

Live Together and Like It

A DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE. By H. A. Overstreet. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by HAROLD U. FAULKNER

PROFESSOR OVERSTREET'S thesis, stated very briefly and inadequately, is somewhat as follows: with the coming of the Industrial Revolution the old America slipped away. A new civilization has taken its place, a civilization characterized by paper property, absentee ownership, and plutocratic rule which has brought with it a degradation of farmer, artisan, business man, and professional worker. In this new order has come the exploitation of the consumer, of the laborer, and of children, and a decline in all of the finer values. If America is to save itself, it must recognize the effects of the Industrial Revolution, the end of rugged individualism, and the necessity of a coöperative interdependent society. And this interdependence must become effective in the world of wages and labor relations, money and credit, producer and consumer, voter and office holder, in the realm of conservation, industrial ownership, and international relations.

All this sounds simple and elementary enough. Anyone with the slightest tinge of liberalism would probably agree with every word of it. Nor is there anything new to anyone acquainted with the literature of protest. The unfortunate aspects of American civilization have been blasted repeatedly and much more thoroughly (e.g., such books as Norman Thomas, "Human Exploitation"), and programs for action have been offered of a more detailed and thorough fashion (e.g., Harry Laidler, "A Program for Modern America"). Professor Overstreet, however, was obviously making no attempt to do this sort of thing. His is not a book for the sophisticated liberal or radical; it aims rather at the ordinary American, the person who realizes that something has happened and is groping for a social philosophy. This volume, written in such simple language that it almost seems to have been subjected to the Thorndike word test for the high school level, actually explains the America of today and offers a sane program.

With the first two thirds of the book it would be difficult to disagree. Some positions in the latter part, however, open themselves to heated argument from the left. The volume is a little irritating to the historian because a large proportion of the historical references are incorrect. Watt did not invent the steam engine after looking at a tea kettle (p. 16); he merely improved it. The explanation of the origin of the plantation system is dubious (p. 34), likewise the suggestion (p. 141) that the abolitionists forced the Civil War on us. But this is not a book on history; it is an extremely intelligent diagnosis of present-day American civilization. There are few who could not read it with profit.

Harold U. Faulkner is professor of history at Smith College.

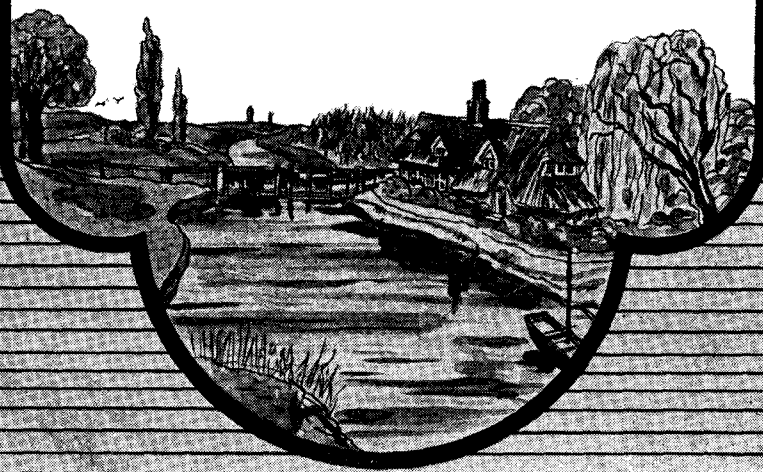
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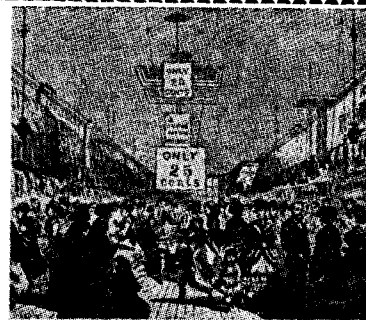
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The New Books

Fiction

TODAY IS FOREVER. By Ramona Herdman. Harpers. 1937. \$2.

Sidney Lane, the heroine of Miss Herdman's novel, belongs to that enormous group of people who incline to believe that some one other than themselves is to blame for the fact that they are no longer twenty, and are filled with psychic unease. She is persuaded that if she can turn back the pages of her life far enough she will come on the villain in her personal piece, burn him in effigy, and begin over again, a Phoenix rising from the ashes of tardy revenge. She is sure she can do it without priest or analyst. This experiment is apt to be a failure. Ramona Herdman makes of it a sufficiently entertaining novel.

Sidney Lane is a successful actress. Retired from the stage, and living in France, an arid malaise falls on her. A desire to go "back to a place, to a moment, to a feeling perhaps, but to something that was her own, a moment to which she could give herself completely." Back she goes, and the reader with her, to retravel as best may be the path of all her years. She returns to the middle New York state town where she grew up, but fails to find her "moment" there. So, somewhat surprisingly, she returns to the husband she has left, only to find, as she rather unfairly knew all along, there was no "moment" for her in his handsome house. She departs just as she did before. Her return to the stage, and her stupendous first night triumph despite the fact that only a few hours before curtain time she had attempted death by an over-dose of sleeping medicine, seem to leave Sidney as unsatisfied and unconvinced as they do us.

"Today Is Forever" sums up into a great deal of really good writing about a woman who doesn't matter much. Ramona Herdman is imaginative and talented enough to devise less exclusively introverted characters, and next time we hope she will.

F. W.

QUEEN'S FOLLY. By Elswyth Thane. Harcourt, Brace. 1937. \$2.50.

Miss Thane's pleasant novel, which carries its story from Elizabethan days to the present, makes its way through the centuries by following the fortunes of a family and a house. It opens with the first Anthony Brand who, as guerdon for a favor done his sovereign, wins her portrait and a modest farm, and ends in 1936 when his descendant is saved from the necessity of selling the picture to pay the taxes on what has developed into a noble estate by the love and millions of an American girl. As epoch succeeds epoch the house and the portrait maintain their dominance in the tale but Miss Thane has been deft in shifting the emphasis so that what has originally been allegiance to monarch and gratitude for royal favor becomes devotion to the house itself. The novel is at its best in the episodes of the past, for Miss Thane knows her historical

background well and is skillful in setting her scene. If her characters are stereotypes of costume fiction they yet move through good romantic and sometimes swashbuckling incident of the bustling times of Elizabeth and Charles II with liveliness and vigor. The last third of the book, with its tale of the present, is a fairly commonplace love story, cut to the pattern of the screen to which, as a matter of fact, the book as a whole would well lend itself. "Queen's Folly" has not the interest of Miss Thane's "The Tudor Wench" or of her "Young Mr. Disraeli," but it is nevertheless a smooth and entertaining romance. Those who like historical novels will like it very much.

A. L.

NIGHTS OF AN OLD CHILD. By Heinz Liepmann. Lippincott. 1937. \$2.50.

During the war and the years immediately following it, no German child could live as a child. From a whole generation the rights of childhood were snatched away. Such a situation is deadly for even the least emotional youngster; but for a boy of imagination and practically morbid sensitivity it is indescribable. Yet Heinz Liepmann attempts to show its effects on himself. This novel is largely autobiography, and as such loses in perspective what it gains in actuality. Nevertheless, the lack of objectivity does not keep it from being a terrible condemnation of the war and the peace—of all war and dictated peace. The only relief, the only hope in the whole tale is the fact that the protagonist lived to tell of his despair.

S. N.

History

ROMAN BRITAIN AND THE ENGLISH SETTLEMENTS. By R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myers. Oxford. 1937. \$5.

This excellent history of Roman Britain, and of the dark and obscure centuries in which the English were establishing themselves beside a ruined civilization, is likely for some time to be the standard book on the subject. The authors, who have not collaborated but rather divided the period between them, have taken advantage of all the recent archeological evidence and with great historical judgment used it to modify and develop the historical and literary facts as they have been known before. One finds here the first satisfactory account of what the so-called departure of the Romans in the fifth century really meant. In the fourth century the Roman towns in England declined with the towns all over the Empire, owing largely to faulty economic organization. The country, however, remained highly prosperous, and it was only the general demoralization of government and the constant raids of the pirates that led to the breakdown of the fifth century, which was not so much general slaughter as the earlier historians have told us, as an acute breakdown of standards of living. Hence the new English civilization was built not so much upon the destruction of a Romano-British