

Letters to the Editor: *Arnold's "Civilization in the United States"*

Gone with the Wind

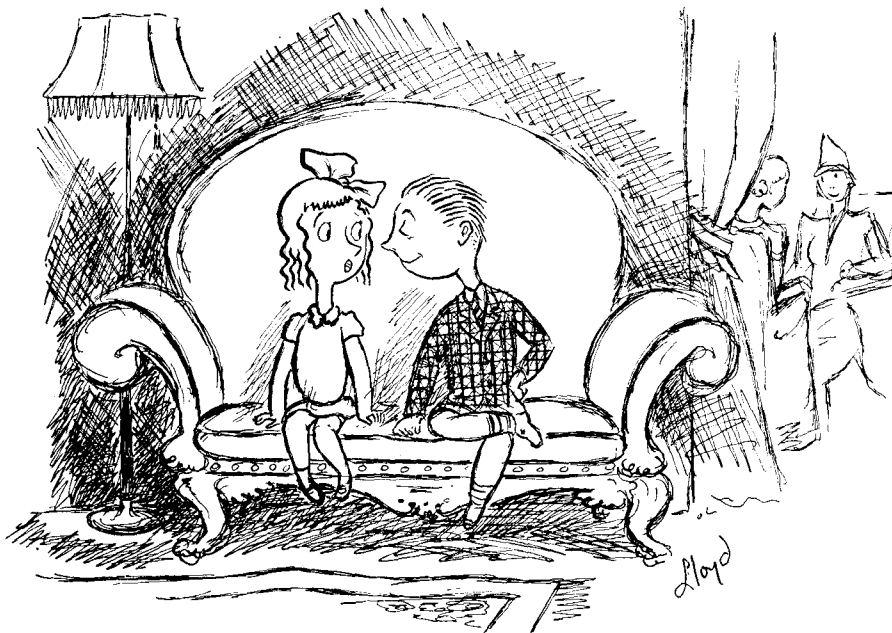
SIR:—You are doubtless aware that Messrs. Macmillan & Company are in a manner the sole custodians of the never-to-be-enough admired Matthew Arnold's immortality, that they are the only surviving publishers of his "collected works."

And the other day, in examining a detailed list of their Matthew Arnold productions, I was astonished to observe that it does not contain that singularly luminous gem of the master, "Civilization in the United States." Surely the world is not willing to let die a work of this force and magnitude, of this classic urbanity and eternal usefulness!

To those of us who were reared with "Civilization in the United States" in the little cabin bookcase this would be an appalling loss. How the very chapter-heads are redolent of our carefree and heedless nonage! "A Word About America," "A Word More about America," "Civilization in the United States." Well, sir, Columbus himself would have felt honored, titillated. Then the particular jewels—that gem quoted from the *New York Nation*, "Miss Bird and the Chalmers family," "Colonel Higginson's 'One more drop of nervous fluid,'" "an elegant and simple social order," "the most common-schooled and the least cultivated people in the world," "Wales says, Mary is a darling," "We have seen him arrive," and dozens more of graphic and inimitable touches and word-pictures which, once they have got into your blood, stay there, take hold, and work wonders.

From a lifetime's acquaintance with this corrective little volume I can testify to its efficacy (with prayer) in almost any variety of painful and embarrassing New World mental or cultural strabismus. And then the pleasant incidents connected with its treasured possession throughout the years! I once had a housekeeper, a young woman of unblemished mind and parts, who was determined to get rid, in a big way, as the current elegance of expression has it, of her profound insularity. We determined that a study of "Civilization in the United States" would help. The plan was to have her read a little of it to me each day during the intervals of her more serious occupations. You recall how the book opens, "Mr. Lowell, in an interesting but rather tart essay, 'On a certain Condensation in Foreigners,'" etc. Her verbal version was "On a certain *Condensation* in Foreigners." And sometimes even now when I take up the volume, I whimsically ponder, with the mellowed retrospect of years, which would be more satisfying.

Surely, Mr. Editor, there must be some alert and public-spirited publishers who read your valuable review. Perhaps one of them will take heart of grace on seeing this, and give us a new edition of "Civilization in the United States," long since, it seems, out of print, but cherished, and reposing on certain bookshelves as a lasting testimony to the ele-



"I'VE GOTTEN SOME RATHER AMUSING IDEAS FROM *ESQUIRE*!"

gant liberality and enlightenment of Messrs. Cupples and Hurd of Boston, Publishers, now, alas, defunct!

FRANCIS SULLIVAN.

Los Angeles, Calif.

An Extraordinary Error

SIR:—In reviews of A. E. Housman's "More Poems," I have seen reference to the curious discrepancy in the printing of the name of the artist who drew the frontispiece of the author—Francis Todd on the picture itself, and Francis Dodd on page X.

I have not seen any review, however, which has noted the extraordinary error which occurs in connection with the poem which appears on page 37 and is numbered XXIV. The first line of the poem itself reads "Stone, steel, dominions pass," but when this line is listed in the table of Contents, page XII, it reads "Stone, steel, and kingdoms pass."

I wonder what this means. Is this just a mistake, or does it record a variant reading?

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES.

New York City.

Not About Hindenburg

SIR:—I was waiting for someone to correct an error in the review of "Wooden Titan" in your issue of November 14. It seems only fair to the author of that book to state that the quotation: "Too late did he awake to realization," etc. was not about Von Hindenburg at all. It is found on p. 437, and gives an accurate description of the feelings of Papen, but it would be entirely unfair to give the impression that the author thought it could be truly said of Von Hindenburg.

J. EDGAR PARK.

Norton, Mass.

Utah Takes Exception

SIR:—I, too, "have a great respect for your opinion"—save on things Utah. Will you never shuck your silly prejudice? Or, if you insist on blobbing out the side of your face with your gifted tongue, make it more obvious. That much by way of general comment.

And now to the particular: what in blazes is a librarian to do when between the devil of the freedom-shouters and the deep sea of the respectable tax-payer? Have you ever been a librarian?

LEAH R. FRISBY,

Reference Librarian

University of Utah,
Salt Lake City.

A Listening Fox

SIR:—Had Thoreau made the drawing for the spirited and beautiful painting by N. C. Wyeth on page 4 of the *Review* for December 26 he would have elevated the right forefoot of the fox. A predatory animal intent upon listening elevates not only the ears but also a front foot in order to increase tension of the ear drum, making it more receptive for light sounds.

ROBERT T. MORRIS.

Stamford, Conn.

What Was the Date?

SIR:—I wonder if any of your readers know whether there are available anywhere copies of the Prospectus of *Stylus* which was the magazine Edgar Allan Poe spent his last years trying to establish? I understand that one was published by Dr. T. H. Chivers, as Editor. But was that one published before, or after the death of E. A. P.? Who can say?

JOHN G. MOORE.

Hollywood, Calif.

The World His Garden

THE HUMAN COMEDY. By James Harvey Robinson. With an Introduction by Harry Elmer Barnes. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THE Victorians were more honest. Eighty years ago this book would have appeared as "The Remains of James Harvey Robinson." It is a collection of essays and fragments assembled by Dr. Barnes and forced into a rough chronological unity. Just how much editorial work was necessary is not clear from Dr. Barnes's introduction, but there must have been a good deal. Dr. Barnes himself confesses that he has had in some few places to "fill in certain gaps or to enlarge upon brilliant fragments." His veneration for the master is well known, however, and the frequent awkward sentences, abrupt transitions, and clumsy figures are no doubt the result of this veneration, which has retained what Robinson, had he lived, would probably have altered greatly.

As it stands, "The Human Comedy" is hardly more than a repetition and partial expansion of material already in print in "The Mind in the Making" and in "The New History." If, as Dr. Barnes asserts in his introduction, James Harvey Robinson had since the earlier books were published "gone on reflecting in a more profound and original fashion than ever before upon the drama of mankind" there is little in this book to show it. Occasional flashes of the old Robinson, touches of the Voltairean wit his students knew—and often dreaded—light up long stretches of improving prose which might almost have appeared in Dr. Barnes's column in the *World-Telegram*. Substantially this latest volume is a running commentary on "The Mind in the Making," with bulges in directions dictated by Robinson's more recent interests, or by the exigencies of a commission from a periodical—the implications for social science of twentieth

century natural science, the promise of adult education, the menace of post-war nationalism, the possibility of discerning historical "laws."

This is not then by any means the best of Robinson, but it was probably worth saving, if only to bring again before the public one of the most important historians of the last generation. Robinson never produced, as Turner did, one of those grand generalizations which open new worlds of study. Nor did he ever achieve a many-volumed history of his own, or even an imposing accumulation of monographs. He did not quite invent social and intellectual history, which may be said in a sense to go back to Herodotus. But more than any other academic historian in America, he helped bring before the public—and especially before the secondary school teachers, so important in the diffusion of culture in America—the kind of interest in the whole fabric of our past which has brought history to life again after the oratorical historians had about written it out. Robinson was, like the Wells he goes out of his way so often to praise, almost too receptive of new ideas, too ready to follow all sorts of leads, especially from the semi-sciences of psychology and sociology. His latest enthusiasm, often reflected in "The Human Comedy," was biology. He seemed to find solace in the wriggings of tiny one-celled creatures, so purposeful and yet so untroubled.

For in this even more than in earlier works, there are overtones of despair. Robinson was always conscious of the stupidities and cruelties of human life. He had studied sympathetically those ethical patterns in which men have eliminated stupidity and cruelty, but he was aware that in the past neither reason nor eloquence has availed to impose those patterns on men's actions. He had absorbed the "anti-intellectualism" of the pre-war years—indeed, he was one of the first to introduce Pareto the sociologist

into America. He knew men couldn't suddenly be made over, knew that even revolutions stop well short of that high, clear place he saw ahead. The mind, he felt, had hitherto done little enough to describe clearly the mess men were in; it hadn't done a thing to clean up the mess. Yet Robinson, who worked so hard to destroy Christian miracles, wanted very much to believe in a supreme miracle—the immediate triumph of mind on this earth. What is sometimes called his Voltairean wit is the spark that flies between these poles of idealistic striving and realistic observation. But Robinson, except perhaps when poking about the microscopes at Woods Hole, never quite attained the wisdom *Candide* bought so dear. The world remained his garden, and it wanted so much more than cultivating!

Tracking a Poet

A WALK AFTER JOHN KEATS. By Nelson S. Bushnell. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1936. \$2.50.

MR. BUSHNELL has done what many of us have only thought of doing and would never have carried out with anything like his resolution, thoroughness, and gusto. He set out to follow the route Keats and Charles Brown took in their northern walking-tour of 1818. It meant walking about 630 miles, and Mr. Bushnell, with no companion, and with the advantages of "twentieth-century roads and lodgings, superior food and weather," accomplished the journey in thirty days, a third less time than that of the original travelers. Except in time Mr. Bushnell adhered to the canonical schedule with the scrupulous accuracy of a scholar and devotee; in order to cross to Ireland from the right place, now no longer a point of departure, he even taxed his budget to hire a boat and voyaged in state.

In spite of the endless small difficulties of a journey off the beaten track, and blisters and moments of discouragement, Mr. Bushnell evidently had a good time, and his travel-diary enables the sedentary reader to share the palm without the pang. He met no personages, and he does not gush about Highland scenery, and one may say, in no disparaging sense, that his chronicle is mostly of small beer (less metaphorically, of Bass and scalding black tea). His anecdotes and snatches of talk from roadside and inn have an unexaggerated flavor which one's own small Scottish experience corroborates. This outdoor book pleasantly vivifies a chapter in Keats's life which the literary critic usually considers only in relation to his poetry. Mr. Bushnell does not forget that, but he writes as a hiker; incidentally, he corrects some errors in the biographies. The book includes, of course, ample quotations, and also some attractive old engravings and a map.

Louis XV Watches

By THEDA KENYON

YOU flaunted your worth, and the exquisite way you were wrought
With enamel and jewels, and intricate, strangely shaped cases.
You knew no closed door: you seemed powerful, your myriad graces
Adorning the Cardinal's quean, or the favorite at Court;
And watching you, no one imagined how madly you sought
To escape from your bondage: your duty was marking the paces
Of time—, the relentless and stern,—and your gay little faces
Were bribed—with enamel and gems!—to reflect what they ought.
But here, time is the slave, and his aeons bereft of their power:
You are turned rebel—you glitter, triumphant and gay,
Stubbornly holding your hands at some long-perished hour,
And making your very rebellion a brittle display!

I see you, and sighing hurry on: time still sets me my task,
And I still cloak my slavery under an intricate mask!