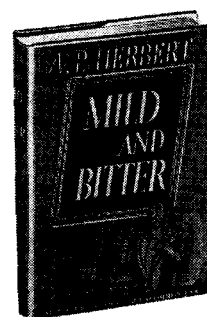
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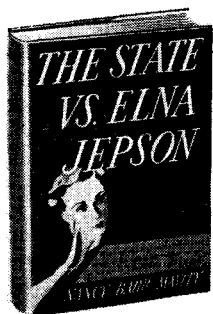
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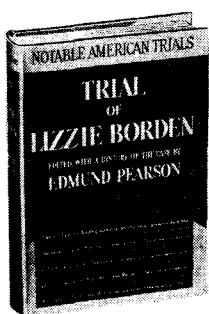
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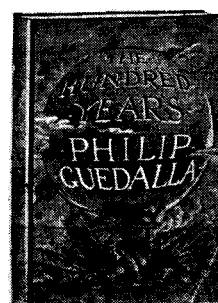
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DOUBLEDAY, DORAN

English Ebb, American Flow

(Continued from page 26)

civilization which is both vast and obstinate. And at the root of this tendency, as at the root of everything at all creative, there lies astonishment—an intense inner conviction that one is perceiving things as they have never been perceived before, that one's unique perception has brought them into existence. At present, the astonishment of the English novelist seems concentrated upon the social gestures of already familiar types: American astonishment is still concentrated upon the types. For example, there is "Of Mice and

Men." John Steinbeck is in general inclined to blur the lines of his characters, but Lennie and George, though misted with their creator's sympathy, are new. They do not seem to have existed before. No doubt they have been wandering in and out of fiction for years; now at last they are rounded and real. To test their reality you have only to measure them against two absolutely stock characters in the same novel—Curley and his poor little bitch of a wife, both relics of earlier behaviorism, and both much the worse for wear.

"The Late George Apley," though Mr. Marquand is no artist as Mr. Steinbeck

is, and though the ironical device which he employs throughout is so simple as to be childish, conveys the same air of discovery. The suprising, and motivating, force in the novel is Mr. Marquand's surprise. He has a quality which Mr. Maugham, far wiser, far more versed in reporting life, so conspicuously lacks—that is, he takes nothing for granted, everything is new, even the obvious; and his portrait of Boston society glows with colors which, though doomed to fade, delight us simply because they are so fresh.

I have mentioned Mr. Marquand, Mr. Steinbeck, and Mr. Fuchs because their work is recent, and without pretending that they illustrate more than a tendency or two to set off against what appears to be a prevailing tendency in the English novel. (For creative astonishment about the past, there is Andrew Lytle's "The Long Night," a wonderful book.) The Americans, not such artists in prose, not always so subtle in perception, represent expansion: the English, contraction. The Americans are still exploring society, and promise more discoveries: the English have their eyes on the present and reveal only its familiar pattern. The flood tide: the ebb tide. Still, there remains the fact that tides turn, and perhaps some such motion is already beginning, with characteristic caution, in English fiction today. Art anticipates life, and the turning of that tide will be more than just literary history.

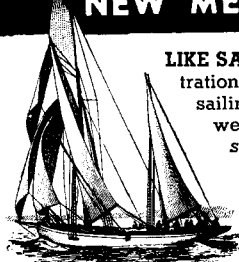
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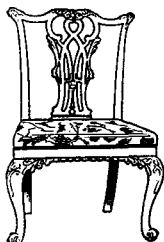
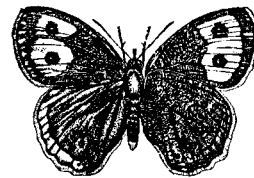


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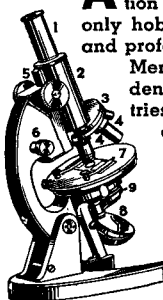


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