

or Greensboro; no sight behind the exteriors of the poignantly dismal little towns Thomas Wolfe saw from the train, at the beginning of "Of Time and the River," nor of the middle class Mr. Wolfe turned to such rich account in "Look Homeward, Angel." Instead there is a dreary succession of "plantations" which give way only to sordid hovels.

A number of the contributors are almost exclusively interested in the past, in what they imagine to be a great tradition. That is their right, of course, but their work is most amazingly sterile. An awareness of tradition can produce, of course, first-rate literature. The two successful examples given us of this vein of Southern writing make clear the pointlessness of the rest. In "Record at Oak Hill," by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, the past becomes a dynamic factor in the continuation of life and society. Miss Roberts weaves an intricate tale which gives life and meaning to a conflict which, reaching far back into the past, finds its resolution in the present, and makes clear how a man whose ancestors fought carpet-baggers might easily, faced with the harshness of modern life, become a follower of Huey Long. For the two ladies in John Peale Bishop's "If Only," tradition becomes a living, if bothersome, incubus. Both of these writers are in these stories, at least, what Mr. Warren in his introduction claims for a whole group—historically minded. For the other members of this group the contemplation of the past seems to boil down to what is perhaps the most tiresome of Southern manias: the endless chatter about family.

The pursuit of picturesque people and customs is the concern of another good-sized group of these Southern writers. Quaintness is perhaps the most dangerous obstacle regional writers have to overcome. Those in the South who have been most successful in finding universal human qualities behind the bandanas and the dialect seem to be a group of Louisiana writers. In talented hands the investigation of local customs produces good writing, as in Lyle Saxon's recent novel, "Children of Strangers," and two excellent stories in this volume, by Elma Godchaux and E. P. O'Donnell.

Several of the contributors—Mr. Wolfe, Mr. Caldwell, Katherine Anne Porter, William Faulkner—have interests that lie entirely outside the main preoccupations of this book. Their work was probably included in an attempt to make the book as representative as possible.

Mr. Warren reminds us in his preface that writers can only deal with the life they know best. If the stories in "A Southern Harvest" represent what most of these writers know best, their world must be indeed superficial. They have missed the best of the South's past, as well as its living present.

Eugene Armfield is on the editorial staff of *The Publishers' Weekly*, and author of "Where the Weak Grow Strong."



HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT IN 1841: From a drawing by T. Cole, courtesy of Frederick S. Bliss.

## The Nutmeg State

### GUIDE TO THE HISTORY AND THE HISTORIC SITES OF CONNECTICUT.

By Florence S. Marcy Crofut. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1937. \$10.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THIS definitive reference book for the local history of Connecticut begins with a series of brief chapters on maps, on accounts of old trails and highways, on political history, on journeys of Washington in Connecticut, on marches of the French armies of the Revolution, on Western lands owned by Connecticut—and then gets down to its encyclopedic business. This is to give of each Connecticut town (township if you are not a New Englander) a condensed account (with bibliography) of early settlement, incorporation, notable people born there, or who lived there, religious history, old roads, educational history, battlefields and memorials, participation in wars, and miscellaneous information of importance. Since the subject is Connecticut, the phrase "if any" need seldom be used!

Miss Crofut has compiled two volumes indispensable for librarians and historians, and by no means only of Connecticut for the broadcast of the Connecticut seed has been extraordinary. Her work, so far as I have been able to test it, is accurate to a high degree. She washes away the West Cornwall covered bridge in the flood of 1936, which is a mistake, but a happy one, since it will soon be pulled down for reasons much less inevitable than the efforts of nature. She

dodges, being a New Englander, the nice question of how the town of Kenilworth was mispronounced and misspelled into Killingworth. She swallows some whoppers about the pine trees of Cornwall, and misses a Quaker relation of a theological encounter at Clinton with Pierson, the first president of Yale, of interest and significance. But the triviality of these exceptions, taken from the towns I know best, merely illustrates the reliability of her survey. With the sources she gives, anyone should be able to find out from this book the essential facts about every community in Connecticut.

Only one caveat must be entered. She does not possess the style of Governor Cross, the literary quality of whose Thanksgiving proclamations (to cite an instance) makes the lover of good English rejoice. Her style is of an aridity and choppiness seldom to be encountered, even in the last edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica." Nor is aridity all. What can be said of this sentence describing the British capture of New Haven: "Finding that their forces had been depleted and alarmed by the gathering militia, the north and west sections of the town were held by a part of the first division of the enemy"! Fortunately for the publishers, no one is going to buy this book for its style; and those who love, or need to know, Connecticut, can be assured that they will find in these two volumes quite the most scholarly and complete summary of the social and political and biographical history of the state, town by town, and sometimes almost house by house.

# A Reviewer Grows Up

BY ISABEL R. A. CURRIER

NOW and then authors complain against the unfairness of very young book reviewers. The more experienced among them declare that they never expect careful, considered reviews from a young reviewer. Time was when I resented these statements hotly but nowadays, when such complaints reach me, I mutter:

"For the injustices which my young reviewing perpetrated against authors, O Lord, be lenient with me."

My litany for lenience must admit responsibility for all of the cardinal sins which authors list against reviewers. I must smite the breast of guilt at the recital of carelessness, of confusion, of getting out of a review by giving a synopsis of the story, of writing independent essays on the author's subject without regard for what the author had done with the subject, of letting my reviewing ego attempt to batter down the established writer and to prop up the beginner. But through it all I had a conscience.

The conscience manifested itself principally in an insistence that I read thoroughly and painstakingly the book which I was to review. That engendered travail, for I was not interested in all books, and I am a slow reader. My sense of responsibility at the beginning of my reviewing (I was twenty-two, and not long out of school) was based upon the conviction that it was the earnest mission of all intelligent and gifted youth, of which I was certain I was one, to inform benighted readers how thoroughly they were being taken in by one set of writers, and to guide their grateful minds to a superior and unshackled set of writers. I gave the readers of my newspaper's book section the benefit of my tolerant wisdom.

This author, I told them, had written an amusing story if there were people who had time to read only for amusement. It was unfortunate, I pointed out, that another well-known author couldn't write the English language. (In that particular review, I demonstrated my own mastery of English by speaking of the author's "most unique" conception of plot.) Carl Sandburg, my readers learned, "dragged lyrical words through downtown drain pipes." T. S. Eliot "should, at least, erect quotation marks to the ghosts of Shakespeare and Andrew Marvell." I sought things to disparage. I never sought anything to praise. This was partly because I thought disparagement more important than praise. It was also due to the admiration I drew from young co-workers, as silly as I. I got away with it, I presume, because ill-mannered criticism always seems more fearless than ill-mannered at first glance.

My outbursts of debauchery as a reviewer lasted for two or three years. They continued until I began to suspect, in so-

ber moments, that the world was not my oyster. Piles of rejection slips intimated that my private efforts as an author didn't cause editors to gasp with the right kind of awe. I learned, to my amazement, that writing is an art which is approached through labor of the most dogged kind. In tossing my own hard-wrung and worthless efforts into the waste-basket, I learned the first lesson of sincere criticism. It is too bad that I learned it after I had been criticizing without it for years.

The scrapbook of my book reviews, which I keep for the good of my soul, marks the change in definite tones. That prolific reviewer who was myself had acquired an almost reverent sense of responsibility in attempting to evaluate a work which, no matter who had produced it or how well it had been produced, represented weeks and months and years of struggle with words on the part of its creator.

There were lapses, of course. The thwarted ego which gnaws the foundations of judgment in many book reviewers manifested itself by a deep reverence for the hard work of little-known writers, and a deep scorn for the hard work of established writers. I had a spell of "discovering" new authors, whom I regarded as my personal property and when, as sometimes happened, the authors wrote me in gratitude, I became almost maudlin in my admiration for them. I received letters of outrage, too—never from authors, but from admirers of their work who didn't admire what I had to say about it. I cherished a particular grudge against those writers who had, in a manner of speaking, formed a cult. Those credited with "sounding new notes in English literature" sounded them sourly in my envious ears.

To a degree it was defense of changing taste which conditioned my struggle to review books according to my lights. As a struggling bantam, I had thrown my loud allegiance with the "revolutionists" in literature. Our platform of praise was based upon the sophistry that art is cheapened when it becomes comprehensible to the many. Then, my maturing taste in literature began to swing heavily to the right. I became a disciple of form, and I no longer pretended to be one of the initiated who found hidden messages. I had two opposite tastes to defend until I found my own balance, and the balance, as a reviewer, was dependent upon finding my own stride as a writer. Reviewers of books invariably like to write, and people who like to write cannot resist, when they are immature, coloring their appraisal of another's work with personal ambitions.

Somewhere in my course I stopped identifying my private hope of achievement with the achievement of every

writer whose work I saw. I don't know how the balance came, but my clippings began to show more of sincerity than of self-consciousness, more of thoughtfulness than of emotion. I had found that, even though art is long, life isn't, and one lives longer if divorced from inner chaos. For the first time since I had subjected myself to what I thought was intellectuality, I began to read for pleasure as well as for analysis, and I stopped reading for spite forever.

In this sweeping apology to the authors whom I have mistreated and the readers of reviews whom I have disregarded during the years in which a small public suffered from my ego, I may point out one great advantage which they have gained by permitting me to live. The advantage is in the fact that I devote all of my time to my own writing now, mistreating no one save, perhaps, myself. With all humility and awareness of the perpendicular path up the noble mountain of literature I feel, at last, that I am equipped to write book reviews. But I seldom write them now.

*For ten years Isabel Currier wrote reviews for a New England paper. She has more recently contributed articles and stories to various leading magazines.*

## Transcience

By ANNE HAMILTON

THE throbbing vein  
in her wrist is still. . . .

Where the counterpane  
made a carven hill,  
her thin sweet flesh,  
discreetly boned,  
lies only a mesh  
as loosely coned  
as heaped-up stack  
of needles and knitting. . . .

But look! through the slack  
in the tissues fitting  
a light leaps surely,  
not evanescent,  
but sharply, purely  
incandescent!  
Out through the shutter,  
skimming the grasses,  
fire-fly flutter  
translucently passes!  
Love, one last touch!  
But no light lingers  
for the satiate clutch  
of intimate fingers.  
Gone like a spark  
through the dark pine's ravelling,  
passing the lark  
in more certain travelling;  
on the peacock sky  
a retreating blur,  
but here all I  
required of her. . . .

Cold, her brain;  
betrayed, her will;  
and the high blue vein  
in her wrist is still!